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Saida and Jezzine: South 1 Electoral District Pre-elections Dynamics and Atmospherics

Conflict Analysis Report – April 2018



Supported by:

This report was written by an independent researcher as part of a conflict analysis consultancy for the UNDP “Peace Building in Lebanon” Project to inform and support UNDP Lebanon programming, as well as interventions from other partners in the framework of the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan (LCRP). Through these reports, UNDP is aiming at providing quality analysis to LCRP Partners on the evolution of local dynamics, highlighting how local and structural issues have impacted and interacted with the consequences of the Syrian crisis in Lebanon. This report has been produced with the support of the Department for International Development (UKDFID).

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Acronyms

FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FM	Future Movement
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
JI	Jama'a Islamiya
KII	Key Informant Interview
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
LF	Lebanese Forces
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PM	Prime Minister
PNP	Populist Nasserite Party
UKDFID	United Kingdom Department for International Development
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Work Agency
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

I. Introduction

This Conflict Analysis Report is part of a series of research studies commissioned by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and funded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development (UKDFID) that aim to assess the recent developments, atmospherics, and programming opportunities in Saida and Jezzine. A recent study by ARK Group DMCC and UNDP has shown that the parliamentary elections in May 2018 impacted dynamics between people in different cities and towns, both among the Lebanese themselves and between them and Syrians or Palestinians. The study showed that 81.6% of people from the Saida area and 73.5% of people from the Jezzine area have expressed a higher concern than others that the parliamentary elections were highly impacting their internal dynamics and leading to more tensions.¹ Hence, this report is designed to discuss and analyse the current situation and conflict triggers, and present any efforts or suggestions that could mitigate rising tensions.

The South 1 electoral district is uniquely divided. It is the only district in Lebanon that joins two separate areas without borders, since the villages of Saida were added to the South 2 electoral district. 'South 1' district encompasses Saida City and the Caza of Jezzine, which are different politically, developmentally, demographically, and in terms of electoral agendas and programs. This might help explain the aggressive and populist attitude among certain candidates who, in most cases, diverted from developmental issues to focus on political and familial ones. The highly tensed rhetoric was reflected on the political electoral bases and had manifested itself through quarrels and assaults on individuals, sometimes via billboards and ads, but most commonly on social media.

¹ "Ark & UNDP, 'Regular Perceptions Survey on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon: Wave III', (April 2018)"

Saida is also host of the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon: Ein El Helweh. The camp is infamous for being the most tense and unstable in the country, which instilled fear of any instability that could have affected the elections. It is also important to consider the impact of Syrian refugees in both Saida and Jezzine. The case of refugees is one of the topics that political parties used in their campaigns, stressing that it adds to the sectarian feelings and the fear of instability.

This report aims to understand how the various issues affect the noted rise in perceptions of potential instability among the citizens of both Saida and Jezzine, as mentioned in the Ark study.

II. Objectives

The research for this report studied the pre-electoral situation in both Saida and Jezzine to assess local dynamics and how the parliamentary elections could affect them. It provides a qualitative analysis based on the information from the Key Informants (KI) interviewed and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs).

Some of the key questions that this report considers are

- 1) What are the main issues identified to be sources of tension (both intra-Lebanese and Lebanese-Syrian/Lebanese-Palestinian) in Saida and Jezzine?
 - b. Are they interrelated?
 - c. Are they being affected by the elections?
- 2) What are the dynamics/relations between key actors who play a role in raising tensions in the identified areas?
 - c. Are there sectarian dynamics that play a role in fuelling these tensions?
 - d. Are they elections-related?
 - e. Are they resource-scarcity or service-related?
 - f. What role do refugee-host

community issues play in the development of these tensions?

III. Methodology

This study was conducted between March and April 2018. The above questions were answered using qualitative data collection tools that included the following:

1) Primary Data:

b. Key Informant Interviews:

Interviews with stakeholders from both Saida and Jezzine, including municipal members, activists, social entrepreneurs, and refugees (both Syrian and Palestinian) served as a main resource of data and captured certain nuances in terms of relationships and dynamics. These one-to-one meetings led to a better understanding of developments, dynamics, and priorities in each municipality immediately before the parliamentary elections on May 6. The initial meeting was held with the UNDP South Area Manager, who recommended a list of key stakeholders to be interviewed. These key stakeholders were then asked to further recommend civil society members and local authority figures for possible interviews.

c. Focus Group Discussions: Three focus group discussions were organized in both Palestinian and Syrian communities and included women, youth, and civil society activists, among others. One of the three FGDs was held with Syrian refugees. It was gender-mixed and involved four females and five males. The other two FGDs were held with Palestinian refugees; one involved nine

females and the other eight males. The FGDs were meant to highlight a community perspective—the refugee communities in particular—while the key informant interviews reflected a Lebanese leadership perspective along with that of a couple of Palestinian activists.

2) Secondary Data:

c. Desk Study and Background

Analysis: This included reviewing UNDP's reports related to the area, especially those uploaded on UNHCR's Refugees Operational Portal² or shared on the Lebanon Support website.³ The desk study and background analysis also included related maps or documents that provided the needed area background and the previously identified themes or priorities. Reports by other INGOs and donors were also taken into consideration as secondary data sources. (Annex 1)

d. Geo-located Mapping of Conflicts

in Lebanon: Monitoring online data, mainly the Geo-located Mapping of Conflicts in Lebanon map⁴ (hosted by Lebanon Support) to keep track of what is being recorded in the media and elsewhere in terms of registered/tracked conflicts.

3) Stakeholders Analysis:

Using both the primary and secondary data sets, a Stakeholders Analysis was conducted to analyse key relations, conflict dynamics, triggers, dividers, and possible connectors and their roles in contributing positively or negatively to the situation.

² <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria>

³ <http://lebanon-support.org>

⁴ <http://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/map>

IV. Context

While the Lebanese people prepared for the parliamentary elections in May 2018, after the parliament self-extended its term twice since the last elections in 2009, local dynamics might have shifted as political alliances changed to cater for electoral gains. As many of the Lebanese towns and villages are still healing from the consequences of the municipal elections in 2016, attention focused on social awareness to avoid an outbreak of any dormant social tension.

The local context in both Saida and Jezzine continued to be affected by the overall national context. Intense political divisions persisted, especially over long-standing issues such as Hizballah's arms⁵ and its participation in the Syrian war, the general amnesty law, corruption related issues, etc. Another issue that divided political parties and agendas was the strategies for dealing with Syrian and Palestinian refugees. A clearer security grip continued to represent the way the Lebanese state deals with refugee-related matters, alongside a more positive approach being advocated or proclaimed by the Ministries of Social Affairs and of Syrian Displaced Affairs. This was mainly highlighted as Lebanon received support from the international community in CEDRE I and Brussels conferences to counter the effects of the refugee crisis on the country's economy, infrastructure, and various other sectors. The voters' base witnessed new dynamics, such as its expansion to include 600,000 new voters, constituting almost 16% of the total number.⁶ Some of these youths have

⁵ "Despite these shifting alliances, positions are unchanged on the presence of a major political party with potential to mobilize for armed action as an obstacle to meaningful political reform in Lebanon." STATEMENT OF THE NDI PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION TO LEBANON'S 2018 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS March 11 - 15, 2018 Accessed at <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Lebanon%20PEAM%20Statement%20EN.pdf>

⁶ "More than 600,000 eligible voters have turned 21 since 2009 parliamentary elections, representing approximately 16 percent of the total eligible voters which are approximately 3.7 million." Source Ibid

been part of the activism waves that started rising during the 2011 protests—demanding 'change in the sectarian regime' of Lebanon—and later expanded following the garbage crisis in 2015. The various independent groups have developed and organised throughout the past few years. This year, they were running for the parliamentary elections in most of the electoral districts for the first time in Lebanon's history. There were almost 130 independent candidates on various lists who were running both against other political lists and also against each other. Sixty-six of these independent candidates ran under one national coalition called Koullouna Watani⁷ (All for the Nation), while others ran on local lists.

A significant development is the record-breaking 111 female candidates.⁸ Still, these female candidates continue to face numerous structural and cultural challenges. The latest report by Lebanon Support on female participation in the parliamentary elections states that 'the new electoral law passed in June 2017 does not provide women with equal opportunity to be elected, and it is yet to be seen whether it will increase female representation in Parliament. Nevertheless, the historic number of female candidates running in this election demonstrates that women are more determined than ever to increase their presence in Lebanese politics.'⁹

Despite many activists praising the electoral law for including proportional representation, pre-printed ballots, and other reforms, it is still perceived to contain many gaps and could

⁷ Accessed at <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/ru/contents/articles/originals/2018/03/new-law-2018-parliamentary-elections-civil-dynasties-lebanon.html>

⁸ "A total number of 976 candidates registered for the Lebanon spring parliamentary elections this year, including a record-breaking 111 women." Accessed at: <https://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/society/2018/3/7/Record-breaking-number-of-women-running-for-Lebanons-parliamentary-elections>

⁹ Politics, Progress, and Parliament in 2018: Can Lebanese Women Make Headway? Catherine Batruni & Marcus Hallinan Accessed at: http://civilsociety-centre.org/sites/default/files/resources/elections/paper_lebwomen_ls_online.pdf

be enhanced. Some of these gaps, such as a mechanism to monitor expenses and prevent corruption, continue to trigger tensions and led to the resignation of one of the Supervisory Committee members, due to the ‘inability of the committee to perform its duties’¹⁰ because of political interference.

