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# Municipal Service Delivery, Stability, Social Cohesion and Legitimacy in Lebanon

## An analytical literature review

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# Summary

Lebanon hosts the largest refugee population per capita in the world. It has accepted more than a million Syrian refugees since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, even though it is home to only four million Lebanese. The international response to the crisis initially only focused on the needs of Syrian refugees. It has more recently started to also address those of Lebanese host communities, in part through municipal service delivery programmes that aim to improve social cohesion, state legitimacy and, as a result, stability.

This analytical literature review explores some of the assumptions behind this international assistance: whether and how the provision of services at the municipal level contributes to social cohesion and/or legitimacy in Lebanon (at both municipal and higher levels of state authority), and the effect of these on social stability. It also examines whether and how those linkages are affected by the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis.

## Social cohesion

Lebanon is made up of 18 officially recognised religious sects, none of which constitute a majority. Increasing social cohesion at a national level has largely been understood as establishing ‘balance’ among Lebanon’s dominant sects and promoting coexistence rather than unity among them. However, the power-sharing political system has resulted in neither social cohesion nor even political stability. It has granted enduring power to local and confessional elites.

Other social divisions in Lebanon are also important—those based on socioeconomic status, region, nationality and gender. Many of these cleavages overlap and reinforce each other.

Most local communities are homogenous from a confessional point of view, with the exception of larger municipalities and Beirut. Limited data exist on the role of municipalities in promoting or undermining social cohesion through service delivery, including in relation to other (non-confessional) cleavages.

National-level service provision appears to be of greater potential significance for social cohesion. This is because municipalities generally provide more marginal services—such as street cleaning, lighting, sewerage and water—and their financial resources and capacity are constrained by higher levels of government. However, the central state has done little to alleviate poverty and extreme regional disparities. On the contrary, it has strengthened socioeconomic differences. It has enabled a major role for the private sector, and for the sectarian and politically-based service delivery that reinforces religious identity as a primary social cleavage. As long as the central state remains firmly divided along confessional lines and the political class divided into pro- and anti-Syrian regime factions, progress on social cohesion will be limited.

## State legitimacy

Legitimacy concerns the different ways in which citizens accept public authorities’ right to rule. It can be based on ‘processes’, such as democratic elections; on other factors including patronage, tradition or ideas; or on ‘performance’. Performance legitimacy can sometimes be derived from service delivery, depending for example on people’s expectations.

Lebanon’s power-sharing political system has resulted in the predominance of a narrow form of patronage- and sectarian-based legitimacy. Political support is exchanged for specific benefits. These include access to services, through political parties (which often draw most of their support from particular sectarian groups) or religious charities. Patronage systems undermine national stability, as they enhance sectarian or political divisions and contrive to keep the state weak, corruption endemic and personalised networks strong. At the local level, municipal elections provide a possible source of ‘process’-based legitimacy, but they are largely not seen as a channel of accountability nor of representation. Their potential is limited

in part by the fact that the voter registry is based on a citizen's village or city of origin rather than of residence.

Lebanese citizens have very low expectations of state service delivery. Few studies specifically look at state or municipal legitimacy. Those that do so measure legitimacy in different ways, making an overall assessment difficult. The reviewed evidence suggests the central state and municipalities do not derive 'performance-based' legitimacy from delivering services for all, and provide few opportunities for 'process-based' legitimacy, such as through participation mechanisms. However, civil society protests are challenging state performance on specific service delivery issues, such as rubbish collection in Beirut.

## The effects of the refugee crisis

There have been fears that the influx of Syrian refugees, 95% of whom are estimated to be Sunni, would upset the delicate religious balance on which the national power-sharing political system is based. Yet this influx does not generally appear to be a source of local sectarian tensions, although it has increased regional and socioeconomic tensions, and, together with other factors, may have contributed to the rise of radicalisation in Sunni border areas. Historically neglected regions, the Bekaa and the North, collectively host nearly 60% of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon, and the population increase has put more pressure on education, health, water and electricity services. However, some studies find that insecurity and competition over jobs, rather than access to services, are the main source of tension between Lebanese host communities and refugees.

Evidence about the effect of greater municipal service provision on social cohesion is mixed. One study in particular (Mercy Corps 2015) finds that direct interventions that have increased interaction through social or economic activities between Syrians and Lebanese have improved community relations more than service delivery or local governance improvements alone.

The Lebanese central state, and in some instances municipalities, have largely hindered social cohesion between host communities and refugees. The introduction of local curfews in at least 70 municipalities and new restrictions on visas and employment make Syrians more vulnerable to abuse. They limit the interaction of Syrians and Lebanese. Increasing municipal service delivery may stop pre-existing socioeconomic and regional inequalities deepening, but is unlikely to suffice to alleviate tensions between host populations and refugees without effort to promote Lebanese–Syrian interaction.

The Lebanese government failed to respond effectively to the refugee intake, initially leaving municipalities and aid organisations to meet the most pressing needs. This local approach probably further undermined people's already low trust in national authorities, and has reinforced the patronage- and sectarian-based legitimacy prevalent in Lebanon. Refugees prefer to rely on host communities (e.g. landowners, employers, political actors). They have low satisfaction and trust in central and municipal government, and even international aid, performance and processes.

The refugee crisis has given municipalities an opportunity to demonstrate their willingness and ability to respond to local needs. Yet if the state is not able—either centrally or through municipalities—to deliver on the increased expectations aid may have generated, and if it does not improve its standing in the eyes of refugees, Lebanon could be further destabilised.

## Key evidence gaps

More evidence is needed on the following issues:

- *How social cohesion and legitimacy are understood by host communities, refugees, municipal authorities and policy-makers:* few studies look at local elected officials' representativeness, accountability and responsiveness, or what leads to changes in citizens' perceptions, beliefs and behaviours.

- *Links between service delivery, social cohesion and municipal legitimacy:* further studies on successful municipal service delivery would be needed to assess its potential influence on local social cohesion and state legitimacy.
- *International funding for refugees and host communities:* more data and transparency are needed to assess how external interventions define and support social cohesion, legitimacy and stability, and potential negative unintended impacts.

## Implications for international assistance

This review provides cautionary evidence. External assistance should not assume that improving municipal service delivery to compensate for an absence of national response will improve social stability through either social cohesion or legitimacy.

To improve social cohesion, the limited available studies point to the need to emphasise broad participatory processes, and, particularly in the context of the current refugee crisis, interventions that increase direct interaction between Lebanese and Syrians, which service delivery may not do. National, rather than municipal, service delivery may be the better route to address country-wide social divisions, including non-religious dimensions (e.g. gender or geography).

Service delivery contributes to state legitimacy in Lebanon in limited ways. International assistance demonstrates what more municipalities could achieve with greater resources, but without systemic changes in how the central state supports municipalities, increased expectations may not be met in the medium to long term, which could lead to further instability rather than greater legitimacy. At the same time, the central state's weaknesses mean that municipalities offer space to innovate and address local challenges.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The Syrian crisis has displaced nearly half of the country's population, with over 6.5 million internally displaced and 4.8 million becoming refugees, in what has quickly become 'the world's single-largest driver of displacement' (UNHCR, 2015). The vast majority of Syrian refugees have moved to neighbouring Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan and, to a lesser extent, Iraq (UNHCR, 2016c). Relative to its population, Lebanon has taken in the largest number of Syrian refugees: over 1 million are registered, out of a Lebanese population of around 4 million (*ibid.*). This makes Lebanon the country with the largest refugee population per capita in the world.

International responses to the Syrian refugee crisis are increasingly combining humanitarian and stability objectives, not only to meet the needs of refugees but also to assist Lebanon in coping with the crisis. This includes programmes providing service delivery in those municipalities significantly affected by the influx of refugees in order to promote stability and social cohesion. However, programmes are built on a number of assumptions, which have not always been tested or for which evidence is mixed.

This analytical literature review aims to inform international assistance in Lebanon. It is a background paper for a collaborative research project on service delivery and social stability in Lebanon and Jordan led by the Developmental Leadership Program in partnership with the American University Beirut and supported by the UK Government.

This review explores whether and how provision of services at the municipal level, such as water, health or education, contributes to social cohesion and/or legitimacy in Lebanon (at both the municipal level and higher levels of state authority), and the effect of these on social stability. It also examines whether and how the ongoing refugee crisis is affecting these linkages. It focuses on municipal service provision because municipalities have been at the frontline of the refugee crisis in the absence of a coherent national response.

## 1.2 Analytical framework

This review adopts part of the UK government's definition of structural stability (DFID et al., 2011: 5), as where the political system can manage conflict and change peacefully, is resilient and flexible in the face of shocks and can evolve over time as the context changes. However, it does not adopt the normative content of that definition, which assumes authorities are representative and legitimate and human rights, rule of law, security and basic needs are provided, with economic and social opportunities open to all. Rather, it seeks to examine the extent of stability in Lebanon and how it is affected by relationships between state institutions and social groups (through the lens of legitimacy), as well as those between and within social groups (through the lens of social cohesion). Specifically, the review analyses whether and how municipal service delivery can contribute to Lebanon's stability via three routes: its impacts on social cohesion, on legitimacy, and in managing the effects of the refugee crisis.

The review tests the 'social cohesion via service delivery route' to stability. It analyses whether and how service provision in Lebanon, at both national and municipal level, has affected the dynamics of social cohesion and the extent to which new pressures exerted by the Syrian refugee crisis have changed this reality.

Social cohesion can be defined in a maximalist or minimalist manner (Shuayb, 2012). Maximalist definitions tend to emphasise the role of shared values and feelings of belonging, as well as the ultimate goal of equality. For example, the Social Cohesion Research Network in Canada defines social cohesion as the 'the ongoing process of developing a community of shared values and challenges and equal opportunity based on a sense of hope, trust and reciprocity' (Jeannotte, 1997, in Shuayb, 2012: 19). In contrast, minimalist definitions do not ascribe particular policy objectives, but rather emphasise the contextual nature of the term. Green and Janmaat (2011), for example, refer to 'the property by which whole societies, and

the individuals within them, are bound together through the action of specific attitudes, behaviours, rules and institutions which rely on consensus rather than pure coercion' (in Shuayb, 2012: 20). While maximalist definitions are often used within the policy realm, one notable minimalist definition comes from the UN Development Programme's (UNDP's) Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Index, which defines social cohesion as 'the nature of the coexistence between individuals within a given social group and the institutions that surround them' (UNDP, 2015: 15).

This review adopts a more minimalist definition of social cohesion, emphasising the contextual nature of the particular type(s) of cleavages within a given society. This is particularly appropriate in the case of Lebanon, as the current approach to social cohesion in the crisis is explicitly cross-cutting and is integrated within a variety of sector programming, ranging from water, sanitation and hygiene to local governance and conflict mitigation, all with the aim of alleviating potential sources of tension (WVI, 2016: 25). While many definitions of social cohesion include both vertical (citizens/groups and the state) and horizontal dimensions (across citizens/groups), this review focuses primarily on the horizontal, and inequalities therein, as the analysis of legitimacy focuses on these vertical dimensions and institutional factors.

The development literature sees social cohesion as particularly important for stability, given the association between social, economic and political inequalities across groups (horizontal inequalities) and violent conflict (Stewart, 2010). While religious divisions have largely been understood as Lebanon's defining societal cleavage, it is important not to ignore other dimensions when considering the effect of the Syrian refugee crisis on social cohesion.

Service delivery has the theoretical potential to contribute to greater social cohesion by addressing historical and structural inequalities and/or diminishing resource-based sources of social tension. This is often an assumption of donor programmes. Alternatively, it can exacerbate existing fault-lines of inter-group hostility and generate new sources of grievance, if it reinforces or aggravates existing inequalities and/or creates new fault-lines (or is perceived to) (Stewart, 2010). A recent literature review concluded that 'the assumed positive contribution of equitable service delivery to social cohesion does not appear to have a strong basis in evidence' (Combaz & McLaughlin, 2016: 2). In addition, there is no evidence-based consensus on the impact of decentralisation on social cohesion and conflict (Scott, 2009:15).

We also test the 'legitimacy via service delivery' route to stability. We examine the different ways citizens accept public authorities' right to rule (based on patronage, tradition, ideas or democratic processes), comparing them with the 'performance-based' legitimacy that can be derived from service delivery. We analyse the available evidence on how and whether municipal service provision in Lebanon has contributed to improved legitimacy—of municipalities and higher levels of state authority—and the effects of the Syrian refugee crisis on these dynamics.

From a state–society perspective, stability is assumed to result from the combination of state capacity and legitimacy, where individuals' and communities' expectations are sufficiently met, creating a positive cycle of reinforcing trust and further capacity (DFID, 2010; World Bank, 2011). In its simplest form, legitimacy is about citizens' acceptance of the state's right to rule. The main sources of legitimacy include (OECD, 2010; Rocha Menocal, 2011; Rocha Menocal et al., 2016):

- *performance/outputs*: legitimacy based on the delivery of basic services or job creation that meets the expectations and needs of the public
- *processes/inputs*: legitimacy based on 'agreed rules of procedures through which the state takes binding decisions and organises people's participation' (OECD, 2010: 23). This includes the rule of law, liberal democratic representation, equal access and respect and participation in decision-making, as well as more traditional or patronage-based origins
- *ideas/ideology*: nationalism and shared culture; political ideology such as communism; and religious fundamentalism or other beliefs that make people consider the state or those in power as having the right to rule

- *international recognition*: when external actors recognise the state's sovereignty

Some sources of legitimacy combine performance and processes and are more personalised. They can challenge the legitimacy of the central state, in particular:

- clientelism and neo-patrimonialism, such as patronage systems that convey legitimacy on elites from the groups they assist as a result of the exchange of material benefits for political support. This is a very segmented and narrow form of legitimacy, which those who do not equally benefit from these patronage systems may not support
- traditional forms of legitimacy, based on non-state communal and customary institutions and authorities, with socially rooted norms of trust and reciprocity, often prevalent in rural communities at the subnational level

How to measure legitimacy is an ongoing challenge. For the purpose of this review, we consider available perception data (such as surveys on public expectations or trust) and more objective indicators (such as data on service delivery performance or political behaviours) in line with other studies (McCullough, 2015).

International assistance often assumes service delivery is a source of legitimacy, based on the performance of the state (DFID, 2010; World Bank, 2011). Recent evidence shows this is far from automatic and depends on which services are expected or provided, by whom and how (McLoughlin, 2015; Denney et al., 2015; Combaz & McLoughlin, 2016).

### 1.3 Outline and methodology

The analytical literature review is structured as follows. Section 2 focuses on the national level. It presents key social cleavages that threaten social cohesion in Lebanon, and the power-sharing agreement among confessional groups. It also identifies the main sources of national state legitimacy and how patronage systems keep the state weak. Section 3 analyses social cohesion and legitimacy at the local level, and identifies the main opportunities and constraints on municipalities, including the potential legitimacy derived from municipal elections and the challenges of interference by higher levels of state authority. Section 4 examines whether and how service delivery contributes to stability in Lebanon through two routes, strengthening state legitimacy and improving social cohesion. It begins with national provision and then examines municipalities. Section 5 then analyses the effect of the refugee crisis on social cohesion and state legitimacy. Section 6 draws the main conclusions and summarises evidence gaps.

In generating this analytical review, first an annotated bibliography of Lebanon-specific academic and grey literature was prepared (Combaz, 2016), using the Scopus academic journals database and advanced search syntax in Google, Google Books and Google Scholar. This was complemented by targeted searches based on the snowball methodology, expert recommendations and reviews of websites of international and Lebanese organisations, including those of the press, think tanks and civil society organisations. Finally, senior scholars with expertise on Lebanon conducted a peer review. Given the paucity of recent academic research on Lebanon's municipalities and the refugee crisis, there is significant use of grey literature. Where possible, we explain the methodology of the most relevant studies to show the degree of robustness of the data.

