



Lebanon

Last update:	16 August 2017
Population:	5,850,743 million (World Bank 2015 est.)
Prime minister:	Saad Hariri
President:	Michel Aoun
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	-
Last election:	31 October 2016 (presidential elections)
Next election:	May 2018 (general elections, TBC)
Sister parties:	Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)

Politics in Lebanon are based on a post-civil war imposed sectarian system where power is shared over the different groups. The president has to be someone from the Maronite, Christian group, the prime minister is reserved for a Sunni, Muslim, and the speaker of parliament has to be a Shia, Muslim. However, divisions within the sectarian groups had left the country in a political deadlock, leaving Lebanon without a president for more than two years. As of 20 October 2016, there has been a turn in the country's political situation. The parliament elected Michel Aoun, from the Free Patriotic Movement, as President with 83 out of 128 votes. Also in June 2017, a new election law was approved which is meant to improve the representation of sectarian groups.

Political Situation

Lebanon has experienced many wars, both civil and international. After the war against Israel, major hostilities seemed to have declined. However, a political crisis erupted between rival Lebanese factions, partly over the issue of the establishment of the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, which was established in 2009. This tribunal investigated the assassination of Rafic Hariri, former Prime Minister of the country. The Doha Agreement finally ended the political crisis in 2008, in which a consensus was found among all parties to nominate Michel Suleiman as President. It paved the way towards new parliamentary elections, but these never took place because of disagreements over the election of a new president. In 2014 Suleiman's term came to an end, leaving the country without a president for two years. Finally, in October 2016, the parliament was able to come to a consensus and elected Michel Aoun as the country's new president.

Syrian conflict

The conflict in neighbouring country Syria caused a deadlock on the previous elections in Lebanon in different manners. The situation in Syria made it difficult for Damascus to influence the electoral process in Lebanon. Moreover, Pro-Hezbollah parliamentarians refused to attend the election sessions, making it impossible for candidates to gain a two-thirds majority of the legislature. Tensions increased as well because of the enormous group of refugees coming from Syria, which is currently over 1 million people. Finally, the ongoing Syrian war has led to increased polarisation in the country, while both Iran and Saudi Arabia wield influence through the rival alliances.

Elections

Lebanon is a republic. The National Assembly indirectly elects the president as head of state for a six years term. The president, upon a binding consultation with the National Assembly, appoints the prime minister. The prime minister chooses the cabinet, after consultation of the president and the National Assembly.

Election law

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In June 2017, it was announced that the cabinet had approved a new election law. The drawing up of a new election law was at the centre of many political disputes, because parties struggled to reach an agreement. There was a significant risk that the country could end up without a parliament for the first time. Now that there is a new law extending the current parliament's term by almost a year until next May, a major political crisis has been avoided. The changed legislative system, a proportional representation system for parliament with 15 electoral districts, will characterize the next elections, which will likely be held in May 2018.

Elections in Lebanon were based on the "1960 law", a voting system where parties gained votes based on their religious sect. In this system eighteen different confessional groups share power, with parliamentary seats being reserved for different groups. Each sect was granted a certain number of seats based on a quota, this quota was however seen as unfair and unrepresentative due to the country's demographic shift.

The National Assembly

The unicameral National Assembly of Lebanon is elected for a four years period. The 128 seats in the National Assembly are equally divided among Muslims and Christians. Each of the eleven confessional subgroups occupies a fixed number of seats in the National Assembly.

Due to this unusual division of seats in the National Assembly, the role of political parties in Lebanese politics is different from the role of political parties in normal parliamentary democracies. Many of the political parties are lists of candidates, supported by an important local figure. Political coalitions are therefore only formed because of electoral reasons, and easily fall apart once the seats in parliament are secured. This form of parliamentary politics sustains a form of politics, based on satisfying instantly the grassroots support, rather than that it supports politics based on ideology and long-term objectives. Analysts say that Lebanese politics is both complicated and confusing. The combination of the fixed division of seats among the various religious groups, together with the many local candidates of different religions, makes it hard to get a clear view of the relative strength of political parties in the National Assembly.

The National Assembly is elected by a system of multi-member constituencies with each voter having two votes, one for a party and one for a specific candidate. The winner-takes-all system, where the party winning most votes wins all the seats in the district, has been abolished as a result of the new election law. The National Assembly is now elected in fifteen rather than six different constituencies. Lebanon has no legal electoral threshold, for now, and no compulsory voting. Lebanon has universal suffrage for all men, with a minimum age of 21. Women should have an elementary education and the minimum age of 21 in order to be authorised to vote. Remarkably, voters do not vote according to their place of residence, but according to their "civil record", usually the residence of their forefathers.

