EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE FIELD GUIDE

LEBANON

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the Levant (Photo: Rock formations near Beirut, Lebanon).

Part 2 is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of Lebanese society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training (Photo: US Coast Guard and Lebanese military members during a staff exchange).

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity (Photo: Children in Karama, Syria).

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture (Photo: Amman, Jordan).

Social Behaviors across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview—how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It

helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner (Photo: A woman working in a bakery in Manbij, Syria).

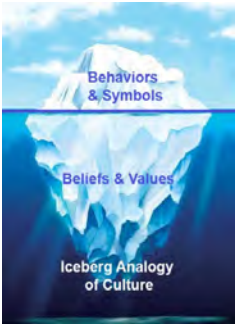
Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change (Photo: A sign marking the border between Israel and the West Bank).

Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).



In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success (Photo: The Western Wall in Jerusalem).

As you travel through the Levant, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

The Levant comprises Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Archaeological finds suggest humans inhabited the region as early as 194,000 years ago. Around 9000 BC, inhabitants began domesticating animals, cultivating crops, and producing pottery. The region is home to some of the world's earliest continuous settlements, notably Jericho in the present-day West Bank and Byblos (modern-day Jbeil) in present-day Lebanon. These and other early settlements played an important role in the development of regional trade and culture (Photo: The Ad Deir structure in Petra, Jordan is some 2,000 years old).

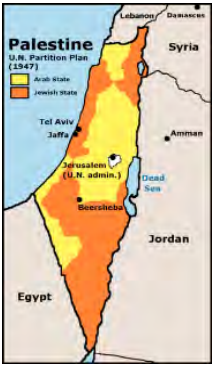
The Levant came under the influence of several powerful empires in subsequent centuries, notably the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, and Greeks. Beginning in the 1st century BC, the region was incorporated into the Roman Empire, and following the split between the Western Roman and Eastern (Byzantine) Empires, was ruled by the Byzantines from their capital at Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul).

By 640, Muslim warriors from the Arabian Peninsula were expanding into the region. Islamic dynasties then controlled the Levant until the Roman Catholic Church pursued a series of religious crusades to capture territories in the region. However, the Crusaders were soon evicted, and Islamic dynasties from Egypt governed the Levant by the 13th century. In the 16th

century, the region fell to the Ottoman Empire based in present-day Turkey, which ruled the Levant, with some interruptions for the next 400 years.

Following the Ottomans' defeat in World War I, European powers took control of the former Ottoman territories in the Levant, with France occupying Syria and Lebanon and Britain occupying Jordan and Palestine. Concurrently, the British committed to establishing a "Jewish homeland" in Palestine. In the 1940s, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria gained independence (though Syria would briefly unite with Egypt to form the United Arab Republic from 1958-61). During World War II, British Palestine's Jewish population grew as many European Jews fled persecution.

In 1947, the United Nations (UN) voted to partition British Palestine into Arab and Jewish states, prompting conflict between Zionists (advocate development and protection of a Jewish nation in Palestine) and Palestinian Arabs. When Britain withdrew from the area and Israel declared independence as a Jewish state in 1948, further violence erupted with Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq declaring war against Israel. At the conflict's end in mid-1949, Israel had gained territory beyond the 1947 UN plan, and Jordan occupied the West Bank and Egypt the Gaza Strip. Both of these territories had been allocated to the unrealized Palestinian Arab state. Further, the fighting caused some 700,000 Palestinians to flee Israel. Forbidden from returning, most settled in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Jordan (Illustration: The 1947 Partition Plan).



After the 1967 war with Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, Israel gained control over additional territories, including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and the Syrian Golan Heights. Conflict continued through the 1970s, despite various peace talks and attempts to establish a self-governing authority for the Palestinians, who still sought their own state. In 1970, civil war

erupted in Jordan between the Jordanian army and Palestinian guerillas supported by Syria. Between 1975- 90, Lebanon also endured a devastating civil war in which Palestinian groups, Syria, and Israel played a large role. In 1988, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO – an umbrella organization of the various Palestinian activist groups) proclaimed the founding of the State of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, though many countries refused to recognize it, and Israel continued to build settlements in territories claimed by the PLO. In the 1990s, a series of agreements transferred authority over some areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip from Israel to the newly-created Palestinian Authority (PA), though Israel continued to promote settlement in disputed areas (Photo: Palestinian Prime Minister, now President, Mahmoud Abbas, US President George W. Bush, and Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon in 2003).

In 2006, a 34-day war erupted between the Lebanese militia Hezbollah and Israel. A year later, Hamas, a militant Islamist group, forcibly took control of the Gaza Strip, intensifying tensions between the PA and Israel. In 2011, civil war erupted in Syria, triggering violence throughout the Levant. As of mid-2020, the Levant continues to face civil war, territorial disputes, and the destabilizing activities of non-state actors.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community.

Jordan is a parliamentary constitutional monarchy with its King holding ultimate executive, judicial, and legislative powers. Lebanon is a parliamentary republic with a unique “confessional” structure which divides political power among 18 Christian and Muslim sects. A presidential republic, Syria has been ruled by the al-Assad family for almost 50 years. The PA governs the

Palestinian Territories through an elected President (presently, also chairman of the PLO) and legislative council and is housed in the West Bank. While Israel lacks a formal constitution, a set of “Basic Laws” defines it as a parliamentary democracy.

Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria are among 140 countries that now recognize the State of Palestine, though the US and Israel do not. Palestine is not a member of the UN but holds observer status. As of mid-2020, the Gaza Strip remains contested, with the Palestinian militant group Hamas presently controlling it. Neither Lebanon nor Syria formally recognizes Israel. Instead, they consider themselves in a state of war with Israel, which occupies parts of their territories. In mid-2020, the PA announced it would end all security, economic, and political ties with Israel.

Regional security threats and mutual distrust motivate significant military posturing in the Levant. The ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, heightened by Hamas’ occupation of the Gaza Strip, and the Syrian civil war have also significantly increased tensions. Israel and Jordan are key US allies, but the PA has cut most diplomatic contact with the US since 2017 (Photo: Then-US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton with King Abdullah II of Jordan in 2009).

While the citizens of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories are predominantly Arabs, other groups, notably Armenians and Kurds, are present. Some three-fourths of Israelis are Jews of a variety of ethnicities. The Levantine territories host large numbers of refugees and displaced persons. As of mid-2020, Lebanon and Jordan together host almost 2 million refugees from Syria, while some 1.5 million Palestinians live in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, the Gaza Strip, and the West Bank.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help

preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

The Levant is the birthplace of both Judaism and Christianity. Today, Jews, Christians, and Muslims consider many Levantine sites sacred. For example, the Temple Mount (pictured), located in Jerusalem's Old City, is Judaism's holiest and Islam's third holiest site, while also holding significance for Christians.

Since its arrival in the 7th century, Islam has been a defining factor in shaping regional cultures and societies. Today, Syrians, Jordanians, and Palestinians are predominantly Muslim, though some are Christian. While Lebanon has a majority Muslim population, some one-third are Christian. As the self-proclaimed "Nation State of the Jewish People," Israel has a predominantly Jewish population.

Religious affiliation continues to be an important marker of identity in the region. While the Levantine governments generally recognize religious freedom, discrimination and intolerance persist, especially towards converts from Islam and atheists. Across the region, religious identity and political affiliation tend to be linked, so religious discrimination often has political underpinnings.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Levantine society. Regional inhabitants maintain strong connections with both immediate and extended family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing physical care for elderly or ailing kin if needed. While residence

patterns differ somewhat across the region, multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

The urbanization of Levantine society has changed family life in recent years. As of 2018, over three-fourths of inhabitants of Lebanon, Jordan, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories live in urban areas compared to around half in Syria. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in urban areas, family structures have become more diverse. Moreover, traditional family dynamics have been disrupted in recent years by regional conflicts, especially in Syria (Photo: Men with their children in Kobani, Syria).

Historically, marriage was an arranged union intended to bring both families social and economic advantages. Although arranged marriages are still common across the region, many regional residents now choose their own spouses, particularly in urban areas. None of the Levantine governments performs civil marriages, relying instead on religious authorities to officiate ceremonies. While divorce was traditionally uncommon, rates have generally increased in recent years. Polygyny, the practice of a man having multiple wives, is legal for some Muslim inhabitants of the Levant.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

The Levant's cultures and religions traditionally privilege the male's role as leader and provider. For example, Islamic law favors men over women in inheritance and other family matters. While most of the region's inhabitants continue to adhere to traditional gender roles – men as breadwinners and guardians and women as mothers and wives – recent decades have seen

some changes. In Syria, for example, gender roles have somewhat shifted since the start of the civil war.

While literacy rates for women have increased in recent decades, female participation in education varies. In 2015, 50% of Israeli women aged 25 and older had completed a postsecondary degree compared to just 23% in the Palestinian Territories. Generally, Levantine women face challenges to attaining education and are often encouraged to pursue traditional “female” disciplines such as education and healthcare.

While women are involved in politics across the region, they are generally less likely to participate than men, and overall, the number of women serving in elected offices remains relatively low. While Israel elected Golda Meir as its first female Prime Minister in 1969, and a few women serve as ministers across the Levant’s Arab states, Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip typically exclude women from formal leadership positions.

Historically, Levantine women rarely worked outside the home, and female workforce participation varies across the region today. While some 60% of Israeli women worked outside the home in 2019, just 14% of Syrian and Jordanian women did – some of the world’s lowest rates. Working women in the region often face a pay gap and discrimination. Some Levantine women experience other barriers to their full participation in society. For example, Jordan’s traditional male guardianship system significantly limits women’s freedoms, and Syrian law permits certain male relatives to place travel bans on female family members (Photo: Jordanian Armed Forces members attend a graduation ceremony).

Same-sex relations in Lebanon, Syria, and the Gaza Strip are criminalized. Discrimination against LGBTQ individuals is widespread throughout the region, even where same-sex activities are technically legal, namely Jordan, Israel, and the West Bank.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

Arabic is the official language of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and the Palestinian Territories and the Levant's most widely spoken language. Most residents regularly use two Arabic varieties – Modern Standard Arabic in school, the media, and in official government proceedings and Levantine Arabic for everyday communication. Some Levantine residents speak other languages and dialects. For example, inhabitants of northeastern Syria tend to speak Kurdish, and Syrians in other regions speak other Arabic dialects, such as Mesopotamian, Najdi, and Bewadi Arabic. Hebrew is the predominant and official language of Israel, with Arabic holding "special" status after losing its official status in 2018. Across the region, English and French also are spoken widely (Photo: Lebanese street sign in Arabic and French).

Generally, the region's residents demonstrate respect, generosity, and candor in their communication practices. In most of the Levant, communications reflect high levels of emotion and engagement, though some residents refrain from displaying emotions around strangers or in public. Residents tend to share information about themselves and often expect foreign nationals to do the same. Gestures are common when speaking, particularly if the speaker is interested in the topic.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This

knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Prior to the early 20th century, religious affiliation largely dictated educational opportunities, with Muslim, Christian, and Jewish communities operating their own schools during the Ottoman period. Following World War I, the British and French imposed European-style education throughout the region, emphasizing French and English language instruction but largely neglecting the development of the educational system as a whole.

After their independence, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Israel developed their own educational structures and curricula at different rates. In 1946, Lebanese reforms replaced French with Arabic as the primary language of instruction in public schools. Meanwhile, the Jewish community in British Palestine created its own Hebrew educational system, and after its 1948 independence, Israel expanded upon this framework. In 1957, Syria and Jordan replaced European curricula with their own educational programs. The Palestinian Territories relied on foreign curricula until the 1990s, when the authorities began developing their own learning materials (Photo: Teachers attend training in Manbij, Syria).

While the adult literacy rate in Syria was just 85% in 2015, the rate is over 95% throughout the rest of the Levant. As of 2017, enrollment rates at the primary and secondary levels were near universal in Israel. By contrast, just half to two-thirds of children enrolled at those levels in Jordan and Lebanon. Public investment in education varies across the region, ranging from 6% of GDP in 2013 in Israel to 5% in the Palestinian Territories and 2% in Lebanon. Due to years of conflict, education in Syria has been severely disrupted with some two million children out of school and one-third of schools destroyed or occupied. International organizations operate schools for displaced and refugee children across the Levant.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. By contrast, in the Levant, establishing and maintaining relationships often takes precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. While regional residents typically agree in advance on scheduled start times, meetings frequently begin late. An exception is Israel, where inhabitants typically prefer to work quickly and efficiently (Photo: US Army Gen Martin Dempsey with Jordanian Armed Forces Chief of Defense Gen Mashal al-Zaben in 2013).

Some Levantines interact with each other in different ways than Americans are used to. For example, in many Muslim and Orthodox Jewish communities, unrelated women and men seldom interact, and when they do, it is typically in group settings. Concepts of personal space also differ from those in the US. For example, many Levantine residents of the same sex commonly sit and stand closer to each other and tend to touch more often during conversations than Westerners.

The region's communities use a variety of calendars, notably Islamic, Western (Gregorian), Julian, and Hebrew ones. Because Friday is considered a holy day in Islam, most of the region observes a Saturday- or Sunday-Thursday workweek. Israelis also observe a Sunday-Thursday workweek, as Saturday is considered a holy day in Judaism. By contrast, in Lebanon, the workweek generally runs Monday-Friday.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Levantine art, architecture, dance, music, poetry, and theater reflect the region's rich history and modern global trends.

Across the Levant, and particularly in urban areas, Western-style clothing is common, though some Levantines prefer long, loose-fitting garments and other traditional attire. Some religious groups have their own traditional clothing and headgear.

Levantine music and dance styles express topics like nature, rural life, love, history, and current events. Both traditional and modern forms of music are popular, ranging from Arab folk songs accompanied by the ***oud*** (a stringed, pear-shaped instrument) to contemporary, upbeat Lebanese and Israeli pop. A popular traditional dance found throughout the Levant is the ***dabke*** (a folk dance performed in circles or lines, with different versions defined by the speed and rhythm of the steps).

Many Levantine artists historically favored geometric designs and patterns to depict plants, flowers, and animals on buildings, jewelry, and household items. Regional inhabitants today create various traditional handicrafts and pieces of folk art that reflect the region's rich heritage and often incorporate religious motifs. Common handicrafts include pottery, embroidery, ceramics, and calligraphy. Soccer is the most widely followed sport in the region. Other popular sports include basketball, weightlifting, handball, and swimming (Photo: US Navy Sailors and Marines play soccer with Jordanian service members).

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

While cuisine varies across the region, residents tend to rely on many of the same staple ingredients such as chickpeas and other beans, lemons, onions, and garlic. Common dishes include mutton and chicken prepared with a variety of spice

mixtures such as ***za'atar*** (made of sumac, oregano, thyme, and sesame seeds) and ***bokharat*** (a seven-spice powder). Fruits, yogurt, various salads, bread, and rice are common accompaniments to meals. Popular drinks include tea, often sweetened and flavored with mint or sage, and a variety of fruit juices. Neither observant Muslims nor Jews in the Levant consume pork. Observant Muslims also refrain from consuming alcohol and prepare food using halal guidelines – allowed by Islamic law.

Health in most of the region has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Most residents of the Levant have access to quality healthcare that is generally subsidized by governments. Nevertheless, years of conflict have created significant challenges to the delivery of healthcare in some areas. For example, some one-third of Syrian hospitals have closed, and two-thirds of Syrian medical personnel have fled since the civil war began in 2011. Consequently, specialized physical and psychological care is unavailable. Meanwhile, Jordan and Lebanon struggle with rising healthcare costs generated by the influx of Syrian refugees (Photo: Syrian doctors).

Healthcare systems face several other challenges such as long wait times at health facilities and increasing out-of-pocket expenses. Further, the quality of care tends to vary between urban and rural areas, where clinics are often understaffed and equipped with outdated equipment. Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer, and chronic respiratory disease now cause more than three-fourths of all deaths in the Levant, except in Syria, where injuries cause some 50% of deaths.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade

with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Prior to the 20th century, the Levantine territories maintained largely agrarian and trade-based economies. Even after most of the region declared independence, conflict and political instability largely hampered significant economic development. The territories subsequently followed different strategies to stimulate economic growth. For example, in the 1960s, Syria implemented socialist economic policies with extensive government involvement, while Lebanon prioritized the growth of its private sector. In the 1980s-90s, Israel implemented market-oriented reforms and its economy began expanding significantly, while the other Levantine economies experienced less impressive growth.

Today, the region's economies are predominantly services oriented. As of 2018, Israel's GDP per capita, the Levant's highest, is more than 13 times that of the Palestinian Territories. Israel, a technologically advanced economy, controls much of the Palestinian Territories' economy, limiting the movement of people and goods. Unemployment rates vary widely, ranging from 26% in the Palestinian Territories to 15% in Jordan, 8% in Syria, 6% in Lebanon, and 4% in Israel as of 2019. In both Jordan and Lebanon, public dissatisfaction with worsening economic conditions has repeatedly led to anti-government protests. Meanwhile, Syria's economy virtually collapsed after the 2011 start of the civil war, losing some $226 billion in GDP from 2011-16. As of mid-2020, the region's economic outlook remains unfavorable, due in part to the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic (Photo: Gaza City in the Gaza Strip).

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology.

Israel has a modern and robust transportation network, while Jordan, the Palestinian Territories, and Lebanon lack transport infrastructure and public transportation systems. In 2017, the Lebanese government estimated that only 15% of the country's main roads were in good condition. While Syria once had an advanced transportation network, the civil war has caused extensive damage, destroying or damaging some 44% of roads in the Syrian capital of Aleppo. By contrast, the Jordanian government invested some $1.7 billion between 2014-19 in transportation projects (Photo: Train station in Tel Aviv, Israel).

