

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	349
Land:	Libanon
Kilde:	Freedom House.
Titel:	Freedom in the World 2009 - Lebanon.
Udgivet:	16. juli 2009
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	24. februar 2010

Last Updated: Monday, 22 February 2010, 11:22 GMT

[unhcr.org](#) | [Partners](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact](#) | [Site Map](#)[Home](#) [Lebanon](#)

Search

Text size [A](#) [A](#) [A](#) [A](#)[Email this document](#)[Printable version](#)Enter a word or phrase [Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Regions

[Africa](#)[Americas](#)[Asia](#)[Europe](#)[Oceania](#)

Countries

Categories

[Country Information](#)[Legal Information](#)[Policy Documents](#)[Reference Documents](#)

Browse by

[A-Z Index](#)[Topics](#)[Publishers](#)[Document Types](#)

Resources

[Special Features](#)[Standards and Training](#)[Information Alerts](#)[Protection Starter Kit](#)[Library](#)[News](#)[Refworld Personalization](#)[External Links](#)

Title	Freedom in the World 2009 - Lebanon
Publisher	Freedom House
Country	Lebanon
Publication Date	16 July 2009
Cite as	Freedom House, <i>Freedom in the World 2009 - Lebanon</i> , 16 July 2009, available at: http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4a6452a528.html [accessed 22 February 2010]

Freedom in the World 2009 - Lebanon

Capital: Beirut**Population:** 4,000,000

Political Rights Score: 5

Civil Liberties Score: 4

Status: Partly Free

Overview

Lebanon began 2008 without a president or functioning government institutions. Hezbollah's armed takeover of parts of the country in May led to negotiations hosted by Qatar, which ultimately brought an end to an 18-month political crisis. Following the talks, a president was elected, a national unity government was formed, and the parliament passed electoral reform in preparation for the 2009 elections. Despite the reconciliation in Beirut, armed sectarian clashes persisted in northern Lebanon, where the army was also targeted in several bombings.

Following centuries of relative autonomy under Ottoman rule, Mount Lebanon and its surrounding areas were established as a League of Nations Mandate under French control in 1920. After winning its independence in 1943, the new state maintained a precarious democratic system based on the division of parliamentary and government posts among the country's then 17 officially recognized sectarian communities. As demographic developments, including emigration, transformed the 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 the political status quo 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 Muslim, 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 would weaken the presidency, establish equality in Christian and Muslim parliamentary representation, and mandate close security cooperation with occupying Syrian troops. A new Syrian-backed government then extended its writ to most of the country, with the exception of southern Lebanon, which remained under Israeli occupation until 2000.

In the years that followed, although Syria consolidated its control over Lebanese state institutions, Lebanon managed to preserve greater political and civil liberties than were allowed in most Arab countries. While Lebanese who openly condemned the occupation risked arbitrary arrest and imprisonment, criticism of the government was tolerated. By the end of the decade, Lebanon's economy was in deep recession, and growing public disaffection with the postwar establishment spurred demonstrations against Syrian domination.

In 2004, the United States joined with France and most other European governments in calling

for an end to Syria's power over Lebanon. Damascus moved to consolidate its control by forcing the Lebanese parliament to approve a constitutional amendment extending the six-year tenure of President Emile Lahoud, a staunch Syrian ally and a rival of Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. On the eve of the parliamentary vote, the UN Security Council issued a resolution calling for a presidential election, the withdrawal of all foreign forces, and the disarmament of militias. The amendment nevertheless passed, provoking an international outcry.

Encouraged by the international climate, Hariri and other politicians who had been loyal to Syria began defecting to the opposition. In February 2005, four months after resigning as prime minister, Hariri was killed along with 22 others in a car bombing. Widespread suspicions of Syrian involvement led to international pressure for an immediate Syrian withdrawal and to extensive anti-Syrian demonstrations in Beirut. An interim government that included Hariri's allies and parliamentary opposition figures was formed to oversee legislative elections. Syrian troops pulled out of the country in April, and in the May and June balloting, allies of the late Hariri – calling themselves the March 14 Coalition – expanded their parliamentary bloc to 72 out of 128 seats. The coalition went on to form a new government led by Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.

