Fueling inequalities in Lebanon: COVID-19, a catalyst for discrimination

Long read

October 2020

Acknowledgements

ALEF is pleased to express its gratitude to all those who contributed, directly or indirectly, to the production of this report, including ALEF's team, board members, partners and friends.

Disclaimer

While the team made all efforts possible to cross-check information and reproduce facts and events accurately, this does not overrule the possibility of inaccuracies or oversights, for which ALEF hereby expresses its regrets.

Introduction

The religious diversity in Lebanon, a country known for its numerous religious groups, has been, throughout its history, dually a positive factor and a negative one. Diverse views have emerged within the Lebanese society and drove communities apart, not only at the sectarian level, but at the secular-sectarian level too. Since October 2019, religious and political tensions among Lebanese have been on a rise, exacerbating political, regional, and economic fractures. While these dynamics have been pacified in most cases, the instability looming in Lebanon since the October protests has led Lebanese citizens and groups to become more vocal and, in some cases, more violent by the day. The following study shows that the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the current context was mainly a catalyst for discrimination based on religion, geography, gender, and nationality.

The protests that erupted towards the end of 2019, and which are still ongoing today, are the direct result of years of rampant corruption, lack of justice and accountability on the part of the political establishment, and, ultimately, the neglect and the non-existence of public policies. Over the years, the impact of the lack of governance has impoverished not only the Lebanese population, but also the Lebanese state, in addition to having rendered the state's infrastructure no longer functional. The economic crisis, which has been intensifying since October, but which also had already started long before that, further weakened the status quo between the various religious communities and political forces on one hand, while reinforcing hate speech, discrimination, and inter-community tensions on the other hand.

As if this situation was not already enough, the first COVID-19 case was detected on February 21st, 2020[1]. The country was already going through its load of challenges and did not need a pandemic to add fuel to the fire. The pandemic has since then added more pressure and has been contributing to the rise of civil unrest, civil disobedience, and discrimination. Further, the COVID-19 pandemic, and its management, is just another example showing that the Lebanese state is not able to maintain control and order across its territory. Throughout the past few months, ALEF has monitored trends and major events that have occurred in Lebanon within this context. Through its Freedom of Religion and Belief project, through which ALEF hopes to monitor and reflect on trends related to hate speech and discrimination against the various religious communities residing in Lebanon, ALEF decided to draft this paper to share events related to the COVID-19 pandemic and their impact on the Lebanese society in terms of social stability.

Stigmatizing narrative

Lebanon was already struggling to maintain a minimal level of stability within its borders. With the absence of an effective social safety net, the most vulnerable must fend for themselves in order to pay bills and put food on the table. Many vulnerable Lebanese were not able to stay at home and isolate themselves from the rest; working from home, paying bills, and buying commodities were in fact a luxury accessible only to a few. For example, most of Tripoli's inhabitants, Lebanon's, and the Mediterranean's poorest city, could not abide by the lockdown measures imposed by the state. Walking around the city

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[1] GardaWorld: "*Lebanon first case of coronavirus (COVID-19) confirmed*", https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/316346/lebanon-first-case-of-coronavirus-covid-19-confirmed-february-21

made it clear: people did not respect the Lebanese authorities' directives, be it the lockdown, the curfew, or simple social distancing measures.[2]

To illustrate the situation, the numbers shared by the Ministry of Public Health show that the number of infected cases in Beirut, where social distancing measures are mostly applied, are at approximately 3500 cases[3] (as of mid-September 2020) for a population of around 2 million individuals.[4] On the other hand, in Tripoli, where measures have been barely respected, around 2000 cases[5] were identified so far; for a population of 550 000 to 700 000 individuals.[6] In retrospect, the rate of infection is not that different between the two cities, knowing that the region of Beirut was witnessing a more brutal testing campaign. This led many Lebanese in the capital to be frustrated by the situation and to feel that social distancing measures were targeting them more than those in other regions.