Elections of 2014

In November 2014 the parliament voted for the third time to put off parliamentary elections until 2017, which should originally have been held in June 2013. Since the spring of 2014, the parliament has gathered nine times in an attempt to elect a new president. On 25 May 2014, then prime minister Tammam Salam stepped in as acting president. This is because on 22 March 2013, incumbent Prime Minister Najib Mikati resigned after his attempt to form a committee. This committee was supposed to oversee the next general election which should have taken place in November 2014. He failed to do so, because of opposing sides in Syria's civil war between parties aligned with Hezbollah and Sunni-led rival bloc. The new government that came out two weeks after, was led by Tammam Salam. He was backed by the March 14 Alliance, the Progressive Socialist Party and Amal. Nevertheless, it took ten months for Salam to form a government, which was announced on 15 February 2014, due to rivalries between the Hezbollah-dominated March 8 Alliance and the March 14 Alliance, led by the Sunni Future Party. "This is a unity cabinet that represents at the present time the best formula for Lebanon with all the political, security, economic and social challenges it is facing", Salam said.

Government formation 2011

On 12 January 2011, all of the March 8 Alliance ministers in the government resigned from a coalition formed by Saad Hariri in November 2009. The March 8 Alliance, consisting of Hezbollah and its allies, said they disagreed about the commitment to the Special Tribunal of Lebanon, that investigated the murder of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri. Hezbollah members were expected to be indicted in the case. The Lebanese, however, have been told by Hezbollah that the UN Tribunal was allied to Israel.

Directly after the resignation, President Suleiman appointed Najib Mikati as new Prime Minister. He won the support of a majority of the members of the parliament and was asked to form a new government. The March 14 Alliance opted out of talks from the beginning due to disagreements about the disarmament of Hezbollah and the cooperation with the Special Tribunal of Lebanon. After five months of laborious negotiations with the remaining parties, a new 30-member cabinet dominated by Hezbollah and its

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allies took office on 13 June 2011. After the formation of the new government, Mikati explained that the new government would cooperate with the Tribunal, as long as it wouldn't destabilise the country.

In the new parliament 18 persons represented Hezbollah and its allies and 12 politicians were appointed by Prime Minister Mikati, President Suleiman and Jumblatt. The portfolios were redistributed through proportional representation. For this reason, Hezbollah only had 2 ministers working in the cabinet, whereas the Free Patriotic Movement was represented by 7 ministers. Women made up 3.1 percent of the seats in the national parliament, which corresponded to 4 seats.

Reactions

The March 14 Alliance called the March 8 Alliance a 'Hezbollah-government' and 'pro-Syrian'. "The country is now being held hostage by the Syrian regime and Hezbollah", a leader of one of the March 14 parties said. Prime Minister Mikati says he is moderate and tries to unite Lebanon, by giving voices to all persuasions. He assured "it is a government for all Lebanese, no matter what party they support, be it the majority or the opposition".

Parliamentary Elections

Parliamentary elections of 2009

On 7 June 2009, parliamentary elections were held in Lebanon. Saad Hariri, the leader of Lebanon's March 14 Alliance, claimed victory hours after the polls closed on polling day. Official results of the election were announced on 8 June. The pro-Western March 14 Alliance won 71 seats, and the Hezbollah dominated March 8 Alliance won 57 seats. Independent candidates did not win any seats. This result almost replicates the situation that existed in the outgoing parliament, in which the pro-Western bloc had 70 seats, and an alliance of Hezbollah and other Shiite and Christian factions had 58 seats. The turnout of 52.3 percent was high compared to the turnout of 45.8 percent in the elections of 2005. About 50,000 troops were on the streets, but the run-up to the balloting had been free of violence. The vote was seen as a proxy battle between the influence of the West and its Arab allies on one side, and Iran and Syria on the other.

Election results

March 14 Alliance	Seats	March 8 Alliance
Future Bloc	30	Reform and change Bloc - Aounist Bloc
Independants	13	Liberation and Development Bloc
Democratic Movement Bloc	10	Resistance Bloc (Hezbollah)
Lebanse Forces Bloc	5	Baath Party
Kataeb Party - Phalangist Bloc	5	Syrian Social Nationalist Party
Tripoli Bloc	3	Lebanese Democratic Party
Allied Independants	3	Islamic Action Bloc
National Liberal Party	1	Solidarity Party
Jamaa Islamiya Bloc	1	Independent
Total	71	Total

Saad Hariri urged supporters to celebrate without provoking opponents. Hezbollah admitted it had lost the election and accepted the results.