Here is a brief outlook of the local context in Saida and Jezzine. This includes the geographic distribution, the socio-economic and political situations in each of the districts, the presence of refugees, and the social stability and security aspects.

Geography

1) South Governorate is one of Lebanon’s eight governorates. It constitutes 929.6 km² (8.89%) of Lebanon’s area. It includes the three districts of Tyre, Jezzine, and Saida,¹¹ the South’s capital. This governorate has been severely affected by the continuous wars and clashes with Israel. The South Governorate has been home to three religious groups: Sunnis, Christians, and Shiites.

2) Jezzine District is one of the three districts located in the South Governorate. Jezzine, located 22 km from Saida and 62 km from Beirut, is the district’s capital. Jezzine has been known for its pine trees, its tourist/religious attractions,¹² and its agricultural sector. Although political unease controlled the atmosphere of this district for a long time, the municipal elections in 2016 contributed to a slow-paced, positive change as the municipal board has proved to be active and in close contact with the people. The

¹⁰ According to the statement of the Supervisory Committee resigned member, Sylvana Lakkis, who is a rights activist <https://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-Elections/2018/Apr-21/446152-supervisory-committee-member-resigns.ashx>

¹¹ Localiban <http://www.localiban.org/article5075.html>

¹² Ibid

Union of Municipalities in Jezzine, headed by Mayor Khalil Harfouche, includes twenty-eight municipalities.

3) Saida District has been an extremely important and strategic district, serving as the capital of the South Governorate. It is located 40 km south of Beirut and heads the Union of Municipalities of Saida-Zahrani, including sixteen councils.¹³ Saida is famous for being one of the first cities in Lebanon to establish a water port, due to its location on the Mediterranean. Saida has been highly



Figure 1. A State Within a State Within a State, by Rafah Farhat and Zahraa Makki.

influenced by the Hariri family after the appointment of late Prime Minister Rafiq Al Hariri as head of the cabinet. It continues to be one of the family’s strongholds.

4) Saida also hosts the Ein El Helweh Palestinian refugee camp (EHC), established in 1948 and located 3 km south-east of Saida.

¹³ Ibid

It is the largest Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon. According to the 2017 Population and Housing Census in the Palestinian Camps and Gatherings implemented by the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee, the camp and its adjacent area host 27,982 Palestinians, but due to the influx of previously Syrian-based Palestinians, the number has increased to over 30,000.¹⁴ This is almost a third of what other past studies have recorded. They claimed the number has risen from 80,000 to 120,000 refugees living in the camp and its adjacent areas.¹⁵ The camp has been managed by UNRWA since 1950. Ein El Helweh camp has coexisted among Lebanese Sunni, Shiite, Catholic, Maronite, and Jewish communities. Residents of the camp get their services from the municipalities of Saida to the west and Darb al-Seem and Miyeh wa Miyeh to the east.

Political Context

1) Jezzine: The main political parties in Jezzine were the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and the Lebanese Forces (LF), but there was an Amal Movement and Hizballah presence in certain Shiite villages on the caza level. However, for the parliamentary elections, family alliances emerged as independent candidates supported by the Populist Nasserite Party (PNP) ran for election. The current Mayor and Head of the Union is a member of the Free Patriotic Movement. He held a strategic role in Jezzine, handling most of the dialogue between various conflicting parties, whether internally (families and Christian political parties) or externally (other political parties in the region).

2) Saida: The upper hand in the political scene in Saida was still with the Hariri family. The Populist Nasserite Party (PNP) continued to regain force to counterbalance the influence of the Future Movement (FM), as did the Jama'a Islamiya and a number of families. The political powers in Ein El Helweh camp also influenced the political situation in the city. Representatives of PLO, Hamas, Al Jihad Al Islami, Osbat Al Ansar, and others were leading groups who were often involved in political tensions inside the camp, a situation reflected on the streets and impacting the residents around the camp. The numerous city cafes constituted platforms for political enthusiasts to pledge allegiance to one party rather than the other. They also presented a rich recruitment base.

In total, four lists were competing in this electoral district:

¹⁴ <http://www.lpdc.gov.lb/lpdc-publications/key-findings-report/399/en>

¹⁵ Marwan Ghandour, Who is in Ain El Helweh? Middle East Digest <http://www.middleeastdigest.com/pages/index/14379/who-is-ain-al-hilweh>

لائحة صيدا و جزين معا - جزين صيدا



زياد أسود 
مرشح عن المقعد الماروني

The 'Saida Wa Jezzine Maan' List¹⁶

Ziad Aswad (FPM, Maronite – Jezzine)



سليم خوري 
مرشح عن المقعد الروم كاثوليك

Salim Khoury (FPM, Catholic – Jezzine)



عبد الرحمن البزري 
مرشح عن المقعد السني

Abdel Rahman el Bizri (Independent, Sunni – Saida)



امل ابو زيد 
مرشح عن المقعد الماروني

Amal Abou Zeid (FPM, Maronite – Jezzine)



بسام حمود 
مرشح عن المقعد السني

Bassam Hammoud (JI, Sunni – Saida)

لائحة قدرة التغيير - جزين صيدا



عجاج حداد 
مرشح عن المقعد الروم كاثوليك

The 'Qudrat Al Taghyeer' List

Ajaj Haddad (LF, Catholic – Jezzine)



جوزاف نھرا 
مرشح عن المقعد الماروني

Joseph Nohra (Kataeb, Maronite – Jezzine)



سمير البزري 
مرشح عن المقعد السني

Samir Bizri (Independent, Sunni – Saida)

¹⁶ Candidates charts are found at the Elections 2018 application by www.elections.ltd; accessed on April 1st, 2018

لائحة لكل الناس - جزين صيدا



أسامه سعد المصري
مرشح عن المقعد السنّي



The 'Li Kol Al Nas' List

Ousama Saad Al Masri (PNP, Sunni – Saida)



ابراهيم عازار
مرشح عن المقعد الماروني



Ibrahim Azar (Amal Movement affiliated, Maronite – Jezzine)



يوسف السكاف
مرشح عن المقعد الروم كاثوليك



Youssef Skaff (Independent, Catholic – Jezzine)



عبد القادر البساط
مرشح عن المقعد السنّي



Abdel Qader Bsatt (PNP, Sunni – Saida)

لائحة التكامل و الكرامة - جزين صيدا



بهيّة الحريري
مرشحة عن المقعد السنّي



The 'Al Takamol Wal Karama' List

Bahiya el Hariri (FM, Sunni – Saida)



روبير الخوري
مرشح عن المقعد الروم كاثوليك



Robert El Khoury (Independent, Catholic – Jezzine)



امين رزق
مرشح عن المقعد الماروني



Amin Rizk (Independent, Maronite – Jezzine)



انجال الخوند
مرشحة عن المقعد الماروني



Anjal Al Khawand (Independent, Maronite – Jezzine)



حسن شمس الدين
مرشح عن المقعد السنّي



Hassan Shamseddine (Independent, Sunni – Saida)

The electoral law adopted in the 2009 parliamentary elections divided the electoral districts based on cazas, hence Jezzine and Saida voted separately on a majoritarian rather than a proportional basis. This led to the victory of only one political party in each district (Jezzine: FPM - Ziad Aswad [current candidate], Michel el Helou, and Issam Sawaya; Saida: FM - Bahiya el Hariri [current candidate] and Fouad Al Sanioura).¹⁷ The current law's introduction of the proportionality principle resulted in greater possibilities and higher aspirations for candidates from various parties, such as LF and Amal Movement in Jezzine and PNP and JI in Saida. For instance, around 12,500 Shiite voters (20% of the total voters) in Jezzine could still influence the results despite the absence of Shiite seats in either of the two districts. In total, there are around 19,000 Shiite voters in the South 1 electoral district, representing almost 16% of the total voters. It was unclear how these voters would be divided in their support of the PNP-Azar list (mainly the Amal Movement voters) and the FPM list (most probably the Hizballah voters). But it was certain that both lists would enhance their positions through support from this electoral basis.

