MULTICULTURALISM AND DEMOCRACY: LEBANON AS A CASE STUDY

[**Issue Number 72 - April 2010**](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/72-d)

**Multiculturalism and Democracy: Lebanon as a Case Study**   
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Many Countries industrialized and developing, some before and many after the turn of the century, have experienced strains and instability caused by the competing demands of communal groups. Attachments to parochial communities within the state reflecting religious, ethnic, linguistic, regional, and racial differences have become more salient reference points in the political process. As Nathan Glazier and Daniel Monahan have written: “Ethnic identity has become more salient, ethnic assertion stronger, ethnic conflict more marked everywhere in the last seventy years.”[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn1" \o ") The media headlines have attested to the fragility of Moslem, African, Asian and even European peoples in the face of ethnic, tribal, or religious struggles. However, states widely considered to have passed the threshold of national integration, like Britain, Belgium, Canada, and others, suddenly again confront basic issues relating to the fundamental rules and processes of the state.

In true platonic fashion, multiculturalism may reflect at the social level the psychological changes within individual members of a democratic society that happens to embrace many cultures. Beginning with their families, individuals later identify with their specific ethnic or racial group and only later widen their circle of understanding to encompass all others in the society, including those who may be very different in physical appearance or in some of their cultural beliefs. In some countries, like the United States, multiculturalism gains particular significance. There, it is couched inside legal, political, and psychological “protective shields” that make it more than just a theory of social existence. Thus, based on legal decisions made by the Supreme Court with the court’s interpretation of the Constitution, minority ethnic, cultural, and religious groups may not be unreasonably discriminated against. This legal protection gives such groups the opportunity and the right to coexist even if a real or hypothetical majority were to prefer that they do not. After almost two hundred years of struggle by the Civil Rights movement, multiculturalism gained its long awaited social recognition and became the rightful heir to constitutional ideals that have legally become a part of the US democracy.[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn2" \o ") However, multiculturalism elsewhere faces major problems. It may be argued that knowledge of other cultures does not guarantee that one will end up appreciating, as opposed to hating, them. To some other theorists, multiculturalism could promote segregation, stifle free speech, and even threaten liberal democracy. According to Jonathan Sachs, Britain’s chief rabbi, multiculturalism has led, not to integration, but to segregation. Sachs states, “Liberal democracy is in danger. The politics of freedom risk descending into the politics of fear.” He added, “A culture of victimhood sets group against group, each claiming that its pain, injury, oppression, or humiliation is greater than that of others

It is hard to adopt a clear interpretation between multiculturalism and democracy in Islamic states where liberal democracy has not yet found fertile ground. The discussions inflamed by Huntington’s “clash of civilizations” thesis make clear the extent of disagreement between Islam and the Western societies. Moreover, Islamic fundamentalism with its exclusions, excessive, self-elevations, and its criticism of human rights damage multicultural civil society just as do the Western concepts of superiority and xenophobia. Nonetheless, it would be wrong to talk of the failure of multicultural movement in the face of the current conflicts and turmoil created by the fundamentalists and Islamists as well as to demand an end to peaceful coexistence between the Islamist majority and other minorities. It’s not acceptable to sacrifice democracy simply because one must recognize that democracy is constantly challenged by its enemies in Muslim states; multicultural society is not to be sacrificed simply because its enemies expose it to crossfire. Democracy and multicultural society are both dependent on a supporting political culture of tolerance for their existence. In the Islamic societies, new support should be found through the efforts of political education.

**Lebanon as a Case Study**

**Historical Background**

Lebanon, which I use as a case study, has experienced the consequences of repeated struggles between its constituent components.

Religious groups in Lebanon constitute the major political forces of the political system.

From a historical perspective, to assess the potential viability of the newly created state of Greater Lebanon in 1920, one must study the relations between the various religious groups which constitute the confessional communities. In speaking of these confessional communities in 1947, Pierre Rondot stated: “The problem of Lebanon’s political institutions seems to reside essentially in the difficult transition of the traditional communities into a modern form, or more precisely in the laborious adjustment of these apparently incompatible entities.”[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn3" \o ")  What was true in 1947 was even more the case than in 1920. The significance of such a confessional identification was by no means unique to Lebanon, but characterized nearly the whole of the Near East.[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn4" \o ")

The Ottoman Empire considered itself as a religious state, with a predominant Sunni population. Non-Muslim minorities were recognized and organized as separate communities or ‘millets’ and were, in most cases, accorded considerable autonomy in handling their own religious and civic affairs. In the early years of the Ottoman rule these minorities were regarded primarily as religious communities, but as time went on “the barriers between the different communities grew higher and harder to cross, and what had been religious tended to become national groups. Their bases became not so much religious belief as the fact that one’s ancestors had held belief; ties of political filial piety, intermarriage, and loyalty grew stronger; for a man to leave his community was looked upon as an act of treason.”[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn5" \o ") The sense of separateness and of suspicion vis-à-vis other confessional groups was not simply a matter of Muslim versus Christian. Differentiation within the Christian community, primarily among Greek Orthodox, Maronite, Greek Catholic, and Roman Catholic; and within the Muslim community, primarily between Sunnis, Shiites, and Druze, became almost as great as that between the larger Christian-Muslim groupings.[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn6" \o ")

For three centuries, social and economic differentiations played important roles in Lebanon’s history, but confessional identification has always been most consistently and most self-consciously defined. Such strong identification was the direct cause behind the confessional conflict in Lebanon that took place in 1840 and 1860.

Mount Lebanon had a fairly complex confessional configuration: the Maronites and the Druze were the two principal confessional groups. Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic groups were also of significant size. The Shiites lost their land in Mount Lebanon to the steadily Maronite migration from the north toward central Lebanon. Orthodox pockets were also scattered in Mount Lebanon.

The division of Mount Lebanon in 1842 into two districts (kaymmakamates) was an attempt to divide Mount Lebanon into two confessionally homogenous provinces, but the actual composition of the population in the two provinces reveals the extent of the geographical mixing of confessional groups.[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn7" \o ")

The Bekaa area contained Shiite, Maronite, Sunni, Greek Orthodox and Greek Catholic towns and villages, some of them confessionally mixed towns. The coastal cities of Tripoli, Beirut and Sidon contained large numbers of Sunnis, as did the areas north of Tripoli, while the areas south of Sidon tended to be predominantly Shiite with a few pockets of Christians.

Given the importance of the relations among the various religious communities in determining the viability and the destiny of the new state of Lebanon, it is necessary to examine the character of these relations prior to 1920. The focus of our examination will be on those relations during the eighteenth century starting with the Chehab dynasty in 1697 and the nineteenth century. The purpose of such an examination will focus on assessing the relationships among the various religious groups in Mount Lebanon with special attention to examples of intergroup conflict.

