



THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN LEBANON

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Abstract:

Along with other developing states, various Arab countries are democratizing as they integrate into the global economy. However, the more liberal Lebanese system has paradoxically failed to keep pace. After the killing of former Prime Minister Hariri in 2005, and the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war, sectarian tension again threatens stability and democracy in the country. With Lebanon's Shiite plurality stronger, a new formula for the country's democracy is needed. As a stopgap, confessional remedies could be taken to buttress democratization. In the longer term, however, other solutions are required, including municipal political development, which may help grass roots democracy to flourish.

Keywords: Lebanon, decentralization, democratization, globalization, governance, municipal development.

Resumen:

Junto con otros países en desarrollo, varios países árabes se están democratizando al tiempo que se integran en la economía global. Sin embargo, el sistema libanés, más liberal, no ha conseguido paradójicamente continuar avanzando en esta dirección. Tras el asesinato del ex primer ministro Hariri en 2005, y la guerra de 2006 entre Hezbolá e Israel, la tensión interreligiosa amenaza una vez más la estabilidad y la democracia en este país. Con el reforzamiento de la pluralidad de los chiíes libaneses, se necesita una nueva fórmula para la democracia en el país. Como medida de emergencia, se pueden adoptar soluciones confesionales para fomentar la democratización. Sin embargo, a largo plazo serán necesarias otras soluciones, incluyendo el desarrollo político municipal, que puede ayudar a surgir la democracia desde la base.

Palabras clave: Líbano, descentralización, democratización, globalización, gobernanza desarrollo municipal.

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1. Background

Lebanon's open social and political orientation is unique in the Arab world. The country adopted a liberal constitution in 1926 that has survived in a variety of revisions. Along with that, relations among sects were organized by the unwritten National Pact of 1943, whereby the country's Maronite Christian plurality promised to forgo traditional dependence on France while Muslims gave up desire for union with other Arab states. Sectarianism, a carryover from the pre-1918, Ottoman communal system, defined division of state power, as positions in government were distributed according to sect: a Maronite president, Sunni Moslem premier, Shiite speaker of parliament, a 6:5 ratio of Christian to Muslim parliamentary deputies, and other state executive and administrative position similarly divided. However, by the mid-70s, internal socio-economic problems began interacting violently with demographic change and the presence of armed Palestinians and other groups in the country, leading to the breakdown of the system and a civil war, which began in 1975.

To end the conflict, parliament met in the Saudi city of Taif in 1989 and reached an agreement again based on proportional sectarian representation. The accord left a weakened presidency as the prerogative of a Maronite, a strengthened Sunni premiership, and the somewhat stronger parliamentary Shiite speakership, while dividing seats in parliament (and higher echelon civil service jobs) equally between Christians and other sects.

During the following decade and a half of post-Taif Lebanon, two visions for the country competed, both articulating deeply-rooted internal dynamics and regional vested interests. The first revolved around the entrepreneur Rafiq Hariri, who became Lebanon's prime minister with strong Saudi and Western backing, and gambled on peace in the Middle East to revive a cosmopolitan country. The second vision, with the Shiite party Hezbollah as a principal, was backed by Iran, considering Lebanon a front against Israel and, when necessary, the West. The competition between these was arbitrated by Syrian tutelage, which was then accepted by the West, and kept in balance.

However, the post-Taif era did not witness genuine political stability, better governance, or open debate on how to resolve major issues as the absence of a coherent long-term national policy that focused on the public good² continued to plague the country. In any case, Lebanon was plunged back into crisis with the assassination in February 2005 of Hariri. As removal of overt Syrian influence followed, Hezbollah was put on the defensive; but it had dynamics of its own that were rooted in resistance to Israeli occupation, Shiite mobilization, ambitions regarding the post-Taif Lebanese system, and the catalyzing effect of the Iranian build-up and the overall Islamist surge in the region. By ignoring these factors and considering Hezbollah as simply the remnant of a previous era of Syrian hegemony, the dominant Lebanese political faction helped doom the national dialog launched in early 2006. (In any case, it was conducted by leaders who had vested interests in the system as it has long operated, sharing spoils among sects according to established patterns of influence.) Finally, in mid-2006, Israeli attacks erased some of the material progress of the post-Taif years, further threatening the country's political balance.

