


NOT EVEN IN THE PICTURE



A study on the marginalization
of women in major political
events in Lebanon



A study on the marginalization of women in major political events in Lebanon prepared by Madanyat for Equality (2025), this study is part of the Women's Rights Fund (WRF) in the Middle East project, implemented in Lebanon and funded by Oxfam.

Madanyat for Equality is solely responsible for the contents of this report, which do not necessarily reflect the views of Oxfam.

This research was conducted by

Nada Saleh Anid, Founder and Executive Director of Madanyat for Equality

Rodolph Zgheib, Project Coordinator at Madanyat for Equality

Contributors

Nadine Hajj Hussein – Project Management and review

Melanie Badr – Communication, proofreading and editorial support

Rayan Barakat, Art Director, Cover Designer, and Graphic Designer for the book.

© 2025 Madanyat for Equality. All rights reserved.

Table of Contents:

Introduction..... 2

Historical Context..... 4

 a. Pre-Taif Agreement: Women and politics in Lebanon before 1989 4

 b. Post-Taif Agreement: Continued marginalization of women in Lebanese politics.....5

Legal and institutional frameworks..... 7

Social and cultural factors 9

Methodology 11

Overview of the timeline of key political events in Lebanon since the Taif Agreement.....12

Conclusion.....52

Introduction



The role of women in Lebanon's political landscape has long been a critical issue. While political representation has advanced globally, Lebanon continues to lag behind, with deeply rooted barriers preventing many qualified women from entering decision-making circles. Despite the significant contributions of women across various sectors, their presence in politics remains limited, reinforcing a system dominated by male-led structures.

In contrast, nearly half of the world's countries have adopted gender quotas, significantly increasing women's political participation. By December 2024, women held 27.1% of parliamentary seats worldwide. In contrast, Lebanon lagged behind with only 6.25% female representation, highlighting the urgent need for structural reforms to enhance women's role in governance.

The title "Not Even in the Picture" starkly illustrates the exclusion of women from Lebanon's political scene. Photographs from major political events consistently depict a reality in which power and influence remain concentrated in the hands of men. This marginalization is not merely symbolic, it extends to political decision-making, where male dominance is evident in political parties, electoral lists, government and parliamentary seats, and even the presidency. As a result, policies and governance continue to be shaped with minimal female influence, perpetuating an entrenched system of exclusion.

The absence of women from these political images carries deep implications, reinforcing patriarchal norms, clientelism, sectarianism, and restrictive personal status laws that define Lebanon's political system. The issue is not just weak representation in leadership roles but the complete exclusion of women from the political landscape at crucial moments. This visual absence is no coincidence, it reflects a systemic and ongoing marginalization that limits women's ability to shape Lebanon's modern history. Recognizing this issue prompted us to take a serious approach by documenting and analyzing key political moments in the country's history, revealing how women have been excluded from both politics and media,

facing a dual form of erasure from public life.

Since the end of the civil war, women, despite their active involvement during the conflict, have remained secondary players in major political transformations. Even before 2005, a period that shaped Lebanon's political discourse, women's presence in negotiations and national decision-making was minimal.

Between 2005 and 2016, as Lebanon underwent electoral processes, peace agreements, and periods of civil unrest including the 2008 Doha Agreement and National Dialogue sessions, women faced systematic exclusion from high-level political negotiations. They were not only absent from decision-making but were often entirely missing from the political scene when crucial agreements were reached.

More recent political upheavals, including the October 2019 uprising, the devastating Beirut explosion in August 2020, and the 2022 parliamentary elections, have once again underscored the marginalization of women in Lebanese politics. Despite their active roles in organizing protests, leading discussions on political and economic issues, spearheading relief efforts, and engaging in crisis response, their influence in formal political processes has remained marginal.

This research seeks to answer a central question: What has been the real role of women in decision-making during major political events in Lebanon since the 1989 Taif Agreement? By critically analyzing these events, the study aims to highlight the extent of women's participation, expose the structural barriers that have hindered their political influence, and examine instances where women were present but had little to no impact on key decisions. Through this analysis, the research will shed light on the stark contrast between women's symbolic and actual roles in shaping Lebanon's political landscape.

Historical Context

a. Pre-Taif Agreement: Women and politics in Lebanon before 1989

Lebanon's political landscape before the Taif Agreement was shaped by the sectarian power-sharing system established by the National Pact of 1943. While this system aimed to balance power among Lebanon's religious sects, it indirectly reinforced patriarchal norms by prioritizing male-dominated religious and political elites, limiting women's political participation and leadership.

The Lebanese Civil War, which erupted in 1975, further exacerbated gender disparities in politics. During the conflict, many women played active roles in relief efforts, combat, and logistical support. However, they were completely excluded from the peace negotiations that brought the war to an end. The 1989 Taif Agreement, which set the foundation for post-war Lebanon, saw no female representatives at the negotiation table, effectively sidelining women from the peacebuilding process despite their active contributions during the conflict.

Although various political parties and foreign delegations worked toward peace, women were conspicuously absent from official negotiations and agreements. This absence reinforced their marginalization in shaping Lebanon's political future. Efforts to reform the political system before the Taif Agreement were unsuccessful, and political power remained concentrated in the hands of male leaders from different sectarian communities.

Nonetheless, women were prominent in broader political and social movements during this period. Many were key figures in leftist, nationalist, and feminist movements, advocating for social justice, gender equality, and the abolition of sectarianism. Women's organizations campaigned for reforms in personal status laws and greater political participation, but their efforts were consistently undermined by the male-dominated political system.

