
Societal Issues and the Scholars’ Epistemological Interests in Social Sciences at Lebanese Universities

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Lebanon has historically stood out in the rich intellectual and academic scene. Yet, it continues to face significant challenges, such as political instability, economic collapse, social inequalities, and its role as a refuge for Palestinian, Iraqi, and Syrian refugees in recent years. Since 2019, the nation has experienced major upheavals, highlighted by key events like the uprising on October 17, 2019, the unprecedented financial and economic crisis, and the tragic Beirut explosion on August 4, 2020. These overlapping crises have deeply affected nearly every part of society, with the academic and intellectual sectors feeling a considerable strain. In particular, social science scholars are encountering increasing financial hardships as they strive to investigate and address the epistemological consequences of these ongoing issues.

The October 2019 revolt in Beirut and other cities across Lebanon was a strong manifestation of widespread frustration and dissatisfaction with political corruption and economic mismanagement. This spontaneous movement paved the way for a collective call for reform, transparency, and accountability (Khatib, 2022). While the movement did not result in significant changes to the political landscape, it did bring about shifts in the socio-political

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environment. It transformed public spaces and offered a platform for various groups to engage in collective civic participation (Sinno, 2020). Additionally, the uprising effectively heightened public awareness regarding the importance of political involvement, leading policymakers to acknowledge a reality where they could no longer easily manipulate public opinion, as noted by Mouawad and Achkar (2020). Ruling classes often maintain their dominance through cultural and ideological means, as discussed by Gramsci in the context of political hegemony (Flynn, 2021). However, such crises can disrupt a hegemonic hold, forcing the ruling elite to resort to coercive strategies to regain control.

This revolt was not an isolated incident, but rather a result of an ongoing economic crisis in Lebanon. Currency depreciation, extreme inflation, with an inflation rate at 251.5% by July 2023, rising public debt, and collapse of the banking sector eroded public trust and purchasing power (Guechati & Chami, 2022; Dahham et al., 2023). This economic turmoil portrayed a damning picture of systemic corruption and inadequacies in governance, which in turn aggravated public disenchantment.

In addition, these crises were compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Beirut port explosion-one of the largest nonnuclear explosions in history-that devastated large swathes of the city and represented another downward spike in Lebanon's economic and infrastructure health (Valsamos, Larcher, & Casadei, 2021). Besides physical destruction, it was these crises that drastically molded Lebanon's academic and intellectual landscape. The academic community is always compelled to rethink its research agenda in response to social urgencies, bringing back to life the rather complex ties between social upheavals, societal issues and knowledge production.

Furthering the Knowledge Production Debate

The connection between societal crises and academic research prompts significant inquiries: How do external disruptions affect research priorities, and in what ways do institutional limitations influence the topics that scholars tackle when addressing urgent societal challenges? These inquiries are part of larger discussions about knowledge production in Lebanon. Researchers like Kabbanji (2010) contend that an emphasis on international academic standards often leads to the neglect of local research needs, resulting in intellectual dependency. He calls for a balance between global

collaboration and the independence of local academia. Expanding on this critique, Kabbanji (2014) cautions against the uncritical use of Western social science models, which can oversimplify the intricate dynamics of the region. He stresses the importance of methodological reflexivity, encouraging scholars to incorporate indigenous viewpoints to improve the local relevance of their research. Bou Akar's work (2021) pushes the boundaries of traditional urban theories by calling for a shift away from established frameworks. By decolonizing urban theory and broadening its focus to encompass a variety of experiences from the Global South,

Hanafi and Arvanitis (2016) similarly explore the structural barriers limiting the conversion of scholarly activity into practical application in Lebanon. They emphasize that knowledge commodification and institutional pressures act as a disconnection between research and societal requisites. According to Longuenesse (2022) and Akar (2023), the academic scene in Lebanon reprises more significant socio-political divisions and neoliberal presence that determine the research priorities along with the institutional framework.

In a paradoxical context, Taha (2015) pointed out that a significant portion of knowledge produced-especially concerning topics like terrorism-has transformed into reports, particularly works about crisis. These reports act as a unique form of sentinel, embodying a state of perpetual vigilance. Additionally, they foster sentinel subjectivities that necessitate continuous observation.

This paper utilizes a comprehensive theoretical framework that merges Bourdieu's theory of practice with Gramsci's view on organic intellectuals to examine the academic preferences of Lebanese scholars in the Social Sciences. Bourdieu's (1988) concept of the field sheds light on how different forms of capitale conomic, social, cultural, and symbolic-shape the positions and intellectual tendencies of scholars. For example, scholars at public universities encounter challenges due to their political affiliations and limited resources, which restrict their capacity to contest prevailing narratives (Bourdieu, 1996). Conversely, scholars at private universities enjoy better access to international funding networks and support; however, their research priorities might be more aligned with external academic agendas than with local needs (Longuenesse, 2022).

