

PERCEPTIONS AND PRESCRIPTIONS: HOW LEBANESE PEOPLE VIEW THEIR SECURITY

SUMMARY

International Alert, in partnership with the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), carried out a European Union-funded project on perceptions of security in Lebanon. The research aimed to produce statistically valid data on people's perceptions, across geographic and sectarian lines, and to inform expert-level dialogue on the role that security agencies were expected to play in Lebanese society. This paper provides a summary of the findings.

INTRODUCTION

The first phase of the research consisted of focus group discussions (FGDs) and a nationwide survey on the perceptions of security and insecurity among the Lebanese public. The focus groups were held in nine locations with representatives of the four biggest confessional groups, covering both genders and three age groups. One of the key findings was that participants across the groups identified politically related threats as the main risk facing them in their daily lives. Some of the threats related to political issues, such as kidnapping, and the rising number of robberies, were in turn linked to the influx of Syrian refugees.

The nationwide survey was carried out from May to June 2013. The resulting report – entitled *Security threat perceptions in Lebanon* – was published in November 2014.¹ The survey revealed that a majority of Lebanese people feel less safe now than they did three years ago, that most security threats are considered very serious at national level but less serious at local level, and that the threat posed by Syrian refugees is consistently identified as serious across the country. Crime threats and security challenges were nuanced across regional, sectarian, urban/rural and gender divides.

As a result of the survey findings, four further in-depth case studies were commissioned on the following topics:

- perceptions of security institutions in Lebanon;
- security threat perceptions stemming from the presence of Syrian refugees;
- gender, security and security sector reform (SSR) in Lebanon; and
- the role of civil society organisations in SSR in Lebanon.

The purpose of this present report is to provide a synthesis and summary of all five reports, highlighting their most significant insights. It begins by describing the security situation in Lebanon as it has developed, and as it is today, and how the Lebanese security sector is organised. It then briefly summarises the most salient points of each report.



¹ Available at <http://www.international-alert.org/resources/publications/security-threat-perceptions-lebanon-en>

SECURITY SITUATION IN LEBANON

The modern history of Lebanon has been one of disagreement and conflict. Lebanon is a multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic state, in which different groups have historically distrusted and feared each other. The potential for large-scale violence was evident since at least the 1960s due to the increasing presence of Palestinian refugees and their strained relationship with some sections of the Lebanese population. Although the civil war, which started in 1975, was sparked by violence between Palestinians and the Phalange (Maronite Christian) movement, it rapidly mutated into a conflict of bewildering complexity, involving not only Lebanese sectarian rivalries, but also Lebanon's two larger neighbours, Israel and Syria, and the ambitions of the Cold War superpowers.

The civil war was brought to an end by the 1989 Taif Agreement, but at the price of institutionalised sectarian power sharing, which made it easy for any of the major groups to veto change. The massive Syrian military presence in Lebanon ensured stability of a kind, but this was brought to an end by the assassination of the (Sunni) Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005. The Syrians – widely blamed for the assassination – were forced to withdraw, leading to the political deadlock and security crisis that still characterises the country. Israel, which

had occupied southern Lebanon for many years, was obliged to withdraw in 2000, largely through the efforts of Hezbollah, the major Shia politico-military force in the region. An Israeli invasion in 2006, intended to destroy Hezbollah, was unsuccessful, although it caused enormous destruction.

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Lebanese politics today can be divided roughly into two multi-confessional blocs. The March 8 Alliance is a coalition of parties sympathetic to the current Syrian government. The alliance includes Hezbollah, Amal, the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Marada and others. It takes its name from 8 March 2005, when several political parties called for a demonstration in Beirut to thank Syria for helping Lebanon. The March 14 Alliance, by contrast, is named after the date of the Cedar Revolution, which was triggered by the Hariri assassination. It called for the withdrawal of Syrian forces from Lebanon and a national leadership less beholden to Damascus. Among the member parties are the Future Movement, the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb. Lebanon's current government, formed in April 2013, contains members of both alliances.

