

# LEBANON

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Lebanon has now held two consecutive, internationally monitored and democratic parliamentary elections across the entirety of its territory. This was made possible by the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the southern part of the country in the year 2000 and the removal of the Syrian military in the spring of 2005. Whereas the last elections in mid-2005 were based on the election law of 2000, which was significantly influenced by Damascus, the elections in 2009 can be considered to be the first manifestation of a truly independent, post-civil war Lebanese republic. The election law of 2008 is itself an expression of a gradual transition to full sovereignty in the fields of democratic decision-making and free and fair partisan competition. It was as much the result of a struggle between entrenched power elites and civil society activists on the one hand, as it was the result of a longstanding tradition in Lebanon of foreign intervention, both by the country's regional neighbours and by international power brokers in Europe and the United States, on the other. The new election law represents a core element of the Doha Agreement of May 2008, which was hammered out by the governing, pro-Western "14<sup>th</sup> of March Coalition" and the opposition, made up of the pro-Syrian "8<sup>th</sup> of March Coalition" and its Christian partner, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). Lebanese democracy currently finds itself in a phase of continuous transition. The trajectory of this process remains unclear because of the multiplicity of conflict factors influencing political change in the country. The continuously shifting dialectical relationship between the institutions of democracy and the partisan players which shape them is perhaps the only constant within the Lebanese context at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Despite the sporadic phases of violence, the underlying culture of corruption and the pervasive traditions of clientelism which have dominated politics in Lebanon since its independence, the country has been gradually moving in the direction of a competitive democracy and the rule of law in the period following the civil war, which ended in 1990. As much a symbol of political pluralism and multicultural tolerance as a sign of the inherent weaknesses in the Lebanese political system, religious sectarianism, linked to clan-based loyalty networks, remains the predominant factor when analyzing politics in Lebanon. The globalization of economic, social, cultural and political interaction has, however, begun to take its toll on traditional Lebanese politicking.

Lebanon has one of the world's largest diaspora populations, which is becoming increasingly skilled in leveraging the political system back home. The intervention of regional and international players – e.g., the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the negotiations for World Trade Organization (WTO) membership – and the impact of global civil society have begun to gradually whittle down the dominant position of the local *zu'ama* (clan overlords) and undermine traditional forms of confessional, regional and family-based loyalty and political affiliation. Lebanon seems to be on the way to becoming a modern democracy.

## I. GENERAL INFORMATION

*Political system* Under the constitution of the First Republic dating from May 1926, as well as under the constitution of the Second Republic, as amended through the Taif Agreement and approved by parliament in November 1989, Lebanon is a parliamentary democracy with a directly elected legislature. Following the civil war (1975–1989), the political elites agreed that, analogous to a model followed in other democracies whose upper house protects the interests of demographically disproportionate provinces or regions, the Lebanese senate was to be confessionally segmented, whereas the lower house was to be non-sectarian. The upper house of parliament has yet to be introduced, thus the lower house is divided along religious and denominational lines, reserving half of the 128 seats for Muslims and half for Christians on a non-proportional basis in order to protect the rights of Lebanon's minority Christians. Because there has been no census taken in Lebanon since 1932, the division of the two blocks of 64 Muslim and 64 Christian reserved seats between the 18 officially recognized religious denominations is based on rough estimates along the following lines: reserved Muslim seats (Sunni 27, Shi'ia 27, Druze 8, Alawaites 2); reserved Christian seats (Maronites 34, Greek Orthodox 14, Greek Catholics 8, Armenian Orthodox 5, Armenian Catholics 1, Protestants 1); and minorities 1.

On paper, the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government are independent of each other and thus guarantee a "checks and balances" arrangement by which each branch can regulate the other. The directly elected, confessionally balanced, parliament elects the members of the executive branch, i.e., the Council of Ministers – which for its part must also be confessionally balanced – and the president of the republic. The president and the Council of Ministers share control of the armed forces. The most important institution within the judicial branch of government is the Constitutional Council, which can interpret the constitution, observe the constitutionality of laws and settle disputes arising from the election of the speaker of parliament, as well as the election of the president and parliament itself. Half of the members of the confessionally balanced Constitutional Council are appointed by the Council of Ministers, and half by parliament.