Other papers from this project include a field visit report (Rocha Menocal et al., 2016), an annotated bibliography on service delivery, legitimacy, stability and social cohesion (Combaz & McLoughlin, 2016) and a Jordan-specific analytical literature review (Shabaneh & Mang, 2016 forthcoming).

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## 2. Social cohesion and state legitimacy at the national level

This section analyses the national factors that shape the prospects of social cohesion and state legitimacy in Lebanon. It presents key social cleavages and the power-sharing agreement among confessional groups (Section 2.1). It also identifies the main sources of national state legitimacy, including those based on patronage, tradition and ideas, as well as 'process-based' legitimacy based on electoral democracy (Section 2.2). For a discussion of 'performance-based' legitimacy, see Section 4 on service delivery.

### 2.1 Social cleavages in Lebanon

This section describes the main social cleavages in Lebanon, and the power-sharing agreement between elites that provides the basis for social cohesion. Lebanon is usually described through a sectarian lens. However, religious divisions co-exist alongside at least four others: socioeconomic, regional, nationality-based (previously with Palestinians and now with Syrian refugees) and gender-based. Many of these cleavages overlap and are reinforcing.

#### Sectarian dimensions and the power-sharing system

Addressing the challenge of social cohesion has been an integral part of the definition of Lebanon's nation-state since its foundation, as a country made up of 18 officially recognised sects, none of which constitutes a majority. As prominent Lebanese historian Ussama Makdisi states (1996: 24):

From the outset, the nationalist project has been intertwined with what historian Ahmad Beydoun calls the '*innommable*', the un-utterable contradiction that has haunted Lebanon: the paradox of national unity in a multi-religious society wherein religion is inscribed as the citizen's most important public attribute stamped prominently on his or her identification and voter registration card.

Increasing social cohesion at a national level has largely been understood as establishing 'balance' among Lebanon's dominant sects and promoting coexistence rather than unity among them, commonly referred to as *aish mushtarak* (Geha, 2016: 51). The institutionalisation of these differences within the political system and the administration has emerged as a major impediment to the development of a society-wide Lebanese identity. Social cohesion in Lebanon has been described as 'strong within communities yet weak across them' with 'elite cooperation [substituting] for inter-communal social cohesion. For the time being, the Lebanese coexist but different communities do not share a common lived experience nor do they have a joint vision for the country and its future' (Cox et al., 2016: 15).

The National Pact of 1943, a brokered informal deal between leaders of the country's most powerful communities at the time, the Christian Maronites and the Muslim Sunnis, forms the basis of the post-independence manifestation of this logic. The Pact bound the nation together based on a few key principles, including (El Khazen, 1991):

- the political representation of communities based on their demographic power in the 1932 census<sup>2</sup>
- autonomy on intra-community affairs
- a 'neutrality' in foreign policy predicated on Christian acceptance of Lebanon's 'Arab face' and rejection of foreign support (notably by the French) in exchange for the recognition of an independent Lebanon by the Sunnis

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<sup>2</sup> This is the last official census conducted in Lebanon. The demographic representation was 6:5 ratio of Christian to Muslim.

The Pact was, in principle, a temporary measure. However, it granted enduring power to local and confessional elites and ‘essentially legitimated a system of patronage and a division of spoils among the elites of the new nation-state’ (Makdisi, 1996).

The outbreak of civil war in 1975 saw the final demise of this agreement and the emergence of new political elites, including militia leaders, who now co-exist alongside former feudal and older parties that survived the war. The 1989 Taif Peace Accord, the settlement document that outlined an agreement to end the civil war, legitimised and consolidated the power of these elites by reconstituting a power-sharing system. This time, equal distribution of seats in Parliament among Christians and Muslims was provided (Krayem, 1997). The top three political positions form what is often called a ‘troika’, with the president a Maronite Christian, the speaker of Parliament a Shia Muslim and the prime minister a Sunni Muslim.

The need for constant negotiations across confessional groups, and the *de facto* veto power given to opposition groups following the 2008 Doha Agreement, has created a fragile and ineffective political system. Parliament has not been able to select a president since the 2014 elections. It has extended its term without parliamentary elections twice since 2013 and has not held legislative sessions since November 2015. The Cabinet is unable to function. The government and Parliament are the least trusted institutions, according to a recent survey (only 2% and 4% of respondents respectively completely trusted them (LADE, 2015: 46)).

Geopolitical factors, such as Syria’s occupation and continued influence, wars with Israel and the Sunni/Shia rift, also explain the fragility of the political system, as regional powers associate with confessional allies inside Lebanon. These factors have often resulted in decisions being taken extra-institutionally, including through external intervention or enforcement (Zahar, 2005; Salamey, 2009: 84).

No recent official breakdown of the population by sect exists. All estimates are contentious, because they could challenge the perceived legitimacy of the political arrangement. The latest estimate, conducted in 2006 and published in the Lebanese newspaper *An-Nahar*, places the population distribution at 65% Muslim (relatively equally divided among Sunni and Shia, with a small Druze population) and approximately 35% Christian (predominantly Maronite) (Verdeil et al., 2007).

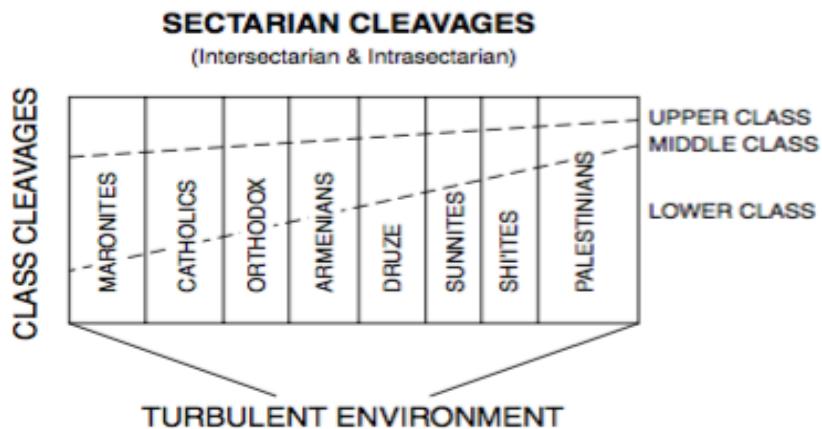
Consociationalism in the Lebanese context has proved incapable of adapting to demographic changes. Potentially higher birth rates within certain communities (Hazran, 2009), higher emigration rates among others (Johnson & Zurlo, 2014) and displacement crises such as the influx of Palestinians in 1948 (Haddad, 2000) are sources of great debate. They are considered major threats to social cohesion given their effect on the relative size of the different confessional communities on which the power-sharing agreement is based.

### Socioeconomic and regional cleavages

The emphasis on social cohesion across religious groups has also come at the expense of addressing other important social cleavages. For much of Lebanon’s history, sectarian identity has overlapped significantly with socioeconomic and political power, creating what are often referred to as reinforcing, rather than cross-cutting, cleavages. Christians dominated the upper echelons of Lebanese society to a considerable degree, particularly in the early years of the Lebanese Republic. They held the presidency and a majority of seats in Parliament, and were also the most powerful socioeconomic community (Figure 1, below).

Lebanese history is also marked by differential patterns of regional development (El Khazen, 2000: 31–50; Verdeil et al., 2007), which complicate the seemingly straightforward overlap between socioeconomic and sectarian cleavages.

**Figure 1: Class and confession in Lebanon**



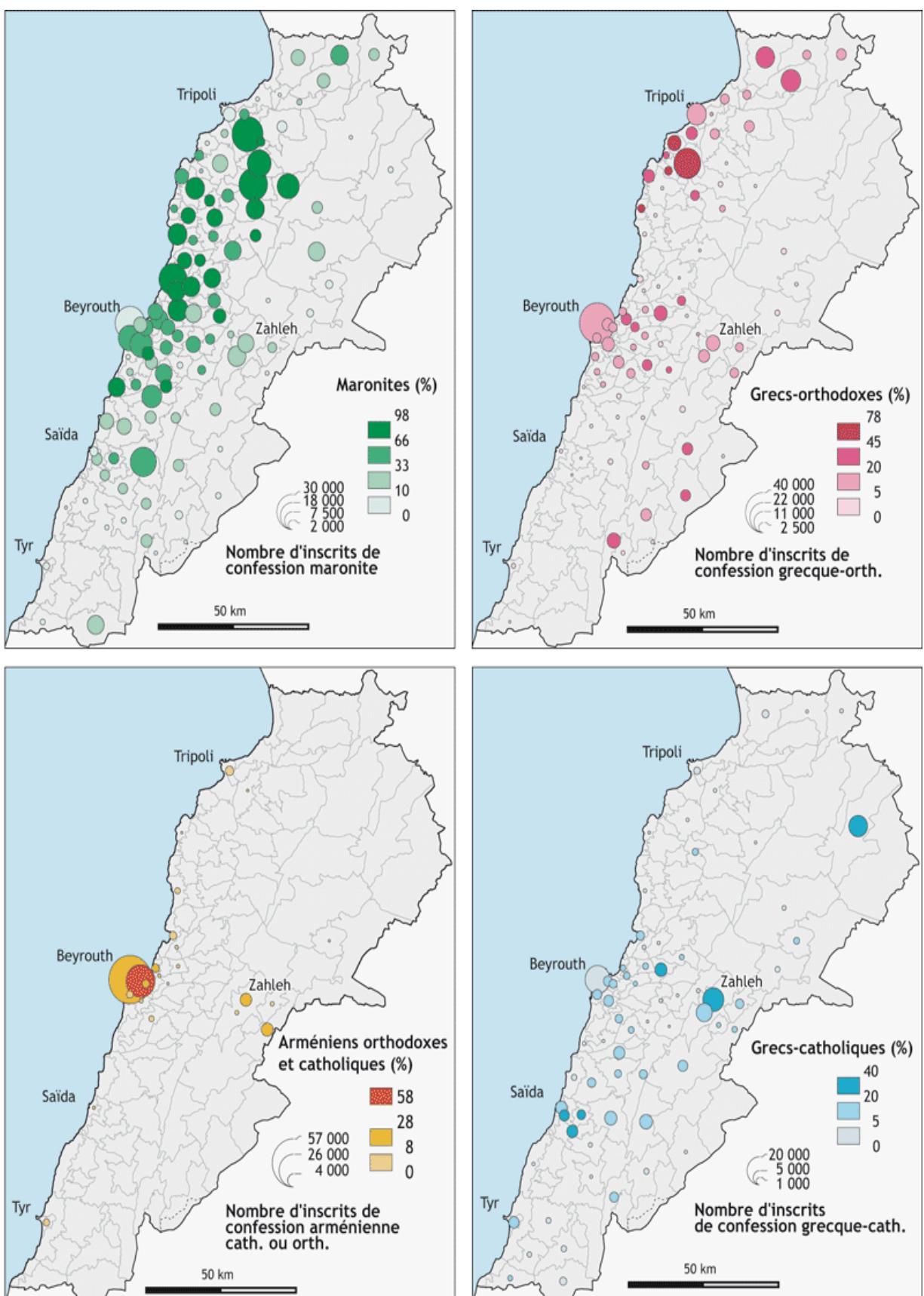
Source: Dekmejian (1978), reproduced in Farha (2012: 70).

Confessional groups are distributed differently across the country (see Maps 1 and 2). Christians are mostly spread across the western part of Lebanon; Sunni Muslims are mostly in urban areas such as Beirut or Tripoli, as well as regions such as West Bekaa, and Akkar in the North governorate. Shia Muslims dominate southern Lebanon and are also numerous in Baalbek, Hermel and parts of Beirut.

Regional disparities in socioeconomic indicators are particularly marked for Muslim communities. Akkar, in the North governorate on the Syrian border, is a majority Sunni governorate with a sizeable Christian population. It is largely considered the most marginalised region in the country, with the lowest literacy rate, the highest rate of poverty and a lack of access to services of all kinds (Mada Association, 2008).

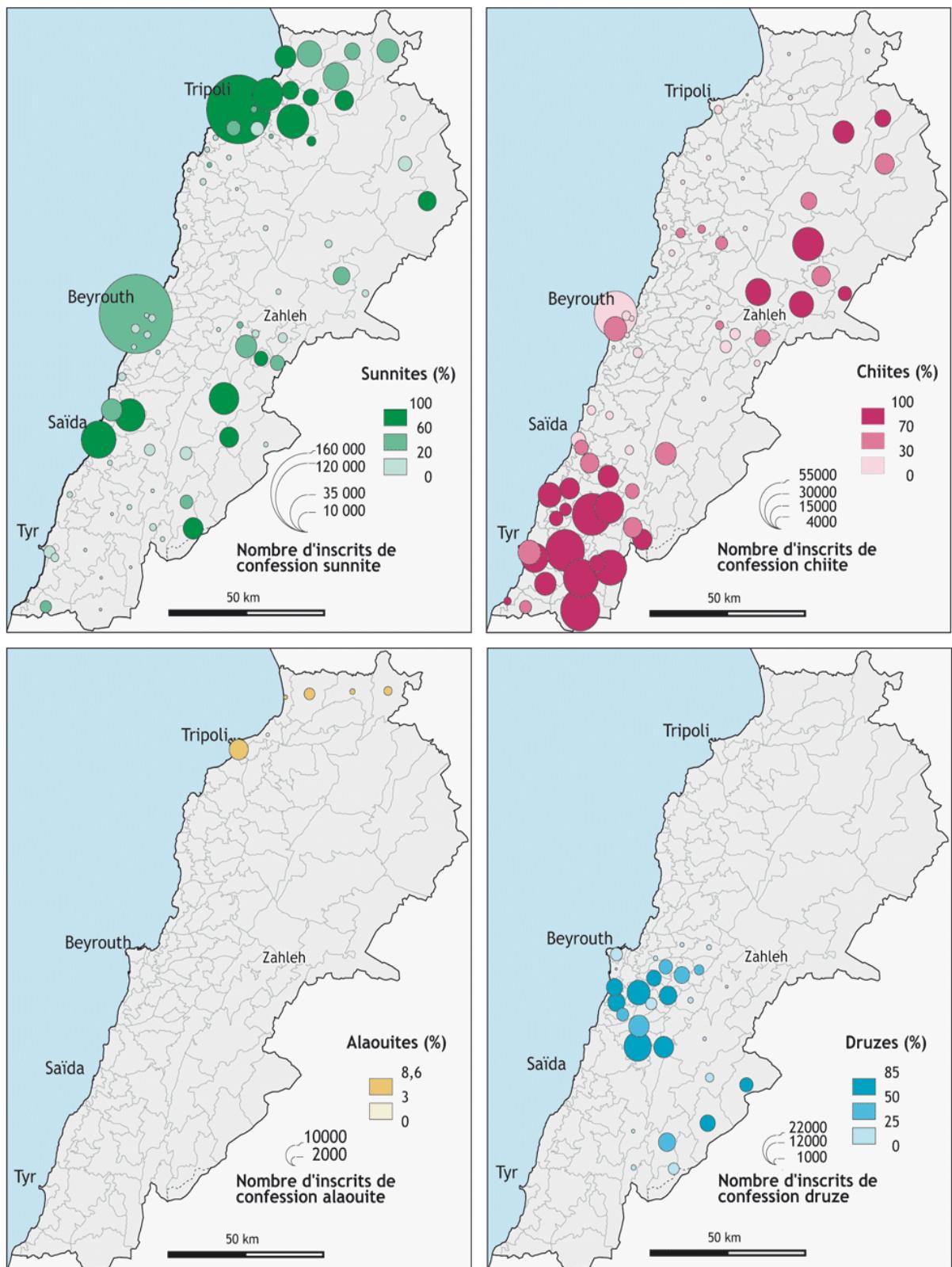
There is also a stark urban–rural divide, with nearly 60% of the population living in Beirut and other large cities. National development policies have tended to favour urban centres, particularly Beirut, and marginalise peripheral and rural areas, most notably Akkar and the Bekaa (Al-Masri, 2015). A comprehensive report on national poverty rates and inequalities, based on the latest household survey conducted in 2004/05, found that '[h]ouseholds in the North are four times more likely to be poor compared to households (with a similar set of characteristics) that reside in Beirut' (UNDP, 2008: 24).

