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Fighting Against the Odds: Emerging Political Actors in the 2018 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections

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Fighting Against the Odds: Emerging Political Actors in the 2018 Lebanese Parliamentary Elections

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Executive Summary

The 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections saw a record number of emerging political actors participate in the electoral race, with 124 candidates running across 13 electoral districts. Despite this record number, their overall performance was disappointing, with only one of these candidates making it to parliament. However, the performance of emerging political actors varied across and within electoral districts.

They tended to perform better in more urbanized, more economically developed, less impoverished, and more confessionally diverse areas. Moreover, their inability to capture votes largely depended on traditional political parties' greater ability to mobilize voters, as higher turnouts were associated with a lower share of votes for independents. Additionally, independent candidates had highly disparate performances, partly explained by which seat they were running for. Their constituents showed a confessional bias, meaning that independent candidates running in a district where their co-sectarian voters were the majority group generally performed better than candidates representing a minority group. Aside from this, anti-establishment political actors competing against traditional parties faced particular challenges in running successful campaigns. For example, familiarity with voters and wide exposure seem to have held higher importance for voters than elaborate electoral programs. These groups suffered from a lack of prior familiarity with voters while campaigning at the grassroots levels, and their limited financial capital made media exposure largely inaccessible, thus hindering their ability to gain voters' trust in the short amount of time available. Also, emerging actors were not adequately prepared for election day, especially in terms of the number of representatives they were able to recruit and train. Lastly, independents were generally aware of ways they could have improved different facets of their campaigns, yet lack of time was the most consistent impediment to enacting those improvements.

Introduction

The 2018 Lebanese parliamentary elections were the first ones to be held under a proportional representation electoral system. This new system created potential for a more competitive race and led to a record number of candidates running for office: A total of 597 ran on 77 electoral lists. The new electoral system also encouraged independent candidates—those not affiliated with any established party—to run. As a result, 124 independent candidates participated in the democratic process, running on 18 electoral lists and across 13 of the 15 electoral districts. These candidates had varying backgrounds and experience in the public arena, and some of them espoused conflicting views that stretched across the political spectrum. However, they faced a common challenge: They were all running against the political class and established parties—a difficult task which necessitated the creation of united fronts. An alliance between emerging and anti-establishment political groups and political activists materialized under the 'Kulluna Watani' coalition, which fielded 66 candidates running across nine of the 15 electoral districts; while nine other independent electoral lists, which had a total of 58 candidates, were formed and ran across seven

electoral districts. This record number of independent candidates did not translate into electoral success, as only one of them made it to parliament—a Kulluna Watani candidate running in the Beirut 1 electoral district. While emerging groups' performance was poor, it varied across the country and seemed to have been affected by a number of district-specific characteristics.

This study focuses on the performance of emerging political actors that ran in the elections, and is divided into four sections. The report breaks down the results of the vote in detail, and looks at different facets of emerging actors' electoral campaigns. Through the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, the analysis allows for an examination of the performance of emerging groups from the perspective of both voters and candidates. The report aims to shed light on which factors influenced voters' support for emerging actors, and the obstacles these actors faced in the run-up to the elections.

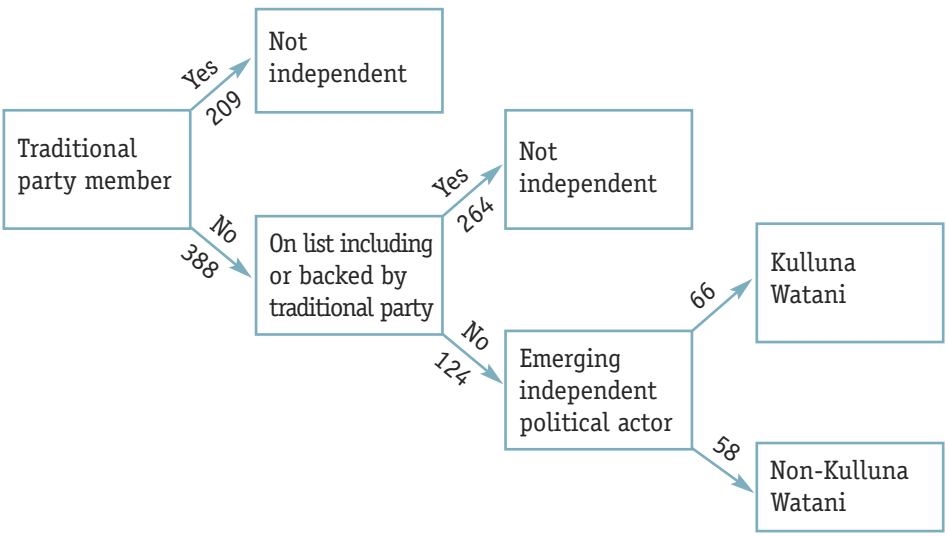
The first section establishes who qualifies as an 'independent' political actor in our analysis. The majority of candidates were not members of political parties, however, many of these ran on party-affiliated electoral lists—meaning they were backed by establishment parties, and therefore cannot be qualified as anti-establishment and emerging actors for this analysis. The second section unpacks the elections results and provides an analysis of the results at the micro-level—i.e. an analysis of voter behavior—through a quantitative approach. Using the official election results at the polling station level and a set of variables at the municipal and cadastral levels collected and constructed by LCPS, such as the level of economic development and confessional homogeneity, the analysis identifies independent actors' main constituents as well as geographical factors that may have affected their performance across and within electoral districts. Building on the empirical analysis, the third section analyzes the challenges independent candidates faced in competing against the political establishment. To this end, it looks at six interconnected facets of emerging groups' campaigns: 1) Political program, 2) alliances and list formation, 3) funding and budgeting, 4) media presence, 5) grassroots presence, and 6) election-day machinery. This section relies on a qualitative analysis of interviews administered by LCPS between September and October 2019, with independent candidates, campaign managers, and members of funding teams, among others. In order to capture regional differences, interviews were conducted with campaigners across 10 different electoral districts, allowing for a breadth of perspectives and experiences. This study ends with potential strategies of moving toward new and expanded political representation.

I Who Were the Independent Candidates?

One of the key challenges for the analysis was identifying which lists of candidates could qualify as emerging, 'independent' actors. Those are defined as actors that are unaffiliated with traditional political parties and belong to new opposition groups that formed in recent years.[1] Such groups include those formed during the 2015 waste management crisis, or as a response to Lebanon's overlapping crises, as well as groups of activists that came together specifically for the 2018 elections. Based on this definition, we categorized all 597 candidates running in the elections into three groups: Candidates from traditional political parties, those who were not official members but ran on party-affiliated lists, and those who were independent and ran on lists not affiliated with any traditional political party.

In total, 209 of the 597 candidates were members of traditional political parties. These are not limited to establishment parties such as the Future Movement (FM), Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Amal Movement, or the Kataeb party, but also encompass other traditional groups such as Jama'a al-Islamiyah, the National Liberal Party, or the Independent Nasserite Movement. While the remaining 388 candidates were not members of traditional parties, not all of them qualify as independents. In fact, 264 were either running on lists with these parties or were backed by them, such as Neemat Frem (FPM), Tammam Salam (FM), Ziad Hawat (Lebanese Forces [LF]), and Walid Sukkarieh (Hezbollah).[2] Our analysis also excludes lists that included figures such as Michel Murr or Faisal Karami who have long been part of the political establishment. We were therefore left with 124 candidates who qualify as emerging anti-establishment actors,[3] and who were further divided into two groups: Those belonging to the Kulluna Watani coalition (66 candidates) and those who ran on other lists (58 candidates) (figure 1).

Figure 1 **Breakdown of candidate affiliations in the 2018 elections**



1 Not all of the independent candidates belonged to an emerging political group; some ran on their own independent platforms.

2 Neemat Frem ran in Keserwan (Mount Lebanon 1), Tammam Salam in Beirut 2, Ziad Hawat in Jbeil (Mount Lebanon 1), and Walid Sukkarieh in Baalbek-Hermel (Bekaa 3).

3 Considering the relatively low number of emerging political actors in the South, we also interviewed two individuals who do not qualify as 'independents' in our analysis. One is a non-affiliated campaigner in the 'Together toward Change' list in South 2 (which included a candidate from the Communist party and one backed by the FPM). This list is considered by many to have been led by independents, but did not fit the criteria we set. We also interviewed an independent candidate in the 'South Deserves' list of South 3 (which included the FM, FPM, and Lebanese Democratic Party) in order to understand the rationale that drove non-party members to run with traditional party candidates in certain districts.

A breakdown of where independent lists ran and how many candidates they fielded indicates that some competed against one another in five districts (table 1). For instance, Kulluna Watani competed against the 'Loyalty to Beirut' list in Beirut 1, 'Madaniyya' in Mount Lebanon 4, and the 'Independent Civil Society' list in North 2.

Table 1 **Independent lists and number of candidates by electoral district**

District	List name	Number of candidates
Beirut 1	Kulluna Watani	8
	Loyalty to Beirut	4
Beirut 2	Kelna Beirut	8
	Independent Beirutis	10
Bekaa 1	Kulluna Watani	5
Bekaa 2	Civil Society	5
Bekaa 3	Development and Change	7
Mount Lebanon 1	Kulluna Watani	6
Mount Lebanon 2	Kulluna Watani	6
Mount Lebanon 3	Kulluna Watani	6
Mount Lebanon 4	Kulluna Watani	11
	Madaniyya	8
North 1	Akkar's Decision	4
	Women of Akkar	5
North 2	Kulluna Watani	10
	Independent Civil Society	7
North 3	Kulluna Watani	9
South 3	Kulluna Watani	5

II Assessing the Performance of Emerging Groups

The aim of this section is to analyze the performance of emerging groups through a quantitative approach. The analysis is concerned with understanding voters' behavior and the factors that may have influenced their decision to vote for emerging groups. More specifically, we look at geographical and demographic variations in support for emerging actors, and variations in support for specific candidates. In addition, while we look at all 18 independent lists, we also separate the Kulluna Watani lists from the others in order to identify whether certain factors may have uniquely affected their performance. This decision stems from the fact that Kulluna Watani ran as a national coalition, while the other lists had no relation to, or coordination with, each other. Our analysis uses the official elections results at the polling station level, published by the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities.[4]

4 Available at: http://elections.gov.lb.

These were merged with a series of potential explanatory factors at the individual, municipal, and district levels. We identified the confession and gender of voters in each polling station, using the interior ministry's list of registered voters in each of the polling stations.[5] Moreover, we used a series of variables at the municipal and cadastral levels, in order to test the effect of different factors on the performance of independent lists. The data collected on the municipalities' and cadasters' characteristics are: The level of economic development, approximated by the night-time light intensity;[6] the poverty rate, based on the ratio of beneficiaries of the National Poverty Targeting Program over the population in the municipality;[7] the level of sectarian homogeneity in a cadastral area;[8] and the share of refugees over the number of registered voters in a given cadaster.[9] Based on this wide range of data, we analyze the performance of independent lists and candidates at three levels: The electoral district, municipal, and polling station levels.