According to the National Pact of 1943 (an unwritten gentlemen's agreement between the country's three largest denominations, the Maronites, the Sunnis and the Shi'ia), the president must be Maronite, the prime minister Sunni, the speaker of parliament Shi'ia, and the deputy speaker Greek Orthodox. Until the end of the civil war the seats in parliament were divided based on a ratio of 6 to 5 in favour of the Christian religious denominations. The Taif Agreement reduced the power of the Maronite president by allowing the prime minister to be directly responsible to parliament, as is the case in most parliamentary democracies. It weakened the political protection of the Christian minority by dividing the seats in parliament according to a ratio of 5 to 5. Parliamentary elections take place every four years; the speaker of parliament is elected based on this four-year term. The president is elected for a period of six years and cannot serve two consecutive terms.

*Constitution* The current constitution was revised for a last time in 1990. It determines that Lebanon is a republic with a multiparty system based on multiple religious denominations, often referred to as "confessions" or "sects". The current system of constitutionality must be seen as a combination of the original document introduced at the beginning of the First Republic in 1926, as revised by the National Pact of 1943 and the Taif Agreement of 1989. From a purely legal standpoint, Lebanese democracy largely lives up to the benchmarks set by the West. It foresees full equality for all its citizens before the law (article 7 of the constitution); establishes a system of checks and balances between the three branches of government (as described above); guarantees free, fair and competitive elections (arts. 21 and 24); and protects the rights of property ownership (art. 15), freedom of religion (art. 9) and freedom of expression and association (art. 13). Analogous to the European system of positive action, which promotes minority group rights and diversity within a consociational context (Lijphart 2004, p. 97), the constitutional system also foresees an upper house of parliament which would protect the interests of the 14 Christian denominations (art. 22), while at the same time abolishing the system of confessionalism, which up until the Taif Agreement had divided seats in the lower house between Christians and Muslims, as described above. It is

important to note that as of 1989 the Republic of Lebanon intended to gradually phase out confessionalism. "With the election of the first Chamber of Deputies on a national, not sectarian, basis, a senate shall be formed and all the spiritual families shall be represented in it. The senate's powers shall be confined to crucial issues." (Taif 2009, II.7.).

Many of the lofty goals incorporated in Lebanese constitutional law are mitigated or even undermined in practice however. A system of institutionalized censorship prevents full freedom of expression. Discrimination against women with respect to personal safety (e.g., honour killings) and traditional habits reserving most rights for the husband and father, confessional family status laws and a lack of gender-based positive action – similar to the regime in place for religious denominations – weakens the concept of equality before the law. The implementation of the 1909 Ottoman Law of Association and the lack of a modern party law (to be discussed later) has led to archaic campaign and electoral procedures; the predominant confessional system gives religious hierarchies a variety of resources to suppress dissent within the ranks of their respective denominations; and finally, the conflict with Israel has led to widespread official and private forms of discrimination and vilification of adherents of the Jewish faith, a practice which theoretically should be prosecuted by the government institutions set up to combat religious strife and promote confessional tolerance between the officially recognized religious denominations.

Lebanon is a country of contradictions. While enjoying a high level of liberal tolerance and freedom, it simultaneously undermines the democratic mechanisms and institutions foreseen in its laws and constitution. Viewed in a regional context, the Lebanese media is comparatively freewheeling, critical and independent of state control. Schools and universities permit a high level of critical discourse, which led to the educational sector becoming one of the few islands of freedom of expression during the long decades of Syrian occupation. Lebanese publishers attract authors and translators from around the world because of the country's long tradition of freedom of the arts. The internet has remained completely unregulated, enabling especially young users to circumvent the official censorship of books, music, films and controversial images. Civil society is highly developed, awash with foreign funding from the West and from neighbouring Middle Eastern sponsors in the Arab Gulf and Iran. Finally, the multiplicity of competing power elites allows even the most controversial groups – e.g., those working critically on issues related to religion, gender or sexuality – to operate free of repression, in most cases fearing at worst an uncooperative response from the Ministry of the Interior's section on non-profit associations when they apply for official status as a non-governmental organization (NGO).

*State  
of democracy*

In the period between the spring of 2004 and the present, Lebanese politics has shifted dramatically, and – most would agree – irreversibly. Prior to 2004, the political violence typical of the first decade of this century was directed largely against members of the Shi'ia (Ali Hussein Salah, August 2003; Ghaleb Awali, 19 July 2004) and Palestinian (Mohammed Jihad Jibril, May 2002) population groups, along with the car-bombing directed at the pro-Syrian, Maronite Lebanese Forces leader Elie Hobeika, who was assassinated shortly before testifying about his role in the 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre.