As Lebanon moved toward peace, the systematic exclusion of women from political negoti-

ations and governance became increasingly evident. This set a troubling precedent for their continued marginalization in the post-war political system, an issue that the Taif Agreement failed to address.

b. Post-Taif Agreement: Continued marginalization of women in Lebanese politics

The signing of the Taif Agreement in 1989 was a pivotal moment in Lebanon's political history, designed to end the 15-year civil war and restructure the political system. However, it failed to address gender inequality in politics.

One of the main goals of the Taif Agreement was to create a more balanced political system by redistributing power between Lebanon's Christian and Muslim sects. Yet, this sectarian power-sharing arrangement entrenched patriarchal structures, making it even more difficult for women to enter political leadership. Although the agreement included provisions for political reforms aimed at abolishing sectarianism and promoting civil equality, these reforms were poorly implemented, and women's political participation remained largely marginalized.

In the years following the Taif Agreement, Lebanon held several parliamentary elections, but female representation remained exceedingly low. Despite the electoral law amendment that took place in 2017, the absence of gender quotas or affirmative action policies ensured that women's participation remained minimal. Women's exclusion extended beyond parliament, with limited involvement in political negotiations and national dialogues.

Since the Taif Agreement, Lebanon has experienced major political upheavals, including the 2005 assassination of Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, the subsequent withdrawal of Syrian forces, and the 2005 Cedar Revolution. These events were followed by regional tensions and the rise of Hezbollah's influence, as well as sporadic confrontations between political factions. Despite these significant political shifts, women's participation in decision-making remained limited. While political changes occurred, cultural and structural barriers within the male-dominated system hindered meaningful progress, and few women attained key positions of power.

The October 2019 protests, which marked a turning point in Lebanon's political crisis, underscored the continued marginalization of women in decision-making circles. Although women played a prominent role in organizing and leading demonstrations, they were once again sidelined in the formation of new governments. Even in the aftermath of these protests, only a handful of women secured ministerial positions, and the 2022 parliamentary elections, touted as a chance for political reform, saw only a slight increase in female representation, with women making up just 6.3% of the parliament.

In response, women's organizations, feminist movements, and civil society groups have relentlessly advocated for gender equality and political reform. They have pushed for gender quotas, electoral system reforms, and increased female representation in government institutions. While there has been some progress, such as the election of a small number of women to parliament and municipal councils, the deeply entrenched male dominance in Lebanese politics has yet to change fundamentally.

Legal and institutional frameworks

The legal and institutional frameworks in Lebanon play a crucial role in shaping women's political rights and participation. While the Lebanese Constitution, adopted in 1926 and amended several times, guarantees equality before the law in Article 7, it fails to include explicit provisions for gender equality in political representation. The absence of explicit gender-related provisions in the Lebanese Constitution makes the general equality guarantee insufficient, allowing discriminatory practices to persist and women to remain underrepresented in political roles. This gap, combined with Lebanon's sectarian political system, creates significant barriers for women in politics, despite their legal right to vote and run for office.

The sectarian nature of Lebanon's political system reinforces patriarchal structures, limiting women's representation. Personal status laws, which govern issues such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance, further contribute to women's exclusion from political life. These laws are based on religious sects rather than a unified national legal framework, perpetuating patriarchal values that restrict women's autonomy. This fragmentation not only limits their social and economic freedom but also diminishes their capacity to engage fully in political life. The absence of a cohesive national approach to personal status laws hinders any significant reform, reinforcing traditional gender roles that restrict women's access to politics.

Efforts to address this gender imbalance, such as the introduction of a quota system, have been discussed, but Lebanon has yet to adopt a comprehensive national quota. While a limited quota for women in the 2018 municipal elections was proposed, it was never officially implemented, resulting in no tangible change at the national level. Additionally, in September 2017, the Lebanese Parliament passed a law allowing women to run for municipal elections in their place of birth, rather than in their husband's municipality.

The absence of a robust quota system contributes to the low level of women's representation, with political positions remaining predominantly held by men. The preferential voting

system exacerbates this gap, as voters tend to support more influential male candidates, further reducing women's chances of success. Political parties also contribute to this imbalance, often prioritizing male candidates over women, which limits women's access to decision-making positions.

In this context, a well-designed quota system could provide essential opportunities for women to actively participate in, and influence, Lebanese politics, helping to break down long-standing barriers to gender equality in the political sphere.

Social and cultural factors

Traditional gender norms and stereotypes further restrict women's political engagement. Societal expectations dictate that women prioritize family and domestic responsibilities over public involvement and political activism. In addition, there are no policies or institutional measures to address the conflict between gender roles and time management, making it even more difficult for women to balance political participation with their familial and societal duties. This "double responsibility" of care work and public life disproportionately impacts women, further limiting their ability to engage fully in political processes.

Educational institutions, the media, and civil society organizations all play a pivotal role in shaping women's political involvement. Education can empower women by providing them with the skills and knowledge necessary for effective political engagement. However, the media often portrays women in stereotypical roles or focuses on their personal lives rather than their political achievements, undermining their credibility and visibility in the public sphere.

To counter this, the media should include more women in political discussions and debates and talk shows, giving them a platform to address national issues and public policies, rather than confining them to "women's issues." Women should also be formally empowered to speak on behalf of their political parties, just as their male counterparts do, in order to break the male monopoly over political discourse and enhance their presence in the public arena.