Violence between political factions in Lebanon has been recurrent since the Syrian withdrawal. One factor has been the continued existence of the armed wing of Hezbollah. Although a political party in government, Hezbollah has its own militia, which is not subject to central political control. Another factor has been the Syrian crisis, which has exacerbated the Sunni-Shia divide, not just in the region as a whole, but especially in Lebanon. Hezbollah, one of the forces alleged to be behind the Hariri killing, sent troops to fight alongside the forces of President Assad, and the Syrian Army bombarded border villages and mountainous areas inside Lebanon, targeting rebel groups. From July 2013, there have been a series of bombings in Beirut and Baalbek in areas seen as Hezbollah strongholds.

LEBANESE SECURITY FORCES

The Lebanese security sector consists of a complex mix of both state and non-state actors and institutions that aim to protect the national territory, the national population, and specific sectors of that population and territory. The civil war resulted in a weakening of Lebanon's state institutions and transformed political parties into warring factions. The end of the civil war in 1990 did not permit the reform of security institutions as envisaged in the Taif Agreement. Demobilisation and disarmament of the various militias were conducted in piecemeal form and largely allowed sectarian political leaders to retain their control over armed groups, even if these were mostly held in reserve.

Like all public services in Lebanon, security is strongly linked to sectarian affiliation, both of individuals and of the political parties that share local and national power. As a result, there is little consensus on the role, composition, leadership and interaction of the security forces. It is therefore not possible to speak about security institutions without considering the political context in which they operate, as well as the non-state actors who have continued to play a large role in security provision after the civil war.

Three decades of Syrian tutelage obstructed efforts by successive governments to reform the security sector and develop independent national security institutions. At the same time, the long Israeli occupation of southern Lebanon and the 2006 Israel–Lebanon War have informally given a special status to the activities of anti-Israeli factions in the south, especially Hezbollah. In 2005, the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon offered a potential opportunity for reforming security institutions. However, while the post-2005 era brought some degree of success in enhancing these institutions, non-state actors have continued to play a large role in the provision of security services.

Formally, Lebanon’s state security apparatus is made up of six agencies:

- Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) – responsible for external security and reporting to the Ministry of Defence;
- Internal Security Forces (ISF) – essentially the police service, reporting to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities;
- General Security Directorate – also reporting to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities;
- State Security Directorate – attached to the offices of the president and the prime minister;
- Civil Defence – reporting to the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities; and
- Lebanese Customs Administration – reporting to the Ministry of Finance.

In reality, the situation is far more complex, featuring not just the armed wings of various sectarian-based political parties, but also a range of semi-sectarian civil society actors, families, clans and tribes, and the private sector. Even the formal security sector itself is characterised by multiple lines of authority and legal ambiguities, stemming from the sectarian system enshrined in the Taif Agreement. The greatest challenge to reform lies in the interests of sectarian political leaders, which limit the ability of security forces to act impartially and to be responsive to security threats and security demands.

Lebanon’s power-sharing formula dictates that representation and participation in public policies and public institutions are on the basis of sectarian identity. Sectarianism gives power and authority to sectarian political leaders, who limit the role that any supposedly national security institution can play. Citizens’ ability to be protected is mediated through their sectarian and political leaders, referred to as *zu’ama*. All political decisions and policies require a process of consensus building among *zu’ama*, who enjoy large autonomy over their confessional constituency. This system has strengthened the role of sectarianism and exacerbated clientelism, not least in the provision of local security and justice.

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PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY THREATS IN LEBANON

In light of the background outlined above, the 2013 nationwide survey attempted to assess the security threats perceived by Lebanese people. The most important question asked was: what do the Lebanese perceive as threats to their security? Further questions were asked in order to study perceptions of different types of security problems, threats from crime, the degree of security felt by the population, and the perceived reasons for insecurity and crime. The main findings were as follows:

- **The security situation had deteriorated over the previous three years:** Although the survey was conducted before the wave of suicide bombings in south Beirut between July 2013 and January 2014, Lebanon had not only suffered a decade of instability, but had also begun to face a humanitarian crisis due to the influx of Syrian refugees across the border. Unsurprisingly, 74% of respondents said that Lebanon was less safe than it had been three years before. This feeling was particularly strong in the North province, among Sunnis and among socio-economic groups earning less than US\$2,500 a month. These findings were essentially confirmed by a second study, carried out by Northern Ireland Cooperation Overseas (NI-CO) a few months later. Of the respondents, 62% said they did not feel safe at all in Lebanon, and a further 22% shared this opinion to some extent.
- **Political instability, physical insecurity and the war in Syria are seen as the main challenges:** There was a significant difference between respondents’ views about security threats at national level and at local level. At national level, an overwhelming majority (95%) saw political insecurity as a threat, as was also the case