Information technology is spreading rapidly throughout the Levant. Between 2000-17, Internet usage grew from 0.2-21 users per 100 people to 65-82. An exception is Syria, where just 34 of 100 people were Internet users in 2017. Cell phones are popular – the Levant reports 65-128 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people as of 2018. While Israel places few restrictions on press freedoms, journalists and social media users in Syria, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories tend to face significant restrictions.

The region maintains trade relationships with other Middle Eastern countries, several Asian nations, and the US. For example, Syria depends largely on imports from Lebanon, Iraq, Jordan, and China, while Jordan primarily relies on imports from China, Saudi Arabia, and the US.

Most of the region faces significant challenges in meeting growing energy needs. With limited resources of their own, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinian Territories import most of their required energy. Syria, once a net oil exporter, has imported its required oil since 2011. By contrast, Israel has recently become a natural gas exporter.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Levantine society at large, we will focus on specific features of society in Lebanon.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Located along the eastern Mediterranean coast in an area that has been at the crossroads of cultures, peoples, languages, and religions for millennia, Lebanon first achieved independence in 1943. Religious sectarianism and the destabilizing effects of regional conflicts boiled over into civil war between 1975-90. Since then, Lebanon has struggled to maintain stability and autonomy amidst external interventions, political divisions, and economic challenges.

Early History

Stone tools indicate early humans inhabited the area during the Paleolithic era. Between 10,000-8,000 BC, residents began to congregate in settlements. Around 3000 BC, the Phoenicians (or Canaanites in neighboring Palestine) settled the region. Around 1200 BC, they developed independent city-states along the coast, notably Byblos (modern-day Jbeil, which has been inhabited since 5000 BC and is one of the world's oldest continuously inhabited settlements), Tyre, Sidon, and Berot (Beirut – Lebanon's capital today). Expert seafarers, the Phoenicians were also skilled artisans, who traded textiles, glass, metalwork, wine, and cedarwood, eventually founding colonies as far as North Africa and Spain (Photo: The Ahiram sarcophagus from around 850 BC features the earliest surviving Phoenician inscription).

Early Empires: The Phoenician city-states never united, and a succession of outside groups struggled for control of the region over the centuries. Notable foreign powers include the Hyksos, Egyptians, Assyrians, Babylonians, and Persians. After a long siege at Tyre, Alexander the Great of Macedonia defeated the

Persians and captured the region in 332 BC. Following his 323 BC death, successor empires (the Seleucids of Syria and Ptolemies of Egypt) fought over the region.

The Romans: Meanwhile, the Romans had begun building their empire in central Italy around 500 BC. Beginning in the 2nd century BC, they pursued rapid expansion, and in 64 BC, conquered the region. Inclusion in the Roman Empire brought advantages, notably relative peace, a legal system, and improved infrastructure. The Romans also built new or expanded existing settlements and constructed grand public buildings like thermal spas, temples, and a school of law in Beirut (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*) (Photo: Roman ruins at Baalbek).

In 285, the Roman emperor reorganized his holdings into western and eastern divisions, and in 380, adopted Christianity as the Empire's official religion. Some 15 years later, the split between the western Roman and Eastern (Byzantine) Empires became permanent, with the Byzantines ruling Lebanon from their capital at Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul). By the mid-6th century, unrest and corruption had weakened the Byzantines' hold on Lebanon, just as a series of earthquakes destroyed Beirut and killed some 30,000. Over the centuries, new Christian sects had emerged, and one notable group, the Maronites, settled in Mount Lebanon (the central region of Lebanon named after its mountains) by the 7th century (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Arab Rule

Meanwhile, a new religion, Islam, was gaining coverts in the Arabian Peninsula (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Soon, Muslim Arab warriors sought expansion into the eastern Mediterranean, defeating the Byzantines in a decisive battle in 636 and capturing Jerusalem 2 years later. In subsequent centuries, rival Islamic dynasties competed for control of the ***ummah*** (community of Muslim believers – see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

Ruling from Damascus (capital of Syria today), the Sunni Umayyad dynasty took control in 661, but internal conflict and economic decline soon weakened them. In 750, they were overthrown by the Sunni Abbasid dynasty, which ruled from Baghdad (present-day capital of Iraq).

As the Abbasids began to weaken in the 860s, Islamic dynasties in North Africa began to strengthen. The most prominent was the Shi'a Fatimid dynasty of Cairo (capital of Egypt today), which gained control over much of Lebanon by the late 10th century. Yet by the 11th century, a new power was rising. The Sunni Seljuk Turks first expanded into Fatimid territory, then won an important battle against the Byzantines in 1071. The 11th century also saw the introduction of a new religion to Lebanon – the Druze faith, an offshoot of the Fatimids' Ismaili Shi'a tradition, although Druze today consider themselves a distinct faith (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

The Crusader States

The Seljuk Turks' success and Arab control of Jerusalem concerned the Byzantines and their brethren in Rome. In 1095, the Pope, leader of the Roman Catholic Church, declared a series of religious crusades to capture territories in the Levant. After seizing Jerusalem in 1099, the Crusaders captured the Lebanese cities of Tripoli, Beirut, and Sidon in 1110, though Tyre repelled the invaders until 1124. Subsequently, the area of modern-day Lebanon was divided between two Crusader states.

However, the Crusaders' hold on their Levantine territories was short. In 1187, the Muslim reconquest of the region began when the Egyptian Ayyubid dynasty captured Beirut and Sidon. The Ayyubids themselves then fell to a rebellion which led to the establishment of the Mamluk Dynasty in Egypt. By 1291, the Mamluks had defeated the last of the Crusader states in the Levant (Photo: Sidon's Sea Castle was built by Crusaders in the 13th century).

Egyptian Mamluk Rule

From their capital in Cairo, the Sunni Mamluks ruled Lebanon for some 225 years (1291-1517). Under the Mamluks, all non-Sunni groups – namely the Maronites, Druze, and Shi'a Muslims – experienced repression, leading to occasional conflicts. Nevertheless, the coastal cities prospered, and Beirut became an important trade center between the Middle East and Europe.

Ottoman Rule

Meanwhile, to the north, the Byzantine Empire had been steadily weakening and losing territory. By the mid-14th century, the region's rising power, the Ottoman Turks, besieged and captured the Byzantine capital of Constantinople in 1453, ending the Byzantine Empire. By 1517, they had defeated the Mamluks and incorporated Lebanon into their growing empire. While the Ottomans ruled coastal Lebanon directly, some interior regions, notably Mount Lebanon, were granted semiautonomous status. There, prominent families, primarily Maronite and Druze, were allowed to rule, provided they deferred to the Ottomans' ultimate authority.

The Ma'an: One prominent family was the Druze Ma'an (alternatively Ma'n) clan. Around 1590, Ma'an leader Fakhr al-Din II (pictured) united the feuding Maronites and Druze under his rule. However, his attempts to build foreign alliances prompted the Ottomans to exile him in 1613. Returning in 1618, he reclaimed leadership then expanded his territory into neighboring Syria and Palestine before the Ottomans captured and executed him in 1635.

The Shihab: By 1697, the Sunni Muslim Shihab (alternatively Chehab) family acquired control of the areas previously ruled by the Ma'an. During Shihab rule, Europeans settled in Sidon and other coastal towns to trade in silk, the region's major export at the time. Further, the Maronites strengthened their ties with the French and the Roman Catholic Church (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). By the 18th century, much of the Shihab family had converted to Maronite Christianity.

The most prominent Shihab ruler was Bashir Shihab II (r. 1788-1840). Often called the "Red Emir" for his repressive rule, Bashir allied with the Egyptians, when they invaded and conquered the region in the 1830s. Occupying much of the Levant, Bashir and the Egyptians were harsh rulers, suppressing rebellions and imposing high taxes, forced labor, and military conscription, resulting in heightened tensions between Maronites and Druze. In 1840, Ottoman and British forces supported a local rebellion that forced the Egyptians to retreat and sent Bashir into exile (Illustration: 20th-century depiction of Bashir Shihab II and Egyptian leader Muhammed Ali).

To reassert their control, the Ottomans subsequently divided Mount Lebanon into a northern district under a Christian governor and a southern one under a Druze, though both were accountable to the Ottoman administrator in Beirut. This formal division, known as the double ***Qa'im maqamiya***, aggravated religious cleavages and encouraged foreign powers to take sides: the French supported the Maronites, while the British favored the Druze.

The 1860 Revolt and the *Mutasarrifiya* Period: Unrest flamed into revolt in 1860, when a Druze group massacred some 12,000 Christians. In response, the French dispatched some 6,000 troops to the region to restore peace. While Lebanon's coastal cities remained under direct Ottoman control, an international commission directed the Ottomans to implement a new political system for Mount Lebanon. Under this 1861 plan, the region was granted autonomy under a non-Lebanese Christian governor (***mutasarrif***) appointed by the Ottoman sultan. Further, each religious group received two seats on an administrative council.

Believing they were underrepresented on the council, the Maronites were dissatisfied with the arrangement. Nevertheless, Lebanon enjoyed roughly 53 years of stability under this *Mutasarrifiya* system. Foreign missionaries founded new schools and universities (see p. 1 of *Learning and Knowledge*), creating a new, educated class, particularly Christians.

World War I (WWI): In 1914, WWI broke out between the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary, Bulgaria, and the Ottoman Empire) and the Allies (the US, Britain, France, and Russia, among others). With the outbreak of war, the Ottomans abolished Mount Lebanon's semiautonomous status and introduced military conscription. The war years were hard, with regional residents suffering widespread starvation due to blockades and poor harvests. By some estimates, up to half of Mount Lebanon's population died of famine or disease by war's end in 1918 (Photo: Lebanese soldiers during the *Mutasarrifiya* period).

The French Mandate

Concluded before the war's end, the British-French 1916 Sykes-Picot Agreement anticipated the Ottomans' defeat and divided certain Ottoman territories between the two powers, with Lebanon assigned to France. Consequently, with the Ottomans' 1918 surrender, Lebanon was placed under French military administration.

The Maronites welcomed the French mandate, which lasted some 20 years. By contrast, many Muslims rejected French rule, seeking instead the formation of an independent Arab state. Many Druze also rejected the French presence, especially after French promises of autonomous rule for Druze areas went unfulfilled. In 1926, a new constitution outlined French control of country's affairs, and, in an effort to calm sectarian tensions, mandated that each religious community be equitably represented in public office. Under the French, education and infrastructure improved, and Beirut prospered as a center of trade. In the 1930s, the worldwide Great Depression and decline of Lebanon's silk industry brought economic challenges. Nevertheless, many Lebanese began to plan for independence.

World War II (WWII): These plans were interrupted by the outbreak of WWII, fought between the Axis powers (Nazi Germany, Italy, and Japan) and the Allies (Britain, France, the US, and the Soviet Union, among others). After France fell to

Germany in 1940, Lebanon briefly came under the control of France's pro-Nazi Vichy government until Free French and British troops overthrew the pro-Vichy administration in 1941.

Progress towards Independence

In November 1941, the French troops occupying Lebanon bowed to international pressure and proclaimed Lebanon's independence. Nevertheless, the French declined to withdraw and continued to exercise their authority over Lebanese affairs.

The National Pact: Meanwhile, Lebanese leaders were forming their government, and in summer 1943, they outlined an unwritten power-sharing agreement known as the National Pact. Based on 1932 census data which counted six Christians for every five Muslims, the pact stipulated that Lebanon's President be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister (PM) a Sunni Muslim, and the Speaker of the National Assembly (NA) a Shi'a Muslim. Other administrative positions were similarly distributed among the religious groups, including the Druze (see p. 5 of *Political and Social Relations*) under a system known as "confessionalism."

In fall 1943, Bishara al-Khuri (pictured), a Maronite as mandated by the National Pact, became Lebanon's first President. In turn, he chose Riad al-Solh, a Sunni Muslim, as PM. When the new government amended the 1926 constitution to formally end the French mandate, the French arrested President al-Khuri, PM al-Solh, and other politicians. Following international outcry, the French released the prisoners on November 22, 1943, the date henceforth celebrated as Lebanon's Independence Day. In 1945, Lebanon became a founding member of both the United Nations (UN) and the Arab League.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli War

In 1947, the UN voted to partition the British mandate of Palestine (bordering Lebanon to the south) into separate Jewish and Arab states. Clashes between Jews and Arabs in Palestine erupted immediately, and when the British withdrew and the Jewish state of Israel declared independence in mid-1948, war

broke out. As an Arab League member, Lebanon joined Egypt, Jordan, and Iraq in declaring war on Israel.

Lebanese participation in war was minimal, although Israeli forces occupied 14 villages in southern Lebanon for 5 months between 1948-49. The fighting displaced large populations, and at war's end in mid-1949, up to 170,000 Palestinian refugees entered Lebanon. Primarily Sunni Muslims, the influx altered Lebanon's demographics and changed its historical trajectory, drawing it more directly into regional geopolitical conflicts. In 1952, President al-Khuri resigned following charges of corruption and favoritism.

The 1958 Crisis

Tensions rose during the tenure of the next President, Camille Chamoun. Resentful of Lebanon's Christian-dominated government and its orientation to the West, many Lebanese Muslims found inspiration in the pan-Arab nationalist ideology of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. On their part, Lebanese Christians saw both this trend and the presence of the predominantly Muslim Palestinian refugees as threatening to their historical dominance.

Sectarian unrest sparked by a controversial election flared into a general strike and armed revolts by Muslims in mid-1958. Fearing that the military would split into Christian and Muslim factions, the army's commanding general, Fuad Chehab, refused to take action against the insurgents. When revolutionaries overthrew the pro-Western monarchy in Iraq in July, President Chamoun (pictured aboard the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1953) feared that Lebanon's stability was threatened and immediately requested US military intervention. The following day, some 14,000 US Marines landed outside Beirut, though they played no active role in the crisis and withdrew by the fall. With support from US diplomats, tensions decreased, and the insurrection slowly faded, but in all, the crisis resulted in up to 4,000 casualties. Following the crisis, the NA elected Gen Chehab to succeed Chamoun as President.

The Chehab Presidency

Having attained the confidence of diverse groups due to his actions during the 1958 crisis, President Chehab returned the country to stability. Over his 6-year term, Chehab promoted national unity, while initiating important reforms such as 1959 legislation requiring equality in governmental appointments of Christians and Muslims. Further, he strengthened the role of the state by reducing the power of the historically elite families and improving infrastructure, especially in rural, Muslim-dominated areas. President Chehab maintained good relations with both the West and Arab countries by pursuing neutral foreign policies. Overall, his reforms plus a period of economic growth contributed to increased standards of living, social mobility, and urbanization. However, his goal of political equality among Lebanon's various factions remained unmet.

Growing Palestinian Presence

In mid-1967, conflict between Israel and Syria, Egypt, and Jordan flared again in the Six-Day War. Following Israel's victory, Palestinian ***fedayeen*** (fighters) retreated into southern Lebanon. From there, they launched raids into Israel, prompting retaliation. In 1968, Israel attacked Beirut's airport as reprisal for an attack on an Israeli plane in Athens by a Lebanon-based Palestinian militant group.

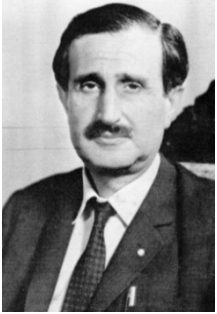
With the Lebanese army struggling to control the Palestinian militants, the government entered into an agreement with the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO – an umbrella political organization formed in 1964 to centralize control of the various Palestinian activist groups) that was intended to reduce internal violence but actually had the opposite effect. Among others, the 1969 agreement granted Palestinian militants the right to launch attacks against Israel from Lebanese territory. Further, 16 Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon came under the jurisdiction of the PLO, providing the movement a key source of recruitment (Photo: Beirut in 1968).

After Jordan expelled the PLO in the early 1970s following a civil war, additional Palestinians entered Lebanon. By 1973, Palestinians comprised some 10% of Lebanon's total population. Largely impoverished and without political representation, Palestinians found common ground with poor, rural, and Muslim Lebanese, especially Sunnis.

In 1973, Lebanese President Suleiman Franjieh ordered the army to confront the Palestinian militants. Many Muslim soldiers refused to comply, and the Lebanese army began to fracture into partisan factions. Soon, fighting between Lebanese army units and the PLO spread beyond Beirut, prompting the declaration of martial law. New ideological and sectarian-based movements emerged, many with their own militias. The escalating violence deepened the rift between Lebanon's Christians and Muslims.

Civil War

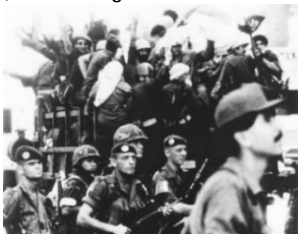
In April 1975, a Muslim militia attempted to assassinate Pierre Gemayel, the Maronite founder of the Lebanese Phalanges Party, killing four in the process. In retaliation, the Phalangists attacked a bus of Palestinians, killing 27. The following day, full-scale warfare erupted between the Lebanese National Movement (LNM – composed primarily of Muslims seeking a more equitable share of power and headed by Druze leader Kamal Jumblatt (pictured) with support from the PLO) and the Lebanese Front (LF – composed primarily of Christians seeking to maintain the status quo and organized by Phalangist leader Gemayel and his allies). Soon, both sides were conducting violent attacks, with Beirut divided between Muslim western and Christian eastern sectors.