During the Chehab dynasty, suspicion on the part of the Druze that one or another of the Chehab emirs favored the Maronites to the detriment of the Druze frequently provoked intergroup hostility and conflict. To the Druze this provided clear evidence of confessional favoritism and could be explained by the fact that Emir Bashir II was himself a Maronite. One of the clear-cut examples of such discrimination against Druze came in 1824 when Bashir II destroyed the province of the principal Druze chieftain, Bashir Jumblat, and later had him killed. The emir was motivated by a desire to eliminate a “dangerous” rival. The Druze interpretations of these events were as being anti-Druze. The perceived intention of the emir was given greater historical significance than the actual motive.

A closely related, but logically distinct motive of intergroup hostility had its origins in the suspicion by a confessional community that a foreign ruling power discriminated against them to the advantage of other communities. The Maronite-Druze conflict during Bashir II’s reign resulted from the policies practiced by Ibrahim Pasha, the Egyptian overlord who controlled Lebanon and Syria from 1831 to 1840. For one reason or another, his policies were in favor of the Maronites to the detriment of the Druze.[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn8" \o ")

A third and closely related cause of intergroup hostility came as a result of the numerous interventions by European powers in Lebanon to promote their interests in the country. For instance, in 1835-1836 Britain attempted to encourage Druze antagonism against the Maronites. Then the British supplied weapons to the Druze in 1841. The British acted with the intention of creating a wedge between the Druze and the French.[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn9" \o ")

In a variety of ways economic interests affected these intergroup relations, and in some cases contributed to conflict. The Druze-Christian civil war of 1860-1861 had its origins in economic conflict between peasants and landlords. The peasant revolt in Kesrouan pitted Maronite peasants against Maronite landlords, and when the peasant movement spread to the southern port of Mount Lebanon it aroused Maronite peasants against Druze landlords since most of the landlords in that area were Druze.

The Druze landlords put the conflict under a confessional rather than economic term and rallied the Druze peasants to support them against the Maronite peasant rebellion.

We should recognize that the weakened feudal system had contributed to the deterioration of the inter-confessional cooperation.[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn10" \o ") With feudal ties weakened, confessional loyalties tended to replace it as the basis for corporate political action.[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn11" \o ")

The energetic efforts of Maronite clergy to strengthen confessional ties within the Maronite community during the latter part of the eighteenth century and the first part of the nineteenth represented another source of confessional conflict in Mount Lebanon. The Maronite patriarch and the clergy were motivated by the desire to enhance their status as well as by their aspirations to turn Lebanon into a Christian state with a Christian ruler.[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn12" \o ") Passions among the Maronite community were aroused against the Druze community. When Maronites burned fourteen Druze villages in 1845, the patriarch proclaimed the attacks to be part of a holy war against the Druze, and Maronite bishops even assisted in mapping out battle plans.[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn13" \o ")

**Intercommunity Cooperation**

The turbulent period 1840-1861 might create the incorrect impression that the history of Lebanon was dominated by intercommunity conflict, particularly between Druze and Maronite.

During most of the periods covering the latter part of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, the socio-political system maintained a substantial degree of political control through feudal ties or through greater centralization of power. An effective feudal system prevailed, based upon political allegiance going from peasant to feudal lord and from feudal lord to the emir, regardless of the confessional affiliation of the actors.[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn14" \o ")

By the middle of the nineteenth century when the political action shifted from feudal to confessional ties, the maintenance of peace and stability came to depend upon centralized political control. In fact, when Bashir III proved incapable of asserting centralized control and the Ottoman authorities were unwilling to impose such control in 1860, it becomes clear why intercommunity conflict erupted at disastrous levels. In contrast, during the period 1861-1900 Lebanon witnessed a period of peace and cooperation among all communities, and the reason was that the European powers exercised their pressure on the Ottoman authorities to assure that the rulers of Lebanon would be given the authority and sufficient means to maintain the confessional peace. One ought to recognize that the equitable distribution of political power among the various communities provided another basis for peaceful coexistence and cooperation during that period.

The first systematic work to create such an equitable distribution came in 1841 when Bashir III, with Ottoman encouragement, organized an advisory council composed of 10 representatives from various confessional groups. The composition of this council was three Maronites, three Druze and one Greek Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Shiite, and Sunni. Under the two kaymakamates system in 1842, the governor of each kaymakamiat named an advisory council consisting of representative from the various communities.

Under the special “protocol of the Mutsarafiat” in 1861, the principal of confessional representation became successfully established. The council evolved to become a cohesive political body which often presented united inter-confessional opposition to the non-Lebanese governors who ruled Lebanon during this period.[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn15" \o ") The revised government structure initiated in 1864 reapportioned the seats in the central representative council to four Maronites, three Druze, two Greek Orthodox and one each of Greek-Catholic, Shiite and Sunni. Many of the concepts adopted during the 1861 -1918 period came to be embodied in the first constitution of 1926. Mention was made of the extent which different emirs or rulers contributed to intergroup disturbances and conflicts within Lebanon; however, there have also been periods in which the opposition of the whole populace to the ruler was so intense. The various groups cooperated to achieve a common objective to oust the ruler. The best example of such inter-group cooperation came during the period of the Egyptian control from 1832 to 1840. The repressive policies of Ibrahim Pasha and Bashir II prepared the ground for the revolt of 1840. It is true the Maronites were in the forefront, but it was in reality an inter-confessional common effort to bring down Bashir and his Egyptian masters.

The most significant common opposition to Ottoman rule came in the late nineteenth century and continued to grow until 1918 when the Allies chased the Ottomans from Lebanon and the whole Arab world. After the civil war between Maronites and Druze 1860 and 1861, a group of Christian intellectuals in Beirut began to call for Lebanese or Syrian-Lebanese independence from the Ottoman Empire. They felt it was time to work towards establishing a secular state which would help them to avoid all kinds of sectarian conflicts. Some of these Christians desired a unified Syrian-Lebanese state, while others wanted an independent Christian state in Mount Lebanon.

In the late nineteenth century another nationalist movement was developed under Muslim leadership. This movement sought greater recognition of the Arab people within the Ottoman Empire, more political authority and more use of the Arabic language. This nationalist movement refused to endorse the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire, linking it with the concept of the unified Islamic state. For this movement, calling for a complete independent state in Lebanon and Syria would mean running the risk of a European intervention against the Muslim state and the Caliph.

During this political interplay, both Christians and Muslims faced a dilemma over whether Arabism and Islam were separable, either politically or emotionally. However, the Turkification policy instituted by the Young Turks in 1909 brought the two movements closer to each other. The Young Turks movement was more Turkish than Muslim, and, consequently, brought more support among the Muslims for political independence of Lebanon and Syria. The Christians and Muslims remained divided over the character and territorial extent of the desired state: an independent Lebanon or a Syrian-Lebanese state, or a pan-Arab independent State.[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn16" \o ")

Nevertheless, the Christians and Muslims agreed on a political restructuring and cooperation. In 1915, the Turkish authorities executed twelve nationalists; both Muslims and Christians, for supposed seditious actions, and, in 1916, twenty-two more nationalists of various confessional communities suffered a similar fate. These executions outraged the whole Lebanese and Syrian populace and unified most of them against the Turks.