² For an exposition of the economic and political shortcomings of post-Taif Lebanon, see for example Makdisi, Samir (2004) *The Lessons of Lebanon: the Economics of War and Development* London and New York, I.B.Tauris



2. Is Lebanon a Democracy?

Thus, eighty years after the creation of modern Lebanon, the country's political life is in delicate health, except for sectarianism, which shows increasing signs of robustness.³ Is this compatible with democracy? Some feel that sectarianism is no more than adherence to the right to be different while admitting the privilege of others to hold a contrary belief, essential for democracy. However, in an era where economies are converging in the context of globalization, Lebanon's sectarianism maintains instability and hampers political and economic development. Could the quest for democracy be a remedy for this?

Though few disagree that the liberalism enshrined in the country's sectarian system is unique in the Arab world, to claim that Lebanon is a democracy or is even democratizing is something else again. Let us examine these questions against suggested conditions for considering a state as a democracy:

1. Periodic free elections, including the possibility of changing the ruling political elites or parties through such election
2. Sovereignty of the people, exercised through a legislative system constructed by a parliament, according to which the judicial system operates. No independent or parallel legislative and judicial system can be created by the state.
3. Equal and inclusive citizenship and civil rights
4. Universal suffrage where every vote is equal
5. Protection of the civil and human rights of minorities from the tyranny of the majority.⁴

Unfortunately, Lebanon falls seriously short regarding most of these measures, and the country's democracy does not structure the distribution of power and authority rationally and justly. At the same time, the country's free press, a functioning parliament, and a more advanced sense of civil society help account for an atmosphere of political freedom. The head of state and politicians in general realize that their power and influence are limited by others. This means that little room is available to a president or prime minister to manipulate the system, as is often the case in the rest of the Arab world.⁵ At the same time, Lebanon's civil society continues to develop, especially under the influence of globalization; interest and professional groups, and even political parties have more of a chance to influence public policy, while the information revolution, satellite television, and the internet⁶ are enlarging the public space and energizing political debate.

Does such a situation at least provide conditions to develop a democratic system? One theory is that the run-up to democracy starts once a sense of national identity exists; but in the case of Lebanon, the country's sects maintain separateness, though there is some Lebanese sense of belonging, which nevertheless has not matured into nationhood. As and when such

³ Sectarianism is further entrenched by not being confined to politics but also informing social dimensions of Lebanese life, with independence in personal matters (such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance) for each sect.

⁴ Kimmerling, Baruch (2001) *The Invention and Decline of Israeliness* p.181, University of California Press; Berkeley and Los Angeles; of course other definitions/conditions are possible

⁵ Abu Jaber, Kamel "Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan" in Saikal, Amin; and Schnabel, Albrecht eds (2001) *Democratization in the Middle East* United Nations University Press, Tokyo, New York, Paris, p 127-141

⁶ Hofheinz, Albrecht "The Internet in the Arab World" in *International Politics and Society/International Politik und Gesellschaft*, no.3, (2005), p78-96



maturity happens, "a prolonged and inconclusive political struggle" is followed by an often contentious "decision phase" in which political leaders deliberately "accept the existence of diversity in unity and, to that end, to institutionalize some crucial aspect of democratic procedure."⁷ This is roughly what is now happening in Lebanon, though the process may take some time and it is likely to be difficult.

However, the cumulative effect of socio-cultural trends, global and regional economic liberalization, and some profound recent events are creating a political environment in which the old political structures of Lebanon are threatened. Specifically, the Israeli attack on Lebanon in July-August 2006 has given rise to a new situation, at the center of which is Hezbollah.

3. The Hezbollah Factor

The latest Israeli war on Lebanon resulted in amplification inside the country of the perception of a weak state countered by a resilient and efficient Hezbollah in touch with the grass roots.⁸ At the same time, there exists a Lebanese discourse arguing that Hezbollah's war with Israel has been an armed attempt at undemocratically depriving Lebanon of its independence and aborting the "Cedar Revolution" of 2005 through Shiite vigilantism. With two diametrically different narratives of the recent war dividing Lebanon, and the tense atmosphere generated, it will take domestic political generosity on all sides and benevolent international concern to keep Lebanon from sliding into civil conflict, though these may not come easily. A classic Lebanese accommodation in which Hezbollah agrees to trade military victory for political benefits is always a possibility, but structural changes and transformations at work since the end of the last civil war could prove too complex to be digested by such traditional mechanisms in the context of Taif.⁹