The tables turned in August of 2004 with the now infamous meeting between Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and Syrian President Bashar Assad, during which the Lebanese government was purportedly forced to extend the six-year term of President Emile Lahoud by an additional three years. This was followed by the United Nations Security Council resolution 1559 later that month, which called for the removal of all Syrian troops from Lebanon. In September of 2004, the Lebanese parliament extended the president's term, immediately after which the prime minister and many key members of the council of ministers announced their resignation. In October 2004 an assassination attempt against the anti-Syrian, Druze former minister of communications, Marwan Hamadeh, failed. This marked a shift away from the killing of members of pro-Syrian groups to the assassination of anti-Syrian leaders in Lebanon, a trend that has continued up until the present. The assassination of Rafik Hariri in February 2005 was a political watershed which marked a paradigm shift of sorts in Lebanese politics.

The most significant changes since 2004 can be traced back to various factors related to a culture of oppression and censorship on the part of the Syrian occupation and its domestic allies. Key Lebanese and international human rights organizations continue to document numerous examples of a lack of concern for the principles of rule of law and the international human rights agenda on the part of the Lebanese authorities, as well as private individuals and institutions. However, two thresholds have been crossed in the last five years with respect to political taboos considered untouchable until recently; first, discourse on the role of the Syrian occupation until 2005 and the nature of the current regime in Damascus. Secondly, following the war in summer 2006, the position of Hezbollah as an independent, non-governmental resistance movement in the south of Lebanon and the role of its political and military leadership throughout the country are no longer off limits. Today freedom of expression has indeed become largely unrestricted, with the important exception of official censorship of the arts and media, and of course the sensitive topic of the country's troubled relationship with the state of Israel.

*Separation of powers* As described above, the Lebanese democratic system is divided into three branches, based on the principle of political and confessional checks and balances. During the period of the French Mandate, the power of the president was enshrined in the original constitution of 1926. It was intended to protect the numerically dominant Christian population within an overwhelmingly Muslim Middle Eastern context. Leading up to independence in 1943, the National Pact informally codified Maronite control of the presidency, allotting the position of prime minister and speaker of parliament to the minority Muslim population, Sunni and Shi'ia respectively. It strengthened the power of the Council of Ministers and its president, the Sunni prime minister. Finally, the powers of the judiciary were based on the 1920s combination of civil law, Islamic jurisprudence and antiquated Ottoman legal principles. Guarantees that the judiciary is founded as an independent entity, subject only to the law, can be found in art. 20 of the constitution. The Court of Cassation, or Supreme Court, hears appeals from the lower courts and adjudicates disputes between exceptional and ordinary courts, or between two types of exceptional courts (e.g., labour, land, military and juvenile courts, as well as the customs committee). Created in 1990, the Constitutional Council judges the constitutionality of governmental acts and adjudicates election disputes. Finally, the Lebanese principle of equality between religions is clearly documented through its system of ecclesiastical family status courts, for Jews, Christians and Muslims (Judiciary 2009).

*National assembly* As previously indicated, the Lebanese parliament has grown significantly in power since the end of the civil war. The legislature is now divided equally between Christians and Muslims using the following breakdown of denominations (Parliament 2009). The unicameral Lebanese assembly exercises, according to the Taif Agreement, "full control over government policy and activities".

**Table 1 | RESERVED CONFESSIONAL SEATS IN PARLIAMENT (OUT OF 128)**

Religious denomination	First Republic	Second Republic
Maronite	30	34
Greek Orthodox	11	14
Greek Catholic	6	8
Armenian Orthodox	4	5
Armenian Catholic	1	1
Protestant	1	1

Continuation of Table 1

Religious denomination	First Republic	Second Republic
Minorities	1	1
<b>Total Christian</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>64</b>
Sunni	20	27
Shi'ia	19	27
Druze	6	8
Alawite	0	2
<b>Total Muslim</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Total seats</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>128</b>

Although the president, as head of state, still appoints the prime minister, as head of the Council of Ministers, the traditionally Sunni prime minister is now directly responsible to parliament. The speaker of parliament, who is traditionally Shi'ia, enjoys privileges uncommon in a parliamentary democracy. He calls parliament into session and, according to the Taif Agreement, "No urgent bill presented to the Chamber of Deputies may be issued unless it is included in the agenda of a public session and read in such a session" (II.A.) by the speaker. Thus, the current speaker of parliament, Amal leader Nabih Berri, can prevent the legislature from taking action on any law, including decisions related to the government's annual budget.