The definition of conventional and organic intellectuals by Gramsci's (1971) gives this study even another perspective. Lebanese scholars move within an academic environment that is molded by ideological and political struggles (Akar, 2023). While some scholars uphold existing power structures, other authors decide to conduct their research in all seriousness with the aim of detracting from courts of-hegemony inserted in neoliberalism and sectarianism (Guechati & Chami, 2022). The institutional affiliations shape these trajectories of research, since scholars at politically or financially dependent institutions will avoid controversial subjects that oppose dominated interests.

By integrating Bourdieu's idea of academic fields with Gramsci's concept of organic intellectual, this study looks into how research priorities in Lebanon's social sciences have changed and become intertwined with larger power dynamics. Knowledge production goes beyond being just an intellectual activity; it is a contested arena where scholars must navigate institutional limitations, ideological influences, and their own commitments to knowledge. In this context, scholars engage in intellectual battles that influence the direction of their research. In light of this, the research examines how Lebanon's ongoing crises affect scholars' intellectual paths, their institutional ties, and their involvement with urgent societal challenges. The paper specifically analyzes how a researcher's role within an academic institution-along with that institution's independence from dominant power structures affects their research interests. Additionally, the researcher's role as an organic intellectual is crucial in determining the subjects they choose to explore. By investigating these interconnected elements, this study aims to fill a significant gap in understanding how knowledge production and research priorities are influenced by Lebanon's changing socio-political context.

Higher Education in Lebanon: A Divided Landscape

In Lebanon, the basic divisions within higher education are created as an issue between the public and private sectors and both are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE). The private sector, home to some of the oldest and most prestigious universities of the nation, is working autonomously; the state sector represented solely by the Lebanese University (LU) suffers from chronic underfinancing and political interference.

Founded during the mid-19th and early 20th centuries, AUB, LAU, and USJ have long held a commanding position in the academic fields in Lebanon. These three major private universities (AUB), (LAU), and (USJ) were founded even before the establishment of the Lebanese state itself in 1920. AUB was established in 1866 by American Protestant missionaries (originally as the Syrian Protestant College), LAU traces its roots to 1835 as a school for girls founded by American Protestant missionaries, and USJ was founded in 1875 by French Jesuit missionaries (AUB, 2023; LAU, 2023; USJ, 2023). This historical precedence grants these institutions a relative autonomy from the Lebanese political field, in line with Pierre Bourdieu's theory of social fields, wherein institutions that predate the formation of the modern state may acquire a higher degree of symbolic capital and functional independence from direct political interference (Bourdieu, 1996).

They represent different educational models: The American liberal arts tradition encompasses AUB and LAU, whereas Saint Josef university USJ is anchored more closely to the French academic system. Their financial independence, income from students², endowments, and international partnerships are other advantages offering them greater flexibility in adapting to global trends in both research and infrastructure investment.

In contrast, the Lebanese University LU, established in 1951, is the only state university whose mission is to provide open access to higher education. It suffers consequent problems, continuing to be starved of adequate government funding, plagued by political interference, and tied down by bureaucratic bottlenecks. In contrast to the private institutions, LU relies much on state subsidies that fall short, limiting its ability to pursue experimental reforms to develop research projects and attract high-caliber faculty. Differences in

² The record enrollment likewise demonstrates a clean divide between private and public higher education in Lebanon in a comparison of student enrollments at the Lebanese University (LU) and at AUB, LAU, and USJ from 2014/15 to 2022/23. LU, the only public university, enrolled much more students on a regular basis almost 86,000 in 2020/21-before dipping to approximately 66,000 in 2022/23, likely as an effect of the economic crisis and declining public trust. In contrast, the private universities maintained fairly consistent levels of enrollment between 8,000 and 10,000 students, reflective of a more solid socioeconomic basis and greater institutional stability. This marked contrast is indicative of class-based stratification of Lebanese higher education: LU is dominated by lower-strata students, while the private universities mainly serve more advantaged segments of society, sustaining larger patterns of inequality. See the Statistical Bulletin issued by the National Center for Scientific Research and Development.

financial support are especially visible in terms of research grants, as private universities are in a much better position to attract external grants or partnerships than LU.

Lebanon's universities are characterized by a mixture of French, American, and Anglo-American influences, noticeable from curricula design to language policies. While this cultural diversity enriches the academic environment, it reconfirms wider structural divides in the sector. Lebanon's higher education system has substantially shown great resilience throughout crises and fluctuations such as civil war, economic collapse, and the like, which now raise critical issues about access, equity, and sustainability for academics in Lebanon.

These structural, financial, and cultural asymmetries among Lebanese universities also shape their visibility and competitiveness on international scales, particularly in global ranking systems. For example, LAU led Lebanese universities in the 2024 QS World University Rankings, followed by AUB and USJ, while

LU, with its weak internationalization and few resources, is usually underrepresented in rankings (QS World University Rankings, 2024).