Judging by the pace at which the Shiite party is acting to compensate Lebanese victims of the violence and the speed with which it has started reconstruction, leaving the government behind, there is little chance of Hezbollah failing in the internal Lebanese political game. The war and reconstruction have tightened the party's hold on its core Shiite constituency, which has reasserted itself as the resistance against Israeli/United States intentions for the country; in this atmosphere, no outsider, whether Israel, the UN or anybody else, can resolve the issue of Hezbollah. At the same time, the government in which Hezbollah participates but which is dominated by the anti-Syrian majority that came to power after lavishly financed elections last year has shown itself incapable of tackling the situation. The 14 March movement, named after the date of mass demonstration against the Syrians in 2005 following the assassination of Hariri, had tried to co-opt Hezbollah by drawing it into the cabinet and adopting some of the party's positions during a national dialog. The 14 March parliamentary majority is now talking about a new agreement with Hezbollah. However, the majority has few options except extensive accommodation of the Shiite party, given the demonstrated might of Hezbollah and the impossibility of forcing it into any arrangement against its will. On the other hand, the ability of the March 14 forces to adapt to the new situation is problematic.

⁷ Dankwart Rustow "Transitions Toward Democracy: Toward a Dynamic Model" in *Comparative Politics* vol 2, April (1970), p.355

⁸ An impression confirmed by the author in numerous interviews with private and civil sector actors in Lebanon, August-September 2006

⁹ Bahout, Joseph "Whose Lebanon Will It Now Be?" in *Bitterlemons-international.org* Middle East Roundtable, Edition 32 Volume 4, 24 August, (2006), "Lebanon: the internal dimension"



Politically there is only one way forward: democratically recognizing growing Shiite demographic and political weight in the country. However, this would involve breaking open the Taif agreement that ended the civil war, thus reducing Christian and Sunni power in Lebanon. Even without changing Taif, various groups could try to strengthen the central state,¹⁰ but then they would have to give up the patronage system that lets small groups or families run the different communities, as exemplified in the power of the Hariri family among the Sunnis.

In the end, the political disruption caused by Hezbollah is really a facet of the instability of the Lebanese system itself.¹¹ Political tensions within Lebanon's fragile government that simmered beneath the surface during the war are threatening to explode. The Western-backed coalition of the 14 March forces, which forced Syria out of Lebanon last year, has emerged weaker, while the country's pro-Syrian camp, which is aligned with Hezbollah and is backed by Iran, has been strengthened.

Hezbollah's popularity has grown sharply among Lebanon's Shiite community (as well as in the Arab world) because of the ability to stand up to Israel's military might. Inside Lebanon, Hezbollah has also proved that it can use political clout to protect its weapons: late in 2005, the party showed that it can rely on more than just arms to wield power as its members of parliament walked out and effectively shut down the government for seven weeks, paralyzing the country. If the 14 March coalition decides to push for disarmament of Hezbollah by force, the party can opt to play this card again.

Of course, the problem is seriously complicated by the outside support that each side in the present crisis enjoys: Syria, Iran, and a certain segment of Arab and world opinion siding with Hezbollah on the one hand, and on the other the West, Israel, and the Arab regimes siding with the 14 March movement. Much of Lebanon's woes come from its long being susceptible to such foreign meddling among its different sectarian groups.¹² A weak central government, meanwhile, continues to muddle through in a state where Lebanese leaders have long paid homage to the interests of their specific sectarian groups, corruptly and in an undemocratic fashion, while foreign powers are able to play off Lebanon's divided factions.

In this latest case, the United States and Israel are set on disarming Hezbollah, while Syria and Iran intend on having the party keep its weapons as a way to confront the West. However, Hezbollah will not be disarmed by force and the issue must remain an internal matter to be determined by Lebanese players.

To finally resolve this issue and strengthen Lebanon's government, Hezbollah should be transformed into a political party like any other; the alternative would be too costly for a country that has long known the consequences of internal sectarian strife that have been fueled by proxy wars.¹³ However, Hezbollah will finally agree to disband its military wing and become a serious partner in the political process to develop a democratic state in Lebanon only if the government majority is willing to accommodate demands for reform. It is thus necessary to rethink the political state system in Lebanon and put the country on the path to

¹⁰ A sentiment expressed for example in the public statements of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, such as that reported in the Beirut Arabic daily *an-Nahar* 30 September 2006 "Working on Lebanon Not Being an Arena for Foreign Struggles, as We Build a Strong and Capable State" p 3

¹¹ Biederman, Ferry "A Symptom of The Lebanese System" *Bitterlemons-international.org*, op cit

¹² For the background to this system, see Ghanem, Khayrallah (1983) "Le système électoral et la vie politique au Liban" Bibliothèque de l'Université St-Esprit, Kaslik

¹³ Roumani, Rhonda "Force Will Not Disarm Hezbollah" *Bitterlemons-international.org* op cit



becoming a functioning democracy.¹⁴ For this to happen, the government majority must embrace Hezbollah and accept seeing its political influence grow and develop. The question is whether the majority will accommodate the party's new role, insofar as this might require giving it a larger share in the cabinet, among other political enticements.