Who Voted for Independent Candidates? The Impact of Geographical and Individual Factors

Independent lists won 57,246 votes, or nearly 4% of the votes cast in the 13 electoral districts they ran in. All electoral districts but two—South 1 (Saida and Jezzine) and South 2 (Sour and Zahrani)—had at least one independent list running. Kulluna Watani ran in nine electoral districts,[10] where it won nearly 4% of the votes. The other independent lists won a total of 2% of the votes across the seven electoral districts that included at least one of them.[11]

The support obtained by independent lists was significantly higher among the Lebanese diaspora: 7.5% of emigrants voted for an independent list—twice as much resident as voters (3.5%) (figure 2).[12] The higher support for independent lists among the diaspora was present in all electoral districts.

5 Note that some polling stations had voters from multiple confessional groups registered to vote. Similarly, some had both men and women registered to vote.

6 Data on the night-time light intensity was obtained from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

7 Data on the number of beneficiaries of the National Poverty Targeting Program was obtained from the Ministry of Social Affairs.

8 Based on electoral data on the sect of voters per polling station, we constructed an index of homogeneity (IH) = $\sum_{i=1}^{n} Sij^2$, where S_{ij}^2 is the sum of the square root of the share of each sectarian group in the total number of registered voters in a cadaster. The index ranges between 0 (when the cadaster is fully heterogeneous) and 1 (when the cadaster is fully homogeneous, or only one sectarian group is present).

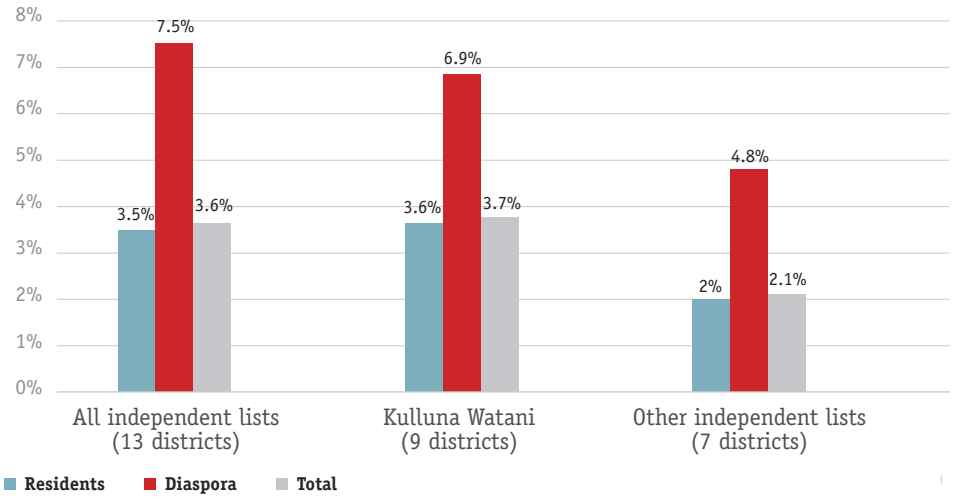
9 Data on the refugee population was collected from UNHCR.

10 Kulluna Watani ran in Beirut 1, Beirut 2, Zahle (Bekaa 1), Keserwan and Jbeil (Mount Lebanon 1), Metn (Mount Lebanon 2), Baabda (Mount Lebanon 3), Aley and Chouf (Mount Lebanon 4), Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh (North 2), Batroun, Bcharre, Koura, and Zgharta (North 3), and Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh (South 3).

11 The districts of Beirut 1, Beirut 2, West Bekaa-Rachaya (Bekaa 2), Baalbek-Hermel (Bekaa 3), Aley and Chouf (Mount Lebanon 4), Akkar (North 1), and Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh (North 2) had at least one independent, non-Kulluna Watani, list running.

12 The 2018 elections were the first ones to allow the Lebanese diaspora to vote from their country of residence.

Figure 2 **Percentage of votes for independents lists across residencies**

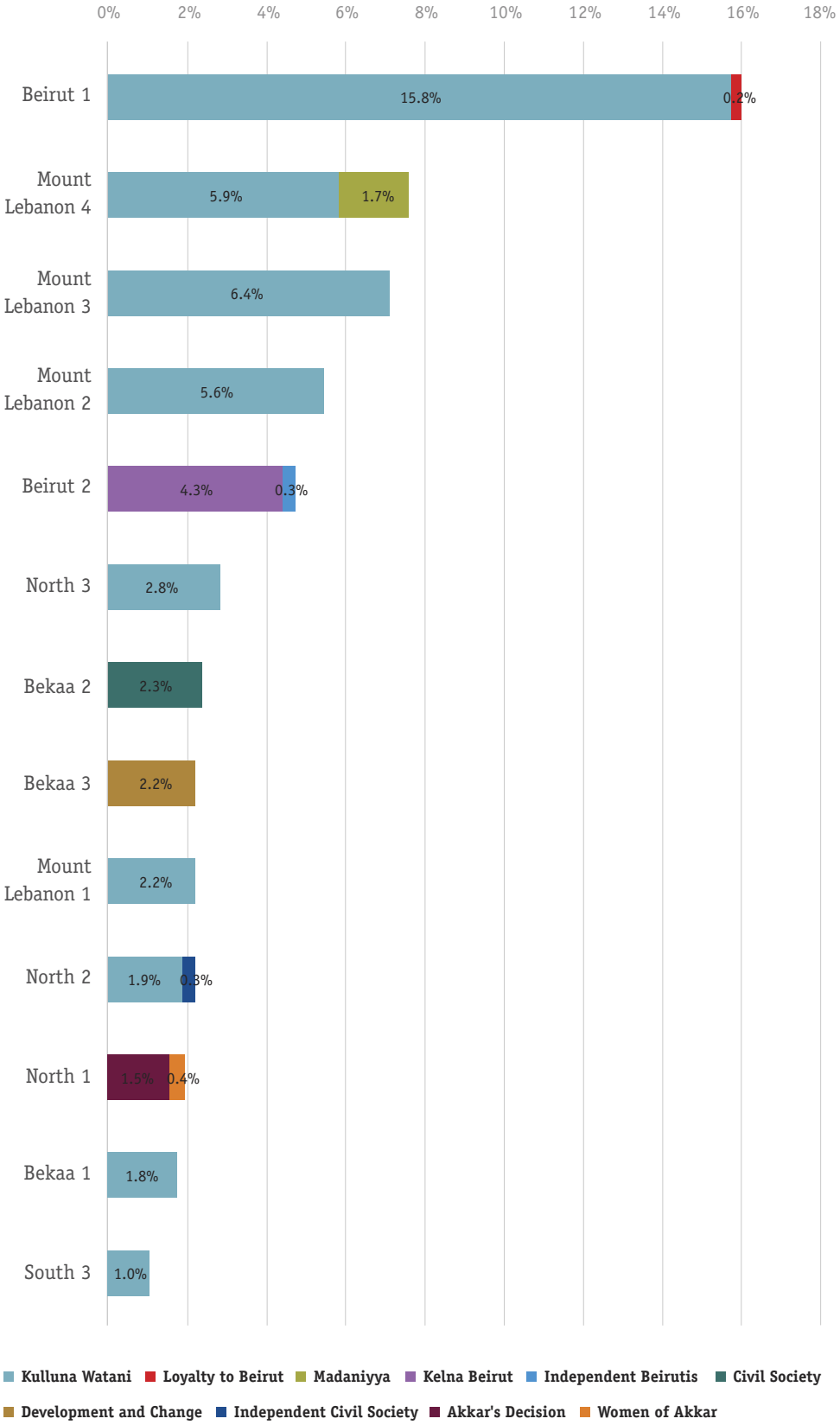


Note **Percentages have been rounded up.**

Across and within electoral districts, independent lists tended to perform better in more urbanized and confessionally mixed areas

The performance of independent lists significantly varied across electoral districts—from 16% in Beirut 1, to 1% in Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh (South 3). In the few electoral districts independent lists competed against each other, most of the votes were won by one; and in those where Kulluna Watani competed against another independent list (in Beirut 1, Aley and Chouf [Mount Lebanon 4], and Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh [North 2]), the former was always more popular. Kulluna Watani obtained its best results in Beirut 1, where it won close to 16% of votes—resulting in its one and only victory. The other independent list in Beirut 1, 'Loyalty to Beirut', performed far worse and only received 0.2% of votes. Kulluna Watani won 6% of the votes in each of Metn (Mount Lebanon 2), Baabda (Mount Lebanon 3), and Aley and Chouf (Mount Lebanon 4), and did not manage to obtain 2% of the votes in Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh (South 3), Zahle (Bekaa 1), and Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh (North 2). Among the other independent lists, Kelna Beirut (Beirut 2) was the most successful, winning 4% of votes, while the other independent list in the district, 'Independent Beirutis', barely won any (0.3%). Some other successful lists included the two civil society lists in West Bekaa-Rachaya and Baalbek-Hermel (Bekaa 2 and Bekaa 3, respectively), which won around 2% of votes.

Figure 3 **Percentage of votes for independent lists by district**

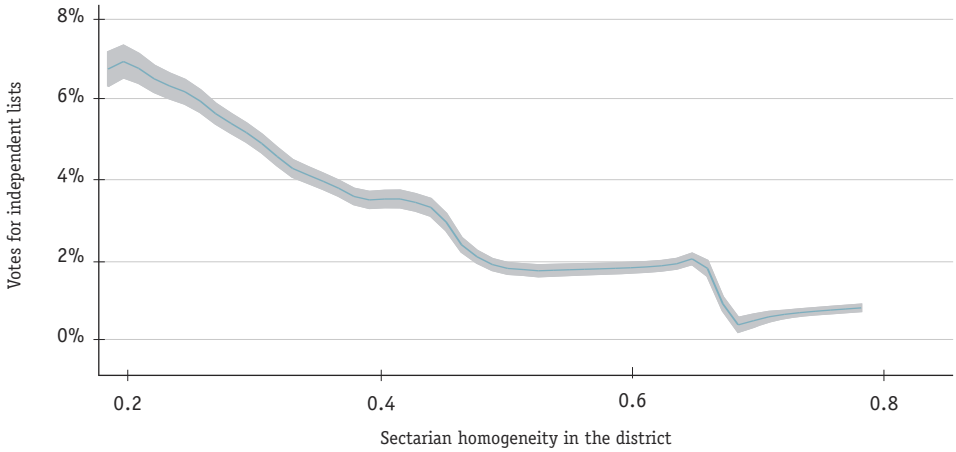


Confessionally mixed districts saw a higher share of votes go to independent lists. On average, the percentage of votes received by all independent lists decreased from nearly 7% in the most heterogeneous districts—those that have a high level of confessional fragmentation—to less than 1% in the most homogeneous districts—those where one confessional group represents the overwhelming majority of registered voters (figure 4). Indeed, the Beirut and Mount Lebanon regions where independents performed best are the most confessionally mixed areas in the country. Even in the electoral districts that were divided into subdistricts[13]—such as Tripoli, Minnieh, and Dannieh (North 2) and Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh (South 3)—independent lists received better results in the most confessionally mixed of the subdistricts—in this case, Tripoli and Marjayoun-Hasbaya. This relationship between the level of sectarian homogeneity and votes for independent lists holds even after controlling for other characteristics of the electoral districts, such as its sectarian composition, level of political competitiveness, population density, and level of economic development.[14] It was the case for both votes for all independent lists and the votes for the Kulluna Watani lists.

