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Decentralization

IN THE CONTEXT OF THE LEBANESE STRATEGEM, A CALAMITY OR AN EXTRICATION?





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A thorough, yet inclusive assessment of factors and considerations that, when responded, will potentially identify the prerequisites and pillars of an efficiently operational and sustainable administrative system in Lebanon.







KONRAD ADENAUER-STIFTUNG (KAS)

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To foster peace and freedom KAS encourages a continuous dialogue, at the national and international levels as well as the exchange between cultures and religions.



AL MUSTAKELLOUN

Al Mustakelloun is a political organization founded in 2006.

It aims to build citizenship and revive the middle class as it is the immunity that strengthens citizenship in Lebanon.

Al Mustakelloun has been vigorously taking part of civil society activities since 2007, carrying out events emphasizing building common grounds amongst the Lebanese.

The organization raised awareness with regard to fighting violence and promoting democratic practices by urging young people to be active participants in political decisions, particularly in electoral processes.

Since 2011, the scope of work of the organization was extended to englobe the development of policy papers in fields related to reform in public policies.

Accordingly, the organization has also been working on drafting public policy recommendations that contribute to the development of long-term sustainable reforms, aspiring to fix the political-administrative structural distortion impacting the citizens economically and socially.

Today, with a team of experts, the organization is conducting studies in hope of finding a new institutional political model for Lebanon, which in a most advanced conclusion would be through a form of decentralization.





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"EXECUTIVE SUMMARY"





Executive Summary

4



Lebanon is currently experiencing an unparalleled economic and social crisis, pleading the development of an improvement strategy to set the country back on track. Although the nation's conflicts are mostly socioeconomic, the administrative system ought to be sought for the resolution of such crises.

Not only did the governmental institution fail to provide basic citizen rights and a contingency plan to escape the crisis, but it also lawfully inhibited local administrations from self-providing and self-emerging on all levels of the crisis. All the while, reforms, feared to be a disguise for corruption prosecution, hampered by sectarian shields and exalted by constitutional and political fronts, prohibited the cycle of improvement (Al Charif, 2021).

Consequently, what ameliorations or methods shall be abided by to chief the desired reform? Reconciling these calamities pertains to the unbiased inquiry into parameters that would appraise the current status quo of the Lebanese administrative structure and distinguish further complications.

Many anticipated decentralization as a solution. It can be clarified as allocating authority to federal units, specialized organizations, municipalities, other local entities, or provincial institutions, upholding themselves accountable for decision making, planning and finance management (Dahrouj, 2022).



Decentralization has three core interrelated dimensions: political, fiscal, and administrative. Being one dependent on the other, these dimensions refer to the extent central governments delegate authority to non-central local entities. The political dimension refers to the decision-making expanse, the fiscal refers to the monetary and taxation authority scope and the administrative dimension refers to the degree of central autonomy. Regardless of the target, this scope involves the transfer of authority and resources away from the central government starting by a political decision (Treisman, 2002). The four major degrees of decentralization are devolution, entailing the highest degree of autonomy, delegation, deconcentration and privatization (Sharma, 2006).

Decentralization poses a recurring dilemma in Lebanese politics; it is worth examining whether protagonists' claim that decentralization would bring the needed results or perhaps just pave the way for reform by giving more independence, autonomy, and accountability to liable authorities, while decisions remain centralized.

Yet, numerous scholars, studies, practices, and reports revealed that decentralization is not an end for a means but rather a means to an end (Schneider, 2019). Decentralization would not deliver new solutions other than the ones attained by the applied system if it happens to be centralized (Schneider, 2019). Therefore, this method of implementation could then possibly be one of the ways that will bring about improvement in the application of the system by delegating tasks and responsibilities to accountable sub-entities and involving the citizens to the utmost degree.

Looking for alternatives, or deliberating solutions resonate that there is a problem requiring scrutiny. Thus, it is of high significance to allocate the exact problems and determine the causes. Hence, the purpose of this mixed-methods approach is to pose and investigate factors and interrogations that, when resolved, will potentially lead to necessities and parameters for the construction of a new working sustainable system in Lebanon.

Consequently, it is imperative to start with the evaluation of the current system in order to determine if new practices should be implemented, existing ones should be improved, or both.



A first guarantee for any system is accountability, which brings to surface the Ta'if agreement that was set to resolve 25 years of internal armed conflict and pave the way for a peaceful future. The agreement emphasized on the separation of powers with regard to the connection between the legislative and executive branches of the government. It is important to note how the Ta'if agreement attempted to protect religious diversity and sectarian rights. Practices that resulted from this agreement allowed the abuse of such laws to nourish sectarianism (Bahout, 2016). This highlights the importance of securing the law in addition to considering the possibilities of abusing it along with its prevention.

When considering accountability, it is necessary to pinpoint the two dimensions needed. The first is set by the system to uphold and maintain the justice and laws decreed. The second is by returning the power to the citizens, whether by the power of opposition or by single citizen fair and just voting representation election system (Thorpe, 2022). All this shall be attainable in

addition to educating and installing high levels of duty, involvement, and knowledge in the lives of the citizens to properly and efficiently hold those in authority accountable for their actions and practices within their responsibilities.

For instance, the Lebanese judiciary is hampered by fundamental defects and deficiencies which warrant that the country's political elites would have a direct influence over how it operates, hindering judicial independence. A plan for the judicial reorganization is a necessity in order to achieve judiciary independence, whether the Supreme court is appointed by judges from the judiciary itself or by a third party from public authorities or designated organizations. Several countries have transferred responsibility for judge appointments from the government to organizations in charge of judicial independence and career management (Hammergen, 2002). Examining the first choice, one issue to consider is how granting the judges untrammelled power will affect accountability of their practices.



One shall also examine the system assigning tasks and powers for assigned councils. Who will choose these councils? How and upon what criteria are they selected and held accountable? Would independence be achieved by appointing these councils who in turn appoint judges or would that inhibit independence? Having the appointment of the supreme court made by a third-party or from within the judiciary body sheds light on the budgeting concern. If the budget eventually comes back to the officials for approval and more importantly for providing, won't that be a possible stumbling block or attachment concern?

Additionally, strengthening democracy can be reached through ensuring that the system allows the implementation of democracy and better yet disallows the breaking of non-democratic acts. One contentious component of democracy is electoral fairness, which is critical and the ultimate assurance of adherence to the democratic concept of free, fair, and authentic elections, yielding electoral accountability

(Verba, 2006). Furthermore, a matter requiring further speculation is whether there is a realistic opportunity by the system to allow the opposition to highlight wrongdoings, propose new solutions, and possess chances to increase its support or gain power through upcoming elections.

Another controversial issue observed by investigating the current Lebanese system is the conflict of interest. The political system freely allows the sectarian leaders, among many, to prioritize acquiring resources for their own groups, resulting in the hollowing out of governmental service provision in favor of corrupt patronage networks (Henley, 2016). The system plainly employs void models with gaps and ambiguities. This poses deliberations that need to be resolved to avoid a lack of accountability and maintain legislative efficiency.



Moreover, Lebanon's fiscal system shall be examined in order for the exhaustive plan to scrutinize all dimensions needed to be covered including the responsible bodies, the level of transparency, and the criteria governing any plan. Consequently, there is urgency in stipulating how the financial regulation in Lebanon is performed and who is responsible for legislating on one hand, and implementing on another. Systematically cumbering corruption, instead of solely striving to prosecute it after occurring, is of great importance as well.

An issue worth stipulation is the absence of timeframes, rendering deadlines inevitable for an efficacious political system whereby they are of equal significance as the consequence of not abiding by them. Henceforth, setting follow-up procedures and then repercussions for any violations of these deadlines is no less important.

In order to deeply dig into the implementation of any decentralization model in Lebanon, similar administered models in the world are worth studying, to collect best practices and lessons learned. This report adopts an expository

approach in portraying decentralized states' comparative analysis. The selection of the three studied decentralized states, Indonesia, Uganda, and Iraq was based on criteria common with Lebanon. Indonesia resembles Lebanon by its religious inclusivism and diversity and its past political corruption. Uganda resembles Lebanon by its civil unrest, political corruption, and international interference. Lastly, Iraq's corruption and sectarian and political affiliations to the international community were all criteria common with Lebanon.

Decentralization was implemented in Indonesia, Uganda, and Iraq with the goal of restoring democracy, stability and accountability and establishing credibility in political systems that had a history of authoritarian control. Decentralization was extremely criticized in these three countries for its discrepancies which resulted in poor implementation (Hadiz & Robison, 2013; Green, 2015; Cameron, 2006).

It was thought that by providing more authority to districts, regional authorities would be able to provide more suitable public services to the



people. However, regional authorities became vulnerable to corruption, collusion, and nepotism as a result of several factors including the rapid decentralization. As an illustration, in Indonesia, fear of disintegration in an atmosphere seasoned with separatist movements was a fundamental motivating reason behind Indonesia's decentralization. The start of implementation of decentralization in Indonesia led to fewer separatist movements (McCollum et al., 2018)

Furthermore, key drivers for these governing systems' fragility included short-term political decisions, poorly institutionalized systems, and inadequate redistricting from early villagization to transmigration. Hence, the governance of these three models suffered from a deterioration in quality as well as a weakening of national cohesiveness. The incompetence of local officials and a lack of coordination between the central and regional administrations became evident. Decentralization thus bred weak institutions in the periphery and rigid resistance, which has put the central state at questionable trust scales. In Iraq for instance, the central state's impotence to

handle its own entity and govern the state at a national scale was discernible as well. Moreover, concerns rose over equitable redistribution of national natural resources to impoverished areas, specifically the critical oil and gas wealth, calling for a more centralized federal system (Meehy, 2017).

Additionally, policies were engulfed in greater power conflicts across these three nations. Citizens have become more split along regional, territorial, ethnic, religious, or sectarian lines, with long histories of grievance, distrust, and hostility. There were instances where conflicts of power and wealth were projected onto religion. As such, in Indonesia and Iraq, religious symbols and venues were mobilized for political action by erecting 'we' against 'them' divisions and producing the illusion of cultural discontinuity with numerous places exploding in community violence (Kapferer et al., 2010; Maleki, 2021). Likewise, regional resources were also a topic of quarrel where unfairness of economic and social inequities were evident.



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It has been claimed that the implementation policy of decentralization in Indonesia, Uganda and Iraq was more of a political ploy than a real attempt to enhance democracy and good governance.

Decentralization measures were often hampered by some central level officials and government bureaucrats. For instance, Idi Amin, Uganda's former president, controlled and destroyed all monitoring mechanisms in the country to facilitate his life presidency scheme, resulting in the dissolution of state institutions (Masumba, 2021). On the other hand, the political regime of Indonesia's former president, Suharto, was not eradicated when structures were created and bureaucratic practices were constructed, allowing many corrupt remnants of Suharto to manipulate the new system (Fiona & Tomsa, 2020).

Despite the many reform attempts including implementation of direct elections and transferring the judiciary from supreme court to the constitutional court, dreadful repercussions were inescapable (Butt, 2018).

Furthermore, in Uganda and Iraq, the importance of external influences cannot be overstated. International interference along with donor pressure including the World bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) to name a few, lobbied for decentralization without having a handle on internal procedures and additional contextual and constitutional loopholes have contributed to the impediment of decentralization attempts (Ojambo, 2012). The lack of financing, the absence of skilled staff, and local corruption were among several factors that rendered decentralization ineffective.

The study adeptly explores the adoption of two alternative development models in Lebanon: Tripoli's special economic zone (TSEZ) and Linord-Matn. TSEZ comprehended two feasibility studies done post-implementation. Challenges identified by USAID's study (2011) included

land lease laws and duration, accessing the use of inbound and outbound voice-over internet protocol, and removing restrictions on the access to and trade of goods manufactured in free economic zones.

No actions were taken to implement Linord's project either (Chamoun, 2014). With many details on the functioning, framework, and feasibility of the project left unanswered, the project was discontinued from 1998 till 2015, and still shows no signs of being developed or carried out in the foreseen future.

The principal reasons for these projects' halt, like with many others, were political and economic concerns aside from the insufficient and sparse feasibility data justifying their design, implementation method, viability, or future projections (Mukherjee, 2022; Inura, 2014).



Upon information provided by the General Manager of the TSEZ, Hassan Dennaoui (2021), several initiatives and policies began to emerge after the first draft of the project was approved, but the proposal did not have a feasibility assessment at that time. Consequently, the project, which was supposed to begin operations in the early 2000s, remains dormant to this day.

Questions as to why the project is recommended to be carried out in Tripoli in specific or how implementing it in this specific area might curtail regional inequalities remain unattended to.

Most prepared projects will render ineffective had they exceeded the timeframe set, since they would have been planned for a certain period under certain conditions. Accordingly, years later, would these projects still be feasible? Were they efficient and sufficient and had they taken into consideration sustainability and future possible changes, demands, inflations, population growth, etc.?

Since there is little-to-no access to official nor credible data on such matters, the lack of data could trace back to the actual nonexistence of feasibility studies. If so, it is only anticipated that they will fail, and thus shouldn't have been endorsed in the first place. However, since explanations are still inconclusive, TSEZ and Linord projects leave no room for improvement

or adoption of best practices, restraining their replication or the avoidance of blunders for future projects.

Additionally, the measurement of the potential benefits or harms shall result from a feasibility study or an extensive plan about the direct and indirect implementation and effects on housing, building, laws, roads, infrastructures, and others. This highlights the importance of abiding by time frames, and more importantly setting time frames, to begin with.

Forby, considering that the current system at hand is the same regardless of whether its management style was decentralized or centralized, decentralization would conceivably be an abundant way for application. However, decentralization requires prerequisites which the PESTEL framework aspired to analyze.

PESTEL was used to analyze the current situation in Lebanon to understand the interconnected factors preventing or facilitating the implementation of decentralization. More specifically, these 6 dimensions are interwoven with two specific aspects, the political decision-making factor and the fiscal factor where investigating them might draw attention to potential additional costs and encourage future plans to incorporate more inquiry (PESTLE Analysis, 2021).

Despite being efficacious in theory, decentralization has deep-rooted obstructions in the Lebanese infrastructure in addition to fiscal regulations and local governance.

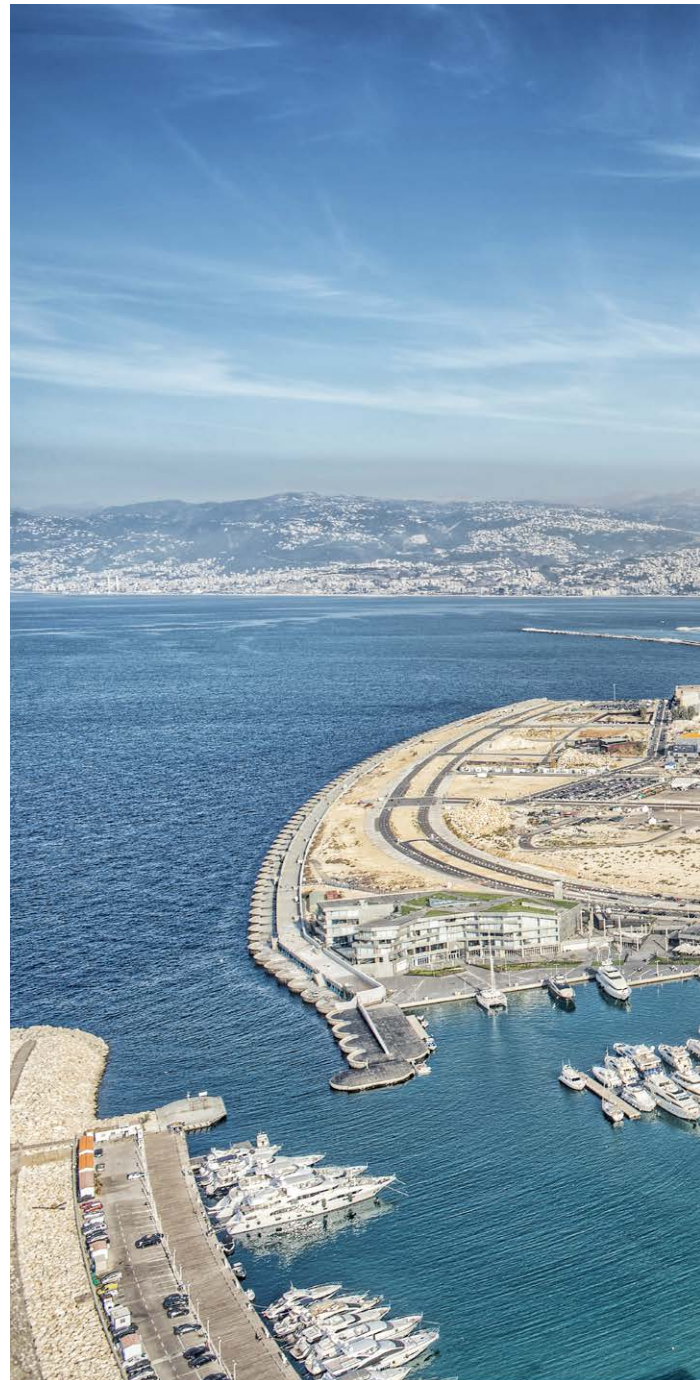
There have been constant complaints that the local authorities don't possess the optimum qualifications to provide the services for its habitants as well as do not possess the ability to plan development projects. Many factors might hinder local authorities' efforts including political, administrative, geographic, fiscal, and legal elements (Hadchity, 2022).

When political groups and officials advocate for or against decentralization, one should be wary of their true motives. For those encouraging decentralization, their intentions beg a question: What kind of decentralization law would Lebanese political parties really want? After all, corrupt politicians are unlikely to be interested in decentralization as a first step toward greater political change, but rather as a means of consolidating their own authority. Would the political parties ruling by preponderance be interested in amending governmental implementation while suffering jurisdiction grip? Would they allow the majority of the Parliamentary votes to pass such deliberations?

12

Lebanon has various regions, each associated with a different culture and assets. Would a certain division in local administration be coerced or will it cause divergence in officials' performance? Would this then contribute to the imbalance of the distribution of services, natural resources, and facilities amongst citizens? On another note, with regard to financing, will certain administrations willingly or forcibly cooperate with each other? Will this support lead to positive competition or concurrent conflict? Will the central state have the ultimate say or will the system encompass all possible manifestations?

Furthermore, a non-probabilistic purposeful sample was used to select 26 participants from six governorates to take part in this case study. This purposeful sample was guided by the following selection criteria: governorates, number of municipal council members, and religious partition. Data was collected from small and big municipal councils (varying from nine to 24 members) of governorates with exclusively one religious sect and others with a wide religious partition. The participants were local administrators, local community members, and stakeholders. Findings from the interviews reveal participants' perceptions with regard to their needs, views and stances on decentralization and the feasibility of this system in Lebanon. The interviewees additionally exposed their



understandings, concerns and expectations of local administrations duties and responsibilities.

The interviews were initiated by asking local administrators and municipality members about their background information about their regions. For instance, questions about the gender and religious partition of their regions revealed unawareness which might potentially render accessing the residents' implausible.

In addition, when asked about their roles or duties, differing views contradicted regarding allocated tasks and responsibilities. This highlights the unclearly defined and ambiguous duties and roles of municipalities and their board members. Findings consequently shed light on the existence of a clear discrepancy between expectations



of the society and performed errands. This disparity exposes the misalignment of expectations and thus lack of unity of actions taken toward residents in each area. Hence, this raises questions as to whether these responsible entities shall be entitled greater responsibilities and autonomy, and how that would facilitate or hinder the sought reform.

When asked about their understanding and requested to attempt to define decentralization, responses varied amongst different interviewees and divergent regions. Some participants from certain governorates portrayed resistance, fear, and rejection of the idea of decentralization. Other candidates revealed more compliance and conformity, believing that decentralization could

hold great assets and serve the community. On the other hand, the interviewees were asked about specific features brought about from decentralization without naming the term "decentralization" including holding the municipalities accountable for enhancing their safety, education, services, transportation, health, and others. All findings represented participants' favoritism for this method. Such responses reflect distinct incomprehension and unfamiliarity with the concept with pre-programmed prejudice. Findings revealed various understandings and differing definitions, portraying different communal awareness and education levels.

Furthermore, when the interviewees from the local community were asked about their understanding and requested to attempt to define decentralization, most responses reflected distrust in the government.

Therefore, with less reported trust in the governmental bodies from the interviewees, it was concluded that the municipalities and local community in Lebanon seek to be self-governed to depend on their own resources.





According to a report conducted by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), Lebanese municipalities have theoretically broad powers that they are unable to exercise due to limited institutional capacity. This pinpoints the governmental authorities' failure to adhere to the needs of its people in addition to putting laws that prohibit them from self-attaining these needs by creating unions, projects, or seeking donations (Atallah & Harb, 2015).

Decentralization has become a common and efficient tool for many countries around the world to strengthen democratic, social, and economic principles. Critics argued that decentralization is a non-pleasant option whereby efforts to decentralize may have unforeseen effects. Decentralization attempts may lead to recentralizing repercussions if not well-prepared or planned for. For instance, decentralization can potentially lead to increased corruption and decreased health and education services if rushed into. In instances of employing decentralization without proper investigation or feasibility studies, decentralization has hindered reform instead of facilitating it. That is why this study aimed to investigate the dimensions to avoid falling into such traps.

Taking everything into account, what decentralization may achieve, centralization could attain and vice versa. While decentralization is a method of application, it would not, however, be the only option to manage a suitable, well-rounded Lebanese system since the structure requires much more tinkering and adjustment. For the desired outcome, reform is required at many levels. For instance, regardless of the implementation strategy chosen, permitting the judiciary to be independent is not a sufficient demeanor to preserve a well-established system. In other words, the system must remain intact whether centralization or decentralization is deployed. The use of decentralization would still be hindered by conflicts of interest, a misaligned division of powers, and other flaws and ambiguities in the constitution. Decentralization therefore wouldn't be enough to yield advantages without reforms to the core of the system.

"INTRODUCTION"







The constitution of Lebanon defines “extensive administrative decentralization” as a change aimed at achieving local development and increasing public engagement. However, decentralization is not a neutral policy process. It has an impact on the distribution of power and resources that are impacted by political interests, especially in Lebanon’s sectarian political context. Lebanon’s present decentralization system comprises municipalities and unions, both of which are referred to in this study as “local administrations” (Haase & Antoun, 2015). Lebanon is a small country with an area of 10,452 km², currently has 1,108 municipalities (Ahad, et al., 2020). Indonesia, the 14th largest country with an area of 1,904,569 km² constitutes 434 official municipalities (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). This factor could be a potential indicator regarding the Lebanese scheme. Additionally, while municipalities in Lebanon are afforded extensive autonomy and a wide range of tasks by law, they are impeded in practice by contradicting statutory texts, the absence of a credible accountability system, administrative and fiscal bottlenecks, and excessive central government supervision. Reform attempts have also been hampered by ongoing quarrel, which have been worsened by governmental stagnation and cycles of local and regional war (Al Charif, 2021).



