



Political Impasse in Lebanon: Internal Causes and Challenges

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ABSTRACT

Persistent failures to stabilise the governmental apparatus and cycles of political deadlocks have now become the hallmark of the small West Asian state of Lebanon. While this might be a recurrent theme in Lebanese political culture, yet the crisis seems to have worsened since 2019. With general elections round the corner in 2026, the elite and the public alike seem to be pondering over a stable and long term solution. Under such circumstances, this research analyses the political and media discourse in order to understand the immediate and long term reasons for such instability in order to seek a policy solution. The possible reasons behind repeated failure to form governmental consensus for important constitutional positions need to be ascertained given the time gap after which Joseph Aoun has ascended Presidency of the state in January 2025. The first section of this paper, therefore, delves into the 2022 parliamentary elections to understand the immediate context for consensus failure. These parliamentary elections (held in May 2022) reveal some new developments and trends in Lebanese politics. The October 2019 revolution and the 2020 Beirut port explosions seem to have acted as catalysts for Lebanese political instability. Yet, there are other factors which are acting behind the

scene. The second part of this paper attempts to thematically understand different reasons for the deadlock. The dynamic nature of sectarian power balances, the weaknesses of the country's political structure, as well as, the flawed nature of Lebanese democracy need to be understood as domestic factors behind the deadlock. These internal factors, in turn give leverage to external pressures. Such nuanced understanding is essential in paving the way for a stable government in future despite political turmoil.

Introduction

Lebanon, a small state in West Asia, came under immense international scrutiny when persistent economic crisis resulted in its reclassification by World Bank into 'Lower Income State' down from 'Upper Middle-Income State' in July 2022 (*World Bank*, 2022). The country had already witnessed political turmoil in the form of massive anti-government civilian protests in 2019 known as the October 2019 revolution (*Amnesty International*, 2021a; Kumar, 2021) as well as the biggest non-nuclear explosion in global history, the Beirut blasts 2020 (*Amnesty International*, 2021b). Under such socially, economically and politically unstable conditions, many analysts have dubbed Lebanon as a failed state (Daniel, 2023; Betz, 2021; Chuluy, 2020; Atzili, 2020). While Lebanon has witnessed various phases of political instability, yet the current situation of political deadlock is disturbing. This is because, despite periods of instability, Lebanon rarely functions for long without both the Head of State (the President) and the Head of Government (the Prime Minister), who can assume certain presidential duties through constitutional provisions (*Reuters*, 2022) for an extended period. Lebanon's previous President, Michell Aoun resigned a day before the end of his six-year term on 30 October 2022. However, as a last decree of his Presidentship, President Aoun pleaded the lawmakers through a letter not to have faith in the government of caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati (Gavlak, 2022). This meant that Lebanon remained without a President or a Prime minister for a substantial period of time—till January 2025, when the new President Joseph Aoun was sworn in, supposedly with the aid of French, Saudi and American support (Gritten, 2025; Yahya 2025). For the two years preceding this ascension, Lebanon had neither a President nor a Prime Minister to pull the country out of its extreme economic crisis.

Critically analysing the sequence of events around and before the 2022 elections, this paper seeks to use discourse analysis to study the possible reasons as to why Lebanon is being rocked by repeated bouts of political instability in general, and after 2022 elections in particular due to which there is no



parliamentary consensus on the head of government, or even the head of the state till January 2025. The first part of this research delves into the 2022 general elections to gauge reasons for consensus failure, since it is the most recent elections held at the time of writing of this analytical piece. The second part of this paper deals with all possible reasons for political instability which have intermeshed leading up to this eventual bouts of governmental paralysis.

A psephological perspective to 2022 elections: Nature of Deadlock and Possible trends

The 2022 parliamentary elections provide a backdrop to the latest phase of political instability in Lebanon. An analysis of the election results might provide insight to the immediate context of consensus paralysis for both government formation and delay in Presidential election.