Methodology

The study identifies the research themes in political science and sociology being developed by Lebanese scholars at three institutions: (LU), (AUB), and (LAU). Choosing an appropriate sample became difficult due to the differing organizational structures of these institutions, which are confronted with conflicting designations for social sciences by their faculties and departments. For example, at the (LU), social sciences are divided among three separate faculties: The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) offers sociology and Social Sciences, while political science and law are offered by the Faculty of Law and Political and Administrative Sciences (FLPSA). In contrast, at the AUB, the Faculty of Arts and Sciences includes the Departments of Economics, Political Studies and Public Administration, and Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies (SAMS). Likewise, the school of arts and sciences at LAU offers a variety of majors in different specializations within political sciences. Governing this is varied across Lebanese universities starting with private universities like the AUB and the LAU and public ones like the LU. While AUB

and LAU operate with higher system autonomy, the plural institutional and strategic governance bodies include trustees, university presidents, and various administrative councils responding to ensure institutional independence and strategic decision-making (El-Hajjar, 2018). These private universities enjoy more resources that grant them a certain ability to innovate their academic curriculum and develop international collaborations, particularly in the departments of political sciences and sociology. On the other hand, as a public institution, Lebanese University is significantly bound by regulations and policies of the government. Its governance is influenced by substantial state interventions, providing room for bureaucracies and limited flexibility in various academic and administrative processes (El-Hajjar, 2018).

First, I set the search to the academics from the departments of political science and sociology at the three universities. I then searched for the published works of those academics from the timeframe 2019 to 2023, specifically targeting the period of study. Two means were embraced to collect the relevant sample data. First of all, I considered the CVs and publications of the professors in the sociology and political science departments of AUB and LAU by accessing the official virtual sites of both universities. Yet no names nor publications were supplied on the electronic pages of LU; hence my data collection from that university was done through secondary means. For this reason: I surveyed two journals, namely, the Social Sciences Journal published by the Social Sciences Institute Research Centre and the Law and Political Sciences Journal by the Faculty of Law and Political and Administrative Sciences. In doing this, I captured all titles published in that corresponding timeframe spanning from 2019 to 2023. The consequent sample was methodically refined by excluding from consideration articles written by scholars from other universities and from non-academic affiliations.

Before proceeding to the next sections, first, let me mention this note: Social issues have been discussed more freely just outside the university walls, with scholars and intellectuals engaging themselves with them while not restricted by institutional and governance structures. This paper is searching into the academic output and establishing its case study to observe how the institutional, governance, and political limitations imposed in the academic field affect knowledge production. Second, while we are attempting only to analyze the titles of the articles, we are well aware that this has somewhat questionable methodology, as it gives

insight into the topics at this time that made it into academic language and caught the attention of scholars. But we will not go into too many details concerning their works; we shall only point out the issues that dominated their focus.

In the next paragraphs, I show the number of articles we will analyze. Furthermore, I present the way by which we will analyze the topics raised by the researchers.

Titles of the Sample: In this research, I analyzed academic productions (published articles 203 titles) of sociologists and political scientists from three universities - AUB, LAU, and LU (see table 1). I chose these disciplines due to their relevance to the societal and political changes after the October 17, 2019 uprising.

Table 1 Titles

Universities	LU		LAU		AUB		Total
Disciplines	Political Sciences	Sociology	Political Sciences	Sociology	Political Sciences	Sociology	
Frequency	91	43	15	0	26	28	203

Of these, 132 titles in political science written by scholars from LU, LAU, and AUB were analyzed. As for Sociology, 71 chosen titles were included in the sample from AUB and ISS scholars.

Method of titles’ analyzing: The methodology used for title analysis entailed categorizing research paper titles from academics in our sample, considering factors such as language diversity, origin of diploma, and thematic content. Our primary aim was to investigate how political and societal changes in Lebanon have influenced the research focus of Lebanese scholars.

To achieve this, we set up strict criteria and gathered a wide range of political science papers, sorting them by whether they were from public or private universities. We then organized these papers based on research interests, thematic areas, and subject matter, which allowed for broader groupings for later analysis. It's important to mention that our categorization relies solely on the titles provided and may not fully reflect the true content of the papers. We applied a similar method for sociology papers, making distinctions between those from the ISS and SAMS to identify differences in research interests among scholars from public and private institutions. Furthermore, we categorized titles based on their main themes to explore variations in research focuses across different university affiliations.

Characteristics of academics³: A sample of 80 academics from the Sociology and Political Sciences Departments at three universities in Lebanon was created. This sample consists of three Political Science departments and two Sociology departments.

For Political Science, the sample includes academics from:

□ The Faculty of Law, Political Science, and Administration (FLPSA) at Lebanese University (LU) with 24 scholars.

□ The School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) at Lebanese American University (LAU) with 7 scholars.

□ The Department of Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB) with 11 scholars.

□ For Sociology, the sample includes:

□ The Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) at LU with 32 scholars.

□ The Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies (SAMS) at AUB with 6 scholars.

The Sociology Department at LAU is not included as it is inactive this academic year due to reduced student enrollments.

The table demonstrates the characteristics of the academics' affiliated universities, the language of publication, gender, and the origin of their academic degrees.