The Purpose of The Study

The Lebanese economic crisis was rated as the worst in the world since 1850, where most attribute this crisis to the existing governmental system and propose decentralization as an answer to all lived crises and corruption (Hayk, 2022). The purpose of this mixed-methods approach is to pose and investigate factors and interrogations that, when solved, will potentially lead to necessities and parameters for the construction of a new working sustainable system in Lebanon. To do so, this study first reveals constitutional ambiguities and loopholes in the Lebanese system through an expository lens. This study subsequently aspires to uncover data of a comparative analysis of three decentralized models along with two local samples of decentralized

alternative proposals at the Lebanese scheme. The study additionally employs the PESTEL framework to expose political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors facilitating and/or hindering the proper implementation of decentralization in Lebanon. Subsequently, the study conducts a qualitative analysis of 26 interviews, collected across six Lebanese governorates, to reveal perceptions of local administrators, local community members, and stakeholders with regard to their needs, views and stances on decentralization and the feasibility of this system in Lebanon. The interviewees additionally expose their understandings, concerns and expectations of local administrations' duties and responsibilities.

“THE EXISTING POLITICAL SYSTEM”







The Existing Political System

22

Having a diverse population, Lebanon has always struggled with inherent political contradictions. "Lebanon's peculiar and profound problem was the distribution of power, owing mainly to its sectarian and ideological cleavages" (Hudson, 1985). Furthermore, Lebanon is currently undergoing an unprecedented economic and social crisis rendering Lebanon in need of an enhancement plan that sets the country back on track. While the country's tensions are mostly socio-economic in nature, this crisis has been engulfed by constitutional and political conditions. Hence, socio-political constructs and current inconvenient procedures need to be reviewed and inspected.

The constitutional experience in Lebanon after 1990 raised questions with regard to whether the relationship between the legislative and executive authorities is valid. Therefore, the current system at hand is worthy of examination to assess the present state, to detect whether practices are to be adopted, need further enhancement, or

entail rigorous adjustment.

To propose an exhaustive reform plan, solutions are required to be sought and questions are to be adequately posed and addressed. The country has witnessed a constitutional crisis since the 1975-1990 war which had been put to an end by the Ta'if Agreement 1989. Decades after this agreement, officials, many of whom are warlords, have still not created a reconciliation plan to bring about civil order to maintain a nation notorious for its inherent vulnerabilities. Instead, the constitution has failed to set clear guidelines that prohibit those in power from taking advantage of constitutional ambiguities and loopholes. Being well acquainted with these loopholes highlights how officials could possess the potential to exploit the constitution to further empower themselves and reach inviolability.

Additionally, it is also worth comparing the constitutional thresholds of other countries. For instance, the German

basic law mandates that the presidential elections must be held no later than thirty days before the sitting president's term ends (Taylor, 2017). However, it entails no measures had there been no conducted elections. What one might call a gentlemen's agreement.

On the other hand, American presidential elections surpassing the deadline entail "Act applies, the President pro tempore of the Senate would act as President until a President or Vice President qualifies. If the House is unable to elect a President by the January 20 inauguration day, the 20th Amendment provides that the Vice President-elect would act as President until the impasse is resolved. If neither a President nor Vice President has been chosen by inauguration day, the Presidential Succession Act of 1947 is contingent with a list of more than 15 possible successors with their detailed scenarios and timeframes" (Fleury, 2017).



Constitutional Ambiguities and Loopholes

Some constitutions encompass ambiguities and loopholes. Perhaps, while counting on the manners and principles on which their governing officials conduct themselves and where the voting citizens are well educated in their rights and more so in their duty to hold those elected or in power accountable for their responsibilities, while others are well rounded with layers in contingency plans. Hence, it is vital to inspect the constitutional texts and practices to analyze or detect the current existing situation in order to successfully bring forth a new abundant system.

A first guarantee for any system is accountability, which brings to surface the Ta'if agreement that was set to resolve 25 years of internal armed conflict and pave the way for a peaceful future. The agreement emphasized the separation of powers with regard to the connection between the legislative and executive branches of the government. It is important to note how the

Ta'if agreement attempted to protect religious diversity and sectarian rights. Practices that resulted from this agreement allowed the abuse of such laws to nourish sectarianism (Bahout, 2016). This highlights the importance of securing the law in addition to considering the possibilities of abusing it along with its prevention.

When considering accountability, it is necessary to pinpoint the two dimensions needed. The first is set by the system to uphold and maintain the justice and laws decreed. The second is by returning the power to the citizens, whether by the power of opposition or by single citizen fair and just voting representation election system (Thorpe, 2022). All this shall be attainable in addition to educating and installing high levels of duty, involvement, and knowledge in the lives of the citizens to hold properly and efficiently those in authority accountable for their actions and practices within their responsibilities.



The Judiciary System

A well-functioning system establishes the constitution's laws on one hand, and ensures the execution of these laws on another. Implementing laws and rules requires people to implement and preserve them in addition to holding those responsible to account. Successful and valid judiciary result in serving the public good and holding corrupt political elites to account. The more intact the system is, the less the chances are for the judiciary performing misconduct or malpractices. However, serious flaws and inadequacies severely hamper the Lebanese judiciary's abilities while ensuring that Lebanon's elites have a direct say in its functioning. (Merhej, 2021).

Judicial independence is a fundamental pillar to the Lebanese constitution which states that "The law should provide necessary guarantees to judges and litigants, and that judges should be independent in exercising their functions". The principle of independence of the judiciary is also established in several Lebanese laws such as the Code of Civil Procedure. The lack of independence of the Lebanese judiciary is traced back to external interference, and the readiness of political elites, controlling the government, to interfere in judicial matters (Harb & Atallah, 2015). Hence, the Lebanese judiciary ought to be solely independent from external interferences. To ensure judicial independence, several nations have withdrawn duty for judicial appointments from the administration and given it to agencies responsible for ensuring judicial independence and career management within the judiciary (Hammergren, 2002). There are some concerns to be taken into account to be able to come up with a judicial restructuring plan to realize independence.

For instance, it is worth scrutinizing whether the supreme court is assigned from within the judiciary by judges, or by a third party from public officials or assigned groups. To inspect the first option, a matter of deliberation is how giving full authority for the judiciary would impact accountability. One shall examine the system assigning tasks and powers for these councils. Assigned groups, sometimes known as councils, serve as administrators of judicial systems. For instance, in some European countries, judicial councils oversee institutional

policy-making and judicial career supervision, but in some parts of Latin America, they have broader administrative responsibilities and focus on budgetary management, judge selection, and training. However, this brings us to the following questions:

Who will choose these councils?

How are these individuals selected?

What is their accreditation or experience?

Who will monitor them?

Isn't appointing these councils who in turn appoint judges still interference but in a different manner ?

Having the selection made by a third-party or within the judiciary body sheds light on the budgeting concern. This raises questions including: If the third-party funds the judiciary, will this render the judiciary independent and who will legislate it? Nevertheless, if eventually the budget comes back to the officials for approval and more importantly for providing, won't that be a possible stumbling block or attachment concern?

There is no judicial council in the United States. Instead, the administration of the judiciary is delegated to three groups, the Judicial Conference overseeing setting policies for the judiciary and for the supervision of the Administrative Office of the US Courts which are in turn responsible for the Federal Court budget, personnel management, and procurement, and the Federal Judicial Center which conducts research on judicial administration and the administration of justice (Welker, 2019). Such judicial administrations are formed to maintain judicial independence and accountability, specifically since much power is delegated to the judging bodies. Hence, the independence of the admins is a crucial component of judicial independence.



The Immunity of Public Officials

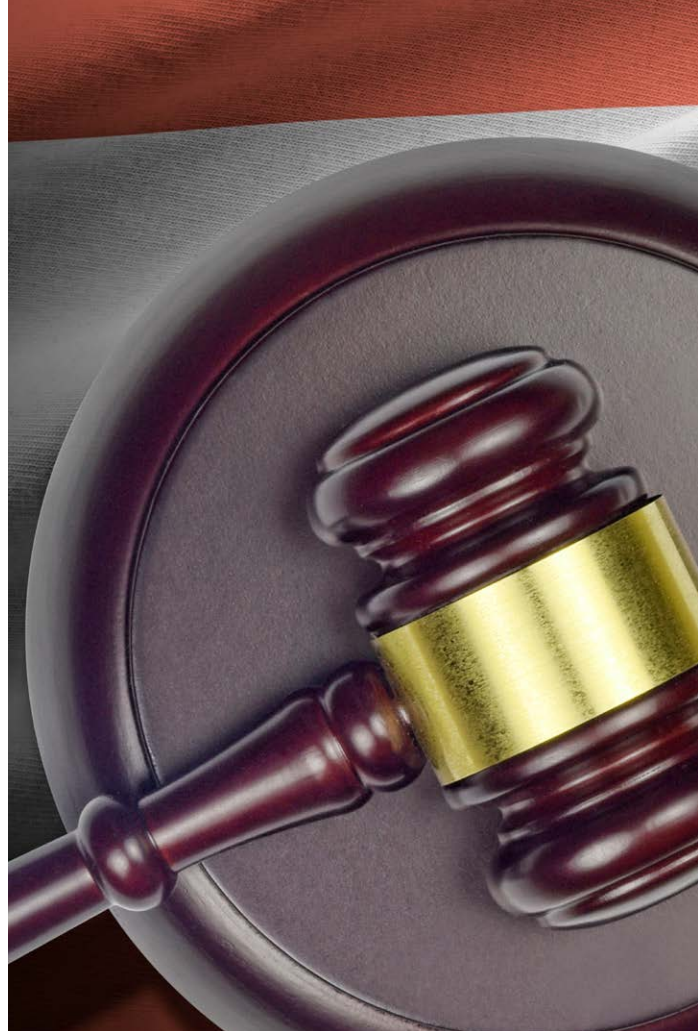
What are laws for if they secure immunity for those accountable instead of charging them? Official immunity is a common law notion that shields public officials from personal culpability for civil damages resulting from wrongs allegedly committed while performing official responsibilities. It is based on the idea that public officials should not bear personal culpability for fulfilling their responsibilities. Official immunity differs from sovereign immunity where the former exists for governments themselves. The latter means that governments cannot be held liable for crimes or damages. This form of protection derives from European legal systems when kings and queens were still at the helm of the government. The United States has retained this tradition to some extent in order to secure the stability of the government; yet many individuals question whether it has a place in the modern world (Finke, 2011).

Unlike sovereign immunity, which protects the government, official immunity protects its officers. On another note, Sovereign immunity protects the state from action in its own courts and provides protection for torts committed by its officers and employees. In contrast, official immunity protects state officials and staff in specific instances. Official immunity protects public officials from action for activities conducted within the scope of their official duties, regardless of whether they were done in good faith or not (Chemerinsky, 2001). Courts have a functional approach to granting absolute official immunity, reserving it solely for judicial, prosecutorial, or legislative activities.

As a result, whether officers are functioning in their official position or not, they are only completely exempt when executing judicial, prosecutorial, or legislative functions. As a result, this type of immunity has traditionally only been granted to individuals who carry out certain tasks, such as judges, lawmakers, and executive officers (Keitner, 2012).

Official immunity is not just a defense to liability, it also confers upon public officers' complete immunity from suit. The ability of an officer to claim immunity under this theory is dependent on whether they are sued in their official or personal capacity. Official immunity protects public officials from the "distraction and expense of defending themselves in court" so that they may better serve the public (Chemerinsky, 2001).

It is common practice that legal systems around the world protect senior government officials from prosecution by granting them immunity,



supposedly to shield them from undue pressure. For instance, Diplomatic immunity means that when ambassadors go to other nations, they cannot be held accountable for crimes. This is due to the fact that a lawsuit may only take place if a court has jurisdiction over both parties. If a diplomat commits a crime (for example, stealing something) in the United States, no court in the nation has jurisdiction over the ambassador. Most of the time, diplomats follow the laws of the nation in which they are stationed. Diplomatic immunity exists to assist all countries retain their contacts, and because without globally recognized protection, ambassadors would have less access to government leaders during times of domestic turmoil.

However, immunity to the law has also allowed numerous politicians to go unpunished for crimes including the ones resulting from corruption. This can chief individuals to take advantage of entrusted power for personal gain. To remove the risks of such wrongdoings, the New Mexico Civil Rights Act was signed, guaranteeing that no public official "shall enjoy the defense of qualified immunity for causing the deprivation of any rights, privileges or immunities secured by the constitution of". Others have debated that the act is insufficient since many constitutional questions were still left unanswered, allowing some courts to then be able to rely on that judicial



silence to conclude there's no equivalent case on the books leading to dodging accountability (Nielson & Walker, 2021).

As for Lebanon, although deputies could be questioned and/or pursued for criminal cases under the Constitution, few recognized such obligations themselves. For instance, Article 40 of the Lebanese constitution states that "No Chamber member may be prosecuted or arrested, during the session, for committing a crime, unless authorized by the Chamber, except in case he is caught in the act" (2004). This paved the way for some officials in Lebanon to use constitutional loopholes to protect themselves from legal consequences and political liabilities, something that one might consider as a license to break the law.

Two years ago, massive countrywide rallies demanded accountability for chronic corruption and financial mismanagement, as well as an end to the country's sectarian leadership's decades of domination. An independent judiciary to probe corrupt politicians and corporate people was a popular demand among demonstrators at the time. "Bitar has also sparked a broader national debate about legal immunity and the really corrupt political and judicial system that effectively shields these high-level officials from responsibility" (Thorpe, 2022).

To cite an instance, Judge Bitar was chosen to supervise the probe in February after his predecessor. Judge Fadi Sawan was removed based on a complaint filed by two former ministers whom he had accused of criminal negligence. The court based its decision in part on damage to Judge Sawan's own home from the port explosion, which it said had raised questions about his impartiality. Bitar has continued to pursue the same persons and has also charged a former minister during the last seven months. He has also demanded that two top security officers be summoned on many occasions; however, the requests have been denied by the Ministry of Interior and the Higher Defense Council (Daou, 2020).

The accused lawmakers have refused to attend the interrogations. They have also repeatedly attempted to remove the judge by filing legal complaints, which have occasionally temporarily halted the probe. Though the judiciary has so far dismissed these objections, legal experts believe this is a stalling strategy, and major political parties have already begun clamoring for Bitar's resignation. El-Halabi, a senior news reporter, made the observation. "It's not just about putting an end to the impunity that still reigns supreme in Lebanon, but also about fear of any type of repercussions of reform that may come via the judiciary" (2021).



Viability of Democracy

The capability of democratic institutions and procedures to strengthen the aspects of rights, equality, and accountability is inextricably linked with government responsiveness to the interests and needs of the greatest number of citizens. Democracy is a statute that binds the entire community, including the government, rather than only the government. Strengthening democracy cannot be done just through popular headlines and titles nor the implementation of rules and processes alone. Instead, it is done by ensuring that the system allows the implementation of democracy and better yet disallows the breaking of non-democratic acts. One must also emphasize its fundamental role in protecting rights and advancing inclusiveness, in this way framing the protection of rights within the broader discourse on human development (Thorpe, 2022).

The establishment of rules and processes alone will not be enough to strengthen democracy. One must also underline its vital significance in expanding inclusion and preserving rights within a system that allows and sustains the titles in implementation and positioning the preservation of rights within the larger discourse on human development. One contentious component of democracy is electoral fairness, which is critical and the ultimate assurance of adherence to the democratic concept of free, fair, and authentic elections (Verba, 2006). Elections ensure that every action, procedure, and decision-related to the electoral process is legal and that the enjoyment of electoral rights is protected and restored, by allowing people who believe their electoral rights have been violated to file a complaint, have a hearing, and receive an adjudication. Nonetheless, the act of election alone is not enough, if the election law and the representation procedure are not properly representative or well monitored.

There are several ways and means for controlling results, such as unmonitored tools to manage the elections, disproportionate campaign financing and biased media regulations, as well as voter pressure (Moukheiber, 2021).

Notably, opportunistic service supply has and continues to play a significant part in Lebanon's political cycle. Thomas Schellen, Executive Magazine's editor-at-large, reporting on Middle Eastern business and economy for over 20 years, was interviewed for the purpose of this study. He claimed, "this is in addition to inefficient election control procedures and some clientelist interest-driven pressures on voters, all of which contribute to skewed electoral results" (Schellen, 2022).

Lebanese elections were and continue to be far from the democratic norm, with very poor accountability and control measures since the governing elites muzzled the key electoral procedures and ensured carefully manipulated results. Citizens should be free to use their voting rights and make political choices in theory, but in practice, most appear to have ceded those rights to merchant-politicians who prospered and continue to thrive in a corrupt climate that regards people as simple merchandise to be manipulated at leisure. The system allowed merchant-politicians to weaken the delivery of basic rights for citizens, education, health... while using their mandate to empower their businesses and financial gain through their appointed official powers and immunity and use a fraction of these gains to link any necessity with their "benevolent" doing, rather than strengthening the system and its executive arms to ensure a sustainable flow of basic rights for the citizens of the country (Hudson, 1985).



The Role of The Opposition

As for Lebanon, it is a democratic country by law. However, several questions come to the surface when inspecting the implementation of Lebanese democracy. For instance, the fairness of electoral laws and framework is worthy of inquiry. One might consider whether they are implemented partially by the relevant election management bodies. Another concern is whether there is a realistic opportunity provided by the system for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections as well since Lebanese politics are largely dominated by a group, the same political class since the 1975–1990 civil war that engulfed the country (Henley, 2016).

These parties do not regularly function as opposition groupings under the country's current power-sharing arrangement; power consolidation among political elites also impedes intraparty competition. In 2017, the National Assembly implemented a new voting system that featured proportional representation, (Atallah & Harb, 2015). Despite the new voting system that came after more than 50 years, many still consider it as sectarian and unfairly representative and still request a new representative voting law.

This allows democratically unaccountable groups, including established patronage networks, religious organizations, armed non-state actors, and competing foreign powers, to exercise influence on Lebanese voters and political figures through a mix of financial incentives and intimidation.

Conflict of Interest

Inspecting Lebanon's confessional governing structure underlies the current crisis. With a system rooted in the country's Ottoman and colonial histories, Lebanon's democracy distributes executive positions, as well as many other powers and institutions, through a confessional power-sharing system that allows political leaders representing different religious or ethnic communities to govern.

Prior to the Lebanese Civil War, this confessional system existed as a largely informal communal power-sharing agreement; the postwar Ta'if formalized this system in 1989, essentially institutionalizing the wartime militias into the political system and distributing political power and institutional responsibilities among Lebanon's various sectarian groups (Henley, 2016). While the intention was to encourage power-sharing and inter-sectarian cooperation, the system has resulted in near-constant political gridlock and the entrenchment of sectarian patronage practices in state institutions, rendering successive Lebanese governments largely incapable of performing core functions.

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Indeed, because Lebanon's confessional government system has effectively institutionalized sectarian identity into Lebanese political institutions, governance disagreements are mostly sectarian in nature. Similarly, this system allows sectarian political leaders to prioritize acquiring resources for their own group (at the expense of others), resulting in the hollowing out of governmental service provision in favor of corrupt patronage networks (Menhall, 2017).

The preamble to the Lebanese Constitution explicitly and sincerely expresses the concept of "separation of powers" in plain and solemn terms (UNDP, 2021). This serves as the foundation of Lebanon's political system, aiming to preserve a particular balance among various branches while also ensuring the most cooperative procedures feasible within them.

However, how can parliamentarians hold the executives accountable if they occupy both functions? How can parliamentarians surveil the executives if the latter are a derivation of the parliamentarians' party without having an opposition empowered by the system in monitoring? How can parliamentarians exercise control over the executives of a "cabinet of national unity" or "coalition government" when every monitoring body is represented in the monitored cabinet with a system that doesn't prevent policies of intertwined interests?





How can the (should be) monitored executive body be held accountable by the deemsters they, themselves assigned?

The system plainly employs models with gaps and ambiguities that must be resolved to avoid a lack of accountability and maintain legislative efficiency. As a result, a critical recovery plan is required that is based on a review of the text of Article 53 in order to clarify what the required procedural steps toward the formation of a new cabinet should be, as well as an emphasis on the explicit responsibilities of each party in order to stop or limit the abusive behavior that drags consultations out over months.

Another concern is if “merchant-politicians” can use their appointed roles/ power positions to benefit their personal businesses, while reducing the quality of services to maximize profit.

If so, this would cripple the government, allowing the “merchant-politicians” to use part of their newly attained “profits” to buy votes by granting voters basic needs that must have been provided by their now handicapped government. Thus, creating a sustainable cycle of clientelism, exerting pressures on voters in need for provision. In such a context, pressure on voters would skew electoral results, which would render the possible candidates valid due only to the possible services they can provide through external channels or favoritism by governmental passages.

Financial Oversight

Lebanon's deep and multi-faceted crisis requires immediate action on several fronts at the same time. This brings attention to the fiscal dimension, as it is a highly significant constituent for the success of any system. Thus, Lebanon's fiscal system shall be investigated, for the exhaustive plan to cover all dimensions needed to be encompassed including the responsible bodies, the level of transparency, and the criteria governing any plan.

The "Power of the Purse" is the capacity of one group to influence the conduct of another organization by denying financing or placing restrictions on how that funding is used. The bodies within a government that have control over taxation and budgets but lack direct executive authority are most likely to use the power of the purse. Some Lebanese parliamentary majorities have devised ways to avoid such a duty, hampering the monitoring aspect of their role, allowing obscurity over the financial proceedings. The constitutionally mandated duty of the Court of Audit along with the finance committee has also proven unsuccessful, notably in overseeing the budget and public financial spending (Moukheiber, 2021).

This sheds light on the urgency of stipulating how the financial legislation in Lebanon is performed and who is responsible for legislating on one hand and implementing on another. Systematically cumbering corruption, instead of solely striving to prosecute it after occurring, is of great importance as well.

Timeframes and Contingencies

Time frames are crucial for the success of any system since anything is efficient during its projected period; otherwise, any conduct would be rendered invalid. The President of the Republic is not bound by time to call for binding parliamentary consultations for the designation of the prime minister. The Prime Minister-designate is not required to assemble the government formation in a precise time frame, nor is there a specific indicator of the unsuccessful attempt. Furthermore, there is no precise time restriction for the minister to sign ordinary decrees, and there is no specific deadline for the President of the Republic to sign and publish them (Lahham, 2022). All of which have a negative impact on the country's welfare. In the event of decrees being issued, a time limit must be set for the competent minister to sign the decree without resigning or being expelled.



The president of the republic is elected by secret ballot in the Parliament by a two-thirds majority in the first session, and an absolute majority is sufficient in the following voting cycles, but in the event of disagreement between the political forces on electing the president, there is no time limit for his election. The establishment of the Senate provides a guarantee for the Lebanese sects so that all legislation related to sectarian issues is entrusted to (Expert Judge, 2022). Hence, setting deadlines is inevitable for an efficacious regime.

It is worth mentioning that these are just minor examples reflecting the importance of timeframes and deadlines whereby the whole system is required to adhere to.

