



Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

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Lebanon (2006)

Polity:

No polity available

Political Rights:

5*

Civil Liberties:

4*

Status:

Partly Free

Population:

3,800,000

GNI/Capita:

\$4,040

Life Expectancy:

74

Religious Groups:

Muslim [Mostly Shia] (60 percent), Christian (39 percent), other (1 percent)

Ethnic Groups:

Arab (95 percent), Armenian (4 percent), other (1 percent)

Capital:

Beirut

Additional Info:

[Freedom in the World 2005](#)

[Freedom of the Press 2005](#)

[Nations in Transit 2004](#)

[Countries at the Crossroads 2005](#)

Ratings Change

Lebanon's political rights rating improved from 6 to 5, its civil liberties rating from 5 to 4, and its status from Not Free to Partly Free, due to the removal of direct foreign influence over government decision making, internationally monitored legislative elections, and a reduction in government restrictions on public freedoms.

Overview

The departure of Syrian military forces in April 2005 removed the single most powerful obstacle to freedom in Lebanon. Although politicians who rose to power during the occupation continued to dominate the Lebanese government, they quickly shed their loyalties to Syria and committed themselves to ending egregious violations of political and civil liberties. The virtually complete suspension-if not abolition- of government restrictions on public freedoms was tempered by a precarious security climate that witnessed a dozen major terrorist bombings, assassinations, and assassination attempts.

For more than a thousand years, the rough terrain of Mount Lebanon attracted Christian and heterodox Muslim minorities fleeing persecution in the predominantly Sunni Muslim Arab world. Following centuries of European protection and relative autonomy under Turkish rule, Mount Lebanon and its surrounding areas were established as a French mandate in 1920. After winning its independence in 1943, the new state of Lebanon maintained a precarious democratic system based on the division of parliamentary seats, high political offices, and senior administrative positions among the country's 17 officially recognized sectarian communities. As emigration transformed Lebanon's slight Christian majority into a minority, Muslim leaders demanded amendments to the fixed 6-to-5 ratio of Christian-to-Muslim parliamentary seats and to exclusive Maronite Christian control of the presidency. In 1975, war erupted between a coalition of Lebanese Muslim and leftist militias aligned with Palestinian guerrilla groups on one side and an array of Christian militias bent on preserving Christian political privileges on the other.

After the first few years of fighting, a loose consensus emerged among Lebanese politicians regarding a new power-sharing arrangement. However, following the entry of Syrian and Israeli troops into Lebanon in 1976 and 1978, the various militias and their foreign backers had little interest in disarming. The civil war lost much of its sectarian character over the next decade, with the

bloodiest outbreaks of fighting taking place mainly within the Shiite, Christian, and Palestinian communities, or between local and foreign forces.

In 1989, the surviving members of Lebanon's 1972 parliament convened in Taif, Saudi Arabia, and agreed to a plan put forward by the Arab League that weakened the presidency, established equality in Christian and Muslim parliamentary representation, and mandated close security cooperation with occupying Syrian troops. After the ouster of General Michel Aoun from east Beirut by Syrian forces in October 1990, a new Syrian-backed government extended its writ throughout most of the country.

In the years that followed, Syria consolidated its control over Lebanese state institutions, particularly the presidency, the judiciary, and the security forces. In return for tacit Western acceptance of its control of Lebanon, Damascus permitted a degree of political and civil liberties in Lebanon that exceeded those in most other Arab countries. While those who openly condemned the occupation risked arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, criticism of the government was largely tolerated. Various militia chiefs, traditional elites, and nouveaux riches who held civilian political positions in postwar Lebanon were persuaded to accept continued Syrian hegemony, primarily through a system of institutionalized corruption fueled by massive deficit spending on reconstruction during the 1990s. By the end of the decade, Lebanon's government debt far exceeded its gross domestic product, and the economy was in deep recession. Public disaffection with the postwar political establishment rose to an all-time high, and demonstrations against the occupation, primarily by secular nationalist university students, grew steadily in size and frequency.