13
The electoral system divided the country into 15 electoral districts, with some of them being further divided into minor districts, for a total of 26 minor districts.

14
These results are based on a multivariate regression analysis.

Figure 4 **Sectarian homogeneity by district and percentage of votes for independent lists**



The performance of independent lists was unequal not just across but also within electoral districts. Zooming in on the municipal and cadaster levels can illuminate the variations in the performance of independents within each of the electoral districts. For example, the independent list in West Bekaa-Rachaya (Bekaa 2), which won slightly over 2% of votes in the district, received over 5% of votes in nine cadasters, but less than 0.1% in 27. Such cadaster-level variations were present in all electoral districts, and also seemed to be partly explained by the level of sectarian homogeneity: Independent lists

received significantly better results in more confessionally mixed cadastral areas, which could suggest that sectarian political parties are more effective at mobilizing voters in more homogeneous areas. More homogeneous areas also tend to include higher sectarian and clientelistic ties, providing a boost for traditional parties.[15]

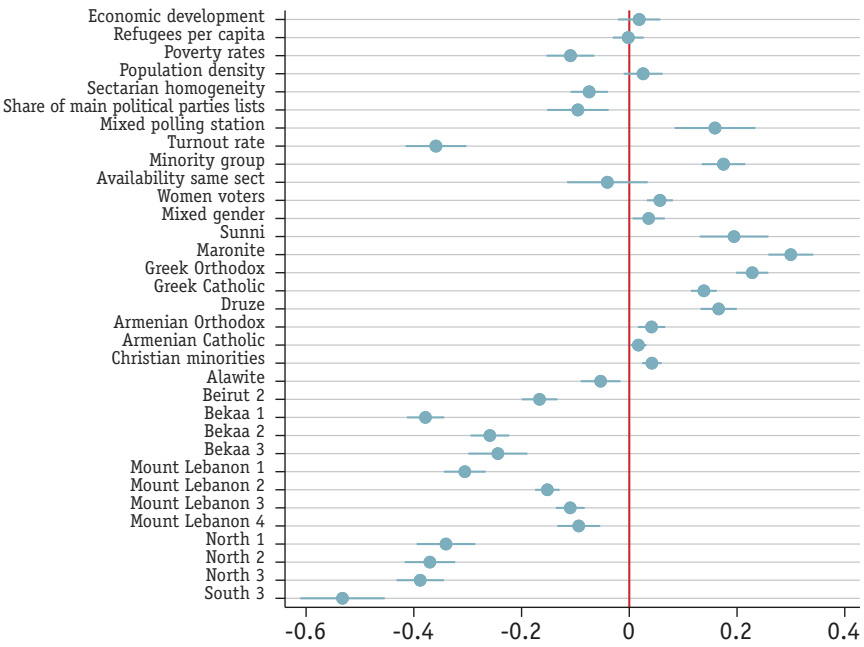
The prevalence of poverty in a municipal area also affected the support obtained by independents, as voters in municipal areas with a lower prevalence of poverty were significantly more likely to vote for independents. This could point toward sectarian parties' higher ability to mobilize voters in more deprived areas by offering economic incentives in exchange of votes.

Aside from those stated above, votes for the Kulluna Watani lists were influenced by other factors as well. In addition to generally performing better in heterogeneous areas and those with lower poverty rates, Kulluna Watani received better results in more economically developed areas. The lists also performed better in more densely populated areas, demonstrating that anti-establishment movements are most present in urban spaces. The socio-economic divide across the country potentially limits the outreach of non-established actors needing to attract the vote in poorer and more rural areas. Interestingly, municipal areas with a higher density of Syrian refugees generally showed lower support for Kulluna Watani, even after taking into consideration other socioeconomic and political characteristics of the localities. This may be due to traditional political parties' ability to capture more of the 'anti-refugee' vote.

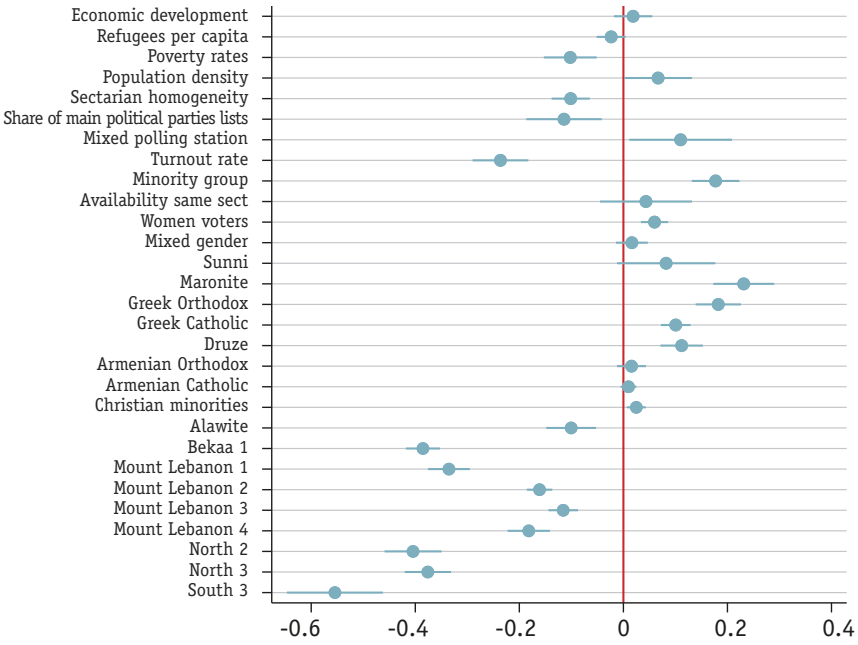
15
This relationship between the level of sectarian homogeneity in a cadaster and percentage of votes for independent lists holds even after controlling for other geographical characteristics, such as the level of economic development and poverty rates in a municipality, as well as the cadaster's sectarian configuration. This is done by running a multivariate regression analysis.

Figure 5 **Drivers of votes for independent lists**

a **Drivers of votes for all independent lists**



b **Drivers of votes for Kulluna Watani**



Apart from these variations within electoral districts, votes for independent lists varied from one polling station to another. In 1,927 of the 6,082 polling stations in the districts independent lists ran in, no single vote was counted for these lists, while in some polling stations, they obtained over 30% of the votes.[16]

Higher turnouts harmed independent lists' results

Independent lists, both Kulluna Watani and others, generally received significantly better results in polling stations with a higher number of registered voters, those that had more than one confessional group registered to vote, and those that saw lower turnout rates. These results hold after controlling for characteristics of the municipalities and cadasters voters were registered in.[17] The better performance of independent lists in larger, as well as mixed, polling stations could suggest that independents performed better among voters who were not specifically targeted by political parties. Indeed, previous evidence has shown that polling stations with fewer voters are more attractive for politicians buying votes, or exerting pressure on voters, because the smaller numbers of registered voters facilitates aggregate monitoring of whether voters cast their ballots, and for whom.[18] Moreover, given that registered voters are segregated by confession and gender, political parties may have stronger interests in targeting voters in specific polling stations where their main constituents are registered to vote, making mixed polling stations less attractive. Finally, higher turnouts

16 This excludes polling stations that had diaspora voters registered to vote.

17 Based on a multivariate regression analysis.

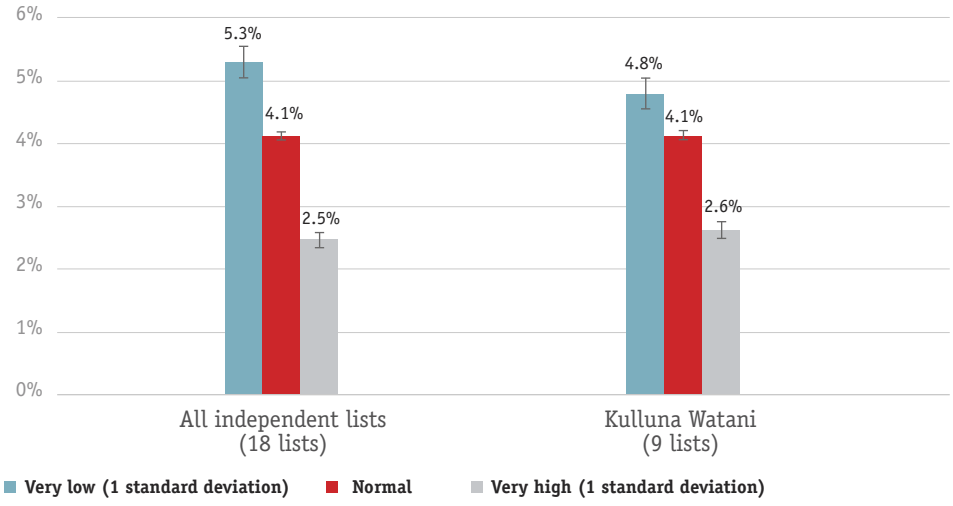
18 Rueda, M. R. 2016. 'Small Aggregates, Big Manipulation: Vote Buying Enforcement and Collective Monitoring.' *American Journal of Political Science,* 61(1): 163-177; and Larreguy, H.A., J. C. Marshall, and P. Querubín. 2016. 'Parties, Brokers, and Voter Mobilization: How Turnout Buying Depends Upon the Party's Capacity to Monitor Brokers.' *American Political Science Review,* 110(1): 160-179.

harming independent lists' results could also be due to the more effective mobilization of voters from their opponents.

The negative effect of turnout rates on the performance of independents by polling station could be related to a number of district-specific characteristics. For example, overall turnout rates, as well as the levels of support obtained by independent lists, varied across electoral districts and among different confessional groups in each district. However, even after accounting for these district-specific characteristics, statistical tests show that independent lists performed much worse in polling stations with significantly higher turnout rates.[19] In polling stations where turnouts were significantly above the mean turnout rate (one standard deviation above the mean), the percentage of votes received by independent lists was, on average, 1.7% lower than it was in polling stations that recorded turnouts closer to the mean (2.5% compared to 4.1%). Conversely, in polling stations that recorded significantly low turnout rates (one standard deviation below the mean) the percentage of votes for independent lists was on average 1.2% higher (5.3% compared to 4.1%) (figure 6). This could imply that independent lists' performance in such areas and polling stations was largely due to the weaker effort of traditional political parties to mobilize the vote, rather than the ability and success of emerging political actors to attract discontented voters.

19
We accounted for these variations by creating standardized variables of turnout rates and percentage of votes for independent lists. The standardized turnout rate would be the turnout rate in a specific polling station minus the average turnout rate of all polling stations in its district with registered voters from the same sect, all of it divided by the variability (standard deviation) of the turnout rates in these stations. The standardized turnout rate measures how abnormally low or high the turnout in a polling station is compared to all other stations within the same sect and district, meaning that it allows to control for variations in turnouts across confessional groups and districts. The standardized measure of percentage of votes for independent lists follows the same procedure.

