Little in-depth research on women’s leadership in political parties has been undertaken to date, particularly on interlinkages with party religiosity informing party politics. Basu exclaims that “What becomes striking is the dearth of scholarship on these relations [between women and parties] on the one hand, and their political significance on the other” (2005: 33). Feminists and scholars have studied women, at large, in political parties in the West, South Asia, and MENA countries.1 Also, Norris (1993) calls for future research to look deeply into the role of party ideology on female representation. In-depth research in Lebanon responds to these calls, aiming to contribute modestly to narrowing this scholarship gap.

This chapter is organized in three sections. In the first section, qualitative evidence supporting the conceptual framework that party religiosity is a plausible explanation for women in leadership is examined. Individual “religion” as influencing women’s social life is differentiated from institutional “religiosity” as affecting their political life and leadership chances within party echelons. Also, in this section I engage with the debate over private and public religion, particularly public Islam, and its potential influence on women’s leadership. The second section highlights the impact of a 15-year civil war on widening religious cleavages and restructuring the multiparty system. In the third section, an ordinal measure of party religiosity is developed that is sensitive to capturing variations thereof across parties. Parties are classified, labeled, and coded along a 5-point religiosity continuum of secularisms and religiosities.
This lays the ground work for the qualitative and quantitative analysis carried out in the following chapters.

Ware describes a political party as “[a]n institution that (a) seeks influence in a state, often by attempting to occupy positions in government, and (b) usually consists of more than one single interest in the society and so to some degree attempts to ‘aggregate interests’” (1987: 5). Blondel describes parties as “[m]ultiform and…at the crossroads between the institutional and behavioural aspects of politics” (1969: 221). Whereas, Norris, one of the few scholars linking parties to women in politics, highlights that

Political parties serve vital functions as one of the main linkages between citizens and government: structuring electoral choice, recruiting legislative candidates, providing a legislative agenda in government. Parties provide a range of opportunities for women to participate in political life from the political booth to local meetings, the conference platform, legislature and cabinet. (Lovenduski and Norris 1993: 308)²

Some Lebanese scholars argue that parties formed after the civil war diverge from the norm while others find that parties conform to the standard pattern.³ Indeed, Lebanese parties fit the standard pattern, albeit with slight nuances. They are multiform, pursue specific goals, and perform similar functions, especially as gatekeepers in selecting and nominating women and men for public office. However, they form around specific communities and as such fail to aggregate interests nationwide. Thus, while Lebanese parties do not fully conform to the standard model of parties, they are not sui generis nonetheless. This allows for generalization of findings and predicting parties’ behavior vis-à-vis women’s leadership. Given the above, which party-level characteristics influence women’s leadership?

Party Variation in Religiosity

Lebanon is a Muslim-majority country with a large Christian population in which religion and religious affiliations play an important role in politics. Religion is inextricably intertwined with politics in such a manner that “religion is politics” (see Corstange 2012). This phenomenon is perceived in many Arab and Muslim countries, as Iliya Harik argues, comparing the East to West: