

## *Public Diplomacy in Lebanon: From Sectarian Division to Communitocracy*

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### **Abstract**

It has been almost three decades since the war in Lebanon ended. A new post-war generation which does not have the same legacy and formative experience is now active in the civil however, it seems that this new generation is more apathetic than their predecessors, lacks a unified sense of “state” and is less willing to engage in changing the sectarian factionalism system. What contributes to such behavior if the legacy of war no longer applies? I argue that research needs to switch focus from discussing social, political, and cultural behaviors from a *longue durée* perspective, to evaluating the impact of communitarianism – seen as the antithetical paradigm to nationalism - on the politics of citizenship in Lebanon. The framework employed will be communitarian theory, which starts with the assumption that that integrative forces have fostered states’ interconnectivity, so that breaking events occurring in one country can directly catalyze reactions in others. These processes, in turn, have rendered impossible the ability of a single, centralized national authority to control power in a particular territory without being directly implicated by events developing in a far distant place. This paper will discuss the ways in which globalization and political dynamics in the Middle East have developed increasingly to force the mutation of the state towards the accommodation of communitarian aspirations and show how these processes have tilted the balance in favor of communitarian associations rather than pure national allegiance.

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## I. Introduction

The 2001 United Nations corruption assessment report on Lebanon was one of the earliest documents that illustrated the blatant scale of corruption in the Lebanese government institutions and its devastating impact on the economy. It was then estimated that the Lebanese state squanders over US\$1.5 billion per year because of pervasive corruption at all levels of government - nearly 10% of its yearly GDP at that time (UN 2001). It was thought that corruption in Lebanon had become an enduring fact of life, that is, of social norms and practices (Adra 2006, in Farida and Ahmadi-Esfahani 2008). Explanations for the persistent problem of corruption in Lebanon vary from its cultural to its political legacy; on the one hand, sociological and cultural factors such as customs, family pressures and traditional values of tributes to leaders are thought to constitute potential sources of corruption which has found acceptance in the social psyche and behavior of the population (Brownsberger 1983). As a result, most Lebanese, regardless of their religion, social status, location, political affiliations or wealth are unwilling to change the present system, not because they are ignorant of its consequences, but because they have developed a stake in maintaining it (Yacoub 2005). On the other hand, the Lebanese sectarian system also serves as a fertile soil for systemic corruption; the leaderships of the established political parties control strong patronage networks which are used to bind their client groups, mostly defined as “their” religious communities (Beck 2015: 3). Allocation of public funding in the realms of health, education, and infrastructure follows sectarian lines rather than socioeconomic needs (Salti and Chaaban 2010).

Modern Lebanon was set up by France in the frame of the Post Ottoman mandate system. Imperialist France actively promoted the sectarian system and the politicization of religion in Lebanon, with the aim of controlling a fragmented society. External interference did not end with Lebanese independence in 1943, but has become a systemic aspect of Lebanese political affairs (Beck 2015: 4). The Taif Agreement which ended the Lebanese civil war (1975-1990) re-institutionalized the confessional system by integrating the warlords and the corruption-based socioeconomic systems they had established during the war (Gebara 2007: 9-11). Western support for the March 14 Alliance headed by Saad Hariri has contributed to fostering the sectarian system, which, in turn, promotes the corrupt Lebanese system. In some cases, Western support is even funded by public development aid, as is the case of the German political foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS), which, in line with the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) is affiliated with it, supports the Lebanese Forces (Beck 2015: 4). There are also reports that international aid provided to Lebanon to support Syrian refugees has been abused in corruptive ways<sup>2</sup>.

The postwar Lebanon, where fighting parties agreed to give up military power and reform government institutions, involved very few and weak institutional control mechanisms, which were often politically controlled. Thus, the unprecedented spread of corruption throughout state agencies was a natural consequence. However, the major reason for the increase of corruption after the war was the growth of the state and its role in the economy. This growth took the form of capital expenditure on reconstruction projects, which were highly vulnerable to corruption due to the

