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Discourse as an Electoral Campaigning Tool: Exploiting the Emotions of Voters

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Discourse as an Electoral Campaigning Tool: Exploiting the Emotions of Voters

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Executive Summary

This paper examines the speeches of notable candidates and sectarian political leaders in the run-up to the 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections. Through an analysis of 81 speeches given by 20 political actors, we argue that the rhetoric of ruling parties is dominated by talks of out-group positioning, favoritism, and a glorification of the past. Their discourse can be categorized into three strategy-based groups: Clientelists, ideologists, and oppositionists. Despite those different approaches, all sectarian parties share a common reliance on affective rhetoric, using fear-mongering, affection, victimization, and symbolic references to the parties' histories. We complement our analysis with a deeper look at intra-party regional variations and show how particular political contexts push parties to adopt radically different rhetorical strategies. We end by highlighting the dangers posed by these discursive strategies, and show how a range of reforms can help reduce the salience of affective rhetoric while prioritizing policy-based campaigning.

Introduction

A few weeks before the 2018 parliamentary election, political parties began intensifying their campaigns to mobilize voters. Usually, most of the analysis on elections focuses on the results, but little attention has been given to the political discourse that leads up to them. While we know that traditional parties do not rely on programmatic rhetoric, there has been little effort to actually unpack the types of discourses that party leaders resort to. In a speech in Msayleh on May 3, 2018, Speaker of Parliament and head of the Amal Movement Nabih Berri tapped on his party's past by evoking the legacy of its founder: 'The nation is calling for you next Sunday May 6, so come through to its demand yet again. Be present on this historic day in the life of Lebanon, as the Imam Musa Sadr would have wanted you to be.' A few weeks earlier, on April 15, Gebran Bassil was also addressing his constituents in South Lebanon in a speech in Rmaich, but instead of resorting to a glorification of his party's past, he used sectarian discourse: '[Christians of the South] have been neglected by the Amal Movement, but now you have an opportunity to change this.' These are just some examples of the strategies parties depend on in their speeches, but there is much more to uncover when it comes to their discourse.

The main motivation behind studying the discourse of political actors is the belief that language shapes and sustains political realities and societal relations.¹ Discursive and rhetorical choices made in campaign speeches can serve as powerful indicators of the strategies and priorities of certain political groups. By understanding language as something that is used purposely and instrumentally to achieve specific outcomes, political speeches and the linguistic choices that accompany them become integral tools of persuasion that reproduce power relations and shape how people experience reality.²

This study examines the most notable speeches made by party leaders and candidates with the aim of understanding how different political actors mobilized voters and presented themselves to their constituents. For this purpose, the study attempts to answer some of these questions: What are the different types of programmatic or non-programmatic rhetorical strategies political actors deploy? How can we make sense of the nuances within their discourse? What purpose do different strategies serve and what factors determine those choices? How do political actors distinguish themselves from other groups through their speeches? Under what conditions do rhetorical strategies converge?

To this end, numerous statements and speeches made by the figureheads of the seven main traditional political parties were collected, as well as statements by 13 other candidates, covering 14 of the country's 15 electoral districts. The speeches were then

¹ Yanow, D. 2000. *Conducting Interpretive Policy Analysis*. Sage Publishing.

² Fairclough, N. 2003. *Analysing Discourse: Textual Analysis for Social Research*. Routledge.

coded and their arguments categorized. After explaining in detail the methodological approach and categorization adopted, the report looks at how speeches addressed each of the five thematic types of discourse we identified. It then focuses on the instrumentalization of affective rhetoric before delving into regional variations in the speeches of traditional political parties.

As expected, traditional political parties relied little on policy-based discourse, especially when compared to independent candidates from emerging political groups. When policy issues were brought up, statements tended to lack any elaboration or practical solutions. Five key discursive elements were identified for this report. First, traditional political parties spent extensive time discussing their positions vis-à-vis other internal or external actors, as criticizing or fear-mongering against opponents was common practice. Second, certain traditional parties relied on favoritism and clientelistic rhetoric while others tapped into their ideological and historical capital more frequently. Third, all traditional parties shared a reliance on affective rhetoric, with most of their arguments qualifying as emotion-evoking: Affective strategies varied from fear-mongering, to expressing affection, casting constituents as victims, or glorifying the party's history. The fourth element found was that traditional political parties adjusted their rhetorical strategies depending on the districts they campaigned in. In other words, geographic and demographic contexts shaped their discursive choices. Finally, the salience of affective rhetoric is rooted in the structural nature of the Lebanese political system.

This report is composed of five sections: The first covers the methodology and framework adopted; the second is an overarching, inter-party comparison based on the findings; the third looks at the results of the study from a topical perspective, focusing on each of the five discourse categories we identified; the fourth looks at emotion-evoking statements, or affective discourse; and the last section is an intra-party regional comparison of the discourse employed in different electoral districts.

I Framing the Speeches

The study of discourse is derived from the work of Michel Foucault, who posited that knowledge itself is a form of power; therefore controlling and shaping the dissemination of knowledge, primarily through language, can mold people's understanding of the world in ways that reproduce the dominant power structures.³ In other words, different forms of discourse can help naturalize certain versions of reality and history, which then affect people's outlook on life and their choices. The study of electoral speeches, specifically, falls within the realm of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA). PDA is a field of study that is not only concerned with the discourse of elected or appointed officials, but also extends its field of concern to the public sphere, where many more participants in political communication emerge. These may include civil society groups, the media, and citizens themselves. Essentially, what defines the categorization of discourse as 'political' is the context surrounding said discourse and whether it qualifies as 'political.' There are different ways of defining what context or which actors qualify as political, and the literature touches extensively on that.⁴ Considering that electoral speeches fall within the realm of the political, the main methodological and conceptual challenge for this study does not lie in justifying the character of the discourse as political, but rather in the categorization of the contents of the speeches. Indeed, how does one go about categorizing dense, nuanced, metaphorical, and often times latent messaging while taking into account the particularities of the Lebanese context?

According to existing literature on PDA, there are several approaches to studying political discourse, through different means and to different ends. There is no standard approach or categorization scheme to adopt. Choices should instead be made according to the purpose of the study, the research questions, and the type of texts being studied. Here are some of the most common ways of analyzing and categorizing political discourse:

1. **Topical:** Discourse may be studied according to the particular topics that are raised in speech. Assuming the contents of the discourse are political, a stance in favor of a wealth tax, for instance, is not only about public policy, but also about fiscal policy as well as economic inequality and social justice. Statements can then be categorized based on the topics they address. The challenge with such an approach is that it is difficult to identify what can be considered a topic per say. This difficulty is further compounded when comparing speeches of numerous candidates across an extended period of time. One could instead think of topics as broader propositions such as promised actions, evaluations of other political actors, threats, or recommendations.⁵ Broadening the scope of the topics resolves some challenges but also creates

³ Foucault, M. 2001. *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*. Routledge.

⁴ Van Dijk, T. 1997. 'What Is Political Discourse Analysis?' *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, 11: 11-52.

⁵ Van Dijk, T. A. 1995. 'Discourse Semantics and Ideology' *Discourse & Society*, 6(2): 243-289.

others, such as overlap between different categories.

2. **Textual Structure:** The schematic structure of texts and the argumentative strategies that accompany them are integral tools of persuasion. The main purpose of textual structure is to signal a choice of how meaning and information is being presented and distributed. Choices of where, when, and how specific information is presented in a text can alter the importance of the information.⁶ In that way, information that benefits the speaker or harms their opponents can be emphasized and even embellished while the opposite is dismissed or diluted.⁷ For instance, placing controversial information at the beginning of a text can help the speaker reach the outcomes needed with their target audience. Similarly, leaving out pertinent information in a story, or writing in small print to mislead readers, are other ways of instrumentalizing textual structure.
3. **Local Semantics:** This type of categorization is specifically concerned with discerning and studying the subtle and indirect messaging of local contexts.⁸ As Van Dijk (1997) put it, examples of local semantics include ‘conditions of local coherence, presuppositions and entailment, indirectness and implicitness, strategies of description and representation, and so on.’⁹ The focus of this category lies in a process of ‘othering’ through the manner by which the in-group is presented in contrast to the out-groups. This polarization is captured through preconceived notions regarding in-groups and out-groups as well as through the level of generality and specificity.¹⁰ For example, negative actions by a member of the out-group will be generalized to the whole group, whereas negative actions of a member of the in-group will be viewed as an exception.
4. **Lexicon and Syntax:** This type of approach to PDA is concerned with the choice of words used to describe certain events or actors, and with the arrangement of words and phrases within a sentence. The specific words and terms used to describe an event or group may signal an implicit message or judgment that is otherwise not explicit in the text. Similarly, the choice in pronouns, the ordering of words, the active as opposed to the passive construction of a phrase, and the complexity of a sentence all have specific effects on the messages being delivered in a text. Indeed, the set of rules, principles, and processes that govern the structure of sentences can serve as tools of argumentation and persuasion in order to shape meaning and influence the target audience.¹¹
5. **Expression Structure and Speech Acts:** Meaning in discourse is also captured by the sounds and visuals that shape it. The pitch and intonation of speakers, for instance, impact which phrases or words to emphasize on. Body language and gesturing are also

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Thompson, K. W. 1987. *Rhetoric and Public Diplomacy: The Stanton Report Revisited*. University Press of America.

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Herman, E. S., and N. Chomsky. 1988. *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media*. Pantheon Books.

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Van Dijk. 1995. ‘Discourse Semantics and Ideology’

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Van Dijk. 1997. ‘What Is Political Discourse Analysis?’ 31.

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Gruber, H. 1993. ‘Political Language and Textual Vagueness.’ *Pragmatics*, 3(1): 1-29.

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Chomsky, N., and D. Lightfoot. 2002. *Syntactic Structures*. Mouton de Gruyter.

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Abadi, A. 1990. 'The Speech Act of Apology in Political Life.' *Journal of Pragmatics*, 14(3): 467-471.

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Kampf, Z. 2015. 'Political Discourse Analysis.' *International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*. Wiley-Blackwell; Benmamoun, E. and R. Bassiouney. 2017. *The Routledge Handbook of Arabic Linguistics*. Routledge; Fairclough, I. and N. Fairclough. 2012. *Political Discourse Analysis: A Method for Advanced Students*. Routledge; Kommaluri, V. and L. Ramamoorthy. 2011. 'Critical Discourse Analysis: Politics and Verbal Coding.' *Problems of Parsing in Indian Languages*, 11(5): 20-29; Chilton, P. 2004. *Analysing Political Discourse: Theory and Practice*. Routledge; and Dunmire, P. 2012. 'Political Discourse Analysis: Exploring the Language of Politics and the Politics of Language.' *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 6(11): 735-751.

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Walgrave, S. 2007. 'Populism as Political Communication Style: An Empirical Study of Political Parties' Discourse in Belgium.' *European Journal of Political Research*, 46(3): 319-345; Ekstrom, M., M. Patrona, and J. Thornborrow. 2018. 'Right-Wing Populism and the Dynamics of Style: A Discourse-Analytic Perspective on Mediated Political Performances.' *Palgrave Communications*, 4(83): 1-11; Hamu Habwe, J. 1999. 'Discourse Analysis of Swahili Political Speeches.' *Linguistics*, University of Nairobi; Horvath, J. 2009. 'Critical Discourse Analysis of Obama's Political Discourse.' Paper presented at the International Conference of Language, Literature and Culture in a Changing Transatlantic, University of Presov, Slovakia; Bayram, F. 2010. 'Ideology and Political Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Erdogan's Political Speech.' *ARECLS*, 7: 23-40; and عماد عبد اللطيف. 2013. 'الحرية معارك الخطاب السياسي في زمن الثورة.' دار التنوير.

forms of communication that convey meaning and serve various argumentative purposes.¹² This interactional nature of political discourse has been referred to as the 'conversationalization' of public discourse. Essentially, sounds and visuals can help make speeches more accessible and relatable, while providing speakers with an additional means of conveying or highlighting certain meanings and messages.

