Lebanon is said to be one of the ‘most democratic countries’ in the Arabic world and its political system, the consensus democracy, is supposed to enhance the political, social and economic equality between the religious and ethnic groups living in the country. The Lebanese political system is thereby a form of confessionalism in which the highest offices are proportionately reserved for representatives from the different religions. Unfortunately, especially during the last decade, the political system itself is blocking reforms and creating tension in society and between ethical and religious groups, it thus works rather exclusive than inclusive and fails to perform its basic ideology.

The system that is supposed to create equality has been stuck without a president for over a year, it created a deadlock in parliament and is responsible for growing social and economic tensions concerning the dissimilar economic situation between the Shiite, Sunni and Christian population. In addition, not only is the current government inactive, its parliament has also unconstitutionally renewed its own mandate twice already. State institutions have become highly unable to act and basic responsibilities can’t be fulfilled.

The increase of Syrian refugees that are fleeing from the civil war are now adding up to the Palestinian refugees that already make up as much as 10% of the population. The government is not able to address those problems due to its deadlock.

The crisis concerning rubbish in Beirut in August/September 2015 is representative of the many problems Lebanon in currently facing.
a) History of the political Situation

Lebanon is a concordance democracy which is supposed to incorporate the 3 biggest ethnical groups: Shia Muslims, Sunni Muslims and (Maronite) Christians. After Lebanon gained independence from the French mandate in 1943, the system of a proportional consensus democracy was established based on a national census in 1932. At that time, the majority in the population was Christian with 51%, 22% of the population were Sunni, 20% Shiite and 7% Druze. These population figures have changed drastically in the last 80 years, but despite that, there have not been any official national censuses since 1932. In 2006, the Lebanese newspaper ‘Al Nahar’ estimated the percentage of the Muslim population to be 63,5% and the Christian and Druze population to be only 36,5%. Even though these censuses are not officially conducted by the government, compared to an unofficial census of the Lebanese ministry of administration development in 1970 (42% Christian or Druze, 58% Muslim), the numbers of 2006 seem trustworthy and at least more reasonable than the official data of 1932. One of the reasons for the demographic change in Lebanon is the civil war that in the late 20th century that led many Christians to leave the country and emigrate. In 1943 an unwritten agreement, the National Pact, divided parliamentary seats as defined in the 1932 census. This principle was later extended to other government institutions so that the president is a Maronite Christian, the prime minister a Sunni and the speaker of parliament a Shia. This division is still used nowadays concerning the distribution of political offices. Muslim groups and especially the Shia community have demanded a more proportional representative political system. At the end of the civil war in the 1990s, the Ta’if Agreement increased the possibilities of political involvement for the Shia population, nevertheless the majority of the population is still not appropriately represented in the political system and its bureaucracy.
The civil war that lasted from 1975 until the early 1990s was also a representative war between regional players like Israel, Syria and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which was held in Lebanon. Both Israel and Syria invaded Lebanon at times. Syria withdrew their troops following the Cedar Revolution in 2005, whereas Israeli troops withdrew their troops from the ‘security zone’ in the south of the country in 2000. The withdrawal of the Syrian troops followed the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, which opposition groups accused Syria over the killing. The UN has since demanded the dismantling of all armed groups, especially the military wing of the Hezbollah.

b) Political Situation: now & current crisis I: No president

The Lebanese president is the head of the state, he presides over the high council for national defense and is the commander of the armed forces. The office of presidency in Lebanon is reserved for a Christian Maronite. Although the treaty of Ta‘If restricted some of the president’s political power, the president still has a strong and influential position in Lebanese politics. The president is able to issue supplementary regulations to ensure the execution of laws, he has the ability to promulgate laws that were already passed by the parliament and he can negotiate treaties. The president, upon a binding consultation with the parliament, elects the prime minister. The president is elected by a two-thirds majority of the deputies in the parliament. If the first round of elections is unsuccessful and no presidential candidate is elected, an absolute majority would suffice for his election. The office of the president in Lebanon has been empty for over a year now. In May 2014 the period of office of the former president Michel Suleiman ended and since then, the government stays dysfunctional and without a president. As the presidential elections stall, so does the parliament’s work, which leaves the parliament paralyzed for now more than a year as well.

During the first election in parliament in April 2014, even though the required quorum of 2/3 MPs was reached, none of the presidential candidates was able to get the required majority of 86 votes. Since April 2014, re-elections have been held every 2-3 weeks, which have been boycotted by the 8th March Coalition every time, which means the required quorum of 2/3 attending MPs has not been reached. The 8th March Alliance’s demand consists of a neck-and-neck race between two candidates of the both Alliances. The 14th March Alliances did not accept this demand until now, afraid of the Hezbollah influence the Christian-Maronite Candidate of the March 8th coalition would have. The March 14th Alliances demands a presidential candidate who is supported by both Alliances and is elected consensual.
The Lebanese parliament consists of 128 members. The speaker of the Parliament is a Shia Muslim and is elected in a four-year term additional to the changing members of parliament. The current speaker is the leader of the Amal Party, Nabih Berri. The present government is composed out of 68 seats including the Change and Reform bloc (29 seats), the March 8 Alliance (29 seats) and Pro-Government Independents (10 seats). The opposition holds 58 seats and is composed of the March 14 Alliance (58 seats). The seats in parliament are apportioned between Christians and Muslims and they are equally divided between the two confessional groups in a 50:50 ratio, thus they are confessionally distributed. Nevertheless, the distinction between Sunni and Shia Muslims is not made, which decreases the representational ability of parliament. Political blocks that are formed in parliament are mostly based on confessional and local interests, which creates an increased influence of religious relevance. The Parliament’s role is to exercise political control over the cabinet.