Election analysis

The election was crucial in determining whether the Arab nation, scarred by war and political instability, would choose the coalition led by Hariri (and supported by the West) or an alliance backed by the militant group Hezbollah. The election was also an early test of President Barack Obama's efforts to forge Middle East peace. The United States signaled concerns over a possible win by Hezbollah months before the election. A win by Hezbollah would have boosted the influence of its backers Iran and Syria, and risked pushing one of the region's most volatile nations into international isolation and possibly into deeper conflict with Israel. The prevalent expectations were that Hezbollah and its allies would win. These assessments were backed by opinion polls, which predicted a slim majority for the March 8 camp. Moreover, it seemed that the victory of these factions was a natural development given the spirit of the times: the weakening of the status of the United States and its Arab allies, compared with the strengthened

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influence of Iran and its allies – Syria, Hezbollah, and Hamas. Still, the elections resulted in a victory for the pro-Western camp. How can this be understood?

It seems several factors are behind Hezbollah's weaker showing according to Middle-East security analyst Amir Kulick. One of the main sources for the surprise lies in the assessment that the success of the March 14 Alliance in the previous elections incorrectly reflected the true balance of power in the Lebanese political system. They were held shortly after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri in 2005 and the ensuing public outrage at Syria's allies in Lebanon – Hezbollah and the March 8 camp. It was suggested that the balance of power between the vying blocs was actually even, perhaps slightly favouring the March 8 camp, and the 2009 elections were supposed to restore the political order to its correct alignment. A second factor may lie in the Lebanese system itself. At the center of this explanation stands Michel Aoun's failure to enlarge his power base in the Christian sector. Aoun, head of the Free Patriotic Movement, was the surprise of the previous elections. Different estimates, especially those within his own close circle, maintained that in the current elections his power would grow significantly because most of the Christian sector stood behind him. The changes in the voting districts made under Hezbollah pressure in the Doha Agreement of May 2008, were supposed to help Aoun attain this goal. In practice, Aoun failed to garner additional support, and his party even lost one mandate. In this sense, the gap between the expectations of the Free Patriotic Movement with Aoun at its head and the actual results is significant. A third factor behind Hezbollah's poor showing – at least compared to expectations – was its inability to reach beyond the borders of the Shiite community and become a national political establishment acceptable to large segments of the Lebanese public. It seems that the May 2008 violence significantly damaged the organisation's national image and demonstrated to the Lebanese public – the Sunnis and the Christians – that the Weapon of Resistance is no less dangerous to the Lebanese than to Israel.

International reactions

The election has been called generally fair and free by international observers. "While not without flaws, Lebanon's June 7 election was fundamentally peaceful and well administered and should provide the basis for confidence in the electoral process and by extension, the formation of a new government," former US Senator John Sununu said, presenting the preliminary findings of the National Democratic Institute's observation mission.

Javier Solana, EU's Foreign and Security Policy Chief at that time, said the elections in Lebanon were an important step in the democratic evolution of the Middle East. US President Barack Obama congratulated the Lebanese people for a peaceful national election held with courage and a commitment to democracy. Arch-enemy Israel appeared relieved by the March 14 victory, but said it would hold Beirut accountable for any attacks on its territory launched from Lebanon.

Aftermath

The smooth formation of a new government could be seen as an important test of March 14's political strength and more importantly it could contribute to the stability of the country. Saad Hariri, the son of killed Prime Minister Rafik Hariri and leader of the March 14 Alliance, even involved the Hezbollah-led opposition in the cabinet, resulting in a unity government of March 14 and March 8 ministers.

Presidential Elections

On 31 October 2016, the Lebanese parliament gathered together for the 46th time to vote on a new president. Finally, Michel Aoun won with a majority of 83 out of 128 votes. Before these elections, Lebanon had been without a president for 2.5 years, and it was the first time that the entire parliament gathered since April 2014. Aoun's election is a victory for his Lebanese Shiite ally Hezbollah, Iran and Syria. It was said that Aoun mainly got elected because of a deal he struck with the head of the Sunni movement, Saad Hariri. The deal involved that Hariri would become prime minister if he would support the election.

There were three rounds of voting. In the first round, Aoun did not secure a two-thirds majority among the 128 MPs present. The second round of voting only required a simple majority to win, though there were 128 ballots cast making the round invalid. In the third round, he received the winning 83 votes.