It is important to note that the literature on PDA is primarily focused on western contexts, where programmatic discourse and policy-related argumentation dominate the rhetoric of political actors. Based on this context, analyses in these studies focus predominantly on language and persuasion strategies, ranging from the use of semantics, syntax, phonetics, and metaphors, to the manner in which key figures, actors, and events are framed to advocate for policy agendas and shape public knowledge.¹³ While examining linguistics in the Lebanese context could generate informative findings, such an approach would fail to cover a range of context-specific rhetorical strategies such as clientelistic and sectarian discourse. We thus found that the topical approach described above was the most suitable for this study. After looking at other case studies that sought to unpack political discourse in a manner that caters to the uniqueness of the relevant political climates,¹⁴ we found that it is best to develop our own discourse categorization scheme.

To capture the different discursive strategies adopted by political parties and emerging groups in the 2018 elections, we relied on an iterative process to develop a codebook and categorize different forms of speech. The unit of analysis in categorizing the contents of speeches is what we refer to as a 'talking point', which can be understood as a specific argument being formulated in the course of a speech. Depending on the context and the manner in which the statement is framed, a talking point may be a phrase, a sentence, or consecutive sentences within a speech. Even though elections in Lebanon operate according to a system of sectarian power-sharing, and that evidence of vote buying and patronage is well documented, we found that speeches and talking points were far more nuanced and layered. Therefore, five categories and 20 subcategories were selected that proved to be capable of encompassing the range of talking points covered in speeches.

Table 1 Discourse coding categories and subcategories

Policy-Related Statements	Out-Group Positioning	Sectarian Coexistence	Glorification of Past and Symbolism	Favoritism
Policy Reference	Criticism of Internal Actor	Anti-Sectarianism	Reference to Political Leader	Material Promise (Unsubstantiated)
Policy Diagnosis	Criticism of External Actor	Communal Unity	Reference to Religious Leader	Material Promise (Substantiated)
Policy Solution	Threat of Internal Actor		Resistance to an Internal Enemy	Victimization of In-Group
Credit for Policy Measure	Threat of External Actor		Resistance to an External Enemy	Affection for In-Group
Policy Criticism of Internal Actor				
Policy Criticism of External Actor				

The Discourse Codebook

To ensure consistency in coding, here is how each of the five categories and 20 subcategories were strictly defined:

Policy-Related Statements

In electoral democracies, political parties are expected to run their campaigns based on programs that reflect the policy preferences of their constituents on key issues such as taxes, development, education, healthcare, and women's rights, among others. A common assumption by political scientists theorizing on democratic competition is that 'politicians are responsive to electorates by advertising and enacting principles and policies sufficiently in line with a stock of constituents to get them reelected.'¹⁵ While programmatic platforms are not frequently associated with the campaigns of traditional parties in Lebanon, it would be wrong to assume that these parties do not have programs at all.¹⁶ Indeed, political actors may not rely primarily on policy positions as key drivers for their campaigns, but it is evident from the speeches of leaders and candidates that policy-related issues are raised at times.

To this end, we define policy-related matters as talking points that reflect, to some degree, a position on a diverse range of programmatic issues such as economic policy, foreign policy, or oil and gas. These talking points signal what the political actor stands for or against. We find that there is often a qualitative difference in the level of engagement and depth provided in these talking points. For instance, some political parties just raise policy issues without providing any further details on how they plan to achieve them. Others may go further and provide a diagnosis of the problem or a solution on how they plan to address them. We thus distinguish, through a second tier of categorization, the differences between policy-related talking

¹⁵ Kitschelt, H. and K. Freeze. 2010. 'Programmatic Party System Structuration: Developing and Comparing Cross-National and Cross-Party Measures with a New Global Data Set.' Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC.

¹⁶ Hassan, N. 2019. 'Analysis of Platforms in Lebanon's 2018 Parliamentary Election.' Policy Paper. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

points that simply raise an issue, diagnose it, provide a solution to it, or claim credit for a past policy achievement.

Furthermore, political actors' policy positions may be captured through statements that signal what they stand against. In such cases, the talking point is a criticism of a specific policy, and the politician associates said policy with a specific political actor or group. While such statements do not directly provide a policy prescription, they still shape the stances of candidates and parties by indicating what policies and actors they oppose, and the targets of such policy criticisms may vary. We distinguish, through a sub-tier of categorization, between criticisms of the policies of internal actors, such as rival political parties, and those targeting the policies of external actors, such as foreign governments. We define internal actors as any group, individual, or entity within the Lebanese borders; therefore, non-nationals, such as migrant workers or refugees, qualify as internal actors. External actors, meanwhile, are understood as any individual, group, or entity outside Lebanese borders—meaning that terrorist groups or international organizations qualify as such. The six subcategories that constitute 'Policy-Related Statements' are listed and further defined below:

1. **Policy Reference:** A talking point is classified as 'Raise Policy' when it brings up a policy matter but falls short of diagnosing the source of the problem or offering a solution to it.
Examples: 'Our program, first of all, is about building the state.' (Gebran Bassil, Koura, April 10); 'We are working to serve you, to protect this country, its stability, and its security.' (Saad Hariri, Beirut, March 11).
2. **Policy Diagnosis:** A talking point is classified as 'Diagnose Policy' when a policy issue is raised and also describes or identifies the source of the problem, but provides no solution.
Example: 'The shortages in electricity result from corrupt practices.' (Nabih Berri, Sour, April 28).
3. **Policy Solution:** A talking point is classified as 'Policy Solution' when politicians provide ways to resolve the policy matter they raise.
Example: 'We need a different economic vision for the country, that's why we are asking for the establishment of a new ministry of economic planning in the next government.' (Hassan Nasrallah, Sour and Zahrani, April 21).
4. **Credit for Policy Measure:** A talking point is classified as 'Credit' when politicians claim credit for implementing a policy measure, or resolving a policy issue while they were in office.
Examples: 'Look at the developmental achievements and economic growth that we have brought to the region since we entered government.' (Hassan Nasrallah, Baalbek-Hermel, May 1); 'Remember the support and state protection we provided to the

North when there were conflicts.' (Saad Hariri, Tripoli, March 25).

5. Policy Criticism of Internal Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Policy Criticism Internal' when a politician criticizes another party's position or actions on a policy issue and explicitly identifies how they have mismanaged it. In the case that no explicit explanation is provided, the talking point is classified as a 'Criticism' of an internal actor.

Examples: 'Hezbollah's weapons impede the development of the state, to certain extents, but we can still do a lot of work across other dimensions.' (Samir Geagea, LBCI, May 2); 'I'm running in elections again for the sake of Aley and Chouf, specifically its Christian regions, which have been marginalized by Walid Jumblatt. That's why they are lacking in development and the displaced [from the civil war] haven't returned.' (Mario Aoun, interview, April 25).

6. Policy Criticism of External Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Policy Criticism External' when a politician criticizes the policy position or actions of a foreign government or international organization in a manner that explicitly diagnoses the problem or offers a solution to it—not simply raising the issue without elaborating on it.

Examples: 'If Iran claims to care about the interests of Lebanon, then why does it only fund Hezbollah instead of investing in the national Lebanese economy and state?' (Samir Geagea, LBCI, May 2); 'We call for the UN Security Council to emphasize Israel's duty to respect resolution 1701 and to support Lebanon's demands of delineating its maritime borders.' (Nabih Berri, Sour, April 28).

Out-Group Positioning

While all nation-states are characterized by social and cultural differences within them—whether ethnic, racial, or religious—in some cases these differences are institutionalized. Consociational arrangements are common in countries that experienced periods of ethno-sectarian violence or war. In such contexts, political parties end up being primarily characterized by the ethnic or sectarian group they claim to represent and lead. The literature has shown that, rather than taming inter-group animosities, such arrangements end up entrenching ethno-sectarian identities by politicizing them further.¹⁷ Moreover, the literature has also shown that ethno-sectarian power sharing increases the likelihood of political gridlocks and disputes, as the system inherently rewards parties and leaders that are uncompromising during negotiations that concern 'their' share of political power and representation.¹⁸ These dynamics and incentive structures reinforce divisions and lead to animosity not only amongst sectarian groups, but also with any actor that is perceived as an opponent or a potential threat to the interests of the in-group.¹⁹

¹⁷ Cammett, M. 2019. 'Lebanon, the Sectarian Identity Test Lab.' The Century Foundation.

¹⁸ Fakhoury, T. 2019. 'Power-Sharing after the Arab Spring? Insights from Lebanon's Political Transition.' *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 25(1): 9-26.

¹⁹ Selway, J. and K. Templeman. 2012. 'The Myth of Consociationalism? Conflict Reduction in Divided Societies.' *Comparative Political Studies*, 45(12): 1542-1571.

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These actors may be specific politicians, parties, sectarian groups, refugees, terrorists, or foreign nations, among others.

These findings are clearly reflected in the Lebanese context, where the speeches of politicians frequently rely on rhetorical tools that criticize, scapegoat, or raise fears of other actors.²⁰ In this study, this category is specifically defined so as to include talking points which are meant to reflect the position of a party toward out-groups, either through discrediting them, disapproving of their ability to rule, undermining their character, scapegoating them as the source of the country's problems, or raising fears of them as a threat. This category does not include criticisms of another actor's policies since its primary purpose is to undermine the other on issues other than policy.

The targets of such statements may be internal actors or external ones. Furthermore, talking points targeting out-groups can take different forms: Some were explicitly threat-evoking while others were less hostile by nature. As such, we capture those nuances through a sub-tier of categorization. Specifically, we separate statements that evoked fear and danger from those that did not explicitly signal a threat. The four subcategories we identify are listed and further defined below:

1. Criticism of Internal Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Criticism Internal Actor' when an internal actor (politician, party, sectarian group, migrants, or refugees, among others) is targeted in a speech without referring to a policy issue. These non-programmatic points include: Stating disapproval of another political party, claiming that another party is corrupt or does not know how to govern, criticizing another party's rhetoric, denying accusations made against them, undermining the character of an opposing political figure, or claiming that a group of people such as refugees is a burden on the country. These talking points do not explicitly signal that the targeted actor is a threat.

Example: 'The Amal Movement imposes candidates on you that do not represent you.' (Gebran Bassil, Rmaich, Bint Jbeil, April 15).

2. Criticism of External Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Criticism External Actor' when an external actor (foreign government, terrorist group, or international organization, among others) is targeted in a talking point without referencing a policy issue. These non-programmatic points can include: Stating their disapproval of a foreign government, criticizing an international organization (such as the UN), or undermining the character of a foreign leader. These talking points do not explicitly signal that the targeted actor is a threat.

Example: 'Foreign nations treat us like we work for them.' (Paula Yacoubian, Beirut, April 3).

3. Threat of Internal Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Threat Internal Actor' if an internal actor is represented as a threat or danger. These talking points are meant to vilify the targeted actor.

Example: ‘The political class are leading us to the abyss and have given the country away to Hezbollah.’ (Samy Gemayel, TV interview, April 28).

4. Threat of External Actor: A talking point is classified as ‘Threat External Actor’ if an external actor is represented as a threat or danger. These talking points are meant to vilify the targeted actor. Example: ‘We will not allow the Syrian regime to lay its hands on the country again.’ (Saad Hariri, Akkar, March 24).

Coexistence Statements

Ethno-sectarian power sharing has entrenched antagonisms between Lebanon’s different sects, and leaders have benefited from such arrangements by capitalizing on their perception as the representatives of their respective communities. Nonetheless, ethno-sectarian leaders frequently position themselves as being opposed to divisive rhetoric and power sharing systems as a whole. As Majed (2017) put it, ‘The speeches of political leaders—ironically, many of whom are sectarian entrepreneurs—are frequently laden with similar calls [to abolish the sectarian system]. Warnings of the threat posed by sectarianism are also common in the charters and manifestos of most political parties.’²¹ This type of discourse is a carefully cultivated strategy that allows sectarian leaders to counter allegations of divisiveness and stress their commitment to ‘al-‘aysh al-mushtarak’ (coexistence) through cross-sectarian and geographic unity. Unlike the prior category of ‘Out-Group Positioning,’ the purpose of talking points falling in this bracket is not to undermine another actor but rather to prop up the party’s own character and values.

