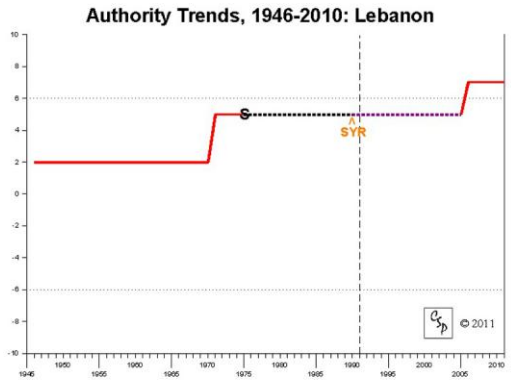
# Polity IV Country Report 2010: Lebanon

| Score: | 2009 | 2010 | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Polity:** | 7 | 7 | 0 |
| **Democ:** | 8 | 8 | 0 |
| **Autoc:** | 1 | 1 | 0 |
| **Durable:** | | 5 | |
| **Tentative:** | | No | |




| SCODE | **LEB** | CCODE | **660** | Date of Report | **1 June 2011** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|

**Polity IV Component Variables**

| XRREG | XRCOMP | XROPEN | XCONST | PARREG | PARCOMP |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 3 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 3 |

**Date of Most Recent Polity Transition (3 or more point change)**

| End Date | 25 May 1975 | Begin Date | 28 April 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|

**Polity Fragmentation: No**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Constitution** | 1926 (1989) |
| **Executive(s)** | President Michel Sulayman; elected by National Assembly, 25 May 2008<br>Prime Minister Najib Miqati; appointed by president in consultation with parliament, 7 July 2011 |
| **Legislature** | Unicameral:<br>Assembly of Representatives (128 seats; elected by sectarian communities: 34 Maronite Christian, 27 Sunni Muslim, 27 Shia Muslim, 14 Greek Orthodox, 8 Greek Catholic, 8 Druze, 5 Armenian Orthodox, 2 Alawites, 1 Armenian Catholic, 1 Protestant, and 1 Christian minority; most recent elections, 7 June 2009) |
| **Judiciary** | Council of State |

**Narrative Description:**[1]

**Executive Recruitment: *Competitive Elections* (8)**

Central government in Lebanon collapsed with the outbreak of intense sectarian warfare in 1975. The introduction of foreign troops, Syrian troops in the north and Israeli troops in the south, provided minimal security. Syrian influence, primarily over the Sunni Muslim groups in the Bekka Valley, eventually expanded across north Lebanon, especially following the Israeli invasion of 1982. The 1989 Taif agreement, initiated by Muslim leaders and Syrian officials and approved by the surviving members of the 1972 legislature, established the basis for the return of central government after fifteen years of fighting. The sectarian quota system that had ensured dominance by the Maronite Christians was revised to acknowledge the larger Muslim population. The accord also increased the powers of the prime minister, an

[1] The research described in this report was sponsored by the Political Instability Task Force (PITF). The PITF is funded by the Central Intelligence Agency. The views expressed herein are the authors' alone and do not represent the views of the US Government.

office traditionally reserved for a Sunni Muslim, and Cabinet at the expense of the once-dominant (Maronite) presidency. A 1991 friendship treaty with Syria acknowledged Syria's preeminent role in guaranteeing security in Lebanon with the stationing of some 40,000 troops. In 1992 Lebanon held its first legislative elections in 20 years, although many Christians (mainly Maronites) boycotted the vote. Syrian-backed candidates secured the leadership roles in the government. The easing of sectarian tensions through the 1990s resulted in legislative balloting in 2000 that included many Christian parties that had boycotted previous elections; a number of candidates representing small parties and 20 independent candidates also won seats. However, the presidential elections of 1998 and the legislative elections of 2000 remained seriously flawed, according to international observers, with the outcomes heavily influenced by Syria whose reduced contingent of 15,000 troops are stationed in locations throughout the country. Strong Syrian influence over the Lebanese government made public officials unwilling to press for a complete withdrawal of those troops. The "Cedar Revolution" of 2005 dramatically altered the political landscape within this country.

