



# The Sociopolitical Undercurrent of Lebanon's Salafi Militancy

**Summary:** The rise in Salafi militancy in Lebanon is not only due to the spillover of the Syrian war, but also to the Sunni elite's failure at tackling the grievances of their co-religionists.

Raphaël Lefèvre  
Paper March 26, 2018

Lebanon has recently witnessed an exponential rise in Salafi militancy. While the spillover of the Syrian war and sectarian tensions in the Middle East are often mentioned as factors, the growth of Salafi violence is more a symptom of the grievances of Lebanese Sunnis. The current state of relative political stability offers a unique window of opportunity for policymakers of all stripes to unite and enact the reforms needed to address these local root causes.

## Qabaday Salafism

- At its core, the rise of Salafi militancy in Lebanon stems from a sociopolitical revolt that originates in marginalized Sunni areas. There, a growing phenomenon, Qabaday Salafism, suggests that the strength of Salafi-jihadi groups has more to do with social dynamics than with any ideological appeal of extremism.
- These groups embrace Salafism often as a means to other ends, such as claiming implicit divine backing in struggles for urban power and resources; justifying, through radical rhetoric, acts of violence that seem like Salafi militancy but actually align more with local traditions of social unrest; or again joining the rebels in Syria.
- Rather than seeing these militants as symptoms of the degrading social and political environment from which they originate, the Lebanese government is viewing them solely through a security prism, sending hundreds to prison, where poor conditions and the indifference of Lebanese Sunni politicians might lead to their radicalization.

- The “securitization” of Syrian refugees, the continual dysfunction of Dar al-Fatwa, and the failings of the Sunni political class are also fueling this inherently sociopolitical revolt—although, so far, the ability of Salafi militants to tap into such revolutionary potential remains confined to small sections of the Sunni public.

## Recommendations

- **Urgently tackle the issue of urban segregation that underlies Qabaday Salafism.** Steps include upgrading infrastructure, curbing unemployment, bolstering local civil society, improving security, and investing in crumbling public schools.
- **Restructure Lebanon’s prison and justice systems.** This entails accelerating procedures, guaranteeing civilian oversight, building more detention facilities, sorting prisoners according to their crime, monitoring the respect of human rights, and facilitating reintegration into society.
- **Reform and empower Dar al-Fatwa.** Moderate Sunni clerics have a key role to play in countering extremism in prisons, mosques, and society at large, but they need more independence from politicians and better management training to allow them to be financially autonomous and invest more in shaping and monitoring the nature of religious speech.
- **Refrain from portraying Syrian refugees as security threats.** This fuels a toxic sociopolitical environment. Instead, the focus should be on improving their safety, education, and livelihoods.

## Introduction

Lebanon has been a main target of Islamist militancy since the Syrian conflict began in 2011. Militants affiliated with Salafi-jihadi groups—such as the self-proclaimed Islamic State and Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham (formerly known as the al-Nusra Front and then Jabhat Fatah al-Sham)—have killed scores of civilians by carrying out suicide bombings and rocket attacks in and outside of Beirut and by engaging in bloody clashes with the army. By 2014, their numbers and strength had grown to such an extent that they came to hold significant sway in parts of the Beqaa Valley, Sidon, and Tripoli, where, according to security officials, they wanted to create an “Islamic Emirate.”<sup>1</sup> To address this challenge, the Lebanese government arrested hundreds of suspected militants and led a military crackdown on suspected terrorist cells. As a result, acts of violence have greatly receded, but this security-focused approach has done nothing to address the root causes that led to the rise of Salafi militancy. Until these issues are tackled, the specter of radicalization will keep looming over Lebanon.

Salafism is a puritan Sunni religious movement advocating a return to the practices of the *al-salaf al-salih*, the companions and successors of the Prophet Muhammad. For decades, this religious school of thought only had a marginal presence in Lebanon, where merely a quarter of the population is Sunni and secular parties and notables dominate religion and politics. Although Salafism was introduced in the 1940s by Tripolitan cleric Salem al-Shahhal, it was not until the 1990s that its influence began to expand, mainly as a result of increased financial assistance from wealthy, like-minded Salafi associations in the Gulf. Throughout this initial period, Lebanese Salafism remained a largely peaceful religious movement. Even among its most radical members, Lebanon was often considered a “land of support” to transit fighters and weapons to wage jihad elsewhere, like in Iraq. And when some Salafi-jihadi groups did advocate for jihad at home, such as in 2000 and 2007, most other Salafis disapproved of their efforts, which were quickly quashed.<sup>2</sup> Since 2008, however, the appeal of Salafi militancy has grown considerably, with varying views on the underlying drivers.<sup>3</sup>

Several explanations have been proffered on the rise of Salafi jihadism in Lebanon.<sup>4</sup> Some analysts suggest that, given Salafism’s propensity to consider Shia Muslims as heretics, a more aggressive

doctrine was bound to resonate in a society that has become profoundly polarized. Sunni-Shia relations deteriorated significantly following the 2005 assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, the Sunni sect's leading figure, and the growth of Hezbollah, the Shia political party and militant group that is often accused of having carried out the killing.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of this event, Salafi clerics began to strike a militant tone—which became more popular among sections of the Sunni public—and some Salafi militias were formed.

Other analysts attribute the rise to the proxy war waged by Saudi Arabia, which has been the main funder of Salafi mosques, charities, and arguably militias in Lebanon, pitting them against Iran, which supports Hezbollah.<sup>6</sup> Finally, more recently, Salafi militancy is being viewed as a by-product of the Syrian conflict, in which Salafi militias are leading actors.<sup>7</sup> While all these explanations are valid, they overlook deeper local causes that must be understood to be able to effectively address them.

Based on six weeks of field research in 2016 and interviews with fifty-five actors, including civil society activists, clerics, former militants, and security officials, it is apparent that, at its core, the rise of Salafi militancy in Lebanon stems from a sociopolitical revolt—one that originates in disaffected urban areas where the growth of Salafi groups has more to do with social dynamics than with any supposedly ideological appeal of extremism. For these groups, embracing Salafism is often a means to other ends, such as benefiting from generous Gulf funding; claiming implicit divine backing in struggles between neighborhood gangs; justifying, through radical, religious rhetoric, acts of violence that seem like Salafi militancy but rather align more with long-standing local traditions of social unrest; or providing a vocabulary and platform to contest local sociopolitical marginalization. Thus, although these groups have adopted the language and profile of Salafism, their militancy remains largely connected to local urban grievances, identities, and networks. The implications of these findings are profound because they illustrate the danger of viewing these militants, operating inside and outside Lebanon, through the prism of security only—they must also be seen as symptoms of the degrading social environments from which they originate.

It is noteworthy, however, that Salafi militants have not yet fulfilled their potential to leverage the sociopolitical unrest. For example, comparatively few Syrian refugees in Lebanon have joined militant groups or carried out attacks even though they face massive challenges. Of course, the government's securitization of these refugees, or attempt to portray them as a direct security threat, might result in a self-fulfilling prophecy, but, for now, their resilience to extremism remains striking. Ultimately, this resistance stems from the fact that Syrian and Lebanese Sunni communities consider their religious practices to be at odds with Salafi puritanism. This, in addition to the Salafis' own divisions and general rejection of militancy, indicates that the dynamics of radicalization are by no means unavoidable.