Lebanon conducted parliamentary elections for its 128 seats on 15 May 2022. These were the first round of elections after the anti-government mass protests popularly known as the October 2019 revolution, because of which the low voter turnout of nearly 50 percent was quite unexpected (Homsî, 2022). This, however, does not signify low participation because, if the data provided by the interior ministry is to be trusted, in comparison to the 2018 elections, there was a 20 percent increase in the number of participating candidates which rose to 718 candidates including 118 women (Ministry of Interior, 2022).

Lebanon's 2022 parliamentary elections were mainly dominated by two major political coalitions: the March 8 Alliance and the March 14 Alliance. The March 8 Alliance, led by Hezbollah, brought together major partners including the Amal Movement, headed by Nabih Berri, and the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), under the leadership of Gebran Bassil. Despite tensions between Hezbollah and FPM, they continued to collaborate within the same political camp, which is generally aligned with Syrian and Iranian interests (International Crisis Group, 2020; Al Jazeera, 2022). In contrast, the March 14 Alliance, often referred to as the Anti-Hezbollah Bloc, was led by the Lebanese Forces, with Samir Geagea at its helm. This coalition also included the Kataeb Party and several independent Sunni and Christian figures (Carnegie Middle East Centre, 2019; Reuters, 2021). Politically, this bloc takes a firm stance against Hezbollah, favours stronger relations with Western nations, and calls for the disarmament of Hezbollah's military wing.

In terms of election results, the March 8 Alliance claimed roughly 61 seats, which included 13 for Hezbollah, 15 for Amal, 17 for FPM, and about 16 shared among other aligned groups such as the Marada Movement and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). On the other side, the March 14 Alliance secured around 34 seats, with the Lebanese Forces winning 19 seats—the highest number for



any single party—along with 4 seats for Kataeb and 11 distributed among their partners and independents (*Reuters*, 2022; European Union Election Observation Mission, 2022; *Al-Jazeera*, 2022). Additionally, a wave of reformist and independent candidates, many inspired by the 2019 uprising, managed to win around 13 seats, reflecting a shift in public sentiment and challenging the country's traditional political order (European Union Election Observation Mission, 2022; *Al-Jazeera*, 2022; *Reuters*, 2022).

A month later, a deadlock emerged over the selection of the Prime Minister. This was an immediate evidence of political deadlock—the inability of the Lebanese parliamentarians to negotiate upon the government. Furthermore, the parties which had formerly remained as a part of the opposition for the last two decades, after the election attempted to form a government with the aid of new 'independent' candidates. This shift in power, popularity and loyalties inspired several notable changes in Lebanese politics.

As the election trends reveal, the coalition supported by Hezbollah no longer have a majority in the parliament. However, Hezbollah and their biggest ally Amal still retain 28 seats (13 and 15 respectively) which is a sizable amount to exert influence. This, perhaps, reveals a temporary loss of popularity for the Hezbollah and allied stakeholders (Kumar, 2022). This duo, after vehement opposition, eventually permitted the ascension of Joseph Aoun of the Lebanese forces as President, although they displayed symbolic opposition by delaying the result by two hours (Yahya, 2025).

Secondly, Hezbollah's key Christian ally the Free Patriotic Movement were down from 29 to 17 seats. This was the party of the former President Aoun and the greatest ally of Hezbollah. Following this, the biggest Christian party is the United States (US) and Saudi backed Lebanese Forces Party which registered a rise in popularity from 15 to 21 seats (*Ibid.*). A third major shift has been the ten percent parliamentary seats being won by the so-called Reformists who had been the champions of the 2019 October revolution.

These Reformists were those who claim to be non-sectarian and whose manifestoes call for an all-round change in Lebanon (*CNN*, 2022). This rise in popularity of the Civil Society activists from 1 to 13 seats in 2022 came as a pleasant surprise. Yet, it is questionable whether such a change reflects a shift away from sectarianism (Kumar, 2022).