Figure 6 **Percentage of votes for independent lists and standardized turnout rates by polling station**



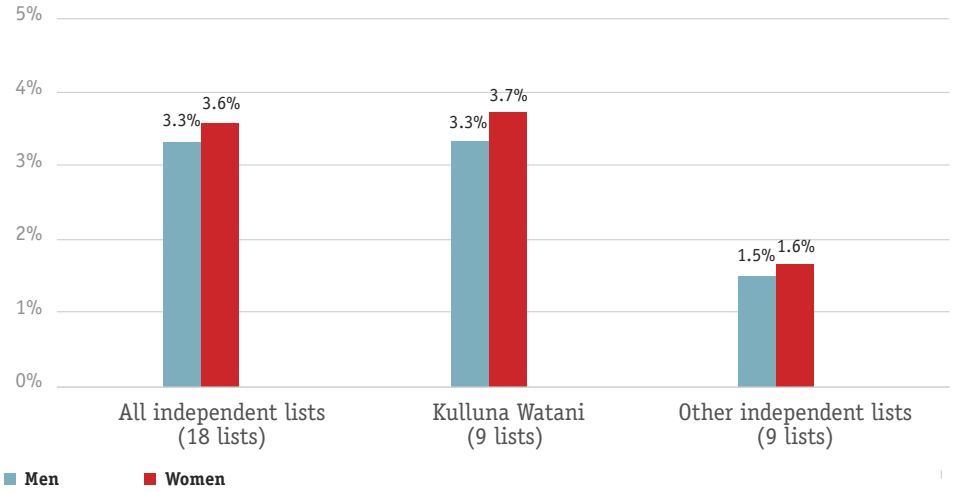
Note **Percentages have been rounded up.**

Support for independent lists and different candidates varied across genders and confessional groups

Beyond the geographical and polling station variations in the votes for independent lists, voters' gender and confession were highly instrumental factors affecting the performance of anti-establishment actors. Given that voters in most polling stations were divided by gender and sect, we are able to show how the individual characteristics of voters shaped their voting behavior.[20]

Women voters showed higher support for independent lists and for women candidates within those lists. In total, counting only the districts independent lists ran in, 3.6% of women voters voted for one of these lists, while 3.3% of men did so.[21]

Figure 7 **Percentage of votes for independent lists by gender**



Note **Percentages have been rounded up.**

There were also variations in preferences for specific candidates. Women candidates running on independent lists were more successful among women voters than they were among men. In total, counting only the independent lists that included at least one woman candidate,[22] 44% of women who voted for an independent candidate chose a woman, while 38% of men did so. These variations across genders existed in each of the electoral districts, with the exception of West Bekaa-Rachaya (Bekaa 2), where the only woman candidate Maguy Aoun received an equal share of each gender's votes. Apart from differing support across genders, these numbers show that the majority of both men and women voters voted for a male candidate. However, out of 105 candidates running on the independent lists that included at least one woman and one man candidate in a district, 31 were women, while 74 were men (30% of candidates).[23] This means that independent women candidates received a relatively high share of votes, considering that they represented the minority of all candidates.

20 The majority of polling stations had a specific gender registered to vote, but some of them had both. Similarly, the majority of polling stations had one specific sectarian group, while some had voters from multiple sectarian groups.

21 Women were more likely to vote for independent lists even after controlling for voters' sect and geographical characteristics of the districts, municipal areas, and cadasters in which they were registered.

22 Note that in some of the electoral districts that were made up of more than one district, not all of the minor districts included a woman candidate. We therefore excluded votes for independent candidates in these minor districts. For example, Kulluna Watani in North 3 did not have a woman candidate in Bcharre, however, one woman ran in each of the other minor districts. In this case we exclude the votes received by Kulluna Watani candidates in Bcharre, and only consider those received in Batroun, Koura, and Zgharta. In addition, the independent list Women of Akkar, in Akkar, is excluded as it was formed exclusively by women candidates.

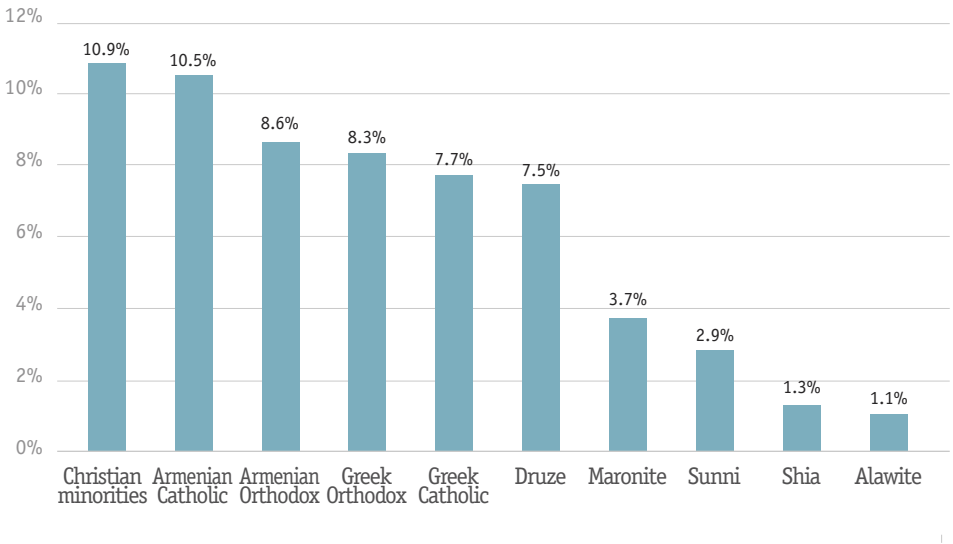
23 In total, 36 of the 124 independent candidates were women. The five women excluded here are those that ran on Women of Akkar, the list formed exclusively by women candidates.

Support for independent lists varied across and within confessional groups, partly explained by a group's political representation

Across confessional groups in the districts where independent lists ran and in which each confessional group had its own polling stations, Christian minorities and Armenian Catholic voters were significantly more likely to vote for these lists (11% and 10%, respectively). The share was also high among Druze, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, and Armenian Orthodox voters (between 7% and 9%). Conversely, less than 4% of all other groups voted for independent lists—with the lowest share being among Shia and Alawite voters (1%) (figure 8).

However, these variations across confessional groups might be due to political competitiveness or political context in each electoral district, instead of simply being variations across confessions. For example, independent lists obtained some of their best results in the more competitive districts of Beirut and Metn, where the majority of Armenian Catholic and Christian minorities were registered, which could therefore explain these voters' higher levels of support for independents. In comparison, independents performed poorly in more homogeneous and less competitive districts, such as Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh, in which the majority of Shia voters were registered. Independents also received some of their worst results in Tripoli and Akkar, which are the only two districts Alawite voters had their own polling stations in.

Figure 8 **Percentage of votes for independent lists by confessional group**



There were geographical variations in the support for independent lists within each confessional group, showing that the results at the national level may indeed mask geographical differences and district-specific characteristics.

Voters were significantly more likely to vote for independent lists when they were not represented by a seat in their district. Some examples include the few Shia voters registered in Beirut 1, Maronite and Greek Catholic voters registered in Beirut 2, and Sunni voters in Baabda, all of whom were more likely to vote for independent lists compared to voters whose confessions were represented by a seat in each of these districts. This could be due to a lack of targeting by traditional parties, or to a lower salience of sectarian feelings given the lack of co-sectarian candidates to vote for.

Moreover, regardless of whether they were represented by a seat, minority groups—defined as those that represented less than 30% of registered voters in a district—voted much more for independent lists compared to majority groups in a given district. Maronite voters, for instance, were more likely to vote for an independent list in a district where they were a minority compared to other Maronite voters in a Maronite-majority district. These results highlight how the salience of sectarian divisions limits the capacity of non-establishment groups to obtain votes in the Lebanese elections.

Those who voted for independent candidates showed a confessional bias

Even when voters decided to cast their ballot for an independent list, sectarian considerations may have played a part in which candidate to choose. Independent candidates were more popular among their co-sectarian voters, and the performance of each candidate was partly determined by the sectarian seat they were running for. Among voters who voted for independent lists and had the option to vote for a candidate from their own sect or another one, 65% chose a co-sectarian candidate.[24] Most confessional groups showed a strong sectarian bias (figure 9), with the share being highest among Sunni and Armenian Orthodox voters (79% and 78%, respectively). While Armenian Catholic voters had a low sectarian bias (17%), the majority of them voted for an Armenian Orthodox candidate (56%), therefore still showing a bias toward Armenian candidates. Similarly, while less than half of Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic voters chose a co-sectarian candidate (45% and 40%, respectively), in total, over 70% of each chose a Christian candidate regardless of the specific denomination. Christian minorities had slightly different preferences: Their votes were fragmented, with the highest share going to Armenian Orthodox candidates (35%), followed by Greek Orthodox ones (25%).

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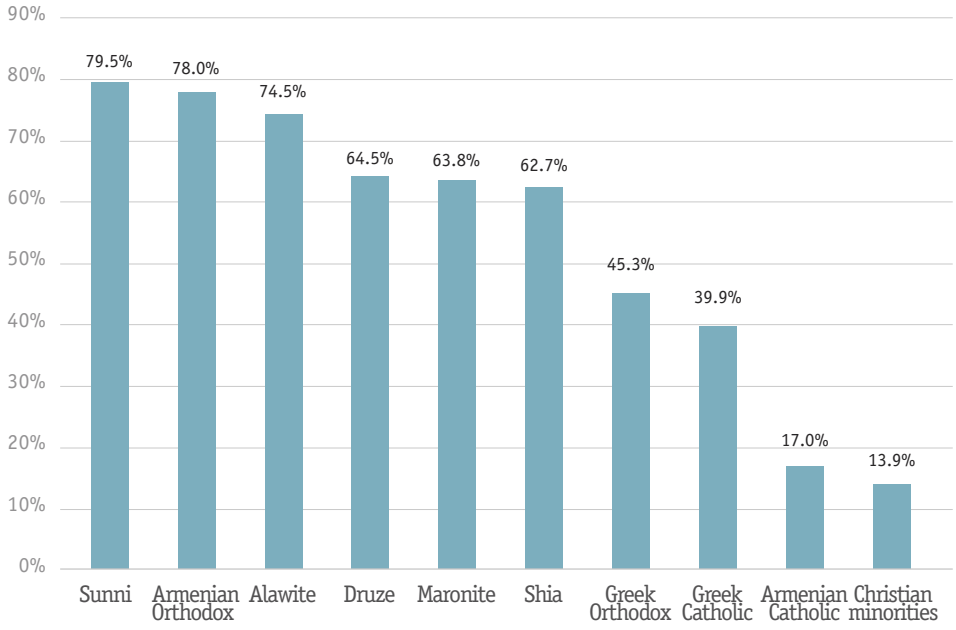
For each confessional group, this is calculated based on the districts each group is represented in. Moreover, in certain districts, independent lists did not field candidates for all seats. We therefore excluded the measure when voters did not have the option to vote for an independent candidate from their same sect, even if they were represented in the district. It must also be noted that, although the majority of independent voters voted for a co-sectarian candidate, the total share across the country among all voters, regardless of the list they voted for, was much higher (81%).