In this research, this category is defined so as to include talking points that highlight a commitment to coexistence and anti-sectarianism. It encompasses talking points that refute claims of the party being divisive or sectarian, and captures talking points where politicians may refer to past instances where they have supported other sectarian groups. Through a sub-tier of categorization, we distinguish between talking points that signal an opposition to sectarianism from those that stress unity and coexistence:

1. Anti-Sectarianism: A talking point is classified as ‘Anti-Sectarian’ if it counters allegations of divisiveness or reflects an opposition to political or social sectarianism. Example: ‘I declare our commitment to continue pushing for the formation of the national committee to abolish political sectarianism, as stipulated by the constitution.’ (Nabih Berri, Ain El-Tineh, Beirut, February 19).

Unity: A talking point is classified as ‘Unity’ if it highlights a commitment to cross-sectarian and geographic unity, or refers to a past instance when support for another sectarian group was provided.

²¹ Majed, R. 2017. ‘The Political (or Social) Economy of Sectarianism in Lebanon.’ Middle East Institute.

Example: 'We've always supported strong Christian representation in cabinet formation, leading up to the latest presidential election that you all know about. Therefore, we support true cooperation between Christians and Muslims in politics.' (Hassan Nasrallah, Keserwan and Jbeil, April 23).

Glorification of Past and Symbolic Statements

While many think of politics primarily through the lens of material interests, a scholarship on symbolic politics pushes back against this assumption and highlights the role of rhetorical and affective processes in entrenching the rule of regimes, and cultivating the consent of the masses.²² Symbolic politics may take on different forms: From the development of cults of personality²³ to the instrumentalization of memory²⁴ and spatiality.²⁵ These forms of symbolic capital are chiefly created through rhetoric. During electoral season, political leaders have an opportunity to tap into that capital and further deploy it. In this research, this category is defined so as to include talking points that refer to specific political and religious leaders associated with the party in question. It also includes references to particular historical events that address armed resistance to internal or external enemies.

Indeed, Lebanese political parties often capitalize on a party-specific understanding of history, which often consists of bloodshed and sacrifices. This unique reading of history and its notable actors is usually transmitted through generations and helps foster a sense of belonging to a community. The speeches and statements of political leaders that exploit that symbolic and historical capital thus have a particularly affective resonance with respective constituencies and allows parties to maintain their hegemony over the segments of the population they claim to represent. In order to capture the different ways political actors make reference to their ideological capital and party history, we rely on a sub-tier of categorization which distinguishes between references to political leaders, religious leaders, struggles against an internal enemy, and struggles against an external one. In this category, we define an internal enemy as any party, group, or entity which is primarily based in Lebanon, such as rival militias during the civil war. External enemies, meanwhile, refer to any organization, government, or entity that is primarily based outside of Lebanon, such as the Israel Defense Forces or ISIS. Each subcategory is further defined below:

1. Political Leader: A talking point is classified as 'Political Leader' if it refers to a political leader whose story or legacy are integral components of the party's history. This leader may be deceased (Kamal Jumblatt, Imam Musa Sadr, Rafic Hariri, Abbas Al-Mussawi) or still alive (Michel Aoun, Samir Geagea). The statement must

²² Kaufman, S. 2001. *Modern Hatred: The Symbolic Politics of Ethnic War*. Cornell University Press; and Wedeen, L. 2015. *Ambiguities of Domination: Politics, Rhetoric, and Symbols in Contemporary Syria*. University of Chicago Press.

²³ Wedeen, L. 1998. 'Acting 'As If': Symbolic Politics and Social Control in Syria.' *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 40(3): 503-523.

²⁴ Hermez, S. 2017. *War Is Coming: Between Past and Future Violence in Lebanon*. University of Pennsylvania Press; and Salloukh, B. 2019. 'War Memory, Confessional Imaginaries, and Political Contestation in Postwar Lebanon.' *Middle East Critique*, 28(3): 341-359.

²⁵ Bou Akar, H. 2018. *For The War Yet to Come: Planning Beirut's Frontiers*. Stanford University Press; and Nucho, J. R. 2016. *Everyday Sectarianism in Urban Lebanon: Infrastructures, Public Services, and Power*. Princeton University Press.

refer to the leader's legacy or memory in a positive light.

Example: 'The nation is calling for you next Sunday May 6, so come through to its demand yet again. Be present on this historic day in the life of Lebanon, as the Imam Musa Sadr would have wanted you to be.' (Nabih Berri, Msayleh, Nabatiyeh, May 3).

2. Religious Leader: A talking point is classified as 'Religious Leader' if it refers to a spiritual leader who holds a significant role or reputation within the religious community they represent. The religious leader may be alive or dead, and does not have to be directly associated with the party in question; what matters is whether said figure belongs to the ideological and cultural capital cultivated by the relevant party over the course of its history. As such, these figures will vary from one party to another, and may include a diverse range of religious figures, ranging from historical ones such as the Imam Ali to contemporary ones such as patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir.

Example: 'You are a symbol of education and love, dear Patriarch Arida, son of Bcharre' (Sethtrida Geagea, Bcharre, April 1).

3. Resistance Against External Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Resistance External Actor' if the statement pertains to struggles against external opponents. These talking points are usually presented in the form of anecdotes or historical references that stir past memories, or refer to specific martyrs, fighters, and their families.

Example: 'Akkar protects the region with the souls of its children. Each village is paying with the blood of its people so that the nation lives in peace and with stability.' (Saad Hariri, Akkar, March 24).

4. Resistance Against Internal Actor: A talking point is classified as 'Resistance Internal Actor' if the statement pertains to struggles against an internal opponent, such as rival militias, during the civil war or the 1958 crisis. The talking point is usually presented in the form of anecdotes or historical references that stir past memories, or refers to specific martyrs, fighters, and their families.

Example: 'Aley is a region that has provided martyrs and had its homes destroyed during the civil war.' (Taymour Jumblatt, Aley, April 30).

Favoritism Statements

A common tool deployed by political candidates and parties to win elections is clientelism. According to Kitschelt (2011), 'clientelistic linkages involve politicians supplying targeted private and small-scale club goods to individuals and groups of citizens who [...] lend their political support to their agent's candidacy for electoral office.'²⁶ The material goods provided to constituents in order to secure their vote may take on different forms, be it direct payments or more specific services such as education tuitions, medical bills, or business permits,

26
Kitschelt, H. 2011.
'Clientelistic Linkage
Strategies: A Descriptive
Exploration.' Paper prepared
for the Workshop on
Democratic Accountability
Strategies, Duke University,
USA.

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De Luca, G., R. Hodler, P. Raschky, and M. Valsecchi. 2018. 'Ethnic Favoritism: An Axiom of Politics?' *Journal of Development Economics*, 132(C): 115-129.

28

Cammett, M. 2014. *Compassionate Communalism: Welfare and Sectarianism in Lebanon*. Cornell University Press.

29

Baumann, H. 2016. *Citizen Hariri: Lebanon's Neoliberal Reconstruction*. Hurst Publishers.

to name a few. The literature also proves that political elites do not distribute these services and goods indiscriminately, but rather prioritize certain groups of individuals, particularly in contexts where ethno-sectarian parties are present.²⁷

Lebanon's political economy has repeatedly been described as patron-dependent and clientelistic.²⁸ The neoliberal period that followed the civil war resulted in the strengthening of ties between political and business elites, with many of the latter becoming notable political figures.²⁹ Through an accumulation of wealth at the top, and the lack of formal redistributive mechanisms, Lebanese elites became the primary providers of a range of essential services such as healthcare, education, jobs, and business permits. The general population thus became dependent on this class for basic material needs. Even the limited welfare wing of the state was co-opted by political parties who used it to complement their informal clientelistic webs. This was made clear by the spike in public sector hiring right before the elections of 2018, at a time when hiring was supposedly frozen.

With regards to politicians' speeches, the favoritism that is inherent in this patron-client relationship is very clear and noticeable. In this study, 'Favoritism Statements' is defined so as to include any talking point addressing a distinct group of people (sectarian or geographic) and evoking a material or non-material form of preferential treatment. Political actors may explicitly promise material goods or services to their constituents during speeches (jobs, healthcare, education, infrastructure, security, aid, etc.), or express non-material forms of favoritism, such as statements that either express affection to in-groups or paint them as victims. By praising voters from a specific group or highlighting their struggles, these non-material statements tap into the emotions of voters in order to make them feel cared for and valued, which reinforces the patron-client relationship developed through the country's clientelistic political economy. Through sub-tier categorizations, we thus distinguish between four types of favoritism: 1) Those that promise a material good while explaining how this good will be secured and provided, i.e., substantiated promises; 2) those that promise a material good without offering such explanations, i.e., unsubstantiated promises; 3) those that express affection for an in-group; and 4) those that victimize an in-group. These four subcategories are further defined below:

1. Unsubstantiated Material Promise: A talking point is classified as 'Unsubstantiated Promise' if it refers to a promise to a specific group or region of a material nature without providing an explanation as to how the party is going to secure and deliver it. These goods or services may include jobs, infrastructure, schools, hospitals, natural resources, security, and aid, among other things.

Example: 'One of our priorities in Metn is to address the environmental issues pertaining to landfills and quarries, which are ravaging our villages.' (Samy Gemayel, Zikrit, Metn, April 16).

2. Substantiated Material Promise: A talking point is classified as 'Substantiated Promise' if it refers to a promise to a specific group or region of a material nature, while providing at least minimal explanation as to how it will be secured and delivered. These goods or services may include jobs, infrastructure, schools, hospitals, natural resources, security, and aid, among others.

Example: 'We will provide healthy water to the Bekaa and the South by cleaning the Litani River.' (Nabih Berri, Sour, April 28).

3. Victimization: A talking point is classified as 'Victimization' when the talking point refers to a form of intangible support for a geographic area or sectarian group that is portrayed as having been unfairly treated. It aims to tap into the emotions of voters and make them feel cared for and valued by validating or acknowledging their struggles.

Example: 'Christians of Tripoli don't have anyone to represent them in Parliament, and our opponents are trying to prevent us from accessing a seat.' (Gebran Bassil, Beirut, March 24).

4. Affection: A talking point is classified as 'Affection' if it refers to a form of intangible support for a specific geographic area or sectarian group by expressing love or affection toward them. This talking point aims to tap into the emotions of voters and make them feel cared for and valued. Unlike the subcategory 'Victimization', this one has a positive element to it. Rather than relying on a strategy that triggers a sense of desperation, as the subcategory above does, this subcategory focuses on lifting the morale of constituents.

Example: 'Our people in Baalbek-Hermel have a good heart, are as generous as the valley, strong as an oak, patient as a farmer, and have been waiting 26 years for change and justice.' (Antoine Habchi, Baalbek-Hermel, March 14).

The data we rely on is a collection of 81 statements and speeches made by 20 political actors from different parties and groups in the months leading up to the 2018 elections. The data was collected from a range of sources, namely social media (Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube), newspaper articles, official party statements, or TV broadcasted interviews and speeches. Our sample of 20 political actors includes the leaders of the seven main traditional political parties, seven other candidates from traditional parties, and six candidates from the Kulluna Watani coalition of independent candidates. The statements or speeches addressed 14 out of the 15 electoral districts and generated a total of 1,637 talking points. The focus on the leaders of political parties was deliberately chosen because their speeches

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Although Walid Jumblatt (PSP) and Samir Geagea (LF) were not candidates in the elections, their speeches and statements were included in the analysis as they played integral roles in campaigning for their parties.

31

While there are many independent candidates who participated in the election outside Kulluna Watani lists, it would be inadequate to lump them alongside Kulluna Watani candidates. These groups ran independently from one another and often had different campaigning strategies and visions. They also competed with one another in certain districts.

were generally the most listened to and anticipated by voters.³⁰ If the collected data from a specific traditional party leader did not amount to at least 80 talking points, or failed to include statements or speeches addressing electoral districts typically associated with the party in question, then data from other candidates of the same party were added to the sample. For instance, the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) leader Walid Jumblatt's speeches amounted to 33 talking points and only addressed Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf). We thus added statements from MPs Taymour Jumblatt (Mount Lebanon 4), Hadi Abou Hassan for Mount Lebanon 3 (Baabda), and Wael Abou Faour for Bekaa 2 (West Bekaa–Rachaya). With regards to independent candidates, we focused on the Kulluna Watani coalition specifically because it was the first independent coalition of its kind to field 66 candidates and run in nine of the 15 electoral districts.³¹ As such, we included the speeches and statements of six of the nine Kulluna Watani candidates who received the most preferential votes. A detailed breakdown of the distribution of the data and the political actors we selected can be found in table 2.