Socio-Economic Context

As tourist destinations, both Saida and Jezzine rely heavily on services as the key economic sector. Municipalities and key figures devise plans to capitalize on the maintenance and development of monuments, historic sites, and traditions. In addition to handicrafts (soap making, knife design, sweets, and others), restaurants overlooking the sea in Saida and the waterfalls in Jezzine constitute a main source of business. Given their locations and weather, several agricultural businesses started to cater to local needs in both cities. Youth

are also attracted to the agriculture sector, which allows them to work with organic agriculture or innovative agro-food products.¹⁸

Socially, while Jezzine remains more liberal, Saida is characterized as being a rather conservative society. This dichotomy has been an interesting aspect to observe as both cazas were part of the same electoral district in the parliamentary elections and had candidates from the FPM and Jama'a Islamiya running together for election.

Refugees

Saida hosts a large number of Palestinian refugees, especially in the Ein El Helweh camp. For several years, unease has taken over with clashes in and around the camp. The most recent clashes, which left several people dead, took place in 2017 between the Fatah faction of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Bilal Badr radical Islamist group.

With the Syrian crisis, both districts received refugees. Most of these reside in Saida (around 45,000 refugees) and in Jezzine (around 2,000 refugees).¹⁹ The influx of additional Syrian and Palestinian refugees added a strain on these cities' resources, as well as on services provided to Ein El Helweh. In some cases, this led to tensions revolving mainly around job opportunities and access to services.

Security and Stability

Israeli airstrikes creating instability on the Lebanese borders used to be the main cause of concern for the people of Saida. While that continues to loom whenever an escalation of rhetoric takes place between Hizballah and Israel, the attention

¹⁷ <http://www.elections.gov.lb/Parliamentary/Elections-Results/2009-Real-time-Results/الانتخابات-لكافة-الاقضية.aspx?lang=en-us>

¹⁸ http://investinlebanon.gov.lb/en/lebanon_at_a_glance/invest_in_regions/south_lebanon_governorate

¹⁹ UNHCR map of refugees in Lebanon

is diverted into the potential outbreak of new clashes between the LAF and Islamist factions, with particular attention to those taking refuge in Ein El Helweh camp. The toughest clashes of that sort occurred in 2013 between the LAF and the Islamist militants led by Ahmad al-Assir. During the June 2013 confrontations, eighteen LAF soldiers died along with forty of al-Assir's supporters and two civilians. The clashes left significant destruction in Abra, near Saida, and has taken a toll on the socio-economic situation in the area. The sectarian rhetoric that al-Assir used in his attack against Hizballah and the Syrian regime was especially effective in mobilizing many Sunni youths, around forty of whom were tried with sheikh al-Assir and put in prison, while he was sentenced to death in 2015.²⁰ Al-Assir's rhetoric was primarily built on countering Hizballah's rising power and its participation in the Syrian civil war. But Hizballah, on the other hand, mobilized Saraya Al Moqawama (Lebanese Resistance Brigades) to

act against al-Assir's group, which created a lot of tension in Saida and is thought to have led to the deadly clashes in 2013. Moreover, the instability of the Ein El Helweh camp has extended to affect the day-to-day activities in Saida whenever clashes erupt. The LAF maintains a security zone around the camp, controlling its four main entrances. However, it has no presence within the camp, as is the case with all Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon. Security inside Ein El Helweh camp is maintained by an inter-factional security committee, Palestinian factions themselves, and a Fatah-led Joint Security Force composed of most of the camp's factions.²¹

The below graph shows the most recurrent security actions within Saida and highlights a high number of arrests throughout 2016 and 2017. These arrests reached their peak (twenty-two arrests) in October 2017.

²⁰ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/09/lebanon-sentences-ahmed-al-assir-death-170928203554043.html>

²¹ South Lebanon: Ein El Hilweh camp profile 2017, UNOCHA.

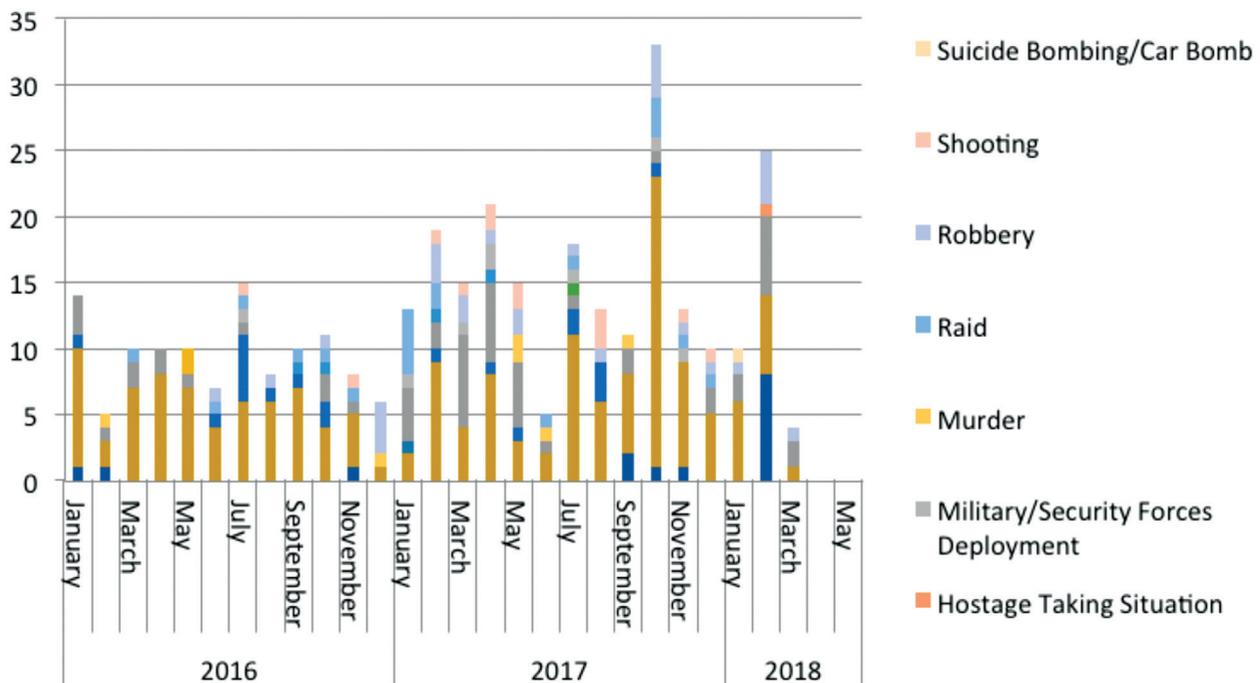


Figure 2 Data of security-related incidents in Saida is adopted from the Lebanon Support "Geo-located mapping of conflicts in Lebanon" accessed on March 30th, 2018 at <http://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/map>

The situation in Jezzine remains calmer for several reasons, the main one being that there are fewer residents and refugees than in Saida. The below graph shows that arrests, primarily of Syrian refugees, was the most recurrent conflict incident.

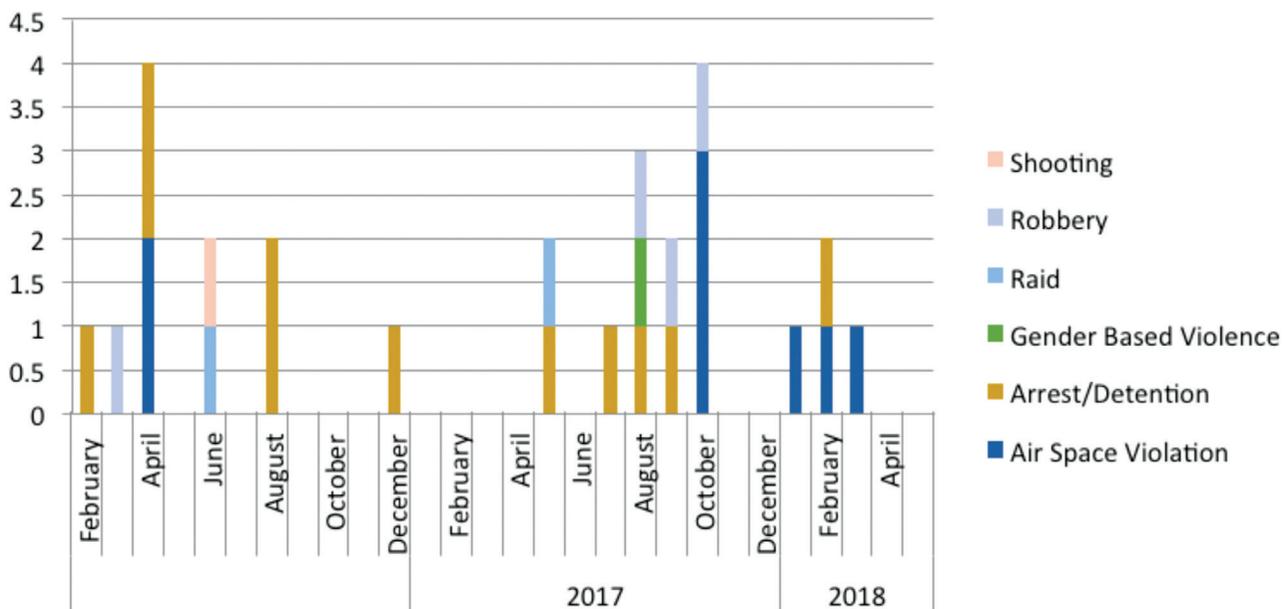


Figure 3 Data of security-related incidents in Jezzine is adopted from the Lebanon Support “Geo-located mapping of conflicts in Lebanon” accessed on March 30th, 2018 at <http://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/map>