According to the constitution, the parliament has to be elected every 4 years. Nevertheless, the last parliamentary election was 2009 and since then, the parliament has extended its mandate twice. The Lebanese parliament is also paralyzed due to the failed presidential election. In November 2014, the parliament enacted another extension, thus keeping its mandate until June 2017.

The Prime Minister is the head of the executive branch. He presides over the cabinet and is responsible for the implementation of its policies. The Lebanese Prime Minister has to be a Sunni Muslim. The Prime Minister chooses the cabinet, after consulting the national assembly and the president. The Prime Minister’s actual political power can vary depending on his support in cabinet, his personality and the preference of the current president.

Since May 2014 Prime Minister Tammam Salam has stepped in as acting president, even though he does not have the political rights to act as president, he is rather seen as the head of a caretaker-government. Opponents have accused Salam of uprising powers reserved for the president, nevertheless the work of the Cabinet is highly restricted and paralyzed.

The Lebanese cabinet is the executive body of the government. Its powers consist of setting policies, implementing rules, appointing public servants and dissolving the Parliament based on the president’s request. It traditionally includes members of both political alliances and the ministers are appointed by the Prime Minister.
Political parties in Lebanon are often personalized and have clientelistic tendencies. They often lack a real political agenda and rather define themselves based on the religious group they represent. In Lebanon, there are two rivaling political alliances, the ‘March 14 Alliance’ and the ‘March 8 Alliance’. The coalition of March 8th is led by the Shia-led Hezbollah and the Amal movement. The Christian Maronite general Aoun and the Free Patriotic Movement Party have also affiliated themselves to the March 8 Alliance.

The coalition of March 14th is led by the Sunni Future Movement Party and mostly consist of pro-western parties. Smaller parties and movements have therefore affiliated themselves according to their confessional ideology. Even though the March 8 Alliance is an intra-confessional Alliance between parts of the Christian Maronite confessional group as well as the Shia movement, nevertheless due to the rivalising alliances, the conflict between Shia and Sunni Muslims has gotten worst.

3 primary issues of frictions: pro- or anti-Syria, cooperation with Special Tribunal for Lebanon a disarmament of Hezbollah.

The Lebanese legal system is based on the French legal system. It is considered a civil law country with its own codes, the most notable code is the ‘Code of Obligation and Contracts’. The judicial branch consists firstly, of the Four Courts of Cassation (three courts for civil and commercial cases and one court for criminal cases), secondly of the Constitutional Council which is obligated to ensure that laws conform to the constitution. The highest administrative court is the Shoura Council, which is mandated to assist in drafting and reviewing of legislations. Thirdly, of the Supreme Council that hears charges against the Prime Minister or President and lastly of a system of various military courts. The justice system is often subject to political pressure, corruption, bribery, slow proceedings, prolonged detention and hearing and an insufficient number of judges.

The Constitution of Lebanon was adopted in 1926 and the most recent amendment was the Ta’if Accord in 1989. The constitution is based on the confessional political system of Lebanon and its main attempt was to maintain equality between Christians and Muslims through modifications in 1989. Even though the attempt ameliorated the conditions concerning political equality of the religious groups, the Muslim population and especially Shia Muslims are still politically underrepresented according to their majority in population.
The Lebanese military forces have faced and still face difficulties, considering the multi-confessional base of the army, the civil war in the late 20th century and the ongoing civil war in Syria. Conflict spillover has made the army a political target with deadly attacks on Lebanese soldiers during the last few years. Domestic conflicts such as demonstrations have posed a challenge on the army as well, which often represents the struggles of the multi-confessional society. The Lebanese army is supposed to be neutral and not influenced by political and social conflicts. The army was never equipped or trained for a military offensive, it was meant to be a neutral arbiter guaranteeing free elections, democratic transition and national stability. The quest of national stability often results in the use of violence by the military during demonstrations and protests about political and social issues in Lebanon. Due to this role, armed groups like Hezbollah have often acted as the national defense forces, which shows a deficit in the democratic reality. The main reason why the Lebanese army is not intervening is a lack of political mandate and the absence of a national defense strategy, especially during situations of governmental lockdowns.
In August, protests over corruption and political dysfunction were growing in Lebanon and the current ‘rubbish crisis’ is representative for Lebanon’s deep political crisis. Public resentment in the Lebanese society toward the political class’s abysmal performance has been growing in the last couple of months, especially concerning the political deadlock since May 2014. The rubbish crisis in Beirut started when the government closed the capital’s main rubbish landfill in July 2015, without an alternative. The Naameh landfill was already supposed to be closed in 2004, but government inaction kept it in use. Now, 11 years later, it was filled far beyond capacity. Criticism of the cabinet’s waste management started on social media, but soon activists and residents protested on the streets of Beirut. Soon, not only the crisis itself but criticized but instead the protesters concentrated on the origins of the events: the governmental impasse caused by political infighting over lucrative deals and thus not providing alternatives for the Naameh landfill.