In some of Beirut neighborhoods and on social media, businessowners were denouncing the fact that they did not have the right to open their business or restaurant under the penalty of paying a fine. "Why do others have the right to open their business in the North without risking being fined by the government, but I am forced to shut everything down here?", says a shop owner in Achrafieh, while another from Ain Mrayseh shares the same observation. This can be explained by the lack of capacity of the Lebanese government to introduce measures and to uphold them at a national level. The Lebanese authorities were able to enforce measures in some areas, including most of Beirut, but were not able to do so in other areas such as in the Bekaa, the South, and the North. What is interesting is that these tensions were not driven by sectarian tensions. The increase in terms of stigmatization and discrimination in that case is mainly geographic. The economic crisis, in addition to the management of the COVID-19 pandemic by the authorities, has created tensions between the Core and the Peripheries across the country. The lack of consistency in the implementation of national measures from the part of the Lebanese authorities is contributing to an increase in resentment and in the conflictual narrative on the ground.

Further, at the start of the pandemic, many criticized the authorities for not closing the border with Syria earlier and not stopping all international flights, especially from COVID-19 epicenters such as Italy or Iran. It was easy to see a stereotypical speech online against the Shia community, accusing them of bringing the disease inside the country.[7] Stereotyping and stigmatizing communities have become a norm when dealing with specific crises such as when Sunnis were targeted following islamist attacks from 2013 to 2015. These discriminations, based on religion, are fueling polarization, which, in return, strengthens the parties to the detriment of the state. For example, the main Shia political parties, Hezbollah and Amal, organized local response efforts through the deployment of thousands of the parties' personnel. In addition to providing equipment, ambulances, and healthcare premises, doctors and nurses were

[2] LBC Group News: "*In Figures: Tripoli is poorest city on Mediterranean Coast*", https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/lebanon-news/438711/in-figures-tripoli-is-poorest-city-on-mediterranea/en.
[3] Epidemiological Surveillance Program, Ministry of Public Health: https://www.moph.gov.lb/maps/covid19.php [Consulted on 16/09/2020].
[4] World Population Review: https://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/beirut-population, [Consulted on 16/09/2020].
[5] Epidemiological Surveillance Program, Ministry of Public Health: https://www.moph.gov.lb/maps/covid19.php [Consulted on 16/09/2020].
[6] World Population Review: https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/cities/lebanon, [Consulted on 16/09/2020].
[7] Al-Arabiya: "*Lebanese Analysts question Qatar Airways Tehran-Beirut flight*", *https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2020/03/21/Coronavirus-Lebanese-analysts-question-Qatar-Airways-Tehran-Beirut-flight*.

deployed in the Beirut Suburbs, the South, and the Bekaa (outside of the Lebanese state emergency response plan), acting as an additional source of division and segregation between citizens. While many Lebanese were abiding by the rules of the Ministry of Public Health at the start of the pandemic, many others were disregarding them and acting upon measures encouraged by their political leaders. This exemplifies the perception of the unreliability of state institutions and confirms a reality on the ground: the absence of the state and the strong presence of political parties. With years of lack of trust in the capacity of state institutions to manage crises, the COVID pandemic only became a reality for some Lebanese when the political parties adopted their own response plans.

Scapegoating the "others"

The presence of more than one million Syrian refugees, and around 175 000 Palestinians, many living in camps, in addition to thousands of undocumented migrant workers, residing in overcrowded neighborhoods, increased the risks of contagion. For example, Palestinian camps, where some streets are too narrow, are among the most crowded areas in Lebanon. International and humanitarian organizations have warned about the risks that refugees face,[8] such as the lack of access to information regarding COVID-19 and to treatment, inability to practice social distancing in densely populated settlements, and an increased fear within refugee communities. For instance, many refugees stated they would not seek medical help in case they displayed symptoms, for fear of being arrested and deported, while undocumented migrants affirmed that they weren't able to receive any.[9]

On April 21st, 2020, the first cases of refugees being diagnosed with COVID-19 emerged in the Wavel Refugee Camp in West Bekaa.[10] Slowly, camps in the North, such as Beddawi, or in Beirut, such as Burj al-Barajneh, faced an increase in cases and were put under lockdown. Local Palestinian authorities forced the camps' inhabitants to remain at home for at least 14 days, which has put Palestinian refugees, as well as Syrians and migrant workers, in worse situations. This is due to their limited income and safety nets, leaving them without the means to stay home for long periods of time.[11]

Further, the lockdown measures implemented by the Palestinian camps' committees themselves followed other measures introduced by the Lebanese state and other Lebanese local authorities. Apart from the fact that most Lebanese authorities implemented non-discriminatory measures against refugees, many organizations and media outlets reported that some municipalities imposed specific measures targeting refugee communities under their jurisdiction.[12] These measures would range from extended curfews for refugees, reinforced measures around camps, such as security controls or the complete lockdown of certain camps without any valid reason, which escalated in certain cases into stigmatizing speech and. in

