



# The Evolution and Characteristics of Nation-States A Case Study of Lebanon

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## 1. Introduction and context

The concept of the nation-state has been pivotal in global politics and societies, evolving through various historical, social, economic, and cultural developments. This paper aims to provide insights into challenges, opportunities, and future directions for Lebanon as a nation-state, emphasizing its unique historical and contemporary experiences.

## 2. Key Elements of a Nation-State

Building on the reconciliation of the theoretical and historical context, we propose the following elements as foundations of a nation and state:

- a. **Shared History and Legacy:** Historical narratives and myths play a crucial role in fostering a sense of belonging and identity among the populace. These shared memories create a cohesive social fabric that connects individuals across generations.
- b. **Present Consent and Collective Will:** The importance of contemporary unity and collective commitment to a shared future is underscored by the ongoing agreement among people to coexist and cooperate. This consent is reflected in democratic processes, political institutions, and civic engagement, representing an active, dynamic process of nation-building.
- c. **Investment in Common Heritage:** Preserving and enhancing cultural, social, and economic assets define a nation. This involves education, cultural preservation, economic development, and social policies ensuring the well-being and prosperity of the nation's citizens. It is also necessary to foster active participation of the various constituents in democratic processes and civic life, ensuring the consent and collective will to live together are continually reinforced through political engagement and social cooperation.

## 3. Lebanon as a Case Study

### a. Historical Context

Lebanon has a rich cultural heritage and history of ancient civilizations that were significant in maritime trade and cultural exchange. Ancient cities like Byblos, Tyre, and Baalbek are testament to Lebanon's historical significance and have the potential to foster national pride. Having gone through colonialization through the Ottoman empire and French mandate in the mid-20th century, Beirut emerged as a cultural and intellectual hub in the Arab world. Yet, the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the emergence of series of conflicts, namely the civil war (1975-1990), due to the successive dominance and interference of foreign entities in state affairs.

Lebanon's political and social fabric is woven from a diverse array of religious and ethnic groups, each with its own historical and cultural narrative. This diversity, while a source of cultural richness, has also been a source of tension and conflict. The challenge of reconciling freedom and justice in such a context is central to building a robust citizenship state. This paper posits that a multidimensional and inclusive approach is essential for achieving this reconciliation, taking into account Lebanon's historical, social, and political heritage and addressing, economic, environmental, and cultural challenges.

## **b. Key Elements that shape Lebanon as a State**

### **1. Shared history and legacy**

- a) Historical Sacrifices:** The Lebanese strife for independence from the French mandate, the Civil War and subsequent reconstruction efforts, and the continuous management of political struggles internally and with neighboring countries, symbolize the nation's resilience, willingness to rebuild, and determination to achieve sovereignty and self-determination.
- b) Ongoing Sacrifices:** Initiatives to revitalize the economy and improve infrastructure indicate a collective will to progress and improve living standards despite economic crises, including hyperinflation, financial collapse, and unemployment. In addition, the burgeoning tech and startup scene in Lebanon reflects an ambition to innovate and achieve new successes on the global stage. These elements highlight the population's willingness to demand and work towards a better future and emphasizes social cohesion despite sectarian divides.

### **2. Present Consent and collective will**

- a)** The active participation of citizens in political protests and civil society initiatives demonstrates ongoing consent to shape their common life and future.
- b)** Lebanon's sectarian landscape contributes to a pluralistic society where different voices and perspectives coexist, with a relatively free press and vibrant public discourse that have safeguarded liberty and prevented authoritarianism.
- c)** Ongoing political dialogue and efforts to implement reforms show a desire to overcome sectarian divides and build a stable, united nation. The Lebanese people have shown a strong desire for political reform and social justice, as evidenced by the 2005 movement that gathered millions in the streets and the October 2019 Revolution, which called for an end to corruption and sectarianism.

### 3. Investment in common heritage

- a) Lebanon's rich cultural heritage and diverse religious traditions, forms a significant part of its national identity.
- b) Post-war efforts to revive Beirut's cultural and intellectual scene reflect a commitment to restore Lebanon's former glory. Lebanon's contributions to arts, literature, and academia are notable achievements that have garnered international recognition.
- c) Lebanon continues to produce influential artists, writers, and intellectuals who contribute to the cultural landscape both locally and internationally. Events like the Beirut International Film Festival and Baalbek International Festival celebrate Lebanese culture and heritage.

### 4. The State of Lebanon – Situational Analysis / Challenges

**a. Political crisis:** Lebanon's history, especially during the Ottoman and French mandate periods, shaped its sectarian divisions. These divisions have heavily influenced Lebanon's post-independence politics, affecting national cohesion and governance. After WWII, foreign and neighboring countries' interference in Lebanon's politics further destabilized the state, deepening the sectarian system that hinders national unity and effective governance. The Taëf Accord of 1989, following the Civil War (1975-1990), aimed to address these divisions, restore unity, and establish a more inclusive political framework. A key achievement of the Taëf Accord was recognizing Lebanon as a finite state with an Arab identity, intended to end internal conflicts. However, challenges remain in fully implementing the accord and balancing its vision, with local and foreign interference continuing to weaken the state's capacity.