Table 2 Distribution of analyzed speeches and statements

Party/Coalition	Politicians	Districts Addressed	Number of Speeches/ Statements	Number of Talking Points
Amal	Nabih Berri	South 2 South 3	4	136
Free Patriotic Movement	Gebran Bassil Mario Aoun	South 3 Mount Lebanon 4 North 3	14	231
Future Movement	Saad Hariri	Beirut 2 Mount Lebanon 4 North 1 North 2	5	222
Hezbollah	Hassan Nasrallah	South 2 South 3 Beirut 2 Mount Lebanon 1 Bekaa 3	8	357
Kataeb	Samy Gemayel	Beirut 1 Mount Lebanon 2	7	86
Kulluna Watani	Ziad Abs Gilbert Doumit Wassef Harake Zoya Jureidini Charbel Nahas Paula Yacoubian	Beirut 1 Mount Lebanon 2 Mount Lebanon 3 Mount Lebanon 4	14	195

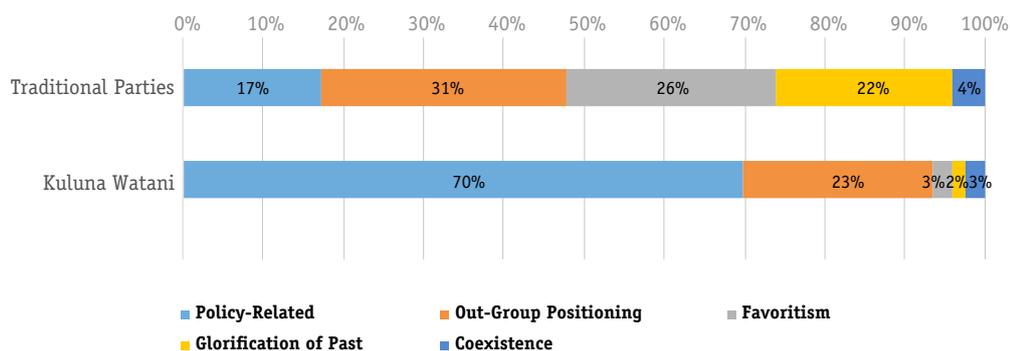
Lebanese Forces	Majed Eddy	South 1	16	338
	Abillama	Mount Lebanon 2		
	Samir Geagea	Bekaa 3		
	Sethrida Geagea	North 3		
	Antoine Habchi			
Progressive Socialist Party	Wael Abou Faour	Mount Lebanon 3	13	158
	Hadi Abou Hassan	Mount Lebanon 4		
	Taymour Jumblatt	Bekaa 2		
	Walid Jumblatt			

II Inter-Party Comparison of Findings

Lebanon’s economic situation had already been worsening prior to the 2018 elections. Not only were unemployment rates high but the banking sector—which was financing the government—was reaching a breaking point as the Central Bank continued to buy time through unsustainable financial engineering schemes. Despite that, traditional political parties’ electoral campaigns failed to address these pressing issues. The seven traditional parties—the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Future Movement (FM), Amal Movement, Hezbollah, Lebanese Forces (LF), PSP, and Kataeb—secured 106 of the 128 seats in parliament, but addressed policy-related matters in less than one fifth of their statements (figure 1).³² This is in stark contrast to Kulluna Watani, a coalition of emerging political groups, whose candidates ran on a programmatic platform, as 70% of their talking points tackled policy issues.

32 The Kataeb led the way at 34% while the Future Movement had the lowest ratio at 11% (figure 2). Other traditional parties had ratios ranging between 15% and 21%.

Figure 1 Distribution of talking points for traditional parties and Kulluna Watani



The rhetorical strategies of party figureheads and traditional party candidates avoided programmatic discourses, as our findings clearly show.

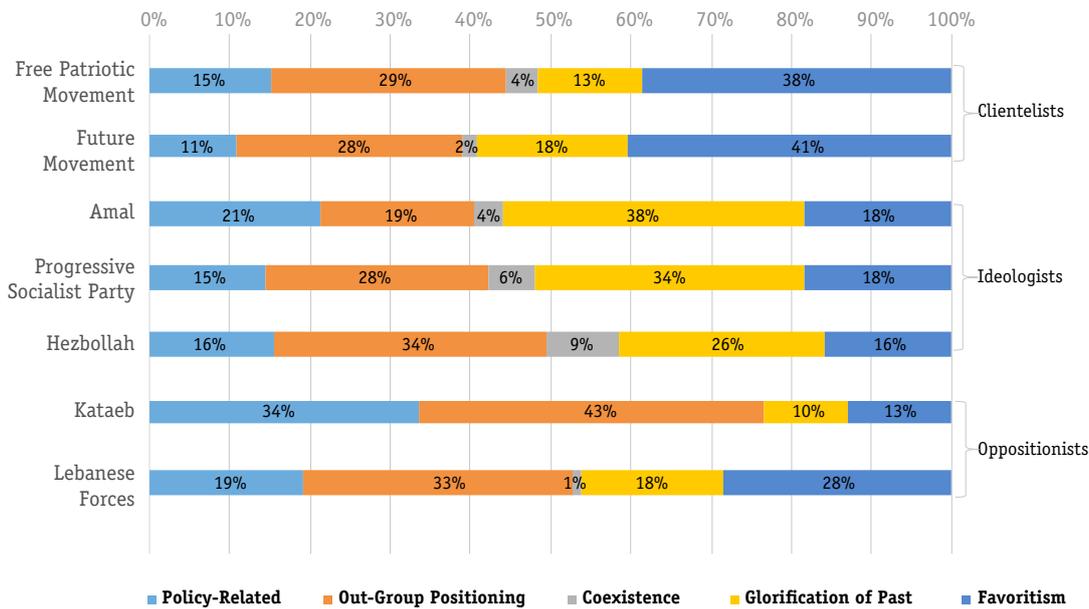
In fact, when viewed as a whole, traditional parties used different discourses, including positioning themselves as different from the other parties, expressing favoritism to their constituency, and evoking historical capital to win over voters.

Looking closely at parties' talking points, 31% of their rhetoric focused on positioning themselves vis-à-vis other groups (figure 1). The Kataeb party, LF, and Hezbollah used this strategy extensively in their discourse. Even though all traditional parties as well as Kulluna Watani spent considerable time discussing their positioning vis-à-vis out-groups, each party had its own distinct targets, and adopted different rhetorical strategies to express their stances toward the respective 'other'.

'Favoritism' was the second most common category of statements for traditional parties, with 26% of their talking points classified as such. Explicit and implicit sectarian statements tend to fall under this category, such as clientelistic promises (like job opportunities), or representations of their respective sect through victimizing or affective discourse. Results show that the FM and FPM stand out in that regard with about 40% of their talking points falling under this category. The LF (28%) also relied heavily on preferential treatment, albeit to a lesser extent than the former two.

The PSP, Amal, and Hezbollah were less reliant on 'Favoritism' because they were more rhetorically invested in their parties' historical and ideological capital. While 22% of traditional parties' rhetoric evoked historical capital, Amal and the PSP led the way with 38% and 34%, respectively. The FM, LF, FPM, and Kataeb had relatively lower rates, ranging between 10% and 18%.

Figure 2 Distribution of talking points amongst traditional parties



Looking at the discourse of the seven traditional parties through a broader lens, their discourse can be categorized into three different strategy-based groups:

1. 'The Clientelists': The FM and FPM relied on 'Favoritism' more than any other group, with ratios of 41% and 38%, respectively. In fact, no other party came close to these numbers, highlighting how relatively frequently they addressed their district or confessional in-groups directly. Whether promising services, victimizing constituents, or encouraging them, these two parties rarely adopted a cross-geographic rhetoric and seemed adamant on cementing their established presence in the districts they addressed. It is also worth noting that the FPM and the FM derive their power primarily through state institutions, providing them with the means to offer clientelistic services—a matter that may explain this high discursive reliance on preferential treatment. Some of the statements they have made in their campaigns are presented in table 3.

Table 3 Examples of statements by 'Clientelists'

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'We promise you [people of Akkar] a large share of the national development projects, particularly in terms of job opportunities.'	Saad Hariri	Akkar	March 24, 2018
'We have been victimized since 2005, but we persevered.'	Saad Hariri	Beirut	April 4, 2018
'We want Koura to have the share it deserves in terms of developmental projects.'	Gebran Bassil	Koura	April 10, 2018
'We won't give up on our people in the South who deserve proper representation.'	Gebran Bassil	Rmaich, Bint Jbeil	April 15, 2018

2. 'The Ideologists': Amal, the PSP, and Hezbollah stand out in terms of their reliance on and investment in their party's historical and symbolic capital. All three of these groups claim rich political and military histories: The PSP is one of the oldest active Lebanese political parties and its founder, Kamal Jumblatt, is one of the most prominent figures of Lebanon's modern history; Amal also has a long history predating its founding in 1974, considering its direct association with the legacy of its founder, Imam Musa Sadr, and his 'Movement of the Dispossessed,' which highlighted the socio-economic marginalization of southern Lebanon and empowered a segment of its Shia population; Hezbollah emerged in 1982 as a militia against the Israeli occupation and progressively became an integral political player within the national and regional landscape, as it repeatedly clashed with Israel, helped protect the Assad regime in Syria, and became increasingly involved in other regional conflicts. All three parties claim many martyrs and maintain strong geographical bases of core supporters. Despite other parties (such as the LF and Kataeb) also having long, rich legacies, these three parties sought to instrumentalize their past more than any other. Some of the statements they made in their campaigns are presented in table 4.

Table 4 Examples of statements by 'Ideologists'

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'Will you vote for those who shed blood for your protection?'	Hassan Nasrallah	Baalbek-Hermel	May 1, 2018
'Mobilize for the resistance on election day as if you were a member of its armed wing.'	Nabih Berri	Sour	April 28, 2018
'We need the support of the resistance to protect our cause and uphold our values, which martyrs have sacrificed for since the events of 1957.'	Walid Jumblatt	Niha, Chouf	May 3, 2018

3. ‘The Oppositionists’: The LF and the Kataeb fall under this category as their campaigns relied heavily on presenting themselves as opposition groups. Their rhetoric was highly critical of the political ruling class they claimed to be separate from, especially when it came to criticisms of Hezbollah. Their high rate of ‘Out-Group Positioning’ is a testament to that confrontational tone (figure 2). Both parties were neither overtly clientelistic nor excessively reliant on their parties’ histories. Despite the LF’s high use of favoritism discourse, less than one fifth of these statements were of a material nature. Additionally, the Kataeb made policy-related statements relatively often, placing it between Kulluna Watani and other traditional parties in that regard. That programmatic rhetoric is in accordance with the party’s strategy of presenting itself as a reformist party against a corrupt class of rulers. Some of the statements both parties made in their campaigns are presented in table 5.