Table (2) Characteristics of academics						
Disciplines	POLITICAL SCIENCES			Sociology		Total
Universities	Lebanese University (LU)	Lebanese American University (LAU)	American University of Beirut (AUB)	American University of Beirut (AUB)	Lebanese University (LU)	
Departments	Faculty of Law and Political Sciences and Administration (FLPSA)	School of Arts and Sciences (SAS)	Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA)	Department of Sociology, Anthropology, and Media Studies (SAMA)	Institute of Social Sciences (ISS)	
Male	18	7	7	1	5	
Female	6		4	5	27	
Total	24	7	11	6	32	80

A significant finding is the predominance of female academics across all three universities, especially within the Sociology

³ We did not specify the number of professors who would be included in the sample, but rather, we took all the professors whose names were on the electronic platforms of the departments that we study.

departments. Notably, the ISS at LU had 27 females, and AUB had 4 females in this field.

On the other hand, our sample shows that scholars in the three departments of the field of political sciences wrote a total of 132 articles between 2019 and 2023. The table (3) indicates that the Faculty of Law and Political Science and Administration (FLPSA) had the highest proportion of publications (68.9%)⁴, followed by the Department of Political Studies and Public Administration (PSPA) (19.7%), and the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) (11.4%) (refer to the table 3). It's important to note that individual scholars may have contributed multiple articles, and others may have collaborated on a single publication. However, the distribution of publications across specific universities doesn't have statistical significance due to data uncertainties, especially regarding academics affiliated with LU.

Table (3) Titles in Political Sciences At the three universities (LU), (LAU), and (AUB)										
Departments	FLPSA			SAS			PSPA			
Language	Arabic	English	French	Arabic	English	French	Arabic	English	French	
Frequency	60	30	1		15		1	24	1	132
%	65.9	33	1.1		100		3.8	92.4	3.8	100%
Total	91			15			26			132
%		68.9			11.4			19.7		100%

In Table 3, we examine the languages used for publishing Political Science titles across three departments at three universities: LU, LAU, and AUB. The table illustrates the frequency and proportion of Arabic, English, and French publications in the FLPSA, SAS, and PSPA departments.

In the FLPSA department, Arabic is the primary language, making up 65.9% of the titles. English constitutes 33% of the titles in this department, while French is used very little, representing just 1.1% of the titles. In the SAS department, all titles (100%) are published in English, with no titles in Arabic or French. The PSPA department also predominantly uses English, with 92.4% of titles

⁴ Please note that the percentage mentioned does not encompass all the professors in the department. Some professors may have published in other journals that were not taken into account for our research. It's important to highlight that our study specifically focused on professors in the Department of Political Science at the Lebanese University and Sociology who have published in the two journals as mentioned earlier.

published in this language. Both Arabic and French are used minimally, each accounting for 3.8% of the titles.

The choice of language in academic writing is essential as it reflects the target audience and scholarly goals. Notably, data from Table 5 indicates that academics trained in French universities are increasingly publishing in English within the Faculty of Law and Political Science and Administration (FLPSA). This trend is influenced by non-native English-speaking scholars' preference for English publications to enhance visibility and citation impact (Di Bitetti & Ferreras, 2017). However, Arabic publications remain dominant in the FLPSA department, making up 66%, likely due to institutional promotion criteria.

At FLPSA, academics generally need five peer-reviewed publications, regardless of the language, to qualify for professorship. However, academic advancement is often influenced by religious and political affiliations, as noted by Awada and al., (2019). Public university is heavily influenced by sectarian and political networks, which play a significant role in career progression. This politicization erodes meritocracy, hampers knowledge production, and stifles intellectual autonomy. The university's fragile autonomy in relation to power structures is reflected in its approach to neutral subjects that do not concern the power elites.

In contrast, English plays a significant role in the SAS and PSPA departments, emphasizing its importance in these fields. While French is the least commonly used language, its presence, especially within specific departments, showcases the diversity of language use across the universities. After exploring the writing characteristics in Political Science, we now shift our focus to Sociology. Throughout the study period, 71 articles were identified in Sociology: 43 published in the Journal of the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS) and 28 from the Sociology Department (SAMS) at AUB. These articles were composed in Arabic, English, and French.

In Sociology, the use of language shows a clear trend: English is more common in private universities, whereas Arabic is more frequently used in public universities. At ISS, Arabic titles make up 65.11% of the total, followed by French at 37% and English at 7%. On the other hand, AUB primarily utilizes English for its titles, which represent 78.5%, while Arabic and French titles account for 17.8% and 3.5%, respectively (see Table 3).

Table (4) Titles in Sociology At the two universities (LU) and (AUB)

Departments	ISS (LU)			SAMS (AUB)			Total
Languages	Arabic	English	French	Arabic	English	French	71
Frequencies	28	3	12	5	22	1	
%	65.1	7	27.9	17.8	78.6	3.6	
Total	43			28			
%	60.6			39.4			100

Additionally, around 50 percent (see table 5) of the academics in the Sociology and Anthropology and Media Studies department have also graduated from French universities, so there are questions about their target readership and preferred venues for publication. The previous table (5) describes the distribution of languages used in Sociology titles at ISS at LU and SAMS at AUB.

A more important consideration is that the analysis is based on limited information consisting of only 71 titles, thus making it useful to know that the contours of the determination are very thin. Yet, according to Table (4), Arabic happens to be the predominant language for titles at ISS, apparently in contrast with English, which is more pre-eminent at the (AUB). This distribution points out the effects that may be imposed by educational backgrounds and preferences towards language publications.