Actual radicalization, meaning the dynamic of clear ideological hardening, seems to primarily take place within the context of two experiences—having waged jihad in Syria and having spent time in Lebanese prisons. Both reflect the urgent need for the government to reform its current judicial and security approach and adhere in practice, not just in theory, to the policy of disassociation from the Syrian crisis. Institutional reform is also needed to empower the country's moderate Sunni clerics. Many of them have attempted to take a lead role in combatting extremist ideologies in prisons and in certain mosques, but their efforts are hampered by a lack of means and the constant meddling of Sunni politicians—some of whom have become unpopular.

## Qabaday Salafism

While the Sunni-Shia rift is often seen as the most important divide in Lebanese society, the fast-growing social gap between the privileged and the poor is as, if not more, significant. Deprivation touches the Sunni community in particular. In Lebanon's second largest city, Tripoli, where Sunnis constitute the overwhelming majority of the population, 57 percent of residents are poor—a far cry from the 28 percent national average.<sup>8</sup> Yet what is even more notable is the fast-growing urban

segregation between the gated neighborhoods of the well-off, where basic services function, and the marginalized districts, where residents struggle with worsening insecurity, deteriorating infrastructure, poorly performing public schools, and high poverty rates. In upscale urban areas such as Basatin Trablous, only 19 percent of residents are considered deprived, compared to 69 percent in Qobbe and 87 percent in Bab al-Tabbaneh. And it is precisely in these types of neighborhoods that Salafism has found a fertile ground. There, puritan religious activists with ties to wealthy Gulf religious associations have earned the respect of many locals by opening schools, running charities, funding orphanages, and helping refugees—in other words, by stepping into the void and fulfilling state-like functions. There are at least five large Salafi associations active in Tripoli and three in Akkar. Moreover, in deprived neighborhoods where population density rates can sometimes be nine times higher than in wealthier districts, there is a growing scarcity of public space and the well-kept, neighborhood Salafi mosques can act as vectors of socialization for youths.<sup>10</sup> “We meet the needs of the poor,” argued a Salafi leader. “We provide them with dignity.”<sup>11</sup>

A key element of the growing appeal of Salafism in these deprived areas is the movement's ability to attract community leaders who bring their followers into the fold. For centuries, neighborhoods characterized by relative state neglect have been dominated by local strongmen called *qabadayat* (*qabaday* in singular form), who provide services, regulate social relations, and defend their district's identity in return for loyalty.<sup>12</sup> While wealthier neighborhoods, and the upper class more generally, view them as disorderly *za'aran* (thugs) given their propensity to engage in violent feuds with rival bands, they have often been hailed as heroes in their own communities. One *qabaday* in a deprived quarter said he is proud to be the area's informal leader and that he stands ready to use his weapon to enforce justice and security since, given the state's absence, “it's the law of the jungle here.” And if, in the past, many *qabadayat* justified their actions and episodic acts of violence by seizing the mantle of left-wing ideologies, a growing number of them now seem attracted by the Salafi discourse.

Salafism is infiltrating the grassroots by merging the figure of the neighborhood strongman with that of the religiously inspired activist. “The Prophet valued strength over weakness,” argued one of the many leaders who could be described as “Qabaday Salafis.” “As a *qabaday* and as a Salafi, I protect my neighborhood from physical and moral threats,” he said before specifying that he provides protection and religious education to the area's impoverished population and strictly prohibits the sale and consumption of alcohol. The spread of the phenomenon of Qabaday Salafism in such neighborhoods also goes hand in hand with a local culture of exacerbated masculinity, where “being a real man” often means showing “courage” by wielding weapons and using violence for the alleged “good of the community.” Salafi discourse—which emphasizes the archetypal chivalrous *fata* (youth) and constantly references the *sahaba* (the companions of the Prophet) and the “brave” battles they waged—is well placed to channel the militant tendencies of these neighborhood strongmen. A Salafi leader acknowledged as much when he proudly stated that traditional values such as “chivalry, honor, and revenge” are being “Salafized.” “Salafism meets the need of our warm-blooded youth for dignity. Salafis refuse to forgive and they don't just talk but rather act.”

Yet the brand of religious doctrine that these Qabaday Salafis are promoting is not always consistent with Salafism. For instance, while Salafism prohibits the targeting of fellow Muslims, the *qabadayat* and their partisans do not hesitate to use violence against those in wealthier Sunni districts. In Tripoli, they are widely suspected of standing behind a racketeering scheme involving chic shops and restaurants and the 2012 looting and torching of a U.S. fast-food branch catering to the local elite.<sup>13</sup> They also routinely engage in skirmishes with gangs from rival neighborhoods and often target the security forces, who are widely unpopular because of their crackdown on illegal housing and illicit trade. Many *qabadayat* are, in fact, more akin to gangsters claiming divine backing than actual Salafi scholars. Most of them are not even clerics; they are self-made imams who are knowledgeable in aspects of Salafi doctrine—often quoting Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah, a twelfth-

century religious scholar highly influential in Salafi thought—but are unaware of wider theological debates. Moreover, as *qabadayat*, they have to remain in tune with the social and religious practices of most residents in their neighborhood—and these have long been more informed by a legacy of Sufism, liberal in certain respects, than by the more conservative Gulf-type Wahhabism. Some of them, in attempting to remain close to residents, thus enact fatwas (rulings) that make *their* Salafism seem more aligned with local practices. One proudly pointed out that he allows *his* Salafis to listen to music, watch television shows, and even smoke—all taboos in doctrinal Salafism. Their ideology is thus Salafi in name only and largely driven by the local social context.

The journey of one of these Qabaday Salafis, Shadi Mawlawi, illustrates the danger of viewing these local militants through the lens of security only. Born and raised in Qobbe, one of Tripoli's largest and most deprived districts, he became, by the late 2000s, one of the area's Qabaday Salafi. As a *qabaday*, he quickly built a following by providing residents with limited services funded with money he had acquired via weapons smuggling and by resorting to violence against the police to defend locals involved in the informal economy. Today, he is still seen by some locals as the “hero of Qobbe” who “protected the district.”

His adherence to Salafism, by all accounts, was initially not rigorous. One of his followers explained that together they grew beards, prayed five times a day, met with the city's famed Salafi clerics, and advocated the creation of an “Islamic Emirate” in Tripoli, but they also smoked hashish, took pills, flirted with girls, and traveled around on mopeds while shooting in the air in wealthy areas. Widely viewed in the rest of the city as “attention seekers” involved in petty criminality, Mawlawi and his partisans used the discourse and practice of Salafism to gain wider respect and status while giving religious sanction to their acts and intimidating rivals. Their militancy, which mainly targeted wealthier Sunnis and symbols of the state as expressions of their sociopolitical marginalization, may thus have taken the garb of Salafism, but it was inherently local and more akin to traditional forms of urban unrest.

Two experiences would turn Mawlawi from a Qabaday Salafi guided by local issues into a more ideologically driven militant with actual ties to the Islamic State and Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham. First, the security forces arrested him in 2012, and although he only stayed in prison briefly because the authorities had to release him in the face of angry protesters in Tripoli, the experience nonetheless seems to have been enough to radicalize him.<sup>14</sup> According to a source close to him, he was greatly affected by the “oppression” suffered by prisoners in jail. Second, upon his release, he started caring about broader issues beyond his neighborhood. He became particularly moved by the deteriorating situation in Syria. One of his followers explained that, as a result, he joined Syria's Islamist rebels in the border village al-Qusayr, where he fought for a few weeks against the Syrian army and Hezbollah.