The inter-group conflict as cited by some historians was not limited to the oppositions and discord between Christians and Muslims. Denominational differentiation within the two larger communities often prompted more serious antagonism than differences between Muslims and Christians as a whole. The Christian identity did not induce the Greek Orthodox to champion the Maronite cause during the conflict with the Druze in 1841. Yet, it should be noted that the Maronites benefited from considerable Shiite support in the conflict with the Druze in 1860. The Shiites in Lebanon have always felt unjustly treated by Sunni Ottoman authority and were resentful of local Sunni domination. Many Greek Catholics fled from Syria to Lebanon in the eighteenth century because of discrimination there at the hands of Greek Orthodox. The Druze exhibited considerable ambivalence regarding as whether or not they were Muslims, and consequently they never felt close to either Sunnis or Shiites.[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn17" \o ")

During the Mameluke period, persecution of non-Sunnis led many Christians, Druze and Shiites to convert to the Sunni faith; later, a tendency was observed for conversions to Christianity away from Islam. The Chehab family conversions from Sunni and Druze faiths to Christianity represent a very clear example of that trend of moving from one community to another. Although the confessional groups tended to be concentrated geographically, they were by no means geographically segregated or out of contact with one another. Many parts of a Lebanon contained mixed populations. Population movements also occurred frequently and added to inter-group contact and intermingling. Historically, the movement of Maronites into southern Lebanon during the 17th and 18th centuries had the broadest social ramifications. The Maronites were integrated into the existing Druze and Shiite communities, becoming laborers or clerks for the local chieftains.

The vast majority of the Lebanese population had at one time been a persecuted minority group in its country of origin which found refuge in Lebanon. In many cases groups moved from Syria or Turkey, or other countries in search of religious freedom for which Lebanon was known. The last great influx was witnessed with the Armenian migration from Turkey in the early part of the twentieth century.

**Involvement of Foreign Powers**

European powers seeking to serve their own agendas played a very important role in Lebanese history. Their interventions in the political life of the country were very frequent and deeply affected the balance of power among the various major communities. The European powers contributed greatly to inter-group conflict within Lebanon. From the sixteenth century France considered itself to be the protector of the Maronite community, primarily because the Maronites were part of the Catholic Western church. This special relation also extended to include the Greek Catholic community, but with weaker bonds. By the eighteenth century the Franciscans, Jesuits, Lazarists and Carmelites all had active missions in Lebanon. They helped to promote the Maronite community and encouraged the spread of the French culture among the Maronites. The French missions were very active in Lebanon well before the time of the French Mandate and tended to create a significant degree of cultural differentiation between the Maronites and the other sects. All of these special relations brought the Maronites to be very favorably disposed toward the French Mandate.

The Russians were ready to compete with the French influence in Lebanon through establishing strong protective ties with the Greek Orthodox. The Russians did assist Greek Orthodox schools, seeking to get in return a favorable attitude from the Greek Orthodox community similar to what the French had developed with the Maronites.[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn18" \o ")

In an attempt to counterbalance the French influence over the Maronites, the British cultivated special ties with the Druze during the nineteenth century, but the depth of these relations never matched the deep French-Maronite relations. The British and Americans established several Protestant schools in the Druze areas.

The Sunnis tended to remain adherents to the Ottomans and did not seek nor welcome ties with the French, Russians, or the British.

**Inter-community Relations**

During the eighteenth century inter-community relations were mostly stable and overt conflict rarely erupted. The Chehab emirs adopted a successful political management with such structure being reinforced by the feudal socio-political system. There was a general awareness about the importance of keeping inter-confessional conflict at bay.

The calm situation in the first part of the nineteenth century started to change. The Feudal system started to crumble and the Maronite clergy began to assert itself as a political force. Until Ibrahim Pasha’s intervention, Emir Bashir II managed to maintain calm and stability. With the Egyptian bad management combined with the crumbling feudal system, the inter-community ties started to change, particularly between Maronites and Druze. The anti-Egyptian sentiment provided a basis for an inter-confessional revolt in 1840, but this inter-confessional cooperation was short lived, leading afterward to serious clashes between Maronites and Druze in 1841.

The ineffective and weak authority of the two kaymakamates and the influence of the meddling of the European powers in Lebanon’s internal affairs and the conflict between peasants and landlords contributed to the eruption of the civil war of 1860 that left 15000 people dead.[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn19" \o ")

Increased governmental effectiveness under what was known as the Reglement Organique, or the Protocol of 1861, and the equitable distribution of power among the communities brought stability and prosperity to the country. However, Turkish authorities became more repressive around the turn of the nineteenth century. Various Arab nationalist movements started to develop, and anti-Turkish sentiments provided a basis for inter-community cooperation among the Muslim and Christian elites. Nonetheless, when the Young Turks attempted to turkify the Arab part of the Empire, the Muslims and the Christians came to agree on the need for political independence. Such political aim was short of being fulfilled with the defeat of the Turks and the imposing of the French Mandate on Lebanon and Syria for twenty –three additional years.

**The French Mandate 1920-1943**

The Paris Conference of 1919 was gathered with the calm assumption that the peacemakers could dispose of the former Ottoman territories in the Arab Middle East to suit their dreams of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

For the British and French, the peace settlements would adhere and follow the Lines of the nineteenth century imperialism again. At the their meeting in London in December 1918, just before the American President Wilson arrived in Europe, Lloyd George and Clemenceau found the occasion to agree on a division of the Ottoman empire’s vast Arab territories stretching from the borders of the Persian empire to the Mediterranean.

Lloyd George apparently gave Clemenceau promises that Britain would support France, even against the Americans, in its demand for control over the Lebanese coast and the interior of Syria and that France would have a share of whatever oil turned up in Mosul.[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn20" \o ") It is necessary to note that Britain and France had already made their deal on the Arab Middle East with the secret Sykes-Picot deal made in 1916.

Lebanese Christians, who did not want to get caught in a dispute with France over its Middle East plans, proclaimed their separate independence at a huge meeting on March 20, 1920 and chose as a flag the French tricolor with a Lebanese Cedar in the center.

To bring Syria under control, the French shrank it. They awarded their Christian allies by swelling the borders of Mount Lebanon with the Beka’a Valley, the Mediterranean ports of Tripoli, Beirut, Sidon and Tyre and the land in the south, north of Palestine. Thousands of Muslims were added to a state dominated by Christians. The result was a Syria, which even after the French finally ended their mandate, that still remembered the territories it had lost, and a Lebanon that was dancing uneasily around unresolved religious and ethnic tensions.[[21]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn21" \o ")

The new state of Greater Lebanon created by the French soon after they assumed mandatory control was considerably larger in space and population than the Matasarrifiate of Mount Lebanon as it existed from 1861 to 1918. Greater Lebanon did have well-defined geographical boundaries.

Even though several portions of the annexed territories had had historical ties with the core area of Mount Lebanon, these ties had been tenuous and intermittent. Little sense of Lebanese nationality existed to draw the diverse religious communities together into a cohesive nation.

It was well know that the French created Greater Lebanon in order to strengthen the position of the Maronite community as well as to reward the Maronites for their allegiance to France for the past two centuries. By separating Mount Lebanon from Syria the French wanted to assure that the Maronites would not be engulfed by Syria. By annexing additional territories to create Greater Lebanon, the French saw themselves securing an economic viability for the new state.