Meanwhile, the Palestinians' displacement of Shi'a communities in southern Lebanon sparked resentment among this historically marginalized population and compelled the formation of the militant Amal movement (see p. 6 of *Political and Social Relations*). The complexity of the conflict was soon heightened by the intervention of two neighboring powers – Syria and Israel.

Syria Intervenes: Fearing that an LNM-PLO victory would provoke an Israeli invasion of Lebanon and destabilize the region, Syria entered the war in mid-1976 in support of the LF. Following an October summit meeting of Arab League members that temporarily suspended the conflict, thousands of Syrian troops were stationed in Lebanon as members of an Arab Deterrent Force. In March 1977, the assassination of LNM leader Kamal Jumblatt was followed by retaliatory massacres of Christian civilians.

Israel Invades: The war intensified again in March 1978, when Israel invaded southern Lebanon in retaliation for a Palestinian attack on an Israeli bus. Demanding that Israel withdraw, the UN established the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL – see p. 8 of *Political and Social Relations*) to restore order. In response, Israel created a 12-mi wide "security zone" along the Lebanon-Israel border, where it installed a puppet militia, the South Lebanon Army (SLA). Following a 1981 Israeli attack on the PLO's West Beirut headquarters, the US negotiated a ceasefire between Israel and the PLO. The Israeli invasion plus strained relations with the Phalangists compelled Syria to change sides so that it now supported the LNM and PLO.



In mid-1982, a Palestinian splinter group attempted to assassinate the Israeli ambassador in London. In response, Israel launched a full-scale invasion of Lebanon. Some 60,000 Israeli troops forced the PLO to retreat to Beirut, where the Israelis bombed PLO-held areas and cut off residents' access to food, water, and fuel. Following an international outcry, US intervention brought another ceasefire, and the PLO fighters were allowed to evacuate Lebanon escorted by a multi-national force (pictured). The 10-week Israeli operation killed some 17,000 Lebanese and Palestinians and wounded another 30,000. The invasion also prompted some members of the Amal movement (who had also been inspired by the 1979 Iranian Revolution) to form a new, radical Shi'a militia group called Hezbollah (also written Hizballah) (see p. 7 and 10-11 of *Political and Social Relations*).

The Violence Continues: In fall 1982, President-elect Bashir Gemayel (son of Phalangist founder Pierre Gemayel) was assassinated, likely due to his cooperation with Israel. In response, a group of Phalangists aided by Israeli troops killed thousands of residents of the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps, prompting US, French, and Italian peacekeeping forces to deploy to Lebanon. In April 1983, Iran-backed militants launched massive car bomb attacks that destroyed the US embassy in Beirut, killing 63 (pictured). In October, attacks on US Marine barracks near Beirut killed 241 US Marines and 58 French paratroopers. As a result, all US troops evacuated Lebanon by 1984.

An aerial view of the American Embassy as heavy cranes continue to remove rubble from the upper floors on 21 April, 1983, following the terrorist bombing three days earlier.

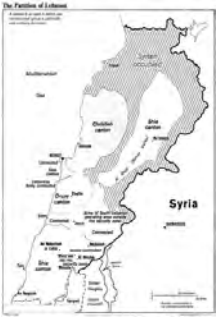
Photo courtesy of Claude Salhani / U.S. Marines in Lebanon 1982-1984
History and Museums Division, Headquarters, U.S.M.C., Washington, D.C.

Meanwhile, the Syria-backed Amal movement became increasingly active, even seizing control of West Beirut in early 1984 in protest of Lebanese-Israeli peace talks, which ultimately failed. Between 1985-89, Amal continued to antagonize several other factions, notably attacking Palestinian refugee camps in South Beirut and clashing with Iran-backed Hezbollah for influence over Lebanon's Shi'a population. Violent confrontations between the two militias continued until 1990, when they agreed to end their rivalry.

The War Winds Down: Deeply divided, the NA could not settle on a successor to President Amin Gemayel (brother of assassinated President-elect Bashir Gemayel) in 1988. Minutes before his term ended, President Gemayel named Army Gen Michel Aoun, a Maronite opposed to Syrian influence in Lebanon, as PM. Since Lebanon's confessional system as outlined in the National Pact dictated the post be held by a Sunni, the Muslim factions immediately protested and declared their own PM, Syrian-backed Salim al-Hoss. Consequently, the government had two competing PMs and no President. Gen Aoun proclaimed himself Lebanon's sole leader and attempted to exert control over al-Hoss' territory and expel the Syrian troops still occupying the country, prompting violence among the Syrians, Lebanese troops loyal to Aoun, and the PLO.

In fall 1989, the Arab League initiated peace talks in Taif, Saudi Arabia. The resulting Taif Agreement maintained Lebanon's confessional system but altered the distribution of parliamentary seats from the previous Christian to Muslim 6:5 ratio to an equal 5:5 ratio (though Christians now comprised around one-third of the population). It also reduced presidential powers and called for the withdrawal of Israeli forces but stipulated that the Syrian military remain for up to 2 years to support stability operations.

Despite the peace terms of the Taif Agreement, Aoun continued to clash with both the Syrian military and rival Christian militias until October 1990, when he was forced to flee. Granted asylum in France, Aoun lived there in exile for the next 15 years. The civil war formally ended on October 13, 1990. In all, the conflict caused some 100,000-200,000 deaths, with 1 million displaced and 17,000 missing. The damage to Lebanon's infrastructure and economy was also profound (Illustration: 1986 map showing areas occupied by Syrian forces and dominated by various sectarian groups).



The Postwar Climate

Recovery efforts after the war were spearheaded by PM Rafik Hariri and included a $20 billion reconstruction program. While some Lebanese credited Hariri with quickly transforming the devastated country, others blamed him for driving the economy into debt and failing to meet the basic needs of the population.

In 1991, the government required all militias to dissolve except Hezbollah, which was given special permission to maintain its forces to resist the Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon. The Israeli-backed SLA refused to demobilize, collaborating instead with Israeli forces to wage war against Hezbollah in southern Lebanon through the early 1990s. In April 1996, Israeli forces bombing Hezbollah bases hit a UN facility, killing over 100 civilians. By 2000, widespread opposition to the conflict among the Israeli population forced Israel to withdraw from southern Lebanon. Concurrently, the SLA surrendered to Hezbollah.

Meanwhile, Syria continued to maintain troops in Lebanon and significantly influence Lebanese politics. In 2004, Syria pressured the NA to extend pro-Syria President Emile Lahoud's mandate, causing anti-Syria PM Hariri to resign.

The Cedar Revolution and Syrian Withdrawal: In early 2005, former PM Hariri and 21 others were killed by a car bomb in Beirut. Large-scale demonstrations immediately erupted, with protestors implicating Syria in the crime and demanding its troops withdraw. On March 8, Hezbollah and other pro-Syria factions organized their own demonstrations in Beirut. Then, on March 14, a much larger anti-Syria demonstration attracted protestors from across Lebanon's sectarian divisions to demand the withdrawal of Syrian forces. Over the next weeks, anti-Syria protests, dubbed the "Cedar Revolution," continued. Syria finally bowed to pressure in April, withdrawing its troops and ending 29 years of military presence in Lebanon. This series of events created the political factions still active today: the pro-Syria March 8 Alliance and the Saudi-, French-, and US-backed anti-Syria March 14 Alliance (see p. 6-7 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Rafik Hariri Memorial Garden in Beirut).

The July War: In retaliation for a Hezbollah attack on an Israeli patrol and the abduction of two Israeli soldiers, Israel launched a military offensive into southern Lebanon in mid-2006. The subsequent 34-day July War caused the deaths of some 1,190 Lebanese and 163 Israelis, with some 1 million Lebanese displaced and vital parts of Lebanon's infrastructure destroyed by Israeli bombs. Following the UN-brokered cease-fire, members of the March 8 Alliance resigned their cabinet positions in protest of the government's endorsement of a UN tribunal to investigate the Hariri assassination, leading to political gridlock.

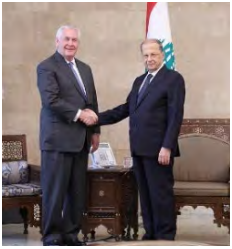
As the political stalemate continued in mid-2008, the government announced the closure of Hezbollah's private telecommunications network, a move intended to curtail its activities. In response, Hezbollah declared war against the Lebanese government and took control of West Beirut.

However, the crisis was soon resolved when the government backed down and signed an agreement with Hezbollah brokered by Qatar. Besides ending the 18-month political crisis, the Doha Agreement granted Hezbollah additional political power.

The anti-Syria March 14 bloc maintained its parliamentary majority in the 2009 elections, yet the government of new PM Saad Hariri (son of the assassinated former PM) was plagued with conflict. In 2011, Hariri was forced to step down when 11 cabinet ministers from Hezbollah and aligned parties resigned after the UN tribunal announced indictments against 4 Hezbollah members for their role in the Hariri assassination.

Contemporary Lebanon

The Syrian civil war and arrival of over one million Syrian refugees (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*) have caused further strain on infrastructure and worsened relations among various factions in recent years. Beginning in 2014, boycotts by legislators prevented the NA from electing a President, leaving the office vacant for 29 months. After complex political maneuvering, the NA finally elected Michel Aoun (the ex-general had returned from exile in 2005) as President in 2016. In return, President Aoun (pictured with then-US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson in 2018) restored Saad Hariri to the post of PM. Parliamentary elections were finally held in 2018.



With the March 8 Alliance receiving a majority of seats for the first time, Hezbollah became one of the country's dominant political parties (see p. 5-7 of *Political and Social Relations*). Public dissatisfaction with the government's inability to provide basic services and address Lebanon's economic crisis flared into mass protests in fall 2019 (see p. 3 of *Economics and Resources*), prompting PM Hariri to resign. In early 2020, President Aoun appointed Hassan Diab as the new PM. In the first half of 2020, demonstrators gathered again to protest the government's response to the coronavirus pandemic and Lebanon's deepening economic crisis. Diab resigned and Hariri was reinstated as PM in late 2020.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be an objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity.

Storytelling historically played an important role in Lebanon. Traditionally, ***hakawati*** (storytellers) recounted legends and tales for both entertainment purposes and to preserve and transmit traditions and values. Many stories relate the exploits of heroes and their chivalrous, charitable, and honorable acts, providing a model of proper behavior. Others tell of evil spirits or relate the adventures of mystical creatures. While the formal practice of storytelling has largely disappeared, it is revived today in some areas during the Muslim month of fasting, Ramadan (see p. 5 of *Religion and Spirituality*) (Photo: A Lebanese mountain village).

Little Mangy One: One afternoon, three goat brothers named Siksik, Mikmik, and Jureybon were grazing on the side of a rocky hill. Smelling the goats from afar, a hyena approached them. First nearing Siksik, the hyena asked the young goat a series of questions. Siksik's responses reflected his fear, so the hyena attacked and devoured him. The hyena next turned to Mikmik, who gave the same fearful responses and met the same fate as Siksik.

Realizing his brothers' mistakes, Jureybon, the smallest of the three, decided to stand up to the hyena. So, when the hyena approached, Jureybon spoke up despite his fear, pointing out he would use his horns to defend himself if attacked. Frightened by Jureybon's courage, the hyena fled. Bolstered by his own bravery, Jureybon chased the hyena. Upon catching him, Jureybon tore open the hyena's stomach and freed his brothers This tale emphasizes the importance of family loyalty, cleverness, wit, and courage.

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name

Lebanese Republic
al-Jumhūrīyah al-Lubnānīyah
الجمهورية اللبنانية (Arabic)

Political Borders

Syria: 250 mi
Israel: 50 mi
Coastline: 140 mi

Capital

Beirut

Demographics

Lebanon's population of 6.85 million is growing at an annual rate of 0.5% as of 2018. Since 2011, the population has increased significantly, largely due to the influx of Syrian refugees. Today, Syrian and Palestinian refugees make up 30% of the population. Over 88% of the population lives in urban areas, mostly along the Mediterranean coast. Inland regions, such as the Bekaa Valley, remain sparsely populated. Lebanon has not conducted an official census since 1932.

Flag

Adopted in 1943, the Lebanese flag consists of two equal red horizontal bands separated by a wider white horizontal band. Red represents the blood lost for liberation, while white stands for peace, purity, and mountain snow. A cedar tree in the middle of the flag symbolizes eternity, steadiness, happiness, and prosperity.

Geography

Located in a region of Western Asia called the Levant, Lebanon borders the Mediterranean Sea to the west, Syria to the north and east, and Israel to the south. Lebanon's total land area is 3,950 sq mi, making it about one-third the size of Maryland.

Despite its small size, Lebanon is geographically diverse. A narrow coastal plain along the Mediterranean Sea contains marine and river sediments interspersed with rocky and sandy beaches. The Lebanon Mountains separate the plain from the interior and extend from the country's northern border to the Litani River in the South. The northern section of the range features the nation's highest peak, Qornet es Saouda, which rises to 10,131 ft.

The fertile Bekaa Valley, the nation's agricultural region, lies between the Lebanon Mountains in the west and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains in the east, which form a natural border with Syria. The Litani River rises near the city of Baalbek and flows southward, emptying into the Mediterranean Sea near the city of Tyre. Other rivers drain the western slopes of the Lebanon Mountains into the Mediterranean. Rich, fertile agricultural land and pastures make up 63% of Lebanon's territory, while forests comprise another 13% (Photo: Zahle, a city at the southern end of the Lebanon Mountains).

Climate

Located in the Mediterranean climatic zone that stretches westward toward the Atlantic Ocean, Lebanon experiences a subtropical climate that divides into two main seasons: a long, dry summer or hot season and a short, mild winter or cool season. In coastal areas, average temperatures range from 55°F in the winter to 80°F in the summer. In the Bekaa Valley, winter temperatures dip as low as 30°F. Mountainous areas tend to be even cooler, with the highest elevations regularly experiencing freezing temperatures and snowfall. Lebanon typically experiences some 80-90 days of rain annually primarily in the winter months.

Natural Hazards

Lebanon is vulnerable to windstorms, earthquakes, floods, wildfires, droughts, and landslides. Located along major fault lines, Lebanon is prone to destructive earthquakes, which tend to be most severe in the South and the Bekaa Valley. While

small tremors occur regularly, the deadliest earthquake in recent history occurred in 1956, killing 136 people and damaging over 20,000 homes. Floods from heavy rain often create mudslides that damage buildings. In the spring and fall, windstorms (***khamsin***) can cause sudden increases in temperatures and blanket portions of the country with thick clouds of dust from the Sahara Desert.

Environmental Issues

The 15-year civil war and subsequent conflicts (see p. 10-15 of *History and Myth*) heavily degraded Lebanon's natural environment and caused significant damage to plant and animal life. Today, Lebanon also faces a waste management crisis. Following the closure of the nation's largest landfill in 2015, huge quantities of garbage accumulated in major urban areas, coastal landfills, and the Mediterranean Sea, sparking the popular protest movement "You Stink."

Though the government has since opened additional landfills, garbage continues to collect around the country as landfills reach capacity. Further, raw sewage and oil spills contribute to the pollution of coastal waters, and air pollution caused by automobile and industrial emissions is a significant concern in Beirut and other large cities. Other pressing environmental concerns include the contamination and depletion of ground water, deforestation, soil erosion, and desertification (Photo: Cedar trees in Bsharri).

Government

Lebanon is a constitutional republic with a parliamentary government. The country divides into eight governorates (***muhafazah***) led by governors (***muhafiz***). Governorates subdivide into districts (***aqdiyyah***) governed by district chiefs (***qaʾim-maqam***). Adopted in 1926 and last amended in 1989, Lebanon's constitution separates power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, while outlining the fundamental rights and duties of Lebanese citizens. The

constitution also calls for the "just and equitable balance" of the country's major religious groups in the appointment of members of the cabinet and certain other government positions (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Amendments and other agreements, notably the 1943 National Pact (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*) and the 1989 Taif Agreement (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), confirmed this confessional system. Governmental appointments that do not conform to the customary confessional pattern can cause social and political crises (see p. 12 of *History and Myth*).

Executive Branch

The President, who is head-of-state and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, is indirectly elected by the National Assembly (NA) to serve a 6-year term. A President is eligible for reelection after he has been out of office for 6 years. While the Taif Agreement made most presidential powers largely ceremonial, the President remains a powerful figure having several functions, notably appointing the Prime Minister (PM) and Council of Ministers (CM) in consultation with the NA.

According to the 1943 National Pact, the President must be a Maronite Christian. The current President, Michel Aoun (pictured on the right with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019), is a former army general (see p. 12-13 of *History and Myth*) who assumed office in 2016 following a 29-month period during which the office remained vacant (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*).

Executive power is vested in the PM, who is the head-of-government. With the support of the CM, the PM oversees the country's day-to-day affairs and advises the President. According to the National Pact, the PM must be a Sunni Muslim. Lebanon's current PM, Saad Hariri, took office in again in October 2020 (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*).

Legislative Branch

Lebanon's legislature is the one-chamber NA (***Majlis al-Nuwab***) composed of 128 members serving 4-year terms. According to the National Pact, the Speaker of the NA must be a Shi'a Muslim.

The NA's 128 seats are divided among Lebanon's officially recognized sectarian groups (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), with Christians and Muslims receiving an equal number and Druze counted as Muslim. The Christian allocation of seats is Maronite Catholic (34), Eastern Orthodox (14), Melkite Catholic (8), and Armenian Orthodox (5), with Armenian Catholic, Protestant, and other Christian minorities each receiving 1. The Muslim allocation is Sunni (27), Shi'a (27), Alawite (2), and Druze (8). A 2017 law replaced the winner-take-all system with a hybrid proportional representation process. The NA's duties include overseeing the CM, electing the President, ratifying certain international agreements, and approving the annual state budget. The NA cannot perform its duties if the Presidency is vacant

(Photo: Then-US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Speaker of the NA Nabib Berry in 2018).