On 22th and 23th august Lebanese police made use of water cannons, tear gas and rubber bullets during peaceful protests. This served as a catalyst, pushing many other citizens to protest as well. The use of force as well as the erection of a 24-hours concrete wall near the prime ministry revealed the state of panic inside the government as well as the public pressure.

Even though many Lebanese have adapted to the state malfunction and state institutions have been replaced by privatized alternatives, a state-initiated solution to the garbage crisis is inevitable. The political divisions and disagreements are so deep-rooted that basic needs of the citizens cannot be secured. This increases the possible influence of nongovernmental organizations and creates a lack of transparency concerning corruption. The positive aspect of the protests against the government has been the solidarity between the rivaling social, religious and ethnical groups during the course of this protest movement. The protests were held by Shia, Sunni and Christian citizens, united in the demand of political reforms.
Lebanon has always been a country affected by huge influxes of refugees over the last 50 years. Around 450,000 Palestinian refugees are registered with UNRWA in Lebanon, which represents an estimated 10% of the Lebanese population. Around 53% of the Palestinian refugees live and have been living in one of the 12 refugee camps for decades. All of them suffer from serious humanitarian deficits, including poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, poor housing conditions and a lack of infrastructure. Palestinian refugees do not enjoy several basic human rights in Lebanon, because they are not formally citizens of any state.

Additional to the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon there has been a large increase of Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian civil war in 2011. According to the UNHCR and as of 6 May 2015 there are currently 1,113,941 Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon (http://data.unhcr.org/syrianrefugees/country.php?id=122). The number of Syrian refugees is now equal to a quarter of the country’s pre-crisis population. The country, which already suffers from high debt ratios will most likely increased poverty and unemployment over the next years. Despite the strain on the host community, Lebanon has mostly operated an ‘open border’ policy until May 2014, when the government imposed first restriction policies against Syrian refugees. Since October 2014 Lebanon closed their borders except from Syrians on humanitarian grounds and for those with qualifications or Lebanese sponsors.

There is widespread poverty among Syrian refugees, inside and outside of government-run refugee camps. Syrians often must work irregularly because they are denied legal access to the Lebanese labor market and because their essential needs are not being fulfilled by the distribution of goods in the refugee camps. Many Syrian refugees are unable to access their basic human rights to housing, education and healthcare.
Lebanon is the country with the largest number of refugees per capita worldwide. Many refugees are also undocumented due to the unaffordable fees and the complicated administrative procedures for refugees to renew their legal residence. The on-going battles at the North-eastern border to Syria have generated a dangerous security situation and an increased hostility towards Syrian refugees. Along border areas there is a very fragile security situation which additionally challenges the humanitarian access and delivery of assistance for international and local help organizations.

**CRISIS IV: RESOLUTION 1701**

The UN Resolution 1701 was implemented in 2006 in light of the Israeli-Lebanese war. It was aimed to end the conflict and stabilize the situation, especially in the south of Lebanon. The resolution called for several specific acts concerning the current crisis, but also an implementation of the agreements of the Ta’if accord signed in 1991, which stated a disarmament of the Hezbollah militia and other military groups besides the Lebanese Armed Forces. Neither Israel nor the Hezbollah have implemented the resolution, leaving the Hezbollah still armed nowadays. The Resolution is still nowadays a topic of conflict which influences domestic politics.
The Lebanese Hezbollah movement is an organization with many facets; it is seen as an Islamic movement, a political party, an armed resistance group or even as a terrorist organization. Nevertheless, the Hezbollah has a strong influence in Lebanese state and regional politics, formal and informal.

It emerged with the help of Iran during the Israeli occupation of the Lebanese south in the early 1980s, even though their beginnings can be tracked as far as 1978 as an Islamic struggle movement of social and political progress. One aim was to abolish Lebanon’s sectarian political system. The original Hezbollah identity was inspired by Iran’s Islamic Revolution and it was to peacefully fight for improved socio-economic and political possibilities for the deprived Shia community. The role of Islam changed during the years of influence and the goal to completely change the sectarian political system has been abandoned. Being a part of the March 8th movement including Christian and Secular parties Hezbollah realized that in order to gain political influence, alliances are mandatory and thereby is closely affiliated to the Christian Free Partiotic Movement (FPM) led by former chief of staff Michel Aoun. Still, the Muslim identity and ideology plays an important role in the many faces of Hezbollah.