Mawlawi returned to Tripoli as a battle-hardened militant with deeper ideological convictions than before, encouraging his local followers to join the ranks of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, prepare attacks in Lebanon, and wage a “revolution” to overthrow the country's whole political order. His status as a neighborhood leader pushed many of his partisans to follow his path. Loyalty among his followers was so deep that one of them, who was a Christian, had been prepared to blow himself up at a Lebanese army outpost in the district.<sup>15</sup> A security operation in 2014 eventually forced Mawlawi to escape and seek refuge in the Palestinian camp of Ain al-Hilwe and then in Syria, where he joined Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham.<sup>16</sup>

## From the Neighborhood to Syria

As many stories similar to Mawlawi's suggest, the phenomenon of Qabaday Salafism, as an essentially local form of militancy centered on the *hara* (neighborhood), is threatening to turn more ideological and radical in the context of the lingering Syrian conflict. There is disagreement over the

exact number of Sunnis who left Lebanon to fight the Syrian regime—from an initial estimate of 900 to a recent estimate of 6,000—but what is clear is that they waged jihad for a variety of reasons.<sup>17</sup> According to those interviewed, while some Sunnis joined the Syrian opposition's ranks out of a sense of "humanitarian duty" or "chivalry" aimed at "defending the honor" of Sunni demonstrators who faced a brutal crackdown by President Bashar al-Assad's regime, others were driven by "a thirst for revenge" for some of the "torments" caused by Syria's 1976–2005 military occupation of Lebanon and, in particular, the Syrian army's 1985 crackdown in Tripoli and its involvement in the 1986 massacre of local Sunnis in the neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh. One militant who fought in Syria also observed that most of his Lebanese jihadi friends happened to hail from deprived Sunni areas and that the "humiliations" they faced there—stemming from a sense of rejection from society, rampant poverty, and difficulties in getting married and starting a family—had pushed them to join a battlefield on which they would be able to "release their frustration and rage." Only a minority, he insisted, went to Syria with ideological goals such as establishing an Islamic state in Bilad al-Sham (Greater Syria). And, in fact, when these Lebanese militants reached Syria, most actually joined moderate rebel groups. A security official explained that this initially happened in unorganized ways, with local groups of supporters of the revolution sending money, weapons, and fighters to brigades they sympathized with in Syria.

Given that Lebanese society remains largely connected to the Syrian hinterland—especially because of lingering family relations between Homs and Tripoli on the one hand and Beirut, Damascus, and Sidon on the other—it is hardly surprising that kinship ties trumped ideology. "At first, we joined the Free Syrian Army because many had family ties with its fighters," explained a Lebanese Salafi. "Back then, our militants were not even considered as foreign fighters!" Over time, however, support among Lebanese jihadists for Free Syrian Army (FSA) brigades sharply declined. Some became frustrated by the large degree of "infighting" that took place in rebel ranks and the FSA's apparent "inability to live up to its promises." Others lambasted the FSA's rampant "corruption." One Tripolitan Salafi who sent some of his followers to fight alongside FSA brigades in Homs expressed his bitter disappointment at the way some rebels "surrendered" to the regime. Another one concluded that "the only hope for the future of Syria lies with the Islamists."

Thus, by early 2013, most Lebanese militants had shifted their support to Salafi rebel groups. This trend increased as violent battles unfolded in al-Qusayr, in the countryside of Homs, during which Hezbollah officialized its armed intervention in Syria on the side of the regime. Two Lebanese Salafi clerics in particular, Ahmed al-Assir and Salem al-Rafei, reacted to the Shia militia's growing involvement across the border by issuing fatwas of their own—making it a religious duty for Lebanese Sunnis to strike back and join the jihad in Syria.<sup>18</sup> The sectarian component of their Salafi discourse, emphasizing the need to "defend the Sunni villages" from the Syrian regime's and Hezbollah's hands, quickly made their fatwas popular. One Salafi recruiter said he became "overwhelmed" by the number of candidates for jihad. From then on, Salafi networks gradually came to monopolize the flow of Lebanese militants into Syria. While some were sent to local Salafi brigades in Homs, such as Liwa Fajr al-Islam and Liwa al-Haqq, others joined larger factions, such as Ahrar al-Sham and Jaysh al-Islam. One Lebanese Salafi explained that these groups earned his followers' admiration because of the degree of their "Islamic commitment" but also because of their "military achievements" on the ground and their "uncompromising opposition" to both the Syrian regime and Hezbollah.

While it is tempting to blindly assume that all Lebanese Sunnis who fought with Salafi brigades came back from Syria radicalized, the reality is more nuanced. For instance, many militants grew highly critical of al-Assir and al-Rafei, whose fatwas, they argued, were issued more out of emotional instincts than sound, strategic calculations—thus unleashing a flow of fighters who haphazardly joined various factions. In the short term, the lack of strategy accentuated the fragmentation of opposition factions in Homs, and in the long term, the lack of a political cover rendered the return of militants to Lebanon harder. In retrospect, al-Rafei himself acknowledges that his decision to issue a fatwa about jihad was taken hastily and "without really taking the time to think and discuss with

others.”

Some Sunni fighters were also traumatized by the difficulties they encountered on the Syrian battlefield. Tripolitan fighters in the Salafi group Jund al-Sham rapidly came under siege by regime forces near Homs; some died of starvation, others were ambushed and killed, and those who made it back to Lebanon were arrested and sent to prison. “Wives were widowed, kids orphaned, and families destroyed,” bitterly concluded a figure close to them. Another Lebanese Salafi who has relatives currently fighting for opposite Islamist factions complained about the “absurdity” of war. “My own relatives are killing each other in Syria,” he said, before wondering in a rhetorical fashion: “Is this still really a revolution, a jihad?”

There are, of course, numerous other Lebanese militants who take pride in their jihadi experience in Syria and would do it over again “a hundred more times.” Many seem to have been particularly inspired by the intense social bonds they forged on the battlefield. “While in Syria, I understood what it meant to be brothers in Islam,” explained a Lebanese militant; for the first time in his life, he experienced in practice, and not just in theory, this deep sense of belonging. “We fought during the day and shared a fire at night!” Other militants were taken in by a more ideological vision of the world. One said that witnessing the scale of the crisis made him realize that Syria had become the “epicenter of the Islamic world” and that this land now felt even holier to him than Jerusalem, which, until then, had been considered the holy grail of jihad. Another Islamist militant who fought with the rebels in the Syrian town of Yabroud until the city fell to the regime in 2014 said that he would remain forever scarred by the deeds of Hezbollah’s men in Syria: “I saw with my own eyes the atrocities they committed against Sunnis there . . . they [Hezbollah] killed kids and wives . . . they are the absolute enemy.” These are the militants who may become attracted to the ideological, sectarian, and violent breed of Salafi militancy that is espoused by Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham or the Islamic State, each in their own way.

## Prisons as Factories of Radicalism

The dynamic of ideological hardening is amplified by the experience of militants in prison. Roumieh prison, the country’s largest detention facility, has over the past decade been known as a “factory of radicalism,” where jihadi groups recruit new members and plot terror attacks.<sup>19</sup> However, since 2014, the problem has taken on new dimensions and now extends to all prisons. The formation of a new government allowed the Lebanese army to carry out a “security plan” that involved arresting hundreds of suspected Sunni militants throughout Lebanon; the crackdowns on hideouts and cells continued until the summer of 2017. In the short term, this naturally restored a sense of security as militant attacks greatly receded. Yet it also resulted in the overcrowding of the country’s prison and justice systems—the effects of which could now make matters worse by raising the specter of long-term radicalization. The scale of the challenge is indeed unprecedented. While Lebanese prisons were originally designed to house a total of 2,700 detainees, official estimates in the late 2000s put the number at 4,700 inmates, and, by 2016, over 7,000.<sup>20</sup> Most of the new detainees are charged with having ties to Syrian rebel groups deemed “terrorists” by the state. “The crisis in Syria puts major strains on our prison system,” admitted a high-level prison official. “We don’t have the capacity to deal with it.”