The time frame is equally important as the consequence of not abiding by it. Usually, the more the layers in the system, the safer the country is. Certain actions must be taken in situations



where deadlines are not adhered to. An important question for democracy is not just whether to proceed with the plan, but what happens if the plan has not been proceeded with. For instance, inquiring about what happens after elections are postponed in several countries, and what the law probes actions to be taken immediately, the following is revealed. Elections appear to be played out differently by various regimes and regime kinds. The absence of an election date in Ethiopia, for example, has exacerbated political upheaval in the area, with opposition leaders suggesting that the PM was exploiting the epidemic to assure his government's survival (Mersie, 2021). Since 2015, elections have been postponed five times. On the other hand, elections in Somalia have been postponed, with no date established for the presidential election that was supposed to take place. Somalia has not had a direct public vote, enabling a variety of political, security, financial, technical, and

logistical variables to sway the outcome (Kahiye, 2021). Delays in holding elections are frequently interpreted as an act of autocratization.

Some nations provide a stronger political foundation for a power grab, which is exacerbated by constitutional deficiencies. Meanwhile, some regimes have stressed repercussions for any prospective deadline violations. As previously stated, if the date for American presidential elections is missed, the vice president will assume the presidency until the deadlock is addressed (Fleury, 2017). Nonetheless, the constitution has taken into account the vice president's absence, assigning the job to the president pro tempore of the Senate until a president or a vice president qualifies.

As a result, setting deadlines is unavoidable for an effective regime and setting repercussions for any violations of these deadlines is equally important.

“DECENTRALIZATION: A DEMANDED SOLUTION”





Decentralization: A Demanded Solution

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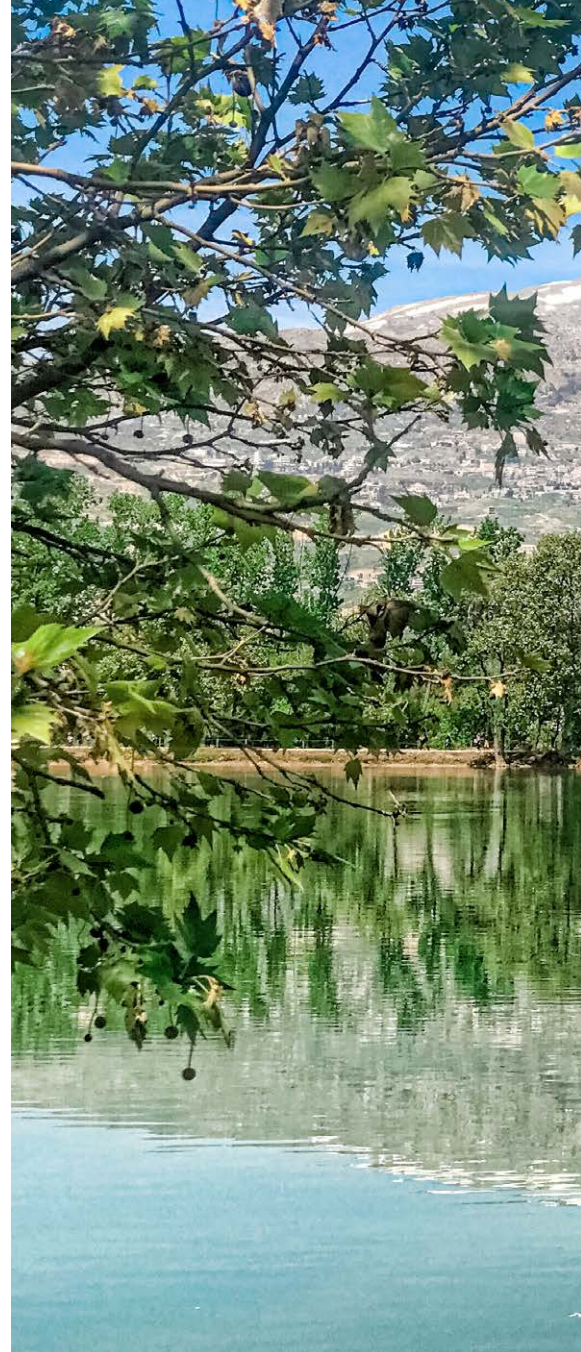
Several possible approaches to reform were proposed. For many, decentralization might be the triumphant end to a long and tough crisis. This topic has been a recurring dilemma in Lebanese politics. It is worth examining whether protagonists' claims that decentralization would bring the needed results or perhaps just pave the way for reform by giving more independence, autonomy, and accountability to liable authorities, while decisions remain centralized.

Decentralization is seen as one of the most important methods that has yet to be implemented (Dahrouj, 2022). This notion has become a common and efficient tool for many countries around the world to strengthen democratic, social and economic principles (Young, 2022). This notion has gained widespread acceptance among many political factions since the Ta'if Agreement 1989. Besides, other groups perceived decentralization as a less unpleasant option of many other poor choices. The Ta'if Agreement paved a partial path by laying the groundwork for administrative decentralization in Lebanon (Young, 2022).

Although the agreement provided for expanded decentralization, the reform's purposeful inability to accomplish broad administrative decentralization was eminent to this date (Expert Judge, 2022). There exists a certain degree of territorial decentralization in Lebanon; however,

it has been crippled due to the enormous overburdening of the municipalities, contradictory regulations, and lack of accountability (Carrascal, 2020). Decentralization was stipulated in the constitution, but it is still theoretical as the executive authority controls judicial formations and transfers (Expert Judge, 2022). Zaher (2020) claimed that the nation-state of Lebanon has never been a viable solution in its current structure. He proposed a highly decentralized system as an unravel for the Lebanese state. He suggested that the people ought to build their own fences, but as part of the same sovereignty by letting each community have its own security, protection, and electoral targets.

Meanwhile, critics argue that decentralization is a non-pleasant option. Mr. Khaldoun Abou Assi (2015) declares that decentralization efforts may have unforeseen effects, claiming that the wider decentralization literature has





established that decentralization attempts may lead to recentralizing repercussions. For instance, Decentralization can potentially lead to increased corruption and decreased health and education services. Furthermore, ineffective, or dysfunctional decentralization procedures have been found in a range of political-administrative system situations, including the Middle East (Haase & Antoun, 2015), South Asia and West Africa, and Latin America (Agrawal & Ribot, 1999). In some of these “failed” examples, additional time may have been required to realize the benefits of decentralization (Ribot, 2002). However, most studies show that the necessary prerequisites for successful decentralization were not present from the start (Hutchcroft, 2001).

Moreover, numerous scholars, studies, and reports revealed that decentralization is not an end for a means but a means to an end (Schneider, 2019). Decentralization would not deliver new

solutions other than the ones attained by the applied system if it happens to be centralized (Schneider, 2019). Therefore, this method of implementation could then possibly be one of the ways that will bring about improvement in the application of the system by delegating tasks and responsibilities to accountable sub-entities and involving the citizens to the utmost degree.

It has been feared that Lebanon, being a small country, with very limited natural resources, divided into several sects with known affiliations, would be divided as soon as decentralization is implemented, and there would no longer be a united Lebanon, nor a united army governing all its territory. Yet when the majority rules, the Government cannot function without breaking the covenant of sects, thus either the possibility of civil war or a handicapped non-functioning government. Could there be a mid-ground solution that benefits all and jeopardizes no one?

Definition of Decentralization

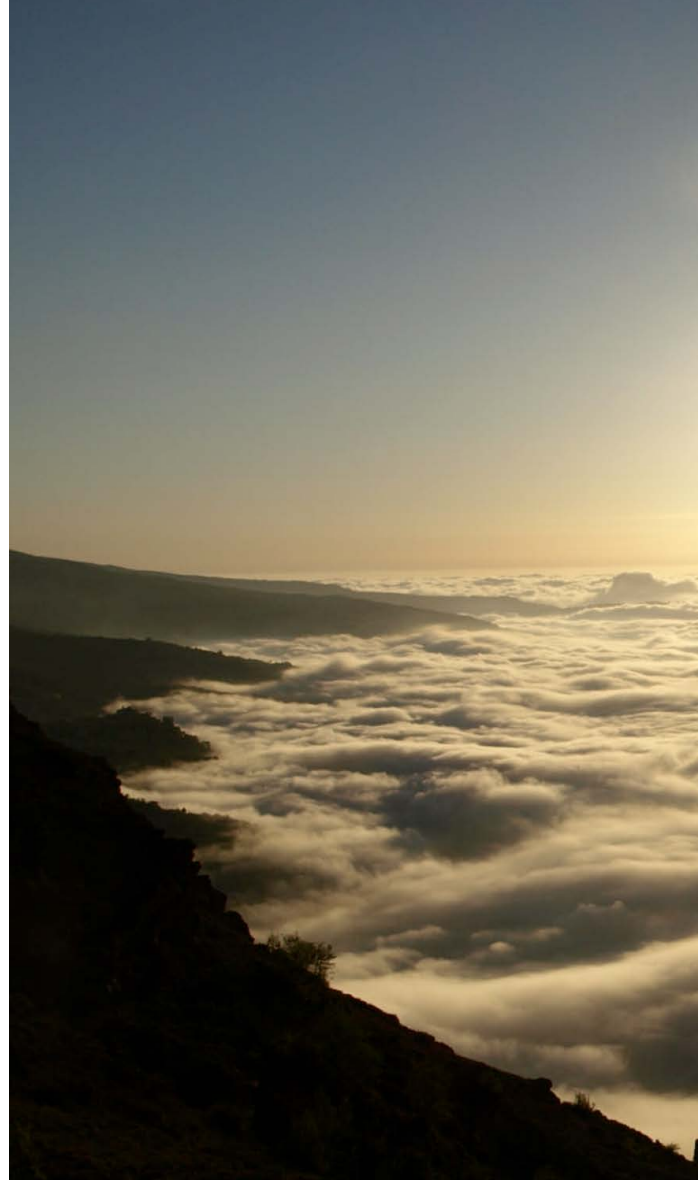
Decentralization is a controversial notion which has several definitions by scholars and experts (Abou Assi, 2015); nonetheless, the most commonly employed delineation is the transfer of power and responsibility from the Central Government to local governmental entities or to the private sector. This entails that there is transfer of authority from the higher to the lower entities or concerned bodies in a government. Decentralization is an appealing conception to a number of activists where many contemplated that having a decentralized state would create a stronger system of accountability for those in power (Dahrouj, 2022). Protagonists of decentralization claimed that this notion provides a wide customized chain of services according to the area and gives more authority for the Local Government.

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Decentralization can hence be clarified as allocating administrative authority to federal units, specialized organizations, municipalities or other local entities, and provincial institutions, upholding themselves accountable for decision-making, planning and collecting taxes. In addition, Litvak notes that this concept isn't just inclined to a state, it is rather a set of organizational structures where there is the delegation of authority by the top management to the middle and lower levels of management in an organization. Those structures can be taken in democratic and authoritarian states, thus shedding light on the fact that democracy and decentralization have completely different meanings.

Types of Decentralization

Decentralization has three core dimensions: political, fiscal, and administrative. The political dimension refers to the extent to which central governments transmit political tasks of governance, such as representation, to non-central government institutions. Fiscal decentralization refers to the extent to which central governments delegate fiscal authority to non-central government bodies. Administrative decentralization refers to the degree of autonomy that non-central government institutions have in comparison to central control. Regardless of the target, this scope involves the transfer of authority and resources away from the central government (Treisman, 2002).



Political Decentralization

Political decentralization outlines the role of political groups that tackle issues directly related to a specific community, thus working on "customized" policies and decision-making with relevance to each region. Clarke (1998) defines decentralized political systems as those in which political players and problems are relevant at the local level and are at minimum largely independent of those at the national level. Political parties, on the other hand, use elections to represent citizens' interest, bringing it directly into the political scheme. Representation is attained when political organizations translate the interest of citizens into policy decisions. It can be carried out in different forms: through NGOs, interest organizations or social movements. Their role is to find the most effective ways to organize, articulate, and disseminate the voice of a society to the state. However, the state is directly linked to the systems of representations whereby it possesses the authority to decide which issues and interests can be politicized. In politically independent states, local concerns shape the interest and identities of citizens



leading political parties and social movements to focus on the local issues and elections and to operate mainly in that field. This gives more weight to localities. Elections reflect the level of political decentralization present. Although there are other indicators, elections are the most valid as they directly tackle fundamental aspects of political power (Schneider, 2003).

The constitution, statutes, and regulations codify the formal rules of the game by which a decentralized system is meant to function in political decentralization. The constitution is used to enshrine the broad tenets on which decentralization is to operate, including the rights and obligations of all levels of government, the description and function of important institutions at the national and local levels, and the foundation upon which specific laws and decrees may be established or modified (World Bank, 2001).

Laws should outline the precise parameters of the intergovernmental fiscal system and the institutional specifics of the administration of the local government. This includes key structures,

procedures (including elections), accountabilities, and remedies; and a series of regulations associated with each law should explain and interpret in detail the procedures and measures by which local governments are to be run. The degree of complexity and location of authority to accomplish changes is crucial in outlining where the administrative or budgetary aspects are defined in the decentralization system, and in determining how explicit those definitions should be.

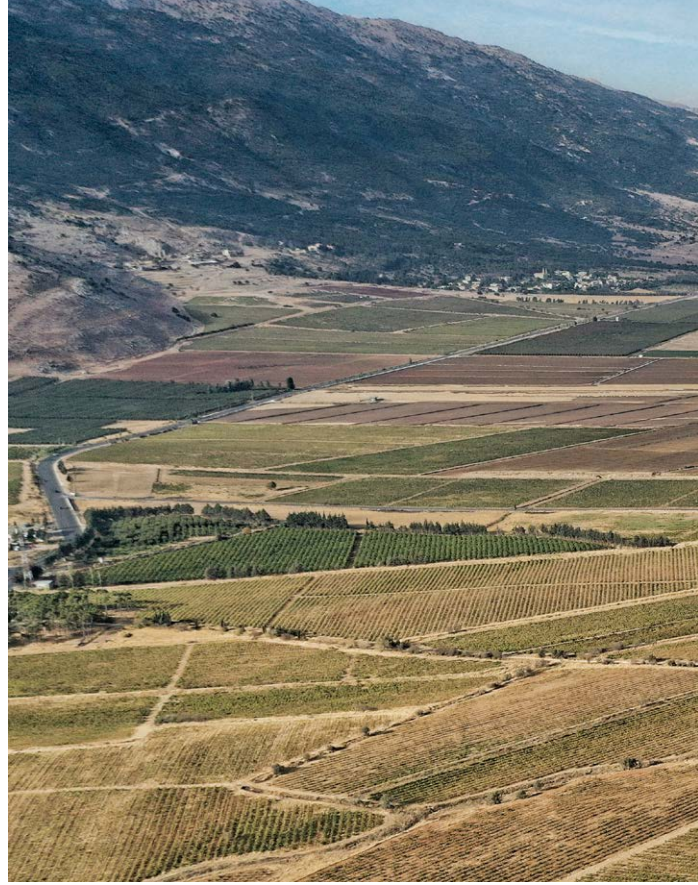
The passing of a law may be the result of a consensus, but it frequently follows tense negotiations between opposing interests. In order to provide the ministry of finance the most flexibility possible when managing public expenditures, those concerned with macro stability, for example, may desire to have intergovernmental fiscal regulations be a topic for regulation under the Minister of Finance. Conversely, proponents of local government may argue (as they did, successfully, in Brazil) for the Constitution to include these fiscal distributional rules (Mookherjee, 2014).

Fiscal Decentralization

Fiscal decentralization represents the monetary aspect whereby local governments are allocated more authority to control expenditures and revenues. Therefore, a fiscally decentralized state's indicator is how much subnational entities have control over expenditures and revenues. The responsible body is bound to directly address local concerns and needs in terms of services and resources, and to create a better system of accountability. Furthermore, fiscal decentralization refers to the financial independence of the local government. In order to maximize welfare, there should be a mix of economic stability, distribution equity and allocative efficiency (Schneider, 2003). To align with this, the central government transfers suitable revenues to the local government to carry out its tasks.

According to the World Bank, fiscal decentralization can be executed through five conducts. The first of which is manifested through self-financing or cost recovery through user charges. Similarly, the second is realized through co-financing or co-production, in which users provide services and infrastructure through monetary or labor contributions. The third way fiscal decentralization can be executed is through the expansion of local revenues by property or sales taxes or indirect charges, whereby the fourth is attainable through intergovernmental transfers of general revenues from taxes collected by the central government to local governments for general or specific uses. The last is obtained through the authorization of municipal borrowing and mobilization of national or local government resources through loan guarantees (World Bank, 2013).

This calls attention to several matters to be stipulated. For instance, how will each decentralized entity devise its financial resources? How will fairness among entities be ensured? How much, in taxes, should be paid to the central government? How far should the central government back up each entity and what happens when a certain entity fails financially? And how does it impact the central government and other interlocked decentralized entities?



Administrative Decentralization

The administrative decentralization focuses on the directorial standard of allocating jurisdictional power to the local government that withstands a combination of personnel control, policy-making authority and even control over public finances. The indicator for administrative decentralization is the level of autonomy that the local government has from the central government. An administratively decentralized state grants subnational entities the power over financing, planning, and managing certain public functions. Additionally, administrative authority has four major typologies that vary with the amount of autonomy allocated, ranging from a low degree of autonomy from the central government, to a high degree of autonomy. Those categories are devolution, delegation, de-concentration and privatization or divestment.

However, there are risks connected with administrative decentralization, the most serious of which are probable failures at the local level owing to the lack of technical or administrative ability of the delegates. Even though decentralization redistributes authority, it really necessitates that the delegate is administratively proficient otherwise, the system would collapse. This also applies to local administrations since operations would suffer in circumstances of decentralization if they lack the necessary technical and administrative competencies. Moreover, decentralization makes distributing financial resources considerably more difficult, especially when resources are limited.



As a result, the quality of services may not be consistent throughout the community due to unequal resource allocation. Furthermore, the lopsided distribution may impair efficiency and effectiveness in particular sectors. Coordination may be more difficult and complex in circumstances where the emergency involves extensive efforts, which is a significant disadvantage given that emergency services typically require rapid responses (Mullins, 2004).

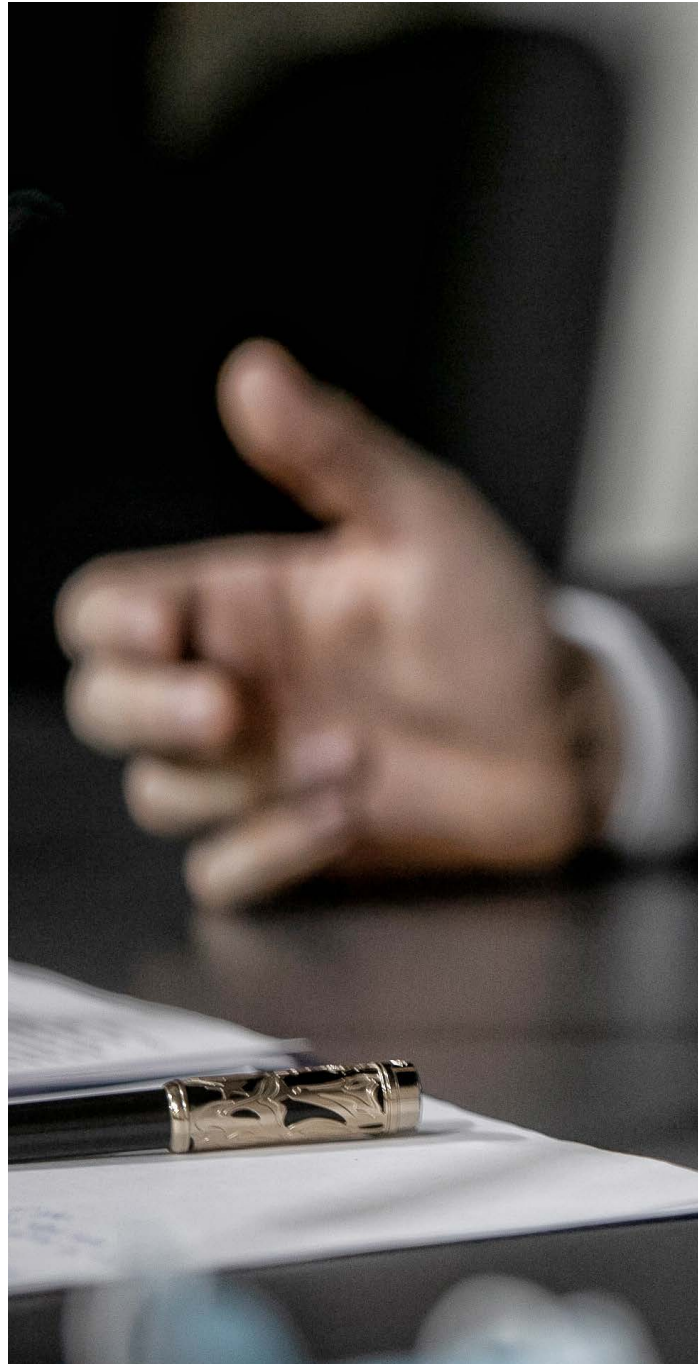
While there are risks, there is little doubt that decentralization in local emergency services is necessary, albeit deconcentration would be the more sensible strategy, allowing for some degree of central supervision and good coordination. As a result, local emergency services would be able to reap the benefits of decentralization, such as increased efficacy and efficiency, while avoiding potentially preventable drawbacks, because the majority of those to whom power is delegated would have proven track records within the field (Dubois & Fattore, 2009).



Degrees and Levels of Decentralization

A true assessment of the degree of decentralization in a country can be made only if a comprehensive approach is adopted. Rather than trying to simplify the characteristics into the single dimension of autonomy, interrelationships of various dimensions of decentralization are taken into account. Outcomes vary not only because decentralization can appear in various forms and combinations across countries, but also because different instruments may have different effects in different circumstances. It is understandable that there is diversity in the degree of decentralization across the world (Sharma, 2006).