The March 14 Coalition lacked the two-thirds parliamentary majority needed to overturn Lahoud's term extension and elect a new president, leaving the pro-Syrian Lahoud in office. This division paralyzed the government and impeded reform of the security establishment and judiciary. In October 2005, a UN panel charged with investigating Hariri's murder reported "converging evidence pointing at both Lebanese and Syrian involvement" in the crime. Meanwhile, a series of assassinations and bombings that began in the months after the Syrian withdrawal targeted key anti-Syrian politicians.

On July 12, 2006, the powerful militia of the Shiite Islamist movement Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and killed eight others in a cross-border raid. The attack sparked a six-week war with Israel that severely damaged Lebanon's infrastructure and killed some 1,500 people, most of them Lebanese civilians. After the war ended with a UN-brokered ceasefire, Lebanese politicians struggled to stabilize the government. The March 8 opposition group – led by Hezbollah and aligned with Iran and Syria – left the government in November 2006, demanding a reorganized cabinet in which it would hold veto power. Hezbollah mounted a round-the-clock protest outside the cabinet offices, and street battles between supporters of the rival factions broke out with increasing frequency.

Political assassinations aimed at anti-Syrian lawmakers and public figures continued in 2007. Also during the year, the army waged a four-month war against a Sunni Islamist militant group based in Nahr el-Bared, a Palestinian refugee camp; the fighting killed some 400 people and displaced more than 30,000 others. The camp was completely destroyed, and reconstruction did not begin until late 2008. UN peacekeepers stationed in southern Lebanon also came under attack in 2007.

Political deadlock continued throughout 2007, as the pro- and anti-Syrian coalitions in the parliament repeatedly failed to elect a new president to replace Lahoud, whose term expired in November. The two sides agreed that army commander Michel Suleiman would become president as a compromise candidate, but they could not agree on the process for electing him.

Increasingly violent clashes between government and opposition supporters broke out in early 2008, and each camp's foreign patrons adopted bellicose rhetoric. The protracted conflict escalated quickly when the government announced two decisions in May that threatened Hezbollah's communications network. Hezbollah and its allies captured West Beirut in one night, closing their opponents' media and political offices by force. Battles between the opposition and government supporters raged across Lebanon for nearly a week, while the opposition kept the country's main roads, airport, and some ports shut down. The fighting left nearly 100 people dead.

Rival political leaders traveled to Qatar for a round of intense negotiations immediately following the clashes. They agreed to elect Suleiman as president immediately, to form a national unity government, and to amend the election law in preparation for the 2009 parliamentary elections. Suleiman was duly elected on May 25, and the national unity government was composed of 16 ministers from the March 14 Coalition, 11 from the March 8 group, and three neutral ministers. March 8 was granted certain key ministries, such as foreign affairs, telecommunications, power, and labor. A revised election law was passed in September.

The Qatar-brokered agreement led to improved relations with Syria; the two countries announced in October that they would establish formal diplomatic relations and exchange ambassadors for the first time.

Even after the agreement, sectarian clashes persisted in northern Lebanon, focusing on the city of Tripoli. The north was also the site of several bombings during the summer that targeted the army. The violence stirred fears of a growing Sunni radical movement in the area.

Political Rights and Civil Liberties

Lebanon is not an electoral democracy. Although the 2005 parliamentary elections were judged to be generally free and fair, vote buying was reported to be rampant, and the districts were heavily gerrymandered to favor Muslim parties. All parties recognized the need to reform the election law before the 2009 elections, and a generally transparent and inclusive process that involved international observers and civil society ensued in 2007-08. The principles of a new election law were negotiated in Qatar in May 2008, and the details were debated extensively in the parliament before final approval in September.

The new law brings Lebanon closer to international standards for democratic elections by introducing campaign finance and media regulations, and by holding the polls on a single day nationwide rather than spreading them over a four-week period. A 10-member committee will supervise compliance with the campaign finance and media regulations. The new law also significantly reduced the size of the multiseat election districts, making them much more religiously homogeneous. With the number of seats allotted to each sect unchanged, the shape of the 2009 government was set to be decided in a small number of districts with politically divided Christian populations. Lawmakers rejected calls to reduce the voting age from 21 to 18, to print standardized ballot papers, and to allocate a certain number of seats for women.

The president is selected every six years by the 128-member National Assembly, which in turn is elected for four-year terms. The president and parliament nominate the prime minister, who, along with the president, chooses the cabinet, 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 National Assembly a Shiite Muslim. Parliamentary seats are divided among major sects under a constitutional formula that does not reflect their current demographic weight. Shiites comprise at least a third of the population, but are allotted only 21 percent of parliamentary seats.