To respond to this challenge, the Ministry of Interior, which in theory oversees all prisons, has encouraged the Ministry of Defense to hold a growing number of inmates in its own detention and interrogation facilities, such as those in Yarze and Rihaniye. Officially, military officers explain that “we don’t keep the prisoners in such prisons very long—only during the investigation.” But other officials acknowledge that, in reality, inmates are often kept there for much longer. Worse, the Lebanese Center for Human Rights reported that “arrests, torture and detention in these places continue with impunity” and accused the military intelligence branch of violating human rights, extracting forced confessions, and keeping inmates in prolonged isolation.<sup>21</sup> A former prisoner in

Rihaniye alleged that, while being detained there, he was forcibly “sleep-deprived” for days, “beaten up,” and the victim of “sexual perversions.”

And when the detainees are finally transferred to a civilian prison—sometimes after six or seven months in military custody—they face conditions that put their health at further risk. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that have visited detention centers often stress that prison overcrowding has not been matched by efforts to renovate and upgrade the infrastructure and to address a shortage of medical staff, thus resulting in the rapid degradation of the health and hygiene situation. In 2015, the Ministry of Interior publicized the renovation of some of the buildings of the infamous Roumieh prison, but officials at Tripoli's Qobbe prison, the second largest in the country, complain that “Roumieh monopolizes the whole budget” and, as a result, “other prisons are neglected.” The bad state of Lebanese prisons, as well as the violent treatment some inmates have experienced, also puts their psychological well-being in harm's way. One NGO working with prisoners noted the increase in undiagnosed mental diseases. It assessed that as many as 75.8 percent of inmates at the Roumieh prison suffer from obsessive compulsive disorders, 60.6 percent from depression, and 43.4 percent from anxiety disorders.<sup>22</sup> The situation is worsened by long waiting periods before detainees can face trial. Statistics show that an estimated 66 percent of all detainees have not yet been judged—and over half will have to wait six months to over three years.<sup>23</sup>

There is a growing risk that these quickly deteriorating conditions might radicalize inmates. A social worker who regularly visits prisoners expressed deep concern after noticing in recent months a sharp increase in hate speech targeting the state. One community leader who works with newly liberated inmates was even more alarmed, arguing that prison conditions had turned regular criminals into “time bombs,” driven by a thirst for revenge against society. Sunni prisoners seem to be particularly susceptible to radicalization as they form the majority of inmates and tend to think they suffer from more discrimination than others. The growing sectarian and antistate components of their speech paves the way for the spread of militant Salafi ideologies in prison. One cleric who gives spiritual advice to Sunni inmates noticed that jihadi groups like Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Islamic State have recently earned popularity in prison, with their discourse providing “meaning” to the prisoners' sense of injustice, especially after all of Lebanon's major Sunni politicians acquiesced to the security plan.

An additional factor contributing to the spread of militant Salafi ideologies in prison is the absence of a rigorous mechanism to classify detainees according to their crime—which means that minor dealers and thieves mix in cells with jihadi ideologues and leaders. The officer in charge of a major prison in Lebanon said that this situation is unfortunate, as it has led to repeated instances of “brainwashing” in which criminals become Salafi militants. Even in the Roumieh prison that, on paper, separates “Islamists” and “non-Islamist” inmates by detaining them in different blocks, categorizations are fluid. A high-level prison official, for instance, regrets that most of the detainees in “Islamist” Block B were at first more akin to *qabadayat* and local gangsters hostile to authority than to hardened Salafi militants; after putting them in the same jail as jihadi ideologues and Islamist leaders, many had changed. The official insisted that both the recent rehabilitation of Block B and the construction in 2018 of a high-security facility to detain the “most dangerous terrorists” provide room for hope, but he also acknowledged that, in the meantime, radicalization would remain a problem. A former prisoner in Roumieh's Block B confirmed the extent of the challenge by recounting that some of his friends joined militant Salafi organizations after sharing a cell with members. Rather than preventing and sanctioning terrorism, he concluded, prisons were “producing” it.

## The Failures of Dar al-Fatwa

In theory, Dar al-Fatwa, the state-sanctioned body dealing with Sunni religious and civil matters and managing the mosques, seems well placed to counter radicalization in prisons, yet a lack of means



and the interference of politicians complicate this task. After nearly a decade of paralysis due to an internal crisis linked to the management style of its mufti, or head, Mohammed Rashid Qabbani, the 2014 election of a more dynamic head, Abdel-Latif Derian, provided hope that the body would become proactive.<sup>24</sup> A high-level prison official expressed confidence that if the moderate clerics affiliated with Dar al-Fatwa were more involved in providing relief and sound religious guidance to the Sunni inmates, it would balance radical voices in prison and contain the appeal of extremism. Religious dignitaries insist that, since 2015, they have been sending clerics to deliver Friday sermons in Lebanese prisons where they have preached “tolerance and moderation.” But the scope of their influence still appears to be severely limited. An official at the Qobbe prison started laughing when asked about the activities of Dar al-Fatwa clerics in his facility: “We only see them coming for an hour on Friday mornings—they are not doing much here!” A former inmate at the Roumieh prison said that Dar al-Fatwa had become widely unpopular because it visited too infrequently and did not speak out enough against prison conditions.

One key issue that restricts Dar al-Fatwa’s activities in prisons is a severe lack of funding. While, for instance, the area of North Lebanon comprises five detention facilities housing thousands of inmates, the religious institution’s local branch can only afford to employ three clerics to deliver religious lectures. One cleric acknowledged that “so much more needs to be done. . . . We see that prisoners are in daily contact with terrorist convicts. What we should do is provide them with moderate religious education but right now we don’t have the budget, which means that we are too few and we don’t have enough time.” It is paradoxical that Dar al-Fatwa faces financial constraints because the endowments it has are plentiful and, if invested, could generate enough revenue for itself. For example, in the city of Tripoli alone, Dar al-Fatwa has inherited over 1,200 properties—from plots of land and dilapidated houses to new buildings—and yet runs a small budget. The roots of this contradiction might lie in the red tape plaguing the institution’s work and in the lack of business management training for clerics, but these explanations will not stop the accusations of indifference or corruption that tarnish Dar al-Fatwa’s reputation.