for physical insecurity (96%), the war in Syria (95%), Syrian refugees (91%) and Israel (88%). In the NI-CO survey, lack of security, terrorist acts, non-fulfilment of basic needs, unemployment and risk of civil war were all identified as threats at national level. However, when the same questions were asked about the respondents' own locality, the percentages were much lower. Only 40% thought that political instability was a threat in their region, with perceptions of threat also being much lower in terms of physical insecurity (44%), Israel (50%) and Syria (65%). However, 75% still thought that Syrian refugees were a threat.

- **Differences among communities are much greater at the local level:** Most respondents viewed different threats at the national level with the same intensity, but threat perceptions varied according to locality. For instance, Syrian refugees were the greatest problem identified by people living in Beirut and the Mount Lebanon province, whereas Israeli aggression was perceived as the greatest risk for those living in the Beqaa and South provinces. There was also a higher perception of threat if it was visible (e.g. militia groups) or had been personally experienced (e.g. crime). Sunnis in general viewed these threats more seriously, and the politically active were especially conscious of risks posed by the Syrian conflict. However, otherwise, gender, age, education and the urban/rural divide did not have much of an effect on perceptions. Thus, respondents did not generalise from their own experiences in relation to the

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nation as a whole, but had different perceptions of the threat at different levels. Moreover, most respondents thought that other areas were more dangerous than the areas in which they themselves lived – a conclusion which is implausible.

- **There are significant differences between perceptions about security and the reality:** Whereas people have their own experiences to go on at local level, at national level they are mainly dependent on local TV (82%) and the internet (44%) for news about the country as a whole. As a result, the population has a sense of insecurity that is not justified by the actual situation – for example, only 13% of all respondents had been victims of crime. The vast majority had never experienced kidnapping (89.7%), bombings (84.6%) or armed clashes (71.8%), and almost two-thirds (61.7%) had never even experienced street demonstrations. The distinction between actual and perceived threats has consequences for a number of areas and needs further study.
- **Much the same is true for crime:** Most respondents saw crimes such as property-related offences, violent crimes and sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) as serious problems for Lebanon as a whole, but less for the areas in which they lived. In addition, while most respondents viewed property-related crimes as the greatest risk, residents of the North province, who had experienced violent clashes, understandably judged political crimes to be the greatest risk to them. Sectarian differences were also evident: Sunnis were much more likely than Shia to consider political violence as a threat. There were also differences in perception between party members and non-party members; assuming that the former are better informed, this may indicate that increased knowledge can help to reduce fear.
- **Different factors influence how risk is perceived:** The presence of an ISF station generally reduces people's perception of security risks. In more tightly integrated communities, such as villages, there is a higher sense of 'people-related' crimes, whereas in urban areas property crime is seen as a greater threat. On the whole, women seem to be slightly more conscious of threats than men, although there are significant variations by area. Interestingly, none of these perceptions of crime accords with reality, and it is clear that fear of crime by region, confession, gender, environment, etc., has no correlation with actual crime rates.
- **Trust is a factor:** Most Lebanese still live in areas where their community is a majority, and less than a third would choose to live in mixed areas. There is little trust towards foreign residents, including Syrians and Palestinians, and this mistrust is broadly equal across all communities.
- **Reasons for insecurity:** Most interviewees thought that socio-economic factors such as poverty and unemployment were a major cause of crime. Other factors such as inadequate state institutions, discrimination and availability of drugs were mentioned by fewer respondents. The perception (albeit not necessarily the reality) of widespread gun ownership is also clearly related to feelings of insecurity.

PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY INSTITUTIONS IN LEBANON

Against this background of perceptions of security threats, what do the Lebanese people feel about both the formal and informal security institutions in the country?

As indicated earlier, the actual security sector in Lebanon is very complex and does not necessarily work in the way implied by laws and organisational diagrams. Lebanese people in general believe that sectarian and political leaders are able to control, and negatively affect, how the institutions themselves work in practice. However, people's actual perceptions of the security sector and what it might do for them are, unsurprisingly, quite complicated. Five main conclusions emerged from the report.

Most Lebanese support the security institutions, at least to some extent...