Such changes hint at Lebanon witnessing a wave of overt anti-incumbency, which in turn hint at strong democratic values, yet the situation has worsened after 30 October 2022. As his final decree as the President, former President Michael Aoun claimed, through an open letter to the Parliament, that the



caretaker Mikati government has no legitimacy and that a new government needs to be hereby chosen. Repeated attempts to elect a new President had earlier failed either in the form of walk-outs by the legislators resulting in no quorum. At other times, blank ballots were being cast by the legislators or, sometimes, symbolic lack of confidence is expressed through mock votes mentioning names of former Chilean President Salvador Allende or the famous South African Nelson Mandela (*AP News*, 2022).

Persistence of Deadlock: Possible Reasons

Lebanon has witnessed Presidential vacuum from October 2022 till January 2025 and the change of Prime Ministers five times within the last decade itself. Covid-2019 epidemic and the Beirut Port disaster (2020) might have been circumstantial triggers, but larger structural problems may be witnessed in the small Lebanese state. Many internal factors may be cited for the failure of Lebanese Parliamentarians in their quest for a consensus. These political, economic and social reasons form a web of issues, thereby maintaining the political deadlock. Some of the reasons for such failure may be cited under the following themes: (i) Sectarianism in Lebanon; (ii) Lebanon's political set-up; (iii) skewed motivation behind allocation of cabinet portfolios, and (iv) Lebanon's weakening and pseudo-democracy. Each of the themes shall be described in some detail.

Politics of Sectarianism

Sectarianism, is perhaps, the biggest reason for repeated phases of political instability and the most prominent cause for the current Lebanese political deadlock. Lebanese politics has a distinct pattern. This 'pattern', represents a cycle of sporadic conflicts followed by negotiations and eventually a fresh political settlement amongst the conflicting sects. Such phases are intermediated with temporary phases of 'relative peace' until a new crisis triggers conflict. Sectarianism, it may be argued, remains at the heart of each of these crises (Assi, 2022).

Scholars in the other side of this argument refute the divisive nature of sectarianism and claim that ruling elites in all sects are together in their silent support of the system. This 'elite cartel', according to them, wishes to maintain the political structure. The current confessional political structure (to be explained in the next section) is often blamed for perpetuating sectarianism. The structure which has created separate representatives, is the very structure which had caused their elitism in the first place. The system has veiled loop holes whereby political leaders tend to enjoy power as well as wealth because of their access to the state's resources. Thus, all leaders, irrespective of sect want to preserve the confessional system



and, thereby, preserve their elite status –a tendency which may be called ‘elitist cartel’ by sectarian leaders (Baumann, 2016).

Despite such claims, sectarian tensions have repeatedly escalated and Lebanon witnessed an era of extreme political instability during the Civil War from 1975 which went on till 1990. A discursive analysis of the sequence of events, thereafter, clearly establishes the causal link between sectarianism and political instability in Lebanon. There might be scholarly debates over the extent to which the Civil War may be termed as ‘sectarian’ in nature. Most writings revolve around the narrative that the Civil War was a series of conflicts which did not necessarily have a sectarian basis (Hanf, 1993; Bicard, 1996; Traboulsi, 2007). Yet, writings in the other side of the debate cite evidence to reveal that militias had to actively disrupt inter-sect solidarity networks in order to impose confessional heterogeneity at the beginning of the Civil War (Joseph, 1983). Christian militias united under the banner of the Lebanese Forces, which acted as the military arm of the Lebanese Front coalition—a Maronite alliance commonly referred to as the Phalanges. They were rivalled by an alliance of nationalist, progressive Druze and Sunni movements popularly known as Lebanese National Movement (LNM) and PLO, the latter serving as the military front. Within a year, other smaller Muslim militia also joined (Lebanese Arab Army, for instance). Both sides perpetuated massacres which deepened the sectarian divide often remembered by historians as the Massacres of Karantina and Damour (Tamimova, 2018). The Shi’ites initially remained neutral, though militarization happened under Amal.

An attempt to alter the sectarian confessional system into a secular one was made during the political negotiations undertaken under the Committee for National Dialogue (CND) but was sabotaged by an alliance of Maronite leaders thus preventing reform of the system. This was to be one of the many National Dialogues which the Lebanese would undertake to solve the sectarian issue (Wählich, 2017). This flavour of sectarianism was further complicated by the entry of Syria and Israel in the Civil War. Added to it was the military activism of the Shi’ite community where the new-born Hezbollah wanted to establish the Islamic Republic of Lebanon using the Iranian model (Wiegand, 2009).

