

2. Political and economic developments

2.1. Recent political developments

On 9 January 2025, Joseph Aoun, a Maronite Christian[95] and former army chief, was elected President of Lebanon through secret indirect suffrage by the parliament.[96] He secured 99 out of 128 votes in a second round,[97] ending a 26-month presidential vacuum.[98] During this period Lebanon was governed by a caretaker administration, struggling with political deadlock and a deep economic crisis.[99]

Shortly after his election, Aoun announced the formation of a new government[100] with Nawaf Salam, a Sunni Muslim[101] and President of the International Court of Justice, designated as Prime Minister on 13 January 2025. Salam secured the support of 84 out of 128 parliamentarians' votes.[102] On 8 February 2025, the President signed a decree appointing the Prime Minister's new government composed of 24 ministers, including five women.[103] The new cabinet also includes several independent persons, such as former UN envoy Ghassan Salame, reflecting a shift in Lebanon's political landscape after Hezbollah's weakened influence and the end of a prolonged political deadlock.[104]

According to the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS), one of the key achievements of the new executive lies in eliminating the 'blocking third' clause, which was established by the 2008 Doha Agreement. This clause granted any political party holding one-third of the ministers plus one, the power to veto and overturn the government. This mechanism had been repeatedly exploited by the Shia tandem of Amal Movement and Hezbollah, along with their allies.[105] Despite this, the new president has received broad support, including from the political wing of Hezbollah and Amal Movement in the parliament.[106]

To maintain confessional balance and secure political support, Lebanon's new government assigned the Finance Ministry to Yassine Jaber, an Amal-backed figure close to Speaker Nabih Berri. This ensured that the Shia tandem of Hezbollah and Amal retains significant influence despite lacking formal veto power.[107] In addition, several other ministers, including women like Tamara Elzein (former Secretary-General of Lebanon's National Council for Scientific Research, and former Vice President of the Lebanese National Commission for UNESCO) and Haneen Sayed (World Bank economist), come from academic and professional backgrounds, reflecting a mix of technocratic expertise alongside political appointments.[108]

Although Hezbollah and Amal continue to hold all 27 Shia seats in the 128-member parliament, 109 the Shia community has suffered major setbacks after the war with Israel and the fall of the Assad regime, with many areas in ruins and weakened leadership.110 According to the United Nations Secretary-General's July 2025 report, the formation of a government and the holding of municipal elections were significant steps toward extending the authority of the Lebanese state at the local level.111

While the formation of the new government has reshaped Lebanon's political and economic landscape,112 President Aoun and Prime Minister Salam remain under intense domestic and international pressure to implement structural reforms while maintaining state control and pursuing Hezbollah's disarmament.113 On 5 September 2025, the Cabinet led by President Joseph Aoun approved the Lebanese Army's plan to hold the sole authority over weapons, prompting all five Shia ministers to walk out in protest —Hezbollah and Amal ministers leaving first, followed by independent minister Fadi Makki, reflecting their opposition to Hezbollah's disarmament.114 On 24 September 2025, during a parliamentary session on a new election law, Hezbollah and Amal MPs suggested linking Hezbollah's disarmament to full implementation of the Taif Accord, while Christian leaders called for decentralisation or federalism, highlighting a chance to combine disarmament with broader political reform.115 For more information on the process of disarmament, see section 6.2 Overview of security dynamics related to recent developments with Israel.

2.2. International context

Lebanon's modern history, shaped by over a century of foreign intervention, including 20 years under the French Mandate, 30 years of Syrian influence, and repeated Israeli invasions, has seen various communities, including Christians, Sunnis, and Shias, alternately seeking foreign protection or support from the state when it aligned with their political and demographic interests.116 This historical pattern continues to shape Lebanon's present-day political landscape.117 France's role remains symbolic,118 while the United States supports mainly the Lebanese Armed Forces.119 The Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, have shifted from direct political patronage to economic leverage,120 while Iran has entrenched its power by backing Hezbollah121 for decades and reinforcing its political and military role.122 Meanwhile, Lebanon's relationship with Syria has been tense and often hostile, marked by wars, assassinations, occupation, and conflicts.123

The country's political system has long been shaped by the influence of international actors pursuing their own agendas within the country's domestic affairs.124 Following independence from France in 1943, thse founders viewed non-recognition of Israel as essential for maintaining strong relations with Arab states,125 a decision that laid the foundation for Lebanon's complex and often tense relationship with Israel over the past seventy-five years.126

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