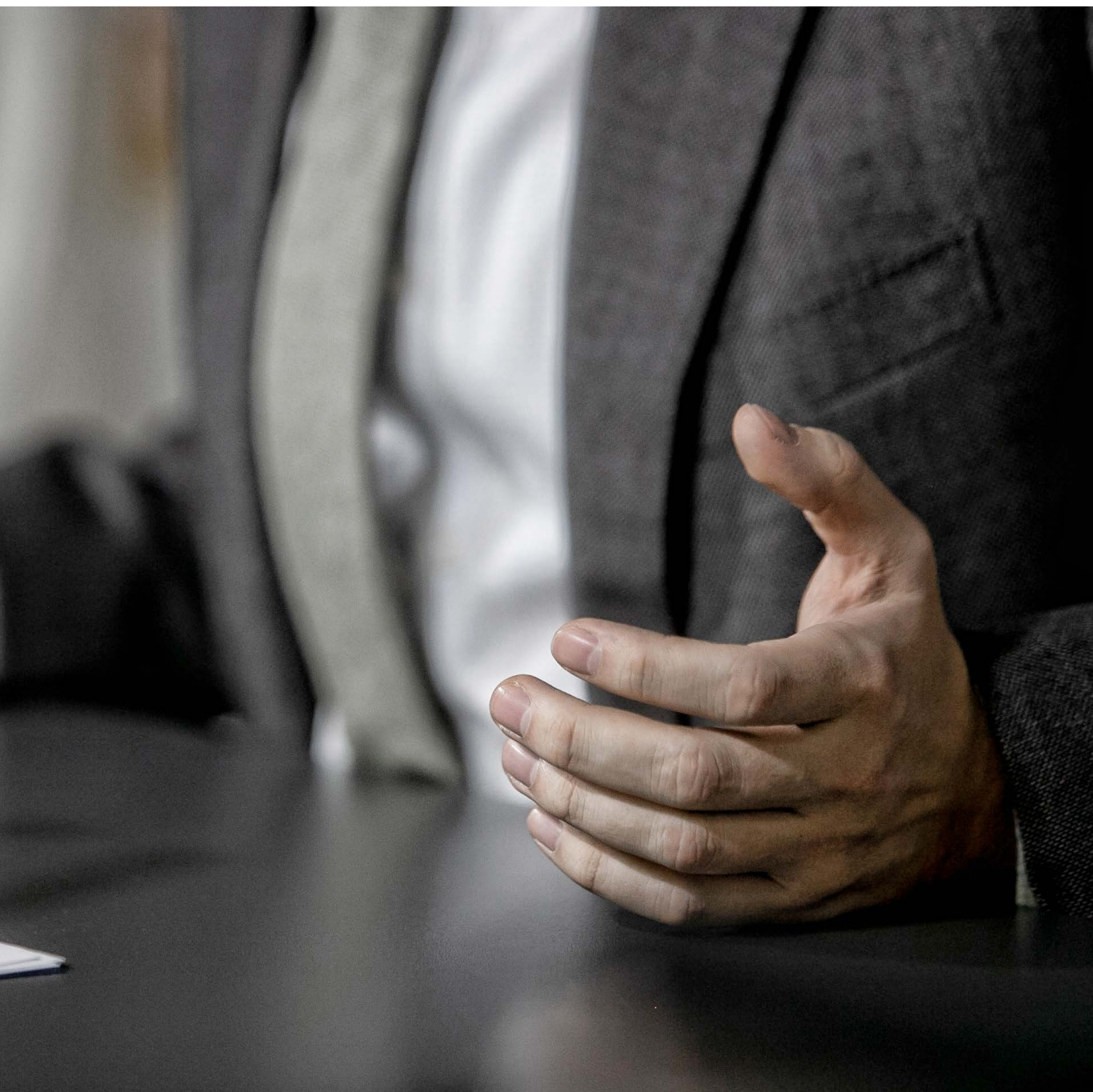
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Devolution

Devolution entails the highest degree of decentralization, thus the highest level of autonomy. Through devolution, the central government empowers semi-autonomous local forces of government to exercise authority and control over certain policies (Sharma, 2006). The central government transfers authority for decision-making, finance, and management to quasi-autonomous units of local government. Within the territorial boundaries, each sub-national government has the freedom to decide upon its areas of authority and perform public functions (Carrascal, 2020).

The majority of political decentralization is linked to devolution. For example, in the late 1990s, both Uganda and Tanzania passed legislation aimed at devolving major responsibilities to locally elected urban and rural councils in order to provide basic services and stimulate local economic growth. Decentralization attempts to improve service delivery as well as local democratic governance in both nations. Accordingly, local governments have been given authority over human resources, income creation, planning, and budgeting. Tanzania has preserved a regional administrative level, which functions as a decentralized layer of central administration and serves as a possible connection between devolved and central government. There is no such transitional level in Uganda. Local governance is structured into five layers there, ranging from district and town to village and ward (Land & Hauck, 2003).



Delegation

Delegation refers to when the central government transfers responsibility for decision-making, and administration of the public function to local governments or semi-autonomous organizations (Sharma, 2006). Delegation assigns policy responsibilities to local governments or semi-autonomous bodies that are not controlled by the central government but are nevertheless subject to it. This reflects a little higher level of administrative flexibility for local units than deconcentration provides (World bank, 2008). Delegation shifts an intermediate amount of accountability towards the local units. These subnational units become semi-autonomous, while the accountability mainly leads back up to the delegating authority (Carrascal, 2020).

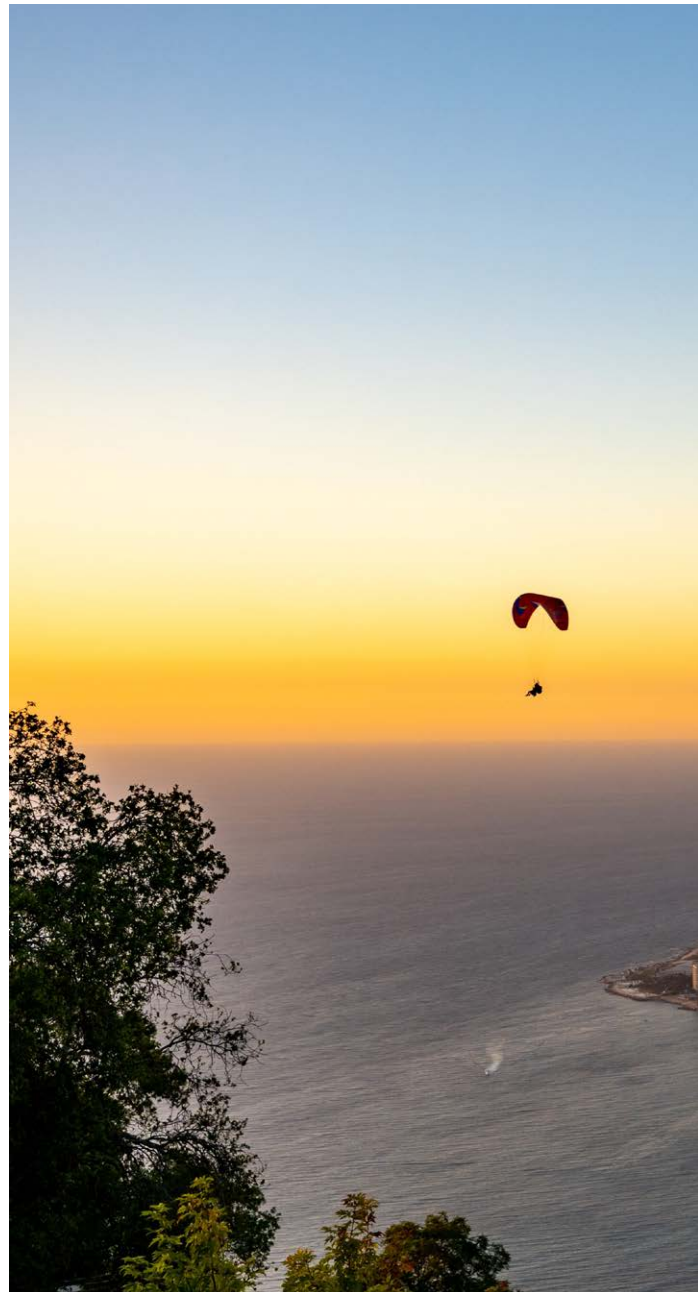
In Mexico, for example, health-care decentralization began in earnest in the mid-1990s. The National Health Council was established in 1995 to manage the reform, with representatives from all states and the central government. Its functions include negotiation, discourse, and dispute resolution, as well as reform coordination. The reform established new state entities known as OPDs (Public Decentralization Agencies). All federal workers were moved to the OPDs as state employees throughout the decentralization process, and all state staff were brought up to the salary levels of federal employees. This policy's financial expenses were borne by the federal government. These OPDs are funded by the state health budget and have great leeway in distributing existing primary and secondary care resources.

Deconcentration

The major distinction between deconcentration and delegation is that the central government maintains control through a contractual relationship that requires local governments to be accountable (Rondinelli, Nellis, & Cheema, 1999). Deconcentration occurs when the government gives certain responsibility to some regional branch offices, but this doesn't involve any transfer of authority to lower levels of government which does not lead to the potential benefits of decentralization (Sharma, 2006).

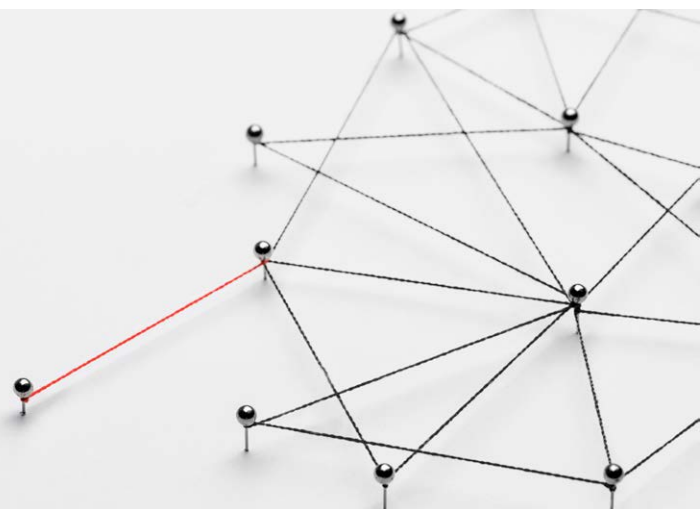
The term "deconcentration" refers to a central government that delegated policymaking authority to field offices. This transfer alters the spatial and geographical distribution of authority but has no meaningful impact on the organization receiving the power. The central government retains power over the field office under deconcentration systems, and this authority is exercised through the hierarchical mechanisms of the central government bureaucracy. Deconcentration provides just a somewhat higher level of autonomy than centralized systems (The World Bank, 2008). Authority and responsibility are therefore moved from one level of the central government to another, without transmitting power to the local levels. Consequently, the sub-national units stay accountable to the central government (Carrascal, 2020).

Burkina Faso and Benin are both West African countries with a French political, legal, administrative, and financial legacy. The administration of the government, which is mostly based on the French model, is extremely centralized, with only limited powers and spending authority allocated to decentralized agencies for service delivery. A delegate of the minister responsible for territory administration represents sector ministries at a decentralized level in both nations and has official coordinating powers. Decentralization measures in Burkina Faso call for three deconcentrated levels of government as well as two tiers of devolved authority. In Benin, there is one degree of deconcentration with 77 communes and one level of devolution with all deconcentrated agencies utilizing the same administrative departments.



Privatization or Divestment

Privatization or divestment connotes the transfer of public services and institutions to private companies and firms (Sharma, 2006) which basically transfers control of public functions to private corporations, NGOs, or voluntary contributors. It necessitates the private sector taking over the state's control and monitoring tasks (Akel, 2017).





Privatization of land, for example, is a constraint for economic development since the municipality must seek clearance from the central government (Thompson, 2007). Decentralization of tasks and responsibilities to local authorities has been followed by privatization in former communist nations in order to transition the communist economy into a free-market one. In these nations, central authority over local administrations is frequently maintained. In Lithuania, for example, local government is divided into two levels: the county, towns and villages. The counties are administrative territorial entities of the state. Only municipal governments have independent authority, the right to self-government, and the ability to organize elected bodies. The central government's labor code applies to all public employees. Local governments can recruit additional employees, but they cannot establish

new roles or provide different pay or other forms of remuneration. The case of Klaipeda, a thriving port town in Lithuania, demonstrates that, while privatization and local sovereignty have set the municipality on the path to economic success, the capital retains tight control (Thompson, 2007).

Regardless of its form, decentralization is characterized by the establishment of locally elected legal entities, each having a legal personality and enjoying administrative and financial autonomy. So far, Lebanese municipalities have theoretically broad powers that they are unable to exercise due to limited institutional capacity. In all other cases, any delegation of competencies has involved devolution from the central government to civil servants that it appoints.



"COMPARATIVE DECENTRALIZATION MODELS"



Comparative Decentralization Models



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In order to deeply dig into the implementation of any decentralization model in Lebanon, similar administered models in the world are worth studying, to collect best practices and lessons learned. This report adopts an expository approach in portraying decentralized states' comparative analysis. The selection of the three studied decentralized states, Indonesia, Uganda, and Iraq was based on criteria common with Lebanon. Indonesia resembles Lebanon by its religious inclusivism and diversity and its past political corruption. Uganda resembles Lebanon by its civil unrest, political corruption, and international interference. Lastly, Iraq's corruption and sectarian and political affiliations to the international community were all criteria common with Lebanon.





INDONESIA

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Following President Suharto's highly centralized reign, significant appeals for more regional autonomy prompted Indonesia's national government to implement a decentralization program. Indonesia transformed its political system from one of the most centralized in the world to one of the most decentralized. (Evans & Manning, 2004). A comprehensive plan for decentralization was implemented in 2001 with the passage of two laws: No. 22 on regional governance and No. 25 on regional fiscal balance (Shoesmith, 2020).

The speed and scope with which decentralization occurred surprised all observers of Indonesian politics, prompting the process to be termed the "big bang" (Evans & Manning, 2004). This devolution of power was crucial since instantly, 473 district chiefs were responsible for funding and implementing socioeconomic development programs such as health, education, and public works for an average of 500,000 people. Despite its special features and democracy process, Indonesia has remained unseen in the global arena, and as a result, little has been published on Indonesia's democratization and decentralization process (Shoesmith, 2020).

Decentralization was implemented in Indonesia with the goal of developing democracy and establishing credibility in a political system that had only just emerged from decades of authoritarian control (Shoesmith, 2020). The notion of a federalist structure was quickly abandoned due to worries of fragmentation and aversion to Dutch colonization history. Fear

of disintegration in an atmosphere seasoned with separatist movements in Aceh and Papua was the fundamental motivating reason behind Indonesia's decentralization. The desire to enhance people's welfare was another major cause for decentralization since it was thought that by providing more authority to districts, regional leaders would be able to provide more suitable public services to the people. Furthermore, changes were prompted by the economic crisis, the fall of the Suharto administration, and intense international pressure. Devolution reforms in Indonesia aim to enhance the quality and lower the cost of public services, particularly health care (McCollum et al., 2018).

Decentralization has resulted in significant administrative and political devolution at the local level, putting political parties under pressure to cede power to local/regional level and non-party players. Non-party members include bureaucrats and even some politicians with tenuous affiliations to political parties (Hidayat, 2017).



Religious Inclusivism and diversity

Indonesia is characterized by significant religious, ethnic, regional, and linguistic differences. One peculiarity of the Indonesian government's stance on (freedom of) religion is that it recognizes six official religions only, namely Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Every Indonesian is required to embrace one of these religions as it is mandatory personal data that is mentioned in official documents such as passports and other identification cards (Hidayat, 2017).

Religion, as a manifestation of social connections, helps give group affiliation and an orienting framework in times of transition (Kapferer et al., 2010). Religious symbols and

venues, on the other hand, can be mobilized for political action by erecting 'we' against 'them' divisions and producing the illusion of cultural discontinuity.

As religious organizations form increasingly transnational connections linking local religious communities with bigger orthodoxies and upsetting local customs and cross-border contacts, a trend toward decentralization may result in enhanced religious identity politics. The importance of religious identity and distinction, both in terms of local definition and alignment

with global orthodoxies, is growing, and it is affecting social and political action (Ibid et al., 2014).

Indonesia was ready for the growth of religion-infused identity politics as decentralization and regional autonomy movements proceeded. Resonating to Lebanon, as conflicts for power and wealth were projected onto religion, growing economic and political contests became marked by religious differences. As a result, cracks in the system appeared, with numerous places exploding in community violence. The research "Religious Pluralism in Indonesia" investigated if decentralization exacerbated tensions and whether social and economic issues were interpreted religiously.

Furthermore, the article investigated how religious symbolism and sacred spaces feature in the construction of power, political strategies, and the religious 'other' (Pedersen, 2016).

State actions that redefine group identities and territories alter the balance of local connections in ways that might be represented in religious terms, sometimes with disastrous results. This encompasses everything from early villagization and transmigration schemes in Indonesia to redistricting as part of decentralization. Power and



resource struggles are also organized in ethnic and religious terms, and if the society desires peaceful communities, the unfairness of economic and social inequities ought to be addressed.

Most of the examples covered here involve national regulations governing the construction of houses of worship. This is based on a 2006 Joint Ministerial Decree (originally 1969), which specifies standards for establishing and remodeling houses of worship and requires consent from other members of the community. This is done ostensibly to promote inter-religious harmony, but in fact, represents a notion that minority groups must yield to majority feelings regarding their existence. In fact, the government's regulatory attempts to "reduce violence and promote religious harmony" frequently produce anything but peaceful outcomes.

There is a crucial impact of increased identification with extra-local orthodoxies and wider religious groups in all situations, as well as shifts in local connections as a result of simultaneous anxiety that the 'other' group is gaining strength and moving its alliances. For example, social group spaces and potentiality spaces, as well as places of religion, are contested, protested, assaulted from one side, and protected from another (Hoon, 2015). Where the majority have personally

supported the minority in their worship, this gains significance and is mobilized toward peaceful solutions in times of strife. When majorities curtailed minority' freedom of worship, the results were negative. In Siberut, the post-independence process put Protestantism, Islam, and indigenous religion in tense relationships that had nothing to do with religious ideas per se and everything to do with modernism and economic policies imposed with its own religiosity. Despite all of the interventions, most of the area's forest dwelling peoples continue to practice indigenous animist and spiritual practices in some form.

The dynamics are evolving again in the light of Indonesia's recent decentralization and regional autonomy initiatives, but it remains true in Siberut and across Indonesia that "to follow exclusively indigenous religion is to be anti-state". The 'business' of peacemaking and reconciliation that emerged practically soon after the conflict, focusing on the increasingly popular idea of revitalizing 'customary practice' as a weapon of reconciliation. The intention ought to be moving the attention away from religion and toward ethnicity because religious identification divides local communities and carries the burden of past grievances, but ethnic identity has the capacity to unite (Masolo, 2002).

Political Corruption

Despite its decentralization strategy, the country's corruption problem persists. While a World Bank study suggests that an ethnically diverse country makes it more difficult for states to establish strong, corrupt-free government institutions. Several studies sought to delve deeper into how Indonesia's decentralization process and changes in corruption levels have affected public officials' ability to deliver public services and bring about higher socioeconomic development. It is often assumed that democratization will result in political structures that offer enough checks and balances, yet decentralization in Indonesia has not necessarily shown to be successful in decreasing corruption and providing better public services to the people. In Indonesia, the insufficient implementation of decentralization lacked the tools to limit the incentives for old and new political elites to engage in corrupt, collusive, and nepotistic activities. Despite some encouraging developments, Indonesia's decentralization effort has been hampered by widespread corruption at the local and regional levels (Hadiz & Robison, 2013).

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Furthermore, the implementation of direct elections proved insufficient to reverse the tendencies of corruption. One factor for the rise in corruption scandals in subnational politics was

the lack of legal and social repercussions for their actions, as well as legal gaps and the judiciary's inadequate enforcement of the rule of law. Moreover, the fast decentralization of budgetary authority to 473 regional leaders has rendered them subject to corruption, collusion, and nepotism. Corruption has grown so ubiquitous that the phrase "money politics" has been used in nearly all elections for governors and mayors. This demonstrates that certain voting systems are more subject to special interest pressures than others, and that additional forms of public monitoring are required for direct elections to be a viable element of democracy.

To address this issue, the central government enacted the Legislative Election Law in 2007, which called for the establishment of an election supervision body, Bawaslu (Election Monitoring Agency), entrusted with monitoring campaigns and election rule infractions. Changes in the judiciary, such as the transfer of authority to mediate disputes in subnational executive elections from the Supreme Court to the Constitutional Court, have also contributed to the elections' credibility (Butt, 2018). The responsiveness of the central government to these challenges, as well as the high degree of public participation in uncovering bribery and other forms of corruption, have contributed to the legitimacy of subnational elections.





Nonetheless, the fast pace of decentralization came at the sacrifice of efficacy and efficiency. The Parliament hurried through the regional government and center-region financial relations laws in May 1999, promising extensive autonomy to the regions but stressing that this would only apply to districts and that provinces would retain limited control. From the beginning of its implementation, the bill revealed several discrepancies, resulting in poor implementation and confusion among those attempting to apply it. The remnants of the Suharto regime's centralized structure had not been totally removed, making it considerably more difficult to develop new institutional formations and bureaucratic behavior across the archipelago (Fiona & Tomsa, 2020).

The rivalry among regions makes the central government's role more difficult, especially given that some of these districts do not necessarily have the potential to be autonomous and self-

sufficient. Instead of increasing responsibility to the public, many of the new districts were overrun by special motives attentive to power and the additional autonomy that district would get. However, most historians believe that decentralization was a good factor and growth in Indonesia, leading to more stability and fewer separatist movements and regional bloodshed. However, critics have noted two major criticisms of decentralization: a decline in governance quality due to the incapacity of local administrators and increasing regional inequality, and a weakening of national cohesion due to constant miscommunication and lack of coordination between the central and regional governments. "Overall, decentralization has radically reshaped the face of Indonesia and its politics, but it has proven to be neither the nemesis feared by its detractors, nor the savior anticipated by its champions", said Marcus Mietzner and Edward Aspinall of the decentralization process (2010).

UGANDA

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Uganda features a unitary government system in which authority is delegated from the central government to lower-level local governments. Decentralization in Uganda focuses on the transfer of authorities from the central government to the district and lower-level local administrations such as the sub-county, municipality, division, and parish (Ojambo, 2012).

The reasons for adopting the present decentralized structure were primarily internal. Unlike past initiatives, many of which took the form of redistributing authorities from the center to lower levels of government via central government representatives, the current system of local government gives by far the broadest and most comprehensive devolution of powers (Green, 2015).

As a result, the acceptance of the system of democracy through devolution of powers may be linked to local considerations. Nonetheless, the importance of external influences cannot be overstated. Without a doubt, Uganda is part of the Third World that has been subjected to some donor pressure to accept decentralization as a means to democratic administration, which also applies to the Lebanese scenario. Both countries received wide international attention including The World Bank and IMF (International Monetary Fund) who in turn pushed for decentralization without having a handle on internal procedures and additional contextual and constitutional loopholes, hence impeding decentralization attempts. There have always been strong assumptions about the immense potential of decentralization in extending democracy, and it was given as a near-universal prescription for tackling the governance difficulties confronting the developing world (Steiner, 2006).



Additionally, officials continue to engage in corrupt practices despite laws and institutional instruments that are in place to prevent and punish corruption. In an attempt to combat corruption, Yoweri Museveni created new institutions at both the local and national level. Donors were attracted to Uganda because of their willingness to reform and stop corruption. Foreign donors began sending conditional aid to help Uganda with its reform process. The aid that Uganda received came in the form of structural adjustment programs that were formed by the IMF and World Bank. Structural adjustment programs were in the form of conditional loans with reform policies that were meant to help Uganda transition to a more liberalized state (Beare et. al, 2018).

Decentralization was implemented in Uganda with the aim of creating efficient and responsible governance by increasing people's engagement in how they are governed. The primary goals of decentralization have historically included the promotion of accountability, transparency, and efficiency in governance and service delivery, as well as the empowerment of the masses from the ground up through the promotion of individual and community participation in governance. Uganda's experience with decentralization is especially intriguing given the obvious contradictions between the rather admirable formal legal framework on the one hand, and the continued deplorable plunder of public resources, impunity, poor service delivery, and a high rate of human rights violations on the other, all of which correlate to the Lebanese case (Green, 2015).