Parliamentary elections in Lebanon are highly complex and the result of constantly shifting confessional, political, tactical and personal alliances. The impact of the regional and international powers on the country's political system also plays a major role. In technical terms, the electoral districts are strongly influenced by gerrymandering and vary in size from election to election, depending on the election law in effect at the time. The number of MPs elected from the multimember districts foreseen by all election laws can range from as few as two to well over ten. The "first-past-the-post" (FPP) or plurality principle, typical of the Lebanese electoral system, allows candidates to win in districts in which they receive significantly less than 50 per cent of the votes cast. The combination of a multimember district and the plurality system, on the one hand, with reserved seats for the respective religious denominations, on the other, leads to a situation in which coalitions can shift from district to district, forcing traditional opponents (and in some cases former civil war enemies) to form alliances of convenience in order to secure seats in parliament for their respective party, religion, regional power broker or extended family members. Alliances in parliament are therefore transitory and tactical in nature (IFES 2009a).

For the purposes of this survey, the comparison between the last two elections will focus on the two major coalitions which have formed durable alliances in the period between 2005 and 2009 and are expected to remain partners in the foreseeable future, i.e., the 14<sup>th</sup> of March (FM, PSP, LF) on the one hand, and the 8<sup>th</sup> of March's coalition with General Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (Hezbollah, Amal, FPM), on the other.

**Table 2 | SEATS IN PARLIAMENT (OUT OF 128)**

<b>Parties/ party alliances</b>	<b>After 2005 election</b>	<b>Prior to 2009 election</b>	<b>After 2009 election</b>
<b>14<sup>th</sup> of March coalition (predominantly Sunni, Druze, Christian); PPM</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>71</b>
Future Movement (Sunni); PPM/GS	36	34	30
Progressive Socialist Party (Druze); GJ	15	15	12
Lebanese Forces (Christian); GJ	6	5	8
Tripoli Bloc (Sunni); GJ	4	2	2
Kataeb (Christian); GJ	3	1	5
Zahle in the Heart (mixed); GJ	0	0	3
Independents (including individuals and allied minor parties)	8	10	11
<b>8<sup>th</sup> of March coalition and FPM (predominantly Shi'ia and Christian); O</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>57</b>
Hezbollah (Shi'ia); GJ 2005, O as of autumn 2006, unclear after June 2009 elections	14	14	12
Amal (Shi'ia); GJ 2005, O as of fall 2006, unclear after June 2009 elections	15	15	13
Free Patriotic Movement (Christian); O	21	22	18
Marada (Christian); O	0	0	4
Syrian National Social Party (mixed); O	2	2	2
Independents (including individuals and allied minor parties)	4	6	8

*Note: The change in the size of the coalitions between the summer of 2005 and spring of 2009 is the result of political assassinations, natural deaths and shifting partisan alliances. Two seats were vacant at the time of the 2009 election.*

*Abbreviations: PPM/GS = party of the prime minister and senior partner of a coalition government*

*GJ = party is junior partner in the government | O = party is in opposition.*

*Sources: IFES 2009b; Lebanon News 2009.*

The 8<sup>th</sup> of March-FPM coalition was a result of a "Memorandum of Understanding" negotiated between Hezbollah and General Aoun in early 2006. It followed a shift in electoral behaviour which has been described by the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) as a transition from a "super-local elections" tradition to the "bulldozer lists" system. Prior to the Syrian withdrawal, the Lebanese multimember district plurality electoral system had encouraged voters to select candidates based on the "opportunity to vote for the most appealing local personalities across the parties and confessions ..." The only exception to this general rule was the Hezbollah constituency, which had always tended to vote as a solid bloc. With the assassination of Hariri and the campaign to end Syrian occupation, elections tended to be "run for the first time on almost entirely "national" issues with voter's choices of candidates dominated by the list bloc with which they identified. Voting for individual candidates gave way to partisan voting for one bloc for all available seats. The electoral system now worked in favour of well-organized parties or groups of candidates, enabling them to win all seats in a constituency, excluding other groups from any seats at all and blocking minorities in a constituency from electing any of the representatives they desired" (Assessment 2008, p. 20).