Three quarters of respondents said that they would turn to the state security institutions before anyone else if they were victims of a crime. All the institutions were valued for this purpose by a majority of people, with the ISF rated highest (86%), followed by the LAF (80%), the State Security Directorate (65%) and the General Security Directorate (60%). Since even the lowest of these figures comfortably exceeds the percentage for any confessional component of the Lebanese population, it is clear that all of the institutions enjoy at least some confidence across sectarian divides if a crime has been committed. For the most part, confessional and regional differences were not very marked in determining whether people resort to security institutions.

...But this confidence is limited

Being willing to turn to state security institutions to address crime is not the same as trusting them, based on personal experience. While the LAF is trusted by 80% of Lebanese people overall, corresponding figures for other security institutions are much lower: for instance, fewer than half of Lebanese people trust the ISF. Differences in trust vary much more by region and confession. Thus, trust in the ISF varies from over 90% in Rashaya to just 10% in Tyre. The ISF is least trusted in the south and most trusted in the south-central districts. Conversely, while the LAF enjoyed almost universal trust in south-central districts, it also had the trust of 98% of respondents in Tyre. Only in the far north (Akkar, Miniyeh-Danniyeh and Tripoli districts) does trust in the LAF fall below 70%. This is a regional rather than sectarian distinction; the substantially Sunni regions of Saida and West Beqaa exhibit over 95% trust in the LAF.

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They think these security institutions could do better

Respondents were clear about how these institutions could enhance public trust and do a better job. Large majorities thought that public trust could be increased if the security institutions focused on terrorism, fighting corruption, respecting citizens, arresting criminals, preserving civil peace and (to a slightly lesser extent) increasing patrols. When asked what could enhance the effectiveness of state security institutions, large majorities (over 70%) of all respondents agreed that all institutions should recruit based on merit, address training and equipment requirements, apply sanctions in the case of misconduct, suffer less political interference, be disciplined, be given more authority and have higher salaries. Interestingly, these suggestions are seen as applicable to all the institutions, irrespective of the level of trust they currently enjoy. Thus, although the conduct of the LAF is positively rated by over 80% of Lebanese citizens compared with about 45% approval for ISF conduct, respondents essentially identified the same remedies to improve the efficiency of these institutions.

Some trust remains in political parties...

About 16% of respondents would turn to a political party if they were a victim of crime, although only 5% would prioritise them. This differs significantly by confessional group, with about 30% of Shia willing to resort to a political party for assistance. This is almost three times the rate of other groups. However, Shia are still far more likely to turn to the ISF (89%) than to political parties and barely less likely than other groups to turn to the LAF, General Security, State Security or courts (all over 50%). The Shia community's attachment to political parties as security actors is illustrated by the 90% or more levels of trust recorded for Hezbollah and Amal among Shia respondents. Small majorities of Druze and Sunni respondents would entrust the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) and Future Forces, respectively, with their security. Significant minorities (38%–44%) of Christians would entrust various largely Maronite parties with their security. However, the situation is far more complicated than it appears. Significant majorities of Shia (63%–69%) would also trust the Christian FPM and Marada parties with their security, while almost half of Shia would trust the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP) and

Tachnag (Armenian) parties as well. Meanwhile, Hezbollah is trusted by over 30% of Christians and almost 30% of Druze. Such variations appear to owe far more to the complex party political alliances post-2005 than to simple sectarian allegiances.

...But less trust than in state institutions

Although each confessional community in Lebanon has a relatively high level of confidence in at least some of its own political parties to provide security, there is no significant region of the country where this trust exceeds that placed in Lebanese state security institutions. Moreover, nationally, no party exceeds the trust placed in any of the four main security institutions. While Hezbollah comes closest nationally to rivalling state institutions, and has an unusually trusted position among Lebanese Shia, it should be noted that the two Shia-majority provinces (Beqaa and Nabatieh), often seen as its heartland, also recorded the highest approval ratings for the ISF, which some see as a Sunni-dominated institution. In addition,

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and perhaps by their nature, political parties are divisive: parties like Hezbollah are trusted by some but feared by others. There are other anomalies too. Few Lebanese report property crimes to political parties, whereas somewhat more report crimes of violence. Moreover, experience of dealing with the official security institutions, or having relatives in them, makes recourse to political parties more likely in the future – presumably because of dissatisfaction with state institutions. Unsurprisingly, party members are much more likely to report crimes to their party than non-members.