Notably, the consequences of Dar al-Fatwa’s financial woes extend beyond the prison cells. Budgetary constraints also limit the body’s ability to oversee the nature of religious speech in the country’s mosques. First, Dar al-Fatwa is unable to pay a decent salary to Sunni clerics, which might push some of them to seek additional funding from the more generous Salafi associations or Islamist groups accused of being terrorists. An official in Dar al-Fatwa summed up his frustration: “We can only afford to pay some clerics \$100 a month while Gulf-based associations give an extra \$1,000,” he said before adding that the imbalance restricts Dar al-Fatwa’s capacity to control sermons. This problem is particularly acute in marginalized districts where the body’s influence is low; in the neighborhood of Bab al-Tabbaneh in Tripoli, it only controls two mosques out of fifteen. Second, budgetary constraints signify that it suffers from a shortage of administrative staff, making it difficult to hold examinations to verify the religious credentials of its new clerics. This means that Dar al-Fatwa is prone to infiltration by extremist elements. Two of its clerics, Omar al-Atrash and Khaled Hoblos, were arrested in 2014 and 2015, respectively, for having ties to jihadi groups.<sup>25</sup>

Yet despite the urgency to reform the way it is funded and its clerics trained, no significant change has happened to Dar al-Fatwa since the 2014 election of Abdel-Latif Derian as mufti. This paralysis seems to stem mainly from the meddling of Sunni politicians who have traditionally used their leverage at the heart of the institution to engage in patronage, promote cronies, and politicize religious speech so as to serve their interests. One cleric employed by Dar al-Fatwa spoke for many others when he lambasted the institution’s lack of political independence: “Politicians disagree with each other on virtually all issues except on their common interest to keep us at Dar al-Fatwa dependent upon them.” Currently, the mufti is elected by an electoral college comprising nearly a third of politicians, who also constitute a fourth of the Higher Islamic Council overseeing Dar al-Fatwa. These politicians are mostly members of the Future Movement party, which means that they exercise a significant degree of influence over the religious institution’s policy and speech. It is thus hardly surprising that the mufti is regularly criticized for being a “stooge” of the Future Movement—

not only in Salafi circles but also in the wider community of pious Sunnis. Such accusations have become even more pronounced since 2015, when Derian publicly praised the party's head, Saad Hariri, for endorsing the presidential nomination of Sleiman Frangieh, a Christian lawmaker controversial with many Sunnis because of his close ties to the Syrian regime. And when Hariri backtracked months later to instead support the candidacy of Michel Aoun, who is close to Hezbollah, Derian again backed his choice and gave it religious sanction.<sup>26</sup> "Yes, the Mufti is a friend of the Future Movement," summed up one of Derian's close advisers. Yet it is precisely this type of political meddling in religious affairs that weakens the credibility of Dar al-Fatwa's centrist message and slows down the pace of reforms—thus hampering its ability to raise funds and to initiate counter-extremism projects.

## The Securitization of Refugees

Reportedly, another group likely to radicalize and embrace jihadism is the community of Syrian refugees in Lebanon. This process of securitization—through which refugees are increasingly viewed as a terrorist threat—largely stems from anecdotal evidence and the growing populist tone of state rhetoric. Lebanon's social affairs minister has warned that an alleged 100,000 refugees have "received military training," and the foreign minister has argued that "terrorists have infiltrated the refugees," leading politicians allied with Assad to call for cooperation with the Syrian army and the return of all refugees to Syria.<sup>27</sup> Beyond the political calculations behind such statements, there have also been more "scientific" reports suggesting that refugees in Lebanon are allegedly prone to radicalization.<sup>28</sup> These reports, however, seem more driven by widespread clichés than by hard data from the ground. Statistical evidence instead suggests that Salafi militant groups such as Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham and the Islamic State do not enjoy significant support from Syrian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>29</sup>

There is, of course, a limited number of Syrians who have in recent years joined jihadi groups and participated in operations against the Lebanese army and suicide attacks against civilians. Yet it is remarkable how resilient the Syrian refugee community has broadly been to the extremist message, particularly given their increasing vulnerability to considerable challenges in Lebanon. Data collected by the United Nations (UN) suggest that their socioeconomic situation has severely deteriorated since 2012. Seventy-six percent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon now live in poverty or extreme poverty (up from 49 percent in 2014), 87 percent are indebted, and up to 91 percent are food insecure.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, their legal situation is fast becoming precarious. Difficulties in paying the \$200 annual fee and providing a Lebanese sponsor—both required by the General Security agency to renew their residency permits—are pushing a growing number of refugees into illegal residency. Some refugees are even avoiding registration with UN agencies, thus depriving them of aid. To address this issue, the General Security relaxed some of its conditions for residency renewal in early 2017, but Syrian refugees continue to report facing significant challenges. By late 2017, a staggering 74 percent of refugees above 15 years old still did not have legal residency. In addition to driving them further into poverty and debt, this also makes it harder for them to fulfill key tasks, such as finding a job and enrolling their children in local schools. Finally, they are suffering from worsening insecurity. Figures from 2015 suggest that more than a fourth of Syrian refugees in Lebanon "do not feel safe," but the statistic may now be higher as anti-refugee protests, harassment, and evictions have since multiplied.<sup>31</sup>

In theory, this situation could easily reinforce the appeal of ideological extremism among refugees, particularly as Lebanese Salafi activists have been working to spread their worldview by providing refugees with much-needed aid. Officially, of course, they are simply engaged in charitable activities. "We pay the rent of the refugees, and we provide them food and diesel," proudly stated the leader of a Salafi NGO in North Lebanon. He went on to point out that he liaises with other Salafi-oriented charities in the rest of the country and that their humanitarian impact is greater than ever before, especially as the private Kuwaiti and Saudi donations on which they rely have only increased. But, in

reality, they also hope that their charitable work will earn them new Salafi followers. “Our help is unconditional,” stressed the Salafi leader, but “of course, we also run religious classes and hope that our message can convince some refugees.” In some cases, these Islamist activists might even push the refugees to return to Syria to join one of the many large and powerful Salafi rebel brigades fighting the regime and its allies. “We do educate the refugees about the situation in Syria,” cautiously acknowledged the head of the Salafi NGO. “We teach them how to be effective citizens—not just passive refugees.”

Despite such efforts, though, there is no evidence pointing to an indoctrination of the refugees. In fact, the type of indirect pressure that Salafi activists sometimes put on them can even be counterproductive. A refugee in Tripoli echoed others when he expressed his distrust of local Islamists who “think that we are betraying the revolution and should instead be fighting.” Moreover, the fact that Lebanon’s 1 million Syrian refugees are scattered throughout the country and across cities and small settlements rather than concentrated in one area makes it harder for the well-organized but still small Lebanese Salafi community to extend its reach. And, even when their influence affects a settlement, Salafi activists still have to compete with Syrian clerics who are often best attuned to the refugees’ religious customs and traditions. This is especially the case when the Syrian clerical presence is organized like in the case of Akkar, the stronghold of the Commission of Syrian Scholars (Hay’at al-‘Ulama al-Suriyin), a gathering of refugee clerics who are mostly Sufis and from Homs, like many other refugees. “We teach Islam the way it was taught back in Syria,” explained one of its leaders, noting that the group holds courses, celebrates weddings, and issues fatwas on a range of matters. “Through our activities, we were successful in limiting and curbing ideological extremism.”

Thus it appears that while a limited number of Syrian refugees join jihadi groups and go on to carry out various attacks, the reasons have little to do with Salafi ideology. Rather, the nature of refugees’ relationships to such groups seems instrumental and fluid. One refugee who had been about to return to Syria and join Hay’at Tahrir al-Sham said he was inspired by the idea of “taking revenge” for the siege of Aleppo, during which relatives died, but he changed course after being offered a job in Lebanon and saw his prospects brighten. A report by International Alert confirms the extent to which processes of radicalization and deradicalization, sometimes held as evident from the outside, are actually far from linear.<sup>32</sup> This particularly seems to be the case with younger refugees. The head of a school for Syrian youth in Lebanon noticed a correlation between, on the one hand, the rise of extremist beliefs and aggressive behavior among some refugees and, on the other, the extent to which they have been able to recreate communities of solidarity and trust after having suffered traumas. A large-scale investigation by the NGO Save the Children demonstrated that as many as two-thirds of Syrian children are said to have lost a loved one, had their house bombed, or suffered war-related injuries—experiences that likely underlie the fact that 71 percent of them now have post-traumatic stress disorder and 80 percent have become more aggressive.<sup>33</sup> Rather than viewing, as some officials do, Syrian refugees as a security threat—accentuating patterns of marginalization and resentment—they should be treated, educated, and empowered.