While efforts by civil society organizations, feminist movements, and media initiatives are essential in challenging stereotypes and advocating for gender equality, these initiatives must be paired with structural reforms. Without institutional policies that support women's political participation, such as gender quotas, time management policies, and inclusive decision-making roles, progress will remain limited. Achieving meaningful and equal partici-

pation in Lebanon's political sphere requires not only increased media representation and formal recognition of women within political parties but also a fundamental shift in societal perceptions and power dynamics. Only through sustained, multi-dimensional efforts can women break barriers and achieve genuine political equality.

Methodology

This research investigates the reality of women's political participation in Lebanon, focusing on their absence or limited role in political processes from the Taif Agreement to the formation of Nawaf Salam's new government in 2025. To provide a comprehensive analysis, a qualitative approach was adopted, combining multiple data sources and analytical techniques.

The main data sources included academic articles, books, and online resources, along with visual documentation of key political events through photographs. Official reports, media outlets, and non-governmental organizations were also consulted to track women's representation and involvement in politics over the years.

The research employed several analytical methods to ensure a robust analysis:

Thematic Analysis: This approach was used to identify recurring patterns of marginalization and exclusion in the political landscape.

Visual Analysis: Photographs were examined to assess the representation of women in key political events, providing a visual perspective on their role or lack thereof in the political process.

Trend Analysis: This method tracked the evolution of women's representation in decision-making roles over time, providing insights into the progress or stagnation in their political participation.

By combining these diverse methodologies, the research offers a well-rounded view of the systemic barriers women face in Lebanon's political sphere and the gradual shifts in their representation.

**Overview of the timeline
of key political events in Lebanon
since the Taif Agreement**

The Taif Agreement

Restructuring Lebanon's future

Signed on November 4, 1989, the Taif Agreement marked a turning point in Lebanon's modern history, ending the civil war and restructuring the country's political system. While it introduced crucial reforms, such as adjustments to sectarian power-sharing and governance structures, it notably failed to address gender representation. The absence of women at the negotiating table reflected the broader issue of female underrepresentation in Lebanon's political system at the time; no woman had been elected to the Lebanese Parliament since 1972. This exclusion was not only a consequence of entrenched societal barriers but also a significant factor in the ongoing marginalization of women in Lebanon's post-war political and institutional reforms.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 1989



Source: Arab Center for Information, 1992

1992 Parliamentary elections

Sectarian politics and women's marginalization

Despite the reforms initiated by the Taif Agreement, the 1992 parliamentary elections were marred by a boycott from major Christian parties, including the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb Party, due to Syria's dominant influence in Lebanon. The electoral system continued to reflect Lebanon's traditional sectarian dynamics, heavily favoring local feudal leaders and entrenched political families. This system did not offer meaningful opportunities for women to participate in politics, leaving power firmly in the hands of male leaders. Although six women ran for office, only three Nayla Mouawad, Maha Khoury Asaad, and Bahiya al Hariri were elected, highlighting the limited space for women in Lebanon's political sphere.

1996 Parliamentary elections

Progress or just a glimpse?

In 1996, Lebanon participated in the Beijing Conference, committing to recommendations aimed at enhancing women's political participation. While female voter turnout was high, this commitment did not result in tangible change. The political landscape remained largely unchanged as in 1992, with Nayla Mouawad, Nouhad Souaid, and Bahiya al Hari-ri winning parliamentary seats. This minor breakthrough reinforced the reality that women remained marginalized in Lebanon's male-dominated political system. Nevertheless, women played critical roles behind the scenes, managing election campaigns and supporting political movements, but their representation in official decision-making positions remained minimal.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 1996

1998 Municipal elections

Breaking a 35-year absence

The 1998 municipal elections represented a significant shift, marking the first municipal elections in Lebanon in 35 years. A total of 139 women were elected to municipal councils, and three women headed electoral lists, a small but notable achievement in a field of 8,000 elected officials across 750 municipalities. This represented just 1.86% of all municipal council seats. Interestingly, Lebanese women had entered municipal politics much earlier, in 1963, when Salima Al-Qazzaz Dargham was elected mayor of Bekifa in the Rashaya District, alongside Therese Eid, who became the mayor of Mazraat Al-Dahr in Chouf.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 1998



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2000

August 27 & September 3, 2000

Victory for few women in Lebanon's parliamentary elections

The 2000 parliamentary elections saw 15 women run for office out of a total of 545 candidates. Despite that, three women, the same as in previous elections were elected, Nayla Mouawad, Bahiya al Hariri, and Ghenwa Jalloul. While women made up a significant portion of the electorate and were active in supporting electoral campaigns, their representation in decision-making positions remained dismally low. Despite their vital roles in political campaigns, women were still largely excluded from the corridors of power, with their participation in Lebanon's political system failing to reflect their involvement as voters and activists.

2000 Saydet El Jabal gathering

Women's marginalized role



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2000

The Saydet El Jabal gathering, established in 2000, emerged in response to calls for Lebanese sovereignty and independence, voiced by the Maronite Patriarchate under Cardinal Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir, following Israel's withdrawal from South Lebanon under UN Resolution 425. The movement also opposed Syria's continuing dominance over Lebanon's state institutions. While the gathering saw notable female participation, including MPs Nayla Moawad and other women activists, their involvement remained marginal, and it did not translate into significant political influence in Lebanon's broader political landscape.