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<sup>2</sup> Al-Nahar, Corruption creeps into refugee aid in Lebanon, Al-Monitor, March 8, 2015, available at: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/politics/2015/03/lebanon-corruption-syrian-refugees-aid.html>

magnitude of the projects involved, the multitude of intermediaries, and the different phases of implementation (Pasko 2002; Deeb 2003; Heard 2005; Rasmussen 2005). The borrowed money also induced more opportunities for rent-seeking activities and corruptive behavior (Stamp 2005). These, in turn, changed Lebanese politics, as access manipulation of the government spending process became the gateway to fortune (Farida and Ahmadi-Esfahani 2008). Adwan (2004) shows how public institutions were turned into tools of nepotism and rent seeking, resulting in the arrest of two ministers (Oil Resources and Agriculture) on corruption charges (Al-Azar 2006). Corruption did not stop with the top ministers and directors of various government agencies, but it grew within the entire ruling hierarchy. Abdelnour (2001) states that only 2.4% of the US\$6 billion worth of projects contracted by various government bodies was formally awarded by the Administration of Tenders; the remainder did not go to the most qualified applicants, but to those willing to pay the highest bribes. Yacoub (2005) explains how the lack of government transparency and reliable contract enforcement ensured that private sector investors only entered a market if they had cut deals with governing elites. Therefore, it appears that corrupt practices in Lebanon are at the core of the political system to the extent that even the most optimally designed institutions might fail in combating corruption as society's norms appear to rationalize taking bribes, and the country's elites regard politics as an arena for self-enrichment.

Research up to date has focused on postwar Lebanon, linking corruption to the dynamics of the political settlement and the processes of state-formation that it unleashed. The postwar power-sharing arrangement's emphasis on inclusion, consensus, and the ever-elusive "national unity", coupled with Syria's interference in Lebanese power struggles, set the stage for the extreme dispersal of power, quasi-permanent gridlock in decision making, and political elites with weak popular support - all of which created political incentives for enduring ambiguity in institutions and increasing reliance on the instrumentalization of sectarian and clientelist dynamics to build some modicum of legitimacy. In sum, using terms like "weak", "failed", "penetrated" or "allotment" State has become the norm when discussing Lebanon. This paper makes two important contributions.

First, I argue that a state-centered, fragility-oriented paradigm inherently cannot offer the perspective needed to address why systemic corruption *persists* in Lebanese society. Beck (2015) makes a valid point that when the same question is applied to authoritarian regimes in the Middle East, it is much easier to answer. In authoritarian systems, social groups lack the means to challenge the political leaderships who promote corrupt systems to stabilize their political rule and/or for material self-privileging (Beck 2015: 5). Although Lebanon is not a fully-fledged democracy, the pluralist system secures freedom and participation rights to a much higher degree than in its authoritarian neighboring countries. How, then, can a corrupt system persist in an environment in which people have *some* say? Farida and Ahmadi-Esfahani (2008) show that Lebanese growth is highly negatively affected by corruption. What, then, prevents people from abolishing a system, or what makes them contribute to its maintenance, although it is collectively suboptimal? While most of the literature treats corruption as a principal-agent problem between the state and government officials, focusing primarily on the state's optimal choice of monitoring intensity, incentives and sanctions to constrain government officials' behavior, I propose an alternative understating of corruption through the lens of social capital

theory and the relationship between culture, civil society, and social trust. I argue that employing this approach might be more helpful in understanding why corruption persists in Lebanon, despite being the more democratic country in that region.

Second, the literature on corruption in Lebanon doesn't take into account the fact that it has been more than two decades since the war has ended. A new post-war generation which does not have the same legacy and formative experience is now active in the civil society. It is expected that this new generation will behave differently. However, it seems that this new generation is even more apathetic towards civil society. So, what contributes to such behavior if the legacy of war no longer applies? To this end, I argue that future research needs to switch focus from discussing social, political, and cultural behaviors from a *longue durée* perspective, to evaluating the impact of political corruption on trust and, hence, civil society in Lebanon.

## **II. Positive versus Negative Social Capital**

Social capital is broadly defined as the set of rules, norms, reciprocity and trust embedded in social relations, social structures, and society's institutional arrangements, which enables its members to achieve their mutual goals (Woolcock and Narayan 2000). Social capital is created from the horizontal networks and relations between individuals, groups and organizations in civil society. Social capital is embedded in primary social institutions that provide people with basic values, such as high levels of social trust, cohesion and participation. Social capital provides "trust" as a "public good" (Del Monte and Papagni 2007). The classical study by Almond and Verba (1963) on civic culture gave empirical evidence to the Toquevillian intuition that social trust, cohesion and participation increase the quality of democracy. Putnam (1993) computed the level of civicness of each of Italy's twenty regions and found a remarkable concordance between the performance of regional governments and the degree to which social and political life in those regions approximated the ideal of civic community. In creating trust between members of their organizations, individuals are providing a public good to other members of society who are not part of their organizations – in this way, trust becomes a positive externality. Not only does social capital create a "public good" but "most forms of social capital such as trust, are 'moral resources' - that is, resources whose supply increases, rather than decreases through use and which become depleted if not used" (Putnam 1993: 169). Low economic development and low social capital would lead a community into a "vicious cycle," draining its social capital even more and transforming it into a less civic community. The opposite is also true and a community with high economic development and high social capital will enter a virtuous cycle, which leads to a productive community (Putnam 1993).