There are also other actors

As well as political parties, people also seek redress through a wide range of other non-state actors, ranging from family and friends to religious organisations. The majority of respondents said they would prefer to turn to community mediators rather than political parties (only Shia were more likely to turn to political parties). That said, the distinction between civil society service organisations and political parties or other sectarian groupings is not always obvious or complete in Lebanon. Many NGOs belong to established religious groups, or families of sectarian leaders, and play a crucial role in delivering key services such as education and healthcare.

The courts are not trusted

Lebanon's courts are regarded as inaccessible, unfair, ineffective and not timely by more than half of the respondents. Nearly two-thirds of the respondents doubted they were independent. Political party members have a more positive view of the courts, while victims of crime are much more negative about them. There are also major regional variations: the courts are much more popular in the south than in the north.

PRIORITIES FOR REFORM

The vast majority (92%) of respondents believe that the state should be responsible for security and would turn to state security institutions in the event of a crime. However, they also believe that the performance and conduct of state institutions, particularly the ISF, could be enhanced in a number of ways. Four priority areas were highlighted as follows:

- **Improving access to security institutions:** The perception that the mere presence of an ISF station may deter crime implies that, when the ISF is present, recourse to non-state actors in the event of crime may be correspondingly reduced.
- **Improving performance:** Victims of crime tend to believe that the ISF is too slow to react and does not offer adequate protection. This enables non-state actors to intervene to provide protection, thus further undermining confidence in the official institutions.
- **Addressing the Syrian crisis:** This was an issue of concern to practically all respondents, combined with high levels of distrust towards Palestinian and foreign workers. Security agencies are not perceived to be addressing this problem satisfactorily, once more allowing non-state actors to become involved.
- **Protecting women:** While there is little gender difference in the perception of security challenges, there is some evidence that women see security institutions as being less friendly to them and that relations could be improved.

PERCEPTIONS OF SECURITY THREAT FROM SYRIAN REFUGEES

Since the outbreak of the crisis in March 2011, people fleeing the conflict in Syria have sought refuge in neighbouring Lebanon. Coming in small groups at first, Syrian refugees were easily absorbed by Lebanese communities. As violence steadily escalated in Syria, the number of registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon has exceeded 1.15 million, making Lebanon the country with the highest per-capita concentration of refugees in the world. These numbers do not include refugees awaiting registration, those unwilling to register, or Palestinian refugees from Syria. One out of every four persons in Lebanon today is a refugee of the Syrian crisis. Scattered in 1,700 Lebanese communities, Syrian refugees are mostly concentrated in Beqaa and Akkar, Lebanon's poorest areas. Although the influx has had major economic, social and security implications, there is no national strategy to respond to it.

The International Alert and LCPS report (June 2013) about perceptions of security and security institutions in Lebanon, summarised above, revealed that Syrian refugees were identified as a major security challenge across Lebanon. With this in mind, a follow-up report focused on perceptions of security threats stemming from that presence, providing a more in-depth analysis of the different Lebanese communities' perceptions of Syrian refugees as a security threat. The survey investigated the reasons for this perception of threat, opinions about existing security measures and ideas for improving the situation. The methodology was a mixture of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with decision-makers and senior officials, FGDs and systematic cluster surveys carried out in 13 local communities. In addition, content analysis of media coverage in the mainstream Lebanese media for January and February 2014 was carried out. The main conclusions of the survey were as follows:

- **Refugees are seen as bringing insecurity...**: While feelings of insecurity were common before the Syrian refugees' arrival, the vast majority of respondents said that security conditions in their area have worsened since then. However, this sentiment is less pronounced among specific respondents, such as interfaith families and those who do not vote regularly.
- **...But the position is complicated**: There is no clear pattern to these perceptions of reduced security or regarding the types of crimes (often burglary and vandalism) perceived as having increased in particular areas. It is not clear that an actual correlation exists between worsening security conditions and the arrival of the refugees. On the other hand, there was general agreement that terrorism, arms smuggling and economic insecurity were threats associated with the influx. There was concern that, while social and economic pressures were manageable for the moment, they might not be for much longer. In certain regions (Beqaa, Saida, Tyre), there is considerable fear that sectarian problems will increase: this is not a sectarian issue itself, but is rather shared by all communities. Actual first-hand experience of security threats related to Syrian refugees was rare, and most people's knowledge of them was simply anecdotal.
- **Risks to sectarian balance**: Sectarian balance in Lebanon constitutes the cornerstone of the carefully calibrated power-sharing formula after the civil war. Syria's sectarian demographics are considerably different from that of Lebanon's. The vast majority of refugees are Sunni, which some political and media discourse has represented as a potential problem. However, when asked about their own area's sectarian balance, only 30% of respondents considered Syrian refugees to be a direct risk. This may be because research shows that in general the Lebanese tend to perceive the Syrian refugee presence as temporary, unlike that of the Palestinians. However, there are considerable local variations. For instance, 80% of respondents in Saida and Zahlé felt that the sectarian balance of their own areas would be definitely threatened by the presence of Syrian refugees. Conversely, the predominantly Sunni North province seemed far less concerned about this issue.
- **Fears at national level**: Respondents were more concerned about threats to the sectarian balance in Lebanon as a whole. About 51% of respondents considered the Syrian presence to pose a threat to the Lebanese sectarian balance beyond their own areas, although 38% did not. Sunni communities in particular did not feel threatened by Syrians in general, but showed understanding of other sects' concerns.
- **Fear of sectarian violence**: Almost all respondents saw the potential for sectarian violence as a consequence of the refugee presence, not least in their own communities. There are also indications that both Sunni and Shia leaders are instrumentalising these fears.
- **Economic implications**: The large inflow of refugees has had a number of different economic effects. Fears of cheaper Syrian labour are common in all areas and economic sectors. Among the poor, especially in the

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North province, competition with Syrians over limited jobs and resources seems to be a major concern. Beqaa constitutes a special case, with some respondents finding positive economic effects arising from the presence of Syrian refugees, whose labour has significantly contributed to agricultural production. In that case, increased demand for food has benefited large groups in the population. Once more, perceptions of economic threat seem exaggerated. Asked if they perceive Syrian refugees as a direct threat to their personal economic well-being, only 23% of respondents answered yes. These ratios are reversed when asked if Syrians pose a risk to other Lebanese citizens, with 74% answering yes.

- **Pressure on resources:** The influx of refugees has put increased pressure on resources, and led to general concern about problems with water, sewerage, electricity, telecommunications, as well as education and healthcare facilities. Unsurprisingly, there are also variations between the different regions. However, many Lebanese blame their own government for failing to provide sufficient support to local communities and to establish an organised response to the crisis.

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Lebanese feel that they have not been evenly distributed and are being monopolised by a small section of Lebanese society. The Syrians are perceived as a source of cheap labour and inflation through increased demand for goods and services. It is believed that Syrians – even wealthy ones – are not paying taxes.

- **Fairness:** Although there seem to be some economic benefits arising from the arrival of the refugees, the Lebanese feel that they have not been evenly distributed and are being monopolised by a small section of Lebanese society. The Syrians are perceived as a source of cheap labour and inflation through increased demand for goods and services. It is believed that Syrians – even wealthy ones – are not paying taxes.
- **Influence of the media:** It is noteworthy that the majority of respondents in this study took their opinions and perceptions from TV and radio. Other sources of information and the influence of religious leaders (except in certain Sunni areas) were relatively unimportant.

SOLUTIONS TO REFUGEE INFLUX

As indicated, there is no strategic plan to deal with the influx of refugees and most of the burden has fallen on municipal authorities. While local officials interviewed thought that the measures being introduced were effective, and liaison with the security forces was good, they also felt somewhat left to their own devices by the national authorities, without adequate resources. National guidelines have not been published to address the problem and mandates for officials have not been modified to take account of it. Unsurprisingly, therefore, respondents of all communities are generally disappointed with the response of Lebanese political leaders.

In this context, about two-thirds of respondents believed that the introduction of refugee camps would solve the problem and that they should already have been introduced. The most important reason advanced for this solution was the ease of controlling the refugees. However, some respondents did worry about the possibility of radicalisation and many were concerned that aid would go directly to the camps, with no economic benefit to the host communities.

This uncertainty about solutions reflects the degree to which the Lebanese authorities have been overwhelmed by the problem. It also points to a lack of common perception of what the security problems are. While the perceptions described here are to some extent based on actual events, they are inconsistent among themselves and not necessarily factually correct. They also differ according to region and sectarian, social and economic groups.