Disagreement did arise among Maronites over the practicality of an independent Greater Lebanon as opposed to independent Mount Lebanon. Maronites constituted 59% of the population of Mount Lebanon while they were 29% of Greater Lebanon’s population. Most Maronites were enthusiastic for Greater Lebanon, thinking that they could continue their ascendance with education and with the French political support.

Most of the Sunnis favored the unification of Lebanon and Syria, a state that might be joined to the rest of the Arab countries in a pan-Arab Islamic state. They did not welcome the creation of Greater Lebanon as a separate state. The Sunnis’ distrust of the French was long standing and they feared being perpetually dominated by the French-Maronite alliance. Some of the conservative Sunnis expressed their regret for the dismantling of the Ottoman Empire. Among those who favored the independent state of Greater Lebanon disagreements arose over the role Islam should play in the new state.

The French were aware of the risk surrounding the state of Greater Lebanon as being perceived by the Muslims as a Christian political establishment. France was aware of the country’s historical problem: unless the Christians managed to sell the idea of Greater Lebanon to their Muslim compatriots, Lebanon as a state could not gain the required legitimacy it needed.

France helped its historical Maronite friends to establish an independent state and provided them for the time being with the needed power and protection. France could only give them advice. Maronites accepted the French advice and began to show prudence in their speech and political action. Those who did not comply with the advice were deprived of the French political support, and those who happened to express radical views were subjected to isolation.[[22]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn22" \o ")

As for other Christian confessional groups, the Greek Catholics concurred with the Maronites and were pro-French and favored the creation of Greater Lebanon. In contrast, the Greek Orthodox held diverse views and provided much less support f or the establishment of such a state. Many of them supported the creation of a pan-Arab state and were anti-Greater Lebanon and anti-French, and tended to prefer a Syrian state, but showed less emotion than the Sunnis. The two largest communities – the Maronites and the Sunnis – were obsessed by the fear of being subordinated to the other. This apprehension led the Maronites to advocate a state separate from Syria and drove the Sunnis to call for the merging of Lebanon with Syria. However, for the other communities the issue was not so clear-cut since they would hold minority status in both configurations.

Originally, the Maronites had wanted Lebanon, politically, for themselves, but the French were keen from the beginning to accord all Lebanon’s communities explicit recognition. In 1920, the French Governor appointed an advisory council composed of 17 members selected to represent their respective communities. In 1922, the advisory council was replaced by an elected council, the seats of which were distributed along the confessional divide: the thirty members were ten Maronites, two Greek Catholic, four Greek Orthodox, sixteen Sunnis, five Shiites, and two Druze with one left for other minorities.

When the country received its first constitution on May 24, 1926 and became the Lebanese Republic, the French saw to it that a Greek Orthodox rather than a Maronite was its first president with a Sunni as the speaker of its parliament; but the Maronites, nevertheless, managed to secure for themselves all other key positions in the government and the administration and, ultimately, the presidency of the republic. What made this possible, at such early stages, was the Sunni boycott of the state by a majority of the Sunnis; they were the only community which could stop such a take-over.

The first president Charles Debbas was a Greek Orthodox who remained in office from 1926 to 1933. However, the French Governor refused to allow the parliament to select a Sunni, Sheikh Mohammad Al-Jisr, as a president in 1932, leaving the space for a Maronite, Habib Pasha Assaad to be chosen in 1933. The first Sunni Prime Minister was selected in 1937 and has been followed since by an uninterrupted succession of Sunnis. The first Shiite speaker of the chamber of deputies was chosen in 1943 and since that time the post remained for the Shiites.

**Lebanon as an Independent State**

At the time that self-government was achieved in 1943, the Maronite- elected president Bishara Al-Khouri formulated a political accord with the Sunni Prime Minister Riyad As-Solh; the provisions of it constituted the so-called National Pact. The accord was verbal and its details were never elucidated. Its main elements have provided the basis for political cooperation among Lebanon’s confessional communities from 1943 to 1989, the beginning of the Taif Accord. Under the National Pact provisions, the Christians would recognize Lebanon as an Arab country and would not seek French or European protection. For their part, the Muslims would accept geographical boundaries and would relinquish their advocacy of a union with Syria or any other Arab state. The two leaders stipulated that future presidents would be Maronites and future prime ministers would be Sunnis. They also recognized the need to maintain such equilibrium as a transitional arrangement with an aspiration to improve the system in the future.

In the Lebanese parliament, the representation of Christians and Muslims was fixed by the National Pact at the ratios of six to five. The country was also divided (in a succession of electoral laws) in to multi-member constituencies, most of them confessionally mixed. Seats in parliament were reserved for members of the different sects in the mixed constituencies. This was carried out with the aim of promoting political integration among the different communities. The National Pact certainly provided Lebanon with a practical framework for a working democracy. What was missing was a society with a broad civic base committed to its principles.

The staunchest opponents of the Lebanese political system admitted at one occasion or another that it was worth preserving – with some essential reforms. The Christians were convinced that the system was ideally suited for Lebanon where confessionalism was a fact of life that had to be taken into account. The Maronites, however, were the chief beneficiaries of the National Pact, and, therefore, it was not something with which to be tampered. There were many Muslims and Druze who agreed with the Maronites about the necessity of safeguarding such a special political system in Lebanon, provides its fundamental principles were properly understood and applied. On the other hand, there were Muslim and Druze leaders who insisted that the real problem in Lebanon lay in confessionalism, and, therefore, it should be abolished in favor of s secular political system.

In the absence of real political parties that cuts across confessional lines, political life became the preserve of shifting alliances among politicians who formed parliamentary fronts or blocs.[[23]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn23" \o ")

In 1958, Camille Chamoun, then President of the Republic, clashed with the Arab nation al unity movement led by President Nasser of Egypt, which resulted in an armed revolution. President Chamoun ordered the Commander of the Army, General Fuad Chehab, to put down the insurrection, but Chehab permitted the army to play only a carefully circumscribed role for fear that full involvement by the army might aggravate the split within both the society and the army. Chehab also believed that President Chamoun was disrupting the country’s confessional equilibrium to the advantage of his allies who were mostly Christians. Chehab was fully aware of the risks had he brought the full force of the army against the insurrectionists who were predominantly Muslims and Druze.

Although the Lebanese Army was not very large in that period, numbering 15,000 men, or very well-armed, it had often exerted a very positive role on inter-confessional relations.[[24]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn24" \o ") The Lebanese Armed Forces were seen generally by the people as the national institution with the best record to keep peaceful inter-group relations. This institution made a great effort to keep a rough balance between Christians and Muslims among its ranks. Moreover, the post of the Army Commander was, and is, reserved for a Maronite.

In 1964, during a crisis with the Palestinian commandos, which had dragged on for several months, giving rise to increased tensions between Christians and Muslims, the Army was able to work out a settlement with the Palestinian leaders. The Army again assisted in solving the political crisis which paralyzed the government for seven months. However, it should be noted that when heavy fighting broke out between the army and the Palestinians resistance in May 1973, some Sunnis and the left movement accused the Army of being exploited by the Maronite President and the Maronite Army Commander to undermine the Palestinian struggle against Israel.