Additional to the Amal Movement the Hezbollah is one of the main parties representing the largest religious group in Lebanon: the Shia community. The Hezbollah party has been a part of the government including elected MPs since 2005. Additional, for the first time it fielded two ministers for the cabinet. The group has also effectively gained veto power in the cabinet.

The Hezbollah is mostly popular in Lebanon’s south, which is for the most part populated by Shiites and which is traditionally disadvantaged socio-economically. The Israeli invasions only worsened the socio-economical conditions. The Hezbollah is still heavily armed which is criticized not only by national political alliances like the March 14th coalition, but also by the international community. Even though the Ta’if agreement of 1989 called for the disarmament of all Lebanese militias, Hezbollah was allowed to continue its resistance to Israel which was still occupying Lebanon’s territory in the south. There are a few reasons for Hezbollah’s continued existence as an armed group mostly out of Lebanon’s state control. Firstly, its strategic relationship with Syria which had considerable influence in Lebanon at that time and wanted to keep Lebanon’s Israel fronts open. Secondly, its history as an armed militia and thirdly because of the
necessity to regain Lebanese territory. This was supported by a large percentage of the society. Since then, Hezbollah’s military nature has evolved over time to a hybrid organization combining methods of conventional and asymmetric warfare and in some ways its military capabilities now exceed those of the Lebanese army. Hezbollah has also been accused of carrying out bombings in Israel as well as cooperating with terrorist organizations. The organization provides for hospitals, educational institutions and schools in the disadvantaged regions. The organization is said to be supported by Iran and, mostly before the civil war in, also by Syria financially and through arms.

According to Human Rights Watch, the security situation in Lebanon declined during 2014. Firstly, Violence reportedly spilled over from the Syrian civil war, mostly in north Lebanon and the Bekaa Valley.

Secondly, by November 2014 over 1,143,000 Syrian refugees had approached UNHCR for registration in Lebanon, which does not grant them legal status but only a six-month residency permit with a one-time possibility of renewal. In November 2014 the Lebanese government began implementing measures to reduce the number of refugees but did not further define the restriction to only accept cases of ‘extreme humanitarian cases’. Due to the unclear definition there were said to be discriminatory entry determinations at the border.

In addition to the Syrian refugees and the approximately 300,000 Palestinian Refugees that are already living in Lebanon, 45,000 Palestinians from Syria demanded refuge last year. In May, new regulations limited Palestinian’s ability to enter the country or renew their residencies.

Furthermore, the failing presidential and parliamentary election are signs of a deficit in democratic leadership.

In 2014, charges and prosecutions against journalists and bloggers declined freedom of expression, due to the law that criticizing the Lebanese President or army is a criminal offense in Lebanon, which can carry a jail sentence. The definition of ‘criticism’ and ‘defamation’ are relatively open and legitimize law enforcement against journalists and news outlets.

Women are discriminated under Lebanese Law, for example by being denied the right to pass their nationality to their children. Additional, they face discrimination in the public sphere concerning harassment, wages and social practice.
ACTIVISM AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Due to the Lebanese system which is informally highly based on religious representation and regional influence, the education, health and associational sectors are mainly ‘sectarianized’, with the majority of NGOs that are supported by the state belonging to established religious groups, or families of sectarian leaders. Sectarian NGOs founded by prominent political leaders, especially after the civil war, are also primary providers of up to 60% of basic health and education services. Even sports are tools for competition between sects characterized with patron-client relations and are financed by sectarian elites. Sectarianism is also present in governmental institutions for example in parties or in the judicial system. Security, like any other public service, is also strongly linked to political leadership and sectarian interests, which prompts citizens in many cases to seek security and protection from non-state armed groups. These specificities of the Lebanese system limit the possible influence of independent Civil Service Organizations, especially concerning the ability to have an impact in decision-making within public institutions. Politically affiliated groups and faith based groups are usually much more well-funded and have more access to resources and thus shape an integral part of civil societies in the country.

Civil societies in Lebanon often suffer under the current political situation, especially from the increase of security measures since 2011 in face of the Syrian civil war. On the other hand, the importance of Civil Service Organizations increased after 2011, as Civil Service Organizations began providing basic services to citizens and refugee communities and they often are needed to complement government services. Due to the difficult economic situation of citizens in Lebanon, CSOs are often important providers of aid in sectors like public education, public health services or infrastructure. There are a few political developments like the on-going deadlock of political institutions, the security threats in the field or the polarization among Civil Society Activists limit the ability of CSOs to influence reform and policies. Furthermore, the geopolitical conditions the country is facing as well as the regional instability in the Middle East worsens CSOs possibilities of influence.
Lebanon has a liberal free market orientated economy, with the costs of most goods and services determined by supply and demand. The government supports private investments and public ownership has been limited to utilities and infrastructure.

**Sectors:**

The service sector is the biggest and most important one, accounting almost 75% of the GDP in 2010 (this includes: market services, tourism, personal services, healthcare, education, financial service, trade). The industrial sector accounts approximately 20% and the agricultural sector around 5% yearly, depending on local and seasonal environmental changes.