Judicial Branch

Lebanon's legal system combines elements of French civil code, Ottoman jurisprudence, and the legal traditions of Lebanon's religious groups (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). The judiciary includes a Court of Cassation (or Supreme Court), Courts of Appeal, Courts of First Instance, specialized tribunals, religious courts, and military courts. As the highest court, the Court of Cassation is organized into eight chambers, each with a presiding judge and two associate judges, and hears charges against governmental officials. Judges are appointed by a Supreme Judicial Council headed by the chief justice. A Constitutional Council decides the constitutionality of laws and oversees the electoral process. Its 10 members are appointed by the CM and NA. While the constitution provides for an independent judiciary, political leaders often exert their influence in judicial matters.

Political Climate

Lebanon has a multi-party system in which political parties or coalitions of parties compete for power, with major parties generally organized along sectarian lines. Political parties tend

to be dominated by former militia leaders, civil war veterans, and the heads of Lebanon's traditionally powerful families (***zuama***, see "Social Relations" below). According to the 2008 Doha Agreement (see p. 15 of *History and Myth*), political action requires consensus among Lebanon's various confessional groups. Consequently, political decision-making is often extremely slow, with the legislative and executive branches frequently experiencing complete gridlock. Further, alliances tend to shift frequently, with leaders striking deals to increase their personal influence (Photo: PM Saad Hariri with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019).

While numerous parties are active, two broad alliances dominate the political arena and contend for power: the March 8 Alliance and the March 14 Alliance. Their deeply rooted animosity stems from the 2005 assassination of former PM Rafik Hariri (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*). The March 8 Alliance cultivates relations with Iran and the Assad regime in Syria (see "Foreign Relations" below) and primarily comprises Hezbollah (a Shi'a-dominated movement), Amal (Shi'a), and the Free Patriotic Movement (Christian, also President Aoun's party).

By contrast, the March 14 Alliance pursues relations with the US, France, and Saudi Arabia. It is led by the Future Movement (Sunni) and the Lebanese Forces (Christian) and is allied with the Progressive Socialist Party (Druze) and the Lebanese Phalanges or Kataeb Party (Christian). Since the 2006 July War (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*), the March 14 bloc is generally viewed as a weaker alliance than the March 8 group, primarily due to the strength of Hezbollah and Amal, which together represent about one-third of the population and benefit from Syrian and Iranian support.

The 2018 parliamentary elections, the first since 2009, resulted in the March 8 Alliance attaining a majority. The two parties securing the most seats were the Future Movement (March 14 Alliance) and the Free Patriotic Movement (March 8 Alliance).

As of mid-2020, all 20 ministers in the CM and PM Hassan Diab are aligned with the March 8 Alliance. The PM and almost all the CM ministers are political novices, suggesting that the new government represents an overhaul of the traditional elite-based political system. Nevertheless, each minister is backed by a major political party.

Although recent free and fair elections have strengthened Lebanon's political and social stability, the government faces significant challenges to maintaining the democratic process. Beyond weak governance and societal polarization, widespread corruption and failure to enact significant change to the patronage-based political system have provoked skepticism of the political process and distrust of public officials. Lebanon also grapples with a severe economic crisis (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*) and a large refugee population, which present additional political challenges (Photo: US and Lebanese military members converse with a Lebanese child).

Hezbollah Political Activities: Formed in the early 1980s during the civil war (see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*) and led by Hassan Nasrallah since 1992, Hezbollah ("Party of God," sometimes spelled Hizballah) is a Shi'a Muslim political party as well as a militia (see "Hezbollah Military Activities" below). Since 2005, Hezbollah has held at least one seat in the CM and today wields significant power within the government, notably holding veto power in the CM.

It cultivates and maintains public support by managing a network of social services that include infrastructure support, healthcare facilities and associated services, and schools (see p. 3 and 5 of *Learning and Knowledge*) However, Hezbollah's participation in the Syrian civil war (see "Foreign Relations" below) and its integration into the government have resulted in a loss of confidence among some supporters in recent years.

Defense

The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are a unified military force consisting of 60,000 active duty troops charged with maintaining

Lebanon's internal security with a focus on border control activities. The LAF are among the region's highest trained forces due in part to support from international allies, notably the US, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom, which provide equipment, training, and financial aid.

Army: Consists of 56,600 active-duty troops organized into five regional commands in Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, Mount Lebanon, Northern regions, and Southern regions. They divide into a special forces regiment; 21 maneuver regiments and brigades (including armored, mechanized, air maneuver, amphibious, Presidential Guard, and intervention); 4 combat support regiments, brigades, and groups; and 3 combat service support brigades, groups, and regiments (Photo: US Army and Lebanese soldiers).

Navy: Divides into 1,800 active duty troops equipped with 13 patrol and coastal combatants and two amphibious landing crafts.

Air Force: Comprises 1,600 active duty troops which divide into 2 ground attack squadrons, an attack helicopter squadron, and 6 transport helicopter squadrons, all equipped with 9 combat-capable aircrafts, 45 helicopters, and air-launched missiles.

Paramilitary: Consists of 20,000 active-duty personnel equipped with armored fighting vehicles and a customs unit equipped with seven patrol and coastal combatants.

United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL)

UNIFIL was established in 1978 to ensure Israeli withdrawal and the restoration of authority to the Lebanese government (see p. 11 of *History and Myth*). After the 2006 July War (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*), UNIFIL deployed with the LAF to defend the Israeli-Lebanese border and end the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. As of mid-2020, UNIFIL has some 10,000 troops from 45 countries stationed in Lebanon, though its authorized strength is 15,000.

Lebanese Air Force Rank Insignia

First Year Cadet

Second Year Cadet

Third Year Cadet

Private First Class

Corporal

Corporal First Class

Sergeant

Sergeant First Class

Adjutant

First Adjutant

Warrant Officer

Chief Warrant Officer

Second Lieutenant

First Lieutenant

Captain

Major

Lieutenant Colonel

Colonel

Brigadier General

Major General

General

Security Issues

Lebanon's security environment is dominated by regional volatility, the violation of Lebanon's airspace by Israeli forces and occasional Israel-Hezbollah conflict, and the threat of attacks by jihadist and militant groups such as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS, also known as Daesh, ISIL, and IS) and the Abdullah Azzam Brigades. IS and Al-Qaeda-linked militants such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham (HTS, formerly the Nusra Front and Jabhat Fatah al-Sham) occupy areas along the Lebanese-Syrian border while other extremist groups, notably Hamas and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, operate in the country's 12 Palestinian refugee camps. Extremist activities in refugee camps have occasionally threatened domestic stability.

Lebanon has partnered with the US and other countries in the Middle East to improve counterterrorism initiatives. Of notable success was a 2017 LAF campaign that drove IS militants from the Lebanon-Syria border. Nevertheless, attacks continue to occur. In 2018, IS militants killed an LAF solider and injured seven others (Photo: US Army Soldiers pose with LAF members).

Hezbollah Military Activities: Besides acting as a political party, Hezbollah maintains a militia that was created in opposition to Israeli and Western intervention during the civil war (see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*). Since 1997, the US recognizes Hezbollah as a foreign terrorist organization. Based in the southern suburbs of Beirut, the Bekaa Valley, and southern Lebanon, Hezbollah has occasionally collaborated with the LAF, notably working to contain border attacks by Syria-based groups.

Besides patrolling the Israel-Syria-Lebanon border, Hezbollah also conducts independent attacks in Lebanon and abroad, notably supporting the Syrian regime in its civil war (see "Relations with Syria" below) and engaging Israeli forces in the

disputed Sheb'a Farms (see "Border Dispute" below). Hezbollah is the world's most heavily armed nonstate actor, with an arsenal including some 130,000 rockets and missiles. The Iranian government supports Hezbollah by supplying up to $700 million annually along with training, weapons, and political, diplomatic, and organizational support (Illustration: Hezbollah's areas of operation and financing).

Syrian Refugee Crisis: Another pressing security concern is the political and social unrest in neighboring Syria, which has forced over one million Syrians to seek refuge in Lebanon since 2011. Because the Lebanese government has refused to establish formal refugee camps, Syrian refugees are forced to inhabit informal tent settlements or residential buildings of poor quality, many lacking proper sanitation and clean water. Struggling to adequately accommodate the displaced Syrians, the Lebanese authorities imposed significant restrictions on their entry into Lebanon in 2015. Recently, President Aoun has repeatedly requested that Syrian refugees return home.

Border Dispute: Lebanon, Syria, and Israel dispute a 10 sq mi territory located at their intersection called the Sheb'a Farms currently occupied by Israel. While Israel withdrew from southern Lebanon in 2000 (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), it retained troops in the Syrian Golan Heights, which it had originally seized during the 1967 Six-Day War (see p. 9 of *History and Myth*). Israel considers the Sheb'a Farms part of the Golan Heights and refuses to withdraw.

Foreign Relations

Regional conflicts dominate Lebanon's foreign relations. Rivals Iran and Saudi Arabia exert significant influence over the nation and compete for supremacy through local actors. While Iran formally supported Hezbollah, Saudi Arabia considers Hezbollah a threat. Concerned that the Lebanese government failed to curb Hezbollah's growing influence, Saudi leadership

forced PM Saad Hariri to resign in November 2017, while he was visiting Saudi Arabia, though he later withdrew his resignation.

Lebanon is a member of numerous international organizations, notably the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary fund, and Arab League. Lebanon also participates in the Organization for Islamic Cooperation, a 57-member pan-Islamic organization seeking to improve the image of Muslims, promote peaceful conflict resolution, and counter rising Islamist extremism.

Relations with Syria: Syrian military forces occupied Lebanon from 1976-2005 (see p. 7-14 of *History and Myth*). During this period, the Syrian government exerted significant influence on Lebanese politics. While the two countries established diplomatic relations in 2008, they lack a formal boundary treaty (Photo: Hezbollah guerrillas in 1998).

The Syrian civil war, involving various rebel groups attempting to topple President Bashar al-Assad, has contributed to tensions in Lebanon. The Lebanese government has taken a neutral stance through its policy of "dissociation" and declined to participate in Arab League sanctions against the Assad regime. Hezbollah has actively participated in the conflict since 2012, deploying up to 7,000 fighters at a time in support of President Assad.

Hezbollah's involvement has prompted some retaliatory violence in Lebanon such as suicide attacks by HTS, a terrorist group seeking to replace the Assad regime with an Islamic state. The Syrian civil war has also negatively impacted the Lebanese economy by hampering trade and tourism (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Finally, it has contributed to Lebanese sectarian tensions: while Sunni parties tend to oppose Syrian President Assad, Shi'a parties like Hezbollah and Amal support him, and Lebanese Christian parties remain split.

Relations with Israel: Lebanon and Israel have technically remained in a state of war since 1948 (see p. 7-8 of *History and*

Myth). Today, Lebanon still declines to formally recognize Israel. While UNIFIL identified a demarcation line (the "Blue Line") to confirm Israel's 2000 withdrawal from southern Lebanon (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), this line does not serve as an official international border, leading to boundary disputes between Israel and Lebanon. Further, the two countries continue to clash over their maritime boundaries in the eastern Mediterranean Sea, an area likely rich in oil and gas (see p. 5 of *Economics and Resources*) (Photo: Then-US Ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley visits the Israeli-Lebanon border in 2017).

Israel has traditionally been Hezbollah's main adversary. Since the 2006 July War (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*), Hezbollah and Israeli forces have engaged in intermittent retaliatory attacks, though both strive to avoid full-scale warfare. After Israeli forces repeatedly violated Lebanese airspace to conduct surveillance operations, tensions flared in 2019 when Israeli drone attacks in Syria and Lebanon prompted Hezbollah retaliation.

Relations with the US: The US first established a diplomatic presence in Beirut in 1833. The US deployed troops in the early 1980s to support Lebanon's civil war, though they were forced to evacuate after a series of deadly bombings in 1983 (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*). The US also supported the Israeli and Syrian withdrawals from Lebanon following the war. Since then, the US and Lebanon have forged strong bilateral relations.

US priorities today include decreasing the influence and power of Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria in Lebanon and defending the country's borders against violent nonstate actors. The US has provided some $1.7 billion in assistance and materials to the LAF since 2006. Further, it has contributed some $1.8 billion in humanitarian assistance to aid with the recent influx of Syrian refugees. The US remains Lebanon's largest provider of development, humanitarian, and security assistance.

In recent years, Hezbollah's growing role in Lebanon's government has tested the US-Lebanon relationship. Unlike some European countries, the US does not differentiate between Hezbollah's activities as a political party and its militia-related activities. Along with designating Hezbollah a terrorist organization, the US has passed laws to block the flow of funds to Hezbollah through the US and imposed sanctions on individuals and groups connected to Hezbollah.

Nevertheless, Hezbollah associates are legitimate members of the Lebanese government and today control important ministries. Some US lawmakers oppose allocating funds to Lebanon, fearing the monies might be used to finance Hezbollah activities. Moreover, the US' deteriorating relationship with Hezbollah's sponsor Iran also worsens tensions. After US airstrikes killed Iranian Forces Commander Qassim Suleimani in early 2020, Hezbollah announced its intention to attack US forces in retaliation (Photo: US Ambassador to Lebanon Elizabeth Richard with Lebanese Internal Security Forces Brigadier General Fadi Hachem in 2017).

Ethnic Groups

Lebanon is ethnically homogenous, with around 95% of the population identifying as Arab. Some Maronite Christians (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*) reject the Arab label, choosing to identify themselves as Lebanese or descendants of the Canaanites (Phoenicians – see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). Around 4% of the population identifies as Armenian, most descended from Armenians, who fled Ottoman persecution in their homeland in the early 20th century. Lebanon is also home to some 100,000 Kurds, most descended from Kurds who fled Turkey and Syria after World War I.

As of early 2019, the government estimates that 1.5 million Syrian refugees reside in Lebanon, most of them recent arrivals. Lebanon is also home to some 475,000 registered Palestinian refugees. Most Palestinians have lived in Lebanon for decades,

having arrived in the area after various Arab-Israeli conflicts. Finally, Lebanon hosts some 30,000 refugees from Iraq, Sudan, and other countries and some 250,000 foreign workers, primarily from Sri Lanka, Ethiopia, the Philippines, Nepal, and Bangladesh (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*).

Social Relations

Lebanese society divides along rural-urban, male-female, and rich-poor lines. Generally, urban dwellers, males, and the wealthy have greater access to educational and economic opportunities and hold the most social prestige. Women tend to experience domestic violence and face discrimination in the workplace (see p. 1 of *Sex and Gender*) (Photo: A Syrian family in the Bekaa Valley).

At the top of Lebanon's social hierarchy are ***zuama***, the male heads of the traditionally dominant elite families. Relationships with the *zuama* determine access to government positions and some social services. Divisions also occur along religious lines. Traditionally, Maronite Christians have held significant societal power and influence, while Shi'a Muslims have experienced discrimination and marginalization. Religion remains the most significant marker of identity and often aligns with political affiliation, although the disparate religious communities tend to have amicable relations (see p. 6-7 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

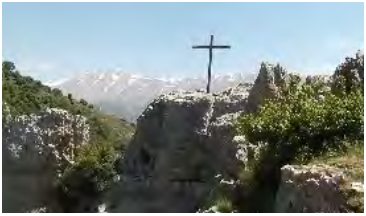
Refugees and foreign workers experience significant discrimination and socioeconomic exclusion. Neither Palestinian nor Syrian refugees are allowed to attain Lebanese citizenship, meaning they lack political representation and are barred from many professions. Many Palestinians live in refugee camps, some of which lack proper sanitation, clean water, and food, while others have settled in urban areas. By preventing the construction of formal camps for Syrian refugees, the Lebanese government hopes to encourage their return to Syria, fearing their continued presence could upset Lebanon's present religious balance (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*).

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Lebanon's last official census in 1932 census showed the population was 58% Christian, 35% Muslim, 6% Druze, and 1% followers of other faiths. According to a 2018 Lebanese research report, the count is somewhat different today: 61% Muslim, 34% Christian, and 5% Druze. Smaller numbers of Lebanese are Jewish or followers of Baha'ism (founded in 1863 in Persia and emphasizes the spiritual unity of all humankind), Buddhism, and Hinduism. The country's non-citizen population, both refugees and foreign workers (see p. 14-15 of *Political and Social Relations*), is predominantly Muslim.

Lebanon's constitution guarantees freedom of religion, prohibits religious discrimination, and allows all Lebanese to worship according to their personal beliefs, provided practices do not disturb public order. Further, Lebanon's penal code forbids the defamation of and contempt for religion, as well as "blaspheming God publicly." Significantly, the constitution also divides political leadership among the country's religious groups (Photo: A cross in the Qadisha Valley).



Lebanon officially recognizes 18 faiths: 4 Muslim sects (Shi'a, Sunni, Alawite, and Ismaili), 12 Christian denominations (Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholic, Assyrian, Chaldean, Copt, Evangelical, and Roman Catholic), the Druze faith, and Judaism. Religious groups must register with the state to gain legal recognition. Privileges granted registered groups include the right to perform baptisms and state-recognized marriages (see p. 3 of *Family and Kinship*). Further, recognized groups may define and enforce their own family and personal status laws regulating marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance (see p. 2-3 of *Sex and Gender*). Nonregistered groups may own

property, where members can gather for worship and religious rituals. However, because most high-level government positions are apportioned among the recognized faiths according to the constitution, National Pact, and other agreements (see p. 3-5 of *Political and Social Relations*), members of unrecognized groups are effectively barred from occupying such positions.