Swift Devolution

In correlation to Lebanon's decentralized experience, Uganda's experience with decentralization is highly acclaimed and criticized. Though some critics see it as one of the most ambitious types of power devolution among developing countries, it has also been heavily criticized for failing to deliver on its promises. According to Steiner (2006), Uganda's decentralization process is unique among developing nations in terms of the magnitude and scope of the transfer of functions and duties to the local level. According to Izama & Wilkerson (2011), it is "one of the most comprehensive local government reform projects in the developing world". In a similar spirit, UNDP claims that Uganda's decentralization effort is "one of the most extreme devolution projects of any country at this moment" (2016).

According to some analysts, Uganda's decentralization policy is more of a political ploy than a real attempt to enhance democracy and good government. "The establishment of the districts did not adhere to any predetermined criteria, nor was the process guided by administrative or economic need. Instead, the president proclaimed their formation through presidential decrees, which were frequently used to reward lawmakers who threatened to withdraw support for the NRM (National Resistance Movement) or to punish those who had backed it" (Tumushabe et. al, 2010).

Examining the effect of district formation, in which new districts have been established out of older districts on a semi-regular basis since the early 1990s, is one technique to analyze the impact of decentralization on service delivery in Uganda. Not only does the Ugandan constitution of 1995 allow for district formation in order to "bring services closer to the people", but local government officials have long asserted that district formation will result in improved public services (Green 2010). Furthermore, evidence suggests that the Ugandan government has formed new districts from counties that are both politically and economically disadvantaged in comparison to their "mother" districts.

However, there is little indication that district development leads to improved public services in Uganda, since changes in UNDP district-level poverty indices between 1996 and 2003 are unrelated to the establishment of new districts in 1997. (Green 2010). None of this was unexpected given the overwhelming evidence that district formation has been dictated by electoral calculations rather than developmental

requirements. Indeed, decentralization has not been as effective as predicted in many aspects, prompting many older Ugandans to harbor "nostalgic views" for the "previous system of local governance".

In recent years, the number of districts satisfying the central government's basic performance goals has dropped from 80% a few years ago to 34% in 2008. As a result, President Museveni went so far in the 2011 presidential election to separate himself from local government leaders and criticize them for bad government performance (Izama & Wilkerson 2011). More broadly, the local council system has been ineffective because of four factors: a lack of financing, a lack of skilled staff, local corruption, and a fixation with district development, which will be later addressed.

Uganda's predicament is fundamentally contradictory in terms of form and content. Despite the apparent commitment to decentralization implementation, at least at the formal level of the institutional and legal framework, the enormous promise of enhanced accountability, efficiency in governance, and popular empowerment remains elusive in the country. According to a World Bank-commissioned report, Uganda is second only to South Africa in practically every facet of African decentralization. However, the same country is considered among the most corrupt in the world, with appalling service delivery systems (Mushemeza, 2019).





Political Corruption

Corruption has a long history in Ugandan administrations. The degrees of corruption in certain regimes were more extreme than in others. From 1971-1979, Uganda had a severely restrictive regime under Idi Amin. Amin proclaimed himself as Uganda's "Life President". In his goal to govern Uganda for the rest of his life, he disregarded fraudulent conduct by his minions as long as they remained committed to his life presidency scheme. Amin's eight-year administration was rife with corruption and had no accountability to anybody. To cite an instance, he donated Asian private property to his subordinates and purchased military weapons at exorbitant prices.

Amin destroyed all monitoring mechanisms in the country to facilitate his life presidency scheme. The Parliament was one of these supervisory entities. Amin controlled Uganda by decree after destroying this law-making instrument of government, resulting in the dissolution of state institutions. Amin further militarized Uganda's governance by installing army generals as governors. These army generals had only him to answer to. Subsequent nominations to public office were made on the basis of allegiance and ethnicity rather than merit (Masumba, 2021).

Similar to the Lebanon case, the lack of accountability was exemplified by the most visible example of institutional immunities, the protection afforded to the president of the republic and ministers, who can only be tried before a special political jurisdiction, the High Council for the Trial of Presidents and Ministers (Moukheiber, 2021). During Amin's reign, he took over most enterprises operated by people of a different race and gave them to his friends. Many firms began to close due to the cronies' lack of expertise and skills in handling those enterprises. Every aspect of society was unmanaged and unruly. Under the Amin government, Uganda quickly became recognized for its survival culture, which made corruption a key element of society. Many people left the formal economy and switched to informal institutions where there was no government regulation (Masumba, 2021).



IRAQ

Where political institutions are strongly bound to group identities, the systems of Lebanon and Iraq suffer from notable similarities. Furthermore, governing elites actively and readily employ 'we versus. them' rhetoric to keep their supporters in line, which is bolstered by their capacity to provide physical security and patronage. While this has kept social unrest under control, it has also fostered illusory stability. This is obvious in both nations' lack of post-conflict reconciliation measures. Additionally, sectarian systems in Lebanon and Iraq have frequently impeded decent government. Citizens are encouraged to adopt ethno-religious identities in a democracy because political arrangements reward cohesive groups with access to state power and resources (Lijphart, 2006).

Iraqi and Lebanese institutions support localities at the expense of the nation, resulting in lowest common denominator concessions, short-term political decision-making horizons, and numerous unsolved issues. Several scholars have identified the state's highly centralized yet poorly institutionalized governing system as a key driver of Iraq's fragility and habitual violent conflicts, failing to manage center-periphery tensions, integrate regions and minorities into larger polities, and provide public goods and services to all (Levkowitz & Kalia, 2021).

It is said that successive Iraqi governments have failed to gain enough legitimacy to preserve popular trust. Citizens of the country have become more split along ethnic, religious, and sectarian lines, with long histories of grievance, distrust, and deadly conflict. Rebuilding Iraq's governance along the lines of its democratic constitution, with decentralization at its core, aims to restore Iraq's stability, and reconstruction. Eventually, Iraq's government will be able to restore the transition to socioeconomic recovery, in which local governments can play indispensable roles in fulfilling the state's key functions, such as governing its security, administration, economy, and politics (Lijphart, 2006)



During the post-monarchy period (1958-2003), there was widespread recognition in Iraq that a new institutional architecture was required for the governing system to satisfy the needs and aspirations of local communities.

The Iraqi Government's highly centralized pyramid structure was replaced by smaller, more independent, and decentralized administrative divisions. This was the preferred method of achieving legitimate government and fulfilling the social compact between the state and society (Pieri, 2014).

Over 1000 Provincial, District, and Sub-district councils were established throughout Iraq between 2003 and 2005. Some of the early councils, like the one at Nineveh, were appointed by the invading military troops, while others were chosen by the provinces.



These councils established the groundwork for ongoing system growth and developed a culture of local government that influenced individuals' attitudes toward governance positively. During the time between the regime transition and the ratification of the constitution, Iraq's occupation administration took efforts to weaken Baghdad's authority and lay the groundwork for a decentralized system (The World Bank, 2021).

While Iraq has formally adopted an asymmetrical federal system that delegates authorities, duties, and resources to lower levels of government since 2005, the implementation process has been non-linear, inconsistent, and, in some circumstances, ad hoc and unfinished. As a result, changes were frequently thwarted or watered down, and the supposedly decentralized state structure did nothing to reduce violence or strengthen the state's credibility. On the contrary, Iraq's system bred weak institutions in the periphery and rigid resistance in the center, which appears to have contributed to violence and the rise of non-state actors. The undermining of the ability to deliver basic services, extend security, or broadly distributed development gains have undermined the regime's ability to deliver basic services, extend security, or broadly distributed development gains (Mawlawi, 2019). This has put the central state at questionable trust scales due to its impotence to handle its own state, hence yielding suspicions about its credibility or eligibility to govern the state at a national scale.

The Iraqi constitution specifies a highly decentralized asymmetrical type of federal governance. Some legal academics have critiqued it. Furthermore, according to David Cameron (2006), the text outlines an ambiguous federal process since "Iraq's constitution has a spectrum of alternate, prospective federal futures encoded within it".

Furthermore, the constitution does not provide a clear distinction between the authorities of regions and normal governorates outside of the Kurdistan Regional Government. While it was clear that the drafters intended the regions to have higher status, larger powers, and a more senior place in the federation, the governorates have a status and authority equivalent to regions in several portions of the constitution. Henceforth, there is much uncertainty over the competencies of governorates. Decentralization allows provinces to gain varied degrees of autonomy and self-government, ranging from that of a federal entity to that of an administrative governorate, depending on the province's self-government goals. The existing arrangement is very uneven because Kurdistan is the sole federal region while the rest of Iraq is made up of administrative governorates. "However, the constitution anticipates the eventual establishment of an indeterminate number of regions" (Cameron, 2006).



Power Struggles

According to a United Nations comparative assessment of local governance changes, power struggles tend to affect the direction of decentralization even when an adequate legal-institutional framework is in place. Because central-level officials and government bureaucrats are used to exerting immense influence, they “always have the perception that decentralization will reduce their bureaucratic empire and power. As a result, they prefer to resist it or discreetly destroy it” (Kauzya, 2003). In the case of Iraq, the execution of decentralization measures was hampered by a push for a greater concentration of authority.

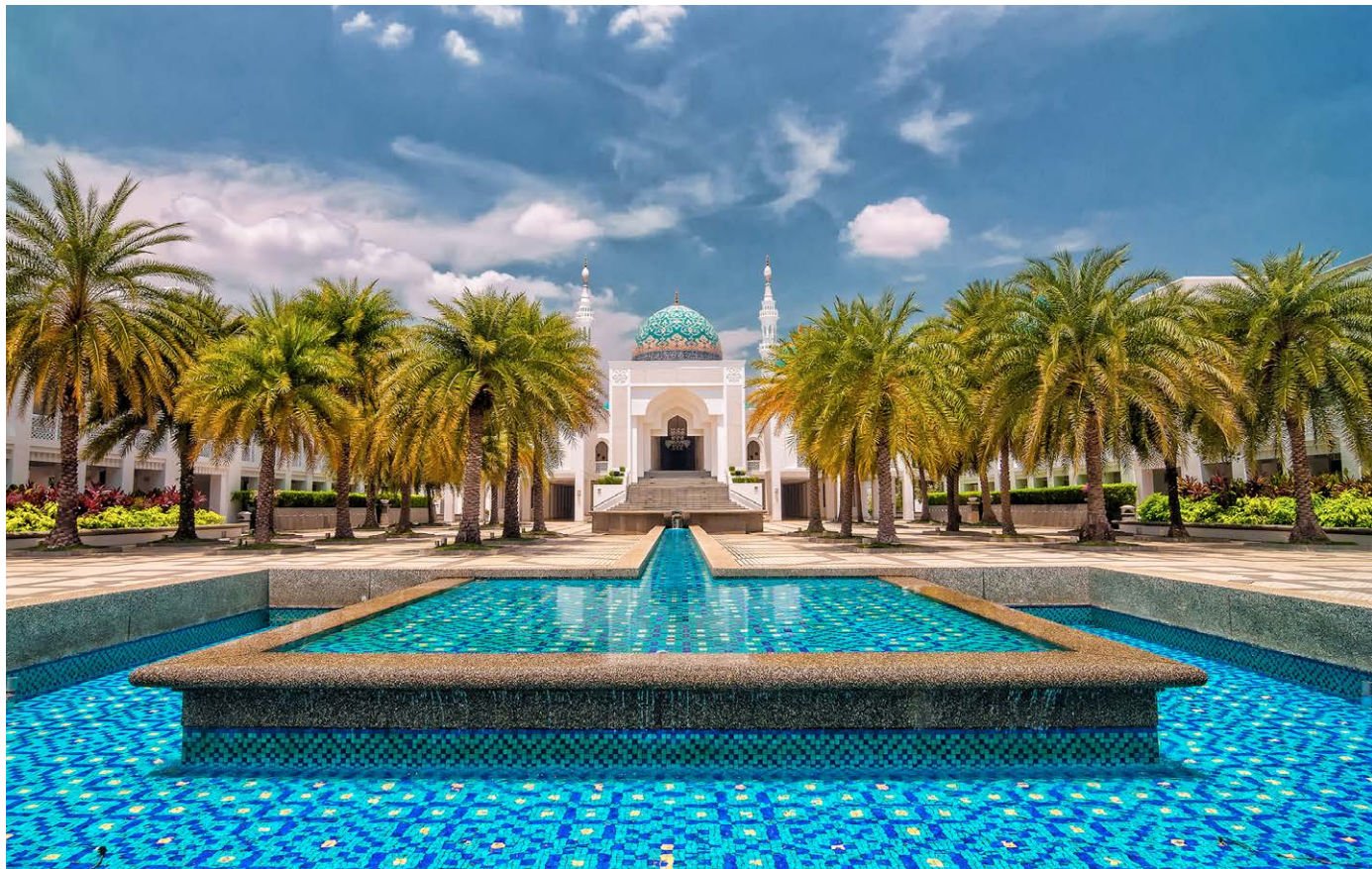
Decentralization policies were engulfed in greater power conflicts between sections of the governing class, as well as between the strong religious parties at the center and the opposition. Because of the attempt to centralize authority at the center, Iraq's 2008 law granted provinces minimal rights despite the constitution's considerably greater requirements. According to some scholars, the issuance of modifications to the legislation in 2013 was an attempt by the Parliament to restrict the expanded powers of the executive branch at the federal level. The reforms called for the delegation of authority in eight ministries to be completed within two years. The importance of the 2013 law resides in its reversal of the previous trend toward centralization.

Article seven of the 2008 legislation, for example, noted that “the governorate councils draw out governorate public policies in conjunction with competent ministries” (Meehy, 2017).

One of the major impediments to adopting decentralization in Iraq has been the inability of the Central Government in Baghdad and local authorities in the West and South to establish an agreement on decision-making in the critical oil and gas industry.

Iraq's principal export is oil, and multinational oil and gas corporations are now the dominant source of foreign investment in the country's economy. Control over this sector is regarded as crucial to greater political power and the growth of the federal state. Granting licenses for production and exploration, as well as the collection and distribution of resources, will help Baghdad consolidate its role by allowing it to develop its coercive power and control national resources that will finance economic development, thereby tying the governorates closely to the center. Oil control, in this opinion, is also linked to bigger concerns over equitable redistribution of national wealth to impoverished areas across the entire country in a more centralized federal system.

Those in favor of decentralization, on the other hand, see local authority over this sector as crucial to the establishment of functional local authorities capable of carrying out their





constitutionally specified responsibilities. Advocates of this perspective emphasize the unusually decentralized structure of Iraq's Federal Government, as envisioned in the 2005 constitution, and see central control of oil as detrimental to the implementation of a decentralized governance system (Meehy, 2017).

Oil and gas resources are declared to be "owned by all the people of Iraq in all the regions and governorates" in the 2005 constitution, however, the law does not specify how these essential resources will be managed. Article 112 of Iraq's constitution requires the Federal Government, in collaboration with subnational authorities, to manage oil and gas extracted from existing fields, provided that revenues are distributed fairly in proportion to population distribution and that the country's development is balanced.

While some claim that this implies exclusive federal power over gas and oil resources, others say that the article reflects a shared

commitment in which all levels of government have co-management obligations. Furthermore, supporters of the latter view argue that when it comes to regulating the industry, regional laws will take precedence over federal law in the event of a disagreement. This legal issue has slowed Iraq's efforts to implement decentralization measures. The fact that the issue of oil management in Iraq overlaps with ethno-sectarian conflicts and the regionalization agenda complicates matters even more. "Disagreements regarding how the oil and gas industry is handled, where decision-making power on licensing and operations sits, and who has competent capacity to formulate policy", Alkadiri claims. (2010). These conflicts were especially obvious in Kirkuk and the Kurdish area.





“LOCAL ALTERNATIVE PROPOSALS”



Local Alternative Proposals

In the following segment, the study adeptly explores the implementation of two alternative development models in Lebanon: Tripoli's Special Economic Zone and Linord in Matn.





Tripoli Special Economic Zone

With the core objective of enhancing the local economy and promoting employment opportunities for local youth in the North of Lebanon, the Tripoli Special Economic Zone (TSEZ) project was legally approved in September of 2008 (Srour, 2017). The objectives to be achieved by this zone were attracting foreign and regional Arab investments, as well as international trade and transactions in a wide variety of sectors, except tourism. Law No. 18, enabling the creation of this zone, portrayed the financial and administrative independence that the authority operating the TSEZ benefits from. The law determined that the authority could implement the activities and legal actions necessary to achieve the project's goals.

Generally, Special Economic Zones are created with the objective of freeing investments from numerous restrictions, enabling them to minimize production costs, including taxes, customs duties, social security, and employment contracts. Thus, while emphasizing on attracting foreign investments in multiple fields, establishing the Tripoli SEZ was proposed by Rafic El Hariri at the time Najib Mikati was the Minister of Public Works and Transport of Lebanon, in hopes of granting tax exemptions as well as other services like unrestricted currency conversion to investors (Srour, 2017).

This brings us to the question: Why was Tripoli specifically chosen? How is it fair to other regions or investors? Some claimed that Tripoli constitutes and unites several requirements needed for an economic zone. More importantly, usually, all economic zones are created in an area where they can expand in the future.

Subsequently, upon interviewing the General Manager of the Tripoli Special Economic Zone, Dennaoui (2021), he declared "by coincidence, it was a good choice by chance or by someone with a futuristic vision to select Tripoli as a suitable location. Beirut port is already saturated, and its backyard area is full; Safety in the South is 50/50, so it's not an option. As for Matn and Kessourwane, the land is so expensive, whereas the Beqaa isn't an option since it doesn't have an airport nor a seaport". That is how he clarified why Tripoli was an excellent choice, by coincidence.

Since TSEZ sought to reduce barriers to doing business and to enhance collaborative opportunities for investment and export-led growth, the project entailed drafting a

feasibility study, done post-implementation, and master plan for a Special Economic Zone in Lebanon's northern city of Tripoli, with the intent of facilitating job creation in an important part of the country outside the capital city.

The first feasibility study was conducted by USAID with a company "ITG" after the promulgation of the law and the application decrees in 2009. Dennaoui (2021) reported: "They did it in 2010 then published it in 2011. For the next five years no managing board was appointed so we did another study in 2017 that was handed in 2018". Consequently, TSEZ comprehended two feasibility studies which both considered the project as very successful.

However, Dennaoui advised against conducting new feasibility plans in Tripoli, claiming there is no need after witnessing it. He suggested conducting six or more market analyses for other locations to adopt the best practices of TSEZ and avoid blunders or errors.

Challenges

This zone could possibly threaten or impede several foci. For instance, as reported by Dennaoui "Local merchants were afraid, those involved in buying and selling, not in the production, that we would create a Chinese market, that we would import products from outside and encourage the population to buy".

Additionally, the team behind the feasibility study identified four challenges to be solved by the Government for the good functioning of the project since 2011. These challenges incorporated land lease laws and duration, accessing the use of inbound and outbound voice-over internet protocol, and removing restrictions on the access to and trade of goods manufactured in free economic zones (USAID, 2011). Overall, it may be said that as a result of political, economic, and administrative delays, TSEZ staggered.

However, these challenges, written in the initial feasibility study proved, to be having numerous other obstacles hindering the progression of the project (Tiqnea, 2022). To this day, there is little-to-no access to official and credible data on this issue available.

For example, "In 2017, we spent a year and a half negotiating with the World Bank to end up having an acceptance for a loan of USD 67,000,000. If we have that money today, we can start with the infrastructure of the zone next to the port and everything related to the studies needed such as hiring a transaction adviser, finishing

the licensing system and making the one-stop-shop... everything would've been completed with the studies if we had this loan. It was agreed on and complete" (Dennaoui, 2021).

There were several roadblocks that delayed the projects' implementation. The first delay occurred in 2003, when the draft law submitted for the establishment of the TSEZ took five years to be passed, resulting in it being legally ready for preparation and execution in 2008, including the executive degree granted in 2009. The second delay happened six years after the executive order was issued, since it wasn't until 2015 that a board was appointed to govern and develop the TSEZ. Finally, according to Dennaoui, several delays in contact with the World Bank delayed the receipt of funds totaling 67 million US dollars. Furthermore, given the delays and the country's present state of disarray, Dennaoui stated that other economic, political, and administrative concerns are posing significant barriers to the growth of the TSEZ. (2021). He also claimed that several initiatives and policies comparable to the TSEZ began to emerge after the draft was approved in 2008. The proposal did not have a feasibility assessment at that time. Hence, it was unclear if the TSEZ would actually survive competition.

Hence, as a result of political, economic, and administrative delays, as well as a general lack of study confirming the project's practicability and actual feasibility, the Tripoli Special Economic Zone, which was supposed to begin operations in the early 2000s, remains dormant to this day (Mukherjee, 2022).





Linord - Matn

Linord is a project launched in 1990. It was officially approved by the Government led by late PM Rafik Al Hariri. The Linord project's initial purpose was to solve the issue of toxic waste dumps near the Burj Hammoud area by utilizing the waste for land expansion in the form of embankment (Hijazi, 2020).

Linord's idea was to feasibly build residential and commercial districts, as well as leisure places incorporated into their surroundings, and to accommodate the region's fishermen. A high highway speed was planned to be incorporated to alleviate traffic congestion on the present route. The project had also sought to include water treatment plants for the Beirut and Matn districts, as well as centralized infrastructure for oil and gas storage (Meed, 2021).

The Linord project, conceived in 1981 by Amine Gemayel, then MP for Matn, proposes to entrust a private organization with the construction of roughly 200 hectares on the shore between the Beirut River and Antelias, utilizing embankments that allow the recovery of land on the coast (Hijazi, 2020).

Rafic Hariri's administration formally endorsed this project in 1995. "On paper, the project supplies the region's infrastructure, which it desperately requires. For example, the ancient dump of Bourj Hammoud had to be turned into an urban park", says Éric Verdeil (2020), geographer and researcher at the Institut d'études politiques de Paris, who focuses on urban planning policy in Lebanon.

Despite objections from certain MPs, such as the late Nassib Lahoud, who pointed out that the order allowing the establishment of private land corporations to rebuild war-damaged regions could not apply to the northern shore, a call for tenders was held in the summer of 1997. Two corporation consortia had participated before inexplicably withdrawing two years later (Inura, 2014).

Of the project's purpose was to expand over the North Lebanon coast from the Beirut River to Antelias River in the same manner. Its implementation and development would be entrusted to a private company. However, much like the TSEZ, this project suffered multiple delays and even halted between the years of 1998 till 2015 for multiple reasons.



Challenges

The Linord proposal resurfaced when measures were taken to solve the 2015 trash crisis consisted of establishing a new landfill in Jdeideh; this happened after a 17-year pause on the project. However, no actions were ever taken to implement it once more. This conundrum highlights the importance of abiding by time frames, and more importantly setting time frames, to begin with. Most planned projects will render ineffective had they exceeded their expected timeframe, since they would have been planned for a certain era under certain conditions. This brings us to another question: Years later, is the project still feasible? Was the study efficient and sufficient and had it taken into consideration sustainability and future possible changes, changes in demands, inflation, population growth, etc.?

