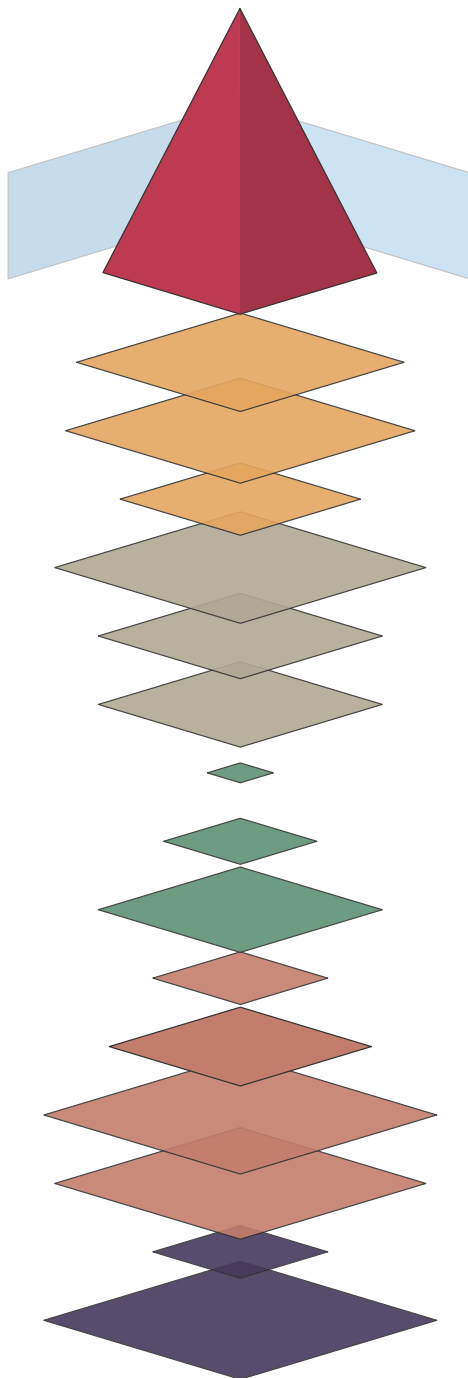




LEBANON



7.10

CRIMINALITY SCORE

9th of 193 countries

3rd of 46 Asian countries

2nd of 14 Western Asian countries



CRIMINAL MARKETS

6.30

HUMAN TRAFFICKING 7.50

HUMAN SMUGGLING 8.00

EXTORTION & PROTECTION RACKETEERING 5.50

ARMS TRAFFICKING 8.50

TRADE IN COUNTERFEIT GOODS 6.50

ILLICIT TRADE IN EXCISABLE GOODS 6.50

FLORA CRIMES 1.50

FAUNA CRIMES 3.50

NON-RENEWABLE RESOURCE CRIMES 6.50

HEROIN TRADE 4.00

COCAINE TRADE 6.00

CANNABIS TRADE 9.00

SYNTHETIC DRUG TRADE 8.50

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES 4.00

FINANCIAL CRIMES 9.00



CRIMINAL ACTORS

7.90

MAFIA-STYLE GROUPS 6.00

CRIMINAL NETWORKS 7.50

STATE-EMBEDDED ACTORS 9.50

FOREIGN ACTORS 8.50

PRIVATE SECTOR ACTORS 8.00



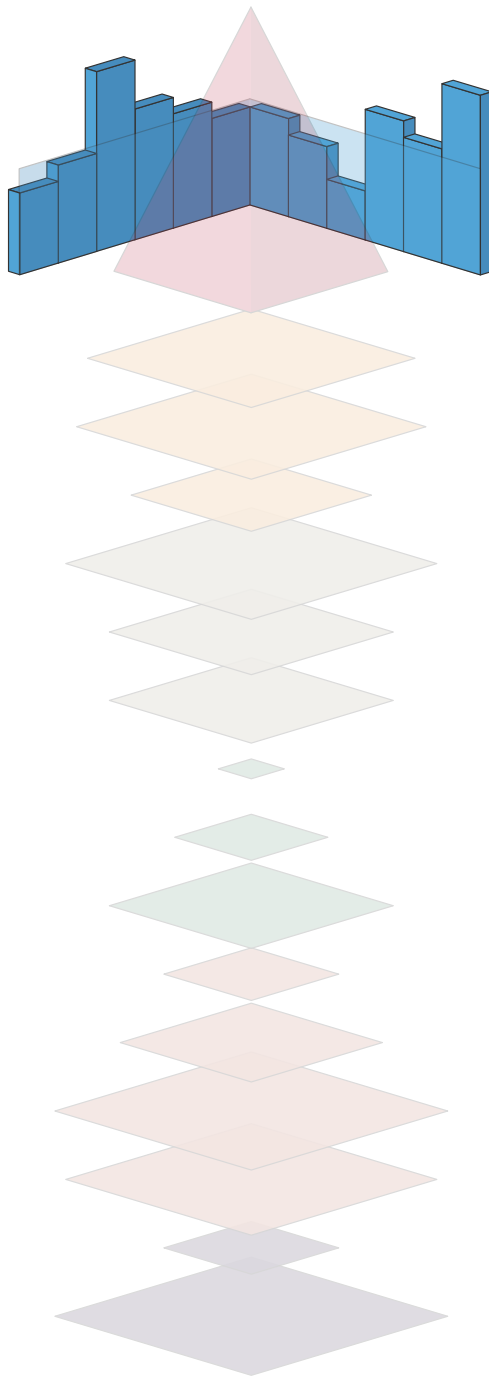
3.46

RESILIENCE SCORE





LEBANON



3.46

RESILIENCE SCORE

147th of 193 countries

34th of 46 Asian countries

9th of 14 Western Asian countries

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE	2.50
GOVERNMENT TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY	3.00
INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION	5.50
NATIONAL POLICIES AND LAWS	4.00
JUDICIAL SYSTEM AND DETENTION	3.50
LAW ENFORCEMENT	3.00
TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY	3.00
ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING	2.50
ECONOMIC REGULATORY CAPACITY	1.50
VICTIM AND WITNESS SUPPORT	4.00
PREVENTION	3.50
NON-STATE ACTORS	5.50



7.10

CRIMINALITY SCORE



CRIMINAL MARKETS 6.30



CRIMINAL ACTORS 7.90



CRIMINALITY

CRIMINAL MARKETS

PEOPLE

Lebanon serves primarily as a destination country for trafficked victims from abroad. While women and girls from South and Southeast Asia have traditionally constituted the majority of foreigners working in domestic servitude in Lebanon, there has been a recent increase in foreign workers from East and West Africa. Male victims from Syria are typically subjected to forced labour in the agriculture and construction sectors. Labour exploitation has particularly surged in the service industry, where citizens have been reported to endure poor working conditions, excessively long hours, and withheld salary payments. Urban areas like Beirut and Tripoli, as well as agricultural regions in the eastern and northern governorates, are notorious hotspots for labour extortion.