Early Spiritual Landscape

The region's early inhabitants had a rich spiritual life characterized by the veneration of multiple deities and spirits. Residents attributed humanlike characteristics to divine entities that constructed the universe, created the earth and humans, and influenced daily life. Archaeological finds suggest residents worshipped deities at temples and other sacred sites (Photo: Stone carving of Baal, the Phoenician Storm God, from around the 14th century BC).

Judaism

The Levant was the birthplace of Judaism, and Lebanon has been home to a Jewish community for some 3,000 years. The 1932 census counted 3,500 Jews. Following the 1948 creation of the Jewish state of Israel (see p. 7-8 of *History and Myth*), Lebanon did not expel its Jewish population unlike some other regional states, and by the 1950s, Lebanon was home to as many as 14,000 Jews. Nevertheless, anti-Israeli sentiment grew during the turbulent 1960s-70s (see p. 9-11 of *History and Myth*, and most Jews fled. Today, some 100 Jews of Lebanese descent reside in Lebanon, though they generally avoid revealing their religious affiliation for fear of persecution.

Christianity

Christianity emerged in the Levant some 2,000 years ago. In 313, Roman Emperor Constantine issued the Edict of Milan establishing freedom of religion and ending the persecution of Christians. Following Constantine's conversion and the late 4th-century establishment of Christianity as the Empire's official

religion, Christianity spread rapidly in the region (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*).

In the 4th century, a Christian priest/hermit named Maron (later St. Maron) gathered followers in Syria. In the 7th century, the patriarch of the Christian Church in Antioch (modern-day Antakya, Turkey), Joannes Maro (later St. John Maron) led Maronites fleeing persecution to Mount Lebanon (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), where they converted the local population.

When the region came under the control of Western European Crusaders in the 12th century (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), the Maronites reestablished contact with the Roman Catholic Church. In the 16th century, this union was formalized. The Maronite community continued to grow over centuries of foreign rule (see p. 4-6 of *History and Myth*), becoming Lebanon's dominant religious group by the early 20th century.

Islam

Origins of Islam

Muhammad, who Muslims consider God's final Prophet, was born in Mecca in 570 in what is today Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or "Holy Book," to guide their everyday lives and shape their values (Photo: Late 7th century Arabian Qur'an).

Meaning of Islam

Islam is a way of life to its adherents. The term Islam literally means submission to the will of God, and a Muslim is "a person who submits to God."

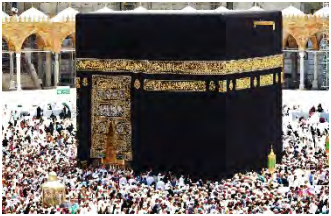
Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into two sects: Sunni and Shi'a. Sunnis are distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, Shi'a Muslims believe the religious leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of the Islamic faith.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God, and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day while facing the Ka'aba in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The Ka'aba (pictured) is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.



- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Donate a percentage of one's income to the poor or needy.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Abstain from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan.
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Perform the pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia once in a lifetime.

Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel those of Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they also believe in one God.

Abraham: All three faiths trace their lineage to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their descent to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims trace theirs to Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ishmael.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Jews and Christians altered God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The three religions differ significantly in their understanding of the role of Jesus. While Christians consider him the divine Messiah who fulfills Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as a prophet but do not acknowledge his divinity or the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that God determines the time of death and birth. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad

The concept of jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's command to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism and consider it contrary to Islamic beliefs (Photo: Fakhreddine Mosque in Deir al-Qamar, built in 1493).

Ramadan

Observed during the ninth month of the Islamic lunar calendar (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*), Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger helps them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, a Muslim learns to appreciate the good in life. Lebanese Muslims typically break their daily fast at sunset with a meal known as ***iftar***. Ramadan includes several holidays:

- **Lailat al-Qadr:** This "Night of Power" marks Muhammad's receipt of the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid al-Fitr:** This "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrates Ramadan's end and is a national holiday in Lebanon.

Another important holiday is celebrated when the Hajj ends, about 70 days following the end of Ramadan.

- **Eid al-Adha:** This "Festival of Sacrifice" commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (or Isaac, according to Christians), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is also a national holiday.

The Arrival and Spread of Islam in Lebanon

Following Muhammad's 632 death, his followers set out to spread the teachings of Islam beyond the Arabian Peninsula. Arriving in the Levant around 636, Muslim Arab warriors won decisive battles and captured significant territory (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*). During the subsequent Umayyad and Abbasid dynasties (see p. 3 of *History and Myth*), the Muslim population began to divide among Sunni and Shi'a. Further divisions appeared within these groups, notably the Ismaili and the Alawite sects, which emerged from Shi'a ideology in the 8th and 10th centuries, respectively.

In the 11th century, a group of Egyptian Ismaili Shi'a calling themselves Unitarians (***Muwahhidun***) combined elements of Ismaili beliefs with other philosophies. Facing persecution for their unorthodox ideas, they left Egypt and settled in Lebanon. Known as the Druze by non-*Muwahhidun*, the group soon closed to outsiders and has not accepted a convert since 1043. While the Lebanese government today classifies the Druze as Muslim, the Druze tend to view theirs as a distinct faith (Photo: Beirut's Mohammad Al-Amin Mosque).

Religion Today

Lebanon's tradition of "confessionalism," or distributing political power according to religious affiliation (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), has affected relations among sectarian groups. Today, religious affiliation continues to be the most important marker of identity in Lebanon (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*), though personal religiosity among Lebanese has declined significantly in recent years. In a 2019 survey, just 24% of Lebanese

considered themselves religious, down from 44% in 2010. Relations among Lebanon's diverse religious groups are generally marked by mutual tolerance and cooperation, though domestic and regional turmoil threaten these amicable relations.

Islam

Sunni and Shi'a Muslims each comprise about 31% of the citizen population. Sunnis predominate in the far North and the coastal urban areas of Tripoli, Beirut, and Sidon, while Shi'a concentrate in the South, Bekaa Valley region of the Northeast, and Beirut's southern suburbs. Many Muslim children attend Qur'anic schools in addition to or instead of attending public or other private schools, where they learn the practices and morals of Islam and memorize Qur'anic verses. Most Syrian and Palestinian refugees are Sunni Muslims.

Christianity

Some 34% of Lebanese are Christians, most followers of the Maronite tradition, followed by Greek Orthodox. Other Christians include Armenian Orthodox, Greek Catholics, Armenian Catholics, Syriac Orthodox, Syriac Catholics, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Copts, Protestants (primarily Presbyterians, Baptists, and Seventh-day Adventists), Roman Catholics, and members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. While Christians live across the country, they concentrate in the mountains north of Beirut (Photo: Then-US President Obama meets with Lebanese Maronite Patriarch Bechara Rai and other Christian leaders from the Middle East at the White House in 2014).

Druze

Some 5% of Lebanese identify as *Muwahhid* (Druze to outsiders). They primarily inhabit the western edges of the Lebanon Mountains and the Southeast. The community does not permit conversion or marriage outside the faith. Knowledge of Druze beliefs and practices is reserved for the ***uqqal*** ("the wise"), a minority of followers, both men and women, who are initiated into the faith (see p. 1 of *Aesthetics and Recreation*).

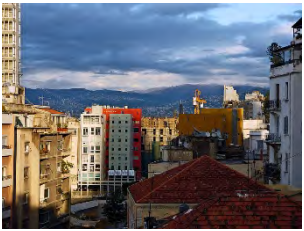
4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

Despite conflict, unrest, and economic hardships, family remains the foundation of society, with members relying on each other for emotional, economic, and social support.

Residence

Since the mid-20th century, Lebanon has experienced significant internal migration and urbanization, especially in and around Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon. By 2018, some 89% of the population lived in urban areas. Decades of conflict that destroyed hundreds of thousands of homes plus the influx of refugees have resulted in housing shortages and rising housing costs. In the absence of government public housing programs, groups like the political party/militia Hezbollah (see p. 7 of *Political and Social Relations*) often provide housing assistance to poor Lebanese.



Urban: City dwellers live in apartments, some historical buildings but most constructed since the 1990 end of the civil war (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). These buildings tend to feature modern, Western-style architecture and interior designs. Housing conditions vary significantly by income, with many upper-class Lebanese residing in luxurious apartments with separate quarters for non-citizen servants. By contrast, middle-income families tend to crowd into small apartments. The poorest Lebanese typically lack adequate shelter, often living in makeshift homes of scrap wood and corrugated sheet metal in settlements on city peripheries. Many urban areas lack proper sewage and waste disposal (see p. 3 of *Political and Social Relations*) (Photo: Beirut apartments).

Rural: Residents in the countryside traditionally live in single-family homes constructed of stone and timber and featuring ***tarboush*** (red tile) roofs. Dwellings typically comprise

two stories, with the ***kabou*** (first floor) traditionally used for animal pens or storing provisions and farming tools. An outdoor stone staircase leads to a second story ***dar*** (central living space), which often features a grapevine-draped ***stayha*** (terrace), where families relax and socialize (Photo: Traditional rural home in the region of Chouf).

Family Structure

Familial relationships are an integral aspect of Lebanese daily life and social organization. Generally, extended relatives are expected to help each other, avoid actions that may bring shame to the family, and value the needs of the family over individual desires. Households often include extended family members, with other relatives living in close proximity. Children typically remain in the family residence as young adults and move into their own quarters after marriage. Lebanese highly respect their elders, with children typically caring for their parents as they get older. Nursing homes are uncommon and are generally reserved for the ailing or those without close kin.

Polygyny: This term refers to the practice of a man having multiple wives simultaneously. In accordance with Islamic law, Muslim men may have up to four wives if they can treat them all equally. While polygyny is uncommon, strict Christian divorce laws compel some Christian men to convert to Islam to remarry without divorcing their first wife.

Children

Historically, Lebanese families had many children but today tend to have just one or two. Extended family members often assist with childcare, with cousins often raised together like siblings. Although the legal working age is 14, young children in poorer families, particularly refugee children, are expected to help supplement the family income typically by working in agriculture, construction, or manufacturing (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*). Children living in poverty, especially refugee and displaced children, often face abuse, sexual exploitation,

homelessness, and restricted access to education (see p. 4 of *Learning and Knowledge*).

Birth: While traditions vary across religious groups (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*), a new mother and her child typically rest together at home for the first 40 days following the birth. Among Muslims, the father whispers the ***adhan*** (call to prayer) into a baby's right ear and the profession of faith in his left immediately following the birth.

Circumcision: Muslim boys traditionally underwent circumcision sometime between the ages of 2-12, signifying their membership in the Islamic community. Today, most newborn Lebanese males regardless of religious affiliation are circumcised at the hospital immediately following birth.

Marriage

The government performs no civil marriage ceremonies, though it recognizes such marriages performed abroad. Instead, religious leaders perform all marriages, with specific marriage laws varying by religious group (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). For example, while the minimum marriage age for females among Sunni Muslims is 17, it is 14 for Assyrian Orthodox Christians, though child marriage is most common among refugee populations (see p. 3 of *Sex and Gender*).

Most faith leaders require a couple to be of the same faith, demanding the conversion of one member if necessary. If a couple is interfaith or simply prefers a secular wedding, they must travel abroad, most often to Cyprus or Turkey, for a civil ceremony. While some religious leaders perform interfaith weddings, the government does not recognize their union as lawful, meaning they still must travel abroad for a civil ceremony. Some faith leaders who perform interfaith religious ceremonies do so only if the non-belonging partner pledges to raise the children in the religion of the other partner (Photo: Beirut's St. George Maronite Cathedral).

Bridewealth: Upon marriage, Muslim and Druze grooms traditionally pay the ***mahr*** or a so-called bridewealth to the bride, which becomes her sole property. The *mahr* symbolizes the bride's financial independence and aims to provide security in the event of death or divorce. However, Druze law permits husbands to reclaim the bridewealth if divorce proceedings determine the wife is at fault.

Weddings: While specific practices vary by religious affiliation, weddings are generally joyous events celebrated by the community. Muslim couples typically sign a ***nikah*** (wedding contract) in the presence of family and friends. Druze weddings involve a ***sandit al-arous*** or "displaying of the bride" when guests admire the bride in her wedding attire before accompanying her to a celebration at the groom's parents' home. Maronite ceremonies include a crowning of the bride and groom by a priest, signifying the symbolic Christian kingdom they will establish within their new home. To encourage marriage and relieve the financial burden of ceremonies, various groups and organizations, such as Hezbollah (see p. 7 of *Political and Social Relations*), Palestinian groups, and the Maronite Church, often organize mass weddings.

Divorce: As in marriage, laws governing divorce vary by religious affiliation. Divorce carries significant stigma in all groups, with some Christian sects banning divorce altogether. Nevertheless, divorce rates rose 28% between 2007-2015.

Death

Funeral traditions also vary by religious affiliation. According to Islamic tradition, Muslims wash and wrap the deceased in a ***kafan*** (shroud or clean white cloth) and bury the body within 24 hours of death. Traditional Shi'a funerals also involve ***al-walwalah***, ritual wailing and singing by professional mourners. Maronite funerals typically include the viewing of the deceased followed by a church service featuring prayers, hymns, and incense before burial in a cemetery (Photo: Beirut's Al-Omari Grand Mosque).

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

The Lebanese social system is patriarchal, meaning that men hold most power and authority. Although women increasingly take advantage of educational and professional opportunities, legal and institutional discrimination, plus certain cultural norms, limit their full participation in society.

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Women traditionally hold responsibility for childcare and household duties, even if they work outside the home. In rural areas, many women also tend crops in addition to their household chores (Photo: A female member of the Lebanese Armed Forces distributes health kits to schoolchildren).

Labor Force: In 2019, some 23% of Lebanese women worked outside the home, lower than the US rate (56%) but higher than many regional neighbors such as Jordan (14%) and Egypt (22%). While women earn post-secondary degrees at similar rates as men, they remain underrepresented in management roles, comprising some 4% of senior executives in 2019, lower than the Middle East and North Africa average of 5%. Further, men typically receive preferential job placement and earn up to 50% more than women with equal qualifications.

Gender and the Law

Although Lebanon's constitution guarantees equality for all citizens, women routinely face unequal treatment before the law. Personal status laws regulating marriage, divorce, inheritance, and child custody differ by religious group (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*). Administered in state-appointed, government-subsidized courts by male religious leaders, laws vary by group but tend to be biased against women or restrict women's rights. For example, a woman's testimony in most Islamic courts is worth just half that of a man, and daughters receive half the

inheritance granted sons under Sunni law. Further, Druze, Sunni, and Shi'a laws permit husbands but not wives to unilaterally divorce their spouses without cause. Lebanese citizenship derives solely from the father. While a Lebanese woman married to a non-citizen maintains her own Lebanese citizenship, she may not sponsor her husband's citizenship nor pass it on to any children born to the couple. Male citizens married to female non-citizens face no such discrimination.

In the case of divorce, most fathers assume custody, though some groups grant mothers custody until children reach a certain age. For example, under Shi'a law, children live with mothers until boys turn 2 and girls 7. While a mother may petition for extended custody, most groups return custody to the father if she remarries. In addition to these legal restrictions, unequal treatment is often rooted in tradition. For example, male elders typically exercise informal control over female family members' freedom of movement and employment. Further, government officials occasionally defer to men seeking to restrict female family members' rights to travel.

Gender and Politics

While women gained the right to vote and run for seats in the National Assembly in 1952, their political participation remains low. A 2020 assessment of 152 countries ranked Lebanon 149 in female political empowerment. Of the 583 candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections, just 86 were women and only 6 emerged victorious. Overall, observers credit women's low level of political participation to Lebanon's divisive sectarian politics and associated discriminatory candidate selection process dominated by a predominantly male political class (see p. 15 of *Political and Social Relations*). Nevertheless, as of mid-2020, a record six women serve on the Council of Ministers (see p. 4 of *Political and Social Relations*) under Prime Minister Hassan Diab, most notably Zeina Akar as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense (Photo: Then-Minister of the Interior Raya El Hassan with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019).

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

While 31% of Lebanese women report experiencing GBV sometime in their lives, experts believe many victims fail to report incidents because of the social stigma attached to the crime, combined with their lack of trust in the authorities to protect them. In 2014, legislation criminalized domestic abuse and in 2017, closed legal loopholes that allowed a rapist to avoid imprisonment by marrying his victim. Nevertheless, Lebanon's religious courts tend to impose little or no punishment on GBV perpetrators.

GBV is a common practice in refugee camps. To avoid the harm to a family's reputation that GBV can bring, some families commit their daughters to early marriage. For example, a 2017 study found that 47% of married refugee women aged 20-24 had wed before age 18. Excluded from many legal protections and often denied any legal recourse, Lebanon's noncitizen female workforce is also vulnerable to GBV. Because they usually live secluded in their employers' homes, noncitizen domestic workers rarely report abuse for fear of losing their employment and housing.

Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2018, the birthrate dropped from 5.7 children per woman to 2.1, lower than neighboring Jordan (2.8) but higher than in the US (1.7). This decrease is primarily due to changes in women's social status. Women who are better educated, work outside the home, and marry later tend to have fewer children (Photo: Then-US Secretary of State John Kerry recognizes Elisabeth Sioufi of Lebanon as a 2014 Trafficking in Persons Report Hero).