The ensuing debate on electoral reform was a direct result of the need to counter this trend towards “bulldozer lists”, which were able to secure electoral majorities, and in some cases orchestrate a clean sweep of all available seats with slightly over 50 per cent of the votes in a given multimember district. In the fall of 2005, set in motion by a grand coalition made up of all major parliamentary parties except the FPM, the National Commission for Electoral Law Reform began the process of drafting a comprehensive new election law, which was presented to the public in June 2006. Based on the stakeholder process, the National Commission (often referred to as the Boutros Commission after former Foreign Minister Fouad Boutros, who headed the commission) allowed political parties, independent experts, NGOs, universities and other civil society actors to play a direct role in drafting the new law. The Boutros Draft proposed, among other things: the introduction of a mixed plurality/proportional electoral system; out-of-country voting; lowering the voting age to 18; a women’s quota; an independent electoral commission; strict and enforceable guidelines for campaign financing and the media; elections on a single day throughout the entire country; and the introduction of pre-printed official ballots. Parliamentary debate on the Boutros Draft was prevented by the war in summer 2006 and the ensuing crisis between Hezbollah and the FPM, on the one hand, and the 14<sup>th</sup> of March on the other.

The protracted crisis following the war with Israel has had a detrimental effect on Lebanese democracy. Beginning in the post-war period in the autumn of 2006, the crisis culminated in the sectarian fighting in west Beirut and the Chouf Mountains in May of 2008, in which Hezbollah and its allies were able to occupy the predominantly Sunni parts of the capital for several days, but were thrown back by the Druze forces supporting the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) in the ensuing “battle of the mountain”. The conflicting parties agreed on a new election law during the post-conflict negotiations in the Qatari capital of Doha. This so called Doha Election Law (No. 25/2008, issued on 9 October 2008) contains few of the far-reaching reforms foreseen by the Boutros Draft. Local and international experts and commentators concur that, with the exception of the introduction of elections on one day, little has changed between the campaign in 2005 and 2009. The watered-down provisions on campaign spending and media fairness in the Doha Election Law have proven unenforceable. Out-of-country voting and the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18 were postponed until 2013. The gender quota for women, common in many neighbouring Arab states, was rejected. Most importantly, the pre-printed government ballots, which would have provided a rigorous instrument for combating electoral fraud, were rejected in a rare act of harmony between the 14<sup>th</sup> of March and the 8<sup>th</sup> of March-FPM coalition.

## II. PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM

### II.1 Party System

The Lebanese party system is considered to be the most democratic in the Arab world. Following the end of Israeli and Syrian occupation in the years 2000 and 2005 respectively, parties have been able to compete openly in comparatively free and fair elections throughout the country.

Neither the original constitution of 1926, the National Pact (1943) or the Taif Agreement (1989) foresaw the existence of political parties. Political party organizations have developed by default, based on the need to perpetuate and codify the electoral list system, which is the actual legal foundation of the multiparty regime in Lebanon. Like all other non-profit associations, political parties are governed by the Ottoman Law of Association of 1909. Art. 13 of the constitution guarantees freedom of association and thus indirectly the right to organize political parties.

*Legal regulation*

There is also no law specifically regulating political parties in Lebanon, although experts and civil society activists have been demanding a party law for some time. The nature of the Lebanese electoral system had traditionally made political parties, as they are commonly perceived in a Western sense, irrelevant. The clientelistic and confessional character of Lebanese society had led most political leaders to rely more on their extended family allegiances, respective religious denominations (including the confessional family status courts), regional loyalty networks and the

flagrant use of illegal practices such as vote-buying and the rigging of polling stations, rather than on partisan political structures, ideologically based party programmes and detailed election platforms. This began to change as of the election in 2005.

As mentioned above, political leaders and movements are permitted to register with the Ministry of the Interior as non-profit associations under the 1909 Ottoman Law of Association. As in the case of all associations, they enjoy the right to autonomously manage and administer their finances, open bank accounts and accept funding and gifts. Parties are obliged to keep three sets of files: first on their membership; second on the decisions of their executive committee or board and the activities of their association; and third on their finances and expenditures, which should be made available to the authorities whenever so requested. An additional updated file must be kept, which includes any change to the bylaws or the party organization. Political parties, like all associations, must submit annual copies of these files to the Ministry of the Interior.