Social Democratic Parties

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Progressive Socialist Party (PSP)

Party Leader: Walid Jumblatt

Number of seats: 11

<http://www.psp.org.lb>

The Progressive Socialist Party was founded on 5 January 1949. The founders comprised six individuals, all with a different background. Among the founders was Kamal Jumblatt. He was the most prominent of the founders and was party leader until 1977, when he was assassinated. His son Walid is the present-day leader of the PSP.

Willing to construct a new order, based on secularism, socialism, Arabism and the abolishment of the sectarian system, the PSP began an opposition movement in the fifties, together with other dissatisfied groups: the Lebanese National Movement (LNM). The PSP (as part of the LNM) and Jumblatt supported the Palestinians for religious reasons, but strived against the Arab nationalists slogans of the Palestine movement.

After the restoration of the constitutional rule in 1989, the PSP participated in a number of governments. Later, the PSP joined the opposition to oppose against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon.

After the fall of the government in January 2011, the party moved from the mainly pro-western March 14 Alliance towards the Syrian and Iran-orientated March 8 Alliance. It presumably did so in return for a governmental post, in order to be able to pursue their policy goals. A secular state is nowadays a top-priority of the PSP. Another important issue for the PSP is the reorganisation of the administrative districts in Lebanon. According to the PSP, more autonomy should be given to regional councils to increase their level of independence. Other important issues are the introduction of a progressive tax principle, the assurance of the separation of powers and enhancing the right to public liberties.

Other Parties

Future Movement

Party Leader: Sa'ad al Hariri

Number of seats: 28

After the assassination of his father, Sa'ad Hariri took over the leadership of the Future Movement. Initially the Future Movement was just a movement, but before the 2005 elections, Sa'ad Hariri vowed to turn the movement into a political party. At the 2005 elections, the party was the most important faction of the Rafik Hariri Martyr list, a coalition of anti-Syrian parties like the PSP and the Lebanese Forces.

Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)

Party Leader: General Michel Aoun

Number of seats: 19

<http://www.tayyar.org/tayyar/index.php>

For a long period of time, former prime minister and current President Michel Aoun (1988-1990) lived in exile while leading the FPM. He returned to Lebanon in 2005 and contested in the 2005 elections, winning 21 seats in the National Assembly together with his allies in the Aoun Bloc.

The FPM claims to be the only party that isn't based on religion. For this reason, the party does not only have Maronite-members, but also many members with a Muslim background.

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The most important issues for the FPM is reforming the Lebanese economy. In the past, disarming Hezbollah was another important issue, but this changed after signing the “memorandum of understanding” with Hezbollah in February 2006.

Hezbollah

Party Leader: Mohammed Ra'ad

Number of seats: 13

Hezbollah consists of two parts. The militant part of Hezbollah was founded in 1982, as a combination of several small militant groups. During the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), Hezbollah fought for the Shiite community. Their main objective was expelling Israeli and Western Forces from Lebanon. Parts of Hezbollah were involved in kidnapping, torture and detention of Western forces in Lebanon. After the Civil War, Hezbollah has often been accused of acts of terrorism and of bombings of Israeli forces in South Lebanon. The European Parliament entitled Hezbollah as a terrorist organisation on 8 March 2005. On 24 September 2004, UN resolution 1559 stated that all Lebanese militias, including Hezbollah, should be disarmed and all foreign forces should be withdrawn from Lebanon. Hezbollah operates mainly in the south of Lebanon and the Beeka valley and is pro-Palestinian.

Since 1992, the political part of Hezbollah takes part in the Lebanese general elections. The results of previous elections always comprised around 11 seats. In 2009, the party garnered 13 seats. Hezbollah says to strive for the introduction of an Islamic government by peaceful means. On the contrary, US sources say that Hezbollah's goal is to introduce a fundamentalist, Iranian-like state, with no secular influences at all. It is widely assumed that the Syrian government and Hezbollah are closely linked. For this reason, Hezbollah was the driving force behind the pro-Syria rallies during the Cedar Revolution.

In February 2006, Hezbollah leader Nasrallah and Michel Aoun (FPM) signed a “memorandum of understanding”. In this agreement, Hezbollah and Aoun agreed to cooperate on a great number of topics, like the reform of the electoral law, security, human rights and foreign relations. This agreement is unique and can be a breakthrough in the relationship between pro-Syrian (Hezbollah) and anti-Syrian (Aoun bloc and governmental parties) politicians.

Hezbollah has been asked several times by UN Chief Ban Ki-Moon and the Lebanese Army leader to disarm. However, Hezbollah rejected these calls, stating that the weapons are the only guarantee to protection of Lebanon.