At SAMS, scholars may opt to publish in English to enhance their visibility and impact on a global scale. As Hanafi pointed out in 2011, “For a long time now, in the Arab East, publishing in international journals, particularly in English, has been viewed as a passport to academic acceptance” (Hanafi, 2011a, p. 60). He further highlights the importance of publishing research in English for career advancement. However, these global trends often overshadow research that is significant at the local level, presenting a dilemma for scholars: should they publish for a global audience or risk being overlooked locally? This situation frequently results in a disconnect between local universities and the communities they are meant to serve, undermining their ability to address pressing regional issues. Hanafi calls for a more balanced approach where global and local scholarship can work together, allowing scholars to benefit from both international networks and regional development (Hanafi, 2011a).

Conversely, the preference for Arabic titles for ISS may reflect regional language norms and the target audience in mind. Hamel's

analysis provides a theoretical framework that allows for the identification of broader trends and pressures influencing language use in academic publishing-more the context for screening the language distribution listed in the table.

Additional factors that influence the language of publication are the origins from which their degree's stem. Professors teaching at private universities often tend to publish in English out of all foreign languages since many of them graduated from universities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and the like. See Table 5 for other information.

Table (5) Origin of Diploma							Total
Disciplines		Political Sciences			SOCIOLOGY		
Departments		FLPSA at LU	SAS at LAU	PSPA at AUB	SAMS at AUB	ISS at LU	
origin of Diploma	UK	1	4	4	3	1	
	USA		3	7			
	France	7			3	9	
	Other					2	
	LEB	11				19	
	No info	5				1	
Total		24	7	11	6	32	80

The origin of diploma is not limited to determining the language of publication among academics, but extends, as discussed by Kabbanji, et.al (2019) to shape the academic and professional trajectories of Lebanese social scientists. It also argues that international education provides Lebanese graduated with access to advanced research facilities, diverse academic networks, and exposure to global methodologies that are often unavailable domestically.

Acknowledging the influence of institutional factors on scholars' research interests, our analysis focuses on the contextual elements. Thus, our analysis draws from institutional perspectives and Bourdieu's academic field theory.

Political Themes at LU, LAU, and AUB

After outlining the research methodology and the context of higher education in Lebanon, we will delve into the research interests of academics in the political science departments involved in our study. Scholars from the Faculty of Political Sciences at the Lebanese University (FLPAS) are engaged in a variety of topics that cover different facets of political science. Their interests encompass a broad range of themes that mirror the complex dynamics of the global political landscape. However, it is noteworthy that there seems to be a relatively narrow focus on issues specific to Lebanon in their published works. The topics explored are grouped into nine main themes: International Relations and Diplomacy, Terrorism and Security, Environment and Sustainability, Human Rights and International Law, Legal Studies and Governance, Education and Society, Middle East Politics, International Disputes and Conflict Resolution, and Technology and Communication. Even though the journal is divided into separate sections for Political Sciences, Administrative Sciences, and Law, there is a significant overlap in the subject matter among the titles reviewed. Moreover, some publications tackle subjects that might appear somewhat peripheral to political science, such as health and education. For instance, the theme of *International Relations and Diplomacy* examines global strategies and the diplomatic relations between major world powers. This theme also looks into France's role as a mediator in international affairs, analyzing the dynamics of international politics and cooperation on a global scale, along with France's changing role in mediating international conflicts. On the other hand, the *Environment and Sustainability* theme highlights the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable development, especially in Arab countries. Publications in this area cover vital issues like *climate change*⁵, *natural disaster management*, and *environmental legislation*⁶, stressing their significance in addressing environmental challenges and fostering sustainability.

Although FLPA academics delve into a range of themes, they frequently sidestep the urgent political and societal challenges Lebanon has encountered since 2019. Still, their research encompasses subjects like terrorism, governance, international relations, and treaties, showcasing their expertise.

⁵ Climate Change and Natural Disaster Management in Arab Countries

⁶ International Energy Law: A Coherent and Effective Category of Law

It's worth noting that FLPA scholars typically avoid controversial⁷ political and societal matters. Among the 60 titles reviewed, only four or five address significant issues within Lebanon. For instance, one title, *Towards a Productive and Effective Public University: Reality and Requirements*, highlights the difficulties facing public higher education amid severe conditions that threaten its sustainability. Another title, *Gaps in the Lebanese Political System in Light of the Current Economic Crisis*, investigates the deficiencies in the political system following the economic and financial crisis that has profoundly impacted the Lebanese population.

Notably, FLPAS academics typically steer clear of controversial political and social issues. Among the 60 titles reviewed, only four or five address challenging topics within Lebanon. For instance, one title, *Towards a Productive and Effective Public University: Reality and Requirements*, explores the difficulties facing public higher education amid severe threats to its sustainability. Another title, *Gaps in the Lebanese Political System in Light of the Current Economic Crisis*, looks into the deficiencies of the political system in the wake of the economic and financial crisis that has deeply impacted the Lebanese population.