**Map 1: Geographical distribution of Christian sects (based on 2000 electoral lists)**



Source: Verdeil et al. (2007, Figure III-22). © Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient.  
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**Map 2: Geographical distribution of Muslim sects (based on 2000 electoral lists)**



Source: Verdeil et al. (2007, Figure III-23). © Presses de l'Institut français du Proche-Orient.  
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### Nationality-based cleavages

Lebanon has a significant non-citizen population that remains structurally excluded politically, socially and economically. While Palestinians and Syrians are the most numerous and well-known of these groups, others include Iraqis, Egyptians, Sudanese, as well as other migrant worker populations, and a significant stateless population. Palestinians living in Lebanon, estimated at around 260,000–280,000, are best described as a protracted refugee population (Chaaban et al., 2016: 23). Lebanon has not ratified the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, and does not fully recognise refugee rights. Palestinian refugees, who constitute 5–7% of Lebanon's population, are seen as a particular threat to Lebanon's stability. Nearly seven decades after their initial displacement, the vast majority have not been granted citizenship and are still considered 'foreigners' under Lebanese law, in part for fear of their impact on Lebanon's social cohesion, as they would affect the religious balance.

The majority (or their families) fled Palestine in or prior to 1948 and are 'registered' as refugees by both the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the Lebanese authorities. However, a small number fall into two other legal categories, namely 'non-registered' refugees (who either left after 1948, originally settled outside of UNRWA area of operations, or did not register with UNRWA at the time, estimated at 35,000) and 'non-identified' refugees (estimated at 3,500) (Chaaban et al., 2010: 4). These different categories entitle refugees to a different set of services, all primarily administered by UNRWA.

Palestinians are among the most vulnerable in Lebanon, with two thirds considered poor or extremely poor (Chaaban et al., 2016). They are twice as likely to be poor, and four times as likely to be extremely poor, as Lebanese (Chaaban et al., 2010: xii). The majority are involved in low-status, low-skilled and insecure jobs in commerce or construction. Very few have work contracts and associated benefits, working long hours with low pay (ILO, 2014a). A total of 53% live in 12 Palestinian refugee camps established in 1948, which are managed by UNRWA and are beyond the responsibility of the Lebanese state. These camps suffer from poverty, overcrowding, unemployment, poor housing and lack of infrastructure (UNRWA, n.d.). They 'are pockets of poverty beyond the control of the central Lebanese state' and a source of social and economic marginalisation (Lebanon Support, 2015: 18). Outside these camps, most Palestinians live in 42 informal gatherings across Lebanon.

Social and economic exclusion has resulted in a profound sense among Palestinians that they are 'the "forgotten people" ... living in a hostile environment where basic human rights, including the right to work, have no effective means of representation or protection' (Chaaban et al., 2010: 7). Palestinian refugees cannot hold Lebanese citizenship and cannot be naturalised. In 2010, a law allowed Palestinian to obtain a work permit but also institutionalised exclusion from so-called 'liberal' professions, such as medicine, law and engineering. It expanded the categories, effectively barring Palestinians from exercising more than 30 syndicated professions because they are defined as foreigners. Notably, six years later, this change appears to have had little effect on the quality of employment: 'less than 3.3 per cent [of Palestinian refugees] have an official employment contract by a public notary that enables them to apply for a work permit' (Chaaban et al., 2016: 7).

Moreover, while prior to 2001 Palestinians had the right to own property based on the same rules as other foreigners, changes in the law exclude those with 'no recognised nationality'. It goes further by preventing the inheritance of real estate by Palestinians, even if it was acquired prior to the changes in the law (Chaaban et al., 2010: 15). These legal and paralegal measures, among others, amount to what the prominent Lebanese lawyer and legal activist Nizar Saghieh has called 'manufactured vulnerability', a 'policy [that] aims to strip various groups of their fundamental rights in order to reject their presence and facilitate their exploitation' (Saghieh, 2015).

In addition to Palestinians, it is estimated that between 80,000 and 200,000 stateless persons reside in Lebanon (Frontiers Ruwad, 2011: 10). Some are persons (and their descendants) who were present on Lebanese soil when the state was established but who were not counted within the census and therefore were deprived of Lebanese nationality. Others' descendants are registered as Lebanese, but their own births were not recorded on those

registers. As Lebanon has no legal framework for stateless persons, these two groups are structurally excluded politically and socially, and lack access to any social services provided to Lebanese (Habib & Trad, 2016).

### **Gender-based cleavages**

Finally, a gendered dimension cuts across all of these social cleavages. At the most fundamental level, Lebanon's legal system is profoundly discriminatory on the basis of sex. This is particularly the case in the area of personal status, where authority lies with religious communities, but also in areas of civil law. Lebanese citizenship is patrilineal and ensures women cannot pass their nationality either to their husbands (except under very discretionary circumstances) or to their children. This policy reinforces the power of both sectarian leaders and kin over women's participation in civic life as equal citizens (Joseph, 2000; Mikdashi, 2014; Human Rights Watch 2015). Where Lebanese women marry men who do not hold officially recognised citizenship, as is the case with Palestinians in Lebanon, their children become stateless (Saidi, 2015), which limits their access to core social state services.

In conclusion, any attempt to address issues of social cohesion in Lebanon must contend with the institutionalisation of religious difference within Lebanese state institutions. At the same time, the political system is fragile and has been unable to manage social and political conflict effectively over the past decade. Therefore, it is difficult to foresee a major overhaul of this system in the short-to-medium term. This indicates the importance of looking beyond religious identity to address other significant and persistent social cleavages. Addressing these divisions is unlikely to provide a panacea for issues of social cohesion while the central state remains firmly divided along sectarian lines. However, it does provide opportunities to cut across existing religious divisions to address longstanding grievances.

## **2.2 Political system and sources of state legitimacy in Lebanon**

This section identifies the predominance of a narrow form of 'patronage-based' legitimacy in Lebanon, where political support is exchanged for access to specific benefits. This form co-exists alongside, and often overlaps with, confessional, traditional or ideas-based sources of legitimacy. These main sources of legitimacy are often in tension with democratic 'process-based' legitimacy. The penetration and co-optation of state institutions by patrons, and the creation of parallel substitutive systems of service provision, have weakened autonomous state capacity and legitimacy.

### **Power-sharing and patronage-based legitimacy**

Most political parties in Lebanon draw their support primarily from one sectarian group, even if the parties do not all have explicitly religious or sectarian ideologies. The civil war saw the creation of new parties and militias, including the Lebanese Forces, Amal and Hezbollah (the former Maronite Christian, the latter two Shia), which would become key players in the post-war political landscape. 'The war between previously warring networks simply moved to the political arena with each trying to secure access to resources at the reconstituted political center – vital in the reconstruction and expansion of clientelistic structures of power' (Kingston, 2001: 59).

Lebanon's political settlement is based on the bargains between these various confessional elites. This is reflected in complex and shifting alliances, the latest division spurred by Syria's military withdrawal from Lebanon in 2005, which led to the formation of two distinct political blocs: the 'March 8' alliance, broadly supportive of the Syrian regime (composed primarily of the Shia Hezbollah and Amal Movement and the Maronite Free Patriotic Movement) and 'March 14', broadly led by the predominantly Sunni Future Movement and its Druze (Progressive Socialist Party) and Maronite (Lebanese Forces) allies opposed to the Syrian regime.

Scholars and analysts have largely agreed that the current system of power-sharing has resulted in neither social cohesion nor even political stability (Zahar, 2005; Salamey, 2009;

ICG, 2012). Lebanon is best described as being in a state of fragile equilibrium—of punctuated crises repeatedly overcome by a reconfiguration of the distribution of power among political blocs. Some have even claimed the power-sharing is ‘inherently conflict-ridden’ (Salamey, 2009: 87), as it encourages state capture by political sectarian elites whose relative power becomes tied to the portion of the public sector pie they succeed in seizing, and to the extent to which they can leverage power from outside patrons to strengthen their power relative to other communal elites (Salamey, 2009; Leenders, 2012).

Lebanon’s consociational political system undermines most forms of national state legitimacy, and instead promotes narrow ‘patronage-based’ legitimacy. National institutions are poorly trusted. According to one poll, less than half of respondents in Lebanon trust their government (Gallup World Poll, 2013, in Brixi et al., 2015: 30). Across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Lebanon had the highest proportion (80%) of respondents in the 2013 Gallup World Poll who considered government was not doing enough to fight corruption (in Brixi et al., 2015: 23).

The main exception seems to be the Lebanese Armed Forces. This is the only national state institution that benefits from widespread legitimacy across confessional groups. A 2013 survey suggests most Lebanese citizens (74.6% of respondents) would turn to state security institutions if they are victims of crime, with no serious differences in responses according to confessional status. The Lebanese Armed Forces was the most trusted at over 80% of respondents (Geha 2015). Another survey found that 75% of respondents had full trust in the armed forces (LADE, 2015: 46).

In many instances, personalised clientelistic networks have delivered a minimum of stability since the end of the civil war, while keeping state and formal institutions weak (Hamzeh, 2001). There is ‘a self-perpetuating capture of the state’ by confessional elites (Salamey, 2009: 84) who have no interest in a strong state that could limit their capacity to provide patronage to their communities (Najem, 2012: 31). Endemic corruption, which emerged in the post-war context, and the weakening of the central state enable these elites to maintain their power (Leenders, 2012).

Interview-based NGO research describes how,

Representatives make themselves indispensable to constituents precisely because of the state’s shortcomings: their presence in state institutions ensures a modicum of redistribution through their patronage networks (which may have political, social, economic, judicial and security dimensions) and a measure of stability (as they share a vested interest in preventing, or at least postponing, collapse of the power structure they collectively live off) (ICG, 2015: 12).

‘Patronage-based’ legitimacy is closely linked to traditional forms of legitimacy, as most political leaders come from powerful political clans. For example, Walid Jumblatt, descendant of the Jumblatt clan, leads the Druze-majority Progressive Socialist Party. The political dominance of patriarchs from former feudal and notable families, often referred to as *zu’ama*, has been marked throughout Lebanon’s history. Family succession (where a son or wife ‘inherits’, so to speak, the seat of a husband) is fairly common (Khalaf, 1980: 254–56; Najem, 2012).

### Ideas-based legitimacy

Ideas, such as ideology or perceptions of national security, matter alongside overlapping religious, political or economic identities. However, political ideology rarely plays a significant role in Lebanese party politics and local governance. There are few parties based on ideology, with the exception of some Arab nationalist, Syrian nationalist and communist parties. Foreign policy—or rather geopolitical alignment—is the driver for ‘ideas-based’ legitimacy in Lebanon. For example, particularly in the early years of the crisis in Syria, the March 14 bloc generally aligned in opposition to the Syrian regime, whereas the March 8 bloc stood behind it. The conflict was seen as an extension of broader geopolitical alignment with Iran, on the one hand, and Saudi Arabia, on the other. However, there are limited differences

among these groups in terms of domestic economic and social policy, as all are broadly supportive of free market economics and little state intervention.

Support for Hezbollah, both as a political party and as an armed movement, is complex and illustrates how ideas/religion/geopolitics can be combined with other sources of legitimacy at the regional, national and local level. Hezbollah clearly bases part of its national and regional authority on the threat or use of force—its military supremacy and control of key state security positions—as evidenced by its takeover of parts of West Beirut in 2008 following attempts by the government to shut down its telecommunications network. However, its legitimacy derives from a much broader and complex array of sources, including through the delivery of core services and welfare provision to the Shia community (and to a lesser extent to members of other sects) (ICG, 2012: 11–13; Cammett, 2014).

Hezbollah has also developed a legitimacy that goes beyond these military and service-based dimensions, through supporting the ‘axis of resistance’ with Iran, Syria and Hamas against Israel and the US (ICG, 2012: 11–13). It has gained support across sectarian groups for its stance against Israel (Beirut Center for Research and Information, 2006). A recent Information International (2014) survey<sup>3</sup> shows how Hezbollah was perceived to constitute only the third threat to Lebanon’s security and stability, being ranked as the main threat by only 6% of the sample (13% for Sunni and 0% for Shia and Alawi). By contrast, extremist Islamist groups were seen as the biggest threat (40% of the total—although 61% of Shia and 25% of Sunni). Israel ranked as the second threat according to 28% of the people polled (50% for Alawi and 23% for Maronites and Catholics).

‘Ideas-based’ sources of legitimacy are therefore most limited to geopolitical considerations in the Lebanese context and are profoundly dividing the country between the March 8 and March 14 political alliances.

### **Democracy-based legitimacy**

The consociational party system provides some electoral legitimacy, and, to an extent, constrains the behaviour of Lebanese political elites. The pluralism and liberalism in Lebanon’s political and civic institutions are not common in the wider region. These include:

- relatively free and fair competitive elections since 2005
- parliamentary politics able at times to hold the executive to account
- a relatively free media
- civil society groups that can mobilise around issues as opposed to solely sectarian-based grievances

The consociational political system itself relies on a degree of democratic principles and practices, including a coalition Cabinet, a pluralist Parliament and proportionality to ensure the representation of different sectarian groups. Elites need to strengthen their links to their group members to win elections (Hamzeh, 2001). ‘Communalism has thus mitigated autocratic pressures, and has functioned as a structural guarantee against full-scale authoritarianism’ (Fakhoury-Mühlbacher, 2009: 248).

Elites are also incentivised to consider broader geographical constituencies. MPs are elected by universal suffrage and each sect has an allotted number of seats, in order to preserve the balance in Parliament. Candidates are limited to certain religious groups in different constituencies but must get support from outside their sect to be elected, potentially creating an incentive to represent a broader share of their constituency beyond their group members.

However, the practice of consociationalism has put limits on democracy, with little competition against confessional group leaders, consistent gerrymandering and election-rigging and other forms of corruption (Sensenig-Dabbous, 2009). The need for predictable distributions of

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<sup>3</sup> The survey covered a sample of 1000 respondents selected according to sectarian communities in different Lebanese regions conducted on August 17 and August 30 2014 shortly before the clashes in Ersal <http://monthlymagazine.com/article.php?id=1445#.VzgFgmOapxh>

confessional groups across districts has resulted in the maintenance of a voter registration system that severely limits electoral accountability. Electors vote in their ancestral village or town, based on their civil registry, rather than in their place of residence.

In principle, changing one's location in the civil registry is possible. In practice, the process is onerous and non-transparent, requiring from the outset the personal approval of the Minister of Interior (Chambers, 2008: 4). One important exception is the transfer of married women's civil registry location to their husbands' ancestral villages, irrespective of their desire or place of residency (NDI, 2015: 60). As the following section on municipalities discusses in greater detail, this has an important effect on municipal level accountability.