Figure 9 **Percentage of votes for co-sectarian candidates among voters who voted for an independent candidate**



This high co-sectarian bias shows that independent candidates faced sectarianism on two fronts: At the level of the state, and at the level of voters. Moreover, it suggests that the performance of each independent candidate was partly determined by the confessional seat they were running for: A candidate running in a district where their co-sectarian voters represented the majority group was generally more likely to beat the other candidates in their list. In addition, a higher sectarian bias among voters benefited some independent candidates, in that most of the votes they received came from their co-sectarian voters. For example, Mohamad Sami Alhajjar, a Kulluna Watani Sunni candidate in Chouf, won 90% of his votes from Sunni voters. Even some candidates who received a very low number of votes were able to rely on their co-sectarian voters. For example, Greek Orthodox candidate Nidal Skaff from Women of Akkar, who won about 150 votes among residents, received half of these from her co-sectarian voters. Similarly, Jihad Hammoud, a Shia candidate from 'Independent Beirutis' in Beirut 2, received 17 of his 19 votes from Shia voters. A candidate's sect, however, is only one of the many factors that affected their performance.

When independent voters did not vote for a co-sectarian candidate, they tended to choose the better-known candidates

These candidates had had visibility and media exposure before the elections, and were therefore already known figures, suggesting that familiarity with candidates is an important factor determining voters' decisions to vote for independents. Notable examples include Charbel

Nahas, leader of the emerging political party 'Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla' (Citizens in a State), and former Minister of Telecommunications and of Labor, who ran for the Greek Catholic seat on the Kulluna Watani list in Metn. Nahas won over half of the votes obtained by his list in Metn, and was the preferred candidate among all confessional groups. Similarly, Kulluna Watani voters in Aley voted more for Greek Orthodox candidate Zoya Jureidini, who is a known women's rights activist and president of 'Kafa', an organization fighting domestic and gender-based violence. Armenian Catholic and Christian minority groups, who had the lowest confessional bias, voted mostly for Armenian Orthodox winner Paula Yacoubian in Beirut 1—a famous journalist who obtained her seat with nearly 6% of the votes in the district. Better known independent candidates were also overall the most successful ones in their lists, regardless of whether voters were represented by a seat in a district or not. For example, Kulluna Watani candidate Layal Bou Moussa—a journalist for the television channel Al-Jadeed—who ran in Batroun, received nearly all of the votes that went to her list in the district. Maguy Aoun in West Bekaa-Rachaya, also a journalist, performed significantly better than the other candidates in her list. One other example is Shia candidate Wassef Harake in Baabda, an activist and lawyer, and co-founder of the 'Badna Nhaseb' (We Want Accountability) movement that was formed during the 2015 protests. All of this shows that more exposure, both in the media and at the grass-roots level, significantly increased the chances of independent candidates, suggesting that voters' familiarity with the candidates played a determining role in their decisions to vote for an independent candidate.

This analysis of voters' behavior provides one aspect of the performance of emerging groups in the elections. This performance can be better understood if analyzed from the perspective of candidates and campaigners, which is the subject of the following section.

III Approaches and Challenges to Running an Independent Electoral Campaign

While the previous section examined the performance of independent political actors through a quantitative analysis of voters' behavior, this section focuses on the different facets of their electoral campaigns based on interviews conducted with members of emerging political groups. By complementing the previous section's findings with individual insights that highlight the challenges these groups faced, we are able to paint a more holistic picture of the elections' outcomes. This section begins with a layout of the framework and methodology adopted, before examining the campaigns of different independent groups. This is followed by an in-depth analysis of the performance

and challenges faced by independents across different facets of their campaigns.

Framework and Methodology

In order to run a successful electoral campaign, emerging political actors need to mobilize a sufficiently sized group of people under an effective organizational structure. This organizational work entails a clear, pragmatic, and elaborate strategy across a range of elements that make up the campaign. While findings remark on how the work between different areas of the campaign may overlap or complement one another, we found it useful to breakdown our analysis into six subsections: 1) Program development; 2) alliances and list formation; 3) finances and budgeting; 4) media presence; 5) grassroots presence; and 6) election day machinery.

The first subsection looks at the elaboration of electoral platforms. Independent lists need a program that coherently articulates their policy positions on various economic, social, and political issues deemed important to citizens. It is also vital to ensure that team members are united with regards to their views and campaigning rhetoric. In parallel, the second subsection reflects independents' alignment in terms of political vision. The creation of alliances relies on difficult choices and several different variables, particularly with regards to the selection of candidates. Navigating these negotiations efficiently while also setting democratic decision-making principles is particularly important in guaranteeing cooperation and reciprocity amongst emerging actors.

While programs and alliances are key building blocks, any serious attempt to compete in elections requires organizational capacity and resources. As such, subsection three looks at finances and budgeting. Raising sufficient funds is a critical and indispensable element of any electoral campaign—necessary to cover expenses across different stages and facets of the race. Effective strategies for attracting and allocating funds are paramount. Media presence (subsection 4) is largely affected by the availability of funds, particularly with access to mainstream media outlets. However, today, social media plays an increasingly vital role in campaign exposure—which requires savvy campaigners who can maximize the added value of online presence.[25]

The final two subsections examine campaigning at the grassroots level and the operation of the electoral machinery on election day. Any successful campaign must communicate with voters on the ground in order to spread its platform, prove its credibility, and address popular concerns.[26] Having a mobilization strategy and consistent presence on the ground is of utmost importance, particularly for emerging actors who are not yet familiar to voters. Campaigners, who are predominantly volunteers, must also be well prepared to represent

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Denton, R., J. Trent, and R. Friedenberg. 2019. 'Political Campaigning in the Age of the Internet and Growing Influence of Social Media.' *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices.* Rowman & Littlefield; Herbert, A. 1992. *Financing Politics: Money, Elections, and Political Reform.* Congressional Quarterly Press; and Johnson-Cartee, K. S. and G. A. Copeland. 1997. *Inside Political Campaigns: Theory and Practice.* Praeger.

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Carty, R. K. and M. Eagles. 2005. *Politics is Local: National Politics at the Grassroots.* Oxford University Press; Cutright, P., and P. Rossi. 1958. 'Grass Roots Politicians and the Vote.' *American Sociological Review,* 23(2): 171–179; and Gans-Morse, J., S. Mazzuca, and S. Nichter. 2014. 'Varieties of Clientelism: Machine Politics During Elections.' *American Journal of Political Science,* 58(2): 415-432.

candidates and their message while being aligned in terms of rhetoric. Similarly, representatives (or mandoubin) on election day must be equipped for a challenging experience inside and outside of polling centers. Guaranteeing that enough representatives are recruited, funded, and trained is essential to assist voters in polling centers and oversee the ballot-counting process.

To address all these issues, LCPS conducted 20 interviews between September and October 2019 with members of different campaigning teams. Half of the interviewees were women, 15 were members of the Kulluna Watani coalition, and five were involved in the campaigns of other independent lists. Interviewees included nine candidates, six campaigners, two coalition representatives, one media team member, one candidate vetting team members, and one funding and budgeting team member.[27] Some were—or are still—members of the following emerging groups: LiHaqqi (For My Rights), LiBaladi (For My Country), Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla (Citizens in a State), Al Marsad al Shaabi li Moukafahat al Fassad (Popular Observatory for Anti-Corruption), Madaniyya (Civil), Kelna Beirut (We Are All Beirut), and Sabaa; and others were not part of any specific group. In total, our interviewees participated in races across 10 electoral districts.

Before discussing each of the six facets of electoral campaigns, certain variables and distinguishing strategic factors should be noted, as there is not one homogeneous prescriptive formula on how to organize a successful campaign.

Independent Campaigns: Nuances and Variations

Based on the interviews carried out by LCPS, as well as the strategies of different independent groups, there are noticeable variations across the campaigns of independents. One factor that shapes a candidate's campaign is the reputation and affiliation of candidates on the list. For instance, a list that includes a candidate backed by a notable emerging group such as Mouwatinoun wa Mouwatinat fi Dawla automatically generates added resources and grassroots support. Similarly, having a notable public figure with experience in media or social justice activism also facilitates campaigning for the list and its candidates. These benefits to the campaign can include increased public visibility, a pre-existing grassroots base, social media support, added experience at managing electoral campaigns, sources of funding, and representatives in polling stations.

Another factor that influences the types of campaigns independents lead is the sectarian demographics of the electoral district in question. In districts that are relatively homogeneous, sectarian tensions tend to be less pervasive, which is reflected in the overall political discourse.

27 Participants were asked about all facets of the campaign(s) they were involved in, regardless of their official roles. For instance, members of media or fundraising teams could also contribute to questions pertaining to alliances decisions if they had input on the matter.

In districts like North 3 (seven Maronite and three Greek Orthodox seats), for example, independents might not address sectarian issues as much as they would in a district like Mount Lebanon 4 (five Maronite, four Druze, two Sunni, one Greek Catholic, and one Greek Orthodox seats) which has a history of confessional antagonisms. More broadly, the strategies of independent campaigns are shaped by such contextual characteristics and the particular histories of their respective localities.

The size of the district is another main distinguishing factor. Campaigning in Baalbek-Hermel (3,009 km^2) or even West Bekaa-Rachaya (910 km^2) poses vastly different logistical challenges than Baabda (194 km^2) or Metn (265 km^2). Independents with limited human resources that lack strong grassroots movements face difficult odds and conditions when it comes to outreach in larger districts. As such, campaigning strategies varied greatly. Some interviewees that campaigned in larger districts noted that strategic villages were identified and visited physically, but populations in harder to reach areas were only reached through social media. The location of the district in question also shapes policy priorities and the concerns of constituents. For instance, security concerns are generally more prominent in districts alongside the Syrian border, such as Akkar. Meanwhile, Metn constituents may prioritize transportation and road infrastructural issues due to traffic congestions on roads to and from the capital. Different electoral programs are thus geared toward certain issues more than others. As such, all these district-specific factors lead to a plurality across the types of campaigns independents lead.

A final factor that shaped the different campaigns was the availability of financial resources. Electoral campaigns are costly, and candidates running for elections must consider the costs of registration fees, media appearances, organizing public events, renting office spaces, recruiting election day representatives, among other things. When funding is limited, expenses will be restricted to bare essentials, often leading to neglecting outreach and media exposure. This was a key difference between the campaigns of independents, as some figures were capable of financing their own campaigns and could afford publicity through billboards or television appearances, while other campaigns were more financially restricted and relied solely on work at the grassroots level. With limited financial assets, independents adjusted their strategies, relying more on social media, door-to-door outreach, and low-cost public events.

Based on interview findings, the subsections that follow discuss the challenges faced by independents across different facets of their campaigns. The analysis also generates recommendations on how to best learn from the experience of candidates running for elections.

Breakdown of the Independent Lists' Campaigns

Developing an Electoral Program

The drafting, elaboration, and delivery of a candidate's program are key components of their electoral campaign. In order to understand the different challenges and steps that characterize this process, we asked interviewees a number of key questions: Who developed the programs, whether constituents' opinions were taken into account, how the contents of the program were elaborated, what key issues were highlighted, and whether the delivery of the program varied by neighborhoods and/or voters' background (confession, socio-economic, age, gender, and so on).