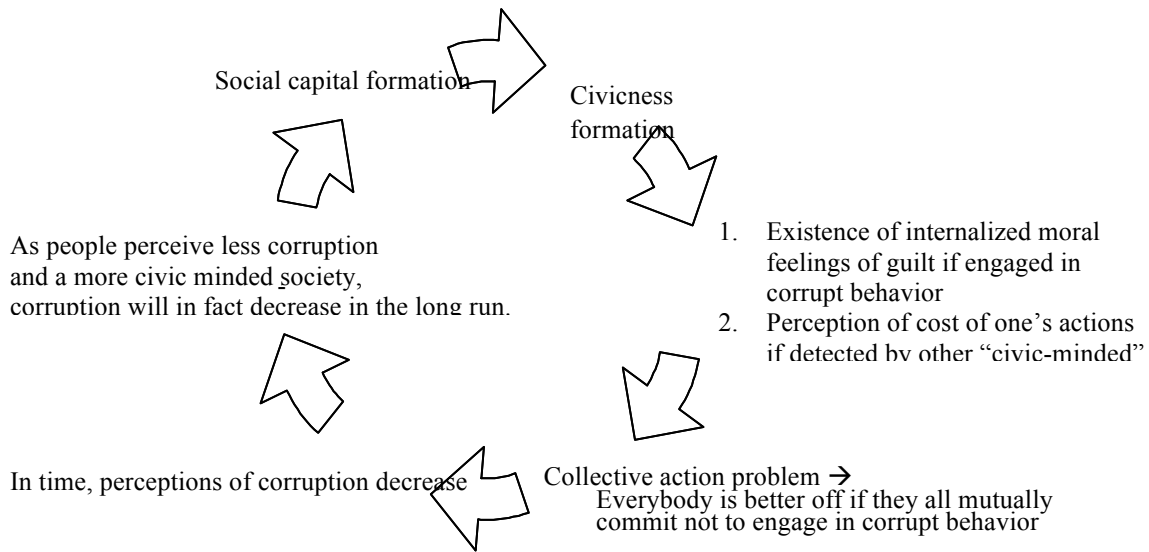
Research specifically on corruption shows that trust matters. In order to be able to set mutual goals and cooperate for achieving them, people have to trust each other and their governmental institutions, which in turn have to ensure the environment favorable for such cooperation (Jankauskas and Šeputienė 2007). The literature on government regulation has argued that the higher the level of trust in government, the more likely the people will comply with government demands and regulations (Levi and Stoker 2000; Scholz and Lubell 1998a, 1998b; Tyler 1990, 1998). This literature approaches trust from a rational perspective - trust reflects

beliefs about risk, and trust is a result of encapsulated interest (Levi and Stoker 2000; Scholz 1998). In cases involving social dilemmas, this rational approach renders that both sides cooperate as long as the other is perceived to be trustworthy. To the extent that people are able to make such a generalization, trust should be related to higher probabilities of compliance (Scholz and Lubell 1998a; 1998b). Applying this argument to corruption, one would expect that the extent to which people trust the government to be fair and trust other people to behave fairly, it is rational for them to reciprocate and also behave fairly. Trust becomes the basis on which non-corrupt exchange is sustained (Tavits 2005).

Other authors have claimed a strong relationship between both trust in government and trust in other people on the one hand, and the level of corruption on the other, both across countries and at the individual level (Camp, Coleman and Davis 2000, 2004; della Porta 2000; Morris 1991; Rothstein 2000; Uslaner and Badescu 2003, 2004a, 2004b). However, this literature argues that trust has a positive consequence in terms of reducing corruption via social bonds rather than via rational calculation of utility - "trust leads to empathy with others - and thus a respect for the law" (Uslaner 2004:10). Seligson (2002) used individual level data to argue that corruption influences the level of trust in other people and trust in the fairness of the political system. Uslaner (2004) on the other hand, relying on aggregate country level data, demonstrated the relationship between high trust and lower corruption, while Uslaner and Badescu (2004b) established several reciprocal relationships between political and social trust on the one hand, and the perception of and actual encounters with corruption on the other.