*Relevant parties* In the period between the crisis of 2004 and the elections of 2009, the number of relevant political parties has remained largely unchanged. Considering that political parties in a Western sense did not exist in Lebanon until recently, the introduction of modern, broad-based party structures in the period following the end of Syrian occupation represents a significant stride in the direction of Western-style modernization. Despite its anti-Western ideological bent, Hezbollah has demonstrated a unique ability to develop a wide range of modern party structures analogous to the social welfare and political mobilization strategies employed by populist mass parties in Western Europe in the 1920s and 1930s.

Listed here according to the size of their parliamentary factions before the 2009 elections, the following political parties can be considered relevant:

- Tayyar al-Mustaqbal (Future Movement [FM]);
- Al-Tayyar al-Watani al-Hurr (Free Patriotic Movement [FPM]);
- Al Hizb al-Taquadummi al-Ishtiraki (Progressive Socialist Party [PSP]);
- Hezbollah (Party of God);
- Harakat Amal (Amal Movement);
- Al-Quwwat al-Lubnaniya (Lebanese Forces [LF]);
- Tashnak (Armenian Revolutionary Federation);
- Al-Hizb al-Souri al-Qawmi al-Ijtima'i (Syrian National Social Party [SNSP]);
- Hizb al-Kataeb (Kataeb Party).

Other, smaller parties, movements and electoral lists are largely dependent on either the 14<sup>th</sup> of March or 8<sup>th</sup> of March-FPM alliance leaders in order to get their candidates elected. This does not necessarily assume a relationship of dependency. As in the case of the Greek Orthodox leader Michel Murr in the Metn region, both leading blocs have competed for his confessional clout in order to secure the success of their respective lists. On the other hand, although the Marada party had no seats in parliament between 2005 and 2009, its status as the "personal party" of the powerful northern Maronite Franjeh clan, its alliance both with the FPM and Hezbollah's 8<sup>th</sup> of March coalition, the gerrymandering of electoral districts contained within the Doha Election Law along with the personal friendship between its current leader, former Minister of the Interior Suleiman Franjeh, and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, collectively ensured that Marada's political fall from grace was only temporary.

*Origins of parties* Many of the significant political parties in Lebanon were founded as militias during the Lebanese civil war, including the Lebanese Forces, Amal, Hezbollah, and Marada. Others, such as the Kataeb, the Syrian National Social Party (SNSP) and the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) were clearly ideological from the outset and were strongly influenced by the European left or extreme-right in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. Both the Future Movement and the Free Patriotic Movement are products of a new generation of post-civil war, neo-liberal reform movements and bear the stamp of their



respective founders, Rafik Hariri and General Michel Aoun. The Armenian Tashnak party, along with two smaller progressive Armenian parties, are products of liberal and social-democratic nationalism in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and were imported to Lebanon following the Armenian genocide.

All Lebanese political parties are primarily the result of patronage relationships and are built on either a nationalist or ethno-religious basis. With the exception of Hezbollah, Lebanese parties have essentially been vehicles for groups of individual candidates to pursue their ends. In the case of Hezbollah, the party has long been an important mechanism for the political integration of voters. As described above, starting with the elections of 2005, Lebanese political parties have been gradually reinventing themselves and taking on many of the attributes of modern political organization along the lines of Western role models.

Owing to the nature of the Lebanese electoral system, up until the current election political parties had played only a limited role in voter mobilization. Voters' ties are much closer to their respective members of parliament, who interact with them through a complex network of family clan, confessional, regional and personal relationships. It remains to be seen if the modernization process, which has accompanied the 2009 election campaign, will lead to more stable relationships between voters and parties in the period following the elections. *Voter-party relations*

## II.2 Individual Parties

According to the 1909 Ottoman Law of Association, parties that have registered with the Ministry of the Interior are required to keep membership statistics. This data is, however, not publicly accessible. Because of the predominance of the electoral lists, based on the confessionally segmented, multimember-districts, plurality system – in place in both the 2005 and 2009 elections – party membership remains largely irrelevant. *Party membership*

Those parties that have registered with the Ministry of the Interior are required to have statutes and update the ministry on any changes thereof. Considering the limited relevance of party organizations between elections, and the primary significance of the ties between individual members of parliament and local family clan, religious and regional leaders during the elections, these statutes remain largely unknown by both the party membership and its voters. *Party organization*