[8] Human Rights Watch: *"Lebanon: Refugees at risk in COVID-19 Response"*, *https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/lebanon-refugees-risk-covid-19-response*.
[9] Synaps Network: *"COVID and the camps"*, https://www.synaps.network/post/lebanon-camps-palestinian-refugees-corona.
[10] ABC News: *"First virus case recorded in refugee camp in Lebanon"*, *https://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory/agency-1st-virus-case-recorded-lebanon-refugee-camp-70281309*.
[11] The New Humanitarian: *"Palestinians in Lebanon say coronavirus help is too little, too late"*, *https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/feature/2020/05/27/Lebanon-Palestine-coronavirus-aid*.
[12] Al-Jazeera: *"COVID-19: Lebanon municipalities 'discriminate' against refugees"*, *https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/04/covid-19-lebanon-municipalities-discriminate-refugees-200402154547215.html*.

some cases, evictions[13]. It is important to note that these measures are usually the result of ignorance and were not implemented by the Lebanese Government, but were strictly localized and still show the degrading situation in terms of social stability and cohesion within vulnerable communities (especially between the Lebanese hosts and Syrian refugees). For example, certain municipalities in the country have tried to evict thousands of refugees living within their areas. The case of the Ghazze[14] village in the Bekaa is the perfect example. Following an incident between Syrian workers and the mayor, who refused visits from the workers' families due to the curfew and social distancing measures, local authorities were about to evict the 26,000 Syrian refugees from the area. Thanks to the intervention of local organizations and the Lebanese Ministry of Social Affairs, this did not come to fruition.

Resurrecting political blocs

Unlike what happened with the trash crisis in 2015, the Lebanese government took early and radical measures following the diagnosis of the first COVID-19 cases in the country. On Sunday the 15th of March 2020, Lebanon declared a state of health emergency and the Council of Ministers ordered a two weeks lockdown to contain the spread of the virus and to "flatten the curve". These measures included closing Beirut's international airport, all public places, such as parks, leisure venues, such as gyms, cinemas, theatres, restaurants, pubs, and night clubs (with the exception of restaurants having the option to deliver food), businesses, such as shops, malls, etc., schools and universities, and all public institutions, except for the ones needed to keep the country afloat, such as institutions related to energy, security, and health. Moreover, the Lebanese authorities introduced a curfew from 18:00 till 5:00.[15]

Following several weeks of decline in terms of cases, and due to more and more uproar and civil disobedience, the authorities decided to lighten the COVID-19 response measures. For example, curfews were shorter, spanning from 21:00 to 5:00. Business owners also received the green light to reopen their businesses, as part of the deconfinement plan set by the government following protests and several statements issued by the syndicate of tourism and hospitality warning that small businesses were in danger.[16] On the 24th of April 2020, Prime Minister Hassan Diab announced a 5-steps-deconfinement plan, opening the country's sectors one sector at a time, starting on the 27th of April. The new measures gave people the time to go to work, generate a limited income, pass by the supermarket to get commodities, and feel some sort of normalcy again.

But throughout the pandemic, since February 2020 and up until the end of the summer, the management of the crisis was in itself a source of polarization. Many supported the authorities' decisions, while many on the other hand mocked the state's directives. Indeed, at the start of the lockdown, people condemned the severity of the measures, which led to lockdown fatigue and thousands losing their last savings. At the same time, praising the state's measures had become a way of supporting the main parties in power

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[13] Human Rights Watch: *"Lebanon: Refugees at Risk in COVID-19 Response",* https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/04/02/lebanon-refugees-risk-covid-19-response.

[14] L'Orient-le Jour: *"Ghazze, dans la Bekaa-Ouest, 5 000 habitants et… 26 000 refugies syriens",* https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/amp/900222/a-ghazze-dans-la-bekaa-ouest-les-refugies-syriens-sont-cinq-fois-plus-nombreux-que-les-habitants.

[15] Annahar Newspaper: *"Lebanon declares state of health emergency",* https://www.annahar.com/english/article/1144112-lebanon-declares-state-of-health-emergency-intiates-total-lockdown.