The militia politics worsened by 1985, when each of the militia groups started taking control of a part of territory and population of Lebanon and undertaking political cleansing within their respective territories. Individuals were circumstantially forced to identify with particular socio-religious status groups. Such horrors of cleansing remain in the memories of the Lebanese party negotiators till date – repeatedly becoming a cause for destabilisation.



The Civil War, which had begun on 13 April 1975 with the Maronite attack on civilians eventually ended with a 22-day long negotiation by the surviving members of the 1972 parliament who arrived at the famous Taif Agreement on 22 October 1989. This Agreement (another phase of relative peace) was also a result of the change in balance of power among sects, which was, this time, due to external pressures. It may be argued that major events like collapse of the Soviet Union and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait resulted in the United States, Syria and Saudi Arabia to pressurise and bring Lebanese Civil War to an end and concentrate on the Gulf War (Assi, 2022).

The logic of equal power distribution between Muslim and Christian sects remained at the heart of power balance and political settlement during the Taif Agreement. The power sharing formula devised during the original National Pact was reconfigured during this agreement, yet the confessional system was largely retained. The agreement clearly stated that the President should be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister a Sunni Muslim and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shi'ite Muslim. The distribution of Parliamentary seats as well as the allocation of grade one offices should be done using the confessional logic and representation. This essentially meant that sectarianism still survived. The Maronite Christian President thereby lost many executive powers which were transferred to the Parliament and the Cabinet of Ministers. Important positions and public offices were evenly distributed among Christians and Muslims, thereby, disturbing the erstwhile 6:5 ratio.

The agreement also recognized the unstable nature of confessionalism and called for a National Committee whereby deconfessionalization may be suggested. Such a committee has, however, not been formed till date (Beck et al, 2009). All militia groups were instructed to demilitarize. Looking back, this might not be a successful tactic as only a voluntary demilitarisation as a "white flag" for the remaining parties could have worked (Khoury, 2020).

Lebanon entered another phase of political instability when the balance of power changed again in 2008. The armed members of Hezbollah threatened to raid Mount Lebanon. This was an attempt by Hezbollah to dominate Lebanese affairs completely. An apparent civil war was looming on the horizon again. Under such desperate conditions the different sectarian parties were brought to the negotiating table in Qatar and the Doha Accord was signed bringing back another round of relative peace after sectarian conflict. The accord gave a sort of veto power to Hezbollah to protect its weapons, which was much coveted by Hezbollah at the time (Levi, 2016).

In the last couple of decades, the nature and type of sectarian politics has changed. On one hand, sects try to cater to their communities through the state. For instance, the Ministry of Agriculture was under a



Hezbollah supported minister, Hussein al-Hajja from 2009 till 2014. In 2011, the President of the Agriculture Syndicate accused him of selectively allocating agricultural infrastructural development projects to those regions which housed their favoured constituents, while other agriculture-dominant constituencies were ignored (Kharich, 2011).

On the other hand, sectarian leaders cater to their constituents through socio-economic welfarism. When the state fails to provide the basic welfare services, the parties and sectarian groups work at the ground level to provide community services such as welfare, health care and education to their own denomination. This creates a different kind of patron-client relationship (Baumann, 2016) where an average citizen becomes deeply aware of their affiliation. Sectarian leaders thus provide both public and private goods to their respective constituents. In reality, there are political motivations behind such community service. They do such work, sometimes at the cost of their own personal wealth, simply to gain and retain sectarian votes in the next elections, that is, to maintain leadership within their own sect (Ibid).

Lebanon has now entered its latest (and current) phase of political instability in the last decade. There has already been a Presidential vacuum from 2014 till 2016. Three factors caused the domino effect for Lebanese politics. Firstly, the economic crisis coupled with massive corruption by politicians added fuel to the fire. Secondly, instead of curbing inflation, the government imposed a series of taxes on people including the taxation of WhatsApp video calls (Amnesty International, 2020). A third glaring issue was government's mismanagement of the forest fires. Eventually, the civilians erupted on the streets in what is famously called the October 2019 revolution. People were fed up of sectarian politics.