In contrast, most of the titles concentrate on neutral subjects, such as *Cryptocurrencies in Lebanon: Between Reality and Legislation*" and *Leadership Behavior in the Healthcare Sector during the COVID-19 Crisis*. Furthermore, some titles tackle international issues that are not related to contentious domestic topics, like *Building the Modern Civil State in Yemen: The Functional Role of Soft Law* and *Environmental Protection Laws in Japan*.

On the side of SAS and SASP's academics various topics have encompassed related to the Middle East. Their research covers diverse themes, including but not limited to Lebanese Protests and Politics, International Relations and Conflict Mediation, Sectarianism and Communal Relations, Security and Conflict in the Middle East, Political Theory and Identity, Middle East Politics and Governance, and Civil Society and Social Issues.

Under the broad theme of *International Relations and Conflict Mediation*, several papers examine international relations in the

⁷ When we use the term "controversial," we are referring to a research topic that challenges or conflicts with political authority, often involving a critical stance toward the power structures in place. This does not diminish its scientific value, but rather indicates that it does not shy away from confronting political power.

context of conflicts in the Middle East. For example, *Mediating for Peace* looks at the UN's role in mediating conflicts in Syria across different leaderships, highlighting the complexities of diplomacy and conflict resolution. Similarly, *Mitigating MENA Communitarian Conflicts through Power-Sharing Options* offers potential solutions to address communal conflicts in the region.

The security and conflict landscape of the Middle East is another key area of investigation for SAS and SASP's scholars. For instance, *"Fluid Concepts and Understandings Redefined"* discusses the changing nature of state boundaries and the involvement of transnational militant actors in Syria, while *On*

Origins: Arab Intellectuals' Debates on the Ideational Sources of ISIS examines the ideological foundations of extremist groups. These studies seek to shed light on the challenges and complexities of governance and state formation in the area.

Civil society and social issues in the Middle East are also important research focuses for SAS and SASP. Papers such as *"Analyzing State-Civil Society Associations Relationship"* and *Lebanese Civil Society and Civic Engagement* investigate the role of civil society, volunteerism, and social engagement within Middle Eastern societies and institutions.

These themes illustrate the diverse nature of academic research and highlight the specific areas of expertise that SAS and SASP's scholars possess.

Academics at private universities have produced thought provoking works that deeply investigate political and societal issues in Lebanon. These works center around two primary themes: *Lebanese Protests and Politics* and *Sectarianism and Communal Relations*. They address approximately ten diverse topics related to the political landscape and protests occurring in the country. Titles such as *The Roots of the Lebanese Protests and the Path Forward* and *Activism, Change, and Sectarianism in the Free Patriotic Movement in Lebanon* underscore the sociopolitical turmoil and the demand for change within the nation. These papers explore the fundamental causes of the protests, the involvement of women in the movement, and the effects of state policies during a sovereign debt crisis. A recurring theme in these titles is *Sectarianism and Communal Relations: Lebanon's intricate sectarian society*. This theme is examined in papers like *Inter-Communal Relations in the Context of a Sectarian Society* and *Hezbollah, Communitarianism, and Anti-Imperialism*. They investigate the complex interactions of

religious and communal identities in shaping daily practices and political movements in Lebanon.

Similarities and Divergences in political Science FLPAS, SAS, and SASP

The themes explored by the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS), the School of Arts and Sciences and Political Science (SASP), and the Faculty of Political Sciences at the Lebanese University (FLPAS) exhibit significant similarities. All three institutions cover traditional topics like gender dynamics, civil society, the environment, and international relations. Additionally, many scholars focus on issues related to terrorism. However, there are notable differences in how they approach Lebanese societal and political matters. Academics at private universities explore more contentious subjects, while scholars at FLPA generally steer clear of these discussions. This disparity suggests a distinct approach to academic inquiry, with private university scholars engaging with contentious local issues. While their FLPA counterparts may prioritize other research areas or adopt a more cautious approach in their scholarly endeavors.

These are the main political sciences topics, which encompassed by both LU, LAU, and AUB. What was the scope of interest that sociology covered in both ISS and AUB?

Sociological themes at ISS and AUB

The Social Sciences Journal, published by the Research Center of the Institute of Social Sciences (ISS), released four issues in 2019, each dedicated to specific themes. The June issue featured a roundtable discussion titled “Building National Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism”. The subsequent issue included extensive papers on *Gender Equality, Cultural and Societal Problems*, and research papers on the *fifth goal of the 2030 Agenda*. The third issue focused on three topics: conference papers on the *Symbolic Father, The Crossing of Generations in Our Daily Lives, and Children and Adolescents in a Changing Society: What is the Reference?* This issue also included an appendix on psychology and social psychology research techniques. The journal's themes were selected based on special occasions and specific subject matters.

Following 2019, two volumes were published: one in 2020 and another in 2022, each covering various topics. The final volume comprised two issues, numbered 22 and 23, which were not part of

any previously proposed titles from the magazine's editorial board. These volumes reflect how ISS academics responded to societal transformations in Lebanon after 2019. In addition to the themes mentioned above, new themes were added to the scope of interests of ISS in these three issues: Youth in Lebanon, Social Issues and Crisis, Education and Culture, and Elections and Politics.