V. Key Findings

This section analyses the current atmospherics based on the data collected from literature reviews, key informant interviews, focus groups discussions, and observations. Elections constitute the main issue with clearly rising fears of tensions among different groups and affiliations. The issue of elections is connected to other political issues, such as the general amnesty and the possibility that it includes members of the Sunni anti-Hizballah sheikh Ahmad al-Assir militia. There are also issues related to access to services, namely waste collection, waste water disposal, and electricity. All these issues constituted good material for electoral campaigns, not only locally, but also in most parts of the country. The livelihood issue remained a significant priority for the community, with rising unemployment and a high number of youths leaving to settle in Beirut

or emigrate to other countries. The migrations issue was not highlighted in the electoral campaigns, which is positive in terms of social stability as it is the main subject connected to the refugee situation with Palestinians residing in the Ein El Helweh camp and many Syrian refugees. Perceived problems with the Palestinians and Syrians are mentioned in the interviews and a certain degree of anti-refugee sentiment was noted by some Lebanese communities in the campaigning. However, these sentiments are not as strong as they are in most other parts of the country. All things considered, the main conflict dynamics are mostly found between Lebanese groups and affiliations, with limited refugee involvement.

South 1 Electoral District



Figure 4. Saida - Jezzine electoral district. UNDP Lebanese Elections Assistance Project

According to the perception survey conducted by the Ark and UNDP, the inhabitants of Saida ranked their city the highest in terms of the community's concern that the elections could lead to increasing tensions. This has been confirmed by the findings of this study. All interviewees seemed to agree that this period was among the most intense among the city residents themselves and between them and both their neighbours in Jezzine and the Syrian and Palestinian refugees. Most interviewees (83.8% in Saida and 73.6% in Jezzine) confirmed the following statement in the Ark perception survey: 'I worry that the upcoming parliamentary elections will lead to more tensions in my area.'²² 'The general response from various stakeholders and during FGDs has been that this was a normal response during this period and that the electoral rhetoric, mainly initiated by politicians, was only a tool for the elections. At the same time, most of the discussants, whether in FGDs or KIIs, agreed that this whole 'crazy mess'—as several called it—would be over after the elections on May 6, 2018, as politicians usually return to an agreeable level of interaction.

The Saida-Jezzine electoral district is the only among Lebanon's other nineteen electoral

districts to be geographically split. The city of Saida is cut off from the rest of the Saida Caza (Qora Saida) villages, which are in turn added to the Zahrani electoral district. A couple of activists in Saida mentioned, during the interviews, that the city's political representatives were against the idea of joining their city to the Zahrani Caza in one electoral district because of the 'potential Shiite dominance in that case over the voices of the Saidawis.'²³ The main concern is that the political aspect of that dominance, which is represented in Hizballah's leverage over the Shiite votes, would put the Sunni Saidawi political leadership at the mercy of Hizballah.

From the viewpoint of the Christian political parties, this electoral law has been the worst for Jezzine as its voters have partially lost the power to select their own MPs—a power reclaimed in 2009 under the 1960 electoral law. According to a key political appointee in Jezzine, 'through this law, we lose our voices and our ability to choose our MPs. We suffered from this from 1992 until 2009 when the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) did a revolution through ballots and got us back the MPs that represent us. Now I don't think this will stay the case, especially if we consider that the Amal Movement through a considerable Shiite voting base in Jabal El Rayhan might influence the choice of one of the Christian seats. Not to forget to mention the influence of Saida's Sunni voters as well.' He added to his discontent of the law, 'and I personally do not understand why they removed from the district our geographic connection with Saida, in other words, all the Christian villages of the Caza of Saida!' The claim that the Christian villages of Saida Caza would have enhanced their representation if they had remained in the electoral district is logical as there are five seats (two Muslim, both Sunnis, and three Christian, of which two are Maronites and one is Catholic) and the voters base, which adds up to around 120,000, is estimated to comprise 72,000 Muslims (52,000

²² «Ark & UNDP, «Regular Perceptions Survey on Social Tensions throughout Lebanon: Wave III», (April 2018)»

²³ Saidawis: the people of Saida

Sunnis; 19,000 Shiites; and less than 1,000 Druze) and 48,000 Christians (35,000 Maronites; 10,000 Catholics; and less than 3,000 Orthodox). So, even though 60% of the voters in South 1 district are Muslims while 40% are Christians, 60% of the seats are Christian and 40% are Muslim. No one on the lists or in the political parties has called for a change in the district's allocation of seats because this has been a sensitive topic since it was sorted out in the Ta'if agreement that ended the civil war. But even if east Saida, which encompasses the Christian villages of Saida, was added to the electoral district, this would only add a few thousand additional votes and would still never reflect the exact representation as per the allocated seats.

The electoral law's proportional aspect created a new dynamic in the relationship among the Lebanese in this area. This is due to the higher probability or potential for new candidates to win. Logically, the proportional law, through better representation, addresses the grievances that could arise from a majoritarian law. It is, however, creating higher tension in communities that used to be strongholds of certain groups or political parties. This could be witnessed in the high rhetorical tone used in Jezzine by the Free Patriotic Movement against the other Christian candidates supported by the Future Movement list,²⁴ or by Ousama Saad (PNP) and Bahiya el Hariri in Saida.

For many Christians in Jezzine, the new law poses a threat of returning to the pre-2009 political era where Muslim leadership, whether Shiite (Amal Movement and Hizballah) or Sunni (Future Movement), would influence, through their voters' base, the selection of at least two thirds

²⁴ Media reported a voice recording of a meeting between FPM and Hizballah representatives, where the former claims that they will be aggressive to those who will vote for Bahiya El Hariri in Jezzine. They used the term "cut their hands off" which is a metaphor for being firm. Accessed on April 4th at: <http://www.saidaonline.com/new/ar/news/details/news-641980384>

of the seats of the Christian MPs in Jezzine. This is true despite the division among the Shiites voters where, in the case of Jezzine, Hizballah was expected to support FPM while the Amal Movement was expected to align with the PNP-Azar list. Nevertheless, the mobilisation of the Free Patriotic Movement was primarily focused on such themes as 'defending the dignity' of Jezzine (Karamet Jezzine) and very little was mentioned about developmental issues. The electoral competition was primarily focused on sectarian and political issues such as the rhetoric of the civil war and its martyrs, which seemed to constitute a cornerstone of the campaign. According to one of the key informants in Jezzine, "this aggressive rhetoric was mostly reflected on social media." In his opinion, 'the space which social media gave to many through its different platforms is being abused, especially because the Lebanese do not know where to draw the line and maintain respect despite having different opinions.' Tensions had not only been limited to the virtual space, but were also manifested in a quarrel between an FPM local leader and another resident of Jezzine who protested aggressively against the traffic caused by the FPM convoy on March 31, 2018. The resident was then threatened with a gun by the FPM local leader.²⁵ This scene was shocking for many, including the head of the Union of Municipalities, who explained how he interfered to make sure everything went back to normal and to make all parties understand that such incidents are not accepted in the Jezzine area.

A few unexpected alliances, not limited to the Saida-Jezzine electoral district, have been established for purely electoral reasons with basically little or no agreement on a long-term agenda. An example was the case of the 'Saida and Jezzine Together (Saida Wa Jezzine Maan)' list (FPM/Jama'a Islamiya/Abdel Rahman el Bizri).

²⁵ Accessed on April 3rd, 2018: <https://www.annahar.com/article/785714--في-جزين-بين-موكب-التيار-ومواطن>

This alliance had already been under fire from competitors since the FPM and the Jama'a are quite dissimilar in terms of vision or approach towards governance. This fact was confirmed by both FPM representatives and supporters of the JI who were interviewed in this research.

According to several interviewees, the history of civil war in the city, where thirty-five members of the JI were killed by the LF, was a major hurdle the JI faced during its negotiations to form an alliance with the Lebanese Forces and the Kataeb Party.²⁶ According to locals in Saida, this issue, as well as former LF–Israeli relations during the civil war, was quite a burden on the JI, who preferred to align itself with the FPM who had a less controversial history. In March 2018 (two months before the elections), billboards with the LF electoral campaign messages at Saida entrance were ripped down²⁷ less than twenty-four hours after they were placed, signalling an aggressive stance against the LF, although no one publicly claimed responsibility for the action. The LF's candidate for the Catholic seat in Jezzine, Ajaj Haddad, condemned the assault and reiterated the need to build 'a state and not a mini-state'.