Positive social capital assumes that monitoring of officials is carried out by the clients (perhaps through complaints to their political representatives), rather than by the state itself directly. Kingston (2005) used a simple linked-games model to show how positive social capital reduces corruption. Social capital can enable citizens to engage in collective action against corruption. Paying bribes often creates a negative externality among the potential bribe-payers. More specifically, by paying a bribe in exchange for preferential treatment, an individual reduces the benefits available to everyone else. Likewise, by accepting a bribe in exchange for preferential treatment, a public servant reduces the benefits available to everyone else. As a result, bribe-payers face a collective action problem: they would all be better off if they could all mutually commit not to pay bribes. Social capital can enable them to enforce agreements not to pay bribes (or informal "norms" against bribery) and thereby reduce the level of corruption. In this way, in states with high levels of positive social capital, people are less likely to act corruptly, and more likely to be punished if they do so (Kingston 2005). In conclusion, positive or "functional" social capital reduces corruption because of positive social norms through which people relate to the government. Figure 1 illustrates the ways in which social capital deters corruption.

**Figure 1: Positive Social Capital**



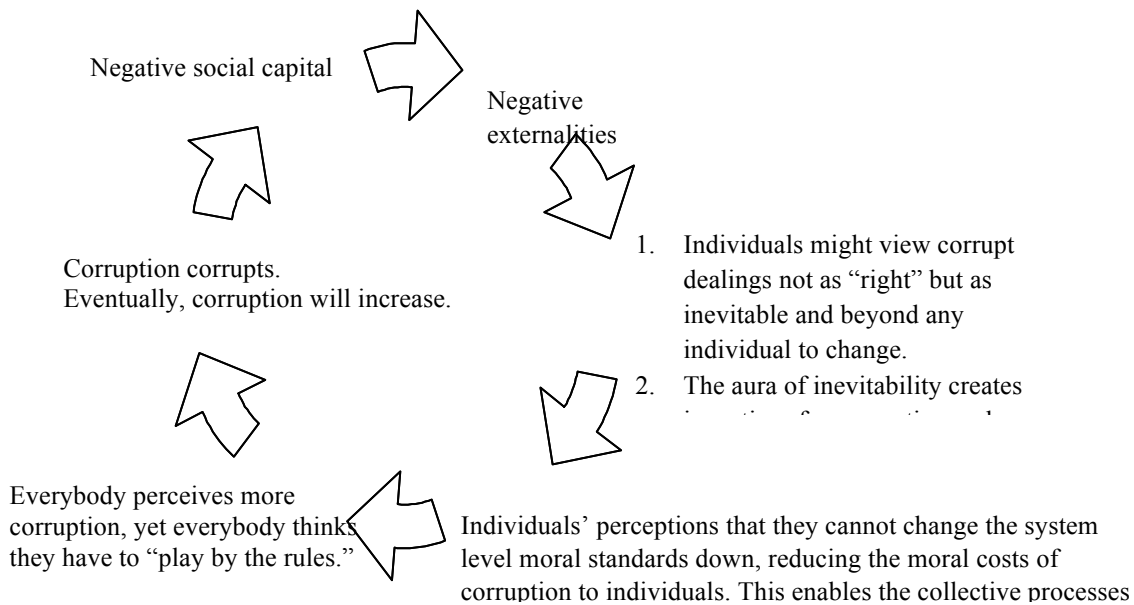
However, social capital could also move in the opposite direction and produce negative externalities<sup>3</sup>. Certain conditions are more likely to cause social capital to function in negative ways, for example a low level of social trust, apathetic citizenry, a weakening of the sense of loyalty to organized society, a decreasing sense of civic virtue. Warren (2006) claimed that when people lose confidence that public decisions are made for reasons that are publicly available and justifiable, they often become cynical about public speech and deliberation. People come to expect duplicity in public speech, and the expectation tarnishes all public servants, whether or not they are corrupt. When people are mistrustful of government, they are also cynical about their own capacities to act on public goods and purposes, and will prefer to attend to narrow domains of self-interest that they can control. In this way, corruption diminishes the horizons of collective action (Warren 2006) and social capital enables the collective processes of corruption - collective in the sense that they solve collective action problems for those involved in corruption, even if they are not public goods.