In 2003, as Syrian-American relations rapidly deteriorated amid allegations of Syrian meddling in Iraq, the U.S. government began openly criticizing the Syrian occupation of Lebanon, a policy reversal that inspired the opposition movement in Lebanon to reassert itself. By early 2004, France had also ended its official silence on the occupation, and both Western powers were openly calling for a Syrian withdrawal, leading most other European governments to follow suit. Defying these calls, Damascus moved to consolidate its control by pressing the Lebanese parliament to approve a constitutional amendment extending (on dubious legal ground) the tenure of President Emile Lahoud, a staunch Syrian ally and rival of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, beyond his six-year term. In September 2004, on the eve of the parliamentary vote, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1559, calling for a constitutional presidential election, the withdrawal of all foreign forces, and the disarmament of militias. Syria's decision to push ahead with the amendment provoked an unprecedented international outcry and veiled threats by Western governments to take "further measures."

In the face of this international pressure, Hariri and many other politicians who had long been loyal to Syria began defecting to the opposition, in spite of what were alleged to be heavy-handed reprisals by Syria. In October 2004, Marwan Hamadeh, a government minister who had resigned in protest over Lahoud's term extension, was severely wounded by a car bomb. In February 2005, four months after resigning as prime minister, Hariri was killed, along with 22

others, in a massive car-bomb explosion in Beirut.

Widespread suspicions of Syrian involvement in Hariri's assassination led to overwhelming international pressure for an immediate Syrian withdrawal and to extensive anti-Syrian demonstrations in Beirut. Prime Minister Omar Karami submitted his cabinet's resignation in late February 2005, which led to the formation of an interim government that included Hariri's allies and parliamentary opposition figures and was charged with providing for free and fair legislative elections in May and June.

Although Syrian troops withdrew from Lebanon in April, the governing coalition left in place a key pillar of the occupation—a heavily gerrymandered electoral law that embeds most Christian regions in majority Muslim districts. Consequently, while Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) won a strong majority of Christian votes in every district, it captured only a third of the 64 Christian seats in parliament. This enabled allies of the late Hariri—calling themselves the "March 14 Coalition"—to expand their parliamentary bloc to 72 seats and form Lebanon's first postoccupation government, but at the expense of alienating Lebanese Christians.

Although the March 14 Coalition aligned itself squarely with the West and expressed commitment to major political and economic reforms, it lacked the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed to overturn Lahoud's extension and elect a new president (and was unwilling to accept Aoun as a successor in return for FPM votes), which left the ardently pro-Syrian Lahoud in office. This division paralyzed government decision making and impeded reform of the security establishment and judiciary. The refusal of the Shiite Islamist Hezbollah movement to disarm, as called for by Resolution 1559, remained intractable under these conditions.

Several assassinations and assassination attempts against prominent political and media figures, as well as a series of explosions in Christian areas, took place in the months after Syria's withdrawal, none of which were effectively investigated. This climate of fear brought economic growth to a dead halt for the year and led many politicians either to leave the country for months or confine themselves to heavily guarded compounds. Nevertheless, the new government presided over a new climate of freedom throughout Lebanese civil society, from the media to the universities, and a vigorous public debate over the country's future.

In October, the UN International Independent Investigation Commission (UNIIIC) charged with investigating Hariri's murder concluded in an interim report that there is "converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement." However, one of the key witnesses in the report, a defector from Syrian military intelligence, recanted his testimony several weeks later.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Citizens of Lebanon cannot change their government democratically. The president is formally selected every six years by the 128-member National

Assembly (parliament). The president and the parliament nominate the prime minister, who chooses the cabinet, which is subject to parliamentary approval. The unwritten National Pact of 1943 stipulates that the president be a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the Parliament a Shiite Muslim. Parliamentary seats are divided among major sects under a constitutional formula that does not reflect their current demographic weight. Shias comprise at least a third of the population, but are allotted only 21 percent of parliamentary seats.

Electoral districts are blatantly gerrymandered to ensure the election of incumbent deputies. In contrast to the last three electoral cycles, the 2005 parliamentary elections were monitored by international observers, who judged them to be relatively free of interference by the authorities. Vote buying was reported to be rampant, however. The FPM challenged the electoral results in districts containing 10 seats, but the Constitutional Council had only begun to adjudicate the matter by year's end. Although the Lebanese parliament's vote in 2004 to extend President Emile Lahoud's term by three years was made under duress, lack of consensus over a prospective successor has precluded a reversal of the decision.