In addition, Lebanon's democracy has done little for many disempowered groups' political participation, including youth and women. For example, the last three national elections (2000, 2005, 2009) indicate a negative trend for women's political enfranchisement. The 2009 elections resulted in the number of women parliamentarians dropping to four (out of 128), from six in 2005, mainly because two gave up their seats for their sons. Three women were elected to Parliament in 2000 (UNDP, 2009). The 2009 elections saw 12 women candidates for Parliament, with 14 in 2005 and 18 in 2000 (*ibid.*). These figures are lower than the average for MENA, which already has the lowest average in the world (World Bank, 2008). Moreover, 'most [women Parliamentarians] originally obtained their position through their familial connections to politicians. There is a saying that women can only enter the parliament 'dressed in black' that is, taking a post left by the death of a male relative' (CRTD-A, 2006: 17).

In conclusion, this section has shown how the 1989 post civil war power-sharing agreement has further politicised and solidified religious divisions. It has strengthened a narrow, personalised, 'patronage-based' legitimacy that keeps the state weak and can be combined with traditional and geopolitical dimensions. Ideas (apart from geopolitical factors) play little role on their own and rarely unify citizens across religious identities on policy-based issues. The consociational political system relies on, and at the same time constrains, 'process-based' legitimacy, based on democratic principles and practices. It both needs elections and limits electoral choice to maintain the religious power-sharing balance.

The political system has ignored other significant social cleavages, such as those based on class, geography or gender, and has kept Palestinian refugees, stateless persons and many others excluded. Power-sharing across confessional elites has maintained Lebanon as 'conflict-ridden' in a state of fragile equilibrium. This has come at the expense of the development of a wider sense of national identity and state-based legitimacy and capacity.

The next section moves from the national to the local level.

### 3. Social cohesion and legitimacy at the municipal level

This section analyses social cohesion and state legitimacy in municipalities, the lowest level of Lebanon's subnational governance system.<sup>4</sup> It examines how social cleavages play out at the local level (Section 3.1), the potential of municipal elections as another source of 'process-based' legitimacy (Section 3.2), and the constraints municipalities face in exercising their mandates (Section 3.3).

#### 3.1 Local social cleavages

Inter-sectarian dynamics are less prevalent at the local than at the national level. The vast majority of municipalities are relatively homogenous, according to existing data (Eid, 2010). This is due to three factors:

- the historical pattern of geographical distribution of sects
- the exacerbation of these historical patterns of migration by displacements brought on by the civil war and increased urbanisation (Verdeil et al., 2007)
- the small size of the most municipalities: 71% of Lebanon's 1,108 municipalities have a population of fewer than 4,000 people

According to a recent study, most Lebanese live in an area where their sectarian community is the majority, and less than a third would choose to live in a mixed area (International Alert, 2015b). Larger municipalities, and urban areas in particular, are much more mixed demographically (Eid, 2010). The vast majority of Lebanon's population is urban—87%—with 64% living in major cities. Beirut and its suburbs constitute the core of urban life in Lebanon, with Tripoli being the next largest city (UN-Habitat, 2011).

However, some caution should be taken when assessing local data. The primary source of local registration data remains electoral lists, based on the civil registry, which does not reflect who actually lives in most areas (Verdeil et al., 2007). The first national household survey, conducted in 1996, is a potential source of data collected at a local level. However, the Central Administration of Statistics released the data at an aggregate district level.

Bureaucratic, political and historical factors explain the relative paucity of local, fine-grained data in Lebanon (Bakhos et al., 2004). As with the national census data, more detailed information could affect the claims and balance of power among confessional groups and regions.

Dynamics at a local level are of course related to national cleavages, in particular with regard to regional disparities and socioeconomic cleavages. For example, land disputes are often cited as sources of conflict at a local level, particularly in the North governorate (PDCI & PeaceLabz 2013; UNDP & Mercy Corps, 2015: 25; IDRC, n.d.). This otherwise local driver of conflict must be placed in the context of the underdevelopment of peripheral regions in Lebanon and the lack of comprehensive and reliable land surveying in rural areas (Verdeil et al., 2007).

#### 3.2 Local politics and sources of municipal legitimacy

Municipalities are the only subnational level where elections are held, with the latest round in May 2016, providing a potential source of democratic, 'process-based' legitimacy. However, use of the out-dated civil registry for voter registration breaks the link between residency and the right to elect local officials. Distribution of the registered population is heavily imbalanced, with 50% of municipalities having only 16% of the registered population (ICCMA, 2011: 19). In some areas this distortion is greater: in the capital city, where more than a third of Lebanese

<sup>4</sup> Lebanon is a unitary state with four tiers of administration: the central level, the governorate level (*muhafazat*, led by a *muhafiz*), the district level (*qada*, led by a *qa'imqam*), in addition to the local level of municipalities (*baladiyyat*, led by a mayor).

reside, only half of the residents can elect their municipal representatives (Harb & Atallah, 2015: 196).

Local elections are usually contests between competing lists formed on the basis of brokered alliances between parties, independent candidates and important families. Particularly in peri-urban and rural areas, powerful clans (sometimes described as ‘families’ or ‘tribes’) hold significant power and often supersede political parties. These families constitute traditional forms of authority that are both part of local patronage networks and formal political processes. ‘Elected representatives of the municipal government are often elected on tribal/family basis – thus considered representatives of the tribe/family’ (Aktis Strategy, 2016: 13). Political parties, which endorse and informally field candidates at a local level, must contend and negotiate with these powers when proposing lists.

Some regions are sites of fierce competition among local elites, Tripoli in the latest election being an important example. But this is not the case everywhere. The formation of consensus lists between families and/or parties can sometimes result in a no-contest vote or no elections altogether (IFES, 2010; NOW Lebanon 2010; NNA, 2016a, 2016b). Historically, municipal elections in Beirut were largely uncontested, with the major political parties coming together to form a list. However, the latest round of municipal elections demonstrated the precariousness of this apparent dominance, with nearly 40% of the popular vote going to a civil society-based list called Beirut Madinati ('Beirut Is My City') (Atallah, 2016).

In general, urban areas appear more overtly politicised along national party lines than peri-urban or rural areas, where families are more significant. In the 1998 municipal elections, for example, in the districts where Hezbollah ran candidates, it ran independently from others in two urban municipalities in Mount Lebanon that have a majority Shia population (al-Ghobeiry and Burj al-Barajneh), but in the *qadas* of Bint Jbeil, Saida, Marjeeyoun and Baalbek, which are more peri-urban and rural, the party struck alliances with independents and large families. In Beirut, Sour and Nabatiyeh, three major cities, its formed allied lists with other parties (LCPS, 1999: 400). In contrast, in the 2010 election, the *qada* of Marjeeyoun was an important battleground between families rather than parties (IFES, 2010).

The boundaries between parties, independents and families are blurred, and perceptions about them can differ. In a rare survey conducted with mayors and municipal council members, only 31.3% of mayors declared themselves partisans of a political party or movement (Favier, 2001). However, political parties claimed a much higher level of success for their supporters in the election that brought these mayors to power (Ishtay, 2001).

In contrast with lists in national elections, which are created on the basis of confessional quotas, those at the local level do not formally provide for such representation. Informally, many municipalities have established norms whereby particular positions, such as that of deputy mayor, are reserved for minority communities.

However, confessional representation should not be conflated with a feeling of being represented by municipal officials. For example, in a survey conducted in the Akkar region, 42% of Lebanese respondents did not feel represented by the municipal government and 29% only somewhat. Sunnis felt more represented at the municipal level (34%) than Maronites (25%) or Greek Orthodox (20%), which may be because the majority of municipal officials—and the population—is Sunni. (Levant7, 2015: 14). The results are low across all groups, however, and indicate a lack of representation, regardless of confessional identity.

Survey data suggest municipal elections are seen as important to effect change but not as a source of democratic accountability. In survey conducted in 2015, 77% of respondents viewed municipal elections as highly or fairly important (LADE, 2015: 81). Though this varied between sectarian communities, it remained fairly high for all (between 69% and 80%). Of those who considered elections important:

- 60% felt they provided an opportunity for change (to select the best candidate and renew municipal members).

- A third considered it an opportunity to exercise political rights (e.g. hold the local government to account or participate/contribute to local decision-making).
- Finally, only 5% felt they were important because of political parties or families' representation.

The top three reasons provided by respondents who rated municipal elections as either not important or not important at all were (LADE, 2015: 85):

- mistrust in the integrity of the elections (38%)
- doubt that the elections would bring about change (30%)
- an absence of candidates they felt represented them (13%)

These results shows a significant disconnect between the actual practice of local politics, based on powerful families and parties, and citizens' expectations of integrity, change and representation. The same survey shows other (non-election based) modes of municipal participation are few and poorly used, with 60% saying they did not follow or participate in municipal work (LADE, 2015:71). Bekaa is an exception, with high degrees of involvement and in contrast, Beirut has the lowest levels of participation. This difference is worthy of further investigation.

Further research could examine the role and practices of different national political parties and other leaders at the local level, to better understand the way in which varied sources of legitimacy—including patronage, traditional authority, ideology and elections as well as performance—operate at the local level as well as how it affects legitimacy at the national level. For example, Hezbollah is a significant player at local level, with either party members or supporters elected to lead many municipalities in the South governorate, Bekaa and the southern suburbs of Beirut. Harb's (2009) study of three Hezbollah mayors describes the many objectives mayors pursue, mixing religion, sectarianism and efficiency. Islam is used to legitimise their approach but does not necessarily guide all their activities. A religious morality can encourage community mobilisation, social solidarity or condemning immoral behaviour (*ibid.*: 70). Mayors also use their local power to consolidate the reach of their national party and deliver benefits to their Shia constituents, though they also need to accommodate their principles of integrity and anti-corruption with the alliances they may have made with local powerful families. However, in the actual design or implementation of local projects, Hezbollah's responsible and efficient local government could be described in some ways as a rational, liberal 'process-based' form of legitimacy. It has even contributed to attracting international investments from UN, Arab and European donors (Harb, 2009).

Overall, survey data and the existing literature suggest the practice of electoral politics at a local level falls short of conferring democratic, 'process-based' legitimacy on municipal officials. However, as the latest round of municipal elections demonstrates, local politics appears to provide greater space for new political actors to mobilise and present challenges to existing authorities. Additional research is needed to understand how citizens perceive that their local authorities represent their interests, how they can be held to account and how this has changed in light of these opportunities for new voices.

### **3.3 Municipalities: Mandate and capacity**

#### **Capacity constraints and political interference**

Municipalities have a broad range of powers (based on Law-Decree 1977) but limited resources to deliver services and develop their territory. Article 47 of the Municipal Act states that 'Each work of public character or interest, in the municipal area, falls within the scope of the Municipal Council's competence'. The broad range of actions defined under the authority of the municipal council and its president is noteworthy—ranging from the issuing of construction and housing permits to 'ensuring public ethics and public decency', and 'establishing and managing public schools and hospitals' (Articles 49, 50).

However, with the exception of some larger municipalities, the services Lebanese municipalities provide are largely 'confined to marginal activities such as street cleaning, road

asphalting, street lighting, setting up road signs, rehabilitating and extending the sewage and water drainage systems, etc.' (Harb & Atallah, 2015:199–200)

Municipalities systematically face challenges to their autonomy and capacity to govern. Many municipalities are simply too small to have an economic base, or the staff and resources to manage projects and deliver services. Over a third do not even have a single full-time paid employee and more than two-thirds need to hire new employees but lack the financial means to do so (LCPS, 2015: 8).

Most municipal revenues are remarkably subject to manipulation by central authorities. The Independent Municipal Fund transfers resources from central to local governments and is the main source of revenue for several municipalities (36% on average, going up to 90% for smaller municipalities). While municipalities have the right to collect taxes directly, the rate of collection varies greatly from one municipality to another. On average, it is quite low and estimated to be around 50% (Harb & Atallah, 2015).

Central and regional administrators have broad powers that constrain municipal autonomy. They can approve and initiate fund transfers, approve projects over a certain value (from as low as LBP 10 million (\$6,600)) and can delay, at least temporarily, any decision on the basis of security (Haase & Antoun, 2015: 200–1). They can obstruct municipal action through administrative delays. Decisions related to planning, budgeting and management of financial accounts require pre-approval by higher levels (*ibid.*). Mayors and other municipal authorities note these pre-approval requirements as a major impediment in their ability to effectively govern (ICCMA, 2011: 25; 35; CIUDAD, 2012: 8). Central authorities' administrative oversight has been described as 'leav[ing] Lebanon's municipalities with nothing more than nominal authority over their internal affairs' (Haase & Antoun, 2015: 201).

Lack of transparency and timeliness in the allocation of transfers, particularly in the Independent Municipal Fund, has made it vulnerable to accusations of 'being used as a bargaining tool rather than as an empowering fund' (CIUDAD, 2002: 7). The disbursement criteria of the fund are prone to allegations of unfair distribution. The absence of any reliable data on the actual resident population of Lebanese cities and towns has many deleterious effects (ICCMA, 2011:19), not least of which is the mismatch between needs and allocations by the Independent Municipal Fund: funds are simultaneously over- and under-allocated differentially to different municipalities. (Those that have more residents than registered population receive less than their needs; it is the opposite for those that have more registered citizens than residents.)

The distribution formula also rewards municipalities with greater levels of direct revenues. Since rental value taxes are among the largest sources of these, the criterion privileges urban or touristic municipal areas, not their rural or agricultural counterparts. A number of other elements of the formula similarly tend to privilege small and wealthy municipalities and under-serve rural or under-developed areas (Atallah et al., 2014; Harb & Atallah, 2015: 216–17). This is particularly striking as there is little evidence that areas with higher levels of development present higher levels of municipal performance (LCPS, 2015: 14).

Moreover, despite its original purpose as an intergovernmental transfer fund, the Independent Municipal Fund has consistently been used to fund development activities ostensibly for municipalities but where the direct benefit to them is not always evident—and nor are they involved in the decision-making (Atallah et al., 2014: 3). As a result of withdrawals of this kind, as well as deductions for services such as waste collection contracted to a private company (more commonly known as the Sukleen Bill), between 1999 and 2009 only 50% of the total amount spent from the Independent Municipal Fund was distributed to municipalities and municipal unions (ICCMA, 2011: 84).

### **Municipal unions**

To overcome some of their limitations, municipalities have opted to form municipal unions, to 'promote inter-municipal cooperation for projects of public interest and/or to implement large-scale technical projects that benefit all municipalities, promoting economies of scale' (Harb &

Atallah, 2015: 202). At present, two-thirds of municipalities make up 51 unions, which range in size from three municipalities in the Fayhaa union to 52 in Keserwan Ftouh (*ibid.*).<sup>5</sup>

While municipal unions have the potential to increase resource efficiency and the likelihood of receiving donor grants, they also suffer from similar issues to those of municipalities, such as weak capacity and low fiscal resources, and they may not include all the territory in an area or be geographically contiguous (Harb & Atallah, 2015: 202–4). Arguably more importantly, lack of clear delineation of responsibilities between municipalities and municipal unions (and in many cases the explicit overlap of their roles) makes them potential sites of conflict. This, in addition to ‘problems related to sectarian politics and geography [has meant that] some unions have become paralyzed’ (*ibid.*: 203).

### **Decentralisation**

Historically, municipal power has been seen as an extension of central power into regions, reflecting primarily a policy of de-concentration rather than decentralization. While municipalities enjoy some legal and financial autonomy and are the only autonomous elected body, their powers are significantly curtailed through encroachment by authorities at other levels of administration.