The general power-sharing approach between Christians and Muslims was reaffirmed again at the end of the crisis of 1958, which ended with the slogan “No victor, no vanquished” declared by Saeb Salam, the leader of the opposition at that time.[[25]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn25" \o ")

The reforms carried out by President Fuad Chehab and President Charles Helou stayed within the confessional power-sharing framework. It has to be made clear that the application of a new fifty-fifty formula to the distribution of public posts between Muslims and Christians only reinforced the sectarian nature of the system.

Lebanon enjoyed relative stability and an impressive economic growth in the late fifties and most of the sixties, and the rate of growth in real terms averaged between six and seven percent per annum.[[26]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn26" \o ") Lebanon during this period was not affected directly by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it benefited economically from its financial institutions and commercial roles as intermediary between the Arab countries and the international markets. The rapid economic growth resulted in uneven social and regional development. In the late 1960’s, especially after the war of 1967, these internal developments coupled with regional pressure began to adversely affect Lebanon’s stability and the power-balancing among its communities. The socially oriented movements strengthened class solidarity and introduced class identities that challenged religious identities, but the development of this pattern was soonest aborted by the outbreak of hostilities between the Army and the Palestinian resistance backed by the National Movement parties led by Kamal Jumblatt. The outbreak of the Civil War in April 1975 quickly reaffirmed the sectarian old divisions and identity traditional patterns.[[27]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn27" \o ")

The polarization into two broad camps intensified the political crisis of the system. Kamal Jumblatt formed and led the progressive and more sectarian front known as the ‘National Movement’ which allied itself with the Palestinian resistance. The Christian Conservative forces lead by the Kataeb Party and later on by the Lebanese Front formed the opposing front. The Lebanese Front rejected all the reforms proposed by the Lebanese National Movement and advocated an alternative plan that aimed to preserve the status quo, or to replace it with wide political decentralization leading to federalism. With pressures exercised by the Palestinian Resistance, the conflict was complicated and the vulnerable political system could not withstand such pressures, and it became harder to achieve a new political compromise.

During the period of 1976 to 1982, President Elias Sarkis undertook several initiatives to find a negotiated settlement to the conflict, but none succeeded.

The Israeli invasion of 1982 dealt a staggering blow to the Palestinians and the Lebanese National Movement and dramatically strengthened the Kataeb and the Lebanese Front. These developments resulted in the election of Bashir Gemayel as President. Bashir was assassinated soon after his election, and his brother Amin was hastily elected as President.

In the wake of the Israeli invasion, American involvement in Lebanon grew and aimed mainly at brokering a quick withdrawal agreement between Israel and Lebanon, as a first step to a fuller peace treaty between the two countries. However, in 1984, the Israeli new order in Lebanon collapsed, and the agreement between Israel and Lebanon initiated on May 17, 1984 ran into strong opposition from Syria and was not ratified by the Lebanese President and was soon abrogated by the Lebanese government. The Israeli troops began their withdrawal from most of Lebanese territories, keeping a border strip south of the Litani River under occupation.

The Lebanese government turned away from Israel and the US to fall gradually under Syrian hegemony.

**Two Governments and Two Wars**

All the attempts to broker a settlement among the Lebanese had failed, and a state of political paralysis prevailed in Lebanon between 1986 and the end of President Amin Gemayel’s term of office on September 23, 1988. In fact, Prime Minister Rashid Karami tendered his resignation as Prime Minister, and soon, thereafter, was assassinated on June 1, 1987, and Salim Al-Hoss replaced Karami in leading the caretaker government.

The failure to elect a new president at the end of Gemayel’s term led to a political vacuum that threatened the unity of the country. Gemayel, in a hasty step, appointed Michel Aoun, the Commander of the Army, as the head of an interim government. The authority was now divided between two governments: the Cabinet of Salim Al-Hoss ruling over most of Lebanon, and the authority of the Aoun Cabinet that was limited to the predominantly Christian areas of East Beirut and Mount Lebanon.

The development of a faction within the military led by Michel Aoun was supported by some social and political forces intensified the crisis. When Aoun reached power, this faction was already convinced that the solution to the problem should come through the military authority. General Aoun exploited the popular mood which was against both the militia led by Samir Geagea and the political traditional establishment that was held responsible for the disintegration of the country.

On March 14, 1989, Aoun exploited these new political developments to declare his ‘war of liberation’ against the Syrian troops. This war had devastating consequences; the areas under Aoun’s authority were besieged and devastated by battles, causing massive emigration of the population of these areas.

On January 30, 1990, another war broke out, this time between Aoun’s troops and the Lebanese Forces led by Samir Geagea. The result of inter-Maronite conflict was indecisive, and it eroded the capacities of both camps. Another war then broke out between the two Shiite factions Amal and Hezbollah in the South and in southern suburbs of Beirut.

These dramatic internal changes coincided with developments on the regional and international levels that also favored a political settlement of the multi-layered conflict. In fact, the intervention of Iraq in the Lebanese war, backing General Aoun increased the risks of a Syrian-Iraqi war in Lebanon. Therefore, the Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, held a summit meeting in Casablanca and formed a tripartite committee composed of King Fahed of Saudi Arabia, King Hassan of Morocco, and President Shazli ben Jedid of Algeria to take the necessary steps to end the Lebanese crisis[[28]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn28" \o ").

The United States was also interested in curtailing the Lebanese crisis so as not to derail the new efforts to negotiate a peace settlement and end the Arab-Israeli conflict.

After the end of the ‘cold war’ and the collapse of the Soviet Union, American influence was greater at the regional level. At the same time it became a clear US interest to contain Iraq after the invasion of Kuwait, as well as to consolidate its relations with Syria. The US supported the Arab initiative in Lebanon which led to the Taif negotiations[[29]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn29" \o ") and lent its special support top both the Arab committee and to Syria for arriving at a successful solution.

**The Taif Agreement**

From mid-1975 through 1985, several government administrations had been looking to offer possible solutions for the crisis: President Frangieh (February 1976) and President Sarkis (1980). Later, the dialogue meetings of Geneva (1983) and Lausanne (1984) as well as various ministerial committees outlined some of the basic principles for a solution, but without reaching much full accord.

The process for a fin al solution began with the formation of a committee by the Arab League Council in 1989. The committee convoked the two principle ministers, SalimAl-Hoss and Michel Aoun, along with the speaker of the parliament Hussein Al-Hussaini, to a meeting in Tunis at the en d of January 1989 to discuss a project for a national accord[[30]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn30" \o ").

In May, the Arab summit at Casablanca appointed a committee of three heads of state – Morocco, Saudi Arabia, and Algeria – to refine the proposed accord and arrange for a meeting outside of Lebanon for all surviving members of parliament (62 out of 99) to approve the text. The committee of three announced its resignation on August 2, 1989 because of Syria’s refusal to accept security arrangements leading to the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon. An amended text was prepared with the United States insistence, and the meeting of Lebanese deputies was held in Taif in September 1989 and approved the agreement which served as a basis for a new constitution[[31]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn31" \o ").