There are three key findings concerning independents' electoral programs. First, committees were formed to draft the programs collaboratively. Second, detailed programs did not matter to voters as much as emerging actors might have thought, and third, concise and brief messaging were more important for the delivery of the program than complex content that runs the risk of being inaccessible to most voters.

One of the distinguishing features of emerging political groups is that they ran on programmatic platforms. According to Hassan (2019), the platforms of three independent groups—LiHaqqi, LiBaladi, and Sabaa—stood out in terms of their scope and depth compared to those of traditional parties. Indeed, their programs covered a wider set of policy issues and provided concrete plans to address those issues.[28] Our interviews also supported this finding, as most outlined that their programs covered issues such as social and economic policy, public services delivery, administrative reform, and foreign and defense policy. Hassan (2019) adds that independent groups particularly distinguished themselves through their emphasis on social issues such as civil liberties, gender equality, and labor rights, whereas mainstream parties focused mostly on administrative reforms.[29]

Interviewees noted that political programs were developed and elaborated through special committees made up of members with knowledge of policy issues. These individuals either had experience working in the private sector—NGOs, consultancy firms, or research centers—or came from academic backgrounds. The policy positions were discussed internally and amended through collaborative processes. Certain groups, such as Sabaa, also conducted surveys to collect the opinion of voters and determine which policy issues to prioritize.

While the Kulluna Watani coalition attempted to draft a unified electoral program, this initiative proved to be challenging. Indeed, the breadth of views among different groups and candidates made it difficult to resolve contentious matters, such as stances toward Hezbollah. As such, the coalition ended up settling on broader principles to abide by

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

29 Hassan, N. 2019. 'Where Do Lebanese Political Groups Stand on Policy Questions? An Analysis of Electoral Platforms.' Policy Paper. Lebanese Center for Policy Studies.

a unified program. Candidates fielded by other independent groups also had varying stances on certain issues, particularly personal status laws, taxation, refugee resettlement, and LGBTQ rights. Indeed, each candidate tended to have their own policy agenda and set of priorities that sometimes diverged from the stances of other members of the same list.

With regards to the delivery of the program, some interviewees remarked that the policies they prioritized were adjusted to meet the characteristics of voters such as age, socio-economic background, and region. Others preferred consistency instead, adopting the same type of discourse and strategy regardless of the background of voters. According to some interviewees, the dissemination strategy was ideally determined through discussions with constituents. Indeed, interviewees stated that they valued the input of voters, yet often lacked the time and resources to collect pertinent information while drafting programs.

It is worth noting that many interviewees claimed that electoral programs did not matter to voters as much as they had initially thought. Sophisticated and elaborate programs may be helpful in consolidating political positions within the campaigning team, but many interviewees remarked that voters rarely sought detailed policy explanations. Although having a thorough plan is vital in any political campaign, its delivery is just as important. As one campaign manager noted, a concise and straightforward political program would be easier to communicate and spread as it would be more accessible to voters.

As one interviewee attested: 'Listening to people and responding to their concerns from the ground is the only way to develop legitimacy as a political alternative if you are an outsider' (Kulluna Watani coalition representative). Indeed, the successful delivery of the program was contingent upon voters' trust in the credibility of the candidates, rather than the extensiveness of the program's contents. To establish this trust, regular contact with voters was essential. Candidates who had prior exposure found it easier to appeal to voters while newer faces spent more time introducing themselves rather than discussing their policy positions.

Forming Lists and Determining Alliances

The electoral law passed in 2017 required that candidates be part of an electoral list,[30] which compelled emerging political actors to build coalitions with each other. In order to understand the process of list and alliance formation, interviewees were asked about the decision-making structure, the priorities and principles set during negotiations, the formation of strategic alliances and their costs, decisions to join—

30 Article 52 of Law No. 44. Available at: https://aceproject.org/ero-en/regions/mideast/LB/lebanon-law-no.44-parliamentary-elections-2017/view.

or not to join—the Kulluna Watani coalition, and the specific challenges faced during coalition building and candidate selection.

There were three key findings: 1) Some alliances failed to materialize due to clashing views and/or personal feuds; 2) broad organizational principles were adopted to find common ground with other emerging actors; and 3) alliances and lists took too long to finalize, which undermined efforts in other facets of the campaigns.

Despite the odds, 11 groups managed to form an alliance that came to be known as 'Tahalof Watani' (My Country Alliance). These groups included LiBaladi (For My Country), LiHaqqi (For My Rights), Sabaa party (Seven), Sah (Correct), Al-Marsad al-Shaabi li Moukafahat al-Fassad (Popular Observatory for Anti-Corruption), Tajamo' Abna' Baalbak (Gathering of the People of Baalbek), Hirak al Matn al-A'laa (Movement of Upper Metn), Tol'it Rihetkom (You Stink), Lika' al Dawla al Madaniyya (Civil State Gathering), Lika' al Hawiya wal Siyada (Identity and Sovereignty Gathering), and Moutahidoun (United).[31] Tahalof Watani partnered up with other independent candidates as well as the Mouwatinoun and Mouwatinat fi Dawla (Citizens in a State) party—headed by former minister Charbel Nahas—and fielded 66 candidates across nine of the 15 electoral districts under the Kulluna Watani coalition, which was the largest alliance of independents in the country's history.[32] The coalition agreed that its candidates could not be affiliated with a traditional political party, had to disclose their assets and savings, have experience in fields relevant to public affairs, and have a proven record of supporting civil rights issues.

Although attempts to form lists with other emerging groups in additional electoral districts were made, these did not materialize. The main reasons why some alliances failed were various: Divergent ideological and programmatic positions, disagreements over organizational principles and campaigning strategies, clashes in personalities, and lack of time to sort out differences.

Noteworthy negotiations between independent groups broke down for several reasons. One example of this was the failed negotiation between one of the Kulluna Watani groups, LiBaladi, and the 'Kelna Beirut' list in Beirut 2, where LiBaladi was unable to field any candidates in the district due to divergences in policy priorities. According to an interviewee, a prospective LiBaladi candidate in Beirut 2 was a strong supporter of tackling gender discrimination in personal status laws—a matter which some Kelna Beirut members felt would alienate conservative constituents. Another interviewee attributed the failure to form a larger coalition to old personal feuds rather than policy differences.

Another alliance that failed to materialize was one between Kulluna Watani and the Madaniyya list in Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf).[33] The reason behind this failed alliance was a clash in views with regards

31 Some of these groups have dissolved or are no longer part of the 'Tahalof Watani' in its present form as it transitions toward a more centralized political group.

32 A candidate in Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf) was backed by the Communist party while one in Mount Lebanon 1 (Keserwan and Jbeil) and another in Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf) were Communist party members but decided to run on Kulluna Watani lists as individuals. The Communist party and Kulluna Watani were not officially allied and in fact ran against one another in South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Marjayoun-Hasbaya, and Nabatiyeh).

to strategy, policy positions, and organizational approach as well as individual quarrels between members. An interviewee remarked a difference in political views and campaigning approach between LiHaqqi—the Kulluna Watani group at the time—and the Madaniyya list. LiHaqqi espoused a clear socialist identity, both in terms of policy positions and participatory organizational approach, whereas the Madaniyya campaign's political tendencies were closer to the center of the political spectrum, especially with regards to economic policy. According to some interviewees, the divisions and public spillovers from these failed negotiations undermined, to a certain extent, the success of the oppositionist movement.

The need to unite as an opposition movement was a common topic throughout the elections season. However, an interviewee noted that 'the views of different emerging groups will naturally range across the left-right political spectrum' (member of candidate-selection and vetting team) yet another remarked that all the independent groups share one thing in common: They 'aim to redefine the nature of political discourse by shifting conversations away from sectarian discourse toward policy-related debate' (candidate in Beirut 1). This range of views and ideological positions may, in fact, be a strength rather than a weakness. Attempts at consolidating one ideology for all independent groups—which proved to be an unrealistic goal—created various internal divisions. Ultimately, emerging groups agreed on broad principles that allowed them to coordinate and work together to undermine the sectarian establishment, as specified by the criteria they set for nominating candidates.

The process of forming alliances occurred alongside and helped decide the selection of candidates. Certain groups set organizational and decision-making principles to ensure consistency and representation within lists. These included: 1) Upholding a balance between candidates with regards to gender and age; 2) adopting a clear, transparent, and democratic process for vetting and selecting candidates; 3) soliciting the opinions of constituents on different potential candidates before picking them; and 4) considering the complementarity, relationship, and willingness of different candidates to campaign together.

Another important point of contention during the alliance formation process was whether or not to ally with fringe establishment parties, such as the Kataeb, in strategic districts. The coalition ended up opting against this, but did field two candidates who were members of the Communist party. There were also disagreements over the independence of a number of other candidates, particularly those who either had previously belonged to political parties, leaned toward an establishment camp more than the other, or had conflicting business interests. Members within different emerging groups disagreed on some of the

33
Adding up the votes of both lists would have essentially resulted in the number of votes needed to reach the threshold, not to mention votes lost by those disillusioned by the failure to broker a partnership.

benchmarks for assessing the independence of candidates. An interviewee argued that 'tactical alliances and compromises must be considered where independents are unlikely to be competitive… such as the South' (Kulluna Watani coalition member, Beirut 1) Some independents who did not run with Kulluna Watani adopted this strategy of allying with parties that may, for good reason, be deemed not independent: The campaign of the 'Together toward Change' list in South 2, which obtained 11,481 votes, was predominantly organized by emerging actors yet included a candidate backed by the Free Patriotic Movement.

Interviewees recognized that different strategic choices must be made throughout different steps of the electoral campaign, meaning that a clear and comprehensive organizational structure is essential when it comes to decision-making. Campaigners also noted that tactics and priorities may vary by district, depending on the political competition and context. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, a main takeaway from interviews is that candidates and alliances should have been made as early as possible. Other elements of the campaign, from the delivery of the program to grassroots and media presence, all require extensive time investment and coordination, and should not be inhibited due to delays in negotiations. A willingness to cooperate and exhibit political maturity is key when it comes to alliances and candidate-selection.

Financing a Campaign and Organizing a Budget

One of the key challenges in running any political campaign is in financing. To understand the independents' funding issues, LCPS asked the respondents about how funds were raised, and how those funds were budgeted and allocated. More specifically, the aim was to understand how much money was raised relative to targets set, whether there was enough time to fundraise, which fundraising strategies and potential donors were targeted, what expenses were prioritized during budget allocation, and what could have been done had additional financial resources been available.

Our analysis finds that: 1) Lack of sufficient funds posed a major challenge to emerging actors, which was compounded by poor oversight mechanisms; 2) the inability to finance an efficient election day machine strongly undermined independents' campaigns; 3) there are several strategies to fundraise that could be utilized; and 4) even with a lack of funds, there are still cost-effective campaigning strategies worth adopting.