Del Monte and Papagni (2007) found using econometric results that the spread of corruption in Italy weakened the sense of loyalty to civil and organized society and the climate of corruption created further incentives for corruption, due to the belief that known offenders could continue their corrupt practices with little risk of punishment. Čábelková and Hanousek (2004) demonstrated that high perceptions of widespread corruption in Ukraine increased corruption in government by encouraging people to believe that they must pay bribes, and by enticing public servants to think that accepting bribes is natural and widely accepted. They found empirical results that perceptions of widespread corruption among the Ukrainian population are correlated to actual encounters of corruption. In this way, perceptions of corruption facilitate actual corruption levels (Čábelková and Hanousek 2004). Tavits (2005) argued that the decision to engage in corrupt behavior is primarily influenced by a personal

<sup>3</sup> Negative externalities are the negative byproduct of processes taking place in the society, negative in the sense that they add cost to these processes at the expense of everyone else.

definition of corruption and individual perceptions of how widespread corrupt activities are (imitation). This explanation borrows from social learning theory - if people perceive that a behavior is widespread and that there is an approval of the problem behavior, they will be more likely to engage in such behavior. Tavits showed that somebody who thinks that corrupt activities are very common in the country is about ten times more likely to be corruptible than somebody who thinks that corrupt activities are not at all common (Tavits 2005). Figure 2 shows how negative or “dysfunctional” social capital breeds a vicious cycle which reinforces corruption.

**Figure 2: Negative Social Capital**



In summary, social capital is an underlying trust by citizens of a country in both their fellow citizens and their government. This trust is based on a belief that we all share the same values and that we will generally play fair and do the right thing. Under this framework, social capital affects corruption, because individual perceptions of corruption depend on how many other individuals in the society are expected to be corrupt. If most citizens perceive honesty to be widespread, honesty in fact becomes widespread – a self-reinforcing mechanism. In this way, social capital reduces government corruption as a consequence of positive social norms through which people relate to the public sector. However, social capital can also move in the opposite direction and produce negative externalities. Certain conditions are more likely to cause social capital to function in negative ways, for example a low level of social trust, apathetic citizenry, a weakening of the sense of loyalty to organized society, a decreasing sense of civic virtue. In a society that is in a negative social capital cycle, perceptions of corruption facilitate corruption and dishonesty quickly becomes the currency by which all people learn how to operate. Under this framework, social capital enables the negative processes in society, including corruption.

### III. Findings

This section draws on preliminary findings from the ten expert interviews that I conducted in Lebanon in 2016 and 2017. The purpose of these in-depth interviews was to gather expert opinion about the transformation and development of Lebanon and document perceptions of ethics and corruption. Identities of the respondents were not revealed to any other persons in Lebanon at the time, nor are their responses identified in the narrative analysis<sup>4</sup>. By looking at corruption in Lebanon using a social capital lens, I wanted to investigate how Lebanese people viewed their relationship with their government and what their sense of social trust was. In this way, I argue, we may be able to better understand Lebanon's cultural challenges in fighting corruption and view why there are barriers to developing positive social capital that in turn allow corruption to persist.

#### *Corruption in pre-(First Republic) and postwar Lebanon*

There is a significant difference between the nature and scope of corruption in Lebanon before and after the civil war. Corruption has indeed grown much bigger in magnitude after the war, because of the reconstruction efforts that followed. These reconstruction projects were carried out through public contracts and have caused corruption to flourish large-scale and become institutionalized. Before the civil war, corruption was “a tiny thing” compared to what it is now, respondents said, because ethics were stronger before the war and because “the men in power back then wouldn't go into things as easy as they do now.” Now you see large-scale corruption all the way from municipalities to ministries and it involves every single politically important person in the country. Before the war, there were institutions that worked, and control authorities like the Central Inspectorate and there were liabilities. Corruption was contained to public officials and civil servants and it consisted of separate cases, it was not endemic or institutionalized. “Now you have billionaires because of the big consortiums between politicians.”

It was argued that corruption is not the result of a “penetrated” state. No external influence can explain corruption in Lebanon. “Before the war, it was a small cancer that could be contained and cured and we were fighting it. But after the war, it metastasized.” External influence has to do with the politics of Lebanon, but not with the corruption in the country. For example, most money from Hezbollah comes during elections. “But we are not corrupt only once every four years. We are corrupt every day. We need to put responsibility on Lebanese people. We are doing this to ourselves. It is our own disease.” The Syrian presence in Lebanon didn't cause corruption. “It worked on us, because we had no immunity. We like to flirt with corruption. Let's not blame others!”