The principal reasons for the project's stop from 1998 to 2015, like with many others, were political and economic. Construction rule changes increased building allowances, increased land prices, and widened the rent differential, making investments much more expensive than in the early 2000s (Chamoun, 2014). Even between 1990 and 1999, the idea was repeatedly rejected. Fouad Saad, former Deputy of the Parliamentary Panel for public works, dismissed it, claiming that no substantial studies were done to demonstrate the project's necessity (Inura, 2014). Thus, with many concerns on the functioning, framework, and feasibility of the project left unanswered, the Linord project was discontinued from 1998 till 2015, and shows no signs of being implemented or developed in the near future.



Since there is hardly any data pertaining to both projects, the lack of data could trace back to the actual nonexistence of feasibility studies. If so, it is only anticipated that they will most likely fail, and thus shouldn't have been endorsed from the first place. However, since explanations are still inconclusive, TSEZ and Linord projects leave no room for improvement or adoption of best practices, restraining their replication or the avoidance of blunders for future projects.

Additionally, the measurement of the potential benefits needs to result from a feasibility study or an extensive plan about the direct and indirect implementation and effects on housing, building, laws, roads, infrastructures, and others.

“DIAGNOSIS OF DECENTRALIZATION IMPLEMENTATION IN LEBANON”





Diagnosis of Decentralization Implementation in Lebanon

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Being possibly a great way for implementation, decentralization requires prerequisites which this segment aspires to inquire into.

In this context, a framework (PESTEL) was used to analyze the current situation in Lebanon to understand the interconnected factors preventing or facilitating the implementation of decentralization. PESTEL stands for Political, Economic, Social, Technological and Environmental external factors that affect a country. Therefore, entities can discover any risks unique to their sector by analyzing those interwoven six aspects and making informed decisions. Additionally, it may draw attention to potential additional costs and encourage future plans to incorporate more research (PESTLE Analysis, 2021).

Political Factors

A year after the Ta'if Agreement, a political reconciliation plan, agreed upon in Ta'if, was approved by the Lebanese Parliament. The constitution was amended, the powers of the President of the Republic were reduced, as the procedural powers became divided between the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and the Government itself. While the revisions divided authority among religious communities, Ta'if also possibly established an ideal foundation for sectarian leaders, many of whom had previously commanded militias, to carve the state apart (Bahout, 2016).

It has been noted that sectarian leaders and their international benefactors were able to take the state after the war ended and convert ministries and governmental organizations into lucrative fiefdoms. Some argue that the post-Ta'if constitution has been turned into a stumbling barrier where politicians and parties have successfully imposed a system of sectarian unity for all significant decisions to drive through their political agendas (Jari, 2010).

The nature of governmental decision-making has generated concerns and fueled the belief that a



unified Lebanon is no longer worth preserving. Many are considering methods of separation that would allow Lebanon to function better, albeit inside the hollowed-out shell of a single state, because of the country's sectarian reflexes. On the other hand, the presence of groups that are too powerful to be brought to heel by the state and are intimately linked to one of Lebanon's main religious communities is a big factor favoring such thinking (Moussallem et. al, 2022).

As a result, many sections of Lebanon may be able to isolate themselves from this party's efforts to exploit the central government to its advantage. However, for those parties encouraging decentralization, can partition work in a small entity as Lebanon? How can new arrangements over religiously mixed districts be sought?

Ta'if did offer a partial path out by laying the groundwork for a process of administrative decentralization; however, this begs a broader question: What kind of decentralization law would Lebanese political parties really want?

Decentralization antagonists frequently argue that transferring power to dispersed tiers of governance allows them to control the opposing group (Jari, 2010). This is accomplished by confining them in institutional structures that the central government can control and constrain. The central government has the municipalities under its control. Every decision made by the council of municipalities or the municipalities itself has to go through the central government bodies to reject and obstruct any decision that does not contribute to their plans or serves their benefit, which then hinders the plans of these municipalities and holds them accountable for not facilitating reform (OMSAR, 2011).

The instance of Ghana exemplifies how those with the ability to accelerate the decentralization process have no desire to do so. Neither the Government nor the opposition is very interested in it. The Government fears political decentralization for the same reason that the opposition does: loss of political authority over specific areas of the country. Similarly, "many elected municipal councilors do not want chiefs to play a larger role in local politics, viewing it as a challenge to their own political influence. Possibly for the reasons stated above and others, government and opposition leaders, and many elected municipal councilors are not pressing for quick action on political decentralization" (Woll, 2006).

Furthermore, an LCPS (Lebanese Center for Policy Studies) survey found that under a new decentralization law, Lebanese MPs would prefer a more limited role for regional councils, sectarian quotas for elected officials, and an electorate made up of the registered population. Although most people were found to support decentralization, this high level of support conceals major problems. In summary, they appear to advocate a more limited role for the Qada' councils, sectarian quotas, and election by the registered rather than resident population. It appears that their viewpoints reflect their intention to not only maintain sectarian quotas but also to hinder political changes (2015).

When political groups and politicians advocate for or against decentralization, one should be wary of their true motives. After all, corrupt politicians are unlikely to be interested in decentralization as a first step toward greater political change, unless beneficial in some way.

Economic Factors

It has been noted that there is political pressure to decrease inter-jurisdictional inequities. Is a decentralized system more likely than a centralized approach to reduce inter-jurisdictional disparities? Some believe that in a decentralized system, local governments would collect all taxes and make all expenditures on behalf of their inhabitants. Others claim that a centralized system would transfer money from affluent to poorer areas, even with regressive taxation and spending (Abimbola et. al, 2019).

The theoretical and empirical research indicate that national budgets diminish regional inequities. Any diminution in the importance of national budgets in comparison to those at the subnational level thereby raises inter-jurisdictional disparities by lessening the impact of national policies aimed at redressing regional injustices (Tanaka, 2007).

This mechanism has both static and dynamic properties. It could possibly create a vicious spiral in which richer jurisdictions have huge tax bases, with tax rates that are the same or lower than other, less wealthy jurisdictions. They then will be able to provide more local public services because they will collect more taxes. They will provide the same services at reduced tax rates in the second. In both circumstances, these areas will be favored by firms and people, who will opt to relocate there, expanding the tax base and widening the income disparity across regions. The question here remains: Will decentralization thereby increase or decrease segregation?

Finally, rivalry among jurisdictions trying to attract investment is a concern. Subnational governments may compete to recruit businesses by cutting tax rates or increasing subsidies. However, although some rivalry is beneficial, especially if it promotes efficiency, too much competition may be harmful. If all local governments provide comparable benefits to businesses (at a cost to taxpayers), geographical patterns would not change, but the balance between the public and private sectors would shift away from an initially ideal equilibrium.

Lebanon has various regions, each associated with a different culture and assets. Would a certain division in local administration be coerced or will it cause divergence in officials' performance? Would this then contribute to the imbalance in the distribution of services, natural resources, and facilities to citizens? On another note, with regard to financing, will certain administrations willingly or forcibly cooperate with each other? Will this support lead to positive competition or





concurrent conflict? Will the central state have the ultimate say or will the system encompass all possible manifestations?

It was denoted: "The greater the degree of decentralization, the more likely the misallocation" (Badia, 2021). However, there are possible solutions proposed to this problem: subnational governments can work together naturally or as a result of national governance.

In Lebanon, although the Municipal Act does not consider municipal unions to be IMF beneficiaries, Article eight of Decree 1917/1979 redistributes funds to municipal unions in the following ways: 25% is based on the registered population to support the union's financial plan; and 75% is saved for development projects, taking into account the unions' development needs and giving priority to feasibility studies and projects that have already been completed (DRI, 2020).

However, due to the economic crisis, and the depletion of the value of the Lebanese Lira, none of the values adopted in all policies and budgets are applicable nowadays. Thresholds are mostly based on fixed values which are subject to be highly influenced by the exchange rates, whereas other countries like Indonesia replaced, when possible, the fixed values with percentages (Atallah & Harb, 2015).

The central government has a formula which does not distinguish between the variations of the registered population in one village or city and the number of actual residents (MOIM, 2011). Because of discrepancies, many municipalities get high funds while having less residents while big municipalities with a dense population get lower sums and grow financial deficits (Information International, 2009).

Discrepancies are not the only problems facing the municipalities, they also face complications from the central government which withholds money in the pretext of economic situations, claiming that municipalities are incapable of managing them or that they fear that the money will be misused.

This situation led the central government to privatize or implement the development projects of municipalities on their behalf using the IMF revenues (Atallah, 2011). Lastly, the unreliability of IMF disbursements further undermines the ability of municipalities to forecast and plan developmental activities (DRI, 2020). The central government's lack of transparency and inconsistency in transferring municipal dues is a major impediment to local government finance, given that local authorities have overall a limited tax collection capacity.

Social Factors

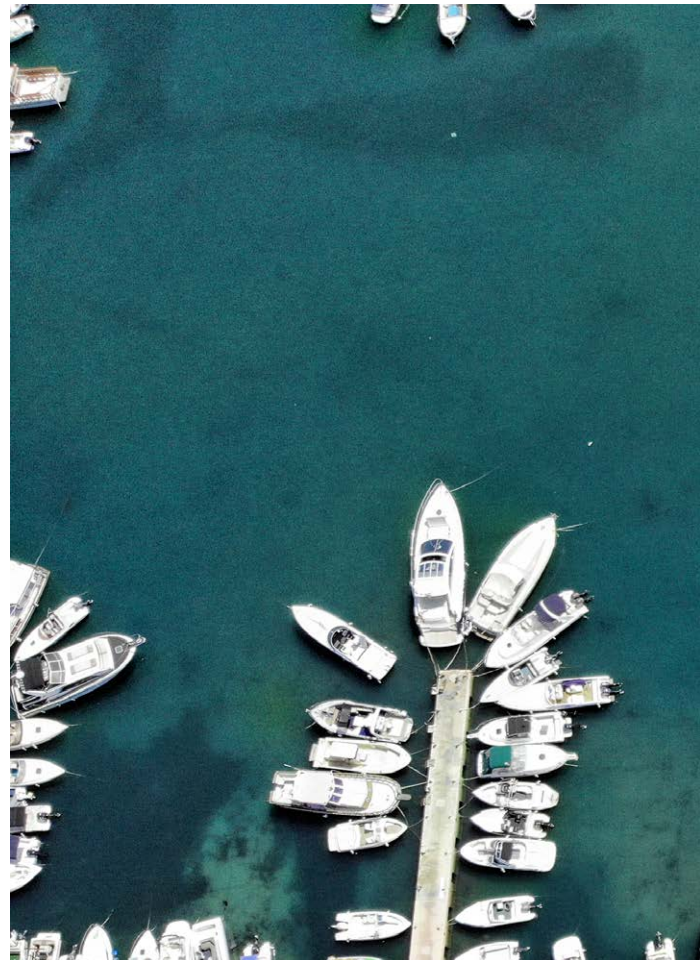
Lebanon's delay in fully implementing decentralization may be due to factors other than a lack of political support or municipal capacity. One can also wonder how strongly Lebanese citizens believe it is critical to support decentralization initiatives. Given Lebanon's tangled history, it's probable that Lebanese people see their relationship with the government as that of a recipient of essential services rather than an active participant in public policymaking (Menhall, 2017).

A poll was done as part of the Arab Barometer initiative to determine Lebanese attitudes toward politics, religion, culture, and society. According to the study, one of the most crucial elements of democracy was the "supply of basic requirements such as food, shelter, and clothes to all residents" (2007). In a follow-up poll, the supply of goods and services was ranked second only to the eradication of corruption as the most crucial element of democracy (2012). Surprisingly, neither study found that Lebanese individuals were particularly eager to become actively involved in the determination or management of governmental matters, such as through public involvement in local organizations or other activities.

The public's lack of interest in government participation appears to reflect a historical trend of popular deference to central government decisions, particularly on local concerns. Residents' estrangement was worsened by the prevalence of corruption in the public sector. Efforts by local reformists and civil society organizations, with international community support, to battle corruption and enact change in the public sector have yet to bear fruit (Merhej, 2021).

Additionally, decentralization debates in Lebanon frequently feature the 'specter' of the country's separation into sectarian cantons—a story intimately connected with the civil war and the wishes of some political organizations to function independently inside their self-administered zones. Many see such a narrative as a danger to Lebanon's consociational political framework, in which power is distributed at all levels of government by diverse sectarian groupings (Menhall, 2017). Thus, in Lebanon, the central-regional-local arguments are frequently laced with these worries, which tend to legitimize the centralization decision while demonizing decentralization and the autonomy of regional and local governments.

The quality of representation in municipal

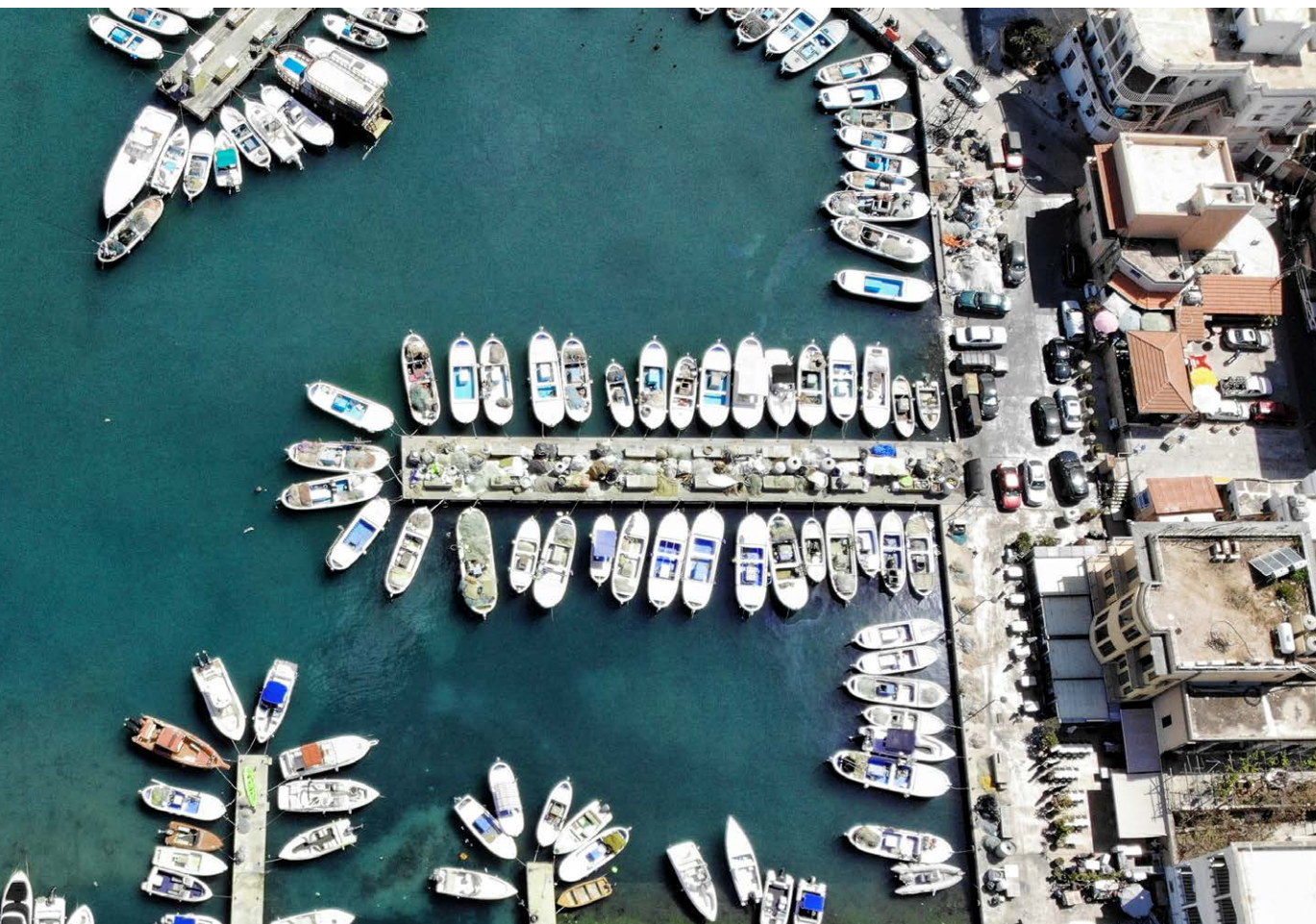


elections is a contentious issue because Lebanon's election legislation links the voter's place of election to the voter's town of origin; that is, you vote where you were born, which is not always your place of residency, given that population migrations in Lebanon have displaced more than half of the total population. As a result, in many villages, towns, and cities, the number of people eligible to vote for municipal councils is less than half of the entire population.

Although Greater Beirut and its surroundings are home to more than one-third of Lebanon's total population, barely half of Greater Beirut residents vote for municipal MPs. Some analysts refer to this as the 'distortion' between the 'legal' and the 'illegal' (Bahout, 2007).

Technological Factors

Lebanon is not classified as technologically advanced. Municipalities and labor organizations have limited technological resources (Massoud et. al, 2019). Municipalities have just recently started using computers to handle their tax schedules. They were unable to uncover current and new sources of revenue since computers were not employed to gather, process, and update information. Despite the need to execute the e-government process in the MENA area, notably in Lebanon, numerous hurdles remain,



which must be removed or addressed within a clear and practical strategy of action.

The primary ones are related to a lack of e-readiness, as well as restricted electrical manufacturing capacity in comparison to customer demand. Indeed, EDL (Electricity of Lebanon) has been implementing an electricity rationing plan that reflects a considerable amount of inequality in the country, since the least developed and poorest parts of Lebanon—particularly rural areas—bear the brunt of the biggest number of outage hours, contrary to development principles (IFI, 2019).

Electricity supply is unstable and significantly worse than in regional counterparts, limiting Lebanon's corporate competitiveness and capacity to attract foreign direct investment. The entry of an estimated two million Syrian refugees added to the already high pressure on Lebanon's existing infrastructure (Telvizian, 2021).

Another barrier to establishing e-governance is limited networking access. Lebanon's mobile market is still immature and not operating at full potential. The industry's poor circumstances include network coverage, connection quality, data and Internet service quality, customer service, and the speed with which technical fixes are completed (Blominvest Bank, 2014).

To this day, internet coverage does not provide equal service to all locations; in fact, decent speed is centered in the city and its immediate environs, and seldom reaches the speeds used in worldwide indexes. Ogero which stands for "Organisme de Gestion et d'Exploitation de l'ex Radio Orient", the fixed infrastructure operator in Lebanon, delivering voice and broadband internet and data services to residential and Enterprises, declared that this is due to a delay in the completion of the fiber optics network construction. There is also a conflict of obligations between the Ministry of Telecommunications and Ogero, as well as a dispute over the competencies and legality of the Ministry of Telecommunications commissioning the network installation to private businesses (Maharat Foundation, 2018).

Since the employed technologies and methodologies reflect limitations, public attitudes, and waste dynamics of each distinct geographical territory, many failed attempts reflected financial and infrastructural deficiencies afflicting local governments that deter the development of solid waste treatment (Massoud et. al, 2019). "If the constitution does not change according to the development of technology, then the constitution becomes an obstacle" (Schellen, 2022).

Environmental Factors

Municipal unions played a key role in lobbying for this system, building on the previously identified characteristics promoting or impeding decentralization in Lebanon. The Lebanese Parliament passed a new integrated solid waste management law (Ahad, et al., 2020). The National Solid Waste Management Authority was established by law, and it reports to the Ministry of Environment. The Authority's primary role is to monitor the progress of significant MWSM (Municipal Solid Waste Management) initiatives.

The law also specifies how to create local decentralized MSWM efforts in places not covered by central projects. Dr. El-Ghousseiny, previous mayor of Baakline, was the only woman to lead the Swayjani municipal union. Dr. El-Ghousseiny has reached an agreement for decentralized collaboration with LMCU (Lille Municipal Union) and the Chouf-Swayjani Union (CSW). The agreement lasted seven years, during which time major infrastructure projects were completed with additional foreign financing and CDR (Council for Developmental and Reconstruction) participation.

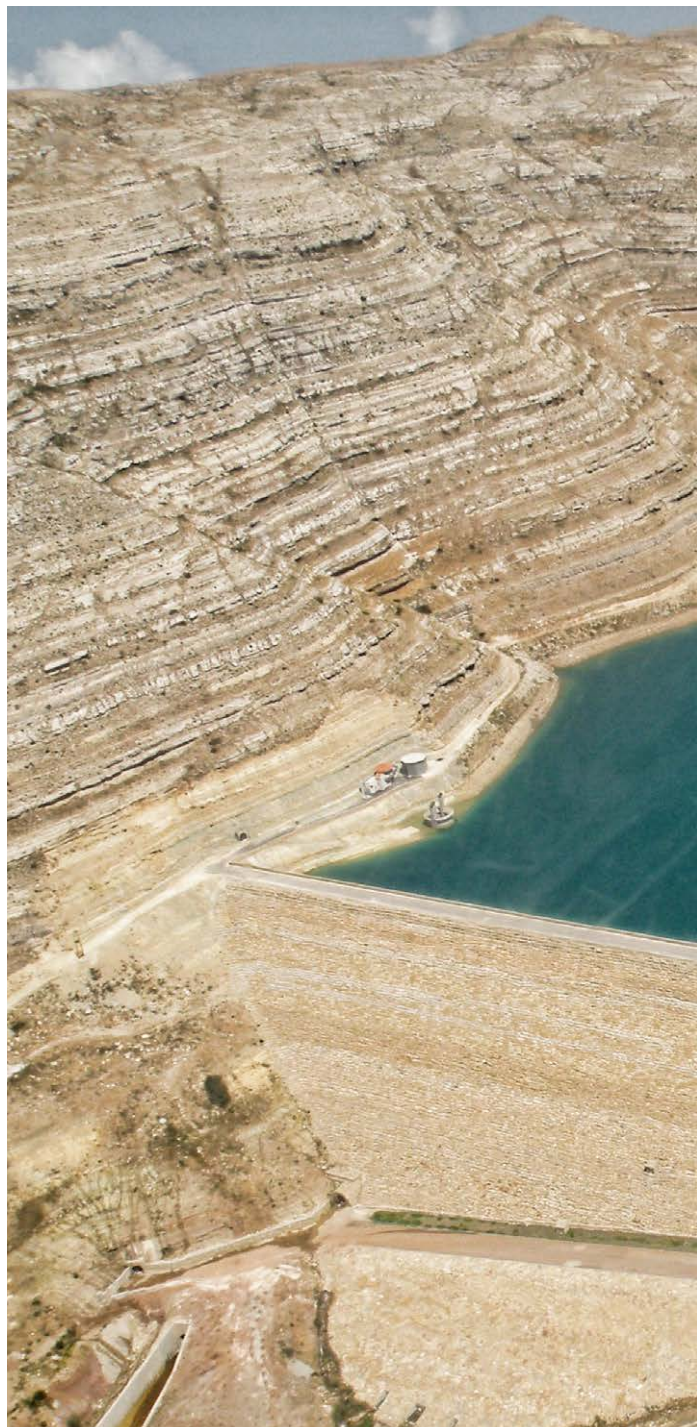
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Furthermore, the majority of Jdeidet Ghazir residents are willing to pay for a local decentralized MSWM project. The conversation with the mayor of the municipality indicated local willingness and interest in improving the village's MSWM procedures. The recent passage of the integrated solid waste management law (Law No. 80) has prompted Lebanon to hold more in-depth debates concerning the decentralization of MSWM services (Ahad et. al., 2020).