The problem of the exploitation of children, which includes child labour, sexual exploitation and street begging, has a long presence in Lebanon predating the civil war, but it has experienced a significant escalation with the influx of Syrian refugees over the past decade. Reports of forced child labour among the Syrian refugee population continue to increase, most notably in the agricultural, construction, and street selling sectors. Lebanon has also long been a destination for women forced into prostitution and nightclub dancing, brought into the country from Arab nations, increasingly from Syria, as well as from Eastern Europe.

Lebanon has a major market for human smuggling activity. The smuggling of Lebanese migrants into Europe via the Mediterranean Sea has intensified since the country's compounding financial and economic crises in recent years. The country also serves as a destination and transit country for Syrian migrants. Over the past decade, restrictions on Syrians entering Lebanon have grown more stringent, leading some Syrians to choose irregular entry routes through the mountainous border area into the Beqaa Valley. The combination of worsening poverty rates and tightened entry restrictions on Syrians has elevated the level of smuggling, potentially facilitated by Hezbollah and the Syrian Army's fourth division. The northern Beqaa region is a particular hotspot for the country's human smuggling operations, where criminals capitalize on both irregular and legal crossing points along the Syrian border. Recent years have witnessed a minor reversed trafficking flow, with Syrian migrants in Lebanon attempting to reenter Syria.

Extortion and protection racketeering are common in Lebanon. Hezbollah controls much of the Shi'ite-populated regions, including the eastern Beqaa Valley, the southern regions, and parts of the Beirut district, and consequently

holds considerable power over their resources. Although local merchants and businesses are presumed to primarily support Hezbollah, it is unclear to what degree their patronage network has legitimate supporters or to what extent it entails a coercive component.