Table 5 Examples of statements by ‘Oppositionists’

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
‘Do not elect those undermining the state by denying the internal military situation in relation to Hezbollah’s arms.’	Samir Geagea	Sahel Alma, Keserwan	March 14, 2018
‘The traditional leadership of the region is incapable of representing you.’	Antoine Habchi	Aaynata, Baalbek	March 22, 2018
‘The people must choose between a ruling class that pillaged the state and an opposition which is with the people.’	Samy Gemayel	Jdaideh, Metn	April 30, 2018
‘The ruling class bestowed decision-making in the hands of Hezbollah.’	Samy Gemayel	Saifi, Beirut 1	April 4, 2018

III Breakdown of Findings by Discourse Category

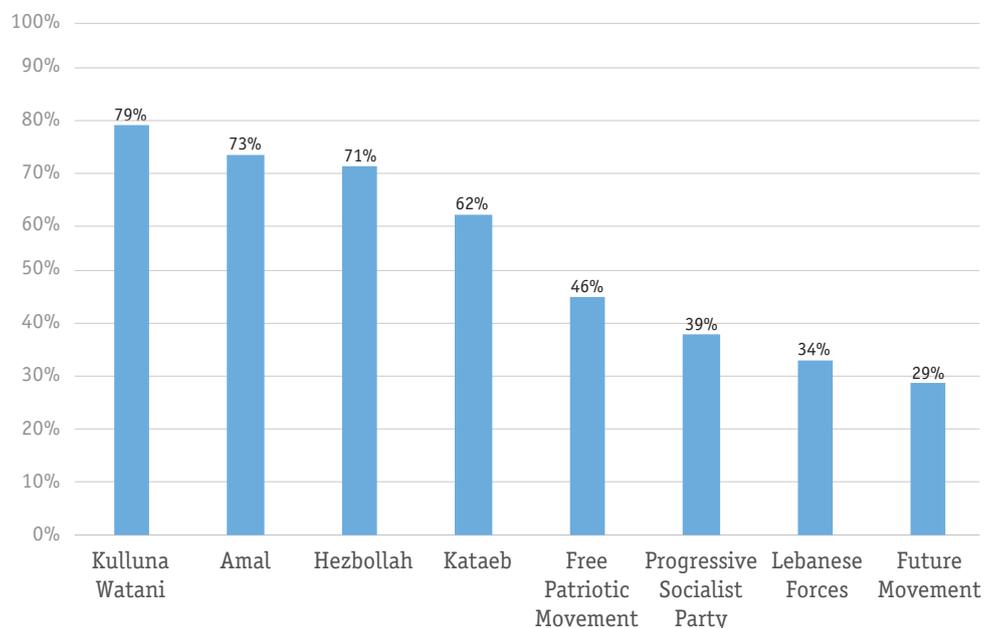
Policy-Related Statements

Even though political parties did not address policy-related issues enough, we further unpack such statements based on the sub-categories presented in the methodology section.

While certain candidates proposed actual solutions or diagnosed policy problems, a significant portion of these statements merely raised issues without actually elaborating on them. Indeed, nearly half of traditional parties’ policy-related talking points only raised issues or claimed credit for a past achievement without offering any explanation or constructive criticism. The traditional parties who most often diagnosed and/or offered solutions to policy issues were Amal (73%), Hezbollah (71%), and the Kataeb (62%). Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s leader, focused primarily on security issues, economic development,

foreign policy, and sectarianism; Berri, head of Amal, placed emphasis on corruption and transparency, judicial reforms, and bureaucratic efficiency; while Gemayel, Kataeb's president, mainly addressed corruption issues, public services, and security matters. The FM and LF score the lowest as they failed to diagnose the problem or provide any solutions. Expectedly, Kulluna Watani exerted the most effort in diagnosing policy-related problems and articulating solutions in their discourse, as almost 80% of their rhetoric addressed a breadth of issues ranging from women's rights, to economic and judicial corruption, environmental issues, public services, and foreign policy.

Figure 3 Share of diagnoses and solutions talking points in policy-related category



Favoritism

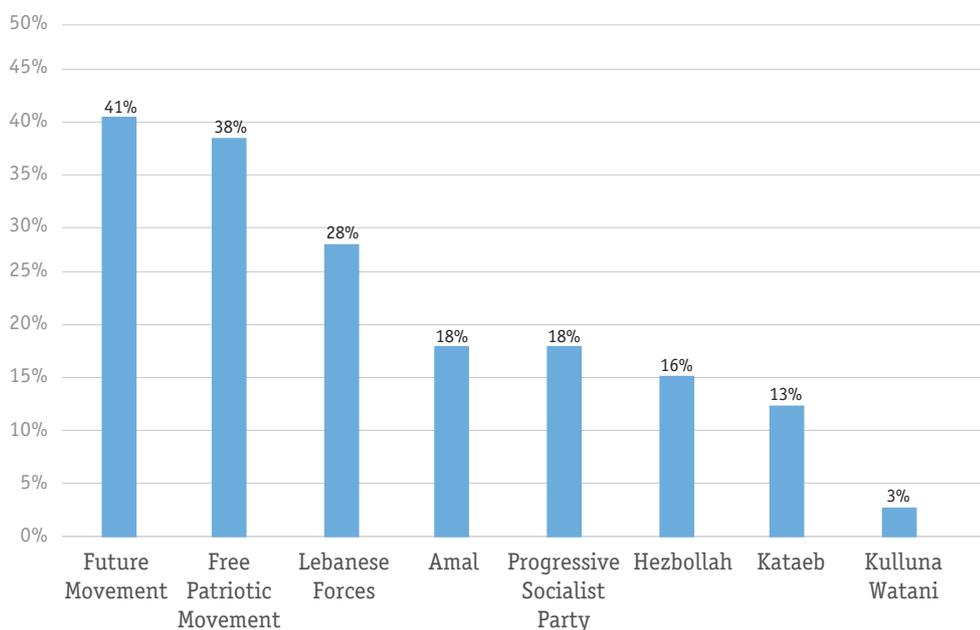
Talking points evoking some form of favoritism were the second most common type of statements amongst traditional parties (26%; figure 1). The FPM, spearheaded by Gebran Bassil, led the way by adopting a strong, although often times implicit and veiled, sectarian language. This was corroborated by the party's reliance on favoritism (38%), focusing on victimizing Lebanese Christians in South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh) and Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf), and highlighting the party's commitment to protect and reestablish its representation and influence in the local political arena through unsubstantiated material promises. These statements were accompanied by a vehemently confrontational language targeting those attempting to marginalize the Christian community, with the occasional demonization of Syrian refugees.

Another party that stood out in regards to preferential treatment is the FM (41%), which also consistently made uncorroborated material

assurances, primarily in the form of economic promises (figure 4). However, Hariri, the party's leader, relied less on victimization and more on a positive encouragement strategy that sought to prop up his constituents and appease their worries by framing the FM as their protector and reminding them of the party's love and commitment to its in-groups.

The LF (28%) adopted a similar approach to that of the FM, though it made fewer material promises, considering its lesser ability to provide clientelistic services. The LF relied considerably on a victimization strategy in Bekaa 3 (Baalbek-Hermel), where it focused on its lack of representation and the economic marginalization of the region. Amal made the least material promises of all, arguably because it faced little to no competition in its strongholds of South 2 (Sour and Zahrani) and South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh). Hezbollah's material promises, albeit limited, were mostly concentrated in Bekaa 3 (Baalbek-Hermel), where constituents face particular economic marginalization and could have potentially shifted their support to the main opposing list.

Figure 4 Share of material promises talking points in favoritism category

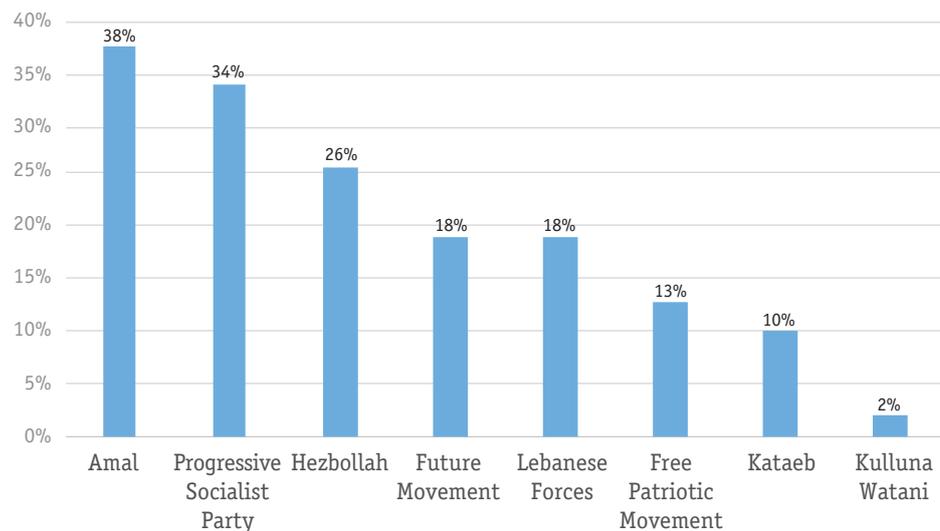


Glorification of Past and Symbolic Statements

The three traditional parties least reliant on favoritism (PSP, Amal, and Hezbollah) were more rhetorically invested in their parties' history and symbolic capital (figure 5). Amal (38%) and Hezbollah (26%) spoke extensively about their martyrs and historical resistance against Israel, particularly when addressing their southern constituents. The PSP (34%), on the other hand, focused on its civil war martyrs and on its internal resistance against the Syrian

regime, accompanied by extensive references to its founder and martyred leader Kamal Jumblatt. The FM (18%) and LF (18%) made periodic references to their parties' historical resistance against Syria in defense of Lebanese sovereignty, also invoking prominent, symbolic leaders—particularly Rafic Hariri in the case of the FM. Considering FPM's relatively recent prominence in local politics, the party unsurprisingly had one of the lowest rates of references to its history (13%), albeit it still made occasional mentions to the sacrifices of Michel Aoun and its partisans during and following the civil war. Despite the Kataeb's long history in local politics, Samy Gemayel only discussed his party's past in 10% of his talking points, in which he referred to the party's numerous martyrs, including his assassinated older brother and former MP Pierre Amine Gemayel.

Figure 5 Share of glorification of past and symbolism talking points

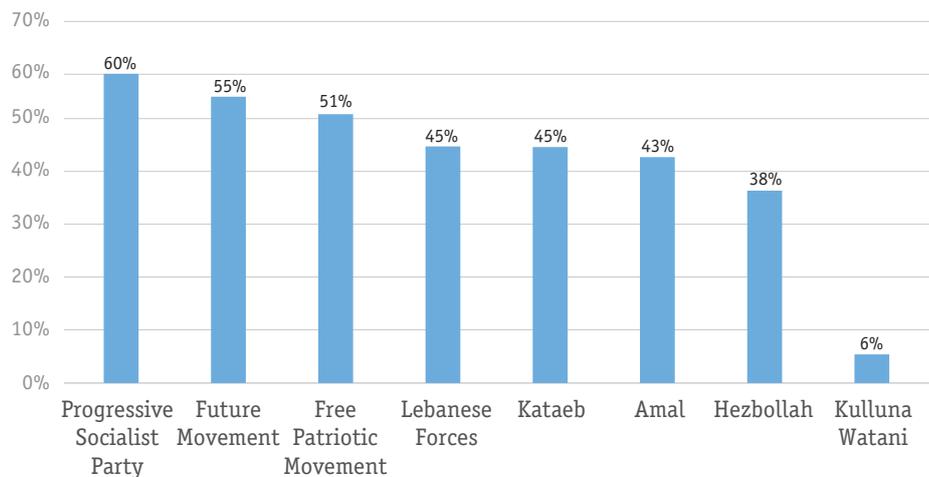


Out-Group Positioning

This category made up a significant portion of each political party's discourse, including that of the Kulluna Watani coalition. Looking at the breakdown of the subcategories, there are interesting findings worth noting. First, all traditional parties relied extensively on fear-mongering when discussing their position toward another group. In fact, nearly half of statements in this category were of a threatening nature (figure 6). The PSP, FM, and FPM were the three parties most reliant on raising fear. While the FM, LF, and Kataeb primarily targeted Hezbollah or the Syrian regime, the PSP focused on vilifying the FPM. Similarly, the FPM invested heavily in a narrative where their in-groups face danger from other groups wanting to weaken them politically. Indeed, all these parties sought to frame their targets as existential enemies seeking to strip their constituents of their historical representation, agency, and/or security. Unsurprisingly,

Hezbollah and Amal targeted Israel more than any other party did, although the former also spent extensive time criticizing and raising fears of ISIS, Saudi Arabia, the United States, as well as their Lebanese allies. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the frequency of fear-mongering varied considerably depending on the constituencies being addressed and the electoral districts they were in. Regional variations will be addressed later in the chapter.