The government thus is faced with the challenge of creating an acceptable opening to Hezbollah.¹⁵ However, it must be stressed that this is not incompatible with the party's Islamism. Political Islam encompasses a broad variety of tendencies compatible with democratization. Islamic values and symbols appeal to societies buffeted by alien forces. Islamist movements carry the seed of a democratic opening because they cannot be easily co-opted. It is hard to imagine a successful struggle to open a public sphere without a non-co-optable opposition. As Islamist parties function in the real world of politics, their operational code is not obviously antithetical to participation and contestation. Indeed, it may be a liberal improvement over the political philosophy of certain Arab kings and security chiefs.¹⁶

Balancing the needs of all Lebanese groups, not just sectarian elites, requires reform for better governance. Local sectarianism, fed by constant foreign influences, helps to explain why Lebanon's central government never rose to the level of efficiency of the country's private sector or civil society, both of which are strong by the standards of developing countries. The sharing of political power among Lebanon's religious communities is inherently discriminatory and undemocratic. That may not have been a severe problem in hundreds of years ago, but given modern technology and globalization, the old Lebanese regime is becoming increasingly unsustainable. The political system always required an external force to stabilize it, the most recent one being Syria in 1975-2005. The consequence of such a system is continued instability, unless its underlying reasons are addressed. Political reconfiguration must help generate a truly new system that is democratic, equitable, and sustainable. Lebanon cannot be at the mercy of outside powers, a situation that risks re-inviting civil war, but must work for political understanding internally.

4. Bases for a New and Democratic State

Following the assassination of Hariri, the political powers that emerged did not have a program to build a modern democratic state, dismantle tensions in the country, pursue equitable social and economic policies, and elaborate a national strategy for development. However, as the political situation in Lebanon deteriorated in 2006, before and after the attack by Israel, there has been more talk about the need for state-building. Politicians from across Lebanon's political spectrum invoked the term during the 2006 national dialog and later since the termination of Israel's most recent war against Lebanon. For most 14 March politicians, "state-building" means asserting the state's monopoly over the means of coercion within its borders, i.e. disarming Hezbollah and militants within Lebanon's Palestinian refugee community; for Hezbollah, the strong state - one liberated from sectarianism and clientelism and accountable to the needs of its constituents - is a necessary precondition to disarmament.

¹⁴ Gerrymandering is only one of the problems that needs to be tackled to impose a functioning democracy; on this issue see Pousenny, Marsha Pripstein "Multiparty Elections in the Arab World" in Pousenny, Marsha; and Angrist, Michele (2005) *Authoritarianism in the Middle East* Lynne Reiner, Boulder and London pp91-118

¹⁵ Osama Safa "Hezbollah: Where to Go From Here" Bitterlemons op cit

¹⁶ Michael Hudson "Democracy in the Arab world: obstacles and imperatives" *The Daily Star* newspaper, Beirut, 24 April 2003, p 5



American and European Union state-building rhetoric advocates a strong state not marked by political autonomy, but administrative efficiency. Sovereignty is not a matter of the absolute right of legal and political independence, but a bundle of administrative capacities that repackages external coercion within a discourse of empowerment, partnership, and capacity-building. Such as state is simply a transmission belt for international influence.¹⁷ That position on state-building falls within the framework of the 14 March alliance, though the forces trying to build the state are mostly sectarian. Moreover, the Taif reforms imagine Lebanon as a confessional state, and the question remains as to the relevance of retooling it, given the long history among the political classes of bypassing the organs of state to secure their positions via foreign patrons. One way of facing this is by founding a strong state, which, because it is based on genuinely democratic principles, is sustainable.

In the short run, the Lebanese have to do more to readjust the sectarian system, so that the country can later move to becoming a secular, liberal democracy. This could be done by abolishing sectarianism in the House of Representatives, and applying the idea of a sectarian Senate. The latter would be an upper house that reflects Lebanese diversity and acts as a check on the other branch of the legislature, which would be elected on a purely democratic basis.