The National Accord document, or the Taif Agreement as it came to be known, constituted the basis of a process of reconciliation among Lebanese, with the effective support of Syria, the Arab countries and the international community[[32]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn32" \o ").

The Taif Agreement constituted a compromise among Lebanese deputies, political groups and parties, militias and religious leaders. It tackled many essential points pertaining to the political structure of the state, to the identity and to the sovereignty of the state. The Taif Agreement was a package deal; it served as a formula to end the war by separating the internal aspects of the conflict from its regional dynamics. The formula would also serve to regain a degree of stability in order to rebuild the national institution, resuscitate the economy and rebuild its cities and infrastructure.

The Agreement is divided into three parts: first, general principles and political reforms; second, extending Lebanese sovereignty over all the territory; and third, liberating South Lebanon from Israeli occupation.

The political reforms placed the executive power in the council of ministers. The President could preside at the council but without the right to vote. He would name the prime minister based on consultations with the speaker of the chamber of deputies. The chamber was enlarged to 108 members (the number was later increased to 128). The term of the speaker of the chamber was made for four years. Although the chamber maintains its communitarian character, this was said to be provisional.

There was a provision to create a senate following the seating of the first chamber elected on a national, non-sectarian basis. All posts of the civil service except those of the first class were to be granted on the basis of competence, not on religious affiliation. First class jobs were to be distributed equally between Muslims and Christians.

The analysis made by Joseph Maila sums up well the Taif philosophy: “The communitarian point of view dominating Taif appears to have invented the logic of institutions. In 1926, Lebanon was given political structures dictated by a coherent constitutional philosophy. The constitution and the institutions put in place were also adapted to its communitarian composition. In 1989, at Taif, it was communitarian inspiration which dominated in reshaping the institutions. The institutions were no more than the tokens of a communitarian setting dressed up as constitutional instances. At Taif the community representatives went about constitutional reforms in the manner of lords redistributing fiefs, rather than seeing to the contraction of communitarian rights, they set themselves to settling the communitarian boundaries of the institutions[[33]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn33" \o ").

Other reforms proposed included administrative decentralization, a supreme court for judging presidents and ministers, a constitutional council, and a council for economic and social developments. In Lebanon the Agreement was opposed by Michel Aoun and the Christian opinion was divided.

Although the Agreement stated that the abolition of confessionalism was a national goal, no specific deadline or time table was provided for its actualization.

Confessional balance and confessional representation predominate in the new constitution; moreover, confessionalism is reproduced and further institutionalized. It is worth noting here that since 1943, political confessionalism has been considered a temporary arrangement that should be abolished as soon as possible. In Lebanon, transforming the provisional decisions into permanent ones has become a tradition, reaffirmed most recently with the Taif Agreement[[34]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn34" \o ").

The Agreement resulted in a reproduction of the Lebanese confessional state under a new formula. Sectarian balance and sectarian participation replaced one-sect hegemony

The most alarming consequence of the implementation of the Agreement has been the intensification of confessional conflicts and divisions leading to the paralysis of the political and administrative authorities. The Lebanese state in the post-Taif period has been arbitrarily controlled by contradictory and conflicting communities and other socio-political dynamics.

**Assessing Lebanese Pluralism**

With resident population of approximately 65% Muslims and 35% Christians and with the two faiths further divided into several sectarian groups in an area of the Middle East where religion has been an important factor in the overall social interplay, Lebanon has had to cope with communal competition and conflicts since its independence until now. Lebanon’s political institutions give more explicit recognition to the primacy of parochial loyalties than, perhaps, any other political system. Before going into assessing the Lebanese system with all its communal diversity and political interplay, one should talk of communalism and plural societies as well as of the equilibrium model of pluralism versus the conflict model resulting from cultural diversity.

**Communalism and Plural Societies**

Communalism, the over-riding attachment to group sharing, inherited bonds based on religious, ethnic descent, language, race, or regional origins, rests on the foundation of man’s need for identity and belonging. This quest for community to confer social meaning seems to be rooted in human nature. Within the context of a national political system (such as Lebanon), the existence of strong communal attachment means that the primary loyalty of citizens is focused on constituent sub-groups, and, whenever there is a conflict of interest between particular groups and the national society, members have always supported the group to which they belong. Moreover, the tendency to perceive others who do not partake of the same background as ‘outsiders’ rather than ‘fellow citizens’ reduces the inclination of any community to moderate its demands. Such an attitude Increases the strains on the whole social and political systems[[35]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn35" \o ").

The relative lack of concern with the commitment to shared membership in the society often weakens the ability of the government to impose a national perspective in the resolution of problems. The communally fragmented or plural societies cannot easily compensate for the deep divisions through vigorous political actions.

Although a society suffering from communal divisions differs from more integrated systems, few of the independent states currently grappling with communalism fit the most popular typologies of fragmented or plural societies. The multiple affiliations could either, optimistically, produce a democratic equilibrium, or, pessimistically, assume that absence of a homogeneous culture produces conflicts and dominations by a minority.

**Equilibrium versus Conflict**

The equilibrium model of pluralism derives from an idealization of the American experience in which cross-cutting loyalties and multiple affiliations moderate demands and create a form of democratic integration through the fluid interplay of political interests. However, communally divided societies rarely manifest a political consensus which underlies the equilibrium model. The imbalance in the attachment to communal groups precludes other associations from adequately countervailing the influence of communalism. Furthermore, in many communally oriented societies, cleavages reinforce, rather than counter-balance, each other. Unequal access to the benefits of modernization and differences among groups in their receptivity to innovations have frequently created major disparities in their level of development. In cases where a group is economically disadvantaged, the advancement of a particular individual may be more dependent group action than on individual initiative, thereby strengthening communal bonds.

In the conflict model as proposed by M.G. Smith, cultural diversity and value variances preclude any form of cooperation or shared activities. With the total absence of common institutions, only political domination by a cultural minority can hold the society together. The pre-conditions for Smith’s model – a rigid hierarchical ordering of groups, the lack of any cross-cutting associations, and a closed political system – do not inhere in most communally divided societies[[36]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn36" \o ").

As a consequence, there is a need to revise these somewhat extreme models of the manner in which communal groups interact. To do so, it seemed advantageous to study one of the most prevalent forms of communalism, or sectarianism, existing in Lebanon.

Both the equilibrium and conflict models of pluralism consider the existence of cross-cutting relationships and ties – a critical variable. In the equilibrium model provides the integrative mechanism which holds the society together. In the conflict model, the presumed total absence of any shared institutions dooms the society to the imposition of authoritarian controls by a minority.

To correct such an inclination, the Lebanese model seemed to have adopted Arend Lijphart’s assumptions about cross-cutting loyalties. He suggested that in a society with deep, mutually reinforcing cleavages, social cleavages, self-containment, and mutual isolation can be more beneficial for stability and democracy than a high incident of overlapping affiliation. The essential formulation is the question related to elite cooperation. In a communally fragmented society, cooperation at the elite level may compensate for the weakness of countervailing loyalties in the masses[[37]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftn37" \o ").