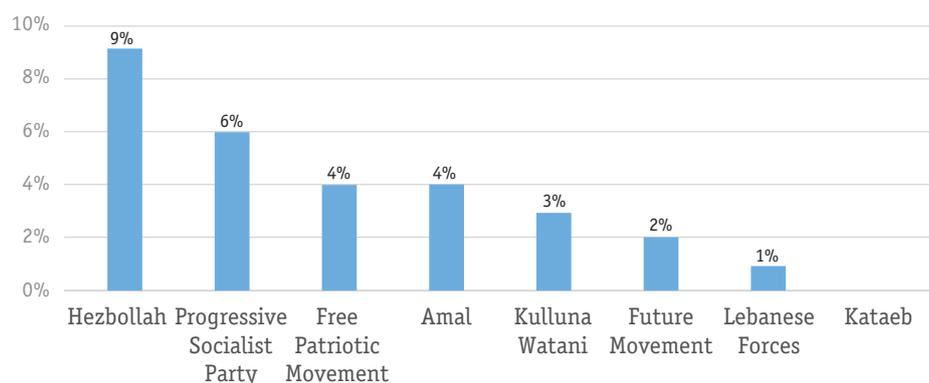
Figure 6 Share of threat-evoking talking points in out-group positioning



Coexistence Statements

This category is the least common one, with only 4% of talking points falling within it. When it comes to opposing divisive rhetoric and framing other groups in a positive light, Hezbollah was the most vocal proponent of inter-communal unity and anti-sectarianism (figure 7). These inclusive statements praising diversity tended to come as responses to the sectarian mobilization strategies of opponents, and often varied depending on the district in question. The PSP, FPM, and Amal also highlighted coexistence in parts of their speeches, albeit less often than Hezbollah. Generally, this category is most revealing through a comparative geographical lens, which will be addressed later on in the chapter.

Figure 7 Share of coexistence talking points



IV The Use of Emotion-Evoking Statements and Affective Rhetoric

With the lack of policy-related discourse in the speeches of traditional political parties, it is evident that their mobilization strategies lay elsewhere. Numerous studies have shown how affect and emotions play a substantial role in guiding political behavior.³³ Coupled with the global upsurge in populist discourse built upon processes of ‘othering’ that symbolically construct in-groups and out-groups,³⁴ it is unsurprising that the rhetorical strategies of leading figures in the 2018 elections relied on stirring the emotions of voters. In a political climate prone to instability and widespread corruption, policy-related discourse seems to have little effect on potential voters. In fact, a set of focus groups conducted by LCPS with voters across different districts revealed how little political programs seem to matter in voters’ decision-making. Participants noted that they rarely read the platforms of different parties or base their voting decisions upon them. Indeed, in Lebanon, political mobilization is driven far more by intangible and symbolic rhetoric, fostering a sense of belonging to a sociopolitical community, complemented by emotionally persuasive narratives that eventually become internalized and transmitted from one generation to the next.

Looking at the 20 subcategories of the discourse analysis more closely, it is clear that eight of them are of an affective nature: Both ‘Threat’ subcategories (external and internal), all four ‘Glorification of Past and Symbolism’ subcategories (religious leader, political leader, internal resistance, and external resistance), and both non-material ‘Favoritism’ subcategories (victimization and affection). The ‘Threat’ subcategories directly evoke feelings of fear, the ‘Glorification of the Past’ subcategories evoke memories of emotionally intense events and/or figures, and the ‘Favoritism’ subcategories evoke feelings of mistreatment and fondness.

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Glaser, J. and P. Salovey. 1998. ‘Affect in Electoral Politics.’ *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 2(3): 156-172; Demertzis, N. 2013. *Emotions in Politics: The Affect Dimension in Political Tension*. Palgrave Macmillan; Kuhn, R., J. Matthes, C. Schemer, and W. Wirth. 2011. ‘Affective Priming in Political Campaigns: How Campaign-Induced Emotions Prime Political Opinions.’ *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, 23(4): 488-507; and Kiss, C. 2013. ‘The Emotional Voter: The Impact of Electoral Campaigns and Emotions on Electoral Behaviour in Britain.’ PhD thesis. Oxford University, UK.

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Campani, G. and G. Lazaridis. 2017. *Understanding the Populist Shift*. Routledge; and Krasteva, A., B. Siim, and A. Saarinen. 2019. *Citizens’ Activism and Solidarity Movements: Contending with Populism*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Table 6 Affective discourse coding categories

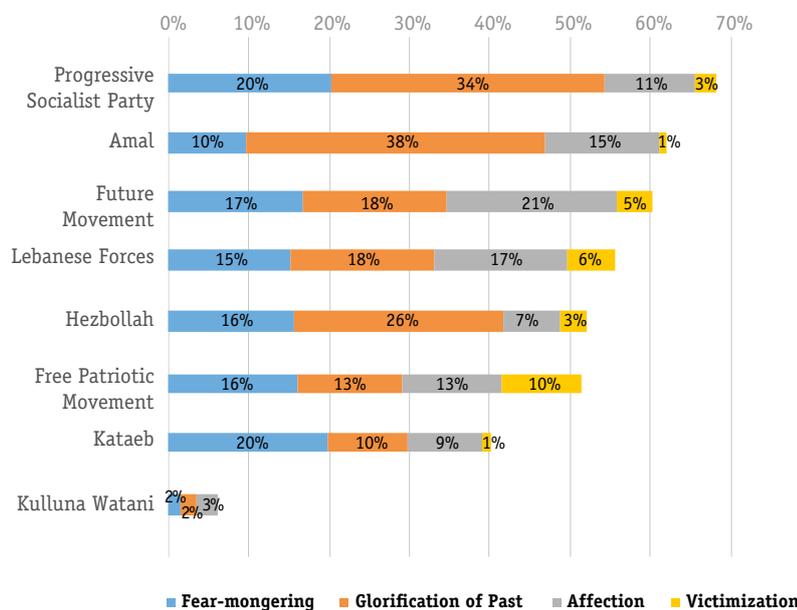
Policy-Related Statements	Out-Group Positioning	Sectarian Coexistence	Glorification of Past and Symbolism	Favoritism
Policy Reference	Criticism of Internal Actor	Anti-Sectarianism	Reference to Political Leader	Material Promise (Unsubstantiated)
Policy Diagnosis	Criticism of External Actor	Communal Unity	Reference to Religious Leader	Material Promise (Substantiated)
Policy Solution	Threat of Internal Actor		Resistance to an Internal Enemy	Victimization of In-Group
Credit for Policy Measure	Threat of External Actor		Resistance to an External Enemy	Affection for In-Group

Policy Criticism
of Internal
Actor

Policy Criticism
of External
Actor

These eight subcategories comprise more than half of the rhetoric of each traditional party, except the Kataeb (figure 8). In sharp contrast, only 6% of Kulluna Watani candidates' statements are of an affective character (11 statements out of 195). In turn, one can make the argument that the main discursive strategies of traditional parties in the 2018 elections rested upon: 1) Fear-mongering; 2) victimization; 3) expression of affection; or 4) instrumentalization of key historical personalities, events, and memories. These rhetorical strategies were deployed across districts, regardless of whether they were strongholds or not. These four types of affective statements often had sectarian undertones, and were particularly effective when they capitalized on threat-evoking rhetoric that refuels communal tensions and legitimizes the existence of the sectarian system. Parties may have then used them as an effective strategy for amassing votes.

Figure 8 Total share of affective talking points



Note Percentages have been rounded up.

Without a process of reconciliation and transitional justice after the Lebanese civil war, each party has constructed its own version of the past. These narratives are most prominently deployed during electoral seasons, as parties seek to maintain their hegemony over their constituencies. In turn, all eight subcategories complement one

another so as to build a compelling narrative that constructs a clearly defined in-group, with its distinct history and identity, fostering a much-needed sense of belonging for citizens struggling in an increasingly precarious neoliberal economy.

While most traditional leaders express their opposition to political and social sectarianism, their local power is reliant on and derived from their perception as sectarian leaders. Without the confessional system, their authority would be fundamentally undermined. However, it is important to note that elites are aware that deploying a blatantly sectarian rhetoric is bound to backfire. Most leaders, thus, adjust their strategies by developing subtle discursive means of reproducing the perceptions that legitimize them without explicitly sounding divisive. The statements falling under the eight affective subcategories discussed here (table 6) are indicative of this strategy and show how deceptive traditional political parties can be. Not only do they develop subtle divisive strategies, they also adjust the emotions they plan to trigger depending on the geographical constituencies they are addressing and the political characteristics of the district in question.

V Regional Variations

While our analysis of discourse did not cover all of the electoral districts, we observed clear variations in types of rhetoric and strategies across the regions that were examined. In light of the scope of this project, we are unable to determine if certain strategies were more effective for some political parties rather than others, or how effective they were in changing voters' behavior. However, we are able to shed light on the choices made by parties in different districts and reflect on the implications of such decisions. Specifically, we look at the discourse of the LF, FPM, FM, and Hezbollah, addressing a few districts for each.³⁵

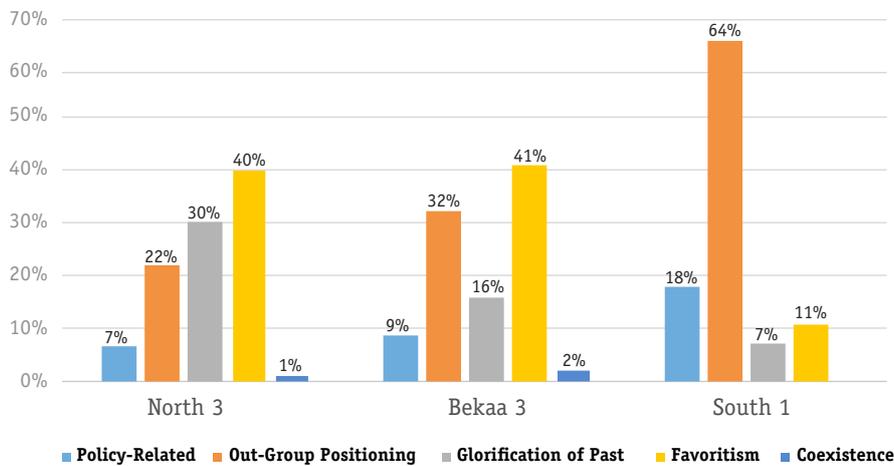
The Lebanese Forces

In broad terms, the rhetoric of the LF focused primarily on casting the party as an opposition party by frequently criticizing or raising fears of its political adversaries. It raised policy issues relatively more often compared to other traditional parties while relying on a fair share of favoritism toward its constituents. When we look at the party's discourse in specific districts, namely South 1 (Saida and Jezzine), North 3 (Batroun, Bcharre, Koura, and Zgharta), and Bekaa 3 (Baalbek-Hermel), there are clear differences that emerge.

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We did not include the Amal Movement because our data was restricted to speeches in South 2 (Sour and Zahrani) and South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh). Similarly, we did not include the Kataeb because most of our data concerns Mount Lebanon 2 (Metn). The PSP is also excluded from the analysis because the three districts we studied—Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf), Mount Lebanon 3 (Baabda), and Bekaa 2 (West Bekaa-Rachaya)—all exhibited relatively similar results. The only distinction worth noting is the lower usage of fear-mongering in Mount Lebanon 3 compared to Mount Lebanon 4 and Bekaa 2.

Figure 9 Distribution of talking points for the LF in North 3, Bekaa 3, and South 1



In its stronghold of North 3, the LF deployed its symbolic capital and history more than it did in other districts. This was done by making several references to patriarchs and bishops, discussing the legacy of party leader Samir Geagea, and bringing up memories of the civil war and its martyrs. We can also observe a relatively high rate of favoritism, particularly in the form of expressing affection toward supporters of the party. North 3 was also the district where the LF mentioned policy issues the least. There was a sense of nostalgia and fervor accompanying the speeches of Sethrida and Samir Geagea in Bcharre, resulting in the highest rate of affective rhetoric for any party (78%) deployed in any electoral district. In comparison, only 55% of the LF's total talking points qualified as emotion-evoking.

Table 7 Examples of statements by the LF in North 3

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'When your son, friend, and leader Samir Geagea was in prison, you refused all outside temptations and stayed by his side in the big prison, until the light shone on us all together.'	Sethrida Geagea	Bcharre	April 29, 2018
'I learn from the constituents of Bcharre, because our people carry a cause, they're resilient and know the meaning of resistance, freedom, and independence.'	Sethrida Geagea	Video addressing Bcharre	March 14, 2018

Moving to Bekaa 3, we notice some parallels but also a clear shift in strategies. There is a similar disregard for policy issues, and while rates of favoritism are almost identical, the forms they take are not. Rather than being focused on affection as it was in North 3, the rhetoric in Bekaa 3 was closer to victimization—primarily highlighting the economic marginalization of voters and their lack of

rights. This is possibly due to the fact that the party's constituents in Bekaa 3 are sectarian minorities, while North 3 is almost fully Christian.