[16] Evening Express: *"Tourism Sector should re-open, say industry leaders",* https://www.eveningexpress.co.uk/news/uk/tourism-sector-should-re-open-say-industry-leaders/.

(mainly those belonging to the 8th of March coalition and their allies) who have been heavily criticized since the October protests. In a way, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to maintaining the 8th and 14th of March tensions, polarizing communities supporting both blocs even more. For example, at several occasions, the Ministry of Health's behavior and decisions have been stirring controversies with people close to the 8th of March coalition backing him up while people from the 14th of March coalition heavily criticizing him. Instead of addressing the subject from a technical and scientific point of view, many approached it in a partisan way.

What impact on religious traditions?

The pandemic has affected all aspects of modern life, and religious practice was not spared. Lebanon is a country where most people are religious, according to the International Religious Freedom Report for Lebanon in 2017,[17] which means that religious traditions hold a high importance in people's lives. With the rise in cases, the Lebanese authorities implemented a series of measures to promote and impose social distancing such as curfews, lockdown, fines, etc., but did not deliver an official decision or procedures to be implemented regarding religious activities or ceremonies until the end of July 2020 – it took the Lebanese authorities six months to ban weddings. This decision was heavily criticized for being taken, despite the many warnings from medical experts and doctors in favor of it.

Since March 2020 and the first lockdown, Lebanese authorities preferred to let the various religious authorities decide themselves about whether or not to maintain the celebration of religious ceremonies. This led Bkerkeh, Dar al-Fatwa, and the Supreme Islamic Shiite Council to not ban these ceremonies. Meanwhile, the Lebanese state was able to close schools and universities, following the decision of the Lebanese government. The Lebanese authorities also took several decisions regarding the health sector, from boosting hospital capacities, such as opening new wards, to enhancing coordination, or setting up a taskforce. Yet, the authorities could not address regulations on religious practices, delegating such issues to the religious leaderships.[18]

Many of these ceremonies, mainly weddings and funerals, have been vectors of the infection. On several occasions, the authorities and the Lebanese Red Cross reported that a number of individuals were infected after attending a wedding or funeral ceremony.[19] These reports, in addition to people sharing pictures and videos of weddings they attended on social media, led many to clash on these platforms. For example, hate speech against believers who have not cancelled or postponed their weddings until after the pandemic was on the rise. Discussions around religious ceremonies have then triggered tensions between people from different faiths and different views on religion.[20] On the other hand, many believers chose to cancel or postpone ceremonies, or, in some cases, reduce the number of attendees.

But despite maintaining the celebration of religious ceremonies, religious authorities have implemented other measures to face the pandemic. For example, many churches and mosques restricted access to their

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[17] Lebanon 2017: International Religious Freedom Report, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Lebanon-2.pdf.
[18] Relief Web: *"Engaging religious leaders in the fight against COVID-19"*, https://reliefweb.int/report/lebanon/engaging-religious-leaders-fight-against-covid-19
[19] US News: "Lebanon records new coronavirus infection high", https://www.usnews.com/news/world/articles/2020-07-11/lebanon-records-new-coronavirus-infection-high.
[20] Al-ain: *"An exception for a wedding ceremony triggers online clash between Lebanese"*, https://al-ain.com/article/weddings-corona-lebanon.

premises by reducing the number of people allowed within the buildings and organizing prayers and masses online or outdoors. For example, many priests organized ceremonies online for schools, while sheikhs used empty fields or spaces next to their mosques to organize outdoor prayers, to promote and ensure social distancing.[21]

The virus, a vector of conflict

The economic crisis that has put enormous pressure on various communities from all around Lebanon, has led parties and movements to strengthen their ties with their own constituency. The severe effects on what was left of the Lebanese economy has reinforced religious divisions between various groups. On June 6, during a round of protests opposing civil society groups supported by some parties riding the protests' wave, against other traditional parties, violence and extreme tensions erupted between both groups in downtown Beirut.[22]

The tensions began after protesters started demanding the dismantling of Hezbollah's weapons' arsenal which led both groups to violently confront each other.[23] Interreligious slurs were heard, which also led to several fights that resulted in injuries. The days following the incident, Sunni, Shia, and Christian political leaders voiced their concern and condemned anyone undermining social stability and cohesion. Political and religious leaders called upon their communities and protesters to refrain from using violence and insulting or cursing religious symbols, to preserve national unity and avoid falling for discord.[24]

Even though violence erupted, the political establishment intervened early and quickly to avoid lasting tensions, which could have led to more confrontation. It is important to note that sectarian tensions in the country are still a real risk and that, despite the several waves of protests, most marked with calls for citizenship and pluralism, sectarian feeling is still deeply rooted within the Lebanese society. The absence of a real transitional justice process, accountability, and of the presence of a strong responsible state, still contributes to exacerbating tensions between the various Lebanese communities.