According to some interviewees, in his meetings with and speeches to several civil society groups, Abdel Rahman el Bizri was signalling that he will be part of either one of the civic lists or one of those formed by reformists, non-politically aligned with current parties in power. This changed when he agreed to run on the FPM/JI list, putting additional pressure on the Sunni candidates in Saida, MP Bahiya el Hariri and Ousama Saad. El Bizri tried to leverage the fact that he is a former mayor of the city and son of a renowned doctor.

A major missing player in these elections was

²⁶ Accessed on April 1st at: <https://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12055>

²⁷ Accessed on April 4th at: <http://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/news/local/1003201818>



Figure 5. LF billboards ripped down on the entrance of Saida on March 10, 2018. Seen on <http://www.aljadeed.tv/arabic/news/local/1003201818>

former Prime Minister Fouad El Senioura.²⁸ He decided not to participate in these elections after holding the Saida MP seat since 2009. El Senioura's announcement came despite PM Saad El Hariri's efforts to persuade him to run for another term. According to some interviewees, the impact of this withdrawal was yet to be seen on the Future Movement and in Saida in general, since El Senioura's role in the city's internal politics has always been significant. The Future Movement has also distanced itself from the LF and the Kataeb in most electoral districts, constituting a major change in the March 14 Alliance compared to 2009. Consequently, an incomplete list formed by the LF and Kataeb parties joined the race despite uncertain chances, especially given the weak popularity of both parties in Saida resulting from the lack of proper reconciliation process following the civil war.

There was also a Hizballah-backed list in the district led by Ousama Saad, head of the PNP, and Ibrahim Azar, the son of a former Jezzine MP for the Amal Movement. The tone of Saad's reformist rhetoric has been quite high in his electoral speeches, calling for accountability of former MPs on what he described as failures in fulfilling

²⁸ Accessed on April 4th at: <https://en.annahar.com/article/767922-mp-sinioura-rules-himself-out-of-upcoming-elections>

various developmental and livelihood promises.

The four lists competing for the five seats in this electoral district nominated a total of only two female candidates (Bahiya el Hariri and Anjal Al Khawand on the 'Al Takamol Wal Karama' list supported by FM). As a result, women's issues were not prioritised in any of the programs or campaigns by any of the lists.

Grievances and Campaign Issues

General Amnesty

The general amnesty issue was one of the most challenging topics that faced the Sunni candidates in Saida, especially as they formed alliances with candidates from Jezzine. Through protests and continuous actions, many local families were demanding^{29,30,31} that the general amnesty law include their relatives who were arrested for being part of sheikh Ahmad al-Assir's militia that clashed with the LAF in June 2013. Even though many promises were made in the past few years, especially by MP Bahiya el Hariri, who tried to include them in the law, it seemed that this topic would not see much progress before the elections. Saida Sunni candidates would be afraid of losing the Christian pro-LAF votes if they push for the release of the Islamists through the amnesty law. Therefore, the Sunni candidates were very cautious as to how they manoeuvred this sensitive topic in order to not lose Christian allies while trying to avoid infuriating voters sympathizing with Sunni Islamists. On the other hand, the general amnesty had also called for the Christian Jezzins who fled to Israel upon the

²⁹ Accessed on April 4th on: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Feb-02/436619-families-of-islamist-detainees-demand-amnesty.ashx>

³⁰ Accessed on April 4th on: <https://aawsat.com/english/home/article/1143111/lebanon-general-amnesty-law-approved-few-exceptions>

³¹ Accessed on April 4th on: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/afp/article-5587161/Lebanon-protesters-demand-Islamist-detainees-freed.html>

liberation of south Lebanon in 2000. This was also a very sensitive issue for Christian parties who face fierce objection, especially from Hizballah and the Amal Movement, but also from Sunni political parties. Therefore, the discussions over the general amnesty, with all the sensitivities it brings to the table, seemed to have been postponed until after the elections with promises continuing to be suspended in order to not lose the affected voters base.

Saida's Mountain of Garbage

A major difference between Saida and Jezzine is that service provision and issues related to infrastructure represent a more solid source of tension in the former. In fact, the head of the Union of Jezzine municipalities and mayor of Jezzine proudly states that 'the infrastructure in Jezzine has witnessed a lot of progress in the past few years'. When interviewed for this research, he stated 'we have twenty hours of electricity daily, twenty-four hours of water supply to around 85% of the households, our road conditions are relatively good, and within two years we expect to have linked 100% of the households to the waste water network'. In fact, the UNDP recently supported the extension of the main sewage network in Lebaa, while USAID are embarking on establishing a water network. In Saida, the situation is different. Issues related to solid waste management, electricity, waste water, and other services were all agenda items for various candidates who were promising to work on them if elected as MPs.

On top of the developmental and service-related issues in Saida is the garbage dump 'Jabal al-Zbeleh,' or the 'Mountain of Garbage'. The dumpsite dated back to 1975, but grew substantially after 1982 when it first received rubble and demolition waste from destroyed buildings following the Israeli invasion of Lebanon.³² Managed by the

³² Accessed on April 1st, 2018 at: <https://ejatlas.org/conflict/garbage-mountain-saida>

Municipality of Saida, it 'received about 300 tons of solid waste daily from 250,000 people living in fifteen municipalities surrounding Saida. The waste mountain stretched 55 meters high from the surrounding terrain, and covered an area of 60,000m².³³ It was located only 200 meters away from urban, residential areas, and therefore became one of the public's major concerns for years. The mountain used to be located right on the shore, placing an environmental hazard on the Mediterranean Sea and sparking complaints from other Mediterranean countries.³⁴ The fumes that the mountain would emit caused the whole city to suffer during heat waves. Finally, the dwindling livelihoods of fishermen who were affected by pollution also placed a high burden from a socio-economic perspective.

According to interviewees, the issue of the rehabilitation of the Saida dumpsite was a major subject used to mobilise voters during the electoral campaigns of the 2009 parliamentary elections. Many promises were made then to find permanent solutions for it and huge resources were mobilised later in 2012 by the Ministry of Environment to start the project. In April 2016, three years after the construction began, a 33,000m² park was opened on the reclaimed land. After that, a 33,000m² garden was created with 10,452 trees and plants, a playground for children, and a roman-style theatre.³⁵ The UNDP, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment and the Municipality of Saida, organised the rehabilitation project that turned the mountain of garbage in Saida into a green garden.³⁶ The project was implemented by the Ministry of Environment and UNDP through a \$25 million fund provided by the Lebanese Government.

³³ Accessed on April 2nd. 2018 at: <http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/ourwork/environmentandenergy/successstories/From-Shame-to-Fame-Saida-Public-Park.html#>

³⁴ Ibid

³⁵ Ibid

³⁶ Ibid

This event occurred only one year after the garbage crisis in Beirut and Mount Lebanon sparked off. Saida claimed that it had sorted out its waste problem and became among the regions in Lebanon unaffected by the crisis. Unfortunately, this environmental success did not last long.

A new mountain of trash has started to pile up and grow in Ghazieh, south of Saida, at the IBC Municipal Solid Waste Treatment Center. This is the facility that has been built to treat the waste of the member municipalities of the Saida-Zahrani Union of Municipalities. According to a Saida municipality member, the amount reaches 'around 250 tons per day', but due to the garbage crisis in Beirut, the amount is increased by an additional 200 tons per day according to an agreement with the municipality of Saida 'as part of our citizenship duties and support to our capital'. He added 'there was an agreement though, that the government would provide a space for the non-recyclable waste which is almost half of that amount; and this did not happen. So now the people of Saida and its civil society are raising their concerns towards the process, and I'm with them'. In fact, the NGO's platform of Saida held a special meeting to discuss the issue of mounting garbage. In their statement, they hold the municipality accountable for mismanaging the situation and request that they halt the receiving of Beirut's waste until a proper environmental agreement is put in place. When asked whether there might be spaces to set up a landfill in areas around Saida, the municipal member smiles and responds that 'in fact, two individuals own large pieces of land, one part was a quarry before so it's a perfect location to do an environmental landfill. But they got under a lot of political pressure to withdraw their offer to support Saida. There are political parties who do not want this issue to be sorted out before the elections so that they can continue to benefit from it. Unfortunately, they frame this issue as defending their land and environment, while if Saida decides not to take their garbage anymore, we would be framed as



Figure 6. Saida's former Mountain of Garbage. Picture seen on <https://www.suez.com/en/our-offering/Success-stories/Our-references/Sidon-waste-storage-sorting-and-recycling>

sectarian and isolated.'