## The Limits of Salafi Expansionism

There is no doubt that the revolutionary discourse endorsed by militant Salafi groups and clerics has piqued the interest of Lebanese, Palestinian, and Syrian Sunni communities—as shown by the quick growth of these groups in Lebanon in recent years. Yet, it has also become evident that there are limits to a true expansion of extremist thinking. One reason is that proportionally few within Lebanon’s Salafi community sympathize with the Islamic State, an organization many call “criminal” and “terrorist” for killing so many civilians. According to several Salafi clerics, the group did initially succeed to attract some of their younger followers who showed “enthusiasm” after its declaration of the so-called caliphate and others who, in the context of political chaos in Lebanon and sheer violence in the region, became convinced of the need to establish an “Islamic entity.” But they also

pointed out that grassroots support for the Islamic State had almost entirely disappeared, replaced by a sense that it had used Salafi texts and ideas “for its interests” and that “it does not represent Islam.”

Some speak more favorably of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, but this is often driven more by admiration for the group's fighting record against the Syrian regime than for its ability to enforce Salafi precepts in the areas it controls. Many also find the two groups to be “two faces of the same coin” and, seven years into the Syrian uprising, express disillusionment.

Another reason is that Lebanon's Salafis are bitterly divided along ideological and political lines. Indeed, Salafism is a broad school of religious thought advocating for a return to the puritanical practices associated with early Islam more than a structured movement with a set of clearly articulated political ideas. Throughout the region, therefore, Salafis are fractured among those who eschew politics to focus on proselytizing and those who believe that political involvement matters. Lebanon is no exception, but given the polarized nature of its local politics, Hezbollah's growing clout, and the war in Syria, another powerful line of fracture relates to which political line Salafis should adopt. These divisions have sometimes become heated, pitting the Hay'at al-'Ulama al-Muslimin, a gathering of mostly Salafi clerics who support the rebellion, against the Liqa al-Salafi, a much smaller platform that one of its leaders claims “represents real Salafism” but is, in fact, close to Hezbollah. Beyond these ideological and political feuds sometimes also lie bitter personal and financial rivalries between clerics who are thirsty for attention and compete over sources of funding. As a result, their own divisions are often irreconcilable, hampering Salafism's credibility.

Moreover, even the militant Salafi clerics who support ideas close to those of al-Qaeda or the Islamic State may help these organizations in Iraq and Syria on moral or logistical grounds but have traditionally rejected the idea of turning Lebanon from a land of support to a land of jihad. One such figure argued that it is impossible to create an Islamic state in Lebanon given the high degree of religious diversity. “Lebanon isn't black or white—it's grey and, as activists, we have to be a part of that society rather than applying on it an imported ideology.” Yet perhaps their realism also stems from an acute awareness of the current balance of power, which would overwhelmingly favor Hezbollah and the Lebanese army in the event of a confrontation. This, at least, seems to have been one of the lessons that some of them drew from the bloody clashes between the Lebanese security forces and the partisans of Salafi clerics Ahmed al-Assir and Khaled Hoblos that rocked Sidon in 2013 and Tripoli in 2014. “These attempts at launching a revolutionary Salafi movement clearly failed,” argued a figure close to the latter to justify why he does not want Lebanon to become “another Iraq or Syria.”

A final factor limiting Salafi expansionism is that while corners of Lebanon's Sunni community might be attracted by the fierce type of political discourse embraced by some Salafi clerics, this by no means seems to translate into an actual embrace of Salafi ideology. For instance, polling data have recently shown that local Sunnis overwhelmingly oppose Hezbollah's intervention in Syria whereas Shias support it and that views are equally split on the issue of Iran's role in the Middle East. But this political polarization has not significantly affected interfaith relations in Lebanon, with the number of Sunnis who accept that Shias are Muslims—a view opposed by Salafi activists—remaining comparatively high.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, when it comes to religious practice, evidence suggests that Salafism still represents a minor trend in a Lebanese Sunni society traditionally quite secularized.<sup>35</sup> Even in Tripoli, often portrayed as a “bastion of Islamism,” a poll showed that while 90 percent of the mostly Sunni Muslim youth “perform their religious duties regularly,” only 9.2 percent agreed with typical Salafi religious precepts, such as finding it “obligatory” that women wear a *niqab* (full body veil).<sup>36</sup> There, Sufi traditions are resilient; they take pride in coexisting with the Christian minority and celebrating the Prophet's birthday—both taboos in Salafism. And, when it comes to electoral behavior, in Tripoli and elsewhere in Lebanon, local populations are more likely to vote for one of the area's leading *za'im* (political boss) than for any of the Islamist parties which, according to polls, typically do not receive higher than 5 percent of the votes.<sup>37</sup> This all suggests that, despite

Salafism's rising profile, the religious practices and belief systems of Lebanon's Sunnis are still situated far from those held by the Salafi mainstream.

## Addressing a Political Revolt

In conclusion, it seems reassuring that the primary drivers of Salafi militancy in Lebanon might not be as religious or ideological as they appear at first glance, since it points to the continued unlikelihood that parts of the country will act as bases of support for militant groups. Yet it also means that if policymakers wish to contain the threat and prevent its further growth, they should address the roots of this inherently sociopolitical revolt. Even though terrorist attacks have greatly receded since 2014, giving a false sense of stability, militant groups are still able to recruit new sympathizers and they could take advantage of both the political turbulences that might precede upcoming parliamentary polls and the looming instability in security flashpoints such as Lebanon's Palestinian camps and the Beqaa Valley. And, then, the current security-centric approach might no longer be enough to contain them.

While there is no specific profile for the typical recruit of Salafi militant groups, the prevalence of the phenomenon of Qabaday Salafism in deprived neighborhoods nonetheless suggests that social and urban marginalization acts as a driver of recruitment. A key priority for the Lebanese government should therefore be to design an ambitious nationwide plan aimed at reducing unemployment, mitigating the spread of the underground economy, developing infrastructure that provides public spaces and deals with overcrowding, and fixing a crumbling public school system. Only confidence in the state and in its capacity to assure the welfare of marginalized citizens will quash the thirst for a social revolt. Qabaday Salafism, rather than being viewed through the lens of security only, should thus be first understood as a symptom of the degrading social environment in which it embeds itself.

The context of Lebanon's reaction to the Syrian crisis since 2011 has also made matters worse. While the country's political parties all officially pledged to disassociate themselves from the turmoil next door, in reality, the government did not prevent Hezbollah from intervening militarily on the sides of the Syrian regime even as it jailed Sunnis fighting for the rebellion. This blatant double standard is leading to accusations among the Sunni public that the Lebanese state has become dominated by Hezbollah and the Shias—a political discourse long spearheaded by the Salafis but which has become more mainstream in recent years. To avoid this type of speech from becoming even more prevalent, steps should be taken to pressure Hezbollah into withdrawing the bulk of its troops from Syria, to discuss the future of its arsenal, and to issue a partial amnesty for Sunni militants who may have fought in Syria but not in Lebanon. Lebanon's prison and justice systems should also be urgently reformed to accelerate procedures, improve infrastructure, and ensure the protection of human rights.