If sectarianism can cause power imbalances, then all attempts towards diminishing sectarianism should be focussed upon. The Family Law makes inter-sect relationships more difficult. Yet, during the October 2019 revolution, average citizen used digital means to counter sectarianism. They posted their respective inter-sect marriages and relationships on social media (Kairouz and Dagher, 2020). This is a symbolic effort to fight against sectarianism.

But the ultimate balance of power has been disturbed with the independent candidates, former civil society activists and the reformists winning ten percent votes in the 2022 elections. A political settlement is yet to be achieved. One may argue that such independent candidates have contested through confessional system and, thus, may not be considered as truly independent. Yet, the deadlock continues.



Confessionalism and Difficulty in Forming Consensus

Lebanon's political set up is such that forming a consensus on a President, Prime Minister or the Speaker of Parliament is much more difficult compared to other regimes. By convention, the presidency is reserved for a Maronite Christian, the prime ministership for a Sunni Muslim, and the speakership of parliament for a Shi'ite Muslim. This requirement, which had been agreed upon over a century ago and reaffirmed during the Taif agreement, limits the candidates for Presidentship based on sect. This also causes another sectarian problem: any agenda proposed by the President is considered as a Maronite Christian agenda, any agenda by the Prime Minister a Sunni agenda, and so forth, thereby increasing sectarian conflict (Baumann, 2016).

A second concern is regarding the electoral system operational in Lebanon. The 1989 Taif Agreement had originally endorsed the twin ethos of *Sohhat Al-Tamsil Al-Siyasi*, meaning 'proper political representation' and *Al-Aysh Almushtarak* meaning 'communal co-existence' by giving equal representation to Christians and Muslims along with large electoral districts (Machnauk, 2017). The spirit of this electoral reform was however lost due to subsequent structural changes. Lebanon follows a proportional representation system. This practically means that any government which comes to power has to be a coalition government, and that such a government is not possible without support of multiple parties. Lebanon, however, practices confessional consociationalism- a system popularised by Lijphart (1977) who cited the system for providing stability to deeply divided societies (Lijphart, 1977). This entails each of those parties which come together in a coalition represent individual religious sects. However, each of the sects has historically witnessed ethnic cleansing in the hands of militia controlled by other sects. There are eighteen religious' denominations: 11 Christian, 6 Islamic and 1 Jewish sect, each of which should be represented in parliament. Thus, the system makes it difficult to form a government. The 2017 electoral law introduced the hybrid system, that is preferential voting with proportional representation system. The former makes it a competition for individuals, making it more akin to majoritarian system. The system is flawed in terms of representation as well because votes are not equally weighted across and within electoral districts (Dagher, 2022). This means rival candidates having lower number of preferential votes might get elected, whereas the one with higher number of votes contesting elections in a different district might not get elected.

Thirdly, constitutional requirements such as threshold requirements further make the consensus difficult. In proportional representation systems, threshold refers to the minimum percentage of votes which a party should receive in order to win even a single seat. High thresholds are beneficial because they filter



out smaller parties and prevent excessive fragmentation of Parliament. Lebanon has a high threshold of 7.7 percent to 20 percent, varying across electoral districts (Mourad, 2019), while most other countries have thresholds of 5 percent or below (Gallagher, 1992). But in the case of Lebanon, the confessional system ensures that the Parliament is already fragmented among 18 sects. Thus, high thresholds merely ensure wastage of votes, that is votes which do not translate into seats, as well as the tendency of parties to form pre-poll alliances (Dagher, 2022.). Thus, if no pre-poll alliance receives a clear majority, government formation is delayed.