Analysts often consider Lebanon to be a classic case of the problems brought on by politicized pluralism. Despite all of this, the Lebanese have developed more of a will to live together and they have been able to put aside their conflicts through their social and political fluidity in what has become known as the Lebanese consensual, democratic approach.

**The Adequacy of the Confessional System**

Given the depth of inter-community suspicions at the time of independence, one of the most remarkable aspects of post-independence is the ability of Lebanese to reconcile after every crisis that has threatened the social and political equilibrium. Despite the political issues that have divided public opinion along confessional lines in 1958 and again in 1975 that had opened the way for inter-communal fighting, Lebanon remained a unified nation. Although the political system may not have aggressively promoted national integration, it has provided a context in which national consciousness has emerged; inter-community cooperation has increased and political values have begun to flourish and to converge.

The strength of the Lebanese political system derives from more than a mere balance of power or a mathematical formula for equitable distribution of political and civil service posts among the various communities. Complex patterns of community inter-action and accommodation are evident in every aspect of human activity.

The Lebanese political system under the Ta’if Accord calls for close consultation and cooperation between the President, the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Parliament for restraint and reconciliation in all matters that could provoke confessional discord or conflict. The Cabinet of Ministers, where all communities are represented, remains the sole and only source for national decision making.

In addition to the balance in the political system, two other important factors have contributed to the promotion of inter-community accommodation. The first factor is the character of Lebanon’s confessional pluralism. The balance in power and not in size of the two large religious communities makes it difficult for either to impose its will on the other. The second factor is that each of the two major groups is sub-divided into smaller confessional communities which are clearly differentiated from each other, not only in terms of theology and religious institutions, but often in political orientation and interests as well. Lebanon is a nation of minorities rather than merely the combination of two major monolithic blocks. As former President Charles Helou wrote in the newspaper “Le Jour” on November 28, 1941, “In a country like ours, made up of minorities which are almost equal, and equally jealous of their rights, where no community can pretend to constitute an oppressive majority, where there is no possibility of a dictatorship – the only possible peace is a consensual peace, founded on understanding and cooperation and on preserving the national equilibrium.”

Such systems oriented largely to maintaining an equilibrium among pluralistic communities is not well adapted to practice a clear and decided foreign policy or to adopt an effective policy of national defense or to control a unified educational system. A large number of the schools are under semi-autonomous control of the religious communities. Even administrative reform cannot easily proceed when it is necessary to respect personnel quotas that reflect confessional composition of the population. Let me add that at on many occasions, the government search for consensus can create more problems than it resolves.

**The Social Framework**

It is essential to understand that the Lebanese government officially recognizes eighteen different sects and they constitute the components of the social and political systems. Theological differences count for much less than the social labels associated with membership. In fact, most Lebanese would be hard pressed to delineate the major dogmas distinguishing one sect from another. Thus, a decline in religiosity and an increasing secular orientation would not necessarily decrease the role of sects in the social and political life.

Nevertheless, in discussing life styles and patterns of socialization, it is important to note that all Lebanese, irrespective of sectarian affiliation, partake of certain fundamental features of Arab culture – a culture that owes much to Islam, but which is not exclusively Muslim. Moreover, all Lebanese (including the Armenians) speak Arabic. In spite of the religious cleavage between them, there is no difference in the culture of a Christian villager with that of a Moslem villager.

Contemporary patterns of social relations result from a complex inter-play of historical, cultural, institutional, and economic factors.

Lebanon opened its gates as a sanctuary of religious freedom for many persecuted minorities. The existence of eighteen sects attests to the diversity of groups that took advantage of the freedom offered to them to practice their faiths in peace. Charles Malek, former President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, expressed the uniqueness of Lebanon when he asserted, “Here and only here can a Christian feel as free as in Bonn as in Boston and a Muslim is absolutely free as in Karachi and Mecca.” For the Lebanese this tolerance constitutes an integral element in the Lebanese system and represents its greatest accomplishment and contribution to the international society.

A crucial, special synod for Lebanon called for Lebanon by Pope John Paul II for Lebanon and held in the Vatican in 1995 demonstrated the Vatican’s binding commitment to Lebanon as the home of free Christianity in the Middle East. The official statement that was issued was nothing less than revolutionary in recognizing Lebanon as a land of co-existence for Muslims and Christians. It has for the first time used the technical terms of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism to describe Lebanon’s social diversity. It has also employed the term consensual democracy to point the way towards eventual political solution using power sharing rather than a federal formula.

**Sectarianism and Politics**

In a political system whose most fundamental guiding principle is that of maintaining equilibrium among the various communities, checks and balances are all pervasive. The president assumes the role of the final arbiter among the various communities and political dynamics. To be successful, he must work closely with the prime minister and the speaker of parliament. He must also collaborate with the cabinet and the parliament; therefore, the president holds frequent meeting and broad consultations to make sure that his policies will have inter-confessional backing. In playing his role, the president tries to give the impression of being above controversy and partisanship in politics. The National Pact reached in Ta’if allocates the presidency to the Maronites, while the prime minister is a Sunni and the speaker is a Shiite.

One of the most important aspects of the Cabinet of Ministers formation is centered on achieving proportional representation of the confessional communities. The Constitution requires that the country’s various confessional communities be equitably represented without specifying a formula for proportional representation.

In a nation rent by deep pluralistic divisions, a strong government bureaucracy can play at least two critical roles in contributing to national cohesion and the viability of the state. First, through sheer effectiveness, a government apparatus of competent officials can conduct government business in a manner that cushions communal conflict among politicians. Second, a large central bureaucracy composed of a broad cross-section of the population can bring representatives of all groups into intimate and continuous contact. In working together, they can create among themselves bonds of trust and mutuality and thereby constitute the needed center for national orientation. This is what President Fuad Chehab tried to do during his term between 1958 and 1964. Unfortunately, the Lebanese bureaucracy has achieved such results only in limited measure.

Moreover, political intervention in the bureaucratic process inhibited the development of strong bureaucracy and good professional ethics. Poor quality of personnel appointed by politicians undermines effectiveness and the development of the appropriate attitudes. Finally, selection of personnel on the basis of confessional quotas tended to reinforce confessional identities rather than promote a national perspective.

One final factor influencing the dynamics of political activity in Lebanon is the role played by foreign governments, both Arab and non-Arab. Hardly a political event occurs in Lebanon that is not influenced by foreign pressure.

**Conclusion**

We cannot find a simple answer to the question of the basis of political behavior in Lebanon. Confessional factors affect political configurations in a variety of ways, but sectarian considerations also inter-play with inter-community political cooperation and intra-community political competition. Moreover, interests deriving from family needs, regional demands, and social-economic pressures also motivate political actors. In addition, various groups look to outside powers to seek support and influence causing more complication in achieving the national equilibrium. The relative importance accorded to these factors depends upon the issue under consideration, the circumstances and the political interests of the actors involved; however, confessional factors remain clearly predominant.