'The fumes and the [piled] waste at the waste treatment plant in Saida will disappear completely within a period not exceeding ten weeks,' Saudi said after a closed panel discussion in the city in October 2017.³⁷ In March 2018, Saudi held another meeting with environmental consultants, municipal members, and other key stakeholders and experts to discuss plausible ways to end the emerging crisis. The quick answer in the meeting was that there will not be a quick fix for the issue. It will need to wait, either until the expansion of the capacity of the treatment facility or until the dumpsites of Costa Brava and Burj Hammoud are expanded. Recent information posted on Saida's municipality website shows that a solution for the leftovers compiling will be to crush them into a mix that will be used to dump into the waste water lake discussed hereafter, which is considered the primary reason for bad odour in the city.³⁸ Since this would require several months to implement, it was certain that promises to sort

out the mountain of garbage issue would stay high on the agendas of candidates. It would also continue to mobilise voters based on the rhetoric that the politicians responsible were putting the health of the people at risk for their personal, mainly financial, benefits.

Waste Water Management

Fuelled by electoral campaigning, waste water dumping was another topic that caused an uproar in Saida. Waste water is dumped into a closed body of water, which is causing a terrible smell that is pervading the city. This has turned into an artificial lake, planned to be landfilled, while the sewage pipe would be stretched to reach the open sea. This, however, does not seem to be happening anytime soon, and remained part of the tension triggers during elections. The pink-coloured lake had been highlighted in one of the videos produced by the Lebanese Transparency Association³⁹ to show the contrast with a clean sea. This was done in order to protest against

³⁷ <https://www.ministryinfo.gov.lb/en/17349>

³⁸ <http://www.saida.gov.lb/news/details/news-2227>

³⁹ LTA's campaign can be seen at: <https://www.facebook.com/LTA-NoCorruption/videos/1352722464810600/>



Figure 7. The park that replaced the Mountain of Garbage. Picture seen on: <http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/ourwork/environmentandenergy/successstories/From-Shame-to-Fame-Saida-Public-Park.html#>

the environmental reality to which the current politicians have driven the country. A local activist says that ‘the city receives the sewage of more than thirty-five neighbouring municipalities through a network that works on both gravity and pumps. When a pump is out of service or electricity is out, the streets start flooding and the situation becomes unbearable. Even dumping into the artificial lake is not a healthy solution.’ Although this issue is unlikely to be a direct source of conflict in itself, it might add to the tension related to environmental hazards and to the sector mismanagement, as it was at the core of the electoral campaigning in Saida. In addition to the statement accusing current and former MPs of not caring about people’s health and wellbeing, there were allegations about corruption or personal benefits spreading locally. Regarding the body of water planned to be landfilled, the questions primarily revolved around who would benefit from this ‘primary’ real estate with sea view, worth millions of dollars, and whether the smell is a way to get people to demand faster

landfilling. In this way, critics say, the focus will not be on who might acquire the land, but only on making the body of water disappear as fast as

‘We are standing today over what was formerly known as the garbage mountain, the mountain has gone forever and in my name and in the name of people of Saida, I would like to welcome you in your public garden that replaces the garbage mountain’

–Mayor of Saida, Mohammad Zuhair Al-Saudi, in the inauguration of the rehabilitation project.

possible.

Electricity

The main outcome of electricity-related interviews and FGDs is that politician-made promises of enhancing the service are no longer

taken seriously. For the interviewees, this nationwide issue is far from being sorted out, due to political disagreements and corruption allegations that are always surrounding this subject. Opposition parties are raising two main issues, especially against the FM and the FPM: the 'Power ships' and the chaos in the alternative electricity sector (private generators). They claim that 'politicians in power do not want to sort out the issue of electricity permanently because they are benefitting from the situation' and 'we hear a lot in the news about the corruption in this sector and how Lebanon continues to receive offers from various countries to build new stations or sort out the matter but then nothing happens'.

Livelihoods

Interviews and FGDs around livelihood targeted individuals from all three nationalities (Lebanese, Syrian, and Palestinian). This topic was among those that resonated in both Saida and Jezzine. Both refugees and host communities reported suffering, to varying extents, from the rising unemployment rates and lack of opportunities. The latter constitutes a key driver to emigration, both legal and illegal. Consequently, according to interviewees, a very low number of youth stay in



Figure 8. The contrast between Saida's sea and its adjacent dumpsite. Picture seen on: <http://blogbaladi.com/a-new-garbage-mountain-in-saida/>

the area. For Jezzine, this is a critical matter. Key informants explained that among the electoral promises and first priorities of the political parties

was to keep the 'Christian youth' in their villages and to create opportunities for them to return if they have already left. 'Youth leave primarily to Beirut for education because we do not have a proper university in the region. They take their families with them in many cases. After Beirut many of them migrate outside Lebanon. We want to create opportunities for them to stay in Jezzine.' But most of those who know Jezzine well are sceptical about the ability of political parties to fulfil their promises regarding employment. Even a senior political activist claims that 'these promises are all for political propaganda. They're not scientific and cannot be taken seriously. The opposition would promise people jobs, but we know well that this needs a whole ecosystem to support it or else it is empty promises.' When asked about whether Syrians are being blamed for the lack of jobs due to competition, a senior official in Jezzine explained that 'the local authorities allow Syrians to work only as per the law in: 1) construction, 2) agriculture, and 3) cleaning. The only additional exception would be shop vendors but for sure they are not allowed to open their own shops or put their street vending tents to compete with Lebanese who are paying rent and taxes. We implement the law with utmost respect to their dignity and we had no issues whatsoever with the Syrians living in the twenty-eight municipalities of Jezzine. They all agree that we will not accept any illegal work.' Syrian refugees have always been part of the daily labour force that supported the rebuilding of south Lebanon after the year 2000, and as long as they continue to work in the aforementioned sectors, very little rise in tensions is expected. This might explain why the issue of competition over jobs between the host community and refugees was not as pressing in Jezzine compared to many other areas where management and oversight by local authorities to enforce this law are absent. Nevertheless, it is the only topic in which refugees were mentioned in relation to tensions or conflict, reflecting most probably a nationwide anti-refugee sentiment

rather than local grievances.

In Jezzine, several sectors are at the core of development plans: ecotourism, agribusiness, and public-private partnerships are being encouraged. For instance, UNDP supported the establishment of an agroprocessing factory in Jezzine. The Union of Municipalities in Jezzine claims to have initiated jobs for around 150 individuals in the area during the past few years with the support from various donors, including ministries and political parties. This is part of a strategic plan developed by the union after its election in 2016, covering nine main sectors for development with a primary focus on tourism. According to the head of the union, an aggressive campaign will therefore be organized to encourage local and international tourists to get to know and visit the area.

Tourism has been a sector of focus in Saida as well. Efforts have been exerted to improve it following an approach based on the city's nature and the sector's needs. One of the projects, implemented in collaboration with the municipality of Saida, focuses on improving food safety in various restaurants in the city, especially in the old parts. This includes training shop owners and supporting them in enhancing their services and menus. The project comes at the same time as the restoration of the city's old souks by UNDP and UNHABITAT. Shops and houses in the area will be rehabilitated, and a touristic trail will be traced for visitors. This trail will show on maps supported by the British Council. One of the municipal council members in Saida says that 'donors supported these projects because they consider us a host community for Syrian refugees and we have to admit that Syrians are not a burden on us as a host community but in fact because of their presence we benefited from various projects'. He adds, 'I'm not saying they've been a catalyst to the economy since most of the Syrian refugees in Lebanon are not the ones who own capital, but rather workers and skilled labourers. Those who own large capital were not properly engaged by the central government and

no opportunities were opened for them to invest in the Lebanese economy, so they preferred to go to Turkey and Dubai.'

Syrians who were interviewed in the FGDs acknowledge the difference between working in Saida and working in Jezzine. In Saida, there is a bigger allowance for opening a shop or doing business without being under pressure, as is the case in Jezzine.

'The only thing we get are promises of twenty-four hours of electricity before every election. Then nothing happens and we're into this cycle again and again.' –Lebanese activist

However, these interviewees are also unhappy with how hard it is to find even unskilled labour jobs due to high competition among Syrians. They reported working for very low daily wages (e.g. 10 or 15 thousand Lebanese liras per day). Women who work in agriculture earn particularly low wages: 'It's almost slavery' said one of the ladies in the FGD. 'We leave at 5 a.m. in the morning and don't come back until the afternoon for less than \$10.' A man interrupts to add 'we do acknowledge that there is competition over jobs, but most of the work we do is unskilled labour which Lebanese wouldn't do. Also, the low salaries that we take encourage the Lebanese business owners to hire us. But on the other hand, we do not have NSSF or insurance or any other benefits which are an incentive for them and reduces their cost.'