The theme "Youth in Lebanon" delves into the myriad challenges and experiences faced by the young population in Lebanon. It encompasses various issues impacting youth, including economic and social challenges such as unemployment, financial instability, and the overall economic environment. This theme includes discussions on the economic crisis, the effects of COVID-19 on Lebanese youth, and the migration decisions of young university students.

The "Social Issues and Crisis" theme addresses a range of societal problems and crises confronting Lebanon. It includes analyses of extremism and violence in the Arab world, with a focus on Lebanon, examining the concepts, manifestations, and policies aimed at combating these issues. Corruption and its psychological and social consequences are also explored, providing an in-depth analysis within the Lebanese context.

These themes echo with each other as those raised related to *the Youth in Lebanon* theme, namely the economic crisis and social issues are finely tied to the wider societal dilemmas under investigation in the theme of *Social Issues and Crisis*. The economic crisis has greatly affected and involved the youth in Lebanon in the series of social issues that include extremism, corruption, and violence. The two themes collectively capture an intricate picture of the kind of challenges that Lebanese youth face standing against the wider background of the different crises faced by society and the economy.

On the other side, the first glance on the themes discussed or occupied by academics of SAMS is a brimming glimpse of topics that reach from Gender and Equality to Global and Comparative Sociology. Nevertheless, a strict categorization displayed five themes that encompassed all books of AUB's academics based on the following understanding: *Youth and Social Movements*, *Sectarianism and Politics in the Middle East*, *Global and Comparative Sociology*, *Social Movements and Solidarity*, *Gender and Equality*. Upon constant scrutiny of the topics within their categories, traditional topics such as Gender and Equality were

addressed. Gender studies approach gender-on-gender topics as byproducts of heated debates on gender equality and inheritance on the formation of non-authoritarian reasoning as applied in gender equality, showing concerns in the area of advances and disputes here.

The themes of the category *Global and Comparative Sociology* were in the center of debate throughout Sociology as a scientific discipline. They examined the global interpretation of sociological issues. *Global Sociology Revisited* is an example of the research of the field of global sociology while investigating new directions and paradigms. *From the Reductionism of the Paradigm of Domination to the Complexity of the Paradigm of Power* critically assesses works of notable sociologists in order to deepen the understanding of power dynamics.

The academics of SAMS have taken up themes relating to catalyzing the most salient changes after the events of the October 17, 2019 revolution. They spoke about the effect of the revolution on youth⁸, in *The Lebanon Uprising of 2019: Voices from the Revolution*, suggesting that it continued the discussion of youth-led movements and their contestation dynamics. Furthermore, *Living Revolution, Financial Collapse, and Pandemic in Beirut* connects the intersections between social movements and the previously unheard-of challenges, notably economic collapse and the COVID-19 pandemic, which have affected youth activism and political struggle.

Sectarianism also has its share within the articles. Papers investigate the intricacies of sectarianism and its role in Middle Eastern politics. *The theoretical and methodological traps in studying sectarianism in the Middle East* challenges conventional approaches to approach sectarianism. At the same time, *Sectarianization: Mapping the New Politics of the Middle East* explores the evolving nature of sectarian politics in the region. These studies build a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationship between sects and politics. *The sociology of sectarianism*, emphasizes the role that interdisciplinary perspectives must play in understanding the dynamics of deeply divided societies.

⁸ Some of these titles: Youth at the margins: Perspectives on Arab Mediterranean youth; Lebanon's 2019 October Revolution: Who Mobilized and Why? ; From Education to Employment? Youth trajectories in Jordan and Lebanon in the context of protracted displacement.etc.

In essence, these studies provide insights into the October 17 revolution's impact on youth and an understanding of the intricate relationship between sectarianism and politics in the Middle East.

In conclusion, there are similarities between the topics in political science and those in sociology. Traditional topics are related to both disciplines, as well as similarities in gender governance, terrorism, and other areas. An important addition to the SAMS theme is the inclusion of theoretical topics related to sociology, which we didn't notice in the writings at the ISS.

Conclusion

This study has examined the complex relationship between societal issues and the research priorities of social science scholars at three prominent Lebanese universities: The Lebanese University (LU), the (AUB), and the (LAU). By analyzing political science and sociology article titles published between 2019 and 2023, this research has shed light on how Lebanon's ongoing crises-the October 2019 uprising, the Beirut port explosion, and the deepening economic collapse-have shaped the research agendas of local academics.

The findings highlight the complex interactions of local, institutional, and global factors which shape academic interests because one important outcome of this is university's research priority, based differently from one institution to the next because of their respective missions, sources of funding, and academic orientations. For instance, it is restricted by limited government funding, which influences the scope and methodology of its academic projects. In contrast, the American University of Beirut (AUB) and the Lebanese American University (LAU) have more flexibility given their varying sources of funding even though these are increasingly forced to align their research agendas with global trends while at times neglecting local issues. As a result, international grants, particularly in the area of global security, pushed research toward topics such as extremism, often at the expense of local political issues. This has created a marked divide along language lines, with English dominating the publishing world and thereby marginalizing research in Arabic.