Lebanese parties depend on the sectarian, family loyalty and clientelistic structures that help their members get elected. The regional, women's, youth, student and professional organizations typical of most Lebanese parties have two functions: first, to help disseminate resources and connections to government officials on all levels (termed "wasta" in the Lebanese dialect); and second, to organize voters during elections to university student unions and the so-called syndicates, i.e., associations of architects, lawyers and other professionals. Lebanese parties are well organized in those regions in which their confessional base is located. Thus Amal and Hezbollah have well-developed party structures in the southern suburbs of Beirut; Future's party organization concentrates on west Beirut, whereas the Christian parties compete for support in the eastern part of the capital and the suburbs to the east and north. The same holds true for the rest of the country, where the dominant Druze, Sunni, Shi'ia, Eastern Orthodox, and Armenian parties use their "wasta" and welfare networks to secure the support of important families and religious leaders. The exception to this rule is the Maronite community, which is currently split between the LF and Kataeb, on the one hand, and the FPM and Marada, on the other.

One significant trend, which has become even more important with the decision to phase in absentee or out-of-country voting (OCV) between 2009 and 2013, is the role of the partisan diaspora organizations. All relevant parties maintain offices in those parts of the world in which their confessional and family clan-based constituencies are located, including many countries in Western Europe, North and South America, West Africa, the Arab Gulf states and Australia. The practice of flying potential

voters to Lebanon was already underway on a large scale in 2005, and appears to have increased in 2009. The Doha Election Law makes provisions for OCV, which should be finally possible during the next election in 2013. This will both enhance the role of the diaspora populations and potentially introduce more stable voter-party relationships because of the difficult logistical nature of organizing absentee voter campaigns around the world. Currently, migration experts estimate that approximately 20 to 25 per cent of all eligible voters live outside of Lebanon on a semi-permanent or permanent basis.

*Societal entrenchment* Because of the close ties most political party elites maintain to religiously based charitable organizations, as well as to leaders within their respective denominations – including the family status courts – ties to civil society are inherent to the work of political parties. Many powerful Lebanese families not only play a major role in electoral politics, but also fund or even maintain NGOs, often bearing their name. The leading Lebanese political families also play an important role in the fields of the media, higher education and sponsored research. Ties between foreign national and international NGOs, Lebanese civil society and the relevant Lebanese political parties are less transparent. Along with the important role that Middle Eastern – e.g., Arab Gulf and Iranian – donors play in this respect, one should also factor in the funds, training and global networking potential offered by civil society actors from the European Union, North America, and other Western sources.

*Internal decision-making* All Lebanese parties are strongly hierarchical and based on patronage-style distribution of resources and influence peddling (“wasta”). Because of the electoral system (multimember districts, plurality-based, confessionally segmented) the selection of candidates is automatically geared to the needs of the respective religious denominations, extended family loyalty structures and regional power elites. As will be discussed below, ideological considerations, if at all relevant, rarely play a role in candidate selection or the success of party lists during elections.

*Stability of party ideology/ programmes* As of the summer of 2004, Lebanon has been gradually divided into two competing camps under the leadership of the 14<sup>th</sup> of March, on the one hand, and the 8<sup>th</sup> of March-FPM alliance, on the other. This trend has enhanced the role of basic ideological differences on a superficial level. Whereas the 14<sup>th</sup> of March claims to support free competitive markets, the rule of law, structural reform, and individual freedoms, the 8<sup>th</sup> of March-FPM alliance champions the ideals of anti-corruption, regional anti-imperialist solidarity and a sceptical approach to the intentions of the United States and the European Union. Party names have remained stable; however, the names and make-up of electoral coalitions shift constantly. In 2005, for example, the FM, PSP, and Kataeb teamed up with their archrival Hezbollah in order to defeat Aoun’s FPM in the district of Baabda-Aley (IFES 2009a). In 2009, the Greek Orthodox leader Michel Murr, a former FPM ally, has joined forces with the 14<sup>th</sup> of March in the hotly contested mixed confessional district of Metn.

*Communication* For the first time in Lebanese electoral history, in 2009 candidates had to reveal their budgets for communications and advertising. The Doha Election Law foresees a ceiling per candidate for electoral advertising. List spending is divided among individual candidates. Campaign advertising in Lebanon is highly professional, as is the cultural sophistication of public relations and advertising in general. Along with billboards and adverts in the print media, a limited amount of money is now being spent on radio and television advertising. For the first time a serious attempt is also being made to monitor the content of campaign advertising. Along with guaranteeing fair and equal access for all candidates, the Doha Election Law has declared the impartiality of the media as a key government requirement. In articles 67 and 68 (1) it states that “[T]he public media shall remain impartial in all phases of the electoral process. They may not carry out any activity that might be considered in favour of any candidate or list at the expense of another candidate or list... All media shall observe the freedom of expression of opinions and trends of thought in the private audio-visual media during the electoral campaign so that fairness, balance and impartiality among candidates and lists would be guaranteed.”