**GDP per capita/poverty:**

The latest estimate for GDP per capita is 9.105 USD from the time 2008-2012. Based on a 2007 UNDP study, around ¼ of the Lebanese population lives below the upper poverty line of 4 USD a day. Additional, there are large geographical as well as social disparities and poverty is mainly located in rural areas. Female-headed and elderly-headed households are more likely to suffer from poverty than male-headed households. Again, the Palestinian population is highly disadvantaged, two thirds of Palestinians are poor based on the poverty line of USD 6 a day.

**Employment:**

The main areas of employment are services, financial intermediation, insurance and trade. The labor market is thereby composed of a large number of migrants who are mainly working in low skilled labor (construction, agriculture, service). There is also a high prevalence of informal employment (20% of workers). Many of those are unregistered refugees that are not allowed to offi-
cially work. Women and youth are underrepresented in the labor market (21% of women working). Especially the Palestinian refugees are underrepresented in the labor market and suffer from discrimination. In 2010, only 37% of Palestinian refugees of working age were legally employed. They often face legal and socio-economical obstacles to working, because they are not allowed to follow certain professions including medical doctors, engineers, nurses and taxi drivers.

Lebanon is very dependent on imported food because the local production only satisfies 17% of local consumption. This food deficit is mostly visible in cereals, the Black Sea region, including Ukraine and Russia, is the main grain source. Due to the dependence of imports and services, economic productivity is highly influenced by regional and international events.

Since 2009 and more so since 2011 in light of the Arab Spring, the Lebanese economy has witnessed a reduction of growth due to political and social instabilities. The Syrian crisis and the great impact on the big numbers of refugees are the main reasons for the negative impact on economic growth and service provision. The influx of a large number of Syrian refugees has increased supply of labor and demand for food, causing the decrease of salaries for low-skilled work and an increase of prices for basic commodities. At the same time the crisis has some positive effects for example the increase in consumption, labor supply construction and small-scale residential construction. However, this is outweighed by the reduction of tourism, foreign investments and increased demand on government services (education, health etc). The agricultural production in Lebanon is concentrated in the Bekaa region as well as the North of the country.

Corruption in Lebanon is present in all sectors of society and government and it exists in all forms- bribery, nepotism, favoritism, patronage, embezzlement and vote buying. The causes behind the increase in corruption are various, but due to the government shutdown and the privatization of many governmental tasks, there is a decreased transparency and corruption can occur more easily.
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

REGIONAL RELATIONS: Sunni and Shia

In order to be able to understand regional and domestic politics and relationships, it is important to consider the Sunni and Shia alliances in the region. Most of the countries in the Middle East are either Sunni or Shia dominated, which influence the relationship between countries but also the socio-economic and political situation of the confessional groups in society. In Lebanon, due to the multi-confessional government, the relationships between the two groups do not mainly determine international relations but rather the domestic relations. The affiliation to one of the confessions (Shia, Sunni, Christian) often determines the social status, work environment, career opportunities and general lifestyle. Generally speaking, the Shia community often face discrimination, especially the Palestinian Shia refugees living in Lebanon.

The majority of Muslims are Sunnis, estimated figures suggest the percentage to be around 85%. The Middle Eastern countries with the greatest proportion of Sunnis are Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Iran has the largest Shia majority making up more than 90% of the population. The Iranian government is said to support the Shia led Hezbollah financially and politically.

Due to the lack of an updated census since 1932, there are no official numbers of the percentage in representation of the religious groups, nevertheless, reliable sources state that the Muslim community is the largest one, following the Christians and lastly the Druze minority. The religious groups are represented in politics according to the unwritten agreement known as the National Pact, which enlarges the impact of Sunni-Shia and also Christian relations in Lebanon, not only politically but mainly socially.

Additional, there are socio-economic differences between the religious groups in society. The Beqaa region in the south of Lebanon, which is mostly inhabited by the Shia community, lacks infrastructure and educational establishments and is weakened by the conflicts on the Israeli border. The Maronite and Druze community on the other hand historically belong to the ruling elites in politics and economy. This disparity defines the relationship between the religious groups in many ways.

Syria

Before 2005, the foreign policy of Lebanon was highly influenced by Syria. The legal framework of those relations was codified in 1991 after the Lebanese civil war and with the signing of the Ta’If Agreement. The Ta’If Agreement included a treaty of mutual cooperation with Syria, which calls for “coordination and cooperation between the two countries.” The contemporary Syrian-Lebanese relationship were shaped and got more independent in 2005 after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafic Hariri and 21 others. There were suspicions that the Syrian government played a role with his dead because of Hariri’s opposition to Syrian influence and intervention in Lebanese
The Israeli-Lebanese relationship has always been complicated and especially the relationship between the Hezbollah militia and the Israeli government is in focus of the ongoing conflict. In 2000, Israel declared to end their occupation and stick to the borders set by the UN 22 years before, after the Israeli-supported South Lebanese Army lost against the Hezbollah earlier that year. This date marked the end of the Israeli presence in the Hezbollah-dominated south and is still seen as Liberation Day, a national holiday. Following the withdrawal of the troops, there were still several complications along the Lebanese-Israeli borders in the south between the Israeli military and Hezbollah forces.