Progress with decentralisation has been limited in recent years. A draft law announced by the president in April 2014 has not yet been passed. Slow progress can be explained by two factors: 1) a traditional centre–periphery reluctance of national elites to share power and resources with other levels of government (Favier, 2001); and 2) municipalities’ relative confessional homogeneity. This has led to a ‘fear of federalism [with] the “specter” of the country’s division into sectarian cantons’, given the consociational nature of the post-civil war settlement where ‘power is shared at all levels of government by different sectarian groups’ (Harb & Atallah, 2015: 192).

This section has shown that, at the local level, most communities are relatively homogenous in terms of confessions—except in more mixed urban areas. Local politics, including the conduct of local elections, are not a significant source of ‘process-based’ legitimacy and are dominated by traditional local elites or national parties. They do appear to provide greater space for new political actors to mobilise and to challenge existing authorities. However, there are few non-electoral mechanisms to engage or hold local officials to account. Constraints on municipalities’ capacity and autonomy mean they have little ability, and few political incentives, to meet the needs of their populations. The next section explores issues of service delivery, often seen as the main driver of ‘performance-based’ legitimacy.

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<sup>5</sup> The development index was developed by the Consultation and Research Institute (CRI) in 2006, and is composed of 12 indicators. The performance index is calculated based on four components: existence of development plan, existence of urban planning strategy, number of new infrastructure services provided and number of infrastructure maintained - 2012 data (LCPS 2015: 14).

## 4. Service delivery, social cohesion and legitimacy

This section examines whether and how service delivery offers a source of ‘performance-based’ legitimacy (Section 4.1) and whether it attenuates or accentuates social cleavages (Section 4.2). It also reviews the very limited evidence with regard to the impact of municipal service delivery on these two dimensions (Section 4.3).

### 4.1 Service delivery and performance-based legitimacy

#### Low expectations and poor performance

The potential legitimacy-enhancing benefits of service delivery depend on people’s expectations of their governments and how these compare with actual performance. Expectations are hard to identify but are clearly not uniform across Lebanon. They vary across communities and depend on the nature of the services. For example, evidence from an impact evaluation of UNDP municipal assistance projects in six areas hosting refugees identifies the following differences (Aktis Strategy, 2015, 2016):<sup>6</sup>

- Expectations of central versus local government differ. Citizens tend to continue to look to central government for certain services, notably education and electricity, whereas water and roads, which are more visible locally, are viewed as the responsibility of local authorities.
- The prior history of service provision shapes expectations. These were greater in Sarafand in the South governorate, which has a more developed history of service provision by the state and other actors than in the North governorate, where populations expected to meet their needs through their own resources and trading.
- Expectations depend on whether communities can obtain services themselves or need a larger entity. Services they cannot access for themselves, such as sewerage, are more appreciated than those they can access either through the private sector or by self-provision (e.g. buying a generator or paying a company for water).

Survey data for Lebanon show low expectations of overall state service delivery and perceptions of high levels of corruption, which indicate that national service delivery is an unlikely source of state legitimacy. For example, according to the Global Corruption Barometer, the majority of citizens in Lebanon perceive their education and health systems to be corrupt or extremely corrupt (in Brixi et al., 2015: 23). The Arab Barometer (2010/11, Wave II data) found 90% of respondents in Lebanon considered their government’s performance in improving basic health services either bad or very bad (in ibid.: 29).

Interview-based research confirms how the population has limited expectations of the state:

Faced with persistent political stalemate, declining basic services and various forms of violence, Lebanese have adjusted to a malfunctioning state by lowering their expectations, bypassing its institutions and resorting to privatised alternatives. These apply to virtually all sectors, from health, electricity and water to more complex activities such as education, employment, justice and even security (ICG 2015).

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<sup>6</sup> Aktis research examines the impact of the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded interventions under the UNDP Lebanon Municipal Support Programme. The research examines linkages between reducing service delivery pressures and the level of tensions between host communities and refugees. It also assesses the effect of perceptions of the legitimacy of the municipal governments. The methodology used is SenseMaker, which elicits micro-narratives from respondents about their own direct experiences. Research for the baseline research (September/October 2014) and the impact evaluation (January 2015) was carried out in the same 3 communities one in each project region. 778 responses were collected. A third round of research was carried out in August 2015 in six municipalities (equally divided between three regions: North, Bekaa and South). The collection of data served the purpose of both continuous evaluation of the three initial municipalities as well as setting a baseline for the additional three.

A characteristic of Lebanon is indeed the high level of privatised health and education services, with public services and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) the last resort for the poorest and most vulnerable. For example, health government spending reduced from 11.9% of the budget in 2005 to 5.8% in 2011. Private sources (households and employers) provide over 70% of health funding but only 50% of the population is covered by insurance schemes. Primary health care centres are mostly run by NGOs (67%) and secondary and tertiary care is mostly supplied by the private sector. The private sector also dominates in education, providing higher-quality services and benefits the most socioeconomically advantaged areas. Around 30% of all Lebanese children are in public schools, which suffer from higher repetition rates, over-age students and lower academic outcomes (World Bank, 2013).

Private sector provision *per se* is not necessarily a barrier to state legitimacy, as the state could be seen to improve the quality and access to services privately provided, for example through regulation or public investment. But here too the Lebanese state appears to fall short. For example, *Électricité du Liban* does not generate enough electricity to meet national demand. It produces subsidised electricity at a loss, with tariffs left unchanged since 1996 (International Monetary Fund, 2014: 14). Privately owned generators distribute power to households and businesses to meet demand (ICG, 2015).

Another example is access to water, which is both inadequate and highly privatised, and illustrates how elite economic interests undermine public provision for all (Riachi, 2015). Prior to the refugee crisis, Lebanon was already using two-thirds of its available water resources, a very high rate by comparison with other regions. In Beirut and Mount Lebanon, where the majority of the population lives, public water networks are of poor quality, with severe water rationing. A quarter of Lebanese have never received piped water from public networks. Across the country, rationing of public water for private consumption has led to a proliferation of private water suppliers, which account for 65% of total water expenditure of connected households (primarily bottled water companies and water truck providers). Many citizens are opting out of the public system by digging boreholes—50,000–80,000—half of which are illegal, by comparison with 650 public wells. Water infrastructure projects are seen as a source of corruption for political elites (MOE et al., 2014: 59–60; Riachi, 2015).

Poor service delivery has been the source of civil society mobilisation against the central government, which shows that some groups do expect better services and are willing to hold government, politicians and companies to account. For example, major demonstrations in Beirut about poor waste collection and management under the You Stink! campaign took place in summer 2015, mobilising over 20,000 people and leading to clashes with the security forces. At its height, the movement displayed a remarkable level of heterogeneity:

People who had long disagreed came together in a broad cross-class coalition to express their discontent with the government and the status quo in general. Some of the new arrivals had never demonstrated before. Others were rank-and-file members or affiliates of some of Lebanon's major political parties: the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Forces, Amal and Hizballah (Abu-Rish, 2015).

Analysts and activists blamed the crisis on ineffective government resulting from the power-sharing system, corruption in contracting and the higher cost of private waste management in Beirut (Atallah, 2015; Nakhoul, 2015). These protests resonated in important ways with debates around decentralisation, with many municipalities speaking out in its favour. Waste collection is an important part of the services municipalities provide, and some have adopted their own independent recycling and sorting systems, which greatly exceed the quality of services provided in the capital (BlogBaladi, 2015; Léon, 2016). Citizen mobilisation has taken place regarding other services, such as against large-scale water projects protests. For example, the Water Not for Sale citizens' campaign interrupted the public-private water sector partnership BlueGold Lebanon Plan (Riachi, 2015: 44).

Based on public expectations and its actual performance, the central state therefore does not appear to base its legitimacy on the delivery of public services to all. The main source of state

legitimacy, as Section 2 explained, is how political power is shared between different sects. The next section illustrates the politicisation of basic services in Lebanon.

### Politicisation of service delivery

Lebanon's patronage-based system extends to service delivery. As Section 2 showed, the logic of patronage erodes the institutional power of the state in favour of elites, which can range from political parties to powerful traditional families.

Political parties, based on sectarian identities, are key to social service and welfare provision in Lebanon. This strengthens the power of sectarian elites over communities (Cammett & Issar, 2010; Cammett, 2014). Cammet (2011: 70), based on survey and interview data, found that, 'First, political [party] activism and a demonstrated commitment to a party are associated with access to social assistance; and second, higher levels of political activism may facilitate access to higher levels or quantities of aid, including food baskets and financial assistance for medical and educational costs'.<sup>7</sup> Political parties and religious charities' discretion in providing this care exacerbates the vulnerabilities of the poor in Lebanon by making them more dependent on these institutions (Chen & Cammett, 2012: 6).

This extends to infrastructure-related services, such as water. Poor networks play a role in 'consolidating political allegiances, as political parties have taken up the opportunity to drill wells, using water as a socio-communitarian service, especially in peri-urban and remote areas that lack complete state intervention' (Riachi, 2015: 41–2).

The role of parties in municipal service provision varies and may depend on their relative penetration within particular state institutions. In Sarafand in the South governorate, for example, Aktis (2015, 2016) found parties played a dominant role in governance and service provision through Amal and the Council of the South, a government organisation intended to enhance regional development but strongly controlled and strengthened by Amal and its leader, Nabih Berri, Speaker of the House. It did not find this was the case to the same extent in the other municipalities researched, where Amal was not a significant actor.

Overall, patronage networks have not necessarily redistributed significant resources within confessional groups, so cannot be seen to deliver what could be described as 'output-' or 'performance-based' legitimacy within groups, with the possible exception of Hezbollah (Harb, 2009). Many see the Taif Agreement as having consolidated economic and political elites' interests regardless of confessional differences, rather than incentivising more inclusive development, even within confessional groups. Elites only need to negotiate with other elites, for example to reach agreement on electoral candidates, and are not incentivised to deliver to their constituencies (Salamey, 2009). Vertical inequalities are high in Lebanon: in 2014, 8,928 individuals controlled 48% of the wealth (Credit Suisse Global Wealth Databook 2014 data, cited in Atallah, 2015, in Banfield & Stamadianou, 2015: 3). This inequality is also geographic, with Beirut benefiting more than the rest of Lebanon.

In some cases, particularly when there is little competition within confessional groups, communities can benefit little from national political leaders from their group. For example, Arsal, a Sunni enclave near the Syrian border, lacks services and did not benefit from investments when the Sunni Future Movement was in power nationally, despite strong support for it in the town. Interviewees felt the party had delivered little in return for their political support and its local leaders furthered their own agendas. One interviewee said, 'the medical facility stopped functioning properly when the Future [Movement] took control of it. Now, people affiliated with the [Movement] get services cheaper or free of charge' (ICG, 2016: 6).

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<sup>7</sup> Analyses of an original national survey (n=1,911) as well as in-depth interviews with providers and other elites (n=175) and beneficiaries of social programs (n=135) conducted in 2008.

### **Other potential sources of ‘performance-based’ legitimacy**

The literature often prioritises basic human development services, such as health and education, when making assumptions about the main drivers of stability. However, people may not in fact prioritise such services. For example, there is growing understanding of the importance of security, justice and jobs in post-conflict contexts (World Bank, 2011).

The World Values Survey 2010–14 found that in Lebanon ‘citizens gave priority in part to economic growth and in part to defense and citizen engagement’ (cited in Brixi et al., 2015: 22). This contrasts with wider findings across MENA, which found people placed a high value on education and health along with employment, with growth the most common top priority (Brixi et al., 2015). Prioritisation of jobs is consistent with various studies of the impact of refugees on Lebanese host communities, which identify jobs as the most mentioned issue causing stress, rather than just basic services (SCG, 2014). Similarly, LADE (2015: 43–4) found that, ‘in order of priority, lack of employment opportunities, electricity, roads, Syrian refugees, water, corruption, garbage, and the environment are the key issues of high importance to more than two thirds of respondents’. At local level, security, education and health were rated least important. This may be indicative of a perception of these issues being managed at a higher level, by either political parties or the central state. However, they also ranked higher in 2013, demonstrating how priorities shift over time and should not be assumed to be fixed.

Section 2 showed how security services, the armed forces in particular, were the most trusted national institutions. Beyond this, the state seems to have opted out of other priorities such as basic economic infrastructure and job creation.

In conclusion, service delivery does not seem to be the main source of ‘performance-based’ state legitimacy in Lebanon. Politicised services, delivered through religious networks, or letting the richer segments of society access services privately form part of a strategy of keeping the state weak and the elites in control. In addition, the population seems to prioritise other state functions on which the central state can or could base its legitimacy, such as security. Recent civil society-led movements against poor services in Beirut indicate potentially increased demand on state institutions on a wider range of issues.

## **4.2 Service delivery and social cohesion**

This section examines the role service provision played in either alleviating or reinforcing social cleavages before the influx of Syrian refugees. It focuses particularly on the sectors of social protection, health and education, as these appear to be the most significant services marked by important social divisions.

### **Poverty and social protection**

The state has done little to combat poverty in Lebanon, which remains significant with acute and regional disparities. Prior to the refugee crisis, 27% (1 million) poor lived on less than \$4/day and 300,000 extremely poor on less than \$2.40/day (UNDP, 2008). Poverty is concentrated in the North governorate (52.5%), the South governorate (42%) and the Bekaa (29%) (World Bank, 2013). The public social safety net system, under the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs, is weak, fragmented and poorly targeted, with high rates of leakages to the non-poor. It reaches 350,000 beneficiaries each year either through approximately 210 Social Development Centres (SDCs) or contracting of NGOs or social welfare institutions. Together with municipalities, SDCs are the only permanent government presence at the local level. They provide social services, health, education and training but are not distributed according to poverty levels (*ibid.*). Sectarian-based welfare organisations are meeting some needs, reinforcing sectarian divisions and exacerbating inequalities.

### **Education**

The effect of access to education on social cleavages in Lebanon must take into account both literacy and educational attainment metrics, as well as the role of private schools in the provision of this core service.

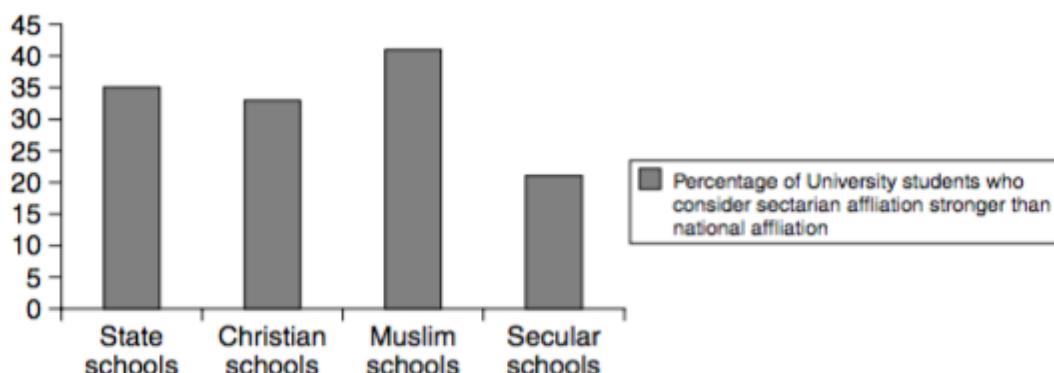
Despite significant improvement over the years, national illiteracy rates continue to reflect important regional and sectarian differences. For example, in 2006, adult illiteracy rates in the predominantly Shia Nabatieh (16.74%) and Bekaa (16.82%) were more than double those in the largely Christian regions of Mount Lebanon (7.51%) (UNDP, 2009: 53).

There is also an important rural–urban divide in literacy figures that goes beyond sectarian difference. Illiteracy rates in Beirut are the lowest in the country (6.1%) (UNDP, 2009: 53). Similar fault-lines appear in levels of primary and secondary education enrolment. Levels of enrolment are high at a national level: over 90% in primary and over 80% in secondary. However, large regional disparities exist. Primary school enrolment in Akkar and Minieh-Danniye is only 76% (World Bank, 2013).