In the longer term, a way out in this respect may be provided by trying to apply a model based on extensive municipal development.¹⁸ In a larger country with less intermingling among sects, federalism might be an option; but for Lebanon's miniature demographic mosaic, more local development could be a way to democratically empower people and make the system more democratic and efficient. Goals to pursue in order to get out of the present situation include decentralization and placing more authority in the hands of the municipalities while modifying the state's taxation policy to make it more decentralized. Decentralization, as a policy orientation involving political, administrative and fiscal structural changes, and leading to a redistribution of power and responsibility between levels of government, could affect significantly the institutional framework and the critical determinants of development in Lebanon with its relatively strong regionalist traditions.

Local government structures are potentially key institutions that could be reinforced by an effective decentralization process under the form of municipal and regional government. Lebanon, despite a considerable municipal tradition (the country's first extant municipality dating back to 1864), and with over 700 municipalities (a number that has stayed quite stable) is structured around a system that remains relatively centralized. The country's few present examples of municipal innovation nevertheless show the importance of institution building, municipal leadership, and citizen participation for a successful and efficient local government. Constitutionally and practically, local power structures have had a measure of autonomy and control over their activities, resources, and expenditures in their jurisdiction, with periodic accountability to their constituencies through relatively fair elections.

On the other hand, there are specific psychological and cultural barriers facing the process of decentralization and devolution of power. In particular, patriarchal culture is an obstacle, insofar as norms of deference to a central government are inbred. However, family structure is changing and "democratizing" in response to socio-economic necessities and, via

¹⁷ For an exposition of such contemporary redefinitions of sovereignty, see for example Chandler, David (2006) *Empire in Denial: The Politics of State-Building* London, Pluto Press

¹⁸ For a Lebanese analysis of this issue, see Baroud, Ziad "Gouvernance Locale et Reforme Institutionnelle au Liban" unpublished paper delivered at the World Bank/Lebanese Center for Policy Studies review workshop on Policy Reforms and Initiatives in the MENA Region, Beirut 23-24 February 2004



globalization, a growing anti-patriarchal culture. Culture cannot be totally re-imagined quickly, but neither is it immutable. Culture itself is shaped and reshaped by exogenous forces, including globalization, which is inexorable and requires the kind of educational attainments and general opening up of society that ultimately promotes liberal democracy.

On the other hand, the capacity of municipal governments in dealing with both the state's central administration, as well as with their own local constituencies, is limited. An evaluation of the internal capacity of local governments (profiles and proficiency of local councilors/elites, state and issues of staffing, administrative and managerial capacities, fiscal outreach, level and quality of routine service delivery and capacity for project development and implementation) also shows the limitations of the present structures.

The ability of Lebanon's local authorities to understand and deal effectively with administrative frameworks, procedures, and control mechanisms governing their relationship with the central state; and the capacity of municipal governments to influence central decision-making mechanisms is limited. In Lebanon, devolution of power has not been accompanied by much needed fiscal decentralization, and this means that the complete dependence of local powers on tax redistribution by the central government defeats any progress towards political autonomy.

The local authorities' strategies and options to maximize their autonomy vis-à-vis the central system on the legislative level are limited by the shortfall of the national constitution in adopting specific institutional frameworks that would reinforce municipal powers. The constitution remains vague in dispositions on local governmental structures; and the national government is still suspicious of decentralization trends, being instead inclined to exploit the legal and constitutional deficit to weaken the political and fiscal autonomy of local authorities.

Consolidation of the democratic basis of local governance in the country is limited by the willingness and ability of local power structures to inform their constituencies about activities, projects, and decisions. The extent to which local authorities (whether elected or appointed) consult local constituencies in the decision-making process concerning the major issue of interest for the locality is limited as well. On the other hand, the aftermath of the summer war of 2006 showed the growing influence of local powers as represented by Hezbollah, and their willingness and ability to collaborate with groups of citizens, local civil society organizations, and other voluntary groups to further the goals of local reconstruction and development. However, some question the capacity of other local powers to become dedicated to democracy and sustainable development, and many of the elected authorities in Lebanon outside the areas of Hezbollah influence come from locally powerful traditional families and clans.

Furthermore, there is a missing link between local and national elections, with no significant migration of locally elected officials towards national positions, and hence no cumulative process in the democratization of the exercise of power. This limits the impact of political involvement and party membership at the local level and leads to the re-assertion of the central government power through a co-optation network.