The Lebanon-based Hezbollah militia and Israel continuously engage in attacks against each other and fought a brief war in 2006, which concluded in the destruction of infrastructure and an influx on people without houses, mainly in the already disadvantaged south of Lebanon. Critics state that even though the borders are relatively safe, the conflict could easily erupt again and that the UNIFIL peacekeeping mission can be criticized.
**Iran**

Lebanese relations with Iran are highly connected to the political alliances in Lebanon. The mostly Shia led March 14 alliance holds stronger alliances to Iran, whereas the Sunni March 8 alliance advocates stronger ties with Iran’s counterweight Israel. The role of the Iran-found Hezbollah is of importance concerning the March 14 alliance, which is Shia led and is supported by the Lebanese Hezbollah. During the 2006 war with Israel Iran supported Hezbollah and Lebanon. The Lebanese Hezbollah is said to be financially supported by Iran, which increases their domestic influence.

**INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS:**

**France**

Due to the history as France as colonial power, the two countries engage in a friendly relationship nowadays. France has often provided economical such as political support during times of crisis, for example supporting the reconstruction of Lebanon after the civil war and the 2006 war with Israel. French is also widely spoken in Lebanon and is used as a medium of education between the religious groups in many Lebanese schools.

**EU and US**

The relationship between the European Union and Lebanon consist mainly of the EU’s European Neighborhood Policy which is focused on closer political associations and economic integration. This goal builds on common democratic values and interests and ties Lebanon to the democratic ideology of the European Union. The European Union is the largest trading partner of Lebanon and Lebanon receives financial assistance in form of the European Neighborhood Instrument. The US states to enjoy a peaceful and friendly relationship to Lebanon, mostly because of the pro-Western orientation nowadays and during the cold war and because of the democratic values expressed by the government. Nevertheless, the influential Hezbollah party and their militia is seen as a major threat to regional and Lebanese domestic stability. Especially Hezbollah’s ties to Iran are observed with concern. By supporting the Lebanese government financially, both the US and the EU hope to improve the influence of the Lebanese government concerning infrastructure and social services and thereby reduce Hezbollah’s influence, mostly in the south of the country. This ambition has not proved to be overly successful in the last years.
PILLARS OF SUPPORT

According to Gene Sharp “Pillars of support are institutions and sections of the society that supply the existing regime with sources of power required for maintenance and expansion of its power capacity” (Gene Sharp - Waging Nonviolent Struggle)

In Lebanon's current political system, there is no oppressive regime that prevents a social and political change, it is the political system itself that is responsible for social and political inequality, corruption, economic difficulties and the current crises. The pillars of support in Lebanon either support the government, the opposition including Hezbollah or the political system itself, either way they are responsible for a political system that has been flawed for decades but sees no future of change.

PILLARS SUPPORTING THE GOVERNMENT

The pillars of support aiding the government automatically are responsible for supporting the political system itself. They help the current ruling elite to maintain their power.

1. POLICE AND MILITARY

The International Security Forces (ISF) are the national police force in Lebanon. The official role of the ISF is to preserve the public order, provide security, act as a counter-terrorist force and handle traffic order in the urban areas. The police forces are obedient to the current government. In the recent protests against the government and the trash crisis, the police forces repeatedly used force to disperse peaceful protests, for example on August 19th, 22nd and September 16th. This use of violence fails to uphold human rights standards of the freedom of assembly and speech. Under article 21 of
the ICCPR, Lebanese authorities and police forces are required to respect the right of peaceful assembly and can only impose proportionate limitations on demonstrations in the case of a threat to public safety and order. The extreme use of violence should lead to internal investigations. The ISF is therefore a tool used by the government in order to frighten protesters and stop anti-government demonstrations.

The Lebanese armed forces are often employed in domestic politics and conflicts, rather than regional ones. In light of the current crisis and as well in the past, the Lebanese military forces have been taking over policing roles such as crowd control during protests. Nevertheless, their equipment is often not modified and many soldiers still wear their military uniforms and standard machine guns instead of protective gear. The Lebanese army is thereby not only a pillar of support concerning regional or international relations, it mostly supports the oppressive governmental structure concerning the freedom of peaceful assembly and thereby creates a situation of fear and violence.

Generally speaking, the law enforcement in Lebanon, both the military and the police forces, lack accountability. Officers that make use of excessive force should face criminal liability as much as violent protesters. As long as the law enforcement lacks transparency and disciplinary action, the pillar of the police and military works in favor of the current government and violates basic human rights in the name of the government.
PILLARS SUPPORTING THE OPPOSITION/ HEZBOLLAH

The opposition in Lebanon is influenced by Hezbollah and thus also by the financial aids of Iran. One of the main pillars of support is the public opinion and their social influence in the southern part of Lebanon, which only resulted due to the lack of involvement and aid in infrastructure and financial help of the government. The Hezbollah’s interest is not only to have more influence in politics but also to maintain their informal power regarding social involvement.