Qornet Shehwan gathering

Women's limited influence

Following the Maronite Bishops' statement on September 20, 2000, political figures close to the Bkirki Patriarchate began meeting to form a civilian pressure group advocating for Lebanon's sovereignty. Some female MPs, such as Nayla Moawad, joined these discussions, but their presence was limited. Initially secretive, the group became public with the release of a historic document on April 30, 2001. The Qornet Shehwan Gathering, composed mainly of Christian political forces, played a crucial role in calling for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. However, due to internal disagreements and shifting political dynamics, the coalition eventually disbanded, with little to show for women's influence within the movement.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2001

The Mountain Reconciliation

Women's absence from Lebanon's healing process

The Mountain Reconciliation between the Maronites and Druze, led by Maronite Patriarch Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir and Progressive Socialist Party leader Walid Jumblatt, culminated in a historic visit by the patriarch to the mountain on August 3, 2001. The visit aimed to encourage displaced Christians to return to their homes and heal the wounds of the civil war. However, women were entirely absent from this critical reconciliation process, as they were from many key political and historical events. Despite having directly suffered the war's consequences of displacement, loss, and economic hardship, women's roles were relegated to secondary tasks like organizing and media coverage, while the decision-making remained firmly in male hands.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 1998



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2001

August 7, 2001

Women in Lebanon's fight for sovereignty

On August 7, 2001, Lebanon witnessed one of the most extensive crackdowns by the Syrian-Lebanese security apparatus since 1994, aiming to suppress the independence movement opposing Syrian presence, which had gained momentum since its inception in Bkerke on September 20, 2000. The crackdown targeted hundreds of activists, particularly from sovereignist parties such as the Lebanese Forces, Kataeb, Free Patriotic Movement, and the National Liberal Party, in addition to independent figures. They faced brutal suppression outside the Justice Council, followed by arbitrary arrests in party headquarters. The number of detainees rose to 250, including many young women. This historical event proved that Lebanese women were not merely supporters of political movements but key players in the struggle for sovereignty and independence, reinforcing the necessity of their fair representation in political life rather than being confined to protest spaces.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2002

The 2002 Arab Summit

Women's excluded role in shaping regional policies

The Arab Summit, held in Beirut on March 27–28, 2002, under the theme “The Summit of Arab Rights,” marked a pivotal moment in Arab cooperation, yielding significant outcomes that cemented its place as a historic gathering. Chief among these was the adoption of the Saudi peace initiative, which secured unanimous Arab support, along with Lebanon’s firm stance against the resettlement of Palestinian refugees on its territory. The summit also played a crucial role in fostering reconciliation and solidarity, notably easing tensions between Iraq, Kuwait, and Saudi Arabia, and setting the stage for resolving a 12-year-long crisis that had strained inter-Arab relations.

Despite Lebanon’s commendable logistical and security efforts in hosting the summit, women’s participation remained confined to organizational roles, with no representation in decision-making. This exclusion underscored their continued marginalization in regional policy making and Arab national security affairs.

2004 Municipal elections

Women's limited representation

In the 2004 municipal elections, women made up only 2.02% of the elected officials. While 552 women ran for municipal council seats, 215 were elected, and 14 secured positions in local councils, these numbers were still far from indicative of genuine progress in women's political representation. The results revealed a significant gap between male and female candidates, highlighting the continued obstacles women face in local governance. Despite widespread participation as voters, the political power remained controlled by men, political families, and electoral brokers, leaving women with limited opportunities to win seats in municipal councils. This ongoing marginalization underscored the urgent need for stronger policies and reforms to enhance women's participation in Lebanon's local governance.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2004

The Bristol Gathering

Women's symbolic role in the opposition to Syrian dominance

The Bristol Gathering, one of the earliest unified opposition movements against Syrian control over Lebanon post-2000, was backed by the late Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir and the Qornet Shehwan Gathering. Women, including MPs Nayla Moawad, Ghenwa Jalloul, and Solange Gemayel, alongside other activists, took part in the movement, yet their presence remained largely symbolic. Despite their engagement, they were confined to supporting roles rather than occupying positions of real influence. While men continued to shape the political strategies and direction of the opposition, women's contributions were often overlooked, reflecting the persistent barriers to their full participation in Lebanon's political struggles.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2004

March 8, 2005

Pro-Syria Protest



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2005

On March 8, 2005, hundreds of thousands of pro-Syrian demonstrators, organized by Hezbollah and supported by the Amal Movement and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, gathered in Beirut to express gratitude for Syria's role in Lebanon. This massive rally, later known as the foundation of the March 8 Alliance, saw significant participation from women. Organizers enforced gender segregation within the square, assigning men and women to different sections as loudspeakers blared militant songs urging resistance to foreign interference. Amid the sea of Lebanese flags, demonstrators waved images of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and held signs declaring, "Syria & Lebanon brothers forever." Despite the scale of their participation, women were once again excluded from any substantial decision-making roles within the alliance.

March 14, 2005

Women at the forefront of protest, absent from decision-making



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2005

On March 14, 2005, Beirut witnessed an unprecedented mass demonstration in response to the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri one month earlier, amid widespread accusations of Syrian involvement. The protest united political parties, movements, and civilians in a powerful demand for the withdrawal of Syrian troops, marking the end of nearly 30 years of Syrian dominance over Lebanon. Much like the March 8 rally, Lebanese women played a crucial role in shaping political messaging, mobilizing supporters, and actively participating in the demonstrations. However, their impact remained largely confined to the streets rather than political decision-making. A photographer covering the event observed that images of women protesters drew significant attention, underscoring their visibility in the uprising. Yet, despite their undeniable presence in this pivotal moment, women continued to be sidelined from the corridors of power, with their influence in national political decisions remaining minimal in the aftermath of the events.

