

MAKING SENSE #2

Defending Human Rights in Lebanon

Lebanon faces a multitude of crises that severely impact the lives and dignity of its people. These crises, caused by long-standing issues such as chronic political corruption, sectarianism, and weak state institutions, led to more recent tragic events such as the Beirut port blast, the cholera outbreak, and over 200% inflation.

Governmental authority in Lebanon essentially lies in the hands of men who were sectarian warlords during the country's civil war, and who took on the mantle of politicians with negotiation of the Taif Accords in 1989. Despite the harm caused by these warlords during the civil war, they have managed to maintain their grip on power by creating a “deep state” that relies on a population dependent on their regime, as depicted in Figure 1. This has resulted in the destruction of democratic institutions and the emergence of an apparent democracy known as consensus democracy, which is based on a systemic corrupt structure.

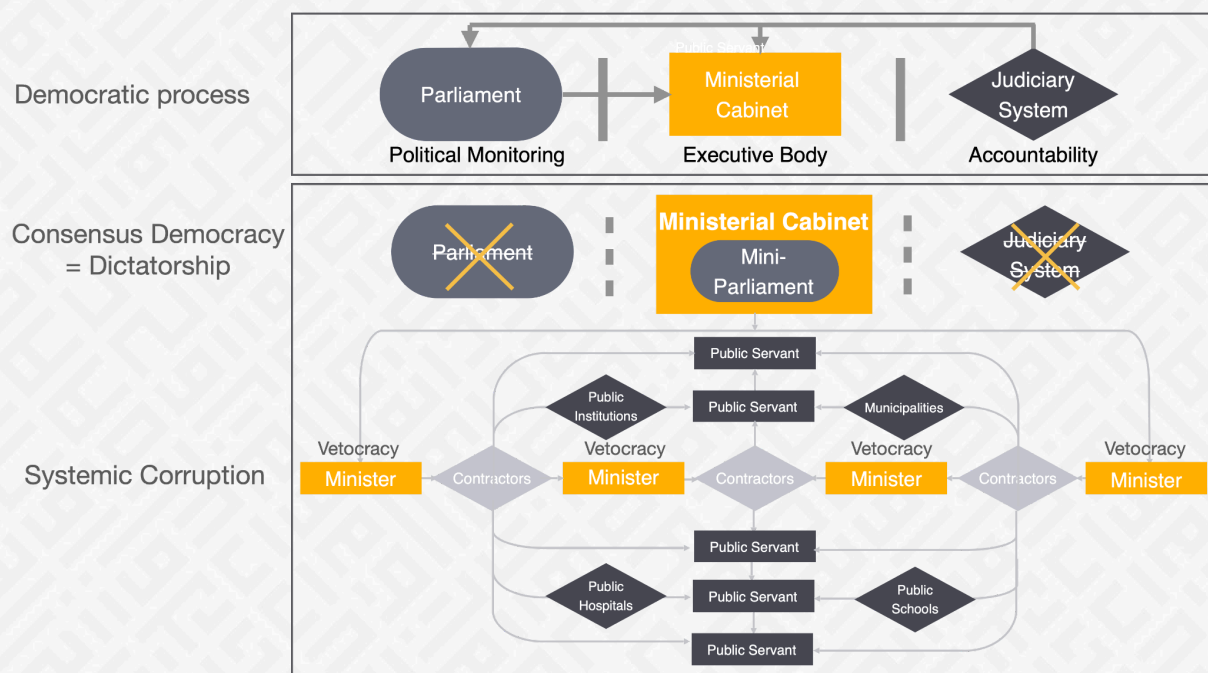


Figure 1: Replacing a sound democratic process by consensus democracy and the creation of a systemic corrupt system.

The breakdown of democratic processes and the adoption of consensus-based decision-making is closely tied to the violation of human rights. The following examples serve to illustrate the adverse effects that these practices have had on individuals and communities.

1. ***Lack of accountability:*** There is a lack of accountability for numerous crimes that have been committed, including the killing of journalists and political leaders, the Beirut port explosion that claimed over 230 lives, the theft of people's money by protected bankers, and the proliferation of smugglers and drug dealers. Unfortunately, the country's judiciary system is severely broken, and many criminals have been allowed to act with impunity or have even been promoted to hold high positions within the government.
2. ***Dependence:*** The warlords in Lebanon have established a system of dependence by providing essential resources like food, water, energy, education, and jobs to the people. This has made it challenging for the populace to survive without the support of these leaders, leading to a situation where they feel compelled to continue supporting them, despite knowing that they are corrupt.
3. ***Fear and intimidation:*** The leaders of Lebanon have resorted to fear and intimidation tactics to quash opposition and retain their hold on power. They have utilized violence, killing, and other forms of repression to silence dissent and exert authority over the populace. Furthermore, they have taken advantage of all media platforms to intimidate emerging political opposition parties and leaders, civil society organizations, and independent media outlets. Most significantly, they have utilized social media abuse tactics, particularly targeting women in politics who challenge their actions.
4. ***Lack of alternatives:*** In Lebanon, the warlords have maintained their hold on the government for 48 years, effectively eliminating any viable alternatives to their rule. They have resorted to violence against protestors, including shooting them at close range in the eyes, and have taken to questioning anyone who dared to question their authority. Additionally, they have neglected their duties and responsibilities, leading to a power vacuum by impeding fair elections and refusing to elect a President of the Republic for six months simply because they anticipate unfavorable results. This has left individuals to fend for themselves, leaving the population feeling helpless and resigned to the notion that they must accept the current state of affairs.

5. ***Environmental deterioration:*** Historically, the EU and other multilateral donors have supported reforms by funding governmental or non-governmental programs, as well as offering technical assistance. Still and under this regime, there is very little, if anything, to show for in Lebanon in terms of impact. From health, education, environment, to a collapsing financial currency in Lebanon, all indicators fall short on supporting life and human rights. We are being stripped of our basic human rights for a healthy and dignified life with equal representation along with any real hope for advancing these rights. We have been living in a cycle of toxic food, air, water, and soil since the day we were born and our children are born into the same cycle. The most recent example is the spread of the cholera pandemic that is attributed to the infiltration of sewage water into the waters of rivers, sea, and agricultural streams and wells.
6. ***Collapse of the public education sector:*** Since the emergence of COVID-19 in 2019, approximately 500,000 students have been unable to attend school and have experienced an incomplete and disrupted academic year. The situation continues to rapidly deteriorate due to inadequate support for schools and insufficient minimum wages for teachers. In this dire circumstance, teachers are forced to choose between providing for their own families' basic needs or investing in fuel to travel to school and educate their students. This current state of affairs is concerning as education is a critical component of societal progress. Unfortunately, it has also contributed to widening the education gap between students who can afford private schools and those who cannot.

Given these circumstances, the democratic process in Lebanon is at a significant risk, and its essential principles and values are undermined. The progressive deterioration of the country's sovereignty has resulted in a lack of confidence in the system. Consequently, numerous young individuals have abandoned the prospect of reform and are seeking to establish their lives overseas. According to the 2020 Arab Youth Survey, approximately 77% of young people residing in Lebanon express a desire to emigrate to other countries.

It is imperative that Lebanese officials adhere to their obligations under the United Nations Charter on Human Rights by providing reports on their due diligence procedures and reporting requirements. As accountable members of parliament and government officials, it is our duty to work alongside UN officials to initiate the healing process and promote truth, justice, and reconciliation. In prioritizing the rule of law, the country's recovery must focus on reinstating democratic values and practices.

“Quand un peuple ne défend plus ses libertés et ses droits il devient mûr pour l’esclavage.” Jean-Jacques Rousseau

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