Institutional responses to socio-political movements, especially the 2019 uprising, vary. While AUB and LAU voiced their support for the revolution, LU has remained particularly quiet. Journalist Sami Kleib (2019) noted this difference, posing the question of why

no professors from LU, which has historically been a key player in Lebanon's academic landscape, took the lead on national reform. Comments on this subject find their echo in the choice of research topics at these institutions. The few scholars at LU have largely avoided research that speaks directly to the uprising, often accompanied by its wider implications, while those at private universities have tended to engage more directly in topics that are related to the revolution and its root causes, including those covered in our study.

The divergence can be understood through Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the field of education, which understands the nature of universities as varied fields, each possessing its own rules and dynamics of power. Most of the scholarly work produced by the LU Faculty of Law and Political Science (FLPSA), for example, is in Arabic and focuses almost exclusively on topics of global scope that bear little relation to the local context. However, the proximity of the university to the political power limits its engagement in any sensitive issues; this speaks to the influence of political and sectarian considerations upon academic work. LU's avoidance of controversial political issues stands, therefore, as an illustration of the complicated relationship of academia to political power in Lebanon.

Furthermore, this study highlights the increasing grip of neoliberalism in restructuring Lebanon's academic landscape. With growing competition for research funds, neoliberal approaches have enhanced the focus on measurable outcomes in tune with global agendas. Clearly, the discussion is reflected in research on social media and extremism, targeting global security interests. Neoliberal pressures have, in addition, prioritized research on international development goals such as gender violence, women's rights, etc. While these topics are of high importance, emphasis on these subjects invariably undermines addressing critical local issues such as gender disparity in labor alongside economic inequalities, and poverty pointing towards a hierarchical approach towards research priorities that transcends the limits of the universities.

Some dissenters have resisted prevailing normative trends by engaging with socio-political issues and the realities emerging from the 2019 uprising. They have focused on urgent topics such as sectarianism, revolution, and collapse, positioning themselves as organic intellectuals in the process. Many of these scholars not only explored these issues in their work but also became directly involved in revolutionary activism, contributing to the growing

debates on societal transformation. This alignment with social movements strengthened their role as organic intellectuals, challenging the established power structures.

In contrast, other scholars, drawing from Gramscian thought, have rejected the apolitical tendencies that increasingly characterize modern academia. These scholars engage with controversial topics while maintaining a critical stance against the neoliberal forces shaping academic priorities in Lebanon, a position notably evident in their involvement in the 2019 uprising. This study offers valuable insight into how local, institutional, and global factors intersect to influence the research agendas of social science scholars in Lebanon. It highlights the ongoing challenge faced by Lebanese universities in balancing international responsiveness with local relevance, all while contending with neoliberal pressures on academic inquiry.

The findings point to the involvement of neoliberalism in the depoliticization of academic research by detaching it from various political and social issues. Neoliberal forces have catalyzed a type of conversation in which research is preoccupied with addressing neutral concerns or those concerning the global community. This might be understood as part of a broader process of knowledge depoliticization, in which politically loaded issues are neglected in favor of those that are designated as "neutral" or corresponding to global ones. In the words of Giorgio Agamben (2009), depoliticization does not only imply the exclusion of political discourse from public debate, but it also marginalizes critical issues concerning social rights and freedoms, shriveling the space for an engagement of pressing issues.

The transition out of political engagement within academic research is manifestly seen as an uptick in studies addressing global issues like security and extremism, while localized questions tend to be given less attention. This de-politicization is reflected in the academic world: research funding is progressively conceived according to global goals that often overshadow more pressing local issues. As Harvey (2005) and Brown (2015) have argued, neoliberalism accords more importance to research outputs purposed for global development goals--involving, for instance, gender violence or women's rights--but little concern is paid to the local political struggles. Although they are global issues worth addressing, very soon we may find ourselves oscillating between these topics and the most pressing concerns of Lebanon itself;

namely, sectarianism and economic inequality, hinting nonetheless at hierarchical arraying of research priorities.

Neoliberalism's focus on measurable outcomes and competitively has intensified competition in seeking research funding and has also strategically redirected scholars toward issues deemed globally acceptable and/or non-contentious. These issues are not contested, yet, by doing so, they fail to provide political analyses of the local contexts. De-politicization was everywhere among the East African universities examined, being primarily an enclosure of the issues that do not contest the political or economic status quo.

The findings highlight the need for Lebanese social scientists to confront critically the political dimensions of research funding and publication trends. The emergence of neoliberal agendas and the de-politicization of research calls for an in-depth understanding of how academic priorities are governed through outside influences. In his theory of hegemony, political power is construed as being sustained through certain cultural and ideological structures that legitimize the authority of the ruling classes, and this very process is infecting academic discourse. Deeper dynamics of the increasingly neoliberalized academic landscape have generated a considerable impact on the priorities of research in the Lebanese universities, contributing to de-politicization of their work. Nowadays, an increasing number of academics take up to study research topics that may best fit within global agendas, which are often perceived as detached from local struggles and limit their windows of opportunity to addressing pressing national issues.

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