However, administrators indicated that decentralized small-scale facilities are unsustainable due to prior unsuccessful attempts that revealed that rural local governments' financial and infrastructural shortcomings prevent the growth of solid waste treatment (Massoud et. al, 2019).

Solid waste management and decentralization are interrelated where one impact hinders or facilitates the implementation of another. Solid waste management is a multifaceted task that incorporates a diverse set of shareholders and operations (Massoud et. al, 2019). Since the start of the Syrian crisis in 2011, the volume of solid trash in Lebanon has grown dramatically owing to a variety of causes, including population expansion and the migration of Syrian refugees (Chaaban et. al, 2019).

At the time, centralized MSWM services were distinguished by a heavy reliance on landfilling, limited recycling and composting facilities, and



high net costs of up to USD 130 per ton of solid waste. This was due, in part, to the government's low capacity for garbage sorting and composting in proportion to the actual amount of waste generated in Beirut and Mount Lebanon. To this day, Lebanon lacks proper solid waste disposal facilities, resulting in dumping in open locations around the country. There are around 900 open dumpsites, according to estimates. This would lead to complaints from certain regions which will then yield conflicts over governance of waste (Abbas et. al, 2019).

Uncontrolled dumping has a broad environmental impact on air, water, and land, providing significant public health risks to vulnerable residents (Human Rights Watch, 2017).



Furthermore, waterborne illnesses (such as dysentery, hepatitis, typhoid and cholera) have been observed across the country, owing to erosion and contamination problems from the neighboring sewage network (WHO, 2022). This low water quality has an impact not just on health but also on household economics, as alternative water must be purchased. Water shortage is really compensated for by purchases from the private sector or informal sources, such as bottled water, trucked water, and wells. The latter, which is often illegal, is utilized for both agricultural and domestic reasons. Corruption and a lack of oversight exacerbate its pervasiveness (Telvizian, 2021).

Furthermore, while sewage systems are established across Lebanon, coverage disparities exist between central and peripheral locations, putting extra pressure on towns. Therefore, Lebanon's infrastructure is not satisfying the minimum sustainability requirements. It is challenged as well by the increase in demand and the inability to supply it. Alternative wastewater disposal systems such as open-air canalizations and septic tanks exist in many peripheral and rural areas in the country. This issue is mainly due to fast urbanization during the war and post-war periods, in addition to a lack of resources and capacities of local authorities to invest in adequate infrastructure (Telvizian, 2021).

Legal Factors

A well-functioning system, on one hand, sets the laws of the constitution and on the other, assures their execution. Laws and norms must be implemented and maintained, as well as those who are responsible be held accountable. A successful and legitimate state serves the public welfare by holding corrupt politicians accountable. The more intact the system, the less likely politicians will engage in wrongdoing or malpractice. However, the constitutional experience in Lebanon has raised questions regarding whether the relationship between the legislative and executive authorities is valid. The current system at hand was previously examined in the text, whereby the constitutional texts and practices were inspected and analyzed for detection of the current existing situation to successfully bring forth an abundant new system.

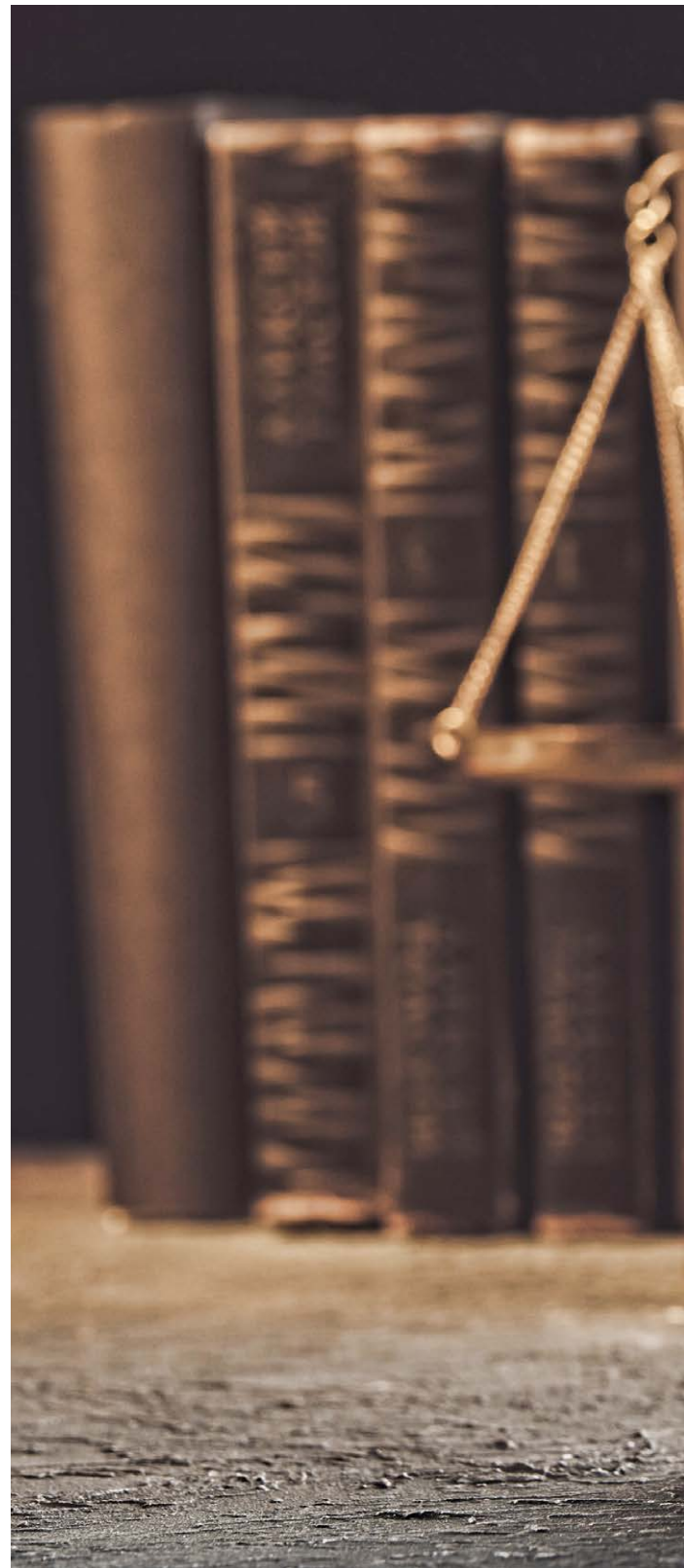
Major defects and shortcomings severely limited the implementation of the Lebanese laws and the state's ability to function, safeguarding Lebanon's oligarchs' direct influence in its operation. The failure to adhere to these laws traces back to the flawed Lebanese system addressed earlier. For instance, the constitution has not set clear guidelines that prohibit those in power from taking advantage of constitutional ambiguities and loopholes. Knowing these weaknesses indicates how authorities may be able to utilize the well-known constitution to further empower themselves and achieve inviolability.

Furthermore, several factors led to the current situation including loopholes in the constitution and constitutional ambiguity comprising the vulnerability of the Lebanese judiciary, impracticalities in the law, immunity of public officials, conflict of interest, distorted separation of powers and others.

Efficiency is expected to be enhanced by employing a decentralized management style due to giving more attention to the citizen by decreasing the ratio of the responsible unit versus residents. For instance, a schoolteacher is expected to give a more efficient lesson for a class made up of 15 students rather than 50, with his/ her attention being dispersed amongst a smaller number. Additionally, involvement and participation of these students would consequently be enhanced, having more opportunities of getting involved and being heard.

However, decentralization, being a way of implementation, would not be the sole method for administering a sufficient well-rounded Lebanese system for the structure needs much

more adjustments and refinement. Reform is needed at different levels to attain the desirable results. For instance, allowing the judiciary to be dependent is not a sufficient demeanor to sustain a well-established system regardless of the implementation method adopted. In other words, whether centralization or decentralization are executed, the system shall be intact. Conflict of interest, distorted separation of powers and other loopholes and ambiguities in the constitution would still take their toll over the system, hindering the utilization of decentralization. Thus, decentralization alone would not bring about



benefits without changes remedied to the core of the system.

Most importantly, the legal aspect shall cover all known and possible areas of conflict, disagreement, and practices of decentralization, encompassing the procedures of inter-decentralized entities, the decentralized-centralized coalition, citizen-government relations and everything in between. Thus, any discrepancy, loophole, ambiguity, or misguidance, could lead to harsh repercussions or the abuse for a certain party's advantage. Hence, the legal

framework is the most important, and most profound, which should cover all aspects and concerns previously addressed in any relevant sector field or area.

The following section will reveal additional findings from interviewed participants from different Lebanese areas with respect to their needs, their expectations of local administrations, their comprehension, and views of decentralization in Lebanon, and their stance with regard to this system (Dennis, 2014).





“COMMUNITY-FOCUSED ANALYSIS”



Community-focused Analysis



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Participants

A non-probabilistic purposeful sample was used to select 26 participants from six governorates to take part in this case study. This purposeful sample was guided by the following selection criteria provided in the table below: governorates, number of municipal council members, and religious partition. Data was collected from small and big municipal councils (varying from nine to 24 members) of governorates with exclusively one religious sect and others with a wide religious partition.

Al Bennay located in Aley district in Mount Lebanon Governorate has 18 municipal councils' members with a religious division of 54.6% Druze, 40.7% Christians and 4.6% Muslims. Beirut's local administration, on the other hand, has 24 municipality members with a religious partition of 27% Shia; 27% Sunni, 21% Maronite, 8% Greek Orthodox, 6.5% other Christian groups, 5% Druze and 5.5% other. Moreover, Chhim's governorate located in Chouf district in Mount Lebanon has 18 municipal council members with a Sunni religion. Adding to that, Jezzine a district in South governorate has 18 municipality members where Christianity majors. Furthermore, Kaifoun located in Aley district in Mount Lebanon governorate has nine municipal council's member religion. Lastly, Saida's governorate a district in the South has 21 municipality members with a religious partition of 79.7% Sunni, 10.8% Shia Muslim, 0.1% Armenian Catholic, and 0.1% Druze.

26 participants were selected from local administrations, the local community, and the private sector of these governorates.

Methodology

'A priori' and emerging themes were employed to organize and analyze the collected data from the interviews through thematic analysis (Merriam, 2009). The themes (perceptions of needs, roles, and responsibilities of local administrations, understanding of decentralization, and perceptions of decentralization) stemmed from the research aim to uncover perceptions of local administrators, community members, and stakeholders with regard to decentralization and its feasibility in Lebanon and their readiness for further responsibility. As for the emergent themes, they emerged during data collection and data analysis to adeptly analyze the findings from local administrators, local community members, and stakeholders. Regarding the interviews, after being transcribed, they were coded for themes with three rounds of coding, applying Merriam's categories of open, axial, and selective coding. Data analysis would have been started during the data collection process and continued through the three rounds of coding where emerging findings were used to modify the data collection process.

Key Findings

The interviews were initiated by asking local administrators and municipality members about their background information with regard to their regions. For instance, questions about the gender and religious partition of their regions revealed unawareness which might potentially render accessing the residents' needs implausible.



Identified Needs

Needs Of Local Community Administrators Finances/ Funds

The local administrators and municipality members shared their views with regard to the needs of the administrations they serve. One prominent premise was the administrations' need for funds. Due to the aforementioned fiscal and financial barricades on the Lebanese scheme, municipalities and local administrations are in dreaded need of financial assistance. In this context, Chhim's municipality member, who chose to keep his identity anonymous, revealed his knowledge with regard to where municipalities' finances come from "The municipality depends on the municipal fund, there is tax collection, and internal taxes in the municipality from revenue stamps, and there are times where donors donate money to the municipality, but it rarely happens". However, the system has other layers that were not acknowledged by several of the local authorities including fees collected by the state, independent departments, or public institutions on behalf of the municipalities, distributed directly to each municipality in addition to fees collected by the state on behalf of all municipalities and others.

On another hand, Chadi Yahya, a municipality member in Al Bennay, explained how the administrations' budget is impacted by the Lebanese Lira inflation "Today, the Municipality is exhausted with its operational cost. All our governmental income follows the 1500 per one dollar exchange rate, same as the revenue from the people. 90% of the revenue follows the 1500

exchange rate". Mr. Yahya disclosed the current financial situation of the municipality whereby "In the past, a town the size of Al Bennay shouldn't have more than 40 million Lebanese Liras (USD 26,666 old rate) in its fund, and the others must be in the bank. Nowadays, 40 million Lebanese Liras are worth nothing (about USD 1,800)! The Government is not doing anything about it". Despite not being supported nor properly managed by the Government, Al Bennay's local authority still managed to serve the humanitarian purpose of a municipality. Mr. Yahya claimed "We don't play by the rules, we support the children who go to school in buses by covering half of the transportation expense because the people cannot take it anymore. Most of the people who admit their kids into a public school in Lebanon are of a low-income household, but how can we help them without giving them financial help? We agreed with bus drivers that we would give them half of the transportation fees through gas coupons". Therefore, denoting that the funds provided for the municipalities are "insufficient" is an understatement. This connects to the analysis made in the previous section, in the PESTEL framework, where data revealed that municipalities struggle with the lack of funds "Local authorities suffer from a lack of financial resources to initiate and implement basic developmental tasks" (Atallah S., The Independent Municipal Fund: Reforming the Distributional Criteria, 2011).



Collaborations/ Partnerships with other Local Authorities

Since the local administrations lack proper funding and hence inability to attain self-sufficiency, several municipalities resorted to teaming up to collaborate with other municipalities for attaining a better included state. For instance, during the COVID-19 upsurge and due to the inability of Chhim's red cross to work under pressure, the municipality developed a union with the neighboring municipalities where they jointly created an emergency cell. Yousra, a member of Al Bennay's local administration's member said "We are in a municipal union and municipal unions are better than the Government".

Mr. Yahya's views come in alignment with the latter proposition whereby he pronounces "I think that the solution will be resorting to the residents and the financial support that we get from them. When the times became tough, we established an emergency cell. People would send us all their needs and we would help supply them. We cannot have an emergency cell that is directly related to the municipality because it's a hassle if we register all the spending and it is not easy. Especially because our beloved Government has stopped every municipality from giving out financial aid". This reveals the interviewees' disbelief and distrust in the management of the Government whereby they needed to count on themselves for meeting ends. Findings portrayed are similar to the PESTEL analysis conducted earlier, municipalities that are struggling financially can't "legally" collect money "Local authorities demonstrate a limited ability to think strategically and proactively in terms of fundraising; that is, outside legally sanctioned taxation revenues sources" (Ahad, et. al, 2020).

Resources and Infrastructure

A common prime complaint about infrastructure was prevalent amongst several local authority members. For instance, Chhim's municipality member noted "The water pipes are decaying, and the Government isn't helping. The bad management in the Government along with the bad system is what led us here". This comes in alignment with the analysis conducted in the analysis of the environmental dimension in the PESTEL framework revealing that the water is deeply polluted, and no changes have been made (Telvizian, 2021). Mr. Mohamad Al Baba, a local administrator from Saida complains about not having a decent public transport and supposed that even if the Government managed to develop one, "it won't be able to control it". A finding utmost protruding in the data analysis was that a shared disparagement from the local authorities was holding the Government accountable for all the desolation and deficiencies.

The suspicion and skepticism of local authorities were mutually articulated by the interviewed municipality members. Mr. Ahmad Fawaz, Chhim's municipality president, claimed that municipalities' mistrust in the Government led them to count on each other and attempt to collaborate with local NGOs and the United Nations for developing infrastructure. "The UNDP in Lebanon aspires to the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through its Art Gold Lebanon Programme, with one of its pillars being the strengthening of local community capacities. NGOs also interfere in the work of local and regional administrations" (Harb & Atallah, 2015).

Surprisingly and conflicting with the municipalities previously inquired about, Jezzine's municipality did not seem to complain about the existence of any lacking capabilities or resources. Mr. Samir Aoun, Jezzine's municipality member, denounced the local administration as self-sufficient, with no

needs that shall urgently be met. This is probably due to Jezzine coming out as a village pursuing development projects in addition to applying decentralization more than other regions, according to what Mr. Aoun has reported.

Needs of Local Community Members Employment

A random sample of local community members was interviewed to inquire about their needs and requirements. One apparent impression given by many participants was that the society suffers from unemployment. The majority of interviewed residents requested better job opportunities. Mr. Al Baba from Saida described the status quo of the Lebanese as “disordered”, anticipating more chaos in the near future which will hence pose a greater burden on the Lebanese economy. Despite being a well-acknowledged phenomenon, the unemployment rates are still snowballing with the government’s negligence to take the right actions. Additionally, employed community members brought about dissatisfaction with their salaries which mostly rose to the surface due to the unprecedented economic crisis in Lebanon.

Services

Participating local community members were disheartened to unveil their frustration and disappointment with the services provided for them. Mrs. Al Hajj from Beirut claimed “There is a lot of slowness in the work of public administrations. Governmental employees come once per week. The whole situation of the country reflects on the work of the municipalities, the country is passing through a crisis”. In addition to the slowness of the procedures, some residents shall drive a long way to the municipality of the governorate of their origin to finish the paperwork needed. Mr. Aahed Salim, a shop owner in Al Bennay drives for half an hour to reach Aley to finish his paperwork. “This is time, financially, and emotionally draining.” Furthermore, Mr. Mustafa from Beirut says, “I hate it the most when I have some papers to do because it’s a burden”. Mrs. Yahya on another hand suggested that she would love to have her papers completed in the municipality “It will make life easier for many”.

These findings come in alignment with findings portrayed previously by the analysis of social factors impacting decentralization in Lebanon, whereby the paperwork was found not to be done in the place of residency. “The quality of representation in municipal elections is controversial since the election legislation in Lebanon links the voter’s place of election to the voter’s town of origin; that is, you vote where you were born, which is not always your place of residency, given that population migrations

in Lebanon have displaced more than half of the entire population” (Harb & Atallah, 2015). This raises questions with regard to the feasibility of this practice.

Additionally, Findings revealed that local community members are dissatisfied with the quality and quantity of the services provided to them. Mr. Ahmad Hajjar, a general security retiree from Chhim argued that they are getting very few services as a recompense for the taxes they pay. He complained, “the services we get are strictly limited to road cleaning”. Mr. Salim from Al Bennay sarcastically narrated “well, they are doing artistic activities” connoting that extravagantly unnecessary activities are being held while their basic needs are not attained nor adhered to.

Needs of the Private Sectors Logistical Needs

Private sector entrepreneurs and stakeholders were interviewed whereby their data revealed a resemblance to the complaints by local authorities. Like their resorting to collaborations and partnerships with other municipalities, private enterprises needed to collaborate with other companies to observe and attain their needs. Mr. Abou Samra, an institution executive from Jezzine, reported how he provided the company with basic materials “I import the needed substances through other companies”. Mr. Abed, the founder of Wadi al Taim in Beirut, explained how the machines need spare parts from Italy which need collaborations with importers.

Furthermore, previous data portrayed in the analysis of technological factors revealed that the electricity outage is a big problem faced by citizens, especially company owners. Citizens must provide for themselves with their own generators and other facilitations. “Electricity supply is unreliable and substantially worse than in regional peers” (Telvizian, 2021). Some stakeholders resorted to their own financial independence to sustain self-sufficiency. For instance, Mr. Rabih, owner of a company at Chhim, described how he grasped autonomy by denoting “I have my own well and my own electricity generator. I do not contact the municipality unless I need a document”. With less reported trust in the governmental bodies from the interviewees, it is concluded that the private sector in Lebanon seeks to be self-governed to depend on its own resources. However, this does not strip the governmental authorities from their duties. In the following section, data from local administrations, local community members, and the private sector reveal the perceptions of the roles and responsibilities of local administrations.

Perceptions of the Roles & Responsibilities of Local Administrations

Local Administrations

Responsibility Acknowledgment and Allocation

Each interviewed party spoke about its needs, but who is responsible for attaining and providing these needs and who shall be held accountable for dereliction? In addition, local administrators were asked about their self-perceived roles, where findings revealed a clear breach in responsibility acknowledgment and allocation. Mr. Yahya, Al Bennay's municipality member, complained about how citizens request from the municipality, but the municipality does not have the authority to do so. "We have water and electricity issues. The people always request from us these two things, although it is not our authority to do so. Nonetheless, we interfere in this process through the maintenance of the networks. As for sewage, we recently had an illumination issue, and its maintenance is very expensive." Mr. Fawaz also eliminated the municipalities' responsibilities by noting "This is something you don't ask a municipality, rather a ministry. Like the ministry of finance, or the general directory of the ministries".

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He added, "The private company that is supplying the water service is responsible for water maintenance, not the municipality. It is water or electricity coming from the state, but never municipality". Chhim's municipality member agrees to the latter by saying "We aren't responsible for water and electricity, but we deliver their voices to the Government, It's not our responsibility."

"Road maintenance is another issue, but it is outside the scope of our capability or duties, the same goes for sewage pipes." Mr. Seryani from Beirut's municipality reports "If a water pipe is broken, the ministry of energy fixes and paves the roads, but what's important is the contact between the ministry and the municipality". On another hand, Mr. Saad from Kayfoun's local administration claimed that citizens request water and electricity "but it doesn't fall under our scope of responsibilities, it's the ministry's job". Mr. Aoun from Jezzine held the municipality accountable for "Security, infrastructure maintenance, development projects, supply lands for aid facilities". Findings consequently shed light on the existence of a clear discrepancy between expectations of the society and performed errands. On the contrary, Dhour El Choueir municipality has successfully provided the above services. This disparage exposes the misalignment of expectations and thus lack of



unity of actions taken toward residents in each area (Farah & Gemayel, 2010). Hence, this raises questions as to whether these responsible entities shall be entitled to greater responsibilities and autonomy, and how that would facilitate or hinder the sought reform.

Taxation approaches

Municipality members' perspectives varied with regard to arrangements for non-payers of taxes. Chhim's municipality member for instance, proposes "You should be considerate with the people, but no one is exempted from taxes, we all understand the difficult situation, we should not prohibit a citizen from accessing his documents in case of delay in paying taxes".

Mr. Harfoush, on the other hand, disagrees with the latter proposal by suggesting "We shall not issue or pass any municipal related document for anyone unless they pay their payments". Mrs. Yousra commends this by mentioning "Citizens should only have the right to vote if they are law abiding citizens who pay their taxes". Mr. Yahya additionally provides his opinion on this matter "In my opinion, indirect taxes are a form of injustice, the direct taxes on the other hand are fair. Nobody should be exempted from taxes, especially those who can afford to build a USD 500,000 worth villa". This disparage reveals the misalignment of expectations and thus lack of unity of actions taken towards residents in each area.