**b. Economic Instability:** Lebanon's economic crisis, worsened by corruption and mismanagement, is a significant barrier to development. Economic inequality has long plagued the country, deepening social divisions by widening the gap in wealth, access to resources, and opportunities. This divide between the wealthy and those struggling economically can lead to fragmented societies, fostering resentment and social discord. Marginalized communities may feel excluded from economic progress, which can fuel political instability. Additionally, when wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, it often leads to political and economic power that maintains the status quo, making it harder to address the root causes of inequality.

**c. Financial Crisis:** Lebanon's financial crisis is severely threatening the country's economic stability, social cohesion, and development. Hyperinflation, a collapsing currency, and widespread unemployment have sharply reduced citizens' purchasing power, driving many into poverty and worsening inequalities. The banking sector, once vital to the economy, has lost public trust due to capital controls and restricted access to savings, increasing public frustration. The crisis also weakens the government's ability to provide essential services, leading to the decline of infrastructure, healthcare, and education. This instability hinders necessary reforms and the ability to attract international aid, crucial for recovery. Consequently, Lebanon is trapped in a cycle where the financial crisis deepens political instability, making sustainable recovery increasingly difficult.

**d. Refugee Crisis:** The refugee crisis, mainly driven by the Syrian conflict, has deeply impacted Lebanon, straining its resources, infrastructure, and social fabric. With over a million Syrian refugees—about a quarter of its population—Lebanon has struggled to provide adequate housing, healthcare, education, and jobs for both refugees and its own citizens. This influx has worsened economic difficulties, increased pressure on public services, and heightened tensions between host communities and refugees. Despite international aid, overcrowded schools, job competition, and a stressed healthcare system have contributed to social and political instability. Although Lebanon has shown remarkable resilience and generosity, the long-term presence of such a large refugee population continues to pose significant challenges, requiring ongoing international support and effective policies to maintain stability and social cohesion.

**e. Social dynamics:** Lebanon's multi-confessional society, with its diverse religious sects, deeply influences national identity. This structure requires a political and social system that balances the interests of various groups, which can both enrich and complicate national unity. On one hand, the living-together of multiple sects creates a rich cultural mosaic and fosters inclusivity, allowing for a pluralistic society where diverse traditions and beliefs are represented. On the other hand, it can lead to fragmentation, as sectarian identities often take precedence over a unified national identity. This division can hinder the development of a cohesive national consciousness, as loyalties to religious or ethnic groups may overshadow a collective sense of belonging to the nation as a whole.

While community-based solidarity can drive local support and action, it can also reinforce division by prioritizing group interests over those of the broader society. In contrast, national solidarity seeks to create unity that transcends individual communities, aiming for a cohesive national identity and collective action toward shared goals. However, national solidarity may struggle to address specific community needs or

reconcile the diverse interests of its people. Balancing community-based and national solidarity requires careful navigation to ensure both localized support and a unified national vision.

**f. Legal and Institutional Frameworks:** In Lebanon, the constitutional and legal framework seeks to balance individual freedoms with collective justice through a complex interplay of legal provisions and institutional oversight. However, and owing to the multiple crisis the country is facing, and the political landscape, which allocates power based on sectarian quotas, the application of these freedoms is complex due to intertwining political representation with sectarian interests. Additionally, administrative institutions' effectiveness can be hindered by sectarian politics and bureaucratic inefficiencies.

**g. Environmental Degradation and Public Health:** the crisis that Lebanon is passing through and the weakening of the state has exacerbated environmental issues like waste management and pollution which have profound impacts on public health. Inefficient waste management has led to the accumulation of hazardous materials and pollutants, contaminating air, soil, and water sources. Addressing these environmental challenges is becoming critical and poses significant challenges in the absence of integrated strategies that prioritize sustainable practices, effective waste management, and pollution control to protect public health and enhance overall quality of life.

## 5. Opportunities

**a. Educational Sector:** The educational sector in Lebanon is distinguished by its multilingual and multicultural approach, with instruction often conducted in Arabic, French, and English, providing students with a competitive edge in global communication and professional opportunities. Despite the country's socio-political challenges, Lebanon maintains high literacy rates and a strong tradition of educational attainment, supported by a robust private sector that includes numerous prestigious schools and universities with international affiliations.

**b. Preservation of Liberty:** The preservation of liberty presents a significant opportunity for Lebanon to strengthen its democratic foundations and promote social cohesion amid its complex sectarian landscape. Lebanon's relatively free press, vibrant public discourse, and active civil society are key pillars that support liberty, allowing diverse voices to be heard and fostering a culture of accountability and transparency. By safeguarding these freedoms, Lebanon can continue to resist authoritarian tendencies

and ensure that governance reflects the will of its people and bolster its international standing as a pluralistic and democratic state.