Popular pressure to remove Syrian troops from Lebanese soil escalated dramatically after the assassination of former-Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. As a vocal critic of Syrian occupation of Lebanon, it was widely believed that Baathist elements within the Syrian government were behind the execution of Hariri. After 25,000 protestors filled the streets of the capital city in the wake of Hariri's death, the Syrian-backed prime minister, Omar Karami, was forced to resign. By mid-March 2005 Lebanon was in the midst of a full-fledged political crisis as hundreds of thousands of Lebanese took to the streets both in opposition to, and in favor of, Syrian occupation. In response, Syria pulled back the majority of its troops to the Lebanese-Syrian border and promised to withdrawal all of its troops from the country prior to the national elections scheduled for May 2005. After six weeks without a formal government, on April 15 the President appointed a pro-Syrian, Najib Mikati, to the post of prime minister. Prime Minster Mikati quickly formed a government of national unity which was comprised of members from both the pro- and anti-Syrian camps. While Mikati was a close ally of Syria, nonetheless, he capitulated to the key demands of the opposition: namely the resignation of senior security officials who were suspected of being complicit in the cover-up of the Hariri murder and the holding of new legislative elections. While Syrian occupation was formally ended on 27 April 2005 with the departure of the last troops, nonetheless, Syrian intelligence agents continued to operate within the country and its political influence continued to be felt through the voices of pro-Syrian Lebanese politicians.

In the first post-Syrian elections, held between 29 May and 19 June 2005, the legislative seats were evenly divided, as prescribed by the constitution, between Muslim and Christian camps. Of the 64 seats held by the Muslim groups, both the Sunnis and the Shias garnered 27 each while the Druze and Alawites followed with 8 and 2 seats respectively. Of the 64 seats held by the Christian groups, Maronites achieved a majority with 34 seats followed by other Orthodox (Greek, 14; Armenian, 5), Catholic (Greek, 8; Armenian, 1) and Protestant (1) denominations. Voting turnout in this election was down 27% from the last election held under Syrian control. Some observers speculated that the low turnout reflected a high level of voter dissatisfaction with the highly sectarian nature of the political system which allows clan and factional leaders the ability to strike deals and forge alliances and leaves voters with few real choices. Despite the lower than expected turnout, the opposition alliance, led by Saad Hariri, son of the assassinated former prime minister, was awarded 72 seats in the 128-seat assembly. As a representative of this coalition, Fouad Siniora was named Prime Minister on 19 June 2005. With this legislative majority in hand, the Government quickly went about the business of dismantling the security state set up by the Syrians over the previous 30 years. As its first step in the rehabilitation of the political system, Parliament asked President Lahoud to step down from office, which he refused to do. The anti-Syrian parties accused the president of protecting Syrian intelligence officers. In response to the efforts of Prime Minister Siniora to cleanse the political system of Syrian influence, in January 2007 the Hezbollah-led opposition stepped up its pressure to force the government of Prime Minister Siniora to resign by staging a general strike. By March 2007 a tent town of political opponents of the Prime Minister had sprung up in central Beirut.

In the midst of escalating political tensions within the country, President Emile Lahoud's extended term in office came to an end on 23 November 2007. After parliament failed to reach an agreement over the election of a successor, who must be a Maronite Christian, Prime Minister Siniora announced that his cabinet would assume the powers of the presidency. When the Prime Minister sought to close Hezbollah's telecommunications network, Hezbollah responded with a massive show of force and, in the process, effectively claimed political control over Western Beirut. When 80 people were killed in clashes in early May 2008, fears that Lebanon was descending into civil war were becoming dangerously real. In an effort

to stem the tide of violence that threatened to rip Lebanon apart, on 21 May 2008 the Doha Agreement was promulgated.