Fourthly, the constitutionally mandated quorum is much higher in Lebanon. According to Article 49 of the Lebanese constitution, in the 128-seat parliament, Lebanon requires a quorum of two-third members, that is, the presence of at least 86 members in the first round to elect the Presidential candidate (Abiad, 2005). This quorum requirement goes down to absolute majority, that is the mandatory presence of 65 members in the subsequent rounds. It has been seen that, if there is a massive disagreement on the Presidential candidates, members choose to be absent or walk out during sessions because of which the quorum is not met for the conduct of elections (Perntis, 2022).

Fifthly, the inability of parties to impose their choice of candidates often leads to trading choice of candidates for other political favours. This kind of trading had been also done during the election of former President Aoun during 2016 (*Reuters*, 2022). Such negotiations are equally complex while forming the Cabinet since multiple considerations like size of parliamentary block, sect and other possible positions in ministry become important. The Taif agreement had ensured the possibility of rotation of seats amongst ministries which further complicated the portfolio allocations.

Skewed motivation behind lobbying for cabinet portfolios

Political parties should have ideally worked for economic development, but they seek power through ministries without responsibility. They exert their influence both through formal means, that is, through their members in state institutions and also through informal means whereby the parties serve their economic, security and political interests without being directly accountable (Khatib, 2021). Some ministries are more in demand and often result in negotiation paralysis at the time of government formation. This has also resulted in turning cabinet allocation into a spoils system (Assawat, 2018).

The Ministry of Finance is a sought-after ministry during negotiations. Hezbollah and its allies often successfully negotiate for this ministry, as happened in 2020. This ministry controls the national budget, tax collection, funding of important projects and also the future international donations for Lebanese



financial reconstruction. All other ministries need to sign off their respective funding from the Minister of Finance (Gadalla, 2021). It has been alleged that control of this ministry could help prevent scrutiny and cover-up of money being funnelled by Hezbollah from the Shi'a diaspora (Freeman, 2011).

The Future Movement had unsuccessfully lobbied for the Ministry of Social Affairs during the 2018 government formation. This ministry was seen as lucrative since a lot of international funds were received by the said ministry to rehabilitate refugees (Khatib, 2021). The ministry of energy is considered equally lucrative for negotiations by political parties because of the regular income stream coming from natural gas reserves in eastern Mediterranean (Ibid.).

The Ministry of Public Works is another lucrative ministry during government negotiations (Cammett and Issar, 2010). This became evident when US Treasury imposed sanctions over former Minister of Public Works Youssef Fenianos, who had provided millions of dollars to Hezbollah-linked companies as part of public works contracts (Gadalla, 2021). Since the Beirut port also falls under its jurisdiction, the said ministry, along with the Ministry of Finance shall receive funds for the reconstruction of the port. Analysts claim that his ministry would, eventually, control smuggling routes as well (Ibid).

In 2010, *WikiLeaks* had released a leak from the research group Stratfor which claimed that the Ministry of Agriculture was used as a cover up for shipment of ammonium nitrate, an important ingredient of fertilisers, and which was, at that time, actually used to mass produce explosives. This may shed some light on the demand for this ministry during negotiations (*WikiLeaks*, 2013).

The political apparatus: Weak democratic values

Multiple efforts have been made in Lebanon to infuse it with democratic culture. The National Pact (1943), the Taif Agreement, the Cedar Revolution (2005) and the October Revolution (2019) are some of these attempts. Yet, a weak democracy is often a long-term cause behind political instability. Now, with the advent of the Army Chief assuming the title of President, it remains to be seen whether the state takes a turn for military rule—an aspect which seems unlikely given its confessional history and control by sectarian elite.

Corruption is the first reason which gives credence to the fact that politicians merely pay lip service to democracy. Every politician simply works for his own sect and party interests instead for Lebanon as a whole. Lebanese politics has ended up being a playground for competing elite interests. The evidence of loss of legitimacy of the democratic governments may be seen in the form of October 2019 revolution,



where corruption was amongst the top issues of mass protest. This is also reflected in international indicators such as *Corruption Perception Index*, a global indicator of corruption published by Transparency International. In 2021, Lebanon scored 24 on a scale from 0 (highly corrupt) to 100 (very clean), compared to a global average of 43, ranking 149th out of 180 countries (Transparency International, 2024). That same year, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched an Anti-Corruption Project to prevent and combat corruption in the country (UNDP, 2023). By 2024, Lebanon's score had slipped to 22, placing it 154th in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (Transparency International, 2024).