Under the current electoral system, registration deposit fees for candidates are set at LBP 8 million while campaign spending is capped at LBP 150 million ($99,240)[34] for each candidate, with a provision to

34 Based on the official conversion rate of LBP 1,507 per dollar used in 2018.

spend an additional LBP 5,000 per registered voter in large electoral districts. While spending ceilings were already high, oversight and transparency was lacking as well, with the Supervisory Authority having no legal powers and the Constitutional Council lacking political independence.[35] In turn, campaigns and candidates capable of financing large budgets had disproportionate advantages. From registration fees, office spaces, and election day representatives, to media appearances, billboards, and public events, running for office is very costly. In addition, the most popular outreach strategy—television appearances—was made inaccessible to most. According to interviewees, mainstream TV stations set egregious airtime costs for candidates. This meant that only politically-connected and/or wealthy candidates had access to the most popular news stations. In turn, unequal campaign finances strongly undermined the fairness of the race.

Furthermore, an essential expense which limited the success of independent campaigns was the recruitment and compensation of representatives on election day. With a total of 1,880 polling centers and 6,793 polling stations[36] across Lebanon, and due to a lack of centralized voting centers, a large number of representatives were needed to cover all areas in each district. Mobilizing representatives did not suffice, as they also need to be registered and trained, have their transportation secured, and basic needs covered. This could only have been done with experienced campaign managers capable of overseeing the matters at a micro-level. Under such a framework, traditional parties dominated polling stations and regularly intimidated independent voters. As interviewees attested, financial needs were a hindrance for many candidates, most of whom accumulated debts in order to cover their campaign expenses.

While advocating for capped and enforceable campaign spending ceilings may be crucial, there are certain actions that can be taken by independents to acquire additional financial resources and more efficiently budget their spending. Interviewees identified cost-effective outreach strategies such as regular public events focused on specific issues to connect with voters, regular open-house events for voters to meet candidates in person, or online live-streaming Q&A sessions. Some even invested in fieldwork research to examine voter behavior and preferences. Research can take on different forms, from online or in-person surveys to focus groups, workshops, and interviews.

Interviewees also highlighted the importance of setting a target budget for fixed and essential costs early on. These include candidate registrations fees, office spaces, at least one public event to announce candidates and electoral programs, training and funding for election day representatives, and basic social media expenses. Fixed costs must be determined as early as possible, in order to reach out to potential

35
The Supervisory Authority is tasked with overseeing all facets of the elections, but even if it identifies electoral irregularities and violations, it lacks the authority to pursue these allegations in court. The Constitutional Council holds this judicial authority, yet lacks independence to adequately fulfill its accountability role due to political interference and patronage.

36
A polling center is usually made up of multiple polling stations, divided according to gender and confession.

donors who will, ideally, cover most of these essential expenses. Moreover, larger groups and coalitions were more likely to appeal to more affluent donors—which is why the Kulluna Watani coalition found it much easier to attract funds, particularly from the diaspora.

According to the interviewees, crowdfunding methods were largely unused. Some of these methods include appealing to smaller donors through social media, public events, existing networks, or a word-of-mouth and door-to-door approach. Through its extensive size, the Kulluna Watani coalition was most capable of organizing a team tasked with handling these different types of crowdfunding, but lacked the time to maximize those efforts. Moreover, certain candidates were also able to raise funds for their individual campaigns through their personal networks. The crowdfunding potential of the diaspora could have been tapped into by investing in the existing foreign networks within emerging groups as well. Recruiting team members from the diaspora could unlock ample fundraising potential from a community eager to contribute and remain connected to its homeland. Fundraising efforts can be maximized if the process is undertaken across the different organizational bodies of the campaign—the coalition, political group, and candidate levels.

Table 3 **Campaign budget expenditures**

Primary Expenditures	Secondary Expenditures
Registration Fees	Mainstream Media Appearances
Training of Election Day Representatives	Billboards
Office Space(s)	Study of Voter Behavior Through Private Contractors
Public Event for List and Program Announcement	Hiring Marketing and Media Experts
Public Events for Individual Candidates	Compensating Campaign Managers and Members
Social Media Boosting	Compensating Election Day Representatives

Outreach: Mainstream and Social Media

Another essential component of electoral campaigns is media exposure. As such, this subsection explores matters related to communications through mainstream and social media. Namely, the interviews asked about the accessibility of media appearances and coverage; the key points relayed through media platforms; the type of contents shared on social media; social media strategies and the use of data analytics; the extent of reliance on media for campaigning; the effectiveness of

social media in mobilizing voters; and the amount of budget allocated to media expenses.

Our analysis finds that: 1) Mainstream media outlets were inaccessible to independents; 2) emerging groups relied on social media in a range of ways, some exhibiting much more elaborate and data-driven strategies than others; 3) spending funds to boost social media presence was not a necessity as organic reach is possible through thoughtful content; and 4) social media presence was more effective for voter mobilization when complemented by work at the grassroots level.

As discussed in the previous subsection, the high cost to appear on mainstream media outlets made it hard for independent groups and candidates to receive coverage. As such, emerging actors were incapable of reaching out to voters through television, which remains the most popular medium by which voters familiarize themselves with candidates. In fact, Tele Liban—the public television network—was the only broadcaster which was accessible for candidates without abundant funds. Most interviewees agreed that with the egregious prices set by private TV stations, even those who could afford it were better off investing in other elements of their campaigns. Publicity through billboards was also made inaccessible to most independent candidates, as they were too expensive.

In view of the reality governing access to the media, independents adjusted their outreach strategies by investing in alternative outlets instead. Social media, specifically Facebook, was the most common platform for campaigns to produce content and share it with prospective voters. These included live streams of Q&A sessions, speeches, open discussions, marketing videos, personal biographies, and programmatic statements. Independent campaigns had varying levels of success in these endeavors, depending on a range of factors. Some interviewed candidates and campaigners who belonged to groups with experienced social media teams and relatively larger budgets, such as LiBaladi, took advantage of the potential of social media as much as they could. They relied on data analytics and conducted research to maximize the effectiveness of targeted boosting.

The exposure that could be generated through social media allowed groups and candidates to reach a number of voters they would not have had the capacity to connect with otherwise—this is particularly true in larger districts. With the proper strategies and thorough content, even modest social media budgets were able to generate widespread interest in certain groups and their candidates.

Another independent group, LiHaqqi, made the most out of its social media page despite running in one of the larger districts—Mount Lebanon 4 (Aley and Chouf)—and having a relatively limited budget. An interviewee from the group noted that this was done by

complementing their active use of social media with effective grassroots organizing that attracted new supporters and kept older ones engaged: 'It doesn't matter how effective your social media strategy is or how much money you spend on boosting posts if you lack the proper grassroots work.' In other words, appealing to the electorate required in-person contact, especially when it came to emerging political groups who lacked prior visibility and familiarity with voters. An active social media presence was a supplement to that grassroots organizing and became a tool for potential backers to gain additional information about the group, its views, and its candidates. In addition, a significant portion of the electorate is not sufficiently active on social media, and thus required other means of being contacted and mobilized. Having a breadth of complementary outreach tools was key.

Outreach: Investing in a Grassroots Presence

Organizing on the ground is perhaps the most important element in the campaigns of independents seeking to penetrate the political arena as outsiders. Namely, the interviewees were asked about how campaigners organized on the ground, how they operated, which rhetorical strategies they adopted, the types of public events they organized, whether they had target constituents, and the challenges they faced particularly with regards to confrontations with traditional political parties.

Our findings show that: 1) Emerging actors struggled to establish familiarity with, and gain the trust of, voters; 2) grassroots campaigning strategies varied by district; and 3) emerging actors faced a range of challenges from traditional parties, as they were victims of intimidation, violence, and fear-mongering.

The different independent groups and actors that took part in the 2018 elections faced a range of challenges when it came to grassroots organizing. A member of a Kulluna Watani campaigning team described their uphill battle succinctly: 'People did not know us. We were constantly introducing ourselves and responding to questions about our background. There was not enough time to do all the work that needed to be done.' Those who had prior experience in public administration or local activism noted that they benefited from an existing, although modest, grassroots presence in their districts, such as in Mount Lebanon 3 (Baabda) and Beirut 1. Groups and candidates that had been politically active in the past were able to draw upon their track records to command some additional degree of legitimacy when campaigning on the ground. Different histories of activism, whether regarding environmental, feminist, or socio-economic issues, were all helpful in generating credibility and expanding grassroots

networks. However, most emerging groups had formed and candidates been selected soon before the elections, and thus faced greater challenges in terms of visibility.

As mentioned previously, the type of campaigning needed on the ground was specific to each district. Reaching constituents in larger districts, for instance, required strategies that prioritized mobilizing representatives and team members outside urban areas in order to cover as many suburbs and villages as possible. Even then, it was still difficult for independents to cover all areas. As such, some emerging actors, particularly those in large districts like Bekaa 3 (Baalbek-Hermel) and South 2 (Sour and Zahrani) and South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Nabatiyeh, Marjayoun-Hasbaya), sought to identify villages most likely to have undecided and swayable voters. In order to be effective, these strategic decisions required appropriate and timely research as well as politically knowledgeable contact persons on the ground.

Other features that shaped the electoral race were the demographics of the district, as well as which traditional parties independents were competing against. Intimidation, fear-mongering, violence, and/or co-optation were all tools mainstream parties deployed, according to interviewees. Parties like the Kataeb, Lebanese Forces, and the Progressive Socialist Party tended to co-opt the oppositionist rhetoric of independents by casting themselves as anti-establishment, while the Amal Movement and Hezbollah strongly invested in their symbolic capital as champions of the resistance.[37] In most districts, independents faced attempts at undermining them one way or another. Some candidates' offices were raided, misinformation and propaganda were circulated, and election day representatives were threatened in a range of ways.[38] Interviewees recounted various cases of voters' livelihoods being threatened if they turned against their traditional party. Indeed, the trappings of the clientelistic sectarian political economy may take on different forms that go beyond traditional vote buying and the distribution of services.

Considering the precarious economic realities of voters' daily lives, clientelistic dependencies are often difficult to escape. Some interviewees noted that they focused their rhetoric on the systemic issues leading to the socio-economic precarity and inhibiting voters from expressing their free political will. Indeed, alternative political actors have made rebuilding the state and its institutions a central part of their campaigns. While these goals provided an alternative to the services being provided by patrons, achieving them was only possible in the long term. Therefore, interviewees recognized that the most marginalized voters often found independents' arguments about clientelism and state-building as out of touch with their immediate material needs. Independents acknowledged that these were valid barriers that

37
Deeb, L. and M. Harb. 2011. 'Culture as History and Landscape: Hizballah's Efforts to Shape an Islamic Milieu in Lebanon.' *Arab Studies Journal,* 19(1): 12-45.

38
El Kak, N. 2019. 'A Path for Political Change in Lebanon? Lessons and Narratives from the 2018 Elections.' Bawader, Arab Reform Initiative.

prevented many voters from openly expressing their support for them. Emerging groups also looked to remind citizens that their votes could not be traced with pre-printed ballots, hoping that this would have been enough of an assurance to encourage them to vote against traditional parties.

All the management, strategizing, and on-the-ground organizing was challenging and time consuming. As many interviewees attested, work at the grassroots level is something to be conducted year-round, and that election season would only be an assessment of that performance. By only becoming active and visible prior to elections, claims of opportunism become more common. Therefore, the best way to appeal to voters and gain their trust, according to interviewees, is to prove genuine concern and contributions to the public good on a regular basis. Active involvement within the community can be done through different initiatives, depending on expertise and needs, and does not necessarily require financial resources. In sum, early and consistent engagement with the people is the foundation of a successful grassroots presence, and is more cost effective and valuable than a campaign that risks being perceived as disconnected from citizens' realities.