The role of the private sector in education has an important effect on disparities in the quality of education received. Three different types of schools operate within the Lebanese education system: public schools, subsidised private schools and (non-subsidised) private schools. In 2009, the non-subsidised private sector served a greater number than both the subsidised and the public sector combined (MEHE, 2010). Public schools primarily serve communities with the lowest socioeconomic indicators. Their quality also varies in considerable ways across regions. For example, 39% of public schools in richer Mount Lebanon are connected to the internet, while the same is true for only 4% of those in the poorer Bekaa region (*ibid.*).

More than simply affecting access to quality education, the predominance of private education (and lack of state regulation) has given confessional and political actors a significant role (Cammett, 2014). The effect of this on social cohesion remains unclear. While there is evidence that students in secular schools show lower levels of attachment to sectarian identification, state schools do not differ significantly from Christian and Muslim schools in this regard (Figure 2). This may owe in part to the often-homogenous regional demographics, which mean public school students are not very diverse (Farha, 2012).

**Figure 2: Relation of type of secondary school attended to vigour of national identity**



Source: *In Farha* (2012: 77).

### Health care

Health care in Lebanon, much like education, is characterised by high degrees of privatisation and significant differences in access for poorer Lebanese. The Ministry of Public Health is the provider of last resort for the uninsured, either through public hospitals or private providers, with significant delayed payments to the latter. Local municipalities (20%) and the Ministries of Public Health and Social Affairs (13%) together run only a third of primary health care centres (World Bank, 2013).

The role of the state is primarily that of financing and regulating, rather than providing, health care. Official estimates from the National Social Security Fund, the most important public insurer, state that 26.1% of Lebanese are covered under its scheme, although a national household survey in 1999 cites a significantly lower figure of 17.8% (WHO et al., 2000: 26; Cammett 2014: 56). However, through a wide variety of mechanisms and sources, most of

the population does have access to some level of health care, particularly in primary care. This owes in large part to the role of NGOs and charities in this sector (Cammett, 2014: 56).

Sectarian parties and religious charities are among the most significant players, accounting for more than 75% of clinics and dispensaries (Cammett, 2014: 53). In addition to their direct role in health provision, political parties also provide subsidised care for supporters and facilitate access in institutions outside their network (*ibid.*: 54). There is strong evidence to show political affiliation and activism play a significant role in access to care, and ‘health services [are] used by political parties and politicians as a deliberate strategy to gain and reward political support from individuals and their families’ (Chen & Cammett, 2012: 1).

In summary, the central state has made little effort in recent years to improve social protection, education or health in such a way that benefits all Lebanese equally. On the contrary, it has reinforced socioeconomic and geographical differences and enabled a major role for private actors within this sector. Sectarian and political service delivery has played a bigger role, and has further reinforced sect and political affiliation as a primary social cleavage. Low-income families without political affiliations have the most to lose.

### **4.3 Municipal service delivery, social cohesion and legitimacy**

National-level service provision appears to be of greater significance for social cohesion and state legitimacy, particularly prior to the refugee crisis. This is because, while municipalities have vast service provision responsibilities, their ability to deliver is severely hindered by poor capacity, interference from higher levels and lack of financial resources, as well as limited political incentives, given the nature of municipal political competition (Section 3).

Data from a 2010 survey show the overwhelming majority of work of the municipalities is related to the provision and maintenance of roads and, to a much lesser degree, water infrastructure (Harb & Atallah, 2015: 201). Similarly, most respondents in another survey found the main functions to be garbage collection (63%), road planning and maintenance (45%), water (36%), electricity (35%) and beautification (23%). Municipalities were not perceived to be providers of cultural, educational and health services (LADE 2015: 56–7).

#### **Social cohesion**

Limited data exist on the role of municipalities in promoting or undermining social cohesion through service delivery. The homogenous confessional nature of most local communities means this is probably not the main level at which to examine sectarian social cohesion, perhaps with the exception of larger municipalities and Beirut. Other important cleavages, at local level, remain relevant. As Section 5.2 elaborates, the Syrian refugee crisis has exacerbated some of these cleavages, with its associated increased pressure on local services, in particular in vulnerable communities. However, the paucity of data on social cohesion at a local level prior to the crisis makes it challenging to effectively establish how and how much these social cleavages have been affected. Below are some findings that could be further tested using additional data. This is clearly an area for further research.

The limited evidence on the effect of increasing municipal service provision on improving social cohesion is mixed. A study in 2014/15 found that the relationship between service delivery and social cohesion is a complex one, and rejected the independent benefits of service delivery on social cohesion. Rather, it found that improving trust and social interactions may be more critical than simply improving service delivery (Mercy Corps, 2015).

As to whether improved Lebanese and Syrian access to municipal services would reduce grievances and lead to better mutual perceptions, Syrian perceptions of Lebanese did increase slightly when they received greater access to health and education, going from 33% per cent to 38%. For Lebanese, greater access had a small to negligible effect on perceptions of Syrians. Findings were similar with regard to access to relief, with a 9.6% increase in the likelihood of positive perceptions of Lebanese by Syrians but only a 1.5% increase in Lebanese positive perceptions of Syrians. There was a much more significant increase in

Syrians' perceptions of Lebanese when they had access to or were satisfied with municipalities (23% and 24%, respectively) than for Lebanese perceptions of Syrians (7.9% and 7.5%, respectively). This is probably because Lebanese provide services and are elected/work for municipalities, so are visible to Syrians; the reverse is not true.

The project found increased social and economic relations improved community relations more than service delivery or improved inclusion or accountability of municipalities. A Lebanese sharing a meal weekly/daily with Syrians was correlated with a 51% increase in the likelihood of positive perceptions of Syrians, much higher than the other tested dimensions.

Similarly, a study examining the impact of the UK Department for International Development (DFID)-funded interventions under the UNDP Lebanon Municipal Support Programme found that, despite recognition of increased services, Lebanese recipients were likely to '[shift] refugee complaints onto the next most pressing problem ... this doesn't mean that people are not happy to have received additional service, or that they do not feel the benefit – merely that they continue to have other problems for which refugees are likely to be blamed' (Aktis, 2015: 3). This study suggests limited cooperation and interaction between refugees and host communities when it comes to services, which could help explain the limited effect of these projects on social cohesion (*ibid.*: 6). This would be in line with the findings of the Mercy Corps study cited above.

### **Legitimacy**

Data assessing the extent to which municipal service delivery improves the legitimacy of municipalities are scarce. When available, they seem to measure different dimensions: satisfaction (LADE, 2015) or responsiveness, ability and willingness to deliver, trust and fairness of municipalities (Aktis, 2015, 2016). This is clearly an area for further research. Below are some hypotheses that could be further tested using additional data.

Satisfaction with the performance of municipalities in delivering their functions across Lebanon seems to be low, which would indicate a low level of 'performance-based' legitimacy. One survey (LADE, 2015) indicates that the level of 'overall satisfaction' with municipality work varies considerably across *muhafazas*, but is generally fairly low. While respondents are relatively evenly split between the highly dissatisfied or dissatisfied and the highly satisfied or satisfied (43.93% and 48.85%, respectively), twice as many are highly dissatisfied as are highly satisfied (23.73% and 12.98%). Levels of dissatisfaction are highest in Beirut and the Bekaa, where over 68% and 57.9% of respondents are either dissatisfied or highly dissatisfied, and lowest in Nabatiye, Mount Lebanon and the South governorates (64.50%, 62.50% and 58.40%) (based on Table 34 in LADE, 2015). Other research in areas affected by refugees show an even lower degree of trust in municipalities. In the Halba municipality in the poor Akkar border region, only 8% of Lebanese respondents said they would rely on the municipality if they needed assistance (Levant7, 2015: 14).

Data on the level of trust in municipalities by comparison with other institutions is inconsistent. Aktis (2016) uses a story-telling methodology to assess host communities' perceptions of local government. Municipalities seem to be trusted service providers compared with other options (central government, religious groups, friends, family, NGOs, etc.) probably because they are visible, except where political parties or families/tribes are the stronger local institutions. As to the legitimacy of municipal service provision through their responsiveness, ability to make a difference and trust, the report finds that, for the Lebanese host communities in the six municipalities researched, the municipal government was 'the most trusted service provider in all municipalities except Sarafand where family and political groups are named as the primary trusted source for the provision of services' (*ibid.*: 34). The family was the second most trusted provider across municipalities, but it overlaps significantly with municipalities as powerful families are elected to municipal governments (see Section 3). However, these results show great variation between communities in terms of which authority is most trusted and for what service.

Trust is not just based on performance but can also be an indicator of 'process-based' legitimacy. Aktis (2016: 3) confirms that trust also depends on how services are provided: 'In towns where the municipalities have developed open channels of communication with the

residents, people tend to have a higher level of trust toward the municipality as a service provider'. Improvements also required participation: 'almost half of the people felt that the best way to improve service planning and delivery was through either including the community more in decision making or improving communication with the municipality (with the exception of Ghazieh)' where there had been more awareness-raising and communication programmes (*ibid.*: 52).

Trust in municipalities is also different from perceptions of their capacity. Aktis (2016: 45) finds that 'overall (with the potential exception of the Bekaa) there is a substantial population in each municipality that is of the view that the municipality is willing but not able or trusted to take action'. It is not clear whether this owes to lack of capacity to deliver, in particular by comparison with other providers, or if municipalities are perceived to meet the needs of only some in the communities.

Finally, fairness of municipal decisions does not appear to be related to municipal trust or capacity. It is probably determined by political and sectarian differences. Aktis (2016: 46) observes that 'overall people do not perceive municipal decisions to be fair'. This differed across services (e.g. roads versus sewage) in some municipalities but not others. For example, in Sarafand, where parties are more trusted, regardless of the service, people did not perceive the municipality to be fair, whereas in Ghazieh there was an overall higher perception of municipal fairness. Contextual factors, such as political alliances and religious identity, would seem to matter more than the nature of the services.

It is difficult to draw clear conclusions on the links between municipal service provision and municipal legitimacy from the limited available evidence. Legitimacy is defined and measured in different ways (satisfaction, capacity, trust, responsiveness, willingness, fairness, etc.). Survey data would also need to be combined with more objective indicators (e.g. of actual behaviour). Further research could be based on the hypothesis that municipal 'performance-based' legitimacy is low, but potentially higher than that of other providers, and depends on local political and sectarian institutions and dynamics. 'Process-based' legitimacy could be assessed separately (in terms of participation and communication channels and perceptions of fairness).

Further research results are likely to differ by locality, services provided and past experiences, which shape expectations. This may make it difficult to draw overarching conclusions on how to promote stability through a municipal service delivery legitimacy-enhancing route. National factors, such as the power-sharing political system and political constraints on municipalities' ability to deliver, are likely to limit any localised benefits that improved local service delivery could achieve.

Overall, this section has shown how Lebanese state institutions and government do not benefit from high levels of legitimacy in the eyes of citizens, at either national or municipal level. Service delivery does not currently offer a significant 'performance-based' channel of legitimacy. The privatisation of most services and infrastructure, failures of the central government to regulate them and guarantee quality and corruption mean services are a source of grievances rather than legitimacy.

Given the homogeneity of most local communities, except in large urban areas, it is probably through national service delivery that the state could improve social cohesion, rather than solely through municipalities. However, the sectarian and politicised delivery of services, and uneven geographical development, furthers divisions and exacerbates inequalities. Interventions aiming to directly increase interactions, collaboration and trust between different groups, rather than simply through service delivery improvements, would seem more effective at improving social cohesion.

## 5. The refugee crisis and its impacts on social cohesion and legitimacy

This section examines the impact of the Syrian refugee crisis on Lebanon's social cohesion and state legitimacy. It begins with a summary of the crisis and Lebanese government responses at the national and local level (Section 5.1). It then examines the effects of the refugee crisis on social cohesion (Section 5.2) and on perceptions of legitimacy, of the state and of international aid, by Lebanese and by refugees themselves (Section 5.3).

### 5.1 Responses to the refugee crisis

In late 2011, as violence in Syria forced refugees to flee to Lebanon, they settled primarily in the North, and later in the Bekaa, given the proximity of the border to the main areas of conflict and to historic and familial ties between the two populations (Naufal, 2012). At that stage, many stayed with family, friends and acquaintances, and even, at times, strangers (ILO, 2014b; Mackreath, 2014). Between late 2011 and mid-2013, the number of registered refugees grew to reach nearly 500,000. The following year saw the most significant increase, with the number of registered refugees surpassing the 1 million mark in April 2014, a so-called 'devastating milestone' according to UNHCR (2014). By some estimates it had reached close to one-third of the population by July of that same year (Westall, 2014).

A number of factors help explain the large influx of Syrians into Lebanon. First, a bilateral agreement established in 1993 between Syria and Lebanon ensured the free movement across the two countries' border, and even granted Syrians the right to employment for six months, pending renewal (SNAP, 2013). This policy remained *de facto* in place well until January 2015, while other neighbouring countries, notably Jordan and Turkey, began tightening restrictions at their borders as early as 2013 (Amnesty International, 2013; Thibos, 2014). Second, a significant Syrian population, of between 300,000 and 600,000 according to estimates, worked in Lebanon as migrant workers, in either seasonal or low-skilled work (MPC, 2013; SNAP, 2013; World Bank, 2013). As a result, many refugees either had pre-existing ties to the country, either personally or by extension. Third, particularly in border areas, tribal links and a history of intermarriage meant these ties were even stronger and enabled Syrians to settle with family and friends as the crisis began (Naufal, 2012).

#### The national response to the refugee crisis

The Syrian uprising and ensuing conflict posed a particularly distinct challenge for the Lebanese government, which has been divided between pro and anti-Syrian political factions (see Section 2). Over the first few years of the crisis, the Lebanese government pursued what has been called a 'policy of "no policy"' or, less generously, a 'policy of ostrich-like denial' (El Mufti, 2014; Saghiel & Frangieh, 2014). The border was left *de facto* open and international humanitarian assistance was allowed. Different Lebanese political factions have been militarily involved in Syria (with Hezbollah fighting on the side of the Assad government and Sunnis joining the rebellion) without pulling Lebanon into the conflict.

The Palestinian experience has profoundly shaped the response to the Syrian refugee crisis, particularly with regard to the refusal to establish refugee camps on Lebanese soil. In terms of both the potential permanence of refugees and the potential security threat such camps pose, 'the Palestinian camp experience [has become] the "scarecrow" behind the question of establishing refugee camps for Syrian refugees in Lebanon' (Nasser et al., 2015: 46)

As the refugee numbers significantly increased, in 2013 the government set up a committee to assess and respond to the needs of refugees and host communities. The Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Social Affairs and UNCHR led the response and coordination (GoL & UNDP, 2014; LCPS, 2016). The government developed a Stabilisation Roadmap with the support of the World Bank and the UN, based on a comprehensive stabilisation assessment (Government of Lebanon, 2013; World Bank, 2013). However, concrete implementation failed because of persistent deadlock caused by internal divisions within the Mikati government, with factions split between pro- and anti-Assad positions, which eventually led to its collapse

in March 2013. The caretaker government that followed, led by Prime Minister Tamam Salam, remained divided among March 8 and March 14 blocs, and was unable to take any decisive position throughout its first year (ICG, 2012; EuroNews, 2013).