2005 Parliamentary elections

A modest rise, but power remains male-dominated

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, 16 women ran for office, out of 484 candidates, but only six Bahiya al Hariri, Nayla Mouawad, Sethrida Geagea, Gilberte Zouein, Solange Gemayel, and Ghenwa Jalloul secured seats, making up just 3% of Lebanon's 128-member parliament. While this marked the highest female representation in the country's legislature at the time, it remained a stark reflection of male-dominated political power.

Due to their limited numbers, women were largely absent from key parliamentary subcommittees, where crucial legislative decisions were made. Instead, they were often relegated to committees traditionally associated with social issues, reinforcing their marginalization in the decision-making process. Lebanon's parliament consists of sixteen committees tasked with overseeing various aspects of governance, with the Finance and Budget Committee being the most influential, as it reviews government spending and financial policies. Other critical committees include Administration and Justice, Health and Labor, and Economy and Industry. However, the tendency has been to confine women to less politically strategic committees, further restricting their influence on the country's legislative priorities.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2005

2008, the Doha Agreement

A unity government, but not for all

The 2008 Doha Agreement marked the end of Lebanon's National Dialogue Conference in Qatar, leading to the formation of a new unity government. Despite the significance of this political breakthrough, women's representation in ministerial positions declined sharply. While the previous government had included two female ministers Layla Solh and Wafaa Hamza the new cabinet featured only one: Bahia Hariri, appointed as Minister of Education and Higher Education.

A key outcome of the agreement was the establishment of a unity government, with ministerial seats distributed among Lebanon's political factions, 16 allocated to the majority, 11 to the opposition, and three to the president. However, unity did not translate into inclusivity or gender parity. Instead, the new government reflected a step backward for women's political empowerment, reinforcing their persistent underrepresentation in positions of power.



Source: Arab Center
for Information, 2008

2009 Parliamentary elections

High female voter turnout, low political representation

In the 2009 parliamentary elections, female candidates declined further, with only 13 women among 702 total candidates, underscoring the persistent weakness of women's political representation. Just four women secured seats, making up a mere 1.7% of parliament, an outcome largely shaped by political family legacies or party endorsements rather than a genuine shift toward gender inclusivity. For the first time, international observers from 20 countries, including a delegation from the Carter Center led by former U.S. President Jimmy Carter, monitored the elections.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2009

2010 Municipal elections

A step forward for women in local governance

The 2010 municipal elections saw significant strides for women in local governance. The number of female candidates surged from 552 in 2004 to 1,349, more than doubling. Women elected to municipal councils increased from 215 to 536, making up 4.7% of the total municipal seats, compared to just 2.02% in 2004. Notably, 132 women ran for the position of mukhtar (village chief), with 39 successfully winning, accounting for 30% of female candidates. This marked a significant break from the traditional gendered perception of the mukhtar role, traditionally reserved for men, and affirmed that women are fully capable of holding representative positions in their local communities.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2010

The Baabda Declaration

A historic dialogue with no women at the table

On June 11, 2012, the National Dialogue Committee convened at the Presidential Palace in Baabda in response to an invitation from President Michel Suleiman. Political leaders and their representatives gathered to discuss Lebanon's future, culminating in the announcement of the Baabda Declaration, a 17-clause agreement aimed at stabilizing the country. Despite the significance of the meeting, particularly after Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian conflict, women were completely absent from the table and the official narrative, underscoring the persistent gender exclusion in Lebanon's political sphere.



Source: Alamy Stock Photo, 2012

Women's leadership in Lebanon's popular movements 2011–2015

From 2011 onwards, Lebanon witnessed a surge in popular protests fueled by the economic fallout from the Syrian crisis, rampant corruption, and demands for better public services. Women played a pivotal role in these movements, often leading demonstrations and directly confronting security forces.

In 2014, more than 3,000 women marched on International Women's Day, demanding the passage of Lebanon's first domestic violence law, a rare display of unity in the country's deeply polarized political landscape.

The following year, during the «You Stink» movement, women were at the forefront of protests against the waste crisis and the government's failure to address it, enduring physical violence from security forces. Despite these obstacles, these movements underscored women's determination to drive change, even as their influence in shaping policy remained constrained.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2011



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2014



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2015

2016 Municipal elections

Progress and challenges in representation

The 2016 municipal elections saw a slight increase in female political participation. Of the 21,932 registered candidates, 1,508 were women, representing 6.9%. Although the number of women winning municipal seats increased from 536 in 2010 to 661 in 2016, this still only accounted for 5.4% of the total seats. The Beirut Madinati list, which proposed a 50-50 split between male and female candidates, was a notable attempt at gender parity but ultimately failed to secure a win. This result reflected the ongoing challenges women face in breaking the entrenched gender norms in Lebanon's political structure. However, it also marked a milestone for other electoral lists and races, where some list makers made efforts, even if limited, to include more women.



Source: Getty, 2016

The 2016 Presidential election

Symbolic women's candidacy and persistent gender imbalance

On October 31, 2016, after a two-and-a-half-year presidential vacuum, Michel Aoun was elected Lebanon's 13th president. During this process, Nadine Moussa made history as the first woman to formally announce her candidacy for the presidency. However, her candidacy was largely symbolic, with little chance of overcoming the patriarchal dynamics that dominate Lebanon's political system. Her bid underscored the deep-rooted gender imbalance, with the official image of the election featuring only male MPs, despite the presence of female parliamentarians. This exclusion illustrated the persistent lack of women in Lebanon's highest political offices.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2016

2008, the Doha Agreement

A unity government, but not for all

The 2008 Doha Agreement marked the end of Lebanon's National Dialogue Conference in Qatar, leading to the formation of a new unity government. Despite the significance of this political breakthrough, women's representation in ministerial positions declined sharply. While the previous government had included two female ministers Layla Solh and Wafaa Hamza the new cabinet featured only one: Bahia Hariri, appointed as Minister of Education and Higher Education.