Election-Day: Having an Effective Machine

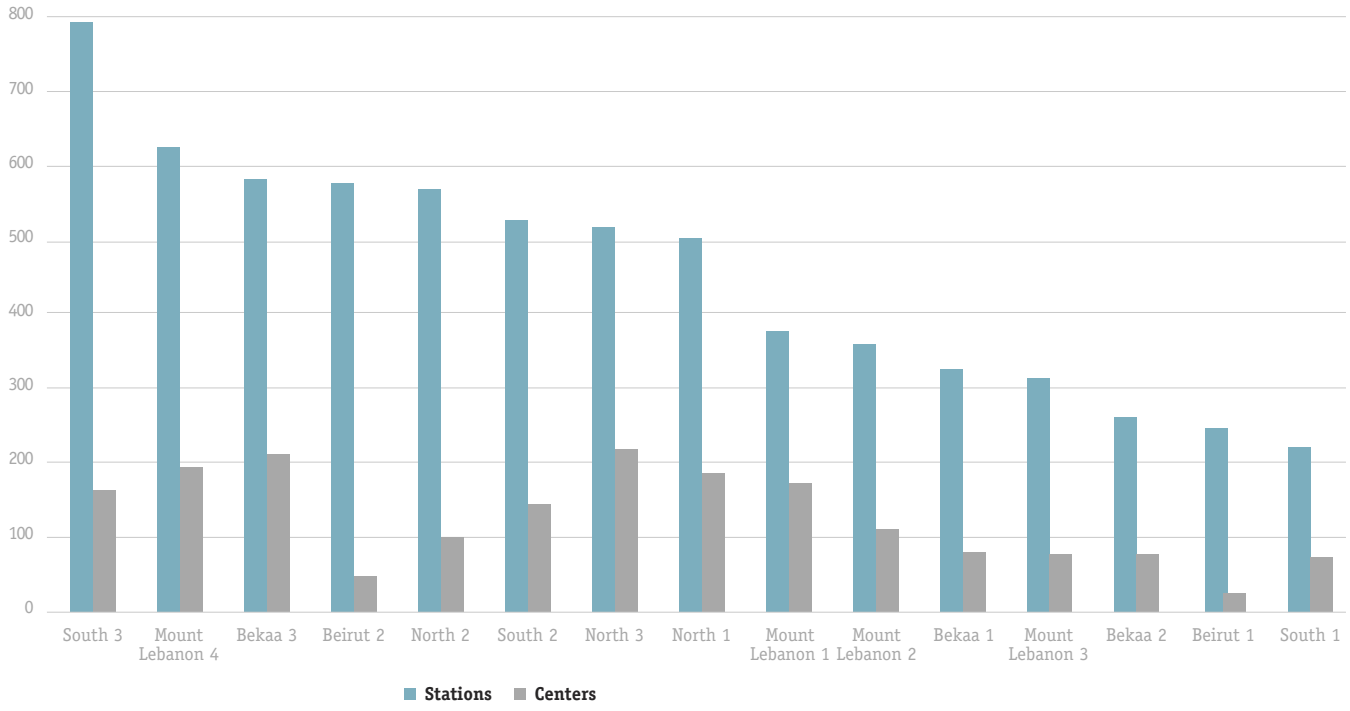
While most campaigning efforts take place prior to election day, a successful electoral campaign requires a well-run machinery inside and outside voting centers. The electoral machine is a coordinating body made up of mandoubin (representatives) tasked with the facilitation, execution, and protection of the voting process. On election day, representatives guide voters inside polling centers and make sure voters understand all technical aspects of the vote. They also oversee the ballot counting process after centers close. To understand the inner workings of the machinery, we asked interviewees about how representatives were recruited and trained, their (in)ability to cover all polling stations in their district(s), the challenges representatives faced inside and outside voting centers, how the electoral machinery was organized, and the vote counting experience.

The main findings are that: 1) Emerging groups struggled to mobilize enough representatives and cover all polling stations; 2) the recruitment of representatives was even more challenging due to intimidation and threats from traditional parties; 3) representatives of emerging actors witnessed violations and fraud inside voting centers, and some were also victims of physical attacks by traditional parties.

Interviewees recognized that managing an effective machinery on election day was the area where their campaigns were the weakest relative to that of traditional parties. One candidate described election

day as follows: 'That's when we truly saw how inexperienced and weak our operation was relative to that of traditional parties.' First, all groups struggled to secure representatives for all voting centers, not to mention the stations. The only groups who did not face such an issue were independents in Beirut 1, which has the lowest number of voting centers amongst all districts. In fact, the number of polling centers and stations varied greatly in each district (figure 10). Beirut 1 only included 24 polling centers while North 3 (Batroun, Bcharre, Koura, and Zgharta) had 217. In South 1 (Saida and Jezzine), there were 222 stations while South 3 (Bint Jbeil, Nabatiyeh, Marjayoun-Hasbaya) had 793. Second, emerging groups found it difficult to finance their machines, as representatives require training, transportation, and sometimes monetary compensation. One interviewee admitted that it took emerging groups too long to realize how costly election day expenses would be, which considerably undermined their performance.

Figure 10 **Number of voting centers and stations by district**



The election day operation required extensive amounts of coordination, planning, and experience. Recruitment alone was challenging since representatives had to be registered in the district in question. Many interviewees noted that it would have been a lot easier for them to mobilize representatives had they been allowed to field campaign members who were not necessarily registered to vote in the district they were running in. Other interviewees remarked that adopting large and centralized voting centers, commonly referred to as 'megacenters,'

would be an electoral reform that would greatly improve their performance and reduce their expenses.

Another major challenge related to the recruitment of representatives was intimidation and threats. While recruiting sufficient representatives was challenging enough, emerging groups also had to deal with the pressure and coercion tactics of traditional parties. Interviewees in most districts recounted the stories of representatives whose families were victims of threats or some form of socio-economic coercion. If a representative's family member was employed through a traditional political figure or received social services from an organization affiliated to a local party, some felt they risked losing their job or access to healthcare or education. These threats often happened a few days before the election, which meant that emerging groups had little to no time to secure alternative representatives.

Representatives were also victims of intimidation and violence inside voting centers which, according to accounts, are regularly dominated by security forces and judges affiliated to traditional parties.[39] These intimidation tactics and bias amongst government officials were particularly flagrant when emerging groups attempted to contest fraudulent practices they witnessed. An interviewed candidate recounted witnessing numerous violations during the vote count, which were dismissed by the judge overseeing the process who asked them to file complaints to the Constitutional Council instead, where appeals are regularly disregarded.

While these challenges were difficult to oppose on the ground without proper legal frameworks and enforceable regulations, there were some measures groups could have taken to have more effective machines and mitigate the damages. By identifying the minimum number of representatives needed in polling stations early on, and how much it would cost to train them, the recruitment of election representatives could have begun earlier and the campaign budget could have accounted for these expenses. In addition, one interviewee noted that if representatives had been identified earlier and had become invested in the campaign, they would have been less likely to succumb to pressure or intimidation by traditional parties a few days prior to the vote. Representatives involved early on could have been better trained, more familiar with the strategies of traditional parties, and more aware of the potential risks involved.

A campaigner and election representative interviewed remarked that representatives should expect to be witnesses of violations inside stations and centers. Violations may occur after centers close, particularly while ballots are being counted. Candidates and representatives should thus make sure they take turns in overseeing the work of judges and public servants who risk engaging in the disappearance of ballots or the manipulation of the vote-count.

39 El Kak. 2019. 'A Path for Political Change in Lebanon? Lessons and Narratives from the 2018 Elections.'

IV Conclusion: What to Do Going Forward?

The adoption of a proportional representation electoral system for the 2018 elections created some hopes for emerging political groups to enter parliament. This system, however, did not lead to changes as these groups performed poorly and faced a range of challenges. There are numerous takeaways from their performance across districts. As the analysis of voter behavior in the first section showed, independents tended to perform better in more urbanized areas and those with a lower prevalence of poverty, showing that their outreach was limited to a certain socio-economic class. This result could be due to their identification of strategic neighborhoods to campaign in, although, given the clientelistic political system, it may also point toward the difficulty in reaching out to voters in poorer areas, who may rely on benefits from traditional political parties. Another finding is that independents received better results in more confessionally mixed areas, pointing at sectarian parties' higher ability and interest in mobilizing voters in more homogeneous localities with a higher presence of their target group. This finding is further supported by the fact that voters were more likely to vote for independents when they were not represented by a seat in a district. A strategy that emerging actors could adopt before the next elections is focusing on mobilizing those voters. Moreover, higher turnouts significantly harmed independents' performance, highlighting their weakness in mobilizing voters compared to established parties. With that in mind, it is important for emerging groups to campaign continuously in order to build grassroots bases across the country, while also taking into account socio-economic factors on the ground in order to appeal to a larger number of voters.

While existing institutional and systemic hurdles explain a large part of the failures of independent groups, there are still ways they can improve different facets of their campaigns. Reiterating some of the findings highlighted throughout this report, emerging actors stand to benefit from a simpler way of communicating their programs by identifying specific policies and campaign slogans to center their campaigning efforts around. Simpler policy objectives are easier to advertise and allow messaging to spread more quickly, organically, and cheaply. Furthermore, in order to maximize financial resources and establish a clear budget, a comprehensive funding strategy is key. Setting a target and reaching out to donors early will help make sure that necessary expenditures are met. Moreover, a clear campaigning strategy at the grassroots level must be communicated to different team members in order to have a comprehensive and consistent rhetoric that anticipates voters' concerns and traditional parties' repressive discourse.

Lastly, emerging groups would greatly benefit from more comprehensive coordination between their different organizational structures.

The campaigns of Kulluna Watani candidates usually consisted of three levels: The coalition, the group, and the individual. Some campaign-related tasks were only handled at one of those levels, while others relied on the efforts of all three. However, more could have been done to guarantee that the three levels of the campaigns complemented each other. With more time to plan, the strategies of all three branches could have been set in tandem, and clearer networks of communication could have been established. Whether related to the recruitment of election day representatives, work at the grassroots level, media content, or the raising of funds, the output of all these activities could have been enhanced and scaled up through more robust organizational and coordination structures.

Although there are many ways for independents to improve their campaigns, there are also a range of other hurdles in their way. Repression, co-optation, and allegations of vote-buying remain a reality while different components of the electoral law also limit the independence and fairness of the race. Nevertheless, emerging political groups have shown great resolve over recent years and continue to accumulate political experience and maturity. In light of these developments and the momentum spurred by the October 17, 2019, uprising, independents are increasingly succeeding in other elections, most notably in the Beirut Bar Association (October 2019), as well as in multiple universities—with independent candidates making a breakthrough in the 2020 student elections at the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese American University, Rafik Hariri University, and Université Saint Joseph. While elections are only one of the various tools to push for political change, the 2022 parliamentary elections will prove to be a crucial juncture for anti-establishment actors.

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