Another reason might be the absence of an independent judiciary which could not put a sufficient check on the power of the political elite. On March 2023, 38 countries issued a joint statement presented by Australia to the United Nations Human Rights Council condemning interference in the domestic investigation of the August 4, 2020 blasts (*Human Rights Watch*, 2023). Nearly four years after the Beirut port explosion, the domestic investigation on the loss of life and property remains stalled. *Human Rights Watch* in its 2024 World Report on Lebanon reports how Judge Tarek Bitar, the lead investigator made multiple attempts to overcome legal barriers, and yet was stalled by corrupt politicians and the lead public prosecutor Ghassan Oueidat under the charges of usurping power. Nine parliamentarians even introduced two draft bills for strengthening of independence of judiciary on March 28, 2023, yet they could not be passed because of the vacuum in the Presidency (*Human Rights Watch*, 2024).

A weak party system is another reason for further weakening of democracy. Many political parties like the Lebanese Forces, Marada, Amal and Hezbollah originated as militia groups (Sensenig-Dabbous, 2024). A transition into so called democratic parties after the civil war in 1989 is weak at best. In practice, they often revert to their former militia activism whenever the context permits. They help extend their connections as well as resources to their constituent government officials at all levels—a phenomenon known as *Wasta* in Lebanese dialect (Ibid). Otherwise, they mostly work for organising voters for syndicates (professional associations) and student union elections (Ibid.). Some dub this practice as their inability to recover from their erstwhile war-time practices, others call it as a challenge for parties which also faced other challenges such as the built-in system which prevented true partisan competition or built in financial incentives to preserve the status quo (Khazen, 2023).

A fourth reason might be the weakness of the national army. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) has been supposedly receiving donations of training, arms as well as ammunition from the British and the Americans (Illiaik, 2023). This not only hints at the weakness of the armed forces but also its vulnerability



to foreign influence. This vulnerability has evidence in Lebanese history. Back in 2008, for instance, Hezbollah did not have any official stake in the government. Its forces proved to be stronger than the army and it had taken over Beirut. It gained a political victory by negotiating for sizable seats in the government in exchange for military withdrawal in the Doha agreement. Such treaties leading to new stakeholders could be a hindrance to any democracy. The transition was clearly from an idealistic revolutionary militia group to a democratic welfare party as can be seen from 1985 manifesto and open letter to the 2009 manifesto (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). This supposed weakness is now bound to change with the new President claiming that the armed forces need to have the sole control of weaponry, thereby hinting at Hezbollah (Yahya, 2025). This demand to disarm, however, seems to be rejected by Hezbollah (*Al-Jazeera*, July 30, 2025). Hezbollah itself seems to have been militarily weakened given the elimination of its key leaders and the Lebanese-Israeli War of 2024-25 (Gritten, 2025; Yahya, 2025).

Conclusion:

A thorough understanding of the political and media discourse of Lebanon has revealed that sectarianism, and the legitimization of sectarianism through confessionalism and consociationalism are the root causes of past and present political deadlocks in Lebanon. Each of the parties wish the furtherance of the religious denomination they represent. Added to this is the problem of politicians who are evading the justice system, engaging in corruption and filling their personal pockets while the state of Lebanon is on a downhill path towards an economic collapse. Instead of finding a structural solution, political parties are engaging in patronage based welfarism, whereby they are only serving their own community at the ground level, further cementing sectarianism. All these domestic weaknesses, have been exploited time and again by international actors, who either declare war (as did Israel), or send their alleged proxies to influence politics (as did Iran), or support local players to help a President favourable to their foreign policy come to power (as Saudi Arabia and the United States are criticised for doing). Each of the international geo-political actors have their own respective agendas. We may, therefore, conclude while the political instability is a result of structural, political, economic, sectarian and geo-strategic reasons, yet its speedy resolution is necessary for its supposed IMF deal as well as to prevent it from becoming a failed state.

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