The Doha Agreement established a power-sharing arrangement which, at least temporarily, stemmed the descent into civil war. As part of this agreement, the Western-backed ruling majority, of which Prime Minister Siniora was a part, was allocated 16 cabinet posts and was given the authority to choose the prime minister. The Syrian/Hezbollah-backed opposition (which is predominantly Shiite) was assigned 11 cabinet posts and, more importantly, was given veto power over all government initiatives. The remaining 3 cabinet slots were to be chosen by the President. While the Doha Agreement also called for the opposition protest camps in central Beirut to be disbanded and demanded that both sides to forego the use of weapons in future political struggles, nonetheless, it did not require Hezbollah to disband its militias. Moreover, the new deal did not solve the fundamental question of Lebanon's political system, which gives the presidency to a Maronite Christian and the premiership to a Sunni Muslim, despite the growing demographic and political power of the Shia Muslim community.

The Lebanese parliament finally elected General Michel Suleiman, head of the country's armed forces and a Maronite Christian, as president in May 2008 after six months of political stalemate that followed the departure of President Lahoud in November 2007. Suleiman, a compromise candidate, had earned a reputation of political neutrality over the past several years as he effectively kept the armed forces on the sidelines during the recent political struggles within the country. In late May 2008 President Suleiman re-appointed the pro-Western incumbent, Fouad Siniora, to lead the new unity government outlined in the Doha Agreement. The nomination of Siniora was backed by 68 of 127 members of parliament. Parliamentary elections held 7 June 2009 pitted the anti-Syrian March 14 Alliance against the pro-Syrian March 8 Alliance led by Hezbollah; the results of the elections were almost identical to those of the 2005 election. Despite ongoing tensions, or perhaps because of them, a National Unity government was eventually forged and Saad Hariri was named prime minister on 9 November 2009. Tensions continued to focus on the Special Tribunal for Lebanon which was investigating the death of Rafiq Hariri and the National Unity government remained paralyzed by the unwillingness of the two alliances to reach any meaningful compromise on the way forward. The Hariri government collapsed on 12 January 2011 when the opposition members resigned en masse. Hariri remained as prime minister over a caretaker government until a new government could be formed. Najib Mikati finally gained the approval of parliament and formed a new government on 13 June 2011.

**Executive Constraints:** ***Executive Parity or Subordination*** **(7)**

Under the guidelines of the Taif Agreement of 1989, executive authority is shared by both the President and the Prime Minister. In the immediate post-Syrian era, the government was deeply divided, with a pro-Syrian President, Emil Lahoud, and an anti-Syrian Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora. President Lahoud's term in office expired on 23 November 2007 without a new president being chosen, leaving the office vacant until May 2008. While the Prime Minister is in control of the day-to-day governing of the country, nonetheless, the president retains significant powers. Moreover, the sectarian structure of the National Assembly, which ensures that a Shia Muslim controls the position of Speaker of the House, has also undermined the political power of the Prime Minister. Saad Hariri's coalition, the Martyr Rafik Hariri List, captured 36 seats in the first post-Syrian elections held in May-June 2005. While far short of a majority, nonetheless, with the support of other anti-Syrian allies in the National Assembly it was able to govern with a 72 seat majority. The new government, led by Prime Minister Siniora, finds political support for their anti-Syrian agenda in the Sunni, Druze and Christian communities. The Shia community, in contrast, continues to favor the influence of Syria in Lebanon. As such, a staunch Syrian supporter, Nabih Berri, was elected as Speaker of the House for the fourth time. The election of Berri as Speaker of the House demonstrates the significant institutional limits on political power that confronts the Prime Minister in the post-Syrian era. The judiciary is independent in principle; however, it continues to be subject to political pressure.

