

13 Years After the Arab Uprisings:

The Strategic Choices of Lebanon's Anti-establishment Movement

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Research Questions

How do we understand leadership in “leaderless movements” which emerged after 2011, the era of the Occupy Movement and the Arab Spring?

How do we better understand the dynamic transformation of the anti-establishment movement in Lebanon and the human protagonists behind it?

How do we provide an in-depth analysis of the ways in which this movement was constructed, activated, sustained, and mobilized across networks and spaces?

CONTEXT



Since 2011, Lebanon's anti-establishment and “non-sectarian” movement has undergone significant transformations. The street protests and demonstrations in 2011, 2015, and 2019, alongside the electoral experiments of 2018 and 2022, raised important questions about the strategic choices of political workers. This study outlines the choices pursued by non-sectarian “political workers” in Lebanon for over a decade, highlighting debates on leadership, organizational models, discourse, and tactics among leftists, liberals, democrats, and feminists. The objective is to provide an analytical forum to discuss past patterns and pursue a practical roadmap for activists and academics based on this common learning experience.

METHODOLOGY



Four focus group discussions were conducted, each focusing on a specific inflection point in Lebanon's opposition movement: 2011, 2015, 2019, and 2022. Participants included independent leftists, progressives, on-ground campaigners, and members/former affiliates of various political and activist groups. The discussions clarified the working context, build-up to mobilizations, primary efforts during upheavals, lessons learned, and forward-looking insights.

GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

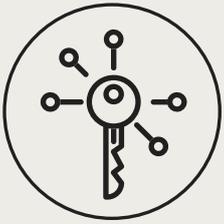


The study was conducted in Lebanon.

PRIMARY THEMES

- 1. Organizational Leadership and Management:** How do political workers organize, distribute power, and manage resources within leadership teams and local units?
- 2. Theories of Change:** What organizational and movement products are political workers relying on between discursive and grassroots dimensions?
- 3. Utopian Imaginaries and Local Adaptation:** How do political workers balance ideological ambitions with the realities of popular politics in Lebanon?
- 4. Electoral Politics:** What are the benefits and limitations of electoralism?

KEY FINDINGS



- **Rejecting Dichotomies:** The movement embraces strategies that energize radical visions with local sensitivities, making their projects accessible.
- **Horizontal Participation:** Emphasis on horizontal mechanisms for wider participation, enhancing organizational capacity and breaking oligarchic tendencies.
- **Electoralism:** Electoral politics offers short-term wins but cannot replace the need for sustainable structures, especially in Lebanon's context.

IMPORTANT FACTS

- **Leadership in Leaderless Movements:** The study highlights the challenges and benefits of leaderless structures, emphasizing the need for dynamic and adaptable leadership.
- **Grassroots Building vs. Media Engagement:** Grassroots building is vital but complemented by strategic use of media for recruitment and communication.

Pragmatism vs. Radicalism: Political workers balance radical ideals with pragmatic adaptations to local contexts, navigating the interplay between universal and local politics.



LESSONS LEARNED

- **Local and Global:** The movement must integrate local sensitivities with global ambitions, ensuring that projects are accessible and impactful.
- **Leadership and Participation:** Effective leadership requires responsibility and horizontal participation, leveraging diverse talents and breaking oligarchic control.
- **Beyond Electoralism:** Electoral politics is a tool for mobilization and short-term gains but must be supplemented with sustainable organizational structures.