Different forms of local democracy now flourish in Lebanon, but distinguishing between the cases of local leadership on a traditional basis and real participatory democratic processes can be difficult. There is thus a need for an effective role for political parties and the mechanisms through which they could actively participate in local democracy. This also



underlines the need for efficient citizen participation between elections rather than just during electoral campaigns.

How to include civil, public, and private actors in the local decision-making process while remaining liable to the community becomes the dilemma for Lebanon. One could wish for more stakeholder participation and community involvement, which however might also constitute a challenge to democracy in terms of transparency and accountability. Accordingly, even though municipalities should eventually attain some political autonomy, local entities could have different levels of fiscal autonomy and redistribution depending on their level of efficiency.

The modernization of tax allocation and collection are an important part of the reform of local government. Furthermore, modernization implies the introduction of information technology, and the training and development of human resources at the local level. Within the framework of municipal governance, greater efficiency and better resource management, alongside a process of amalgamation starting with regrouping various municipalities and villages, could become a sustainable model to support grass roots democratization in the country.

However, such democratization will result in continued administrative inefficiency if local structures are as dysfunctional as the present central government. Tension between democratization and efficiency, in the context of a general lack of financial and legal autonomy due to a centralist control on fiscal resources, could thus be significant. Any fiscal reform on the local level must therefore be based on assured economic, political and social competence of municipalities. Progressive devolution, the search for new financial sources for local governments, and an equitable fiscal redistribution on the national level are needed. Moreover, the need for institutional dialog among the tiers of government is a necessary step towards, first, the development of a legislative framework that could empower local entities and second, a better understanding of the complex mechanism governing their relationship.¹⁹

5. The Challenge of Globalization

Development in the process of decentralization is vital for Lebanon to exit from its present impasse and become strongly associated with some of the positive aspects of globalization. No matter what happens politically and otherwise in Lebanon, globalization requires regional integration of the country to proceed as quickly as possible. Lebanon's economic integration with Syria and other Arab countries is beneficial, long overdue, and inevitable under globalization. There will also be more advantages for the country to speed up south-south integration ahead of integration with the European Union, creating a larger market and raising competitiveness and productivity in the face of coming competition from both North and South.

This will require movement on political fronts, which becomes easier if an effort is made on improving governance and diffusing development so that fruits of globalization are more equitably shared. The latter point - on governance - is perhaps the newest in the list of reforms being presented to the people of Lebanon. Articulating a new dimension of globalization for

¹⁹ "Empowering Local Government Institutions in the MENA Region" in The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, Mediterranean Development Forum, World Bank (2003) *Progress for All, Visions for the Future: Selections from the Fourth Mediterranean Development Forum 2002* Washington, World Bank, p 28-30



the Lebanese, the country in the 1990s was asked to remove trade barriers, plug fiscal and external deficits, stabilize macro-economic indicators, reform various sectors, and privatize public enterprises. Some of these steps having been taken, the Lebanese state is now being called on to move from revamping economic policies to straightforward political reform. The transformation of Lebanon's regime into a more-or-less liberal constitutional democracy involves imposing principles of participation, the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. There is now a variety of programs in the region to expand access to justice, improve legislative processes, make electoral systems more effective, render public institutions more accountable, and widen access to information about good governance, including lessons learned from other regions. This process implies expanding the scope of globalization, defined as the elimination of various barriers to international business, to include bringing down restrictions caused by domestic government practices. In that spirit, growing numbers of intermediaries conveying experiences and lessons in economic and political liberalization from international institutions and a variety of bilateral development programs are invading the country. In particular, the European Union partnership agreement with Lebanon calls on it to engage in governance reforms, as well as economic ones. Contributions to this process are being made by publishing information on websites, commissioning original research from think tanks and individuals, and organizing conferences in which information is widely shared. The hope is that such publicity will induce changes that could help transform the regime by transforming mentalities and practices. Many Western-educated Lebanese technocrats trained in economics and related subjects also want the country to become more serious about governance reform.

While various Arab countries are democratizing as they integrate into the global economy, the more liberal Lebanese system has paradoxically failed to keep pace. With Lebanon's Shiite plurality stronger, a new formula for the country's democracy is needed. As a stopgap, confessional remedies could be taken to buttress democratization. In the longer term, however, other solutions are required, including municipal political development, which may help grass roots democracy to flourish. Otherwise, the tension between economic globalization on the one hand and local political backwardness on the other will lead to yet more unrest.