As of mid-2014, the central government had increased its involvement. A policy framework was finally produced by end-2014, with a more developmental approach, support for host communities and more restrictions placed on Syrian refugees (GoL & UNDP, 2014; LCPS, 2016). The government's three priorities are (GoL & UN, 2014):

- reducing the number of registered Syrian refugees
- addressing rising security concerns across the country and communities
- sharing the economic burden by expanding the response to adopt a developmental approach, also benefiting Lebanese institutions, communities and infrastructure

### The municipal responses to the refugee crisis

As national political representatives repeatedly failed to develop a comprehensive response, Lebanese municipalities and host communities faced the daily reality of responding to the needs of refugees arriving in their villages and towns. Despite their frontline involvement, they were often excluded from the planning and implementation of response projects, in particular those stemming from international organisations. They were consulted beforehand only to obtain local permission to execute projects in their areas (Mercy Corps, 2014). The policy vacuum at central level and the diverse socioeconomic conditions of regions across the country resulted in a wide array of responses (van Vliet & Gourani, 2014). Some municipalities imposed restrictions on refugees, such as curfews and banning the establishment of Syrian businesses (ALEF, 2013; El-Helou, 2014). Others took measures to facilitate refugees' access to aid and shelter. Some of these measures, most prominently curfews, are deemed unconstitutional and illegal by most experts, including then-Minister of Interior Marwan Charbel (AlSharq, 2013), but they remained largely unchallenged.

Cooperation between national and local levels has been problematic. In July 2013, the Council of Ministers gave the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities responsibility to follow up on the situation of Syrian refugees. Sub-regional district (*qaimaqam*) security cells, with representatives of security bodies and of the Ministries of Social Affairs, Health and Education, were to update numbers of refugees, manage and oversee assistance and coordinate with municipalities and NGOs. Municipalities and unions of municipalities used meetings to communicate their service delivery needs. Challenges included shortcomings in the solutions offered to local administrations; irregular attendance by NGOs; inconsistency between proposals and the funding available; and lack of an operational mechanism. They did not discuss the situation of Palestinian refugees from Syria (MoE et al., 2014: 32). Other sources suggest local coordination is poor, and would be better placed at the *muhafaza* level, where UNHCR operates (regional rather than sub-regional level) (LCPS, 2016).

The overwhelming majority of registered Syrians (86%) settled in communities that already housed 66% of the poorest Lebanese (World Bank 2013).<sup>8</sup> The immense pressure on local services made it even more difficult for municipalities to respond adequately to the most basic needs of the host and refugee populations. As the conflict has worn on, tensions have become more commonplace, prompting greater awareness in government, UN agencies and NGOs of the importance of social cohesion as part of the humanitarian response.

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<sup>8</sup> The LCRP cites a more recent figure that places the percentage at 87% in 251 municipalities that house 67% of the poorest Lebanese (LCRP 2015). However, due also to the estimated high number of unregistered Syrians, the exact figures are less important than the general trend, which remains the same.

## 5.2 Effects of the refugee crisis and responses on social cohesion

This section examines whether and how the influx of refugees has affected pre-existing social cleavages among host communities, and the extent to which it has created, or has the potential to create, new axes of social tension.

### Sectarian demographic challenge

Official figures on the sectarian makeup of Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not publicly available but it is widely acknowledged that the vast majority are Sunni: 95% according to some sources (ICG, 2013; Mercy Corps, 2013). Fears that this influx would upset the delicate demographic balance among sectarian groups in Lebanon have become one of the most cited concerns in analyses of the impact of the crisis on social cohesion (ICG, 2012; Salem, 2012; Nebehay, 2014; Pizzi, 2015; Yahya, 2015). Strikingly, while political elites decry the demographic impacts of Syrian refugees, local and micro-level studies of social tension do not identify it as a significant source of tension.

Refugee settlement patterns cannot readily explain this apparent lack of sectarian-based tension. Early in the crisis, it was assumed refugees were settling in primarily Sunni areas because of religious affinity. However, the extent to which confession, as opposed to geographical proximity and family ties, factored in refugee decisions to settle in the border towns in the North and Bekaa is unclear (Naufal, 2013; Mackreath, 2014; ILO, 2014b).

As the crisis wore on and the number of refugees quickly escalated, movement towards other areas in Lebanon became much more common, if inevitable. By 2013, there were reports of refugees moving to the predominantly Shia South (IRIN, 2013). As of the latest available data from UNHCR, Syrian refugees are distributed 12 % in the South, 29% in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, 24% in the North and 35% in the Bekaa (UNHCR 2016a). This distribution indicates that refugees have moved significantly, to much more mixed regions (Mount Lebanon, Beirut) and even primarily Shia areas (South).

The influx of refugees does not appear to have significantly increased sectarian tensions at a local level. In a 2013 survey, only 30% of Lebanese considered the Syrian refugee crisis a threat to the communal balance of their area (International Alert, 2015b: 7).

Reports of tensions in Tripoli and its surrounding area—one of the most active sites of conflict in Lebanon since the beginning of the refugee crisis—have been associated with increased sectarian tension (Kullab, 2014). Radicalisation among Sunni communities appears to be a significant driver of conflict in this region (Levant7, 2015). Although studies remain limited, the available evidence points to a number of drivers, rather than primarily sectarianism. The socio-economic impact of the refugees seems to have increased vulnerabilities. This is combined with a general distrust of others, including own community members, and in the government's inability to provide security (*ibid.*: 16–24). Structural issues, such as poverty and regional under-development, may exacerbate this dynamic (Oxfam, 2016: 29). It is therefore unclear whether Sunni radicalisation is primarily an effect of the refugee crisis or a function of the ongoing Syrian civil war and the geopolitical context's impact on Sunni-Alawite relations in the city, and the broader context of poverty and under-development.

Other important social cleavages appear as more significant drivers of social tension at a local level. A recent report on conflict dynamics in the predominantly Shia southern *cazas* of Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil found ‘variables like political leanings, nationality, class, and differentiation between urban, rural, and Bedouin ways [were cited as] having a greater impact on Syrian-Lebanese relationships locally’ (Al-Masri, 2016). Significantly, tensions have been exacerbated even when refugees and host communities are of the same religious communities (UNDP & Mercy Corps, 2015). Rather than being drivers of tension, it appears sectarian factors can have an exacerbating effect on tensions once they arise (SCG, 2014).

## **Regional and socioeconomic cleavages**

It is unquestionably the most vulnerable localities and populations (including the urban poor) who are facing the greatest pressures following the crisis. In education, this means most Syrian children have entered public schools in areas that are already underprivileged and suffering from low-quality education (World Bank, 2013: 78). Although this increases pressure on local institutions, evidence suggests it may also be a potential source for improving social cohesion over the long term. One study demonstrates that having children study in mixed classes contributes positively to perceptions of Lebanese students towards Syrians. As mixed classes are offered only if a minimum number of Lebanese students are enrolled, they are more likely to occur in areas where enrolment in public school is high among the Lebanese population. This effect is limited, however, by the fact that it does not appear to have a significant effect on the perception of parents (International Alert, 2015a).

Health centres are overwhelmed, with more limited access to treatment for poor Lebanese and refugees, who rely on the public sector (GoL & UN, 2014). Evidence of tension in provision points to the importance of soft factors, such as negative attitudes and stereotypes, in addition to economic factors, such as differences in fees paid and limited space in health centres (International Alert, 2015b). Regional differences are marked here as well, with tensions reportedly higher in the poorer Bekaa than in the South (*ibid.*).

A conflict scan (SCG, 2014) examined the factors considered to worsen social cohesion at local level in South Lebanon and Tripoli. It found economic factors, particularly competition over employment opportunities, were the main source of division, with 71% of Lebanese and 47% of Syrians surveyed finding lack of employment opportunities the most divisive factor. Many studies report the finding that labour competition has been a driver of social tensions between Lebanese and Syrians, and was as early as two years into the crisis (Mercy Corps, 2013; World Bank, 2013). However, this does not appear to apply uniformly across regions, or across sectors. In the South, for example, labour competition appears less significant, particularly as refugees are seen as benefiting the local agricultural market (Al-Masri, 2016).

## **Nationality-based cleavages**

The effect of the crisis on social cohesion is being felt beyond Lebanese–Syrian dynamics. As Syrians gain greater access than Palestinians to Lebanese public institutions, such as public schools, this may further exacerbate feelings of exclusion by Palestinians, whose access to civic rights and social services has been limited for nearly 70 years.

Palestinian communities are also now hosting over 42,000 Palestinian Refugees from Syria (PRS). These communities fall outside the mandate of UNHCR and have a near total dependency on UNRWA for their survival (UNRWA, 2014). Half of this population resides in formal Palestinian camps and the other in gatherings often outside the limits of these camps (UNHCR, 2016b). As such, they are competing with original Palestinian camp residents for services as well as for housing, for example raising rents in overcrowded camps (Mouzahem, 2014). A UNDP conflict study showed that the influx of Syrian Palestinian refugees into Saida's camps had increased tensions within Palestinian communities, which respondents considered to be linked 'to "cultural differences", as Palestinians from Syria have historically enjoyed better living conditions than their counterparts in Lebanon' (Lebanon Support, 2015: 20). UNRWA responsibility for PRS has increased pressure on the organisation and increased tensions among Palestinians (Carrión, 2016).

In addition to grave socioeconomic vulnerabilities (Kukrety, 2016; UNHCR, 2016b), PRS lack legal status and up-to-date civil registration documents as well as being restricted in movement (Abdulrahim & Harb 2015; UNHCR, 2016b). This legal precariousness is now a reality for the majority of Syrian refugees, but is more complex and restricted for PRS. Based on findings by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), opportunities for residency renewal (not regularisation) 'existed only within an extremely restricted time frame and, in practice, were virtually impossible for PRS to benefit from'. Even in the few cases that were successful, renewal was granted for only three months (NRC & IRC, 2015: 6).

### **Legal status as a (not so) new social cleavage**

The precarious legal status of Syrian refugees, and its ensuing vulnerabilities, adds yet another layer of social cleavage. The legal mechanisms that create this vulnerability are not new; there are important parallels with those used against Palestinian refugees, Iraqi refugees and migrant workers in Lebanon (Saghieh, 2015). However, the large number of Syrian refugees now affected by these regulations has created yet another source of social cleavage within the country, with potentially dangerous effects for social cohesion.

New regulations put in place in January 2015, imposing visa requirements on Syrians crossing the border, have made it virtually impossible for refugees to renew their status without paying a \$200 annual fee, and they potentially also require a Lebanese sponsor. While the latter is in principle required only for those Syrians not registered with UNHCR, the policy is not applied uniformly and many report being asked by General Security to provide a sponsor even if registered (Human Rights Watch 2016: 10). No reliable figures exist on the number of Syrians in Lebanon who have limited or no legal status, but estimates place the number somewhere between 60% and 70% in 2015 (Janmyr, 2016: 15).

The effect of this on prospects for social cohesion are manifold, including making Syrians more vulnerable to abuse and discrimination and severely limiting their access to justice as well as services, particularly education and health (Aranki & Kalis, 2014; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Nasser et al., 2015; Janmyr, 2016). It also only serves to make interaction with Lebanese and Syrians less likely, as the greatest effect of limited legal status appears to be on freedom of movement (NRC, 2014; NRC & IRC, 2015). Support for restrictive and discriminatory policies against refugees seems strong among Lebanese, even when sources of economic competition are alleviated (Harb & Saab, 2014). Evidence shows measures to increase inter-group contacts enhance social cohesion, thus policies that reduce interactions are only likely to worsen tensions (Al-Saadi, 2014; El-Helou, 2014).

In summary, the influx of refugees does not appear to have significantly increased sectarian tensions but, together with other factors, may have contributed to the rise of radicalisation in Sunni border areas. Other important social cleavages appear as more significant drivers of social tension at local level, and sectarian differences are exacerbating these pre-existing tensions. The refugee crisis in particular is worsening geographical divisions, with already vulnerable regions hosting most refugees. New tensions include nationality-based ones, between Lebanese and PRS. Government restrictions on Syrian refugees may only worsen social cohesion. Increasing municipal service delivery may stop pre-existing socioeconomic and regional inequalities deepening but is unlikely to suffice to alleviate tensions between host populations and refugees without effort to promote Lebanese–Syrian interaction.

## **5.3 Effects of the refugee crisis and responses on legitimacy**

This section examines whether and how the Syrian refugee crisis has affected perceptions of the central government, municipalities and international assistance by Lebanese and Syrian refugees.

### **Effects on state legitimacy**

Nationwide, trust in government declined between 2013 and 2015, though the survey did not ask whether this owed specifically to the response to the refugee crisis. Only 2% and 4% stated that they completely trusted the government and the Parliament, respectively (down from 4% and 6%). However, there was a sharp increase in the share of citizens who completely mistrusted both. Around 87% and 83% of respondents declared complete mistrust of the government and Parliament (68% and 58% in 2013), the lowest levels of trust of any state institutions when compared with the army, security forces, and judiciary (LADE, 2015: 46–7).

A recent study to identify drivers of radicalisation among Sunnis in Akkar found that, across all sectarian groups, there was overwhelming dissatisfaction with the national response to the

crisis (Levant7, 2015: 26). A significant proportion also stated simply that they did not trust the national government (48%). This was particularly acute among those who felt their own community was not well represented—namely, Sunnis (71%) and Greek Orthodox (88%). As the previous section showed, ineffective state responses, combined with other factors, have increased the legitimacy of radical groups in Akkar. In the border town of Arsal, ‘radical Syrian groups such as the Islamic State (IS) and Jabhat al-Nusra benefit the most, as they can mobilise local anger and harness it to their worldview’ (ICG, 2016: 1).

The refugee crisis has therefore probably contributed to further distrust in the central government. The political class’ persistent failure to be seen to address the crisis effectively or adequately represent the population across sectarian differences feeds into a further cycle of violence and radicalisation. Hezbollah’s growing military strength, and the army’s dominant Shia composition (which means it is less likely to take action against Hezbollah), is starting to diminish the army’s legitimacy in the eyes of the Sunni population as it takes action against Sunni jihadists in northern Lebanon (ICG, 2015).

Rather than unifying the country around a shared challenge, lack of a national response has reinforced patronage and sectarian-based legitimacy, further undermining the central state. ‘Municipalities and local NGOs were left on their own, causing many to turn to their sectarian patronage networks, thus strengthening the sectarian divide and its discourse and further weakening institutions and trust in central government’ (UNDP & Mercy Corps, 2015: 19).

### Potential effects of international assistance on Lebanese institutions

International aid was initially solely focused on meeting refugees’ need, and was perceived by Lebanese host communities to favour Syrian refugees (Christophersen et al., 2013; WVI, 2016; SCG, 2014). Lebanese communities felt the humanitarian response was attracting more refugees and encouraging their reproduction (UNDP & Mercy Corps, 2015). Aktis (2016: 13) confirms how, ‘The fairly low level of trust that people have ... is due to the general perception that only Syrians are targeted by these organisations’. Previous neglect of the border areas in the Bekaa and the North (including Akkar) has exacerbated local resentment of aid (Carpi, 2014) and the real or perceived unfairness of its distribution (Al-Masri, 2015).

Municipalities similarly reported negative views of humanitarian assistance: ‘Municipal leaders [in Tripoli] are frustrated by what they perceive as fragmentation and duplication of humanitarian assistance [and] want more investment according to the percentage of Syrian refugees relative to the total population’ (Oxfam, 2016: 40).

International assistance has been able to adjust and now also aims to meet the needs of host communities. Since the beginning of implementation of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan in 2015, 168 municipalities have been supported with projects for host communities as well as refugees, out of 252 identified as the most vulnerable; 39 of these support the delivery of municipal services (primarily related to infrastructure repair and public and recreational facilities) (Inter-Agency Coordination, 2016).