The response to the pandemic – humanitarian relief

As cited earlier, Lebanon was already going through financial, socio-economic, and political crises, which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The immediate impact was cushioned by pre-emptive interventions by humanitarian organizations, that provided support to Lebanese residing in vulnerable areas, in addition to supporting refugees. A local Christian organization in the North, International Orthodox Christian Charities, [25] distributed aid, such as clean water, food, and sanitization products, to dozens of families in host and refugee communities. Further, several initiatives were seen on social media

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[21] The National: *"Coronavirus forces change to religious traditions in Lebanon",* https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/coronavirus-forces-change-to-religious-traditions-in-lebanon-1.991138.

[22] Garda: *"Lebanon: Anti-government activists call for demonstration in Beirut June 6",* https://www.garda.com/crisis24/news-alerts/348331/lebanon-anti-government-activists-call-for-demonstration-in-beirut-june-6-update-109.

[23] Al-Arabiya: *"Splinters in Lebanon protests emerge as some call for Hezbollah disarmament",* https://english.alarabiya.net/en/features/2020/06/06/Splinters-in-Lebanon-protests-emerge-as-some-call-for-Hezbollah-disarmament.

[24] National News Agency: "*Hariri warns against sectarian strife*", http://nna-leb.gov.lb/en/show-news/116292/nna-leb.gov.lb/en.

[25] International Orthodox Christian Charities: *"Working for a better tomorrow",* https://iocc.org/where-we-work/lebanon.

where local citizens engaged in campaigns to collect food, clothes, medicine, and certain equipment to support the most vulnerable.[26]

Of course, there are always tensions that can emerge despite the large extent of solidarity. For example, many organizations reported that they had to face angry mobs when they distributed aid of any type to refugees. These organizations affirm that they distributed aid equally between the host and refugee communities but were threatened and verbally abused by local families. According to one social worker in charge of aid distribution in one of these regions: "We had to distribute aid packages during the night to avoid clashes with Lebanese families." These sensitive situations are set to increase in the upcoming months due to the degrading financial situation and deteriorating quality of life. The latter are drastically having an impact on polarization not only between the Lebanese and the refugees, but also between the Lebanese themselves.

What is certain is that, without the intervention of local organizations and the solidarity of the Lebanese society, the Lebanese state would not have been able to support the most vulnerable, a dimension of the lockdown that was ignored by state actors. The authorities did not develop emergency plans over the years, neither built up reserves to support the ones in need and are not taking responsibility for that. Further, the various tensions between the host and refugees' communities, in addition to threats encountered by humanitarian organizations are increasing, without real conflict management planning from the authorities.[27] It is then time for the latter to start anticipating emergency situations, come up with contingency plans, and provide Lebanese, as well as any other individuals residing in the country, with protection and the necessary support to cope when lockdown and other social distancing measures are being implemented, especially when they directly affect the need for an income to buy basic necessities.

The state versus the parties

Political leaders and parties did not sit idle while the virus started emerging across the country. Contrary to the government, political speech, in some cases, manipulated COVID-19 to serve political interests. Stigmatizing the Shia community, for example, was an attempt by many to put the blame on the 8th of March coalition. Further, the leader of the Lebanese Forces stated on March 13 that Palestinian refugee camps should be on lockdown. The political party's leader backed up his claim by saying that refugees could spread the virus across the country, at a very early stage of the pandemic when no case of COVID-19 was identified in any camp.[28]

At the same time, the state was not able to monopolize the emergency response due to other emergency measures being taken by local political actors, such as Hezbollah and Amal.[29] Similarly to how these two parties operated in the areas under their political control, the same happened in other areas such as in

[26] Euronews: "*Solidarity in Lebanon: Local initiatives respond to rising poverty*", https://www.euronews.com/2020/05/22/solidarity-in-lebanon-local-initiatives-respond-to-rising-poverty-levels.
[27] Middle East Institute: *"Waiting for the bad to get worse: Lebanon in the time of corona"*, https://www.mei.edu/publications/waiting-bad-get-worse-lebanon-time-corona.
[28] Arabi21: "*Geagea asks for the isolation of Palestinian camps*", https://bit.ly/3mphqpe.
[29] L'Orient-Le Jour, *"Hezbollah's fight against the Coronavirus: A Display of Power"*, https://www.lorientlejour.com/article/1213374/hezbollahs-fight-against-the-coronavirus-a-display-of-power.html.