Table 8 Examples of statements by the LF in Bekaa 3

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'It's been 26 years that this region, and Aaynata specifically, has been stripped of its rights.'	Antoine Habchi	Aaynata, Baalbek	March 22, 2018
'Our people in Baalbek-Hermel are living in poverty and deprivation, and have been waiting silently for 26 years because your voice did not have value. Today, it is time for revolution.'	Antoine Habchi	Sahel Alma, Keserwan	March 14, 2018

Last is the case of South 1, where the LF was a political outsider and failed to win a seat. Here, we observe a drastic shift toward deploying fear-mongering as a strategy. Specifically, 43% of talking points in the district raised some form of threat from the Syrian regime and its local allies. This trend may be due to the LF knowing it had little chance of winning in this district, and therefore resorting to more extreme strategies in its discourse. Fear could have been deployed as a tool to stir a sense of urgency among constituents, with the hopes of flipping voters who may be dissatisfied with the traditional leadership of the district. Ultimately, the LF's list only obtained 6,238 votes out of the 13,148 needed to clinch a seat.³⁶

³⁶ Under the proportional representation system, a list has to pass a certain threshold to win a seat in a district. This threshold, or electoral quotient, is equal to the total number of valid votes in the district divided by the number of seats in this district.

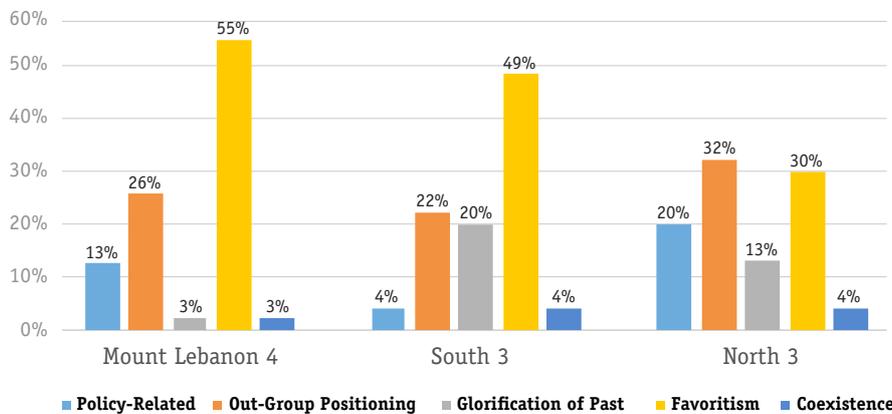
Table 9 Examples of statements by the LF in South 1

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'We remained committed to our national project, even in the midst of Syrian tutelage, although that cost us the disbanding of our party, the persecution of our leaders, and our incarceration.'	Samir Geagea	Saida and Jezzine	April 8, 2018
'They [our opponents] tried to marginalize and isolate us because we are meritocratic while they are clientelistic.'	Samir Geagea	Saida and Jezzine	April 8, 2018

The Free Patriotic Movement

Looking at all of the statements we analyzed from the FPM, we find that the party's rhetorical strategies focused primarily on favoritism and its positions and views vis-à-vis other groups. The party's discourse across Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf), South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh), and North 3 (Batroun, Bcharre, Koura, and Zgharta) showed great variations.

Figure 10 Distribution of talking points for the FPM in Mount Lebanon 4, South 3, and North 3



In Mount Lebanon 4, 55% of the FPM's statements were categorized as 'Favoritism', which was largely driven by 'Victimization', as 21% of the party's statements in the district qualified as such. There was also a significant degree of material promises, with 24% of statements falling under this subcategory. The remaining statements focused mainly on criticizing the PSP and its policy failures in the region. Overall, 45% of statements in the district were of an affective nature—significantly lower than than the FPM's total average of 52%. The FPM was relatively confident about its expected performance in Mount Lebanon 4, in large part due to the nature of the new electoral system. As such, the party focused on the importance of the 'return' of its political representation in the region, and how its supporters were finally going to get their rights protected through the FPM.

Table 10 Examples of statements by the FPM in Mount Lebanon 4

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'The Chouf needs to shift from a period of tyranny and domination by one political group, specifically Walid Jumblatt's, to one that reinstates confidence amongst our people, particularly the Christians.'	Mario Aoun	Video addressing Aley and Chouf	April 28, 2018
'Our list is a guarantee of turning away from sectarian strife, and through our political awareness, we will make sure that our opponents who use provocative rhetoric fail.'	Gebran Bassil	Aley	April 14, 2018

Conversely, in South 3, 63% of party leader Gebran Bassil's rhetoric was affective. He adopted a combination of victimization discourse, threats from the Amal Movement, resistance against Israel, and affection toward voters. Almost none of the party's discourse addressed policy issues. One could argue that the FPM opted to deploy such a significant degree of affective rhetoric in South 3 because it

is aware of its status as a political outsider in the district. Rather than adopting a moderate or programmatic rhetoric, it sought to tap into the emotions of its constituents in order to create a sense of urgency with the hopes of increasing their turnout. This did not prove sufficient, as the FPM's list, which included the FM and the Lebanese Democratic Party, fell 3,469 votes shy of winning a seat.

Table 11 Examples of statements by the FPM in South 3

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'Those who are guilty toward the nation must be brought to justice, and those who left for occupied Palestine as a result of the wave of migration must return. We do not want Lebanese people who speak Hebrew, we want them to speak Arabic. This is also a form of resistance for Lebanon.'	Gebran Bassil	Marjayoun	April 14, 2018
'You have been neglected [by Amal], but now you have an opportunity to change this.'	Gebran Bassil	Rmaich, Bint Jbeil	April 15, 2018

Meanwhile, in North 3, Gebran Bassil's affective rhetoric followed a similar pattern than that in South 3: In both districts, the focus was on victimizing constituents and raising fears of their enemies in order to cast the FPM as their protector. However, North 3 was the district with the most references to Michel Aoun and the party's history of internal struggle during the civil war and against the Syrian tutelage. It was also the district with the highest share of policy-related statements and criticism of political opponents. Indeed, Bassil, who failed to win a seat in Batroun in 2009, used a range of discursive strategies in order to sway all types of FPM voters in 2018. These included discussing policy issues, criticizing the LF and its allies, borrowing from the legacy of his father-in-law, relying on favoritism, or referring to civil war martyrs.

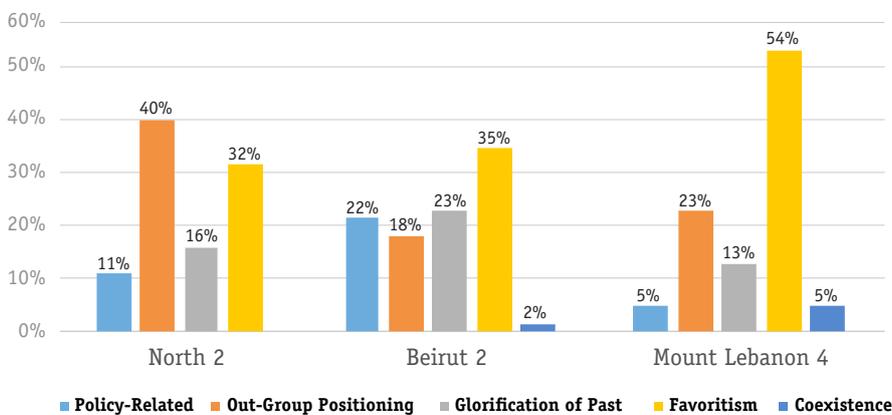
Table 12 Examples of statements by the FPM in North 3

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'My love for Batroun does not suffice, for I must also work in the interest of Batroun. When I work for Batroun, I think of all of Lebanon, and I want to make Batroun an example for all of Lebanon.'	Gebran Bassil	Batroun	April 14, 2018
'It's clear that the only source of power that saved Lebanon during the war was family, because families remained united and so did Lebanon. If there's a real threat on Lebanon, it's the dismantling of the family, and here lies the value of women, for the family remained because of women's resiliency that brought families together.'	Gebran Bassil	Batroun	April 14, 2018

The Future Movement

The FM is the party that relied on favoritism the most, through both material promises and non-material (victimization and affection) statements. It is also the party that relied the least on policy-related statements while exhibiting one of the highest rates of affective rhetoric. Looking at the FM's discourse in North 2 (Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh), Beirut 2, and Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf) we find considerable strategic distinctions worth examining.

Figure 11 Distribution of talking points for the FM in North 2, Beirut 2, and Mount Lebanon 4



North 2 is the district where Saad Hariri relied the most on threat rhetoric by evoking fears of both internal and external actors. He specifically targeted the Syrian regime and its local allies, suggesting the threat of a return of Syrian influence to the country. He combined this narrative with regular references to his father and former prime minister Rafic Hariri, who was assassinated in 2005, allegedly by the Assadist camp. However, Saad Hariri opted not to rely on victimization but rather on affection as a means of asserting his commitment to the people of the North and his role as their protector. Overall, 58% of statements in North 2 qualified as emotion-evoking, right around the party's average of 60%.

Table 13 Example of statements by the FM in North 2

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'Let those who are on the lists of Bashar [Assad] and Hezbollah know that the time of taking over decision-making in the North will not return. The period of sectarian strife will not return. Abuse of power through intelligence forces and weapons will not return.'	Saad Hariri	Tripoli	April 11, 2018

'My favorite part of the elections is standing here, in the golden triangle of Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh. You are gold that cannot be bought with any money in the world. Your loyalty to the Future Movement, Saad Hariri, and Rafic Hariri is gold that uncovers the cheap metal others think they can sell you.'	Saad Hariri	Tripoli	April 11, 2018
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In Beirut 2, the FM had a similar rate of affective rhetoric (59%) but exhibited a relative shift in strategy. In the Lebanese capital, Hariri discussed policy-related issues more than in any other district, raising matters pertaining to job opportunities, public services, housing, economic growth, and security. Beirut 2 is also the district where Hariri made the most references to his father and party founder Rafic Hariri. In contrast to North 2, Hariri did not focus as much on raising fears of the Syrian regime, although Hezbollah remained a significant target of his rhetoric. Hariri made it verbally clear that not voting for the FM's list would be a vote for Hezbollah, and that moving away from the party would be turning against the vision and project of his late father. In addition, Hariri also painted a picture of victimization, referring to the events of May 7, 2008³⁷ as well as to the assassinations of anti-Syrian regime figures.

³⁷ On May 7, 2008, clashes occurred between rival sectarian parties in Mount Lebanon and Beirut after the government's decision to crackdown on Hezbollah's informal telecommunications network.

Table 14 Examples of statements by the FM in Beirut 2

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'We are all working to serve you, to protect the country, its stability, its safety, its constitution, and its democracy.'	Saad Hariri	Beirut	March 11, 2018
'We've been on the ground since 2005, and we have been the targets of smear and treachery campaigns, but remained on the frontlines to protect the country and Beirut.'	Saad Hariri	Beirut	April 4, 2018

The district where affective rhetoric was most common was in Mount Lebanon 4. There, Hariri invoked affective rhetoric in 69% of his talking points. Specifically, he prioritized expressing love and affection for the region of Iqlim El-Kharoub, where most of his constituents reside. He praised the trust and loyalty of people of the region, and applauded the high share of residents working in government institutions such as the security, judicial, education, and healthcare sectors. He was also critical of the FPM's list running against his party, and warned of attempts at getting his constituents to turn away from him. This was also the district where Hariri focused the least on policy issues. The high rate of affective rhetoric in Mount Lebanon 4 may be due to the FM's fears of losing seats to the rival

FPM-led list, which was bound to win seats under the proportional representation electoral system.