Aktis (2015) found the UNDP municipal support project had had some positive effects and enhanced perceptions of the capability and trustworthiness of municipalities:

- There was a decline in the extent to which citizens looked to central government as they continue to receive services from the municipality. In areas where the municipality had been under-resourced and had provided very little (e.g. the North), the impact of service delivery through the municipality was greatest, probably because people’s expectations were very low.
- Delivery of one service by the municipality tended to improve perceptions of the municipality in other thematic areas but also raised expectations that the municipality could deliver wider improvements. Increased expectations of state service provision could lead, over time, to a decrease in satisfaction with the state.

External assistance therefore has the potential to change expectations of service delivery. While this could have short-term benefits, the Aktis study points to a number of risks that could further destabilise Lebanon should external assistance be reduced or the central state

not take up the new, expected, responsibilities, either directly or by better funding or empowering municipalities.

The impact of this assistance seems to have emboldened municipalities to call for greater independence from the central government and (re)-assert desires for stronger decentralisation. The experience of direct international assistance may also further the empowerment of municipalities to seek out further international resources (LCPS, 2016).

### Refugees' perceptions of municipalities and international aid

Syrian refugees do not trust the central government or municipal authorities, according to available data, including focus group discussions by Oxfam (2016) and the UN vulnerability assessment (UNHCR et al., 2015). They prefer to rely on host communities—landowners or neighbours—or humanitarian organisations (Oxfam, 2016: 40). In particular, refugees have accused municipalities of wrongdoing and would prefer if municipalities were not involved in distribution of assistance, as refugees are not registered with them (UNHCR et al., 2015).

NGO research also suggests municipalities have low legitimacy in the eyes of Syrian refugees and are seen as worsening, instead of ameliorating, social tensions. 'Performance-based' legitimacy is poor, as municipalities are not seen as offering sufficient protection to refugees. Non-legally mandated curfews introduced by municipalities are causing feelings of intimidation. Municipalities cannot protect Syrians against exploitation in the workplace or against bullying in some neighbourhoods. Some Syrians claim municipalities have 'security files' on all Syrian inhabitants within their jurisdictions, especially in the South (SCG, 2014).

'Process-based' legitimacy is also low in the eyes of Syrian refugees. Some studies found a lack of willingness on the part of Syrians to report abuses and harassments (Al-Masri, 2015). There are few channels for Syrians to make complaints and obtain redress. Refugees reported that employers and residents threatened them with deportation back to Syria if they denounced intimidators to the authorities (SCG, 2014). Few organisations represent refugees with municipalities, as refugees are integrated in communities and not organised (*ibid.*). Exceptions include Jihadist groups in the Bekaa who can speak on behalf of the Syrian refugees and demand their protection by Lebanese authorities (Al-Masri, 2015).

Patronage networks are the main source of support for Syrians, who 'seek membership in local patronage networks for protection, including that provided by landowners on whose land informal settlements are constructed, employers, and local political actors. While such patronage networks provide some guarantee of safety for the Syrian refugees, they are not in themselves free of exploitation' (Al-Masri, 2015: 17). Lebanese employers can make Syrians without protection work for longer and reduce their wages. 'Sponsorship' has been extended beyond work permits: Lebanese must pledge responsibility for Syrian refugees, changing the host-refugee relationship and furthering their 'manufactured vulnerability' (Saghieh, 2015). New restrictions on Syrian refugees, limiting their income and increasing their poverty (UNHCR et al., 2015), include denial of work permits and requesting that those registered with UNHCR pledge not to undertake paid work (LCPS, 2016).

Perceptions of international assistance by refugees also show challenges. Humanitarian aid was found to have 'limited trust at the local level', with 'ambiguous and unpredictable' policy (Al-Masri 2015: 15–16). Even among refugees, and not just host communities, some believe NGOs discriminate (e.g. in favour of female-headed families) (UNHCR et al., 2015). In UN focus groups with refugees, the majority claimed there were no support mechanisms in their communities. Support was not sufficient and the reduction in World Food Programme cash for food from \$30 to \$19 a month meant they could not cover their basic needs. Refugees do not understand the selection criteria for aid. Some consider NGOs corrupt (paid by refugees to get assistance) (*ibid.*). Refugees do not always understand where the aid is coming from or what is available. This is made worse by rumours of mismanagement, corruption and limited accountability. By contrast, aid from Gulf countries or through religious organisations was seen as more personal and as including demands for political loyalties (Al-Masri, 2015).

In summary, refugees prioritise patronage networks and have low satisfaction and trust in central, municipal and even international aid performance and processes. Municipal support

projects can enhance Syrian's perceptions of Lebanese (Mercy Corps, 2015), but it is unlikely that they can transform wider perceptions and public policies towards refugees. This is made all the more unlikely as these projects operate in—and do not appear to challenge—a context of increased restrictions on mobility, right to work and access to justice for Syrian refugees. The continued underfunding of this sector, which has only reached 6% of its target funding for 2016 (Inter-Agency Coordination, 2016), is also unlikely to make significant strides in addressing Lebanon's historically unbalanced national development policies, which bear immensely on the host communities' ability to support refugees.

Overall, this section has shown that many of the sources of tensions between Syrians and host communities have their origins in issues that predate their arrival. The refugee crisis has not significantly worsened sectarian tensions but has exacerbated pre-existing regional and socioeconomic dynamics, with the effects hitting poor Lebanese and vulnerable localities the hardest. National, local and international responses have had different effects on state legitimacy. The central government's inability to respond seems to have further reduced its already low legitimacy and contributed to radicalisation in the border region. By contrast, municipalities' responses, such as the introduction of curfews or the benefits of international assistance, have the potential to improve their standing in the eyes of some of the Lebanese populations and empower them to make more demands on the national state. International assistance may have negative impacts in the longer term if the state is not able to deliver on the increased expectations aid may have generated—either centrally or through municipalities—and if it does not improve its standing in the eyes of refugees.

## 6. Conclusion

This section summarises key findings from the literature on whether and how service provision at the municipal level contributes to social cohesion and/or legitimacy in Lebanon (at both municipal level and high levels of state authority), and the effect of these on social stability. It also summarises whether and how the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis affects those linkages. It concludes by looking at some of the key evidence gaps and implications for donors.

### 6.1 Social cohesion

Overall, Lebanon has failed to create a society-wide sense of identity that transcends sectarian identities. The current power-sharing system has resulted in neither social cohesion nor even political stability; it is inherently ‘conflict-ridden’ (Salamey, 2009). It cannot adapt to demographic changes and structurally excludes non-nationals, such as stateless persons and Palestinian and now Syrian refugees, as well as groups such as women and youth. Inter-sectarian tensions are less prevalent, though still present, at local level, where communities are more likely to be homogenous.

National-level service provision appears to be of greater potential significance for social cohesion: municipalities generally provide more marginal services, such as street cleaning and lighting, sewage and water systems. Municipalities are also constrained in their capacity and financial resources. However, the central state has done little to alleviate poverty and extreme regional disparities. On the contrary, it has strengthened socioeconomic differences. It has enabled a major role for the private sector, and for the sectarian and politically based service delivery that reinforces religious identity as a primary social cleavage.

While the sectarian lens is the most often used for Lebanon, the review has shown the importance of other cleavages: socioeconomic, regional, nationality-based and gender-based. Addressing these divisions, which cut across religious lines, could address some long-standing grievances, such as those about geographic inequalities. However, as long as the central state remains firmly based on confessional division of power, and the political class divided into pro- and anti-Syrian regime factions, progress on social cohesion will be limited.

### 6.2 State legitimacy

Sectarian patronage systems are the main source of legitimacy for those in power in Lebanon. Political support is exchanged for specific benefits, including access to services. It co-exists alongside, and often overlaps with, confessional (based on sect), traditional (e.g. family or tribes at the local level) or ideas (e.g. geopolitical) sources of legitimacy. These are often in tension with democratic ‘process-based’ legitimacy and contrive to keep the state weak, corruption endemic and personalised networks strong.

Municipalities are the only subnational level where elections are held, providing a potential source of democratic, ‘process-based’ legitimacy. However, local elections are dominated by deals between parties and powerful local families. They are largely not seen as a channel of local accountability. Representation is also undermined by the use of the civil registry for voter registration, which results in Lebanese having the right to vote in their ancestral village regardless of their current residence. There are few non-electoral mechanisms for local accountability or participation. In the most recent municipal elections there were many non-traditional candidates from civil society, in the capital and across the country. Local politics appear to provide greater space for new political actors to mobilise and challenge existing authorities. However, electoral turnout has been low, especially in Beirut.

Lebanese citizens experience high levels of corruption and have very low expectations of state service delivery. Expectations are fluid and can differ according to the level (local or national), the nature of services, past experience of service provision, etc. Few studies specifically look at state or municipal legitimacy, and they measure legitimacy in different ways, through expectations, trust or performance, making overall assessment difficult.

The reviewed evidence suggests the central state and municipalities do not derive legitimacy from their performance in delivering services for all, such as health and education, and provide few opportunities for 'process-based' legitimacy, such as participation mechanisms. 'Performance-based' legitimacy is important but not enough, particularly as expectations change. It needs to be complemented by other forms of legitimacy to deliver some stability.

Personalised patronage systems undermine national stability as they further sectarian or political divisions and discourage the creation of stronger national or local state capacities. Patronage systems could benefit from 'performance-based' legitimacy in the eyes of their constituents but they have mainly benefited elites, and have maintained high levels of vertical and horizontal inequalities. Civil society protests are challenging state performance on specific, service delivery issues, such as the rubbish collection crisis in Beirut, but so far have not led to reconfiguration of the fundamental agreement on how power is divided and structured.

### 6.3 The effects of the refugee crisis

There have been fears that the Syrian refugee influx would upset the delicate sectarian balance of the national power-sharing political system (as 95% of refugees are estimated to be Sunni). Yet this influx does not generally appear to be a source of local sectarian tensions. One exception is in Tripoli and its surrounding area, where sectarian tension has increased and there has been radicalisation among Sunni elements. It is unclear whether this is primarily an effect of the refugee crisis, however. It may also arise from the ongoing Syrian civil war and the geopolitical context's effect on Sunni–Alawite relations in the city, and the broader context of poverty and under-development in the area.

The Syrian refugee crisis has exacerbated pre-existing regional and socioeconomic cleavages, affecting poor Lebanese and vulnerable localities the most. The Bekaa and the North (including Akkar) collectively host nearly 60% of Lebanon's Syrian refugee population. These regions have historically seen the greatest levels of poverty and social inequalities, and services are coming under greater pressure as a result of the increase in the local population. Some studies find that insecurity and competition over jobs, rather than access to services, are the main source of local tensions between Lebanese host communities and refugees.

The evidence with regard to the effect of increasing municipal service provision on social cohesion is mixed. Direct interventions that have increased social and economic relations have improved community relations more than service delivery or local governance improvements (inclusion or accountability). However, the generalisability of this is difficult to establish as the evidence is limited to two studies (Mercy Corps, 2015; Aktis, 2016).

The Lebanese central state and municipalities have played negative roles with regard to social cohesion between host communities and refugees. The introduction of local curfews in at least 70 municipalities and new restrictions on visas and employment make Syrians more vulnerable to abuse. They limit interaction between Syrians and Lebanese, one of the few factors for which there is strong evidence of its importance for social cohesion.

The Lebanese government failed to respond effectively to the refugee intake, initially leaving municipalities and aid organisations to meet the most pressing needs. This local approach reinforced the narrow patronage- and sectarian-based legitimacy prevalent in Lebanon, including in how refugees perceived local and international assistance. It appears to have also undermined trust in national authorities, which had already started from a very low point. However, the refugee crisis has provided a new window for municipalities to demonstrate their willingness and ability to respond to local needs. International assistance projects that strengthen municipal service provision may shift local expectations so that citizens expect more of their municipalities than of the central state. If done sustainably, this could strengthen local legitimacy. However, if sustainable sources of funding do not emerge, it could lead to negative consequences, as these more recent service delivery expectations are not met. This has the potential to further destabilise Lebanon.

## 6.4 Key evidence gaps

This review has analysed the main sources of evidence related to social cohesion and legitimacy in Lebanon, including in the context of the refugee crisis. Some of the key evidence gaps identified by this review include the following.

### How social cohesion and legitimacy are understood by host communities, refugees, municipal authorities and policy-makers

First, there are few studies on the representativeness, accountability and responsiveness of local elected officials, which could be used to assess changes in perceptions of legitimacy. Such research could also include a rigorous analysis of how social cohesion and legitimacy are understood by host communities, refugees, municipal authorities and policy-makers. The disconnect between the actual practice of local politics, based on powerful families and parties, and citizens' expectations of integrity, change and representation calls for more dedicated research to measure changes in perceptions, beliefs and behaviours on a more comparable basis. One of the big challenges lies in understanding the role of political parties in local elections, as candidates are not officially tied to political parties in the final published results. Research could also examine how local elites (families, tribes) derive their legitimacy and how they are held to account, and the role of local civil society groups in these processes. It could also analyse differences across the country.

### Links between service delivery, social cohesion and municipal legitimacy

Second, it is difficult to draw conclusions on the links between service delivery and municipal legitimacy based on the current evidence. There are also few studies on successful municipal service delivery, particularly among municipalities that extend services beyond the basic (sewerage, roads etc.) to, for example, education. Such information would be needed to assess potential influence on local social cohesion and state legitimacy, and could provide a useful source for municipalities or municipal unions seeking to improve their performance.

### International funding for refugees and host communities

Third, greater data and transparency on international funding and aid interventions for refugees and host communities would be beneficial. Selection of which municipalities receive assistance, aside from the classification of Most Vulnerable Municipalities developed jointly by UNDP and the government, remains overwhelmingly *ad hoc* and opaque. This may exacerbate perceptions of unfair distribution of support, in particular if it turns out that Southern municipalities receive most aid because of their perceived greater effectiveness, even if they proportionately host fewer refugees. Such data could help assess how external interventions define and support social cohesion, legitimacy and stability, and potential negative unintended impacts.

## 6.5 Implications for international assistance

This review provides cautionary evidence. External assistance should not assume that improving municipal service delivery to compensate for an absence of national response will improve social stability through either social cohesion or legitimacy.

The limited available studies point to the need to emphasise broad participatory processes, and, particularly in the context of the current refugee crisis, interventions that increase direct interactions between Lebanese and Syrians, rather than 'hard' service delivery that does not take into account these so-called 'softer' factors. Municipalities, but also other actors such as NGOs, the media and the central state, can address tensions between refugees and host communities. Improved service delivery can address other cross-cutting social divisions, such as those based on class, geography, nationality or gender. However, national, rather than municipal, service delivery may be the better route to address country-wide divisions, especially in the absence of capable municipalities and fair national distribution of resources to municipalities.

The Lebanese evidence also aligns with the wider literature, which points to the limited ways in which service delivery can contribute to legitimacy. If public expectations of services are low, or how services are provided is not improved (e.g. with participation and accountability), legitimacy is unlikely to increase significantly solely in response to improved services.

Bypassing the central state by focusing on municipalities needs to better take into account the wider national context. It should not be assumed that municipalities provide greater accountability because they are closer to populations. Particularly under the current electoral system, local elections provide only limited opportunities for voice. In a context of de-concentration rather than decentralisation, most municipalities remain weak and central authorities undermine their access to funds and autonomy. International assistance demonstrates what more municipalities could achieve with greater resources, but, without systemic changes in how the central state supports municipalities or delivers locally, expectations may not be met and could lead to further instability in the future. At the same time, given the central state's weaknesses, municipalities offer space to innovate and address local challenges.

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