The Taif Agreement constitutes a step forward, but it does not provide a basis for a real democratic system. The survival and the political and social stability will depend on whether the Lebanese communities can break with its history and to seek building a system focusing on the citizens’ rights rather than on community shares and rights. Lebanon needs and merits a different vision and a different political philosophy.

At the end of this analysis, it is logical to ask a fundamental question: Should Lebanon be secularized only at the political level, or should the secularization also reach the social level? The Druze as they were represented by Kamal Jumblatt did not object to the total secularization, although their main insistence was on political secularization. For the Muslims, however, total secularization, political and social, was out of the question. The reason for this is that the matters of personal status involving marriage, divorce and inheritance were left to the religious courts of the different religious sects that were officially recognized as a part of the Lebanese judiciary. While these matters regarding personal status remained outside the realm of the civil laws, each citizen had to belong by law to one of the recognized religious communities. This situation meant that every Lebanese citizen was officially recognized as having two identities – one national and the other confessional. Such realities will remain hard to change and the Lebanese society is doomed to remain divided along confessional lines for many decades to come.

[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref1" \o ")-   Pierre Rondot, **«Les Institutions Politiques du Liban»,** Paris, Institut d’Orient Contemporain, 1947, p. 21.

[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref2" \o ")-   David R. Smock and Audrey C. Smock, **«The Politics of Pluralism»***,*Elsevier, New York/Oxford/Amsterdam, p.14.

[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref3" \o ")-   Rondot, p.21.

[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref4" \o ")-   Smock and Smock, p.29.

[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref5" \o ")-   Albert H. Hurani, **«Race, Religion, and the Nation State in the Near East»***,*The Hague, Monton, 1970, p. 4.

[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref6" \o ")-   Smock and Smock, p. 29.

[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref7" \o ")-   Within the Maronite province 56% were Maronites, 8% Druze, 19% Greek Catholic and 17% Greek Orthodox. Within the Druze Province 18% were Druze, 47% were Maronites, 21% Greek Catholics, and 14% Greek Orthodox.

[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref8" \o ")-   Smock and Smock, p. 31.

[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref9" \o ")-   Ibid.

[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref10" \o ")-  Malcom Kerr, **«Lebanon in the Last Years of Feudalism 1840-1868»***,*American University of Beirut, Beirut, 1959.

[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref11" \o ")-  Smock and Smock, p. 33.

[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref12" \o ")-  As part of the effort, the Maronite Patriarch brought Maronite leaders in 1841 and had them pledge their support for the political struggle in which the Maronite church felt itself-engaged. (Smock and Smock, 32-33.)

[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref13" \o ")-  Noel Spencer, **«The Role of the Maronite Patriarch in Lebanon From 1840 to Present»***,*Beirut, American University of Beirut, 1963.

[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref14" \o ")-  Iliya Harik, **«Man Yahkum Lubnan (Who Rules Lebanon)»,** Al-Nahar, Beirut, 1972.

[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref15" \o ")-  Albert Hurani, **«Lebanon from Feudalism to Modern State»**, Middle Eastern Studies, April 1966, p. 259.

[[16]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref16" \o ")-  Smock and Smock, p. 35.

[[17]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref17" \o ")-  Ibid, p. 37.

[[18]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref18" \o ")-  These relations between Russia and the Greek Orthodox Community persisted even after the 1917 Revolution. (Smock and Smock, p. 40.)

[[19]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref19" \o ")-  Smock and Smock, p. 40.

[[20]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study" \l "_ftnref20" \o ")-  CM Andrew and Kanya Forstner, **«France Overseas: The Climax of French Imperial Expansion, 1914-1924»,** Stanford California, 1981, pp.174-175.

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**التعددية الثقافية والديموقراطية دراسة للحالة اللبنانية**

العديد من البلدان الصناعية والنامية، جزء منها قبل بداية القرن الواحد والعشرين والجزء الأكبر منها بعد بدايته، عاشت حالات من التوتر وعدم الاستقرار بسبب المطالب التنافسية للمجتمعات. الارتباطات الوثيقة بالمجتمعات الضيقة ضمن الدولة تعكس اختلافات دينية وإثنية ولغوية ومناطقية وعرقية أصبحت مراجع اكثر بروزاً في العملية السياسية.  
من الناحية الأفلاطونية النظرية قد يعكس التعدد الثقافي على المستوى الاجتماعي تغيرات نفسية لدى أفراد المجتمع الديموقراطي الذي يعتنق عدة ثقافات.  
بعد حوالي مئتي عام من النضال خاضتهم حركة الحقوق المدنية، نال التعدد الثقافي الاعتراف الاجتماعي الذي طال انتظاره وأصبح الوريث الشرعي للمثل الدستورية التي أصبحت بشكل قانوني جزءاً من ديموقراطية الولايات المتحدة.  
غير أن التعدد الثقافي يواجه في أماكن أخرى مشاكل مهمة وإحدى النقاط الجدلية المطروحة هي أن التعرف إلى ثقافات أخرى لا يضمن أن يبدأ الناس بتقدير هذه الثقافات بدلاً من كرهها.  
أما بعض المنظّرين الآخرين يعتبرون أن التعدد الثقافي قد يعزز التمييز العنصري ويخنق حرية التعبير وقد يهدد حتى الديموقراطية الليبرالية.  
من الصعب تبنّي ترجمة واضحة للتعدد الثقافي وللديموقراطية في الدول الإسلامية حيث لم تجد الديموقراطية الليبرالية حتى الآن أرضاً خصبة.  
مع ذلك من الخطأ التحدث عن فشل حركة التعدد الثقافي في وجه النزاعات الحالية والاضطرابات التي أحدثها المتعصبون والإسلاميون وكذلك من الخطأ المطالبة بإنهاء التعايش السلمي بين الأكثرية الإسلامية والاقليات الأخرى.  
من غير المقبول التضحية بالديموقراطية لأنه يجب الإقرار بأن الديموقراطية تواجه تحديات دائمة يقودها أعداء الديموقراطية في الدول الإسلامية. يجب عدم التضحية بالمجتمع المتعدد ثقافياً لمجرد أن أعداء التعدد الثقافي يصوّبون نيرانهم عليه. المجتمع الديموقراطي والمتعدد ثقافياً يعتمد على ثقافة سياسية داعمة. وفي المجتمعات الإسلامية يجب خلق حالات دعم جديدة من خلال جهود التثقيف السياسي.  
من المهم أن نشير إلى أن لبنان، الذي يستخدمه الباحث كمثال، اختبر عقبات النزاعات المتكررة بين مكوناته حيث تشكل المجموعات الدينية فيه القوى السياسية الأساسية في النظام السياسي.  
كما يشير الباحث إلى مختلف المراحل في تاريخ لبنان من العهد العثماني وصولاً إلى إتفاق الطائف الذي شكّل خطوة إلى الأمام تعطي المواطن اللبناني رسمياً وبحسب القانون هويتين الأولى وطنية والأخرى طائفية .

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/multiculturalism-and-democracy-lebanon-case-study#sthash.KuxHfiCN.dpuf