LGBTQ Issues

Despite a 2018 court ruling that consensual same-sex contact is no longer an "unnatural offense," homosexuality remains punishable with up to 1 year in prison under the law. While Beirut is home to one of the Middle East's largest and most visible gay communities, law enforcement tends to target members of the LGBTQ community for harassment and arrest.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

The official language is Arabic. Due to colonial influences and widespread use in private educational institutions, French and English are also widely spoken.

Arabic

The first language of most Lebanese is Levantine Arabic, an Arabic dialect also spoken across Jordan, Palestine, and Syria. The Lebanese variant of Levantine Arabic is Lebanese-Syrian Arabic, or alternatively, North Levantine Arabic. In school, Lebanese learn to read and write Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a variety used across Arabic-speaking countries. Lebanese use MSA for writing, formal discussions, speeches, and in many national news broadcasts. With a 28-character alphabet, Arabic is written horizontally from right to left (Photo: Lebanese road sign in Arabic).

Levantine Arabic and MSA differ in both vocabulary and grammar. For example, Levantine Arabic avoids certain noun endings common in MSA, and while the subject precedes the verb in Levantine Arabic, the verb comes first in MSA. While Levantine Arabic varies among speakers, it is mutually intelligible with most other regional Arabic dialects and relatively well-known across the Arabic-speaking world.

French and English

Due to the French occupation post-World War I (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), French remains a widely spoken second language, especially among residents of East Beirut and Mount Lebanon. Further, French remains prominent in government administration and education, with most secondary students attending private schools that prioritize French as a language of instruction (see p. 3 of *Learning and Knowledge*). Following

World War II, English became increasingly important as a language of business and education. Today, English skills tend to correlate with age, with younger urban dwellers more likely to speak the language.

Other Languages

Some 294,000 Lebanese speak Western Armenian and another 294,000 speak Northern Kurdish (see p. 14 of *Political and Social Relations*). Other languages spoken primarily by refugees or immigrants include Egyptian and Iraqi dialects of Arabic (some 123,000 speakers), Assyrian and Chaldean Neo-Aramaic (31,200), Spanish (19,600), Greek (3,350), Italian (3,350), and Turkish (3,040).

Communication Overview

Communicating competently in Lebanon requires not only knowledge of Arabic and/or French, but also the ability to interact effectively using language. This broad notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch, gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). When used properly, these forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as the speaker intends.

Communication Style

Lebanese communication patterns reflect politeness, generosity, hospitality, and respect for tradition. Accordingly, Lebanese devote significant time to greetings and other formalities such as inquiring about one's family and background in detail. In their interactions, Lebanese strive to emphasize respect for their conversation partners and their social status, while avoiding embarrassment to themselves or others, particularly in business meetings and in interactions with elders and social superiors (Photo: US Marines converse with members of Lebanese Armed Forces).

The emphasis Lebanese place on politeness is evident in a widely-held preference for indirect or non-specific answers. For

example, Lebanese tend to deliver bad news in a roundabout manner and often preface requests of elders or superiors with significant formalities. Further, Lebanese tend to provide a positive response to most requests, usually accompanied by the phrase ***insha'allah*** ("if God wills" – used across religious groups). However, this "yes" answer is not necessarily a promise of action. Similarly, foreign nationals should not interpret a noncommittal answer to a request as neutral, as an answer might actually be negative.

Additionally, politeness demands that Lebanese express goodwill instead of criticizing another person's ideas. Consequently, a foreign national should avoid giving direct criticism, especially in public. Instead, he should combine indirect criticism with praise for any positive points, while reassuring the individual of his high regard for him personally.

In relaxed social situations among family and friends, Lebanese tend to be talkative, often shouting when excited and employing liberal use of terms of endearment like ***habibi*** ("my dear"). Lebanese consider the display of emotions during discussions to be indicative of deep and sincere concern for the subject and may pause frequently during conversations to choose words that suitably express their emotions (Photo: US Army Gen Joseph Votel speaks with Commander of Lebanese Armed Forces Gen Joseph Aoun).

Greetings

Lebanese extend greetings with great care and respect, typically offering ***marhaba*** (hello) in order of seniority. Oral greetings vary by region and reflect Lebanon's diversity. For example, the typical Beirut greeting ***Hi, kifak ça va***? combines *hi* (English), *kifak* (Arabic for "how are you?") and *ça va* (French for "are you well?"). Meanwhile, the greeting ***Ahlan wa sahlan*** ("you have come among family") demonstrates residents' inherent regard for hospitality.

Following a verbal greeting, Lebanese generally exchange nods and handshakes, though some Muslims may decline to shake hands, particularly with members of the opposite sex. In place of a handshake, Lebanese may bow their head while placing a hand on their chest to indicate deep respect. Some Lebanese men exchange pats on the back, while family members and close friends may exchange cheek kisses (Photo: Lebanese Armed Forces Col Sami Harb greets a US Army soldier).

Names

Arab names for both genders reflect the genealogy of the father's side. The full name consists of a first (given) name, the person's father's (first) name, sometimes the paternal grandfather's (first) name, a family name, and sometimes a clan name. Some Lebanese omit family names and use only their given name plus their father's first name (such as Ahmad Hafiz). Other Lebanese include the term ***bin*** (son of) or ***bint*** (daughter of) between a person's given name and his/her father's name. Family names frequently begin with ***al-***, the article meaning "the." A Lebanese family or clan name typically indicates membership in an extended family, a relationship with an ancestor, or origins in a particular geographic location. Upon marriage, some women adopt their husband's family name.

While Lebanese Christians (see p. 1, 2-3, and p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*) generally observe these naming conventions, many prefer French first names like "Michel" or "Pierre." Some names, like "Sarah," are common across religious groups.

Forms of Address

Lebanese friends and relatives of the same sex usually address one another by first name. Honorifics such as military ranks and professional or personal titles (Dr., Engineer, Mr., or Mrs.) are often combined with the person's first name (e.g. Dr. Bill, Engineer Sarah).

Conversational Topics

Polite conversation typically involves inquiries about general well-being and that of one's extended family. Male Lebanese usually avoid inquiring about another man's female relations, and male foreign nationals should do the same. Other common conversational topics include careers, schooling, and places of origin. While Lebanese may be eager to discuss politics, foreign nationals should avoid this and other sensitive topics, notably religion and regional conflicts, particularly those between Lebanon and its neighbors (see p. 11-13 of *Political and Social Relations*). Lebanese consider cursing offensive.

Gestures

Lebanese often use gestures to augment spoken words and emphasize their point of view. To beckon, they wave the fingers with the palm facing down, and to indicate direction, Lebanese use the entire hand instead of pointing with one finger. To indicate "no," Lebanese raise an outward facing palm or lift the head and eyebrows, while making a "tsk" sound. Shaking the head side-to-side conveys a lack of understanding, rather than "no." Flipping the wrist of an outstretched arm means "What is the problem?"

As in many other Arab countries, placing the right hand over the heart is a gesture of greeting used alone or to accompany a handshake. This gesture also signals "no thank you" in Lebanon. Lebanese consider raising a closed fist and beckoning with the index finger as rude. Foreign nationals should also avoid showing the soles of their feet to Lebanese and walking in front of someone who is praying.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Arabic Pronunciation and Transliteration

Transliteration is the process of spelling out Arabic words using the Roman (Latin) alphabet. The table below shows sounds or letters having no English equivalent or that vary from MSA pronunciations. When texting or writing informally online in Romanized Arabic, Lebanese frequently replace certain Arabic letters with numbers, also depicted below.

Arabic Letter	Transliteration and Description	Number (if applicable)	Example
أ	a	2	**A**frica
ع	‘a or aa	3	sound from deep in the throat as in the name **‘A**li or the instrument **‘ou**d
خ	kh; strong “h”	5	lo**ch** (as pronounced in Scotland)
ط	ṭ or t	6	**t**ar
ح	ḥ or h; whispered “h”	7	**h**oot
ق	g (pronounced as a glottal stop in Levantine Arabic and as “g” in MSA)	8	pause in the middle of “uh-oh” (in MSA pronounced like **cou**gh and transliterated q)
ص	ṣ or s	9	**sa**w
غ	gh; like the guttural French “r”		Pa**r**is (as pronounced by a French person)
ذ	dH; Soft “th”		**th**is
ء	’ (glottal stop)		pause in the middle of “uh-oh”
ج	y (or j)		**y**es
ك	ch (or k)		**ch**in

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Arabic (Romanized)
How are you?	Kaifa haloka (haloki for female)
Hi	Marhaba
Good morning	Sabah el kheer
Good afternoon/evening	Masaa el kheer
My name is...	Esmee…
Yes	N'em
No	La
Please	Men fedlek
Thank you	Shukran
You're welcome	'Afwan
Good night (when leaving)	Tosbeho (tosbeheena for female) 'ala khair
Where are you from?	Men ayna anta (anti? for female)
Where do you live?	Ayna taskun? (Ayna taskuneen? for female)
I am American	Ana amreeki (amrekiah for female)
Do you speak (English/Arabic)?	Hal tatakallamo alloghah al enjleziah/alarabiah?
Today/Now	Alyawm/Al aan
Tomorrow	Ghadan
Yesterday	Ams
The meal was very good	Alwajba tayba waayed
Look!	Onzor (Onzori! for female)
Excuse me	Lo samaht
Pardon?	A' ederney?
I don't understand you	Ana la afhem 'eleyk
What?	A'eesh?
Where?	Ayn?
How?	Kaif?
Me/you	Ana/anta/anti (you for female)
Him/her	Houwa/hiya
Help!	Moosaa'id (male) Moosaa'ida (female)
Call a doctor!	! Tabeeb tisil 'ala
Call the police!	! Ishurta tisilee 'ala
I'm lost	Ana duht

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 95.1%

- Male: 96.9%
- Female: 93.3% (2018 estimate)

Early Education

Ancient Phoenicians (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*) informally transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, a sense of community, and skills related to agriculture, sailing, woodcarving, and metalworking, among others, to younger generations. Around 200 AD, the Romans (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*) established the esteemed Beirut School of Law. Known as ***Berytus Nutrix Legum***, "Beirut the mother of laws," the school produced numerous famed jurists and legal scholars. With the spread of Islam after the 7th century (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), instruction for children was formalized, with teachers giving lessons in Qur'anic verses, Islamic rituals and duties, and Arabic calligraphy to the children of elite Muslim families. Some male children also received instruction in mathematics and science at a ***kuttab***.

Instruction for the region's Christians remained informal until the 1624 establishment of a monastery school by Maronites (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*). By the end of the 18th century, 10 Maronite schools taught Arabic literacy, philosophy, numeracy, foreign languages, and religious doctrine to local children. Formal Christian education expanded further in the 19th century, with American Protestant and French Catholic missionaries establishing educational institutions across Lebanon, notably the American University of Beirut, founded in 1866 as the Syrian Protestant College and open to students of all faiths. Overall, this increase in opportunities supported the development of a large class of educated, urban-based Christian professionals (Illustration: 19th-century depiction of Syrian Protestant College).

20th Century Education

Adopted under the French mandate following World War I (see p. 6 of *History and Myth*), Lebanon's 1926 constitution guaranteed public education for all students regardless of gender, ethnicity, or religion. Modeled on the French system, public education at the time comprised 6 years of free, non-compulsory primary schooling focused on Arabic, French, history, mathematics, hygiene, morals, and sewing.

High fees largely restricted attendance at secondary schools and the country's private religious universities to wealthier families. Following independence (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), the government allocated significant resources to expand education, though allegations that urban, Christian areas received disproportionate investment contributed to sectarian divisions in subsequent decades.

During the 15-year civil war (see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*), many educators fled, and education ceased in many areas, as displaced Lebanese sought refuge in schools. Although public schooling reached only about 40% of Lebanese children before the war, that proportion had dropped to 33% by war's end in 1990.

Modern Education System

Today, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE) oversees schooling. Public education is free and compulsory for grades 1-6. Although Arabic is the primary language of instruction, French and English become increasingly prominent in higher grades. The school year runs October-June, with 3 consecutive academic years comprising a "cycle." For example, the 6-year primary sequence comprises two academic cycles (Photo: A member of the Lebanese Armed Forces speaks with schoolchildren).

Government spending on education as a percentage of GDP was just 2.4% in 2013, roughly half that of the US (4.9%) and the global average (4.6%). Generally, students tend to exhibit

poor scholastic achievement. In a 2018 assessment of 79 countries, Lebanese students ranked 50th in reading, 54th in math, and 57th in science, compared to 11th, 29th, and 16th respectively for the US. Many public schools suffer from a lack of resources and trained teachers, overcrowding, and a deteriorating infrastructure.

Due to the poor state of public education, over two-thirds of Lebanese students attend fee-based private schools. The constitution grants Lebanon's 18 officially recognized religious groups (see p. 1 of *Religion and Spirituality*) the right to operate their own schools with the stipulation that they not incite sectarian discord. Further, the government subsidizes tuition at "semi-private" schools in communities without public schools (Photo: Members of Lebanese Armed Forces distribute health and hygiene kits to schoolchildren).

Both public and private schools follow the Lebanese national curriculum through the intermediate level. At the secondary level, many private institutions switch to French, US, or international curricula. Although most private schools align with a particular religious group, they typically accept students from any religious tradition. Public school attendance increased by 12% in 2019, a rise experts attribute to higher tuition costs at private schools amidst Lebanon's worsening economic conditions (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*).

Some organizations have their own educational institutions. For example, the political party/militia Hezbollah (see p. 7 and 10-11 of *Political and Social Relations*) operates schools from pre-primary through post-secondary levels, and its education expenditures typically exceed those of the MEHE. Hezbollah schools predominate in Beirut, southern Lebanon, and the Bekaa Valley. While Hezbollah-sponsored schools charge tuition, many students receive generous scholarships. Curricula incorporate traditional academic subjects alongside Hezbollah political ideology and Shi'a Muslim religious doctrine. Due to

Hezbollah's association with the Iranian government (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*), students pledge loyalty to both Hezbollah's leadership and Islamic Republic of Iran founder Ayatollah Khomeini. Generally, students in Hezbollah-run schools have access to computer labs and swimming pools largely unavailable at public schools. They also tend to perform well on national university entrance exams.

Lebanon hosts some two million refugees, primarily Palestinians and Syrians (see p. 14-15 of *Political and Social Relations*). To accommodate the high volume of refugee students, some schools operate two shifts, with students attending classes 9am-3pm or 4pm-10pm. In partnership with international development organizations, the government also offers refugee students vocational training in carpentry, plumbing, and sewing. Nevertheless, enrollment of refugees lags. While some 213,000 Syrian refugee children attended school in 2017-18, at least the same number remained unenrolled (Photo: Then-US Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken and then-US Ambassador to Lebanon David Hale pose with Lebanese scholarship recipients in 2015).

Pre-Primary: International development organizations provide some free, non-compulsory pre-primary programs for children aged 3-5 focused on building Arabic and English literacy through songs and games.

Primary: Compulsory primary school consists of grades 1-6. The standard national curriculum focuses on Arabic, civics, art, mathematics, science, and physical education. Students also begin study of foreign languages, with the law requiring math, physics, and chemistry be taught in French or English. In 2019, 87% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled.

Intermediate: Comprising grades 6-9, non-compulsory intermediate school includes academic, technical, and vocational tracks. The academic track adds subjects such as geography and technology education to the primary school

curriculum. Upon successful completion, students may advance to academic general secondary school.

Students on the technical and vocational tracks study towards professional certification exams in some 55 specializations such as accounting, cosmetology, and hospitality. After certification, students may enter the workforce or pursue a technical diploma, which grants access to post-secondary vocational-technical programs. In 2019, about 68% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in intermediate education.

Secondary: Non-compulsory secondary school consists of grades 10-12. After 1 year of the general curriculum, academic secondary students choose electives like computer science, art, and philosophy. Graduates of public schools earn a General Secondary School Diploma while private school students usually receive the International or French Baccalaureate. In 2019, some 55% of students of the appropriate age were enrolled in secondary programs.

Post-Secondary: The nation's only public university, Lebanese University, was founded in 1951. Attainment of a General Secondary School Diploma guarantees acceptance into this low-cost university, which enrolled some 39% of all university students in 2016. The majority of post-secondary students attend 1 of some 40 private universities, the most notable and prestigious being the non-sectarian American University of Beirut and St. Joseph University, a Catholic institution. Most private institutions are modeled on the European or US systems and provide most instruction in French or English (Photo: Members of the Lebanese Armed Forces attend a seminar).

Hezbollah also offers post-secondary education and training, with most programs focused on technical subjects or Islamic studies. Most graduates find employment in Hezbollah's extensive bureaucracy or militia (see p. 10-11 of *Political and Social Relations*).

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Lebanese view interpersonal connections as key to conducting business. In general, public displays of affection are inappropriate, though social touching among friends and family is common.

Time and Work

The Lebanese work week runs from Monday-Friday, and businesses hours vary by establishment type. While public sector employees generally work from 8am-3:30pm, private businesses typically open from 9am-6pm. Some businesses have limited hours each Friday, the Muslim holy day. Most shops are open Monday-Saturday from 9am-8pm, though some are open 24 hours. Many large shopping centers are open 9am-10pm or later. Some stores maintain shorter summer hours. Generally, banks open 8:30am-2pm, Monday-Saturday (Photo: Beirut shop).