A key outcome of the agreement was the establishment of a unity government, with ministerial seats distributed

among Lebanon's political factions, 16 allocated to the majority, 11 to the opposition, and three to the president. However, unity did not translate into inclusivity or gender parity. Instead, the new government reflected a step backward for women's political empowerment, reinforcing their persistent underrepresentation in positions of power.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2018

The 2018 CEDRE conference

Women's absence in Lebanon's official delegation

In April 2018, Paris hosted the CEDRE conference, a major initiative aimed at supporting Lebanon's economic and developmental growth. The event brought together Prime Minister Saad Hariri, ministerial, official, and economic delegations, and key advisors to President Michel Aoun, including Elias Bou Saab and Mireille Aoun, as well as Hariri's advisors Nadim Munla, Fadi Fawaz, and Hazar Karakalla. Also in attendance were French Ambassador to Lebanon Bruno Foucher, Pierre Duquesne tasked with overseeing the conference's progress and representatives from 51 countries, the World Bank, the IMF, Arab and international financial institutions, and the private sector.

Despite the significance of the conference, Lebanese women were entirely absent from the official government delegation. Female experts and technical specialists played key roles in drafting the reform agenda presented by Lebanon, while civil society activists participated in parallel discussions, pushing for transparency, governance, anti-corruption measures, and gender-sensitive policies. However, the few women present at the conference were there through special invitations from foreign parties rather than as part of Lebanon's official delegation, highlighting their continued exclusion from high-level political and economic decision-making.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2018

The Arab Summit

A missed opportunity for Lebanon

On January 20, 2019, Lebanon hosted the 4th Arab Economic Summit, inaugurated by President Michel Aoun. However, the event was defined by the absence of 19 Arab leaders and the notable exclusion of Lebanese women experts. Despite the presence of numerous qualified women in relevant fields, none were invited to contribute to discussions on the Syrian displacement crisis or key economic, cultural, and environmental issues. This missed opportunity highlighted the persistent exclusion of women from critical decision-making spaces, even when their expertise could have added significant value to the discourse.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2019

2019 Lebanese national unity government

A milestone for women's political representation

After more than eight months of political deadlock due to disagreements among Lebanese factions, a national unity government was formed under Prime Minister Saad Hariri on January 31, 2019. The inclusion of four women in the cabinet marked an unprecedented milestone in Lebanon's history. Notably, Raya Hassan was appointed Minister of Interior and Municipalities, becoming the first woman in Lebanon and the Arab world to hold this sovereign position in a traditionally male-dominated ministry. Nada Bustani took on the Ministry of Energy and Water, May Chidiac was appointed Minister of Administrative Development, and Violette Khairallah-Safadi became Minister of State for Economic and Social Empowerment of Youth and Women.

Although women's representation remained limited, with only 4 ministers out of 30, this development was widely welcomed by organizations and institutions advocating for greater women participation in politics and public affairs.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2019

The October 17, 2019 Revolution

Women at the forefront of the protests

The spark for the October 17, 2019 revolution was ignited by the government's decision, headed by Saad Hariri, to impose a tax on the "WhatsApp" service, fuel, and tobacco. Mass opposition flared nationwide, leading to road blockages and the shutdown of institutions, schools, universities, and banks. The popular protests continued, reaching their peak on November 20 with hundreds of thousands of people demonstrating across Lebanon. Women played a pivotal role in these actions by organizing forums and discussions, forming human shields between demonstrators and security forces, and confronting the political authorities that attempted to disrupt the movement. They were not exempt from the violence faced by protesters, and their presence was particularly notable in the longest human chain stretching from northern Lebanon to the south.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2019

2020 government formations

Peaks and declines in ministerial participation

In 2020, Hassan Diab formed a government that included 6 female ministers, representing 30% female participation, the highest level of female representation in Lebanese governments since independence. However, this representation fell to just 4.2% in the subsequent government of Najib Mikati, due to the lack of institutional mechanisms to promote women's participation in government.

Since Lebanon's independence in 1943, only 19 women have been appointed to ministerial positions out of a total of 1,072, accounting for just 2%. Women's participation has been limited to only 10 out of 78 governments formed up until early 2025.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2020



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2020

August 2020

Women's vital role in Beirut port explosion aftermath

The devastating explosion at Beirut Port exposed the political authority's failure to manage the crisis and its aftermath, sparking widespread public outrage. Amid the chaos, Lebanese women youth, women's rights organizations, and feminist groups, rose as key figures in rescue and relief efforts, showcasing exceptional organizational skills and a strong sense of responsibility in supporting affected communities. Their contributions were vital in accelerating the relief process. However, despite their pivotal role on the frontlines, women remained excluded from decision-making circles that should have guided recovery and compensation policies. This stark contrast highlights a recurring pattern: while women are central to crisis response and humanitarian efforts, they remain absent from leadership positions and political decision-making when it matters most.