As emphasized elsewhere in this survey, the nature of the Lebanese electoral system and the confessional and clientelist character of society in general severely undermine the power of political parties. In order to get elected and to wield power between elections, MPs must maintain close links to their confessional base, service the needs of the powerful families and regional elites who support them and continuously develop ties to candidates of other parties and confessions in their respective districts.

*Relationship  
between party  
and parliamentary  
groups*

### III. GENERAL ASSESSMENT

The state of Lebanese democracy in general, and the situation of the political parties in particular, is currently difficult to assess. The persistent waves of violence which had plagued the country between the passing of UN resolution 1559 in August of 2004 and the Doha conference in May of 2008 have currently subsided. Lebanon has enjoyed a comparatively peaceful and quiet period lasting more than a year, a considerable achievement in view of its development during the first eight years of this decade. Lebanese civil society is vibrant and is not only pressuring the government and the two respective party alliances to make progress in areas as diverse as sustainable energy, women's rights and labour migration, but many NGOs have also developed policy initiatives of their own, including full-blown draft laws and proposals for executive decrees. Compared to conditions in other Arab countries, the media and universities in Lebanon are bastions of freedom of thought and expression. Lebanon enjoys one of the highest densities of international NGOs in the entire developing world. With the exception of the thorny issue of the country's relationship to Israel, all political thresholds have been crossed, all taboos dismantled. The possibility of a rapprochement between the United States and Iran, following the election of US President Barack Obama in November of 2008, promises to potentially defuse the core conflict between the 14<sup>th</sup> of March alliance and predominantly Shi'ia 8<sup>th</sup> of March coalition. The Turkish-sponsored peace negotiations between Syria and Israel could open the door to negotiations on a final disarmament of Hezbollah following a comprehensive regional peace agreement between Lebanon's southern neighbour and the Arab world.

Despite these promising regional and security-related developments, the Lebanese political party system remains in a state of crisis. A major stumbling block in the path towards a modern and fully democratic political system is the lack of a truly democratic electoral law. The promising reforms codified in the Boutros Draft of 2006 have been largely rejected by leaders in both camps. Those political movements and electoral alliances which have chosen to codify their structures and become officially recognized parties have been forced to do so based on an antiquated Ottoman law that can celebrate its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year.

Ironically, the conflicting trend toward ideologically based electoral blocs, and the protracted battle between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> of March coalitions between the elections of 2005 and 2009 are both signs of partisan modernization. Not only have the two coalitions transcended the historical fault lines traditionally dividing Christians and Muslims, the trend towards consolidated, so-called "bulldozer lists", highlighting differences on the national and regional levels, has led to the professionalization of party structures. If Lebanon's political parties are to overcome – or at least to balance out – the current dominance of family clans, confessional loyalties and regional power brokers, they must further develop and refine their nascent party programmes. Furthermore, truly competitive elections which transcend the Christian-Muslim divide will require detailed election platforms, thus allowing voters to not only assess the general beliefs and values of any given party or list of candidates, but also the actual implementation of these declared goals between elections. A prerequisite for this lies in the field of parliamentary and administrative transparency. Publicly accessible voting records of all parliamentarians, both in plenary sessions and on committee levels, would enable citizens to judge the actual performance of their elected officials. The introduction of proportional representation in a non-confessional lower house, coupled with the use of official, pre-printed electoral ballots, would go a long way towards undermining the blatant fraud still prevalent in Lebanese elections.

As foreseen by the Taif Agreement, the minority rights of the Christian population could be protected by a senate, the election of which would be based on confessionally reserved seats. Finally, the lowering of the voting age to 18, the introduction of gender quotas and out-of-country voting would help enfranchise the youth, women and Lebanon's massive diaspora population.

Considering the complex nature of Lebanese society, confessionalism in some form or other will probably be retained in the foreseeable future in order to balance out the legitimate concerns of the various interest groups in the country. The introduction of a modernized consociational model, based on religious denominations, as mandated by the Taif Agreement, will most likely be the major challenge for Lebanon following the 2009 elections.

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