Working Environment: Lebanese labor laws establish an 8-hour workday, a maximum 48-hour workweek, and at least 36 rest hours per week. Laws also guarantee overtime pay, 15 days of paid vacation, and 2 national holidays. However, Lebanon's non-citizen workers are often exempt from protections, and laws are underenforced, resulting in conditions of forced labor and lack of legal recourse for victims. For example, employers often abuse the ***kafala*** employee sponsorship system of contracting and monitoring migrant labor (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), confiscating passports and withholding salaries. Child labor (see p. 2 of *Economics and Resources*), sexual harassment, and workplace discrimination are also common.

Time Zone: Lebanon adheres to Eastern European Time (EET), which is 2 hours ahead of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) and 7 hours ahead of Eastern Standard Time (EST). Lebanon observes Eastern European Summer Time (EEST) from the end of March-October, when Lebanon is 3 hours ahead of GMT.

Lunar Calendar: Lebanese Muslims use the ***Hijri*** (Islamic) calendar to track Muslim holidays. Since it is based on lunar phases, dates fall 11 days earlier each year in relation to the Western calendar. The Islamic calendar's 12 months each have 30 days or fewer. Days begin at sunset on what the Western calendar would show as the previous day. For example, each new week begins at sunset on Saturday, and the Muslim holy day of Friday begins on Thursday evening.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- January 6: Armenian Orthodox Christmas
- February 9: St. Maron Day (see p. 3 of *Religion and Spirituality*)
- February 14: Rafik Hariri Memorial Day (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*)
- March 25: Feast of the Annunciation
- March/April: Good Friday (Western and Eastern)
- March/April: Easter (Western and Eastern)
- May 1: Labor Day
- May 25: Resistance and Liberation Day (commemorates the withdrawal of Israeli forces in 2000—see p. 13 of *History and Myth*)
- November 22: Independence Day (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*)
- December 25: Christmas

Variable dates according to the lunar calendar:

- ***Eid al-Fitr***: End of Ramadan
- ***Eid al-Adha***: Festival of Sacrifice
- ***Awal Muharram***: *Hijri* New Year
- ***Ashura***: Martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali
- ***Mawlid al-Nabi***: Birth of the Prophet Muhammad

Time and Business

Lebanese tend to have a relaxed approach to time, considering schedules and deadlines less important than relationships and social obligations. As a result, lengthy introductions, small talk,

and interruptions may delay the start or progress of meetings. Workplaces are typically hierarchical, and subordinate staff's inability to confirm an agreement without management's approval may prolong negotiations and decision-making.

Personal Space

Most Lebanese maintain an arm's length when conversing with strangers but stand closer to family and friends. Friends of the same gender may maintain very little personal space when interacting.

Touch: Unrelated Lebanese of the opposite sex tend to refrain from touching, even during greetings (see p. 4 of *Language and Communication*). Close friends and relatives often touch while interacting, and friends of the same gender may hold hands in public. Lebanese tend to use only the right hand when eating, gesturing, passing and accepting items, and shaking hands. Foreign nationals should adhere to this custom to avoid offense.

Eye Contact: While Lebanese consider direct eye contact during greetings a demonstration of sincerity and interest, foreign nationals should avoid prolonged staring and winking.

Photographs

Mosques, airports, government offices, and military installations may prohibit photography. Foreign nationals should obtain permission before photographing a Lebanese.

Driving

Like Americans, Lebanese drive on the right side of the road. Conditions are often poor, with roads lacking adequate illumination and signage. Other hazards include unmarked lanes, potholes, and drivers who disregard traffic laws, speed, and ignore traffic lights. In 2016, Lebanon's rate of traffic-related deaths was 18.1 per 100,000 people, lower than neighboring Jordan (24.4) but higher than neighboring Israel (4.2). While laws prohibit both texting and drinking while driving, enforcement is lax, and Lebanon has taken few measures to reduce road fatalities (Photo: Aerial view of Beirut).

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

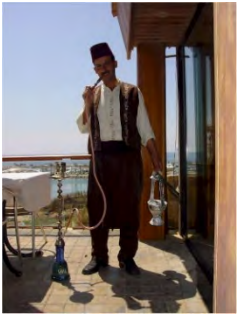
Overview

Lebanon's clothing, sport, music, and art reflect its religious, ethnic, and linguistic diversity, along with the country's place in the modern global economy**.**

Dress and Appearance

For everyday dress, most Lebanese wear the latest Western fashion trends. Some women combine the latest fashion with traditional styles, such as a ***hijab*** (headscarf).

Traditional: Traditional clothing for men includes the ***shirwal*** (loose trousers cinched at the ankle) combined with a loose tunic. Some older men also wear a ***tarboush*** or ***fez***, a brimless red felt hat. Women's traditional clothing consists of long colorful skirts with an ***abaya*** (a loose black robe that covers most of the body) and *hijab*. Among Druze who are initiated into the faith (see p. 7 of *Religion and Spirituality*), men and women's traditional attire includes white head coverings (turbans, fezzes, or headscarves) paired with dark black or blue clothing (Photo: Lebanese man in traditional dress smoking a shisha pipe).



The ***keffiyeh***, a checkered headscarf traditionally worn by Palestinian farmers, became a symbol of Palestinian nationalism in the 1930s. Today, many Palestinian activists continue to wear the *keffiyeh* as an emblem of their cause, and it is often featured at protests and demonstrations against the Lebanese government. Accordingly, observers criticize the use of the *keffiyeh* pattern by Western clothing brands and discourage foreign nationals from wearing the scarf as a fashion statement.

Recreation and Leisure

Lebanese often spend their leisure time with close friends and family dining, shopping, and socializing at cafes or traditional covered markets (***souqs***). Biking and hiking are popular outdoor

activities, as are swimming, scuba diving, sailing, and fishing along Lebanon's Mediterranean coast. In the winter, wealthier Lebanese typically ski at one of six resorts in the Mount Lebanon range (Photo: Winter landscape near Bsharri).

Holidays and Festivals: Lebanese celebrate a variety of holidays reflecting the country's religious diversity (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*). Among Christians, Easter and Christmas are central holidays, though customs and dates of celebration vary according to Eastern and Western traditions. While most Muslims celebrate the holidays of Eid-Al Adha and Eid Al-Fitr (see p. 5-6 of *Religion and Spirituality*), only Shi'a Muslims commemorate Ashura (see p. 2 of *Time and Space*) with religious processions. Other holidays commemorate important dates in Lebanon's history. Independence Day marks the end of the French mandate over Lebanon in 1943 (see p. 7 of *History and Myth*), and Resistance and Liberation Day acknowledges the withdraw of Israeli troops from southern Lebanon in 2000 (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). Both holidays feature parades, speeches, and rallies.

Although the 15-year civil war (see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*) halted most cultural events, the Beiteddine Art Festival opened at the height of the war to honor and celebrate artistic expression amidst the violence. Today, the event showcases visual art plus theater and musical performances in the historic Beiteddine Palace. Another notable event is the Baalbek International Festival, featuring international musicians and local Lebanese talent performing among Roman ruins.

Sports and Games

Sports: Known as "football" in the region, soccer is Lebanon's most popular sport and pastime. The men's domestic premier league includes 12 teams that tend to align along Lebanon's sectarian divisions. For example, the ***Al Nejmeh*** team has a Sunni fan base, while Hezbollah (see p. 7 and 10-11 of *Political*

and Social Relations) sponsors ***Al Ahed***. Due to ongoing violence among fans, the league banned spectators from 2005-12 and broadcasted games from empty stadiums. Today, a limited number of spectators may attend matches. Lebanon also has a women's professional league with six teams, though it is regularly underfunded. At the international level, the men's national team competed in the Asian Cup in 2000 and 2019.

The 10 men's and 6 women's teams in Lebanon's professional basketball league also align along sectarian lines. Since first qualifying in 2002, the men's national team has competed in the Basketball World Cup three times. Cycling and volleyball are other popular sports. Despite decades of conflict, Lebanon has regularly sent competitors to the Olympics, where athletes have medaled in weightlifting and wrestling.

Games: An ancient West Asian boardgame, ***tawle*** (backgammon – pictured) involves two players vying to clear their markers from the board. It is especially popular among older Lebanese, who meet to play in parks and cafes. Other popular pastimes include ***basra*** (chess) and ***dama*** (similar to checkers).

Music

Traditional: This genre often accompanies oral poetry. Typically performed at parties and weddings, ***zajal*** features improvised verses sung by two skilled ***zajjalin*** (poet singers) competing to out-do each other. During the performance, audience members support their favorite singer with chants and cheers. By contrast, ***dalouna*** requires performers to sing memorized poems composed for specific occasions like holidays, funerals, political rallies, or religious observances. Traditional percussion instruments include tambourines and a variety of drums made of animal hides stretched over bases of clay, metal, or wood. Other traditional instruments include the ***oud*** (pear-shaped, fretless, stringed lute), ***qanun*** (a trapezoidal string instrument related to the zither), and ***nay*** (reed pipe).

Modern: Many Lebanese listen to Arabic pop, Western, and other regional music genres. Popular musicians often mix traditional instruments with Western styles, with some composing in French or English. Admired across the Arab world, Lebanese pop singer and cultural icon Fairuz combines Lebanese and Western musical elements. With a repertoire focusing on themes of peace and unity, Fairuz is best known for her song *Behebek Ya Libanan* ("I Love You Lebanon").

Dance

Some scholars believe the ***dabke***, Lebanon's national dance, evolved during Phoenician times (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*), when neighbors gathered to stamp mud into cracks in thatched roofs. Today, the dance involves dancers holding hands and stomping together in a circle or line. Typically, the most skilled dancers lead the procession to demonstrate increasingly complicated leg movements. While traditionally performed at rural ***haflas***, (nights of dinner and dancing), *dabke* is also popular at urban weddings and nightclubs. Beginning in the 1970s, some Lebanese dancers began combining elements of traditional *dabke* with Western genres such as break dance, hip hop, and ballet.

Performed throughout the region, ***raks sharqi*** (belly dancing) involves barefoot female dancers performing in flowing dresses. Lebanon's version is unique for the way it requires dancers to coordinate the movement of several body parts at once. Some modern interpretations of the dance involve male performers (Photo: Belly dancing costumes for sale).

Theater and Film

Lebanon's earliest performing artists were ***hakawati***, traveling storytellers, who spun tales of religious figures and mythical heroes (see p. 16 of *History and Myth*). During the Ottoman era (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*), ***karagöz***, shadow puppet shows with allegorical lessons in Islamic values, rose in popularity. In the mid-19th century, playwright Maran al-

Naqqash introduced the use of music into Arabic dramas, and in the early 20th century, Farah Antun pioneered the scripting of dialogue in colloquial Arabic. During the 15-year civil war (see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*), most film and performance theaters closed. Today, all performances are subject to government review. While Lebanon lacks a robust film industry, female director Nadine Labaki received an Academy Award nomination in 2019 for her film *Capernaum* about child neglect and abuse in Lebanon.

Literature

The region's ancient Phoenicians (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*), developed one of the first phonetic alphabets. Following the arrival of Arabs beginning in the 7th century (see p. 2 of *History and Myth*), a rich tradition of written and oral Arabic poetry emerged, with most early poetry focusing on universal themes of love, grief, peace, and war.

During the Arabic literary renaissance of the early 19th century, Lebanese authors like Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq and Butrus al-Bustani pioneered a less ornamental style of literary Arabic and experimented with new genres like essays, dramas, and novels. Into the early 20th century, Khalil Gibran, a Lebanese-American poet, writer, and artist became well known, especially for his 1923 collection of poems *The Prophet*. Whether written in Arabic, French, or English, much Lebanese literature explores the trauma of the civil war. Lebanese winners of the prestigious International Prize for Arabic Fiction include Rabee Jaber and Hoda Barakat (Illustration: Self-portrait by Khalil Gibran).

Folk Arts and Crafts

Lebanon has a rich tradition of folk arts and crafts. Common crafts include pottery, woven baskets and furniture, blown glass, jewelry, woodworking, and textiles like carpets, scarves, and clothing. Additionally, soapmaking is a time-honored tradition in Lebanon, especially in the coastal city of Tripoli, where artisans blend olive oil with scented herbs and dyes to make colorful and aromatic varieties.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events. Traditional Lebanese cuisine reflects the country's multicultural history of Turkish, Arab, and French influences. Dishes generally incorporate fresh, local ingredients seasoned with aromatic spices.

Dining Customs

Most Lebanese eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. Traditionally, the midday meal is the largest, during which friends and family enjoy conversation and companionship. When invited to a Lebanese home, guests typically arrive a few minutes late and present the host with a small gift such as flowers or sweets.

A meal typically consists of a large collection of starters (***mezze***), flat bread, and main courses that are shared by all diners. Some Lebanese avoid using the left hand to eat or pass food (see p. 3 of *Time and Space*). Hosts usually insist on providing guests with additional servings of food, coffee, or tea as a gesture of hospitality, and politeness dictates guests oblige and sample all dishes offered. Further, leaving as soon as the meal concludes is considered rude. Instead, guests should remain to enjoy extended conversation with other diners (Photo: US service members and Lebanese Armed Forces members share lunch in Beirut).

Diet

Bread, Lebanon's most common staple, is served alongside most dishes. While there are dozens of varieties, a common form is ***khubz*** (pita or flatbread) that diners tear into pieces and use to scoop dips like ***hummus*** (blended chickpeas and sesame paste) and ***labneh*** (thick, creamy yogurt garnished with olive oil or served strained with diced cucumber, fresh mint, and crushed garlic). Other traditional breads include ***kaak*** (crispy flatbread

topped with sesame seeds) and ***marcook*** (thin, unleavened bread baked on a griddle).

Besides bread, most meals include vegetables and/or an animal protein such as lamb, chicken, or fish. Prepared in a variety of ways, rice also accompanies many dishes. Common herbs and spices include cinnamon, oregano, nutmeg, allspice, mint, parsley, and garlic. Fresh fruit is a typical snack, and common fruits include figs, tangerines, oranges, apples, grapes, melons and persimmons. Observant Muslims consume neither pork nor alcohol. In addition, they adhere to particular rules of animal slaughter and meat preparation to ensure that food is ***halal***, allowed by Islamic law.

Meals and Popular Dishes

For breakfast, Lebanese eat a variety of sweet and savory pastries like ***knefeh*** (filled with cream and drizzled with syrup) or ***manakish*** (topped with olive oil, cheese, and herbs such as thyme or sesame seed). Other common breakfast foods include ***kishk*** (a deep-fried mixture of bulgur wheat, garlic, onion, and yogurt) and ***fuul*** (fava beans mixed with lemon, olive oil, garlic, and cumin served with vegetables and bread).

As the largest meal, lunch traditionally starts with several *mezze* such as ***tabbouleh*** (a salad of cracked wheat, parsley, mint, onions, shallots, and tomatoes dressed with lemon juice and olive oil), ***fattoush*** (a salad of cucumber, tomatoes, lettuce, and fried pita bread tossed with mint and sumac), ***moutabel*** (grilled eggplant), ***warak enab*** (grape leaves stuffed with spiced beef and rice), olives, and small pizzas. Lebanon's national dish, ***kibbeh***, features ground lamb or beef mixed with onion, cracked wheat, and spices served raw, fried, or baked in pastry. Other common main dishes include ***hashweh*** *(*rice laden with ground meat, raisins, and toasted nuts and seasoned with allspice and cinnamon), ***kebabs*** (skewered meat–pictured), and fresh grilled fish.

A traditional Lebanese cooking method is vertical roasting, whereby large pieces of meat cook slowly in their own juices on a rotating spit. For dessert or a sweet snack, Lebanese prefer ***baklava*** (a pastry of layered filo dough, nuts, and rose-water syrup), ***sanioura*** (a cookie stuffed with dates or pistachios and dusted with powdered sugar), or fresh fruit. Due to the historical French presence (see p. 6-7 of *History and Myth*), French ***patisseries*** (bakeries) specializing in European pastries are also common.

Beverages

Lebanese drink traditional Turkish or Arabian coffee served black and heavily laden with sugar and sweetened tea brewed with mint throughout the day. Lebanese also drink fresh-squeezed fruit juices. Historians believe the ancient Phoenicians (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*) planted some of the world's first vineyards in Lebanon around 2000 BC. Wine continues to be popular today, with some 42 wineries operating across the Bekaa Valley. Western Asia's first beer brewery opened in Beirut in 1931, and today, Lebanon is home to several craft breweries. Another popular alcoholic beverage is ***Arak,*** a traditional anise-flavored liquor typically served with *mezze*.

Eating Out

Restaurants and cafes are popular sites for socializing with friends and families. Coffee shops offering ***shisha*** (flavored tobacco smoked through a water pipe) are also common gathering spots. Street stalls offer casual fare and snacks such as slices of fresh fruit, ***falafel*** (fried balls of ground chickpeas), ***shish tawook*** (chicken kebab marinated in lemon, garlic, and yogurt), and ***shawarma*** (meat grilled on a rotating spit, sliced, and wrapped in flat bread with yogurt and vegetables). Restaurants serving Western-style fast food and other international fare are also common. Restaurants typically do not add a surcharge to the bill, and servers may expect a 10-15% tip for good service (Photo: Dish featuring grilled meat and vegetables along with bread topped with herbs).

Health Overview

The Lebanese population's health has improved significantly over the last few decades, largely due to improvements in the private healthcare system. Life expectancy at birth increased from 63 to 79 years from 1960-2017, exceeding the global average of 72. Similarly, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) dropped from 57 deaths per 1,000 live births to 6 – lower than the Middle East and North Africa average (18) and equivalent to the US rate.

While maternal mortality decreased from 28 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2000 to 23 in 2010, by 2017 maternal deaths had surged to 29. Experts attribute the increase to lack of access to prenatal care due to political instability and conflict. Overall, deteriorating economic conditions and anti-government protests (see p. 2-3 *of Economics and Resources*) impede access to quality and timely healthcare (Photo: US servicemen conduct medical training for Lebanese Armed Forces members).