Palestinian Refugees

Many Palestinian refugees, who had been long working in most of the low-skilled labour jobs, have in many cases been replaced with Syrian refugees. With the increasing security pressure and the stricter rules for mobility to and from

the Ein El Helweh camp, many Palestinians have very limited options, especially considering the aggressive tone used against them in the media and by politicians who saw this as an electoral opportunity. 'Palestinians have been used to the rhetoric against them from various parties in Lebanon,' said a Lebanese activist from Saida, 'especially that which discriminates against them (and the Syrians) from getting a Lebanese citizenship in the case of having a Lebanese mother'. But in his opinion, which is in line with that of the participants of two Palestinian FGDs, this is just for 'elections consumption' and will not be translated into violence or longer-term tensions. 'It will all end on May 7.' On the other hand, a senior Jezzini activist who supports the position of FPM's leader and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr. Gebran Bassil against giving the citizenship of a Lebanese mother to her children especially in case she was married to a Palestinian or Syrian. He acknowledges that this statement, 'albeit rightful, will negatively affect our candidates running in the Saida-Jezzine district because of Palestinian sympathizers, in addition to the three or four thousand Palestinians who have been given Lebanese citizenship throughout the years, especially in 1994 under late PM Rafiq Al Hariri's cabinet.'

According to the Palestinians interviewed during this research, the overall pre-elections political tensions are negatively affecting their lives in various ways. The most important issue for Palestinians residing in Ein El Helwe is the tighter security control by LAF on the entrance checkpoints. They believe this came at the same time as a media campaign 'that started spreading rumours of potential deterioration in the security

situation in the camp. The media^{40, 41, 42, 43} reported several stories about militants returning from fighting alongside Daesh and Haya'at Tahrir el Sham in Syria to the camp.' Not all interviewees were comfortable discussing security-related matters, even though they all admitted to the fragility of the security situation in the camp. They referred to this fragile security situation as discrimination against Palestinians' basic human rights, whether the right to work or to own a property, or the day-to-day pressure caused by the camp cordon and the prohibition on construction materials. The issue of entering construction materials seems to have a particularly negative impact on the whole construction value chain, affecting construction workshops, builders, plumbers, electricians, and many more. On the other hand, very few interviewees criticised the wall that was erected by the LAF around the whole camp, sealing it off from the surrounding areas, except for the official, tightly-secured and monitored entrances.

Female interviewees were complaining about being searched and asked for their IDs every time they enter or exit the camp, especially since they do not believe the LAF are looking for female fighters or returnees. Therefore, the question they raised has been mainly 'why do the LAF keep searching us girls while they know none of us poses a threat on the Lebanese state?' The sensitivity of this matter is that women passing through the checkpoint prefer being searched by female soldiers. Since most of LAF personnel at the checkpoint are men and, according to interviewees, 'sometimes they are rude and unprofessional', this triggers occasional quarrels and sometimes shooting by male relatives or

⁴⁰ http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Mar-27/443193-prominent-wanted-men-return-to-ain-al-hilweh-sources.ashx?utm_source=Magnet&utm_medium=Entity%20page&utm_campaign=Magnet%20tools

⁴¹ <http://www.lebanon24.com/article/5ac28962294a07659b5255e6>

⁴² <http://www.hayatweb.com/breaking/123791>

⁴³ <http://www.nbn.com.lb/تحذيرات-للبنان-عودة-إرهابيين-من-إدلب/>

partners of the Palestinian girls in this culturally conservative community.

Many stories about the checkpoints were shared during the FGDs, highlighting the difficulty of the situation for residents who frequently have to pass. A key Lebanese informant, who is also a Saida municipal member, confirms that even children must be searched. The lengthy process forces them to leave their homes at 5:30 a.m. to arrive at school at 7 a.m. if it is outside the camp.

Another major issue for Palestinian interviewees was the UNRWA status. According to them, 'there's some sort of a conspiracy against the UNRWA which represents part of our modern history and it is a witness for our cause... just seeing it collapsing under claims of budget cuts makes no sense.' For them, the closure of UNRWA, or even the continuous reduction in its budget, means a larger number of youth with no future, as such situation affects education directly. Also, there will be no healthcare or other basic services. 'It's a disaster by all means!' says one interviewed youth. 'The number of jobs we will be losing is very big, especially for females, because UNRWA used to hire teachers, doctors, nurses and other jobs that we can only practice with UNRWA since they're prohibited by the Lebanese authorities.' What makes the matter more suspicious for Ein El Helweh residents is the timing of Trump declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel. Additionally, a census has been conducted by the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee that Ein El Helweh residents, along with most Lebanese interviewed, believe is under-representing the true number. They claim the number should range between 400,000 and 500,000 refugees, but the census reported only around 174,000 refugees. Certain Palestinian interviewees were afraid that this number would be used to advocate for naturalising Palestinians in Lebanon, while certain Lebanese feared that this aims to give Palestinians more rights at the expense of the Lebanese workers, pressuring the

economy even further. However, all interviewees agreed that the number cannot be accurate.

The various sources of pressure on Palestinians, as well as the internal conflicts, are 'pushing many youths into a limited set of options including militarisation and joining gang groups for social status and money,' according to one interviewee, a statement agreed on by others. Some youths have seen their peers join these groups to guard checkpoints or do other militant tasks for only \$100 or \$200 a month.

The Palestinian interviewees criticised the increasing discrimination against them and pointed out that they were born and raised in Lebanon and have always been contributing to the economy, unlike Syrian refugees who would earn money in Lebanon and go back and spend it in Syria, without benefitting the Lebanese economy. They also feel that the competition in sectors in which they work, especially the construction sector, is very high because of the Syrian labour.

Syrian Refugees

For the Syrian refugees who were interviewed in the Ouzai complex on the Northern exit of Saida city, the perception is different. They believe that they 'do a lot of positive contributions to this community. We do the hard labour. We work in buildings putting our lives at risk. We work in the hot weather at high degrees in greenhouses and fields. All that and more are things the Lebanese will not do. We wish there were real reports highlighting these positive contributions we do to the market and the economy.' They do not believe they present much competition to Palestinian labourers.

Syrians speak about the hardships they face, such as work conditions, the kafala sponsorship system, and the discrimination against them. But they also speak highly about the treatment they receive from the people of Saida and about their experience with them so far. 'Syrian

refugees living in Saida interact positively with its community. They have integrated well, and I don't see any issues or agendas against them from the city's candidates,' said the Saida municipality coordinator of Syrian refugees. Both the Lebanese and Syrians interviewed believe that the current wave of hate speech or aggressive tone against both Syrians and Palestinians is not new, and that it was all adopted for electoral purposes. They also believed that this would not continue beyond May 7. 'Lebanese politicians who are asking for our immediate return know well that

UNHCR and MOSA following the request of the complex owner to get his property back after the UNHCR stopped paying the rental fees in 2015. They accepted resettlement in Turkey, but only on the condition that they all leave together (around 200 families—approximately 1,100 individuals), which has been deemed unfeasible so far.

When asked about the refugee situation in Saida or whether the Lebanese have any concerns about the refugee presence, almost all respondents were positive and agreed that refugees are well integrated in the community. The only concerns they expressed were related to what they hear about the Ouzai complex and the regular LAF raids on it. Given this perception by the Lebanese, the Ouzai complex has been selected for the Syrian refugees' FGD. On the issue of the LAF raids on the complex, the refugees confirmed that these take place almost twice a year. During these raids, the LAF cordon the entire complex. While the complex is cordoned, every room is searched, but nothing is found except individuals who have not renewed their papers. Sometimes the children are scared because 'some of the LAF personnel are masked and enter in the early morning when it is almost dark'. According to the FGD participants,

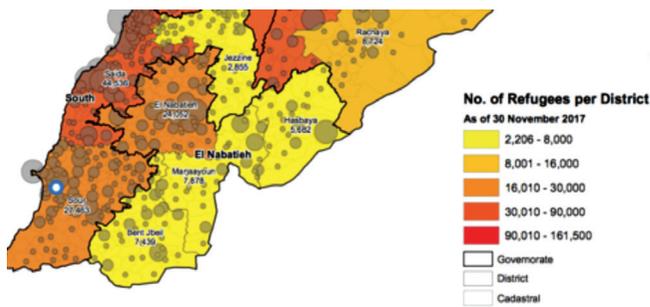


Figure 9. UNHCR map of refugee distribution

we cannot go back to most of our villages at this point. The situation in Syria is still bad, very bad.' However, the residents of the Ouzai complex were progressive in terms of their negotiations with the



Figure 10. Ouzai Complex on the Northern entrance of Saida.

the highest number of individuals arrested in one of the raids was sixty-six, and these arrests were due mainly to their failure to renew their residency permits. Those were arrested around 2 p.m. and released after eight hours. 'There was no place for us to stay, so they let us out. They know we're not a threat,' said one of the men arrested. Another man added that in one of the other raids 'they arrested me. I don't know why but I spent five days in prison. Then the investigator asked me "what brings you here?" I said "you did! I have no clue what for though", so they decided to leave me. That simple! No one treated me badly but the whole experience is humiliating.'

Apart from issues regarding the raids, Syrians seemed to be positive about the level of services at the complex. They reported that electricity and water are available free of charge and that the municipality sends a garbage truck every day.