**c. Regional Stability:** Lebanon's strategic location and diverse cultural fabric position it as a potential linchpin for regional stability in the Middle East. Its historical role as a mediator and hub for dialogue among various religious and ethnic groups underscores its capacity to foster peaceful living-together and mitigate sectarian tensions in a region often marred by conflict. Lebanon can serve as a model for balancing diversity within a pluralistic society, offering lessons in tolerance and resilience to neighboring countries. Furthermore, Lebanon's diplomatic relations and engagement with international organizations provide a platform for influencing regional policies and supporting peace initiatives.

**d. Diaspora Engagement:** Diaspora engagement plays a crucial role in Lebanon's socio-economic landscape, serving as a vital bridge with the international community. The Lebanese diaspora, which is significantly larger than the population within Lebanon, contributes substantially through remittances, investments, and the transfer of knowledge and skills. These contributions have been essential in bolstering the national economy, supporting local communities, and fostering innovation, particularly in the fields of entrepreneurship and technology. Moreover, the diaspora's involvement in international advocacy has helped raise awareness of Lebanon's challenges on the global stage, influencing foreign policy and aid.

**e. International Support:** International support for Lebanon has been pivotal in addressing the country's economic, political, and humanitarian challenges, especially in the wake of crises such as the Syrian refugee influx and the Beirut port explosion. Countries and international organizations have provided substantial aid, including financial assistance, humanitarian relief, and technical expertise, to help stabilize Lebanon's economy, rebuild infrastructure, and support vulnerable populations. Additionally, international diplomatic efforts have played a crucial role in mediating political reforms and encouraging dialogue among Lebanon's diverse political factions.

## 6. Building for the Future: Recommendations for Lebanon

- **Strengthening Solidarity**

- a. Inclusive Policies:** Implementing policies that promote inclusivity and equality, bridging sectarian divides, strengthening sustainable development, and fostering national unity.

- b. Educational Reforms:** Develop a national curriculum that emphasizes common history, heritage and shared values, reducing sectarian biases and promoting a unified national identity.
  - c. Legal Protections:** Strengthen legal frameworks that protect individual and collective freedoms, ensuring that liberty is maintained against internal and external threats.
  - d. Civic Engagement:** Encourage participation in civic activities and national dialogues to foster a sense of belonging and collective responsibility.
- **Reaffirming Present Consent**
  - a. Democratic Reforms:** Enhance democratic institutions and processes to ensure that the consent of the governed is continually expressed and respected.
  - b. Anti-Corruption Measures:** Strengthen anti-corruption measures to build trust in public institutions and ensure transparent governance.
  - c. Youth Participation:** Engage the younger generation in nation-building activities, ensuring their voices are heard and their aspirations are addressed.
  - d. Cultural Diplomacy:** Promote cultural diplomacy both internally and externally to enhance Lebanon's international standing and protect its sovereignty and independence.
- **Investing in the common heritage - economy, society, and culture**
  - a. Stabilizing and diversifying the economy:** Develop strategies for inclusive economic growth that address disparities across different communities. Focus on diversifying the economy to reduce reliance on any single sector and build resilience against economic shocks.
  - b. Supporting Startups:** Encourage innovation and entrepreneurship through policies that support startups and small businesses, creating new opportunities for growth and employment.
  - c. Cultural Investment:** Invest in cultural preservation programs and initiatives that celebrate Lebanon's rich history and achievements.



- d. **Tourism Development:** Promote Lebanon's historical and cultural sites to boost tourism and foster national pride.
- e. **Diaspora Engagement:** Engage the Lebanese diaspora in national development efforts, leveraging their expertise, investments, and networks.
- f. **International Partnerships:** Build partnerships with international organizations and countries to support economic and social development initiatives.

## 4. Conclusion

The evolution of the nation-state is a complex interplay of historical, cultural, social, and economic factors. Lebanon's unique experiences highlight the resilience and adaptability required to navigate the challenges of nation-building. By strengthening solidarity, reaffirming present consent, preserving liberty, and pursuing inclusive and diversified development strategies, Lebanon can continue to build a stable and prosperous future. By focusing on shared goals and leveraging the strengths of its diverse communities, Lebanon can navigate its challenges and seize opportunities in a changing world. This approach not only enhances the nation-state but also builds a more resilient and cohesive society.

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## Authors' Short Bio

**Lina Tannir is a holder of MBA degree from the American University of Beirut and a CFA charter holder.** She started her career with the United Nations Development Program at the Lebanese Ministry of Finance as a senior project manager. She currently is a Senior Lecturer of Finance at the American University of Beirut, and the Director of the MBA and the founding director of the MBA online program. In addition, Lina works closely with entrepreneurs and startups and is highly active in executive corporate education, with a number of publications in peer reviewed journals.

Lina is also an entrepreneur. She set up her company in 2012, a franchise for an international cosmetics corporation. She currently serves on the board of Directors of the company.

Lina is also active with civil society organizations. She serves on the board of Beitedine Art Festival, and CFA Lebanon chapter, and chaired the board of Assabil Network of Public Libraries between 2010-2012. She currently serves as VP at Dar el Aajaza el Islamia. She is also a political activist, part of Sayyedit el Jabal and other political think tanks, and ran for parliamentary elections in 2022.

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