Batroun or Bcharreh.[30] For example, in the latter, the Lebanese Forces distributed masks, hand gel, and other commodities to the region's inhabitants so they could protect themselves during the pandemic. On the other hand, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) disinfected areas in various majority Christian towns by deploying vehicles doing rounds of disinfection in certain neighborhoods.[31]

This kind of actions, from the part of political parties, is a clear depiction of partisan political action that seeks to create party-legitimacy and party-credibility rather than being targeted towards public institutions. It sheds light on the absence of real leadership by municipalities and other local authorities. Instead of working with the municipality in order to strengthen the presence of the state on the ground, political parties bypass the Lebanese official authorities and implement their own initiatives. That way, parties guarantee a limited presence of the state on the ground, forcing the latter to rely on the parties' interventions, without which, no response would be possible due to the lack of resources, expertise, and capacities among official authorities.

Conclusion

Facing superposed shocks and crises, the Lebanese society was anxiously anticipating how the authorities were to address the COVID-19 shock. But similarly to other crises and events, Lebanon suffers from the lack of anticipation and planning. These events are most of the time manipulated to serve political agendas or interests. For example, back in October 2019, a series of forest fires swept the country.[32] A Christian political leader stated that the fires only targeted "Christian regions", a statement that revived sectarian tensions.[33]The response to the fire also revived political activism and strengthened the views against the failures of the government in addressing major life-threatening events such as the 2015 garbage crisis. Back then, trash was piling up all around Lebanese cities and regions, pushing several political representatives to promote a sectarian narrative. For instance, some regions refused to stock, recycle, or sort garbage coming from areas mainly populated with people from another religious group.[34]

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the Lebanese society, especially at a time where the country could afford a pandemic the least. From worsening the financial situation by forcing people to remain home for long lockdown periods, to increasing anger and stress levels, which feed tensions and lead to confrontation, the coronavirus has had an important part in exacerbating tensions between the various Lebanese communities. From stigmatizing a community, to sectarian violence erupting during protests, the Lebanese communities have been paying the price of the country's lack of capacities in terms of anticipating crises and the lack of political will to find solutions to old sectarian tensions.

At the same time, despite the increase in sectarian narratives, various Lebanese communities have chosen solidarity and have supported each other by rallying behind local organizations or initiatives to support the most vulnerable. From collecting food and commodities, to organizing reduced religious ceremonies

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[30] Foreign Policy: *"Can a small Lebanese town become a model for conquering Covid-19?"*,
https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/04/30/lebanon-bsharri-coronavirus-pandemic-covid-19/.
[31] El-Nashra: *"Free Patriotic Movement disinfects streets in Batroun"*, *https://bit.ly/2ZFtkkY*.
[32] BBC News: "Lebanon calls for help as forest fires spread", https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-50059819.
[33] Lebanon Debate: "*Mario Aoun: How did the fires target only Christian regions?*",
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DdDlGN4hpF0&ab_channel=LebanonDebate.
[34] Al Monitor: "*Will religiously divided landfills solve Lebanon's trash crisis?*", https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2015/11/lebanon-waste-crisis-sectarian-landfills.html.

to limit the spread of the virus within local communities, the Lebanese society and some authorities have taken steps to promote pluralism and inclusiveness. These principles are slowly getting more ground within a portion of the Lebanese society, especially within the generations that did not witness the war. Though, it would be a mistake to think that sectarian subjects are not taboo anymore or have become easy to tackle and approach.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic re-exposed many of the Lebanese state's weaknesses. The latter are the result of a too-strong presence of political parties at the grassroots level, where they provide support, material aid, and protection. Instead of strengthening the state's institutions, the parties use their resources and network to lead on initiatives that should be implemented by the state itself. These actions contribute to increased polarization between communities, which has a dangerous impact on social stability and cohesion, similarly to what we have seen during protests or between Lebanese and refugees.