2022 Parliamentary elections

Increased women candidacies, yet limited representation

On May 15, 2022, Lebanon held its first parliamentary elections after the October 17, 2019 revolution and the 2020 Beirut Port explosion. A record 157 women ran for office, with 118 joining 64 out of 103 competing electoral lists. Despite this increase in female candidates, it did not translate into significant electoral gains. Only 8 women secured parliamentary seats, representing just 6.25% of total MPs, an improvement from the 6 women elected in 2018 but still a stark underrepresentation. To advance women's political participation, MP Inaya Ezzedine had proposed a bill to establish a women's quota through a joint parliamentary committee. However, the proposal was neither discussed nor adopted, with the Deputy Speaker of Parliament, who chaired the committee, citing a lack of time to examine the details. This failure to

pass the quota highlights a persistent reality: without temporary measures and genuine political will, women's representation in parliament will remain limited. Despite ongoing civil society efforts to pressure political parties for more inclusive policies, systemic barriers continue to impede meaningful progress.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2022

Lebanon's maritime border demarcation agreement

No women at the table

On October 27, 2022, Lebanon signed a historic agreement demarcating its maritime borders with Israel. The Lebanese delegation, appointed by President Michel Aoun to participate in the signing ceremony, included Director-General of the Presidency Antoine Chaqir, Lebanese Government Commissioner to the International Forces Brigadier General Munir Shhada, Oil Authority Member Wissam Chbat, and Head of the Legal Consultancy Center Ahmad Al-Arfa.

Lebanon is home to many women experts in the oil and gas sector, with professionals working not only across the country but also in regions like the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Despite their expertise, however, they remain excluded from key decision-making roles within their own country. While some have been consulted by the media for analysis and evaluations, their influence in official policymaking and strategic leadership remains limited, as critical positions continue to be dominated by men.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2022

Shifting dynamics

the absence of Lebanese women in high-level presidential talks

In January 2024, the Quintet Committee launched a series of meetings with Lebanese leaders to resolve the presidential vacancy crisis and expedite the election of a president, paving the way for the implementation of a ceasefire between Hezbollah and Israel. Among the participants, the presence of U.S. Ambassador Lisa Johnson was particularly striking, not only due to her influential role in the discussions but also because she was the only woman in the room. From the outset, Johnson made her priorities clear and played a pivotal role in shaping the talks. Her visible presence stood in stark contrast to the absence of Lebanese women in these high-stakes negotiations, despite their proven expertise in diplomacy and public policy.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2024

Women's crucial role in war relief

Exclusion from negotiations and peace talks

During the war in southern Lebanon and later in Beirut, women played a crucial role in humanitarian and relief efforts, responding swiftly and effectively. They led numerous initiatives to support displaced people, mobilize donations, and secure aid and housing. Women from various sectors, including municipal representatives, NGO leaders, and activists, temporarily set aside their political activities to focus on relief work, while political decision-making and public statements remained dominated by men.

The real challenge after the war is to restore normalcy while addressing the glaring exclusion of women from ceasefire negotiations and peace talks, despite their indispensable contributions. Although their efforts were instrumental in mitigating the crisis, women's roles remained confined to humanitarian and relief work, even though a comprehensive political-humanitarian approach was both necessary and entirely feasible.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2024

The 2024 International Conference

A missed opportunity for inclusive representation

On October 24, 2024, the “International Conference for Lebanon’s Support and Sovereignty” was held in Paris, initiated by French President Emmanuel Macron and in collaboration with the United Nations. Seventy countries and international organizations involved in Lebanon participated in the conference, in addition to representatives from NGOs, local authorities, regional authorities, and the private sector.

Lebanon was represented by a ministerial delegation led by Prime Minister Najib Mikati. However, the delegation lacked female representation, and despite being the only woman in the government, Minister Najla Riachi was not included in the delegation.

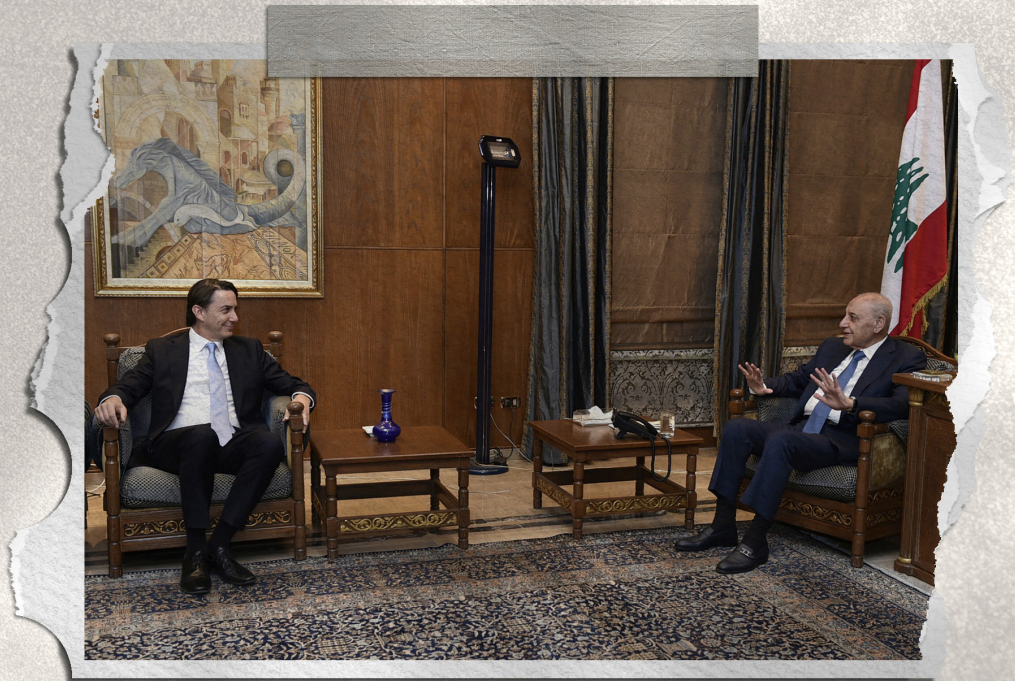


Source: Arab Center for Information, 2024

Absence of women in Lebanon-Israel ceasefire negotiations

Overlooking their role in relief efforts

After more than a year of confrontations and two months of open war, the ceasefire agreement between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon was implemented, aiming to end the conflict that forced more than a million Lebanese to flee their areas. Before the signing, active negotiations took place between U.S. envoy Amos Hochstein and Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri, with Prime Minister Najib Mikati participating in some of the negotiations, with a notable absence of women in these discussions. This exclusion is particularly jarring given their pivotal role in humanitarian and relief efforts during the conflict.