GENDER PERSPECTIVES

As already noted, perceptions of security in Lebanon tend to depend primarily on considerations of geography, class, and confessional and political affiliation. Differences between genders are not very marked, but some distinctions were nonetheless found in the 2013 study. These were further analysed and supported by supplementary interviews as well as a review of secondary literature.

Some of the differences in perception may be long-term in nature, while others may be the result of current events, notably the influx of Syrian refugees. In certain areas of Lebanon, for example, women were more worried about theft than men, whereas in others this concern was greater among men. Similarly, while perceptions of the risk of physical attacks, including bombings and assassinations, were primarily related to geographical location, there were also some differences in perception between men and women. Finally, fears of sexual assault and rape among both women and men were especially high in West Beqaa, bordering Syria. In other areas, there were differences between men's and women's perception of the threat, but no clear pattern emerged which would explain the variations.

As shown, Lebanese people generally felt less secure in 2013 than they had felt three years earlier, and this was particularly the case in areas bordering Syria and in the South province. Both men and women perceive ‘hard’ security threats as very serious, overshadowing more everyday concerns – although, as indicated, the distinction between the two is fluid and individual events, especially as reported by hearsay and a sensationalist media, can disproportionately influence longer-term and higher-level perceptions.

There are other areas where perceptions differ between men and women. One is in relation to SGBV and domestic violence. When women and girls are the victims, these crimes are increasingly considered serious issues, but this is much less the case for male victims. In this case, it appears that social pressures to conform to stereotypes of masculinity pose considerable hurdles for men when considering whether to report being victims of such crimes.

Those who have been victims of such crimes may also face difficulties in reporting them. Some of these are practical issues – for example, problems in accessing services in remote areas – whilst others may be based on other perceptions – for instance, that the reported crime will not be treated seriously. Research suggests that both men and women would feel happier about women visiting a police station if a women’s unit existed. The 2013 study showed that, while less than half of women would visit a police station in the event of a crime, and less than half of men would allow female relatives to go there alone, 60% of both women and men would do so if a women’s unit was available. This perception has yet to change to reflect the recent recruitment of women police officers.

Public perceptions of Lebanese security forces, as well as informal security providers, show many similarities between men and women, but also some differences. While 75% of all Lebanese say that, in theory, they would report a crime to the authorities, 47% of women did so in practice, compared with 38% of men. Moreover, while 24% of women turned to their families for help, a third of men did not seek help of any kind. Finally, small proportions of women (4%) and men (6%) say that they would resort to political parties in theory. In practice, women do not seem to do so at all, while men do so much more (22%) according to one study.

On major issues, perceptions of the security forces (and especially the ISF) tend to cut across gender lines. Both men and women consider the ISF to be partial, subject to partisan influence, corrupt and nepotistic, and this limits the degree of popular trust. In such situations, both men and women can resort either to informal systems of power and patronage, or even to outright bribery. The generally paramilitary image of the ISF also seems to be unattractive to both genders.

Only 47% of women and 38% of men reported crimes to the authorities.

More women have been employed in the security forces in recent years. The General Security Directorate (the oldest service) actually began recruiting women in 1974, although the civil war led to recruitment being halted, and it did not resume until 2006. Nonetheless, some women rose to being generals during that time. Most women work in administrative roles, including, since 2009, work at airport immigration counters – a move which the public has welcomed. Women have been employed in the LAF since the end of the civil war. They also tend to work in administrative roles, up to the rank of colonel, and are not deployed on operations.

The ISF was the last service to recruit women, from 2011, and there are now some 900 female recruits. Although women are being employed in more varied roles today, there is quite firm public opinion that their tasks should be different from those of men: only 13% of respondents thought women should do the same work. That said, a recent study also showed a general perception among Lebanese people that female ISF officers would be less likely to take bribes, and more likely to both treat people with respect and apply the law equally to all citizens.

ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

As has already been noted, the Lebanese security sector is complex and multifaceted, and there is a difference between the public description of the sector and the pragmatic reality experienced by citizens daily. The perceptions of many Lebanese people about the sector remain ambiguous, and in some cases contradictory.