Lebanese Forces (LF)

Party Leader: Sethrida Geagea

Number of seats: 8

<http://www.lebanese-forces.org>

The founder of the Lebanese Forces, Bashir Gemayel, started his military organisation in 1976. On 10 September 1992, the Lebanese Forces Party was officially formed. The party members are mainly Christian Maronites, although the party claims to be secular. The party is based on three principles: safeguarding Lebanese independence and sovereignty, founding the Lebanese government on the basis of human rights, and establishing a democratic system with respect to human rights. Furthermore, the LF party embraced a hard-line, anti-Syrian opposition and revived ties with Israel.

In 1994, the party leader Geagea was arrested and accused of undermining government authority during and after the Civil War. Geagea was released in 2005. For the 2005 elections, the LF was part of the Rafik Hariri Martyr list, which won the elections. The LF is still considered a very well organised party with its own magazine and TV-station.

Qornet Shewhan Gathering

Party Leader:

Number of seats: 6

This reasonably small party was founded in 2001 by 21 individuals, representing small political parties and civic organisations. Qornet Shewhan emphasises the independence of Lebanon; the Israeli and Syrian withdrawal has always been an important issue for this party. Furthermore, Qornet strives for the complete implementation of the constitutional changes, as they are written in the

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Taif Agreement of 1989. Qornet is, like the PSP, in favour of changing the electoral law to stop the gerrymandering. Finally, Qornet emphasises the importance of a widely supported peace agreement with Israel to safeguard Arab right. However, Qornet is in favour of an independent Palestine state, with Jerusalem as its capital.

Biographies

Michel Aoun

President

Michel Aoun, leader of the Free Patriotic Movement, was elected as President of Lebanon on 31 October 2016. Aoun is a Maronite Christian, making him eligible for the presidency according to the sectarian system. In 1988 President Amin Gemayel appointed Aoun as prime minister of one of the two rival governments at that time. In that period his government fought two wars; one against Syrian forces in Lebanon and the other against the Lebanese Forces. In 1990 he was driven away from the presidential palace by the Syrian army, going into exile in France. Aoun was against the 1989 peace deal which reduced the political powers of the Maronite Christians and increased the powers of the Sunni Muslim prime minister. During his exile, Aoun lobbied against Syrian domination of Lebanon as Damascus kept troops stationed throughout the country. He also supported Western moves to end Syria's dominance. In 2005 he returned to Lebanon because Syrian armed forces withdrew due to the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri. Eventually, Aoun declared an alliance between his party and the Shi'ite movement, which was led by Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah. Hezbollah's support in the parliament has enabled Aoun to get sufficient votes to be elected.

Saad Hariri

Prime Minister

Saad Hariri is the son of former President of Lebanon Rafik Hariri, who was killed in 2005. He is a well-known businessman and politician. In 2016 he was elected by President Michel Aoun as prime minister. Before becoming a politician he studied business administration at the Georgetown University in the United States. Following which he was director of a Saudi company established by his dad. Following his father's death he became a politician. He is a Sunni Muslim and was able to create a coalition that represented many parties and ethnic groups in Lebanon. With this coalition he won the elections in 2005. Eventually, he was elected as prime minister at the election on 7 June 2009. This parliament ended in 2011, after the resignation of mainly Hezbollah and its allies because of political tensions caused by investigations into the assassination of Rafik Hariri. It is said that Aoun was elected as President because he was able to strike a deal with Hariri. This deal involved Hariri supporting Aoun and in exchange becoming the prime minister.

Walid Jumblatt

Leader of the Progressive Socialist Party

Walid Jumblatt is the current leader of the Progressive Socialist party. He succeeded his father Kamal Jumblatt, who had been assassinated in 1977. The Jumblatt family founded the PSP and has been leading the party from its establishment. The family has always been very prominent in the Druze community.

Source

- [Adam Carr's election archive: Lebanon](#)
- [Amnesty International: Lebanon](#)
- [Aoun-Hezbollah agreement](#)
- [BBC: Who's who in Lebanon](#)
- [CIA: Lebanon world fact book](#)
- [Electionguide.org](#)

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- [Epic Project: electoral law Lebanon](#)
 - [Foreign & Commonwealth Office](#)
 - [Free Patriotic Movement](#)
 - [Freedomhouse: Lebanon](#)
 - [Hezbollah official website](#)
 - [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance \(IDEA\)](#)
 - [IFES](#)
 - [Kamal Jumblatt Website](#)
 - [Lebanese Forces Website](#)
 - [Licus](#)
 - [Najib Mikati](#)
 - [National Democratic Institute](#)
 - [Progressive Socialist Party](#)
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 - [Wikipedia: Amal Movement](#)
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