**Political Participation:** ***Factional/Restricted Competition*** **(6)**

Lebanon is a country deeply divided along sectarian lines which, in the past, have manifested themselves in violent conflict. These sectarian divisions have historically been forged along religious lines, with Christian groups on one side and Muslim groups on the other. In an effort to secure peace within this religiously diverse society, the 1943 National Pact allocated political power in the new state based on religious affiliation. Under this unwritten agreement, seats in the National Assembly were to be divided on a 6-to-5

ratio of Christians to Muslims. Moreover, the top three leadership positions in government would also be distributed on the basis of religious affiliation. Under this system, the office of the President would be the permanent domain of the Christian Maronite community, while the Muslim community would be represented in the posts of Prime Minister (Sunni) and Speaker of the House (Shia). The institutional rigidity of this system failed in the face of changing demographic realities in which the Christian population became the minority group in the country but retained its political dominance within the halls of government. This tension contributed to the violent civil war that tore this country into pieces between 1975 and 1990. After the invasion of Syria into this country (with US and Israeli support) in 1990, the ratio of seats held by Christians and Muslims was readjusted to a 50-50 allocation. However, deep divisions within both the Muslim (e.g., Sunni, Shia, Druze, Alawite) and Christian (e.g., Maronite, Greek Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Armenian Orthodox, Armenian Catholic and Protestant) communities, in conjunction with the significant regional, class-based and clan-based divisions present within this society, continued to exacerbate the factional nature of politics in Lebanon.

In addition to the religious sectarianism found in Lebanon, in recent years another type of factionalism, which cuts across these divisions, has come to plague Lebanon. This factionalism has its basis in geo-strategic affiliation and loyalty. On one side of the divide is the so-called "14th March Group." This group reflects the loose alliance of Lebanon's political elite which pushed for the removal of Syrian troops from Lebanon in 2005. This group takes its name from the date of the massive anti-Syrian protest in 2005. Members from the Sunni, Druze and Maronite Christian communities are active supporters of this group which is favorable to US influence in Lebanon as a bulwark against future Syrian interference in Lebanese politics. On the other side of the divide are the Shia-dominated Hezbollah and their allies. Hezbollah was formed (with financial backing from Iran) in response to the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982. In addition to becoming the most powerful military force in Lebanon, Hezbollah also holds political seats in the legislature, although their representation in the government and the legislature is restricted in relation to their proportion of the country's population. The Maronite and Sunni groups continue to control the central government and the political agenda, although deep fissures within those groups have emerged with the strains of international pressures from east, west, and south. While Hezbollah initially proposed an Iranian-style Islamic state in Lebanon, in recent years it has abandoned this goal.

Since mid-2005 Hezbollah and is allies have been calling for a national unity government to be constructed that would replace Prime Minister Siniora's cabinet. The effect of this type of national unity government would be to increase both pro-Syrian and pro-Iranian voices within government. This group, led by Hasan Nasrallah, criticizes the present government for being to compliant to the wishes of both the United States and Israel. Divisions between these two groups have become increasingly visible with the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon in August of 2006. The goal of Israel in attacking Lebanon was to wipe out the strategic threat posed to it by Nasrallah's Hezbollah. After 34 days of fighting and the death of 1,000 Lebanese and 159 Israelis, a truce between Israel and Hezbollah came into effect. A UN peacekeeping force was deployed at the border between the two countries and a UN-sponsored framework for establishing a tribunal to try suspects in the killing of Prime Minister Hariri was proposed.

In the wake of the war between Israel and Hezbollah, Sunni-Shia tensions escalated in a rapidly polarizing crisis. At the end of 2006, Hezbollah (along with several allied Christian factions) staged massive strikes and demonstrations in Beirut demanding a greater share of power and the calling of early elections. Hezbollah actively sought to replace the Western-backed cabinet with a government in which it would have veto power. Hezbollah supporters accuse the government of colluding with Israel to undermine their power. Leaders of the anti-Syrian parliamentary majority said that the actions of Hezbollah reveal a "hidden plot" by Syria and Iran to stop the establishment of the Hariri tribunal and foil UN Resolution 1701, which halted the conflict between Hezbollah and Israel in August 2006. After the country stood precariously close to descending into widespread civil war, in the spring of 2008 both sides agreed to a power-sharing arrangement which, at least temporarily, has held the peace.