One respondent said that corruption breeds on ignorance and it is maintained by ignorance. “When you don't know the laws, anyone can take you for a ride.” For example, you go to a ministry for the service that you need. The public servant tells you to come back tomorrow, then tomorrow he tells you to come back in two days, and so on, until you understand that you need to pay for your formality to be processed. Civil servants are not accountable in Lebanon, because you need a clean

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<sup>4</sup> See the Appendix for the list of interviews and affiliations.



and bold judiciary able to carry out the law for accountability to work. “We don’t have that here.” One respondent asked a judge, “Why are you not taking action?” and the judge answered, “Remember when four judges were killed in court by machine guns in Saida?”<sup>5</sup>

*The consociational political arrangement<sup>6</sup> and the lack of a sense of state*

The TAIIF agreement set a new government after 1990, based on different Lebanese communities and a new constitution - which respondents argue that it needs to be revised to make Lebanon a viable democracy and a non-confessional state. There are 18 major communities recognized in Lebanon: 14 are Christian and 4 are Mohammedans or Muslim. Lebanon was meant, essentially, to be a confessional equilibrium. The tragedy of Lebanon today is that everything is divided between major communities. “Instead of appointing someone because of his know-how and his professionalism, I am appointing him because he is Sunni, Shia, Christian Maronite, or Druze.” One respondent argued that, “they forgot about confessional equilibrium and went straight into confessional piracy. They now hide behind confessions to do mafia! We have pirated our own system and transformed it into mafia.” The parties that were once secular (“laymen” parties) have almost disappeared. They have been destroyed. The only parties that can reach to Parliament and the government are the sectarian parties. “You have to belong to a confessional party to be in a leading position.”

Sectarian factionalism encourages corruption because it works on impunity. Druze will not fight Druze corruption. Christians will not fight Christian corruption. Confessionalism is therefore a very important element of corruption. Respondents say that since independence, people have been behaving like members of a confession, not like Lebanese citizens. The state has failed to instill a spirit of citizenship. “We can talk about a political establishment here, not about a state. As a Lebanese, I have to believe in the state. But we don’t have statesmen.” When you want to call out corruption, people will team up to back their people based on religious identity. Religious identity overruns citizenship in Lebanon. “We are parishioners in a confession rather than citizens of a community.”

It seems as if the possibility of change is non-existent. “We are not like other Arab countries to have a revolution. Here in Lebanon there is no possibility for an Arab Spring, because we don’t have one leader to change, but 18 of them.” All 18 confessions have mutual interests and they would have to overthrow 18 heads of confessions. These confessions have split among one another the interests and benefits of the political system.

“When you want to seek employment in the public sector, it is the same thing. Go to your sect!” Respondents argued that there is no meritocratic system in Lebanon. Everyone has to go to their confessional leader. “We are not citizens, we are part of a

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<sup>5</sup> Şaydā (Arabic) or Saida (French) is the third-largest city in Lebanon located in the South Governorate.

<sup>6</sup> A political arrangement in which various groups, such as ethnic or racial populations within a country or region, share power according to an agreed formula or mechanism. When consociationalism is organized along religious confessional lines, it is known as confessionalism, as is the case in Lebanon.

sect” is something I kept hearing over and over. Education, health care, social welfare, employment – all are based on sectarian politics in Lebanon. “In this way, you are producing not a citizen, but a son of a sect,” one respondent said. He went on to say, “You grow up as a product of your confession, not as a citizen. How many people can reject what they have been brought up to think?”

There have been some attempts for change, made by independent thinkers. But the political parties have moved fast to say, for example, that these people are against Hezbollah, so that they would feel in danger. It was the parties that broke these attempts, not the police. The confessions have an interest in maintaining the status quo of corruption in Lebanon. I heard again that Lebanese are not citizens of a state, that they belong to religious communities. If you target a corrupt political leader, they will deflect accusations against their communities. “They will make it look like you not against them, but against their people, against their communities!”

There are no real barriers created by confessionalism, another responded argued vehemently. It is an “open country”, he said. “When barriers were taken down after the war, people jumped to embrace each other!” It is the politicians who have created their own barriers to hide behind and do whatever they want. “Politicians entertain something close to hatred, close to fear, to control the population.” This fear has been built inside people for so long. “You are made to believe that you are always in danger. And that to be safe, you need to belong to a group.” The sentiment was unanimous that unless you hide under the wings of your confession, you will be under threat from others.