Traditional Medicine

Traditional medicine consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Lebanese medicine relies on herbal treatments to identify and cure the causes of illness, both physical and spiritual. Besides herbal remedies, common treatment methods include acupuncture (a process in which a practitioner inserts very thin needles into various parts of a patient's skin), bloodletting (the removal of blood from a patient for therapeutic purposes), and ***hijama*** (also known as wet cupping, the process of applying heated cups to the skin to extract toxins from the body, improve blood flow, and alleviate pain). Although some accredited medical facilities administer traditional treatments, they are not covered by public or private insurance.

Modern Healthcare System

The Lebanese healthcare system relies on a combination of public and private insurance. Just 56% of Lebanese are insured, and nearly half of those are urban professionals, who access public healthcare plans through their employers. By contrast, most agricultural workers, tradesmen, and industrial laborers must purchase costly private insurance or go without.

While public medical facilities provided most services before the civil war (see p. 10-13 *History and Myth*), the conflict brought widespread destruction of healthcare infrastructure and caused many medical professionals to flee. After the war, many small, private health centers run by foreign-trained physicians and international organizations opened, resulting in an influx of advanced medical technology and specialized care.

Today, privately-run clinics, hospitals, and specialized health centers comprise some 82% of Lebanon's health care capacity. These facilities are typically well-equipped with up-to-date resources and highly qualified medical personnel. Public insurance covers many services at such facilities (Photo: A US serviceman demonstrates combat casualty care to Lebanese Armed Forces members).

Although it spent just 8% of GDP on healthcare in 2016 (compared to 17% for the US), Lebanon exhibits rather good health outcomes. In a 2014 global health study of 166 countries, Lebanon ranked 31, slightly under the US (32). Further, a 2017 global health index evaluated Lebanon as the healthiest Arab country.

Despite this progress, many residents lack access to adequate care, with notable disparities in healthcare outcomes between rural and urban residents. Related to the country's recent economic crisis (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*), the government is behind on some $1.3 billion in payment it owes to private hospitals. As a result, many healthcare facilities struggle to compensate staff and purchase medical equipment, while

suffering shortages of medicines, surgical instruments, and other necessities Further, Lebanon's large refugee population (see p. 11 and 14-15 of *Political and Social Relations*) is ineligible for public health services and relies on costly private insurance or international aid. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees operates 28 primary healthcare facilities in Lebanon for displaced Palestinians and reimburses costs associated with secondary care in partnership with the Red Crescent.

Health Challenges

Chronic and non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases are now the leading causes of death and accounted for about 91% of all deaths in 2018. While cardiovascular diseases contributed to about 47% of all deaths, other prominent causes included cancer, diabetes, and chronic respiratory diseases. Preventable "external causes" such as accidents, suicides, drug use, and smoking, caused 6% of all deaths in 2018, comparable to the US rate of 7% (Photo: A US serviceman applies an oxygen mask to a member of Lebanese Armed Forces during bilateral training).

Nevertheless, a lack of proper sanitation and drinking water combined with low vaccination rates contribute to the spread of communicable and infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, measles, and malaria. Particularly vulnerable populations include refugees and low-income Lebanese who are more likely to live in crowded, sometimes unsanitary conditions without running water (see p. 1 of *Family and Kinship*). Overall, communicable disease accounted for 4% of all deaths in 2018.

Decades of violent conflict combined with political and economic instability contribute to chronic stress and mental health conditions. In 2014, Lebanon launched its first nationwide mental health campaign, integrating mental health services into primary care and expanding access to online counseling resources. However, due to significant stigma, many Lebanese remain reluctant to seek treatment.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

For centuries, the area of modern-day Lebanon had an agrarian and trade-based economy, first emerging as a prominent regional center during the Phoenician era (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*). After its 1943 independence, Lebanon implemented economic policies that granted the private sector significant financial and monetary freedoms.

Consequently, Beirut became a vital regional financial hub, attracting significant sums of foreign wealth, and the country's services sector rapidly expanded through the early 1960s. However, regional instability coupled with the 1966 collapse of the country's largest financial institution, Intra Bank, slightly shifted the economy away from services and towards the industrial sector (Photo: Lebanon's Arab Bank in 1969).

Following the 1975 outbreak of civil war (see p. 10 of *History and Myth*), the economy was initially resilient. However, as the conflict intensified, trade and tourism halted, and residents were displaced. Further, electricity, telephone, water, and transportation infrastructure were destroyed, and many skilled workers fled, contributing to serious economic decline. Soon, the country faced hyperinflation and the virtual collapse of the Lebanese currency. Between 1984-87, GDP reduced by half and further contracted by one-third between 1987-90.

At war's end in 1990, the government initiated an intensive reconstruction project, the National Emergency Recovery Program (later renamed Horizon 2000), to rebuild basic infrastructure, distribute public funds, and promote the growth of the private sector (see p. 13 of *History and Myth*). However, the fact that most of the reconstruction was financed by borrowing

led to severe budget deficits. Between 1992-98, foreign debt grew from $150 million to over $2.7 billion.

As the country continued to rebuild, the 2006 July War (see p. 14 of *History and Myth*) brought $3 billion in infrastructure damage, causing significant negative economic impacts. However, the trend soon reversed, with GDP growth averaging 8% between 2007-10. When Lebanon's central bank imposed strict policies, the economy weathered the 2008-09 global financial crisis, even continuing to expand during this period

(Photo: A building in Beirut displays a "Stop Solidere" sign in protest of a private-public partnership to rebuild the city's downtown).

The 2011 outbreak of the Syrian civil war severely impacted the economy, causing GDP growth to contract to around 1% and foreign direct investment to fall by 68%. Experts estimate that between 2012-14, the Syrian crisis cost the Lebanese economy $5 billion. The conflict continues to negatively impact the economy by sharply reducing Syrian demand for Lebanese goods and services, while disrupting Lebanon's trade routes through Syria. Further, with an influx of some 1.5 million refugees (see p. 11 of *Political and Social Relations*), the labor force has grown by over 35%, increasing competition for jobs, especially in the informal sector, and expanding demand for public services. Overall, the Syrian refugee population is plagued by high poverty rates, with over 70% of them living below $2.40 daily and some 180,000 children forced to labor instead of attend school.

Generally, Lebanese society exhibits significant economic inequalities. Around 10% of the country's workforce are non-citizens, who often work in dangerous, unhealthy conditions and without proper compensation. Lebanon continues to use the controversial ***kafala*** system, a sponsorship program that ties workers to their employers' human rights violations. In 2018, 28% of the population lived on less than $4 a day, with numbers

likely rising in 2020. By some estimates, the top 1% of the population accounts for almost 25% of total national income while the bottom 50% accounts for only 11%.

Growing public dissatisfaction with economic inequalities and frustration with corruption grew into widespread protests in October 2019. In subsequent months, the coronavirus pandemic only worsened the economic crisis, with inflation reaching over 50% in early 2020, compared to 5% in 2019. As demonstrations continued through spring 2020, Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced a 5-year recovery plan.

Nevertheless, as of mid-2020, the economic situation continues to deteriorate. With the Lebanese currency losing 80% of its value in a matter of months, prices have continued to soar, and many middle-class Lebanese have been plunged into poverty. As capital inflows stagnated in recent years, GDP contracted by -6.5% in 2019, and even before the full effects of the coronavirus pandemic are known, experts predict GDP will reduce profoundly in 2020.

Meanwhile, Lebanon faces an array of challenges to future growth. With some $90 billion in debt, Lebanon has the world's third highest debt burden, equivalent to 176% of its GDP at the end of 2019. Further, the economy has historically relied on remittances from Lebanese living abroad, which comprise almost 13% of GDP in 2018.

However, due to the 2019-20 lowering of oil prices and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, remittance flows have significantly decreased. Other challenges include high unemployment rates, poor infrastructure, reliance on foreign aid, and a hard currency shortage. Finally, experts estimate that over half of university students leave the country following graduation, resulting in a significant loss of skilled labor (Photo: Harbor in Tyre).

Services

The services sector accounted for about 75% of GDP and 64% of employment in 2018. Key subsectors include tourism, banking

and financial services, retail, real estate, education, and information technology.

Tourism: The subsector directly accounted for 7% of total employment and 7% of GDP in 2018. Around two million tourists visited Lebanon in 2018, primarily from European and Arab countries. Popular attractions include historical and archaeological sites, Lebanon's famed cedar forests, and its Mediterranean beaches. Recently, the subsector has been severely impacted by the Syrian civil war, domestic unrest, and the halt of international travel and tourism due to the coronavirus pandemic (Photo: Roman ruins in Tyre).

Banking: With its tight confidentiality laws, attractive interest rates, and tax exemptions on investment income, Lebanon is a global financial center, hosting some 50 commercial and 16 investment banks with assets of $220 billion in 2017. Since late 2019, the banking sector has experienced a deepening crisis that required it to significantly limit cash withdrawals. Experts note that politicians and their families control some one-third of banking assets.

Industry

As the second largest component of the economy, the industrial sector accounted for 22% of GDP and 23% of the labor force in 2018. The most significant subsectors are manufacturing and construction.

Manufacturing: This subsector comprised about 8% of GDP in 2018 and focuses on food products, cement, wood products, and textiles. The subsector employed some 11% of the labor force in 2019. Over three-fourths of the country's 5,000 industrial companies have fewer than 19 employees.

Construction: Construction comprised some 4% of GDP in 2018 and accounted for 9% of total employment in 2019. Despite recent challenges to the subsector, the government's 2018

Capital Investment Program includes plans for some 250 infrastructure projects worth $17 billion.

Oil and Gas: In 2018, the government signed an agreement with French, Italian, and Russian companies to begin exploratory offshore drilling in the Eastern Mediterranean Sea in an area disputed by Lebanon and Israel. As of mid-2020, the effort has not revealed large reserves, though the government continues to pursue exploration.

Agriculture

Historically an important sector of the Lebanese economy, agriculture made up just 3% of GDP and employed around 14% of the labor force in 2018. Domestic production meets only 30% of Lebanon's food demand (Photo: Farmers in the Bekaa Valley).

Farming and Livestock: Some 13% of Lebanon's land is arable. Most farming occurs on small holdings and is characterized by low productivity. Major agricultural regions include the Bekaa Valley, where over 40% of the land is cultivated, the North, and the southern coast. Primary crops include citrus fruits, grapes, tomatoes, apples, potatoes, olives, other vegetables, and tobacco. Lebanon's most common livestock are dairy cattle, sheep, and goats.

Forestry: Forests cover some 13% of total land area and other woodlands cover another 10%. Dominant trees include oak, pine and juniper. The famed Lebanese cedar (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*) accounted for less than 1% of forests in 2015, and the government has initiated cedar restoration projects.

Currency

Lebanon's currency is the Lebanese pound, known as the ***lira*** (L.L.) in Arabic, issued in six banknote values (1,000, 5,000, 10,000, 20,000, 50,000, and 100,000) and five coins (25, 50, 100, 250, and 500). The US dollar is a popular second currency and is often used interchangeably with the Lebanese pound. The pound has been pegged to the US dollar at an official rate of 1,507.5 L.L. to $1 since 1997. Since late 2019, the currency has

significantly depreciated. As of mid-2020, $1 was informally trading for around 9,500 L.L. (Photo: 250 *lira* coins).

Foreign Trade

Totaling $3.5 billion in 2017, Lebanon's exports primarily consisted of jewelry, base metals, chemicals, consumer goods, fruits and vegetables, tobacco, construction minerals, electric power machinery and switchgear, textile fibers, and paper destined for China (13%), the United Arab Emirates (10%), South Africa (8%), Saudi Arabia (7%), Syria (7%), Iraq (6%), and Turkey (5%). In the same year, imports totaled $18.3 billion and comprised petroleum products, cars, medicinal products, clothing, meat and live animals, consumer goods, paper, textile fabrics, tobacco, electrical machinery and equipment, and chemicals from China (10%), Italy (9%), Greece (7%), Germany (7%), the US (6%), Turkey (5%), and Egypt (4%).

Foreign Aid

Foreign assistance to Lebanon has increased significantly since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. Since 2011, the European Commission has earmarked more than $1.4 billion in aid, while the US has provided over $1.8 billion in refugee support since 2006. In 2017-18, Lebanon received some $1.4 billion in official development assistance, primarily from Germany, the US, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and Kuwait, which was primarily allocated to humanitarian assistance, social infrastructure, and education.

In 2018, 51 international donors pledged $12 billion in grants and loans contingent upon significant internal reform, though these funds have yet to flow as of mid-2020. At the same time, Lebanon is in negotiations to receive $10 billion in aid from the International Monetary Fund pending the implementation of economic reforms and anti-corruption measures.

Volatile domestic politics and regional events sometimes affect Lebanon's access to foreign assistance. For example, in 2016, Saudi Arabia suspended $3 billion in military aid over political disagreements.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

Decades of conflict and dire economic conditions have left much of Lebanon's infrastructure in poor condition. Although residents have access to a modern telecommunications network, the government imposes restrictions on media and monitors social platforms.

Transportation

Urban areas have few mass transit options. For example, just 10% of Beirut commuters use the city's limited bus system. Instead, most Lebanese rely on privately-owned vehicles, contributing to heavy traffic and pollution. For long-distance travel, some Lebanese use buses and "share cabs," vehicles whose drivers offer unoccupied space to paying passengers, who are traveling in the same general direction (Photo: Tyre).

Roadways: Since ancient times, the region has been at the crossroads of prominent trade routes linking Asia with North Africa and Europe. Today, Lebanon's road system includes some 13,400 mi of paved and unpaved roads. The Beirut-Damascus Highway links the Lebanese and Syrian capitals, while a coastal highway stretches from the Syrian border in the North to Israel in the South.

Railways: The Ottomans (see p. 4-5 of *History and Myth*) built Lebanon's first railroads in the late 19th century. By 1930, the coastal city of Tripoli had become a major railroad juncture of the Taurus Express, an extension of the famed Orient Express. Most trains ceased operations in the mid-1980s at the height of the civil war (see p. 10-13 of *History and Myth*). Today, Lebanon's 250 mi of rails remain largely abandoned.

Ports: Major seaports are Beirut and Tripoli. Among the largest Mediterranean ports, Beirut has been a center of maritime trade since ancient times (see p. 1 of *History and Myth*).

Airports: Lebanon has eight airports, five with paved runways. Beirut Rafik Hariri International Airport is home to Middle East Airlines, Lebanon's national flag carrier. Aiming to double capacity and streamline departures, Beirut International opened a new terminal in 2019 (Photo: Middle East Airliner at Beirut's airport).

Energy

Lebanon produces little of its own energy, relying on imports for 98% of its domestic demand in 2014. Most of the imported energy is generated from fossil fuels. Ambitious government plans to lessen dependence on oil and reduce energy costs by increasing renewable energy usage to 30% by 2030 have been disrupted by ongoing political instability and economic crises (see p. 2-3 of *Economics and Resources*). Lebanon suffers a chronic electricity shortage, with most residents getting just 3-12 hours of electricity a day, depending on locality.

Media

Although Lebanon's constitution guarantees freedom of press, the media face significant restrictions. Laws criminalize criticism of the government and speech that negatively impacts morality or "national unity." Most media outlets rely on financial support from various sectarian groups, leading many journalists to self-censor. Further, journalists are often subject to harassment and threats of violence from authorities and sectarian rivals.

In 2019, the government sued the newspaper *Nida al-Watan* for coverage it deemed critical of the President, and in 2020, journalists covering anti-government protests were assaulted and detained. Nevertheless, Lebanon maintains West Asia's most diverse and least restrictive media environments, with Lebanon ranked 102 of 180 countries in a 2020 press freedom study.

Lebanon counts 12 national daily newspapers and some 1,500 local publications. Widely circulated Arabic newspapers include *An-Nahar* and *Al-Mustaqbal,* while *L'Orient-Le Jour* is the

leading French publication and *The Daily Star* is Lebanon's only daily English paper.

TV and Radio: Government-run Télé-Liban provides television programming in Arabic, French, and English. Additionally, eight private television stations promote content to a particular sectarian group. For example, *Al-Manar* ("The Beacon") aligns with Hezbollah (see p. 7 and 10-11 of *Political and Social Relations*). Prominent politicians own or manage some outlets, with The National Broadcasting Network owned by longtime Shi'a Muslim Speaker of the National Assembly Nabib Berry (see p. 4-5 of *Political and Social Relations*).

Lebanon has five major radio stations, with state-owned *Radio Liban* offering news programming in Arabic, French, Armenian, and English. Private channels broadcast primarily in Arabic and English and play Western and Arabic pop music. Many residents also access additional private radio stations and television channels through satellite services (Photo: Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri addresses reporters with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in 2019).

Telecommunications

Lebanon has a modern telecommunications infrastructure with 15 fixed-line telephone subscriptions and 73 mobile phone subscriptions per 100 people in 2018. The government owns the country's primary fixed-line telecommunications provider, OGERO.

Internet: Some 78% of the population had Internet access in 2017, with most Lebanese gaining that access through mobile phones. In 2019, a proposed tax on Internet voice-call services sparked anti-government protests, with demonstrators using social media platforms to coordinate activities and document police abuses. Since then, the Cybercrimes Bureau of the Internal Security Forces increasingly infiltrates social media platforms to monitor and disrupt activists. The authorities also use broadly written defamation laws to detain citizens for what it deems are government-critical social media posts.

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