Source: Arab Center for Information, 2024

Women in the February 2025 cabinet

A genuine progress or political symbolism?

In February 2025, the first government under President Joseph Aoun, led by Prime Minister Judge Nawaf Salam, appointed five women among its 24 ministers, increasing female participation to 20.81%. This marked a significant improvement compared to the previous government, where women held just 4% of cabinet positions. However, despite this progress, questions remain about the depth of political commitment to advancing women's representation. The cabinet formation process, shaped by consultations with Lebanon's political parties, lacked transparency regarding the criteria used to select ministers, including women candidates. It is unclear whether political parties actively nominated women for ministerial positions or if the responsibility to include women largely fell on the Prime Minister. While the inclusion of five female ministers is a positive step, the overall male-dominated composition of the government raises concerns about whether women's participation was truly driven by political will or if it was merely a symbolic gesture.

Without a sustained commitment from political factions to nominate women for key leadership roles, the appointment of five female ministers, though notable, may not signify a structural shift toward more gender-inclusive governance.



Source: Arab Center
for Information, 2025

Lebanon's Legal Advisory Committee

A serious concern about gender inclusivity

The formation of Lebanon's Constitutional and Legal Advisory Committee, which advises the presidency on political reforms, has highlighted significant concerns regarding gender inclusivity in Lebanon's political framework. Despite promises of reform and increased representation, the committee is entirely male, with no women included in its ranks. This is especially glaring given the important role women play in Lebanon's judiciary, including their contributions to the Court of Cassation, the highest judicial body in the country.

Given women's demonstrated competence in Lebanon's legal landscape, the absence of female representation in such a critical advisory body raises serious questions about the country's commitment to true political reform. It underscores a broader issue of gender exclusion from key decision-making processes within the country's most influential institutions.



Source: Arab Center for Information,2025

Conclusion

The persistent exclusion of women from Lebanese politics has profound implications, affecting not only women but the nation as a whole. Politically, the absence of women in decision-making roles results in a significant lack of diversity in policymaking. Women bring unique perspectives, especially on issues that affect not just women, but families and communities as a whole. By sidelining women, Lebanon's political system perpetuates an unrepresentative and imbalanced governance structure, weakening democratic processes and reinforcing gender power imbalances.

Moreover, the ongoing political marginalization of women hinders broader societal progress and tarnishes Lebanon's international standing. While many countries in the region have implemented progressive reforms, Lebanon lags behind, ranking low in global gender equality indices. This undermines Lebanon's commitment to global standards and agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and obstructs the country's social and economic development. Studies consistently show that greater gender equality in politics leads to better governance, more inclusive policies, and stronger economic growth all of which Lebanon urgently needs amid its ongoing crises.

Without a concerted effort to integrate women into politics, Lebanon risks perpetuating a cycle of exclusion that weakens both its population and its democratic institutions. The exclusion of women from political life reflects a broader system of inequality that stifles social, economic, and political development, preventing the country from reaching its full potential or addressing the needs of its people.

To overcome the deeply rooted barriers to women's political participation in Lebanon, a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach is required.

First, legal reforms are crucial. Introducing mandatory gender quotas in electoral laws and political party structures is essential to ensuring a baseline level of women's representation in parliament and other decision-making bodies. These quotas should be paired with broad-

er reforms to Lebanon's personal status laws. Electoral reforms must also address structural barriers that hinder women from running for office, including modifying campaign financing regulations could provide targeted support for female candidates, such as public funding or incentives for parties that promote gender equality, ensuring women have equal access to the resources needed to compete effectively. Furthermore, measures should be put in place to ensure that women can campaign and participate in politics without fear of harassment or violence. Civil society organizations and women's rights groups must continue to pressure political institutions to prioritize gender equality.

Beyond legal and institutional changes, cultural shifts are necessary to create an environment in which women can thrive in politics. Education and media play a crucial role in shaping public perceptions of women's roles and capabilities. Promoting successful female role models who have navigated Lebanon's political landscape is key to inspiring the next generation of women leaders. Leadership training and mentorship programs for women interested in political careers are essential for bridging the skill and network gaps that many women face. These programs should be designed to equip women with the tools and resources needed to run for office and build connections within the political sphere. Partnerships between civil society organizations, universities, and international bodies can help develop such initiatives, empowering women and enhancing their political participation.

Finally, Lebanon must reaffirm its commitment to international agreements on gender equality and take tangible steps to turn these commitments into action. This includes aligning national legislation with international human rights standards, creating mechanisms to monitor and report progress, and holding political leaders accountable for their promises on gender equality. Agreements like CEDAW and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality must be fully integrated into national policies and practices.

In conclusion, achieving gender parity in Lebanese politics requires a concerted effort across legal, institutional, and cultural dimensions. Through a combination of political reform, civil society advocacy, and cultural change, Lebanon can overcome the historical and systemic exclusion of women from its political life.



madanyat.org



+961 70 067 831



@madanyatlb



@madanyatlb8140



info@madanyat.org