Political and bureaucratic corruption is widespread. Businesses routinely pay bribes and cultivate close ties with powerful politicians to win contracts, and anticorruption laws are loosely enforced. There were numerous allegations of graft surrounding the distribution of reconstruction aid and victim compensation for both the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah conflict and the 2007 Nahr el-Bared fighting. Accusations of corruption in the country's electricity sector are also persistent. Though an access to information law was discussed, but not approved by parliament in 2008, there is currently little incentive for transparency, and ministries release information at their discretion. Ministers and members of parliament are generally accountable to their parties and political constituencies rather than to the public at large. Lebanon was ranked 102 out of 180 countries surveyed in Transparency International's 2008 Corruption Perceptions Index.

Freedom of expression is somewhat limited but far more substantial than elsewhere in the Arab world. Lebanon has a long tradition of press freedom, though nearly all media outlets have ties to political groups. Seven privately owned television stations and more than 30 privately owned radio stations operate, as do dozens of privately owned print publications, reflecting a diverse range of views. Internet access is not restricted. Vaguely worded laws that criminalize critical reporting on Syria, the military, the judiciary, and the presidency remain in force. The series of assassinations that have targeted anti-Syrian journalists since 2005 have all gone unpunished to date.

Journalists cannot report from some Hezbollah-controlled areas without the group's explicit permission and oversight. The opposition forcibly shut two newspapers, a magazine, a television station, and two radio stations during the May 2008 fighting. These attacks on the media led to a public outcry, and the outlets resumed operation shortly after the violence ended. Three journalists were injured during the May fighting. Separately, the home of the editor of *Al-Anbaa*, a newspaper that was critical of the opposition, was targeted in an arson attempt in January.

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in the constitution and protected in practice. However, informal religious discrimination is common, especially as the country's recent political crisis had a strong sectarian element. Academic freedom is firmly entrenched. The country's universities are the Arab world's most open and vibrant.

Rights to freedom of association and assembly are generally unrestricted. On several occasions in recent years, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese have rallied in favor of or in opposition to the government. A tent camp populated by opposition supporters remained in immediate proximity to the government's headquarters from December 2006 to May 2008.

Lebanon's civil society is vibrant, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including human rights groups, operate openly. The government requires notification of an NGO's formation. The Ministry of Interior has at times transformed the notification process into an approval process and has been known to conduct inquiries into an organization's founding members. NGOs must invite ministry representatives to general assemblies where votes are held on bylaws or boards of directors. All workers except those in government may establish unions, which have the right to strike and bargain collectively. The country's largest union, which has ties to the opposition, won a modest minimum-wage increase in 2008.

The judiciary – consisting of civilian courts, a military court, the Judicial Council, and a Constitutional Council – is ostensibly independent, but it is subject to heavy political influence in practice. The Judicial Council nominates judges, who are then approved by the Justice Ministry. Both government and opposition parties vet judicial appointments. A member of the Judicial Council resigned in October 2008, citing the council's refusal to endorse even one of the 100 or more qualified judges on its list in the past two years. 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. Most military court trials are concluded in a matter of minutes.

Arbitrary arrest and detention by the security forces were commonplace before 2005, but they have been curtailed since UN personnel were embedded with the security services to investigate the assassination of former prime minister Rafiq Hariri. The use of torture to extract confessions is widespread in security-related cases. Prison conditions are poor; inmates suspected of being radical Islamists, many of whom were detained during the army's 2007 assault on Nahr el-Bared and have not been formally charged, rioted in April and October 2008.

Nearly 350,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon are denied citizenship rights and face restrictions on working, building homes, and purchasing property. Residents of the Nahr el-Bared camp live under extremely difficult conditions as they await reconstruction.

Women enjoy many of the same rights as men, but they experience some social and legal discrimination. Since family and personal-status matters are adjudicated by the religious authorities of each sectarian community, women are subject to discriminatory laws governing marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody. Women are underrepresented in politics, holding only three parliamentary seats, and do not receive equal social-security provisions. Men convicted of so-called honor crimes against women usually receive lenient sentences. Female foreign domestic workers are routinely exploited and physically abused by employers.

Copyright notice: © Freedom House, Inc. · All Rights Reserved