



Climate Change and (In)Security Project Briefing Note

Lebanon: Prospects for Climate Change Mitigation

The latest projections from the International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) demonstrate the urgency of mitigating the climate crisis being observed around the world (IPCC 2021). While Lebanon is no exception to these changes, it is confronted with a series of additional challenges that adds to the complexities of climate change mitigation. Wild fires, waste and water crises, corruption and failures of the state apparatus have resulted in social protests, economic upheaval and political instability.

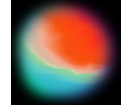
In the past decades, climate events and environmental mismanagement in Lebanon have significantly impacted aspects of human security and political instability. Yet, socio-environmental challenges have continued to be neglected and deprioritised by the political leadership in the state apparatus. Moving forward, socio-environmental insecurities could further provoke instabilities and should not be ignored as the effects of climate change intensifies.

Insecurity brought on by socio-environmental challenges are neither new nor exceptional in Lebanon. Since the end of the Civil War (1975-90), the country has experienced a series of climate events, such as severe wildfires and flooding, and ongoing environmental mismanagement that has led to water scarcity, waste crises and electricity shortages. The impacts of these challenges have been far-reaching, reducing the quality life of inhabitants and intensifying socio-economic inequalities. Today, this situation is made worse through the current economic crisis, which has led to a sharp decline in the standard of living and increasing shortages in necessities including water, food and fuel.

The socio-environmental predicament in Lebanon has been greatly exacerbated by the prioritization and transgressions of the political leadership. Inefficiency, corruption and the absence of political will have contributed to the ineffectiveness of public services and environmental mismanagement. Everyday experiences include hours of the day without water and electricity that are only relieved when inhabitants can afford it. More extreme failures included the 2015 solid waste crisis that saw piles of waste on the streets of Beirut and Mount Lebanon. The crisis led to large anti-governmental protests chanting the slogan 'you stink' directed at the political leadership.

Similarly, climate events are likewise impacted by deficiencies of the state apparatus. Areas have become prone to frequent flooding due to waste or defective infrastructure. Further, in 2019, wildfires were able to spread, and extinguishing them was delayed, due to the lack of maintenance of Lebanese firefighter helicopters. The anti-governmental protests initially triggered by the wildfires later intensified through the intent to increase taxes and, in turn, lead to the *October Revolution* (Azhari 2020). Soon after, the government resigned, driving the country into a political and economic crisis, which has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Shock events, which were avoidable with robust management, have been the latest manifestations of political order in Lebanon. The 2020 port explosion in Beirut and the



latest fuel tank explosion in Akkar, which claimed 218 and 27 lives respectively (BBC 2021), showcased further dysfunctions of the state apparatus and the state's inability to safeguard its population from preventable death. Political instability in the aftermath of these events could have severe security consequences. Political and economic instability could also serve to foster intercommunal violence and insecurities.

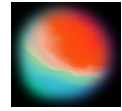
The 2015 solid waste crisis, 2019 wildfires and 2020 Beirut explosion demonstrate systematically the structural failings of the state apparatus. To understand these failings, we need to understand political governance in Lebanon. In the aftermath of the Civil War, governance became based around the relationships of, and agreements between, political leaders. These leaders were originally derived from the major sectarian group, but which have existed as their own *class* (see Mansour and Khatib, 2021).

Making up the Lebanese state, these political leaders have maintained their power and influence through economic incentives and sectarian networks. This structure has enticed inefficiency and corruption that has led to economic and environmental mismanagement and extreme public sector debt. From a human security perspective, the well-being of all inhabitants in Lebanon have been set aside for the few, which have received governmental contracts and benefited from neo-liberal policies. Inhabitants have in return been exposed to structural violence, in which social institutions are preventing inhabitants from meeting their needs, but also direct violence and death (Galtung 1969).

At the very least, the political ordering of Lebanon calls into question any ability to appropriately mitigate the devastating effects of climate change. In the last decades, this political leadership has exposed its inhabitants to extreme socio-environmental insecurities. Moreover, during the consequential economic crisis the same leadership are making the active decision to do nothing and thus shifting the burden onto the everyday lives of citizens. With intensifying climate change, such inaction will have escalating and overwhelming effects on the lives and wellbeing of inhabitants. In a worst-case scenario, it could lead to further political instability, and provoke political and sectarian violence.

The Lebanese state is ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with, as the IPCC (2021) put it, future 'widespread, rapid and intensifying' climate change impacts. Whilst Lebanon's political leadership today remains intact, recurrent and escalating calls from anti-governmental protestors indicate ongoing the ambition to reform the political order and diminish exposure to insecurities, including economic, social and environmental. If no changes are forthcoming to the state apparatus, the security situation will deteriorate.

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