Other major issues voiced by the interviewees in



Figure 11. Ouzai Complex hosts nearly 200 families in Saida.

'Comfort him, he'll comfort you. Pressure him and he'll burst in your face'. –Saida Municipality Council Member on refugees.

the Syrian refugees' FGD were the ones related to the kafala. In 2015, the aid received by the Syrians began to shrink. According to these interviewees, 'the situation with UNHCR is deteriorating and they are reducing the support to the families whereby only seven out of 200 in this complex still receive support. They stopped paying rent to the owner of the building. No one is currently paying the rent. We are at risk of staying in the streets because there are no alternatives. They said they will find an alternative shelter for only twenty-five families, but we didn't accept.'

'We only go all together.' The dwindling support from INGOs is primarily affecting women and children, who usually do not work and rely mainly on cash or in-kind support previously distributed by these INGOs. Interviewees also told distressing stories about pregnant women who are afraid of having complications during pregnancy or delivery due to reduced healthcare support. But they still prefer to be registered as refugees, even though they are not receiving any benefits, instead of seeking kafala from a Lebanese employer.

According to the interviewees, 'the whole system of the kafala is unfair'. It also puts the refugees, especially women, at risk of being abused or ill-treated by the kafeel (sponsor). This is why none of the women met have chosen to go through the kafala process. 'Before this system, a Syrian foreman used to get around 50,000 Lebanese Liras per day but now the kafeel would give him 15,000 LL per day and treat him very badly. It happened to me, my kafeel decided not to pay me my money which accumulated to around \$500. I kept requesting it until I decided not to go to work anymore, so he reported me to the security forces and I was arrested. I spent twenty days in prison. Afterwards, I decided to register as a refugee with UNHCR instead of the kafeel thing.'

Another explains that ‘there are probably no more than two or three individuals of more than a thousand at the complex currently working under the kafala. Everyone else see it not worthwhile.’

Interviewees in the Ouzai complex wanted to send a message through this research, requesting to ‘relay the real image of refugees. Who we really are. That we’re good people. We ran away from war and weapons. So, there’s no one in this complex who would want to do anything with that. We’ve been in the Ouzai complex for the past six years. We did not harm a cat on the street. And we have continuous communications with the Lebanese security agencies, the Ministry of Social Affairs, and the Municipality of Saida.’

A main concern repeated among Lebanese respondents about both Syrian and Palestinian refugees is the fear that the international CEDRE I conference to support Lebanon holds a hidden agenda of nationalisation of refugees as a condition for that support. No one supported their claims with any solid information; it was only speculation and electoral rhetoric.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendations

All interviewees acknowledged that elections-related tensions were high in the Saida-Jezzine district. They agreed that this district ranked among the highest in Lebanon for several reasons: the electoral law itself and the way it divided the districts; the struggling services sectors in Saida; the high unemployment levels; the changing dynamics; and the rising tensions between Palestinian and Syrian refugees. However, the presence of refugees was not visibly impacting the local political dynamics, either within the two districts or between them. Interviewees confirmed that this tension would only last up until the May 6 election, but that does not downplay the importance of the grievances, issues, or causes that were at the epicentre of the electoral rhetoric. This is mainly based on the

perception that politicians were only adopting this speech for electoral purposes because they knew it would mobilise voters on sectarian and political grounds. For that reason, despite acknowledging the tensions, almost none of the interviewees seemed to be worried or afraid that these tensions would translate into significant or

‘No one is allowed in nor out. All families are asked to remain in their rooms. We cannot even go to the bathrooms.’ – Syrian refugee

disruptive violence.

The overall weak governance structures and lack of transparency are triggering tensions and mistrust on the public level. Therefore, during an election period, the opposition’s rhetoric becomes quite aggressive on matters related to fighting corruption and holding responsible parties accountable. Some of the issues that were being put on the table were within the municipalities’ mandates rather than the MPs’, but campaigning was still focused on those in power, keeping them fully responsible for the deterioration of the overall situation in services, rights, environment, security, and governance.

Based on the data collected in this study and the above analysis, the following are the recommendations:

- 1) It is crucial for INGOs and donors, especially those who positively responded to the Government of Lebanon (GoL) pledges at the CEDRE I conference, to not only demand and push for reforms, but to also create monitoring and evaluation mechanisms and to engage in the implementation of any projects or policies from the Lebanese side. In order to prevent rumours from continuing to fuel hate speech and tensions, amplifying the public disagreements, it is important to

have a clear and simple communications strategy regarding what every donor or lender has offered to Lebanon and under what conditions or considerations.

2) Continue to support service delivery either by expanding or by enhancing the sectors, whether through infrastructure, technical support, strategizing, or capacity building. The current issues seem to be environmental in nature, such as:

- a. Expanding the support started by transforming the mountain of garbage in Saida into a public garden so that it includes finding a solution for the new mountain, but also produces a more sustainable solution for the whole region.
- b. Establishing a sorting facility in Jezzine to reduce waste production in the whole district, but also to ease the burden on Saida. Also expanding the awareness campaigns for sorting from the source and allowing cluster municipalities to benefit from this facility. This would make the facility sustainable on the long run.
- c. Examining health hazards created by the artificial lake near the Saida former dumpsite and considering options to reduce its environmental impact while it gets landfilled, as per the municipal plan. Donors could also study the option of establishing a nearby link to the network or increasing the capacity of the waste water treatment plant at the area.
- d. Considering the replication of the process of installing solar lights in other areas to encourage tourism and reclaim public spaces and enhance the sense of safety and security. Solar power could also

be used to operate water pumps or sewage pumps if needed, given the continuous electric shortages.

- 3) Promoting dialogue and enhancing communication between youths and candidates from different groups through town hall meetings, debates, and other forms of positive interaction with the public to discuss policies and positions. The NGOs' Saida platform initiated this activity recently. With support it can be expanded. These events should also be documented for future reference.
- 4) Monitoring and raising awareness on hate speech and social media usage, especially among the youth and politically affiliated or opinionated groups whose method of expressing their opinions can trigger tensions.
- 5) Taking into consideration the structural issues of each community, as well as the overall economy, when focusing on the improvement of livelihoods.
 - f. Jezzine: Promoting the culture of entrepreneurship, especially in agribusiness and ecotourism, can support the efforts of local authorities to provide opportunities for the youth to stay in their land. But this needs to be well structured to support a whole value chain.
 - g. Saida: The tourism sector can benefit from innovation and encouraging investments, especially investments in infrastructure, including the rehabilitation of the old city. Other opportunities can be created in sectors such as solid waste management, if the capacity of the treatment plant is increased. Most importantly, Saida needs a holistic strategy to expand livelihoods to

various sectors such as fishery, handicrafts, and the hospitality and food sector.

- h. For Palestinian refugees, the priorities would be supporting advocacy for their right to work and allowing construction material to re-enter the Ein El Helweh camp. This would revive the whole value chain of related businesses.
 - i. Syrian refugees would benefit from organising the sectors in which they can work and advocating for more skilled labour sectors, especially industry-related sectors, as the Lebanese economy can benefit from their manufacturing skills. Both the agriculture and manufacturing sectors can benefit from proper investments while employing a larger number of refugees.
 - j. Changing or removing the kafala system is another demand. Further research should be carried out regarding the impact of this law on Syrian refugees and domestic workers.
 - k. A strategy needs to be devised to encourage Syrian capital investments to provide jobs for both Lebanese and Syrians and to contribute to economic growth.
- 6) Encouraging the diaspora to invest in their communities since the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) and various political parties have already engaged them to mobilise their votes. A long-term engagement plan needs to be implemented in order to maintain the relationship.
- 7) Various donors and INGOs need to maintain their support to UNRWA since it represents more than an aid agency; according to Palestinians and many

Lebanese, it is an advocate for the rights of Palestinian refugees. This will reduce the frustration and anxiety within the Palestinian community, as well as the illegal migration from camps in Lebanon to Europe.

Annex

Desk Review Resources

- 1) Lebanese electoral law 2017 accessed at: <http://www.mfa.gov.lb/Library/Files/Uploaded%20Files/Lebanese%20electoral%20law%202017.pdf>
- 2) 2009 Elections results accessed at: <http://www.elections.gov.lb/Parliamentary/Elections-Results/2009-Real-time-Results/نتائج-الانتخابات-لكافة-الاقضية.aspx?lang=en-us>
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- 4) Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee, 'Population and Housing Census in Palestinian Camps and Gatherings in 2017' (February 2018)
- 5) National Democratic Institute, 'Statement of the NDI pre-election assessment mission to Lebanon's 2018 Parliamentary Elections March 11 - 15, 2018'
- 6) C. Batruni & M. Hallinan 'Politics, Progress, and Parliament in 2018: Can Lebanese Women Make Headway?' (April 2018)
- 7) ALEF 'Municipalities in the protection of human and refugee rights: A Case Study of Jezzine and Roum' (March 2015)

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