Political corruption in Lebanon is widely considered to be the most egregious in the Arab world. Lebanon was ranked 83 out of 159 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2005 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is limited but far more substantial than elsewhere in the Arab world. Lebanon has a long tradition of press freedom, though nearly all media outlets are owned by prominent political and commercial elites. Five independent television stations and more than 30 independent radio stations operate in Lebanon, as well as dozens of independent print publications, reflecting a diverse range of views. Internet access is not restricted.

A number of vaguely worded laws criminalize critical reporting on Syria, the Lebanese military, the security forces, the judiciary, and the presidency. Three journalists were charged with defaming Lahoud in April and July, though none were arrested and all three cases remained pending at year's end. The General Security Directorate has the authority to censor all foreign magazines and nonperiodical media, though no major cases of censorship were reported in 2005. In August, parliament reversed the government's controversial closure of Murr Television (MTV), a station sympathetic to the opposition, though the station had not resumed broadcasting by year's end. Although journalists faced little or no harassment by the authorities, the assassination of journalist Samir Kassir in June and the attempted assassination of anchorwoman May Chidiac in September created a climate of fear among journalists and led some to practice self-censorship on matters pertaining to Syria.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the Lebanese constitution and protected in practice, though the constitution and current electoral law respectively weaken the political representation of Shias and Christians. Academic freedom is long-standing and firmly entrenched. The country's universities are the Arab world's most open and vibrant.

Rights to freedom of association and assembly are relatively unrestricted. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including human rights groups, are permitted to operate openly, though the authorities have occasionally imposed ad hoc restrictions in the past. In August, the government ended the requirement that NGOs be licensed. Public demonstrations are not permitted without prior approval from the Interior Ministry, but only one unlicensed demonstration was forcibly dispersed by police during the year, and none after the Syrian withdrawal. All workers except those in government may establish unions, and all have the right to strike and to bargain collectively. In contrast to previous years, the General Confederation of Labor did not organize any strikes in 2005.

The judiciary, consisting of civilian courts, a military court, the Judicial Council, and a Constitutional Council, is ostensibly independent, but in practice is subject to heavy political influence. Aside from the Judicial Council, the courts remained dominated by judges carefully vetted by Syria over the past 15 years (in part because divisions within the government precluded replacing them) and continued to issue indictments against journalists critical of the president, though none were brought to trial. Four former senior security officials were arrested in September in connection with Hariri's assassination and remained in detention at year's end, though their lawyers claim that prosecutors have presented no direct evidence of their involvement.

International standards of criminal procedure are generally observed in the regular judiciary, but not in the military court, which consists largely of military officers with no legal training and which tries most cases in a matter of minutes. In late 2005, the military court was preparing to try lawyer Muhamad Mugarby on charges of slandering the military in his 2003 testimony before the European Parliament.

Arbitrary arrest and detention by Lebanese security forces are commonplace, and the use of torture to extract confessions is widespread in security-related cases. During the Syrian occupation, Lebanese security agencies routinely monitored the telephones of cabinet ministers and political dissidents alike, though the practice appeared to have ended after the Syrian withdrawal. Prison conditions are poor; overcrowding and pre-trial detention are major problems.

Lebanon remained plagued by politically inspired violence in 2005. In June, prominent journalist Samir Kassir and former Communist Party leader George Hawi were killed by bombs placed in their cars. A similar device seriously injured journalist May Chidiac in September. In July, a car bomb injured Defense Minister Elias Murr and killed one bystander. Several other bombings took place during the year, the bloodiest being an explosion in Beirut that killed one person and injured 23 others.

Nearly 350,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon are denied citizenship rights and face restrictions on working, building homes, and purchasing property- restrictions that reflect Lebanese sensitivities about the impact of mostly Muslim Palestinian assimilation on the country's precarious sectarian balance. According to Amnesty International, tens of Syrian workers in Lebanon

were killed and scores injured in attacks by local residents.

Women enjoy many of the same rights as men, but suffer social and some legal discrimination. Since family and personal status matters are adjudicated by the religious authorities of each sectarian community, Muslim women are subject to discriminatory laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Women are underrepresented in politics, holding only six parliamentary seats (and, until the appointment of two female ministers in October, no cabinet positions), and do not receive equal social security provisions. Men convicted of so-called honor crimes against women usually receive lenient sentences. Foreign domestic workers are routinely exploited and physically abused by employers.