### *The lack of successful anticorruption efforts*

Respondents said corruption is a state of mind. “The mafia does not exist; the Sicilians are Mafiosi.” When you fight it, it becomes difficult for corruption to become endemic. But in Lebanon, because of no real anticorruption fight, corruption *has* become endemic. It appears that there have been no successful efforts in fighting corruption in Lebanon. “All talk, no action. Like a prostitute preaching on good virtues! The public officials are all against corruption, they are very bold as if they are the victims, but in fact, they are all corrupt!” I was told that there is no hope now, because Lebanon is under tight grip of Hezbollah and Iran, and nothing can be done as long as others dictate the policy in the country. “As long as you have two states within a state, there can be no hope.”

“What we need is to have a good electoral code that allows ordinary people to get into Parliament.” It seems that the current laws that exist from 1992 allow politicians to have their way in elections. “We need laws that limit their influence.” Right now, the Parliament is mostly Sunni with a Christian minority. It is the Sunni parliamentarians who elect the Christian representatives on Parliament, not the Christians themselves, which is how it should be. We need proportional representation.” Another respondent argues that, “It is easier for them to have big circumscriptions<sup>7</sup>, to have large coalitions funded by foreign states. We need uninominal circumscriptions to break these coalitions and allow the voter to vote the

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<sup>7</sup> A circumscription is a geographical area with a number of voters, usually about 30-35,000 each, and a mixture of different confessions.

way he wants.” There are 24 circumscriptions now and 128 MPs. “What we need to have is 128 circumscriptions and 128 MPs.” It is a lot more difficult to fight coalitions, respondents argued, and each candidate should be within reach to start having some sort of accountability, because the voter could change his vote the next time around. With a new one-on-one basis there would be a much better chance for independence, for women in politics, for social activism. “We need a changed Parliament.”

Salaries of public servants are also very low in Lebanon. The General Director, which is the highest office in civil service, cashes about US\$2,000/month. In the private sector, that is the equivalent of lower to middle management pay. It is understandable then why this General Director would be tempted to go to the private sector, unless his salary was supplemented with bribes. Public agencies are also severely overstaffed, because each religious group wants their people to get a job, and that, of course, contributes to corruption.

When asked about possibilities for reform, one respondent argued that “we need leaders, not puppets or marionettes. Then the change will make its way down to the society at large.” However, another respondent brought up an old Arabic saying (the approximate translation is “the way you are, the leader will be like you”) and he argued that the leader is the product of the society. “So we must change ourselves before changing the leadership.” And they all seemed to agree that Lebanon can only change if Lebanese people are getting involved in politics. There is this sense of being fed up, we can’t take it anymore, yet there is no fight against corruption. Everybody participates in it and everyone enables it. “The problem is that people aren’t pressing enough to make change happen.”

“We all want the same public goods, yet we act as if we are different. As if Christians have different needs than Muslims. That’s why the civic movement is very weak.” People don’t participate in civic action unless the leadership tells them to. “Lebanese like to nag but they don’t take action, they sit home and watch TV. They think that by complaining, they have done their duty. They protest verbally.” It is only 1,000-2,000 people who go down to demonstrate. For example, about US\$16 billion have been spent in the past 20 years on electricity, yet Lebanon doesn’t have electricity 24/7. “As long as they find an alternative - even if it is more costly – then they choose the alternative, not action against the wrong-doing.” Another respondent said that, “People are to blame too, because we don’t take ownership. We just nag and complain.”

“Instead of venting we should act,” someone said. “I am from Baalbek Mountains, where 85% of the population votes for Hezbollah.” Life expectancy there is three times lower than in Beirut and educational opportunities are four times lower. “Yet, they still support Hezbollah. But this is true for Sunnis as well, not just for Shia’s. Regardless of poverty or lack of education opportunities, we are prisoners of this system.” If you criticize a sectarian leader, you will have an uprising from that community.

“My generation was more free, more open minded, more willing to change.” The young generation from now is worse. The secular young people are being isolated and you have young people who are more fanatic than their parents. For

example, there are young girls who wear the head scarf and hijab and go to college when their mothers who didn't go to college never wore that. "Social pressure is far more significant than the way you were brought up," someone said. Others have brought up the need of belonging, and told me that "The youth wants to belong to a group."