2. IRAN

Iran is a pillar of support regarding Hezbollah’s involvement in Lebanon, both formally political but also informally. Iran represents the general involvement of international and regional actors in Lebanon as well as the Sunni-Shia conflict of power in the MENA region. By supporting Hezbollah financially, there is the possibility for Hezbollah to create a ‘state in a state’ in the southern regions of Lebanon, which would weaken the executive powers of the government and furtherly divide the country’s society. Iran’s government profits from a strong position of Hezbollah in Lebanon, especially concerning the relationship to Israel and the borders in the south of Lebanon.

3. CIVIL SERVICE

Hezbollah increasingly influences the civil services like education, health care, infrastructure, in the southern Beqaa region of Lebanon. Due to their impact on everyday life in certain regions, their influence is a huge pillar of civil and local support.

PILLARS SUPPORTING THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

The following pillars of support are not composed of the traditional pillars supporting one oppressive government but rather the political system of Lebanon itself. There are certain institutions and legal documents that prevent change. The ruling elites but also other actors like the Hezbollah or their financial support Iran benefit from the disparities in society, all in their own way.

4. CONSTITUTION AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The legal framework of Lebanon and the most recent version of legal accords, the Ta’If Accords, are constituted in a way that supports the current political system as well as the government and which hinders political and social reforms. The system of a consociational democracy which is divided along religious identities might seem equitable, but is not applicable in the current form in Lebanon. The result of this political system is, more than ever, visible nowadays: Failed presidential elections for now over a year, a parliament that renewed their own mandate unconstitutionally twice, corruption and protesters that demand a
change in politics. The political system failed to develop a national identity and rather focus on the differences between the political, ethnical and religious groups. The current division of power benefits the Christian and Sunni religious elites. The president always has to be Christian Maronite and the Prime Minister Sunni, which leaves the two most influential positions in the state to those two religious groups. Because this division of power is based on a census from 1932, the Shia population which grew during the last decades, is underrepresented. The constitution and legal framework create a separation between the religious communities in many areas: political parties, schools, social communities. As long as the aim of the National Pact and the Ta’if accords to abolish the confessional system in Lebanon is not achieved, this separation in society will be difficult to overcome.

5. (BUREAUCRATIC) CORRUPTION

Bureaucratic corruption is a present problem that supports the current political system and especially the Elites that profit from it. There are many cases of abuse of power or position in the bureaucracy but also in other fields of interest. Clientilism is very common in Lebanon, especially concerning the role of religious elites, and is often connected to corruption, which makes it hard to reform. Every religious community, nevertheless, demands the containment of corruption and more political transparency.

SPLIT ALLEGIANCES

There are a few institutions like the media or civil societies that advocate change in the political system as well as the social reality. Nevertheless, in those institutions the religious elites are always represented as well due to their political and monetary influence which restricts their impact.

6. MEDIA

The media in Lebanon is said to be relatively open and unbiased, reporting critically on governmental coverage. The media and especially online blogs often act as a force against the traditional pillars of support and provide relatively unbiased commentatorship. There are many newspaper and media outlets in Arabic, French, English and Armenian and many of them are free from State control. The press does, however, reflect the limitations of the sectarian political system, where a news outlet is often identified with one of the main religious and political groups. Nevertheless, according to Reporters without Borders, there have been a series of violent assaults against journalists and reporters, which limits the freedom of press.
The Lebanese police forces are also said to use violent tactics towards journalists, especially during times of protest. These tactics of fear could be a governmental tool in order to limit criticism concerning the political system. The media is thereby a split allegiance, on the one hand social media and independent news outlets criticize the political system and the limitation of sectarianism, on the other hand the majority of newspaper and TV stations are still divided into the religious groups, which divides the society even further. Not only the news coverage is dependent on the religion, even the history of Lebanon is perceived differently by each group. This makes the goal of a unified Lebanon and the abolition of confessionalism almost impossible to reach.

7. CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society in Lebanon is often trying to overcome the difficulties between the religious groups in Lebanon and often little achievements go a long way: shared newspapers, shared schools or different intracultural establishments can help to bring the ethnicities closer together. Additional, civil society often brings together activists from the different ethnical groups. Protest movements like the cedar revolution in 2005 or the current protest movement unite religious, social and ethnical groups in favor of social and political change. Unfortunately, the influential civil societies are often still funded through one of the religious groups. The landscape of civil society is thereby split in allegiances, some demanding real change and the cooperation between the communities, but others using their influence in order to strengthen their power in society.
OUTCOMES