Budgeting Responsibilities

When asked about financing responsibilities and services provided by local administrations, members yet again were articulate about shortcomings blaming the Government. Mrs. Osta from Beirut noted “the municipality cannot provide the basic needs” since it is not provided with its basic needs. Mr. Fawaz explained, “The Municipality is helping the state, although the budget law that was issued in 2020 forbids that. We are trying to help in any way we can, not only financially”. He adds “we have revenues and independent municipal funds, but they are insufficient and even at its best, we can provide for trash collecting”. Mr. Fawaz claimed, “The priority is employee salaries. And during the pandemic, our priority was COVID-19 prevention”. Mrs. Osta denoted “The budget’s priority is employee salary, internal medical insurance, and maintenance”. Despite that many agreed that the priority of the municipality’s budgeting is for salaries, they argue that this leaves them with insufficient amounts for other errands.

Local Community Services

The previous section exposes perceptions of local administrators with regard to their responsibilities and roles. This section reveals how local community members perceive the municipalities’ duties and their expectations of them. Comparing these findings with the self-perceived findings of municipality members, one concludes that there exists a clear misalignment between expectations of the society and performed errands. For instance, when asked “what do you require from your municipality”, Mrs. Hammoud from Chhim replied “Everything,

including fixing the roads, monetary aid, electricity, etc.”. Mr. Hajjar, also from Chhim requested “I believe that the municipality should take care of the sewerage system. In other regions, they have fixed the sewage pipes but have failed to install them”. Mrs. el Hajj from Beirut reported, “The municipality should keep the lighting in the streets”. Mr. Abou Samra from Jezzine called for “road lights, road maintenance and security”. Security is another topic that arose when discussing the responsibilities of the local administrations where Mr. Mohammad narrated how he got robbed just a day prior to the interview. This raises a concern about society’s satisfaction with the local administrations’ performance.

To the contrary of Mr. Mohammad’s dissatisfaction with the municipality’s performance in providing safety, Mr. Salim from Al Bannay acknowledged that the municipality in his area is helping the residents even in terms of money and security “Thank God they are providing us with safety”. Mrs. Yahya agrees by mentioning how the municipality helps them regarding safety and transportation when needed. Varied responses and perceptions of performance pinpoints varied behavior and actions taken by each municipality which reveals individual initiatives of each municipality with inconsistency and misalignment with others. This probably traces back to the absence of governmental proctoring, leaving each municipality to decide on its own.

In the end, findings revealed that many citizens understand that the municipalities are doing the best within their capabilities to perform their roles. Mr. Hajjar noted, “The municipality is doing what it can do with the funds it has”.



The Private Sector

The private sector also had its share in assessing the performance of local administrations. Mr. Abed, the owner of Wadi Al Taim in Beirut, complained about the underperformance of the municipality. When asked what the municipality offers you, Mr. Abed replied "Before you ask me, nothing. All the municipalities in Lebanon are slacking off their duties, no electricity, no water, no proper garbage collection". He adds "It does not provide me with anything, whether it's electricity, safe roads, or trash collection. You are asking the questions that you should know the answers for".

Mr. Abed expected the interviewer to know the answers to the questions posed since he believes that the situation is crystal clear. However, not all company owners share the same experiences and perceptions as Mr. Abed. On the contrary, Mr. Khaddaj, appreciated the support from the municipality in the area he resided in "I thank the municipality for supporting us. Especially with trash collection and waste sorting. The municipality does patrols very often and keeps everything under its control, and I thank it a lot. I never asked them for anything, and they didn't deliver". He added, "I hope every person who decides to open up a business has a municipality like this supporting him".

These findings highlight individual differences about stakeholders' perceptions of the municipality's performance which in turn reveal real differences within the performance of those local authorities. However, this does not mean that all stakeholders had no additional requests from the local authorities. Mr. Fawaz recommended, "we would need a little more independence from political influence", while Mr. Mohamad suggested, "If I had a document that needed ratification in Beirut, I should be able to save time and do it in Chhim".

These suggestions bring us to the subject of decentralization. The following segment portrays the different definitions and understandings of decentralization in Lebanon as perceived by the local administrations, local community members, and the private sector.

Defining Decentralization and its Feasibility

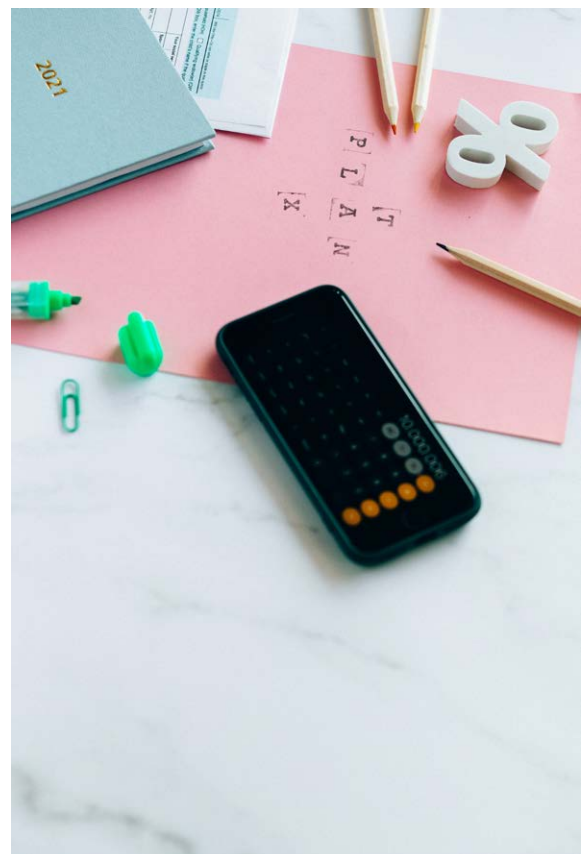
Local Administrations

Definition

When local administrators were asked about their understanding and requested to attempt to define decentralization, responses varied whereby Mrs. Yousra from Al Bennay's municipality reported, "I'm not deep into it, but I believe that its advantages are greater because the decision is in the hands of the municipal council".

Mr. Al Baba, a municipality member from Saida, adopted Mr. Baroud's claims "I have been closely following minister Baroud when he suggested this idea gradually and I agree with him". Mr. Aoun, Jezzini's local administrator, defined it as "It is the independent development for the region, with the state's care". These varied viewpoints represent different understandings and different definitions portraying different educational and awareness levels.

Mr. Seryani from Beirut claimed that "It is independence, but we will go back to being alone. It's financial independence away from the Government". Mr. Saad expressed his skepticism about decentralization by saying "It is an attractive title, but did you indulge in its details? Can it be implemented?". This brings us to their perceptions of how feasible the implementation of decentralization is in Lebanon.



Feasibility

When asked about whether they believe decentralization is applicable to the Lebanese scenario, opinions varied. Chhim's municipality member denoted, "We are an integral piece of the Arab world and Lebanon. We approve of decentralization on an administrative level, but we strongly refuse cantons. We are against isolationism".

Mr. Fawaz, Chhim's municipality president claimed, "In Lebanon, no one knows the nature of the law that will dictate administrative decentralization". He highlighted the importance of knowing the law so one can develop it "a decentralized regime may give you the authority for road maintenance, but not the authority to build walls. It is still the same, your powers are still limited with laws. We should know the law so we may be able to develop from it".

Mr. Yahya argued that the Lebanese people do not have a full understanding of decentralization and demand it to have chaos. He argued "we have a little bit of decentralization going on in our municipalities with what concerns the spending, but I believe it needs modifications. Decentralization with no supervision won't work." Chhim's municipality members also believed that we have a sense of independence, but are still restricted and limited.

However, while Mr. Yahya called for expanded decentralization, the latter argued that Lebanon is a tribe-like community, opposing the idea of elections in this specific context. Additionally, Mr. Yahya recommended that if decentralization is to be applied, "the municipalities will have to operate like the Government; the commander of the executive power is the head of the municipality, the executive council is the municipal board".

Local Community

Local community members were also asked to share their understandings of decentralization, Mr. Moustafa from Beirut said, "I heard about it, but I don't agree with it". When asked why, Mr. Moustafa backed his claim with no supportive arguments. On the other hand, Mrs. el Hajj from Beirut said that she does not know a lot about decentralization "but I hear a lot about this topic". The rest of the interviewees had no answers, reflecting distinct incomprehension and unfamiliarity with the concept. The responses revealed lack of communal awareness and education about decentralization.

The Private Sector

Definition

This study also attempted to inspect and unravel

stakeholders' perceptions and understandings of decentralization. When asked to define decentralization, Mr. Khaddaj defined it as the following: "Decentralization is freedom, and for that to happen there shouldn't be a sect on your ID. As for the documents, it becomes a secondary concern". Mr. Mohamad, a company owner in Chhim, believed "Decentralization means that you have a state within your region. My son in Chhim has graduated from university and he needs to ratify a document in Beirut! Chhim has achieved decentralization except for a few centers like the cadaster center which we are working on getting to Chhim".

Mr. Abed from Beirut expressed "Decentralization is when a decision doesn't has to pass to the whole pyramid of work, and responsibilities are divided". On the other hand, Mr. Abou Samra, from Jezzine, said "I believe that decentralization means that the center of the governorate would have an economic independence and autonomy. But all the big stuff stays related to the Government. And I prefer it".

Feasibility

The answers reflect a certain level of acquaintance amongst the private sectors' shareholders. Despite a certain level of understanding of decentralization amongst company owners and employees, and despite many believing that it holds great assets, most did not reveal a positive stance when asked about how feasible they thought it is in Lebanon.

Mr. Khaddaj believed that "our parties are more religious than ideological, so I don't think it is applicable here". Mr. Abed on the other hand claimed "In Lebanon, neither centralization nor decentralization will be good because the people are corrupt. Responsibilities will be divided and not focused". These views reflect the participants' frustration and lack of faith in the country whereby they believe anything in Lebanon is doomed to failure. This represents the views of many stakeholders, community members, and municipality members.

On the contrary, the interviewees were asked about specific features brought about from decentralization without naming the term "decentralization" including holding the municipalities accountable for enhancing their safety, education, services, transportation, health, and others. All findings represented participants' favoritism for this method. Findings revealed various understandings and differing definitions, portraying different communal awareness and education levels.

Perceptions of the Impact of Decentralization

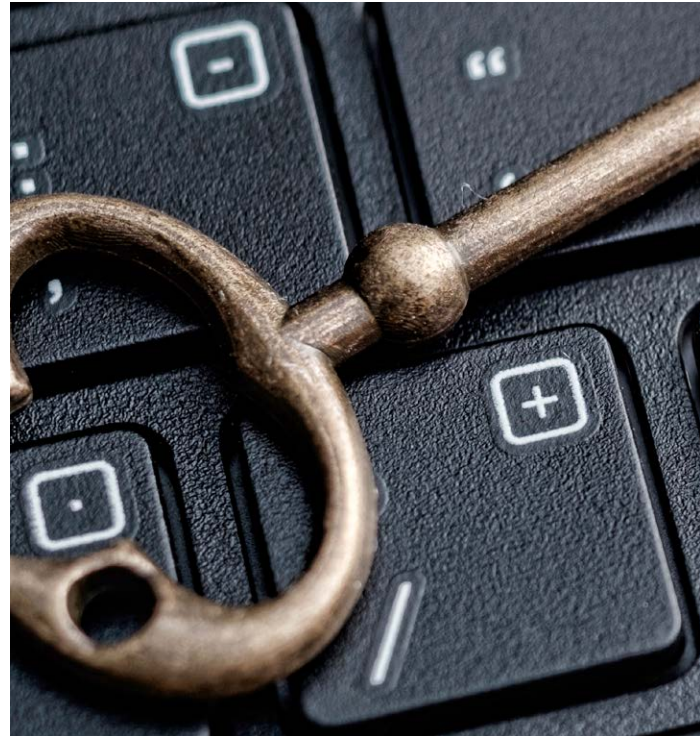
Local Administrations

Advantages & Disadvantages

Analogous to the varied responses regarding defining decentralization, opinions varied about the advantages and disadvantages of this notion. When asked about the foreseen advantages of decentralization, Mr. Al Baba replied "We request a decentralized system because it will give us liberty in taking our own decisions", while Mr. Seryani claimed, "Financial blooming and the ability to take decisions away from the Government" to be prospective reimbursements of employing this system in Lebanon. Mr. Aoun described "It will lead to local autonomy, less time consumption, self-funding, less bureaucracy and more transparency".

Mrs. Osta shared common thoughts relevant to Mr. Aoun. She believed that "Decentralization would eliminate bureaucracy, speed the process of filing a document; local authority knows what their area needs best". Despite the variety of answers, most interviewed members of local authorities agreed that decentralization primes certain benefits that would profit the country if instigated. Mr. Yahya further elaborated on why he thinks decentralization brings about prospects to the country. He explained "The advantage is that each council board will know better what rules to follow and apply. Today, the state cannot issue a circular to each town because it does not know its needs and demands, but the municipal council does! And it knows when to accept this circular or deny it. This is the benefit; the municipal council can comprehend what the town needs and what it doesn't".

Despite having a consensus amongst most municipality members regarding the benefits of decentralization, everything comes at an expense. Participants predicted certain disadvantages as a ramification to decentralization. Mr. Saad articulated his worry "You are sorting the people demographically, and it derives isolation". Mr. Yahya on the other hand was concerned about violation and posed the question "If I have the absolute power to do whatever I want, what would stop me from hiring family members?" Chhim's municipality member shared a common concern, pointing out "The members of the Parliament are the ones who are going to write the law. It will lead to cantons and divisions. If a region doesn't have water sufficiency, it won't give the other regions water". He added "there will be less supervision if a certain party were to be in control". This necessitates enhancing the current system at hand and conveying the needed reform.



Additionally, although participants shared some concerns, findings revealed strong advocacy to decentralization with limited fears anticipated to be escorted with putting it into practice. This further reflects local administrators' inclination and preparedness to embrace novel procedures in hopes of achieving a better structure.

Local Community

One might also wonder how strongly Lebanese citizens think it is crucial to support calls for decentralization.

Advantages & Disadvantages

As mentioned earlier, Local community members were not very responsive when it came to sharing their understanding of decentralization. One resident, Mr. Hajjar, a protagonist of decentralization claimed, "Decentralization is the solution, it is my sweetheart, but there should be supervision and control". He believed this system would rather be advantageous to our current nation "The pressure on the departments will decrease and bribery will decrease".

Mrs. Hajj also noted "Decentralization always gives you an option. My friend is running for elections, but I can't vote for her because she is from Tyr, and I am not. Let me think on a national scale, it decreases extremism's effect". She believed that decentralization would expand the scope of possibilities which a citizen can retain through voting to candidates from other areas since voting and running for elections are only permitted in the districts of the person's official town of origin. Even though a sizable section of Lebanon's population now lives in Beirut, very



few of them are registered to vote or run for office there (Abu Rish, 2016).

Since findings related to local community members revealed ignorance regarding this subject, most of them had no opinion about the disadvantages of decentralization. Mrs. Hajj repeated, "I am not a lot into it, but I think decentralization does not let you only be excited about your city or village, the problem is we as Lebanese are very individualistic, we love ourselves". This points out to a previous apprehension highlighted within the findings unraveled from interviews with local administrators. Due to Lebanon's history of civil war and sectarian partition, most expressed suspicions of seclusion, violation, and canton-formation.

The Private Sectors

Advantages & Disadvantages

As portrayed in the previous section, stakeholders' retorts mirror a certain level of decentralization awareness. When asked about the advantages of decentralization, from the perspective of an entrepreneur, Mr. Mohamad supposed "It will break the hand of the foreign competitor. And if you want to employ a Syrian worker, you can add more taxes". He added, "decentralization will help small businesses through securing taxes". Mr. Khaddaj also depicted his support for decentralization with regard to his industry. Mr. Khaddaj pointed out that "Decentralization offers stability and when there is stability then the purchasing power will be okay". A contracting company owner from Jezzine highlighted the issue of having to finish paperwork at one's own area of origin rather than area of residence "I

would like decentralization because we should take into consideration transportation costs to do paperwork, especially these days". Mr. Abed also highlighted this thought "It will be less

time consuming in the sense that I wouldn't go to Baabda for my company in Hasbaya".

Despite being a strong advocate for decentralization and believing it will serve his business, Mr. Khaddaj was concerned "if you didn't have a proper country, you won't have decentralization. If you can't open a bank account, how are you supposed to develop your situation?". Mr. Abed also called for decentralization especially if it ought to solve the commuting constraint; however, he noted "decentralization won't help much with reducing tax expenses". Others did not have anything to add when asked about the disadvantages of decentralization, reflecting their support for the implementation of this system or incomprehension of this notion.

These varied viewpoints represent different understandings and different definitions portraying different educational and awareness levels and distrust in the Government. Therefore, with less reported trust in the Governmental bodies from the interviewees, it was concluded that the municipalities and the local community in Lebanon seek to be self-governed to depend on their own resources. This pinpoints the governmental authorities' failure to adhere to the needs of its people in addition to putting laws that prohibit them from self-etching these needs by creating unions, projects, or seeking donations.

"CONCLUSION"







Conclusion

By combining research methods, this study gained an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon and emphasized creating meaning. This kind of research frequently focuses on the "how and why of a specific issue, process, situation, subculture, scene, or set of social interactions" (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021). Moreover, in this study, the purpose was not to sample research, since a sample of a few isn't going to be representative of many. The aim here was not to understand other cases but to explore each case with its unique representation.

With this mixed-methods approach, questions were posed and investigated with the hope that the results would point to requirements and guidelines for the development of a new, functional, sustainable system in Lebanon.

This study first revealed the constitutional loopholes and ambiguities along with analyzing Lebanese factors facilitating and hindering decentralization. Furthermore, the study gathered information from a comparison of three decentralized models: Indonesia, Iraq, and Uganda, as well as two local samples of

decentralized alternative ideas for the Lebanese plan: TSEZ and Linord in Matn. This report further makes use of the PESTEL framework to highlight the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal elements that promote or impede Lebanon's decentralization efforts. The research then undertook a qualitative analysis of 26 interviews from six different governorates in Lebanon to uncover perceptions to expose perceptions of local administrators, local community members and stakeholders of decentralization and their stances on its feasibility in Lebanon.

Decentralization has become a common and efficient tool for many countries around the world to strengthen democratic, social, and economic principles. Critics have argued that decentralization is a non-pleasant option whereby efforts to decentralize may have unforeseen effects. Decentralization attempts may lead to recentralizing repercussions if not well-prepared or planned for. For instance, decentralization can potentially increase corruption and decrease health and education services if rushed into.



In instances of employing decentralization without proper investigation or feasibility studies, decentralization has hindered reform instead of facilitating it. That is why this study aimed to investigate the dimensions to avoid falling into such traps.

What decentralization may achieve, centralization could attain and vice versa. While decentralization is a method of application, it would not, however, be the only option to manage a suitable, well-rounded Lebanese system since the structure requires much more tinkering and adjustments. For the desired outcome, reform is required at many levels. For instance, regardless of the implementation strategy chosen, permitting the judiciary to be independent is insufficient demeanor to preserve a well-established system. In other words, the system must be intact whether centralization or decentralization is deployed. The use of decentralization would still be hampered by conflicts of interest, a misaligned division of powers, and other flaws and ambiguities in the constitution. Decentralization therefore wouldn't be enough to yield advantages without reforms

to the core of the system.

Decentralization succeeds when well monitored from the top-down (the central government) and bottom-up (the citizens). When decentralization is sought due to the government's failure in providing citizens with their basic services, it mostly entails a deficiency that will substantially still appear when monitoring instead of implementing. Additionally, the central government's failure, to call for international interference, usually denotes that the citizens were not able to practice their duties as upholders of the constitution and their rights. This would in turn indicate that the citizens lack the knowledge, capability, and courage to interfere to hold those they voted for accountable for their responsibilities. Therefore, a lack of monitoring from top-down and bottom-up, without adhering to decentralization's prerequisites, the right council, guidance, culture, and education, will likely lead to more unpleasant ramifications compared to the ones prevailed by a centralized system.



Appendices



List of Acronyms

CDR	Council for Developmental and Reconstruction
DRI	Democracy Reporting International
EDL	Electricity of Lebanon
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ITG	Information Technology Group
LCPS	Lebanese Center for Policy Studies
LMCU	Lille Municipal Union
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MWSM	Municipal Solid Waste Management
NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
NRM	National resistance movement
OPDs	Public Decentralization Units
PESTEL	A framework used to assess political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal factors.
PM	Prime Minister
TSEZ	Tripoli Special Economic Zone
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Table of Selection Criteria of Governorates

Region	Muslims			Christians				Other	District	Governate
	Sunni	Shia	Druze	Maronite	Greek Orthodox	Armenian Catholic	Other Christian Groups			
Al Benney Aley	4.6%		54.6%	40.7%					Aley	Mount Lebanon
Beirut	27.0%	27.0%	5.0%	21.0%	8.0%		6.5%	5.5%	Beirut	Beirut
Chhim	Mostly								Chouf	Mount Lebanon
Jezzine				Mostly					Jezzine	South
Kaifoun		Mostly				0.1%			Aley	Mount Lebanon
Saida	79.7%	10.8%	0.1%						Saida	South

Table of Interviewees

Governorate	Name	Role	Specific Role	Number Of Interviews
Saida	Mohamad El Baba	Local Administration	Municipality Member	1
Kaifoun	Bilal Saad	Local Administration	Head Of Municipality	1
Jezzine	Khalil Harfoush	Local Administration	Municipality President	5
	Samer Aoun	Local Administration	Vice President	
	Anonymous	Private Sector	Contracting Companies	
	Jihad Abou Samra	Private Sector	Employee	
	Anonymous	Local Community Member	Store Owner	
Chim - Chouf	Ahmad Fawwaz	Local Administration	Head Of Municipality	8
	Anonymous	Local Administration	Municipality Member	
	Anonymous	Local Administration	Municipality Member	
	Anonymous	Private Sector	Mohammad And Rabih Owners	
	Ahmad Mohammad Amir El Hajjar	Local Community Member	Retired General Security	
	Carmen Hamoud	Local Community Member	Unemployed	
	Em Wael	Local Community Member	Grocery Shop	
Ahmad	Local Community Member	Mechanician		
Beirut	Antoine Seryani	Local Administration	Municipality Member	6
	Huda Osta	Local Administration	Municipality Member	
	Adel Abou Hasan	Private Sector	Company Owner	
	Layal	Local Community Member	Volunteer In Mono	
	Moustapha	Local Community Member	Beirut Marina Safety Security	
Al Benney	Rima El Hajj	Local Community Member	Unemployed	5
	Chadi Yehya	Local Administration	Head Of Municipality	
	Yousra Bennay	Local Administration	Municipality Member	
	Rami Khaddaj	Private Sector	Gates Of Glory Owner	
	Aahed Salim Yehya	Local Community Member	Mini Market Owner	
Hoda Amin Yehya	Local Community Member	Shop Owner		



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