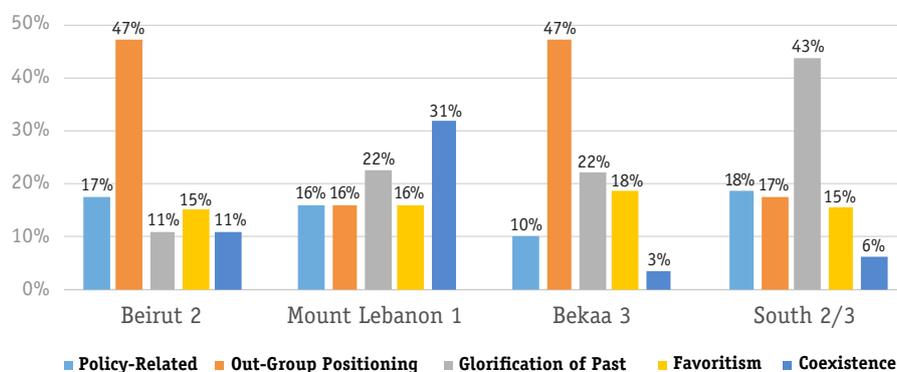
Table 15 Examples of statements by the FM in Mount Lebanon 4

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'There are attempts to separate Barja from Saad Hariri and the Future Movement. We must answer to each person that backstabbed Rafic Hariri and thinks they can use Barja to backstab the Future Movement. Barja is the mother of loyalty, and not each person who claims to be from Barja is a true Barjeweh.'	Saad Hariri	Barja, Chouf	April 19, 2018
'The people of Iqlim El-Kharoub are a true example of loyalty to the state. Wherever you look in state institutions, you will find qualified people from the Iqlim.'	Saad Hariri	Barja, Chouf	April 19, 2018

Hezbollah

Hezbollah's rhetoric relied primarily on two types of statements: References to the party's history and cultural capital, and criticizing or raising fears of internal and external opponents. The party's reliance on affective rhetoric was substantial, with 52% of talking points qualifying as emotion-evoking. However, Hezbollah waged considerably different electoral battles depending on the district it was running in. Looking at Beirut 2, Bekaa 3 (Baalbek-Hermel), Mount Lebanon 1 (Keserwan and Jbeil), South 2 (Sour and Zahrani), and South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh), we notice significant variations.

Figure 12 Distribution of talking points for Hezbollah in Beirut 2, Mount Lebanon 1, Bekaa 3, and South 2 and 3³⁸



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South 2 and 3 were combined because Hassan Nasrallah addressed both districts in the same speech.

In Beirut 2, Hezbollah exhibited one of its lowest rates of affective statements, with only 38% of talking points targeting voters' emotions. Instead, Hassan Nasrallah focused on his party's opponents,

both internal and external. He extensively criticized the FM for attempting to raise fears of his party while criticizing its alliance with Saudi Arabia and the United States—external actors he framed as the true threats to Lebanon and the region. He backed this fear rhetoric with constructive criticism of Saudi and US foreign policy, while praising the people of Beirut for their support for the Palestinian cause and the sacrifices they made during the civil war. Overall, Nasrallah relied on a calm and collected approach in his speech, in sharp contrast to Saad Hariri’s approach. Ultimately, this strategy seems to have paid off as the Hezbollah-led list won four of 11 seats in the district—arguably the FM’s biggest upset in 2018.

Table 16 Examples of statements from Hezbollah in Beirut 2

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
‘I want to ask the people as well as our opponents: What type of Arab identity are you [the Future Movement] calling for as Beirut’s identity? Is Arabism the submission to the expansionist ambitions of the United States in the Arab world, and fighting its battles as its proxies? Is Arabism giving up on the Palestinian people?’	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Beirut	April 13, 2018
‘Beirut has carried the Palestinian cause since the very first day. Beirut represents the resistance that has fought the [Israeli] invasion since 1982. The first gunshots fired by the Lebanese resistance were in the streets of Beirut. The people of Beirut, with their guns and bombs, forced the soldiers of the occupation army to exit the city in shame and defeat.’	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Beirut	April 13, 2018

In Mount Lebanon 1, Hezbollah also did not rely on triggering emotions as much as it did in other districts: 36% of talking points were emotion-evoking, and focused primarily on the historical role of Hezbollah in national security, by protecting all of Lebanon from terrorism and Israel. Nasrallah was looking to reduce fears of the party in a district comprised of seven Maronite seats and only one Shia seat. He thus addressed Christian constituents directly by stressing the importance of Christian representation in the post-Doha governments,³⁹ highlighting his alliance with President Michel Aoun, discussing how Hezbollah protected Christians of Jezzine after the withdrawal of the South Lebanon Army, and prioritizing inter-sectarian unity and coexistence more broadly.

³⁹ The Doha agreement was reached on May 21, 2008, to end an 18-month political crisis between rival sectarian parties.

Table 17 Examples of statements from Hezbollah in Mount Lebanon 1

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'In all of the governments formed after 2008, we were accused of holding up cabinet formation. That's because we've always supported strong Christian representation, leading up to the latest presidential election that you all know about. Therefore, we support true cooperation between Christians and Muslims in politics.'	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Keserwan and Jbeil	April 23, 2018
'The Lebanese army lacks the true resources to wage all battles, and that needs to be addressed. So, raising fears of the resistance weapons needs to stop. I want to assure everyone, and particularly the Christians, that the resistance, through its ideology and commitment to the nation, is a key player in guaranteeing the stability and protection of Lebanon.'	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Keserwan and Jbeil	April 23, 2018

The party's discursive strategies in Bekaa 3, conversely, signaled a radical shift for Hezbollah. There, it discussed policy issues less, and relied more on fear-mongering, focusing on its history of armed resistance. As a result, 54% of Nasrallah's rhetoric was affective. Considering that the regions of Baalbek and Hermel are particularly marginalized economically, Hezbollah feared a shift in support to the list backed by the FM and LF. As a result, Nasrallah strongly attacked the two rival parties, going as far as associating them with the Islamist terrorists who had been threatening the region's security since 2013. Nasrallah was also quick to remind voters of Hezbollah's role in historically protecting the region from external attacks, paralleling that with the alliances of the FM and LF with both the Saudis—which he qualified as defenders of terrorists—and the US—the backers of the Israelis. Indeed, Nasrallah did not shy away from aggressive confrontation in Baalbek-Hermel, yet his party's list still lost two seats to its rivals.

Table 18 Examples of statements from Hezbollah in Bekaa 3

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
'Look at the developmental achievements and economic growth that we have brought to the region since we entered government.'	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Baalbek-Hermel	May 1, 2018
'The rival list in Baalbek-Hermel, through the Lebanese Forces and the Future Movement, represents the political camp that stood by the armed terrorist groups which wanted to invade all of the Bekaa and its people.'	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Baalbek-Hermel	May 1, 2018

In South 2 and 3—Hezbollah’s other strongholds—Nasrallah adopted a significantly different rhetoric than in Bekaa 3. He relied on affective rhetoric more than in any other district, with a rate of 68% of talking points. However, he relied very little on fear-mongering and a lot more on evoking memories of past resistance struggles, martyrs, and notable political and religious leaders. Indeed, two thirds of affective statements fell under the category of ‘Glorification of the Past’. Unlike his speech for Bekaa 3, Nasrallah focused very little on terrorism and the Islamic State and instead targeted Israel solely. He extensively discussed the region’s history and armed resistance, tapping into the legacies of Imam Abdul Hussein Sharafeddine and Imam Musa Sadr, while also reigniting memories of battles against Israel during the civil war, and in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2006. However, Nasrallah did not bring up those events in order to cast constituents as victims. He stressed on Hezbollah’s victories and sought to transfer that pride onto constituents. He briefly criticized the FM, noting its economic failures while highlighting that Hezbollah successfully did its part in guaranteeing security. Otherwise, he did not spend much time criticizing opponents. Indeed, Nasrallah’s demeanor reflected a confidence in electoral victory in the South, which proved to be valid as Hezbollah’s alliance with Amal swept all seats in both districts.

Table 19 Examples of statements from Hezbollah in South 2 and 3

Statement	Speaker	Location	Date
‘Between 1960 and 1975, Imam [Musa] Sadr used to always tell the state to send the army to protect the South and train the youth from all sects to protect their land. He asked the state to come arm the people, but to no avail.’	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Sour and Zahrani	21 April 2018
‘When I talk about the achievements of the resistance, I’m not brandishing slogans; these are facts. Show me your achievements with the economic file... This experience proves that the party which controlled the economy for decades has failed. What we’re calling for, in light of the difficult situation, is for the next government to approach the economic and financial file differently.’	Hassan Nasrallah	Addressing Sour and Zahrani	21 April 2018

VI Conclusion: Reducing the Salience of Affective Rhetoric

The fact that policy-related issues command little attention in political discourse and exhibit limited effectiveness in swaying voters is quite problematic. Lebanese state institutions are in dire need of reforms as the country struggles to cope with a range of crises: Financial, economic, environmental, educational, and healthcare, to name a few. When political discourse is dominated by matters that do not address any of these issues constructively, it puts the country at additional risks. Citizens are reliant on politicians to devise and implement effective solutions to the challenges affecting their daily lives, especially as their living conditions become increasingly dire. If political figures truly represented the interests of their constituents, electoral campaigns would provide a space to publicly discuss and debate on potential solutions to the breadth of issues currently at play. In that sense, the speeches and statements of traditional political parties can only be described as alarming, for they signal a few things: An inability to formulate viable and socially just propositions to address the crises at hand, the deception of the public to secure reappointment through inflammatory or symbolic language, and a disregard of the struggles and dangers facing the nation. What are some of the key factors that have made affective rhetoric so salient, and how can its effectiveness be reduced?

A main impediment to redefining the nature of political discourse in Lebanon is systemic. The confessional system produces incentive structures that encourage sectarian gerrymandering, divisive rhetoric, and identity rather than merit-based criteria for assessing political candidates. Rather than using electoral laws as a creative tool to transition away from sectarian politics and reduce the prominence of ascriptive identities, lawmakers reproduce the existing status quo by devising unnecessarily complex electoral laws to blur their subtle efforts at guaranteeing their reappointment. Instead, one could consider how confessionally diverse districts can help desectarianize the political landscape, how eliminating sectarian quotas can shift the focus to merit-based considerations, how having an independent commission capable of guaranteeing free and fair elections can redefine electoral races, and how mandating public debates between candidates can help inform the populace about already existing policy solutions. Such systemic and electoral reforms can go a long way in incentivizing a more honest, constructive, inclusive, and productive political process.

Another key impediment is institutional. Indeed, systemic changes require transparent and efficient institutions that can be trusted with the execution of such measures. It also implies that other institutions, particularly service ministries, be no longer utilized as

tools to expand clientelistic service networks, but rather fulfill their roles as guarantors of the public interest, operating as accountable structures led by qualified policymakers without ulterior interests. The only way voters will be swayed by policy-based rhetoric is if they can regain trust in political institutions; a process that is, admittedly, easier said than done. In order to attain that trust, ministries must be compelled to release and answer questions about their budget details, the judiciary must be overhauled, and perpetrators must be held accountable. Considering the existing levels of corruption, such a process will take time, but steps in the right direction can generate positive momentum and a shift toward the landscape needed to begin deconstructing the existing webs of fraud and socio-economic material dependencies.

Lastly, desectarianization requires a process of reconciliation that begins by addressing latent issues that are often instrumentalized by opportunistic and self-interested leaders. Matters pertaining to the civil war and essentialist misconceptions regarding the nature of inter-sectarian relations will only be transcended once a collective discussion occurs. By creating spaces where repressed tensions can be discussed, relevant actors can express their grievances with the ultimate objective of healing as a community. Such a process of reconciliatory justice, while emotionally heavy, is necessary to reach a more inclusive and viable conception of the nation and its history. This would also lay the foundations of a nation-wide consensus regarding Lebanon's collective past, allowing the development of a nuanced understanding of the nation's modern history which can be communicated to future generations through formal educational programs. If this process is combined with a thorough unmaking of the sectarian political economy, then manipulative narratives deployed during electoral campaigns will lose their legitimacy and become easier to identify and dispel. The October 17 uprising of 2019 offers some hope that voters may be ready to approach the next elections differently. Exerting pressure so as to devise a new and fair electoral law is the first step in that direction.

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