Yet the spread of Salafi militancy—far from merely embodying a Sunni pushback against Hezbollah's domination—is also a response to the Sunni elite's failure at tackling the grievances of their co-religionists. Their fast-declining political credibility became visibly evident after the Future Movement suffered major setbacks in the 2016 municipal elections, and it is now at an all-time low. Crucially, this disaffection with politicians is accompanied by a widespread frustration with the way Dar al-Fatwa's Sunni clerics operate, therefore endangering their moderate message. Thus, before empowering centrist Sunni politicians and clerics, they must reform their ways. On the one hand, Dar al-Fatwa must better manage its funds, train its clerics, and monitor the content of religious speech; on the other hand, Sunni politicians must give the institution greater independence and leverage. To regain the trust of their electorate, Sunni politicians must also make their work more transparent, embrace civil society, encourage the rise of a new generation of young activists, and commit much more effort and money to help the less privileged sections of society. The current state of relative political stability offers a unique window of opportunity for policymakers of all stripes to come together and enact much-needed sociopolitical reforms.

# Acknowledgments

The author thanks Maha Yahya, Lori Merritt, and Michael Young for their valuable comments and edits on various drafts of this paper. Gratitude also goes to Wissam Tayar, Ibrahim Chalhoub, and Moustafa Hajar for their constant support and to the fifty-five political, religious, and civil society actors who kindly granted their trust and time during interviews.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cendrilla Merhej, "N'am, Da'esh qadma ila lubnan" [Yes, ISIS is coming to Lebanon], *El-Nashra*, March 29, 2017, <https://www.elnashra.com/news/show/1089653/نعم-داعش-قادمة-الى-لبنان>. See also Antoine Ghattas Saab, "ISIS Preparing to Declare Islamic Emirate in Lebanon: Sources," *Daily Star*, February 23, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Feb-23/288379-isis-preparing-to-declare-islamic-emirate-in-lebanon-sources.ashx>; Abdel Kafi al-Samad, "ISIS's Victories Revive Fears of Islamic Emirate in North Lebanon," *Al-Akhbar*, June 21, 2014, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/20270>; and Robert Fisk, "ISIS Brings Its War to Lebanon—and It Could Be Key to a Masterplan," *Independent*, August 4, 2014, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-brings-its-war-to-lebanon-and-it-could-be-a-key-part-of-a-masterplan-9648009.html>.

<sup>2</sup>See, for instance, the excellent report on Fatah al-Islam's rise and fall in Lebanon: Tine Gade, *Fatah al-Islam in Lebanon: Between Global and Local Jihad* (Kjeller: Norwegian Defence Research Establishment, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Bilal Y. Saab, "Lebanon at Risk From Salafi-Jihadi Terrorist Cells," *CTC Sentinel* 3, no. 2 (2010).

<sup>4</sup> This paper does not delve into the history of Sunni Islamist militancy in Lebanon, which has been covered in great detail in the following works: Bernard Rougier, *The Sunni Tragedy in the Middle East: Northern Lebanon From al-Qaeda to ISIS* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015); Tine Gade, "Sunni Islamists in Tripoli and the Asad Regime, 1966–2014," *Syria Studies* 7, no.2 (2015): 20–65; Abdul Ghany Imad, "A Topography of Sunni Islamic Organizations and Movements in Lebanon," *Contemporary Arab Affairs* 2, no. 1 (2009): 143–161; and Abdul Ghany Imad, *Al-harakat al-islamiya fi Lubnan: echkaliyat al-din fi mujtam'a mutanaew'a* [The Islamist movements in Lebanon: the problem of religion in a diverse society](Beirut: Dar al-Talia, 2006).

<sup>5</sup>This factor is covered in excellent previous research. See, in particular, Zoltan Pall, *Lebanese Salafis Between the Gulf and Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013); and his more recent paper: Zoltan Pall, "Kuwaiti Salafism and Its Growing Influence in the Levant," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, May 7, 2014, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/05/07/kuwaiti-salafism-and-its-growing-influence-in-levant-pub-55514>. Also see Robert Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon: From Apoliticism to Transnational Jihadism* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> Geneive Abdo, *Salafists and Sectarianism: Twitter and Communal Conflict in the Middle East* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2013); and Rabil, *Salafism in Lebanon*.

<sup>7</sup>Mona Alami, "The Impact of the Syria Conflict on Salafis and Jihadis in Lebanon," Middle East Institute, April 18, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> Adib N'ameh, *El faqr fi madinat Trablus* [Poverty in the city of Tripoli] (Beirut: United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, 2014), 20,

<http://css.escwa.org.lb/ECRI/Docs/UNTripoliexecutive.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>10</sup> On this point, see also sociologist Saoud Al-Mawla's interesting remarks according to which "the mosque remains the focus of social action, having either replaced or augmented the niche traditionally filled by the café amongst the poor and marginalized. The mosques allowed the youth who operated within them to finally become visible, to appear before the rest of society, reversing their previous invisibility. For the youth, the mosque is the first 'liberated' social space they encounter, one in which they have a wide margin of freedom from official, bureaucratic and religious bodies." Saoud Al-Mawla, "Salafis in Lebanon: New Manifestations of a Movement" (Doha, Qatar: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2015), 9–10.

<sup>11</sup> Unless stated otherwise, sources have been kept anonymous at their request.

<sup>12</sup> On the role of the *qabadayat* in Beirut during the 1960s and 1970s and the values they claimed to embody, see Michael Johnson, *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2001).

<sup>13</sup> "Houdou' bi Trablous b'ad mouejahat bein muhtajin wa quwa al-'amn" [Calm in Tripoli after clashes between protesters and security forces], *LBCI Lebanon*, October 14, 2012, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMPzSDoC3\\_s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMPzSDoC3_s).

<sup>14</sup> "Al- qada' el lubnani itlaq sarah Shadi al-Mawlawi aladhi ash'al 'ataqalah shamal Lubnan" [The Lebanese judiciary releases Shadi Mawlawi whose arrest had ignited North Lebanon], *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, July 23, 2012, <http://archive.aawsat.com/details.asp?section=4&issueno=12230&article=678566#.WohJNKjFKUk>.

<sup>15</sup> S'ad Elias, "Mukhabarat al-jaysh al-lubnani tu'alan ehbat mukhatat li tanfiz selselat 'amaliyet entihariye" [Lebanese military intelligence announces that it has thwarted a plot to carry out a series of suicide attacks], *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, January 17, 2015, <http://www.alquds.co.uk/?p=280839>. Also see "Shadi al-Mawlawi 'errab al-entihariyin" [Shadi Mawlawi, godfather of the suicide bombers], *Al-Akhbar*, January 16, 2015, [http://www.mulhak.com/عَرَاب-الانتحاريين-المولوي-شادي-; Antoine Amrieh, "Lebanon's Christian Terror Suspect 'Brainwashed' By Nusra: Neighbors," \*Daily Star\*, January 16, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Jan-16/284324-lebanons-christian-terror-suspect-brainwashed-by-nusra-neighbors.ashx>; and "Au Liban, un jeune chrétien rejoint les rangs du djihad" \[In Lebanon, a young Christian joins the ranks of jihad\], \*Le Point\*, January 18, 2015, \[http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/au-liban-un-jeune-chretien-rejoint-les-rangs-du-djihad-18-01-2015-1897557\\\_24.php\]\(http://www.lepoint.fr/monde/au-liban-un-jeune-chretien-rejoint-les-rangs-du-djihad-18-01-2015-1897557\_24.php\).](http://www.mulhak.com/عَرَاب-الانتحاريين-المولوي-شادي-; Antoine Amrieh, )

<sup>16</sup> Hussein Khreis, "Hkdha harab Shadi al-Mawlawi min 'Ain al-Helwe" [Shadi Mawlawi escaped from Ain al-Hilwe], *Al-Modon*, October 26, 2017, <http://www.almodon.com/politics/2017/10/26/-هكذا-هرب-شادي-المولوي>.