It may be the case that organisations outside of government can help here. Lebanon has always had a vibrant civil society. It has been calculated that in Lebanon today there are 1.3 associations per 1,000 inhabitants, compared with 0.2 in Jordan and Egypt. These associations are diverse in character and include: NGOs; ethnic, family, alumni or neighbourhood associations; sports and cultural clubs; youth and student groups of different kinds; religious and political organisations; and trade unions and professional associations, among many others.

One type of organisation, described as a civil society organisation (CSO), is essentially concerned with advocacy – that is, campaigning for changes in the existing situation. Some organisations in Lebanon today are interested in reforms to the security sector. During the Syrian military presence in Lebanon, relations between such organisations and state authorities were extremely strained, and some CSOs were dissolved amidst charges that their activities had exceeded the licence they had been given. However, the Syrian presence did provide an incentive for the formation of CSOs campaigning for peaceful co-existence and human rights, and, even under the Syrian tutelage, such organisations were able to act with more freedom than their homologues in countries in the region under authoritarian rule.

The focus of NGOs continues to be on issues such as the delivery of social services and local development. Little effort appears to go into activism towards the security sector.

With the departure of Syrian military forces in April 2005, it became easier to organise NGOs of all types, and they no longer needed to be formally registered by the state. Many have been established since. However, according to recent studies, the focus of NGOs in general continues to be on issues such as the delivery of social services (29%) and local development (15%). Little effort appears to go into activism towards the security

sector. In part, this is simply because civil society in Lebanon has very little expertise in security affairs and has in the past been kept out of such issues. It is also partly because of the enormous range of other problems in Lebanon that activists may choose to be involved with. The complexity and opaqueness of the security structures, the existence of non-state security sectors and the sheer number of major security problems confronting the country also act as disincentives.

Moreover, many foreign donors as well as foreign organisations (like the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces – DCAF) linked directly to foreign governments have been active in recent years in projects to reform the security sector. Although many of these projects involve local Lebanese partners, the funding essentially comes from overseas. In addition, there are a large number of state-to-state projects between the Lebanese government and foreign donors.

Despite these many difficulties, there has been some useful cooperation on security issues between the Lebanese authorities and organisations outside government. In general, these organisations have been NGOs that have developed special expertise in one particular area and are therefore regarded as worthwhile interlocutors by the authorities. For example, the Afif Osseiran Foundation, whose speciality is providing legal assistance to juvenile delinquents, has worked with the ISF to help it with the interpretation of the 2002 law on the subject. Likewise, the Caritas Lebanon Migrant Center has carried out training for ISF and General Security personnel to ensure the effective implementation by Lebanon of the Anti-Human Trafficking Protocol, ratified by the Lebanese Parliament in October 2005. In a very different area, specialised NGOs have been working with the ISF to promote traffic safety and push for better law enforcement. They are involved in the preparation of a new Traffic Law for the country, which has yet to be adopted.

Security-related advocacy groups and NGOs have accepted that, in order to influence thinking in the security sector and to promote reform, they have to develop a satisfactory level of expertise. Some steps have already been taken in certain areas, often with foreign partners.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Lebanese people feel considerably less secure than they did in 2010, which is entirely understandable given regional developments. Moreover, it is not surprising that the sense of insecurity is a mainly existential one, felt primarily for the nation as a whole, rather than based on the personal experiences of those interviewed. Even where more mundane threats – such as theft – are assessed, public opinion has a very inaccurate notion of their nature and extent. Overall, there is little or no correlation between fears of security threats and their reality, whether globally, or in the specific case of Syrian refugees. Although this may seem curious, it is a pattern found in most societies and usually stubbornly resists attempts to resolve it. As in the Lebanese case, the usual reason is that people generally get their information about security issues from the mass media or hearsay.

This paradox poses an obvious problem. Lebanon's security forces (especially the ISF) cannot do their job effectively without public support, and this has to involve, at least to a degree, taking account of public perceptions and wishes. However, at the same time, such public perceptions may be exaggerated or simply wrong. This dilemma clearly needs to be explored through further research. The wider process of building confidence is a long and complex one, and there is much still to do. Nevertheless, initiatives such as increased employment of women and drawing on the expertise of civil society are showing some promise.

Finally, the perception of security risks, especially at the strategic level, is remarkably constant across regions, confessional groups and genders. The same is broadly true regarding perceptions of security institutions. That said, as well as regional variations related to the Syrian crisis, there are other, more mundane regional variations, along with variations between gender and community, which would clearly justify further study.

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