During the 1950's and the 60's, Beirut was in high-time politically, socially, and economically, despite the lack of technology. The country was very advanced in terms of education, infrastructure, as well as politically and religiously. It was a lot more open-minded. People were more committed to the country. One way to give insight into social capital in Lebanon is to look at it in terms of generational cohorts: you have that generation from the 50's and the '60's, then you have the generation of people who lived the war, and you have the new generation after the war. There is a sense that these three generations have very different values and that in time, people have become less and less committed to the country, to its history, and to their sense of belonging, and respondents argued that this is the root cause of everything. The new generation is looking to leave, respondents told me. All the newborns are named Western names, parents don't believe in the country, they teach kids English and French and these kids barely speak Arabic. Their parents hope these kids will leave and come back to Lebanon only for vacation, and "to show off". They told me that, "There is no interest in community anymore."

"The revolution starts within ourselves", someone else said. "We have the education, we have the knowledge, but we don't have the character. We are being taught the knowledge in school, but we are not being instilled the values." What are some steps to change, I asked? "First, we need to fight sectarianism!" But then we agreed that this would be hard now, because the whole region is getting more sectarian and this affects the next generations. "Second, we would need to fight poverty and illiteracy through education." Respondents also argued that before giving people freedom, they should have a sense of responsibility towards their duties as citizens of a nation and towards the public good. "We should also teach life skills and values that are common to all of us, regardless of the religious community that we belong to."

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Preliminary findings from the expert interviews that I conducted indicate that Lebanon is in a dysfunctional social capital cycle that seems to be getting only worse. Corruption and low trust remain significant problems, while social trust had become progressively more dysfunctional through successive generations until present day.

Findings seem to suggest that in order to transition from an ecology of self-reinforcing corruption to a state where corruption plays a minor rather than dominant role, the political culture in Lebanon needs a legitimate governing ethos. Efforts to build civic attitudes are also needed to help override historical legacies and build positive social capital that can sustain change.

I was also interested in exploring the question of whether corruption has since replaced the legacy of war as a factor undermining trust in others and government in Lebanon. To that end, I presented a preliminary narrative examination of the

association between corruption and post-war civil society. In essence, these findings are in line with my hypothesis that future research needs to switch focus from discussing social, political, and cultural behaviors from a *longue durée* perspective, to evaluating the impact of political corruption on trust and, hence, civil society in Lebanon.

Reforming the electoral system, restructuring the Parliament, and efforts to improve public education outside confessional lines seem to be the most urgent steps for fighting corruption and building positive social capital and a sense of civic ethos in Lebanon. There also seems to be no role-modeling system in place in Lebanon's public employment sector. Therefore, a possible next step could be to build a rewards system where "good" employees are being rewarded and "bad" ones are being reprimanded. Other efforts to instill civic attitudes in Lebanon may be undertaken using television and the media. There seems to be no sense of nationalism, or of loyalty to the country. Newspaper ads and television campaigns could be designed to instill civic attitudes and a sense of pride in the nation, with the goal of building positive social capital and a sense of civic ethos. With that said, it seems rather clear that any Lebanese civic movement that aims at touching the fundamentals of the sectarian system will meet strong opposition from the established political leadership. It remains to be seen whether the Lebanese youth who wants change can overcome these hindrances.

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## **Appendix**

Interviews were conducted with the following experts (in alphabetical order) who gave consent, except for one person who asked to remain anonymous:

*Saada Allaw*, Journalist for the daily Assafir newspaper.



*Youssef Hage Ali*, Recruitment and Volunteers Officer, Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections.

*Robert Gharios*, Assistant Dean and Chairperson of Finance Department, Faculty of Business and Economics, American University of Science and Technology.

*Amal Haddad*, Lawyer, Former President of The Beirut Bar Association (2009-2011).

*Yahya Hakim*, Secretary General, The Lebanese Transparency Association.

*Salah Honein*, Lawyer, Former Congressman.

*Salim J. Jreissati*, Minister of Justice (since December 2016), Lawyer, Former Lecturer at the Beirut Faculty of Law and Political Sciences, Former Member of the Constitutional Council, Former Minister of Labor (2012-2014).

*Wassim Kaakour*, Special Investigation Commission, Banque du Liban.

*Walid Nasr*, Board Member, Head of Strategic Planning, The Lebanese Petroleum Administration.

*Anonymous*, NGO Representative, Former Journalist.