<sup>17</sup> While initial official estimates suggested that 900 had joined the struggle in Syria by 2015, an updated assessment by Lebanese security forces leaked to the pro-Hezbollah daily *Al-Akhbar* suggested that, by early 2017, as many as 6,000 Lebanese and Palestinian Sunnis had departed Lebanon to join armed groups in Syria, with around 1,300 killed on the battlefield. See "6000 'jihadi' ghadaru lubnan lil qital fi suria wal 'airaq" [6,000 'jihadis' left Lebanon to fight in Syria and Iraq], *Al-Akhbar*, February 3, 2017, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/272030>.

<sup>18</sup> "Assir Calls for Jihad in Syria," *Now Lebanon*, April 22, 2013,

<https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/assir-calls-for-jihad-in-syria1>.

<sup>19</sup> Mona Alami, "Roumieh Has Become a Radicalism Factory," *Daily Star*, September 3, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2014/Sep-03/269382-roumieh-has-become-a-radicalism-factory.ashx>.

<sup>20</sup> Figures retrieved from the Ministry of Interior. Also see Lebanese Center for Human Rights, *Prisons in Lebanon: Humanitarian and Legal Concerns* (Beirut: Lebanese Center for Human Rights, 2010).

<sup>21</sup> Lebanese Center for Human Rights, *Prisons in Lebanon: Humanitarian and Legal Concerns*, 41. Also see Nadim Houry and Graeme Reid, eds., *'It's Part of the Job': Ill-Treatment and Torture of Vulnerable Groups in Lebanese Police Stations* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2013); and Lebanese Center for Human Rights, *Women Behind Bars: Arbitrary Detention and Torture* (Beirut: Lebanese Center for Human Rights, 2015).

<sup>22</sup> Catharsis Lebanon, *Mental Health in Lebanese Prisons: Prevalence Study of Severe Mental Illness Among Inmates in Roumieh and Baabda Prisons* (Beirut: Catharsis Lebanon, 2015), 37.

<sup>23</sup> Lebanese Center for Human Rights, *Prisons in Lebanon: Humanitarian and Legal Concerns*, 49.

<sup>24</sup> Raphaël Lefèvre, "Lebanon's Dar al-Fatwa and the Search for Moderation," *Sada*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 5, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> "Lebanon Issues Arrest Warrant for Suspected Terrorist Sheikh," *Now Lebanon*, February 4, 2014, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/lebanonnews/533902-judge-issues-arrest-warrant-for-omar-al-atrash>.

<sup>26</sup> "Lebanon's Mufti Backs Hariri's Presidential Initiative," *Daily Star*, December 22, 2015, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2015/Dec-22/328540-lebanon-mufti-backs-hariris-presidential-initiative.ashx>.

<sup>27</sup> "Derbas: Over 100,000 Syrian Refugees Received Military Training," *Daily Star*, October 19, 2014, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Oct-19/274583-derbas-over-100000-syrian-refugees-received-military-training.ashx>; "Terrorists Infiltrating Refugee Ranks: Bassil," *Daily Star*, July 1, 2016, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Jul-01/359935-terrorists-infiltrating-refugee-ranks-bassil.ashx>; and "Aoun Calls for Return of Syrian Refugees to 'Safe Zones,'" *An-Nahar*, February 3, 2017, <https://en.annahar.com/article/534236-aoun-calls-for-return-of-syrian-refugees-to-safe-zones>.

<sup>28</sup> Oytun Orhan, *The Situation of Syrian Refugees in the Neighboring Countries: Findings, Conclusions and Recommendations* (Ankara: Center for Middle Eastern Strategic Studies, 2014), 57.

<sup>29</sup> In November 2016, a survey of 2,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon suggested that while a little over half sympathize with "the opposition," they all almost invariably cited the Free Syrian Army (FSA) as their first choice to express support for the rebels. See Daniel Corstange, "What Syrians Want: New Survey Data Show Which Side Refugees Support," *Foreign Affairs*, September 14, 2016, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/syria/2016-09-14/what-syrians-want>. A survey conducted by Sayara International in late 2014 in Akkar, where nearly a fourth of Syrian refugees in Lebanon live, confirmed that there was "no express support for Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State" among respondents. See "Drivers of Instability, Conflict and Radicalization: A Snapshot From Akkar," Sayara International, April 16, 2015, 18, <http://sayarainternational.com/drivers-of-instability-conflict-and-radicalization-a-snapshot-from-akkar/>.



<sup>30</sup> UN Children's Fund, UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and UN World Food Program, *VAYSR 2017: Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (Geneva: UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> The survey included 1,200 Syrian refugees in Lebanon. See Carole Alsharabati and Jihad Nammour, *Survey on Perceptions of Syrian Refugees in Lebanon* (Beirut: Institut des Sciences Politiques de l'Université Saint Joseph, 2015), 12.

<sup>32</sup> Caroline Brooks, Meg Aubrey, Rosie Aubrey, and Francis Brodrick, *Why Young Syrians Choose to Fight: Vulnerability and Resilience to Recruitment By Violent Extremist Groups in Syria* (London: International Alert, 2016).

<sup>33</sup> Alun McDonald, *Invisible Wounds: The Impact of Six Years of War on the Mental Health of Syria's Children* (Fairfield, CT: Save the Children, 2017), 2.

<sup>34</sup> A poll conducted by *Now Lebanon* in 2014 suggested that while 60.1 percent of Lebanon's Shias supported Hezbollah's intervention in Syria, as many as 85.8 percent of Sunnis rejected it. See "Views on Hezbollah's Involvement," *Now Lebanon*, July 8, 2014, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/554835-views-on-hezbollahs-involvement-in-syria>. Another study found that while 86 percent of Lebanon's Shias reported having "positive views" of Iran, only 8 percent of Sunnis did so. See Richard Wike, "Lebanon's Precarious Politics," Pew Research Center, November 15, 2007, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2007/11/15/lebanons-precarious-politics/>. However, the political nature of this sectarian polarization does not seem to affect most Lebanese Sunnis' views of Shias as a religious community. According to a large-scale survey, 77 percent of Lebanon's Sunnis "accept Shias as Muslims"—reflecting that 90 percent of the Shias "feel free to practice their faith" in Lebanon. These are two of the highest percentages found in the Middle East. See Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity* (Washington, DC: Pew Research Center, 2012); and "Many Sunnis and Shias Worry About Religious Conflict," Pew Research Center, November 7, 2013.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, polling data from Richard Wike and Juliana Menasce Horowitz, "Lebanon's Muslims: Relatively Secular and Pro-Christian," Pew Research Center, July 26, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Robert Rabil, *Religion, National Identity and Confessional Politics in Lebanon: The Challenge of Islamism* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 50. The figures come from a statistical survey on the religious practices of 1,000 Sunni Tripolitans, carried out in 2010 under the supervision of Dr. Husam Sbat at al-Jinan University and kindly provided to the author.

<sup>37</sup> 'Abd al-Kafi al-Samad "Islamiyou Trablous: enqisamat tazid 'faqurhum' al-entikhabi faqaran" [Islamists of Tripoli: divisions increase their 'electoral poverty'], *Al-Akhbar*, January 12, 2018, <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/289158>.

End of document

---

Carnegie Middle East Center

Emir Bechir Street, Lazariéh Tower  
Bldg. No. 2026 1210, 5th flr.  
Downtown Beirut, P.O.Box 11-1061

Riad El Solh, Lebanon

Phone

+961 1 99 15 91

Fax

+961 1 99 15 91

Contact By Email

© 2018 All Rights Reserved