1. POSITIVE OUTCOME
The first possible outcome is the hardest to achieve but would tackle all the structural aspects that cause the current problematic political and socio-economic situation from the base of the problem. There are three layers of change that are acquired; firstly the general change of the political system and the legal documents and agreements, secondly the current political situation and thirdly the current crises concerning rubbish and Syrian refugees. In order to really change the second and third layers it is essential to have a legal base that supports the changes in current politics. The first layer, the general improvement of the political situation and the abolishment of the sectarian confessional system in governance which is set as a goal in both the national pact of 1943 and the Ta’If accords of 1989, must be the first to address concerning long term change.
Before completely abolishing the sectarian system it is necessary to update the current system. In order to achieve that, there has to be a new and updated census of the population in Lebanon in order to adjust the demographical change during the last 70 years. Based on the updated version of the census, the system of percentage would be more accurate, but still not sufficient concerning a successful decision making incorporating all political and religious actors. One alternative in parliament would be the muthalatha system of representation, a 3-way-balance among Sunnis, Shi’a and Christians, which would replace the current 50:50 ratio of Christians and Muslims. This change would include the Shi’a community more and consider the Sunni-Shia relationship and political alliances that can be difficult at times. The quotas would also have to be applied to the bureaucratic institutions creating equal chances of work.
Another requirement is the establishment of parties that are not primarily based on religious terms but on actual political platforms that represent the groups in society. The same representation should be implemented in the educational and media sector. Institutions should be based rather on interest and political opinion then on the ethnic and religious background of the citizens. This improvement would prevent a certain grade of corruption and clientelism which is responsible for the missing transparency and thus the defect democracy. Due to the increasing inclusion of the Shia population, the socio-economic situation in Shia populated regions like Southern Lebanon will show improvement, nevertheless the Lebanese government is obligated to support the development of infrastructure in the impacted regions. Lastly, the Hezbollah militia should be included in decision making concerning the national defense considering that their armed forces are more powerful than the official Armed Forces of Lebanon.
Besides the political and socio-economic improvements, the humanitarian situation has to improve as well in order to change Lebanon to the better. Basic human rights like the right to shelter, freedom of expression especially concerning journalism, or the freedom to work in every field you wish to be valid for all minorities including Palestinian and Syrian refugees, regardless of sex or ethnicity.
The second layer of change concerns the current political situation. The most important concern is the presidential election. It is essential to elect a president and a new parliament in the near future. The current parliament extended its own mandate twice already and suffers from a lack of representation. The presidential candidate should be supported by both alliances. In order for that to happen, the opposition’s demands should be considered to some extent but on the other hand Hezbollah and the FPM
are obligated to be willing to agree on a compromise and not boycott every round of election. Michael Anoun has recently proposed a presidential election by popular vote instead of the election by parliament, nevertheless this proposal is not supported by the constitution and is thus a rather unrealistic option.

The third and most recent improvements that are necessary concern the refugee and garbage crisis. In the last 3 years Lebanon has had a huge influx of Syrian refugees. In a best-case scenario, the Syrian civil war would either end soon or at least the living situation of Syrian refugees would improve in Lebanon, which is not possible without international financial aid. In order to integrate Syrian refugees, educational institutions have to be developed. The humanitarian situation would improve by providing housing and sufficient hygienic facilities. The current trash crisis would be solved by investing in long term ecological friendly trash dumps and have a dialogue with the citizens of Beirut showing concern and the willingness to improve. The demonstrations would not spark police violence and thus increase the foundation of efficient change in policy. The current protests do not only demand a solution of the garbage crisis but increasingly criticize the political situation and current governance of Lebanon. In order to change those basics in the Lebanese state, the first layer of improvements is essential and required, otherwise the enhancement will not last but only provide a short-term alternative.

2. NEGATIVE OUTCOME

The possible negative outcome, the worst-case-scenario would occur in the case that the Lebanese political system stays paralyzed and the disputes between the religious communities increase. The Hezbollah militia plays a big role in domestic peace and could either use this power in order to establish a more democratic system or, on the other hand, misuse it and provoke violence. Especially the currently peaceful but fragile situation in the south of Lebanon and the borders to Israel could be endangered. Iran’s increasing influence in Lebanon could also evoke a proxy power struggle or even war between the Shia and Sunni nations of power. The relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia could be represented in Lebanon which would again divide the society even further. Another worst-case scenario would involve the Syrian Civil war and violence swap over, especially on the Syrian border. Both, the conflict between Assad’s troops and the opposition as well as the Islamic State are regional threats. The Islamic State could gain influence and power and without intervention of the international community, it is also a threat to Lebanon.
3. MOST-LIKELY SCENARIO

The most likely scenario is probably a combination out of the two extremes. In the future, realistically both a Parliament and a President will have to be elected. The presidential candidate is obligated to be accepted by all the parties, hence a compromise must be found and claims have to be adjusted.

The future of Lebanon is highly dependent on the situation in Syria and the regional Iranian- Saudi power struggles. The current humanitarian and socio-economic situation will not be approved within a year or so and as long as the Syrian civil war is proceeding. There are insufficient financial and human resources to end the refugee crisis and the resulting socio-economic crises.

Another point of influence is set in the mind of the people, independent from the political situation. A change in society and a convergence of the confessional communities can only be successful as long as the people demand it, act accordingly to it and change their behavior. Protest movements like the Cedar Revolution in 2005 but also the current demonstrations against the rubbish crisis and the dysfunctional government have proven to be an occasion for all parts of society, regardless of their sex, religion or social status. The current protest movement can be a chance for the communities to get closer together, regardless of the political situation.