TRADE

Lebanon's arms trafficking market is pervasive, with the majority of arms estimated to be purchased on the black market and sourced from abroad. In recent years, Iran has supplied advanced weapons and missiles to Hezbollah, contributing to the expansion of its arsenal, the vast majority of which is reported to be smuggled into the country through the border with Syria, or through seaports or airports. There are in fact disputed claims suggesting that Beirut Airport has become a considerable smuggling hub for Iranian weapons and other sanctioned goods. The country is particularly grappling with a proliferation of small arms, driven by domestic and regional conflicts as well as economic instability. With the ongoing economic collapse, high theft rates, and the failure of the state to prevent crime and political violence, the arms trade among the Lebanese population has been booming. Lebanese citizens turn to 'self-security' to protect themselves and their families by purchasing arms on the black market. This has led to an increase in unlicensed arms purchases among the civilian population, with reports of households owning not only basic pistols but sometimes medium-range weapons, such as RPG-7s, grenades and drones, or even machine guns, primarily Kalashnikovs. The demand for weapons surged in the aftermath of the port explosion in Beirut in August 2020, with many of these weapons reported to be semi-automatic firearms of Russian or American origin.

Lebanon is a prominent hub in the region for counterfeit goods. The financial and economic crisis, compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic, has created opportunities for criminal networks to exploit the population's need for lower-priced products. Counterfeiting is particularly prevalent in the country's pharmaceutical and medical product market. There is also a wide range of counterfeited trademarks flooding the market, including clothes and footwear, as well as patent infringements in pharmaceuticals, agrochemicals and machinery.

Lebanon also has a substantial illicit market for excisable goods. The illicit trade of tobacco, in particular, has been a longstanding issue in Lebanon, with illicit trade accounting for roughly a quarter of the total tobacco market. Currently, Lebanon primarily serves as a source country for tobacco smuggled into neighbouring countries like Syria, Iraq and Jordan. Smuggling flows into Syria take place mainly along the northern plains, on the same routes used for fuel,

medicines and household goods. Lastly, the illicit production, trafficking, and consumption of alcohol in Lebanon remains a murky area with limited available data, although there are some accounts of illegally produced or smuggled alcohol.

ENVIRONMENT

Even though Lebanon's illicit flora market is small, the country plays a limited, but notable role in fauna trafficking to and through the region because of its geographic positioning – connecting Asia, Africa, and Europe. While various types of wild animals and reptiles are traded, birds comprise the majority of the illicit trade, and the trapping and shooting of birds persist as widespread practices across the country. Situated along the African-Eurasian flyway, Lebanon occupies a crucial position for global bird migration, resulting in the illegal killing of migratory birds within its borders. Particularly, the central and northern regions, including Mount Terbol, Daraya, and Egbeh in Mount Lebanon, serve as vital pathways for soaring birds during their migration, making these areas hotspots for fauna crimes. Coastal areas in the west witness a higher incidence of warbler shootings. Endangered bird species are often advertised on the same online platforms used for regular bird sales. Legal bird listings occasionally include endangered species such as the Syrian eagle, eagle owl, golden eagle, Egyptian mercy, black eagle and griffon eagle. Advertisers typically adopt fictitious names to protect themselves from potential prosecution.

There exists a pervasive and growing market for non-renewable resources, smuggled to and from Lebanon. Smugglers take advantage of the high profit margin on oil and oil-derived products, which are typically heavily subsidized by the government, and criminal groups traffic these products into neighbouring countries. It is estimated that nearly one billion litres of diesel are smuggled from Lebanon to Syria each year. Lebanon also serves as a transit country for precious metals, especially gold.

DRUGS

The heroin market is limited in Lebanon due to high costs and low local demand. Nevertheless, Lebanon acts as a transit zone for heroin shipments destined for the Gulf, Turkey, and Europe, with the Beqaa Valley serving as the primary source. Similarly, while larger than the heroin trade, Lebanon's involvement in the cocaine market is also relatively small, primarily serving as a transit zone for shipments to other regions. Cocaine enters the country through various routes, including land, sea, and air, with connections to criminal networks in Latin America.

On the other hand, Lebanon is one of the biggest producers of cannabis in the world and this drug is the most consumed in the country. The Beqaa Valley has been a longstanding cultivation area for cannabis. Despite efforts to control cultivation, the industry has thrived, leading to both

local use and exports to various destinations. Most of the cannabis exported each year is destined for the Gulf, Syria, Iraq, Cyprus and Europe. There has been a debate regarding the regulation of cannabis for medicinal purposes, considering its potential economic benefits and associated concerns. Additionally, the identification of cannabis as a possible source of government revenue has sparked the debate around legalization.

Another pervasive illicit economy in Lebanon is the trade in synthetic drugs, specifically Captagon, which has experienced rapid growth in recent years. While Lebanon was previously a transit zone, it has now become a production hub, facilitated by the availability of precursor chemicals and the porous border with Syria. The Beqaa Valley and surrounding areas have witnessed the establishment of Captagon factories, with support from Hezbollah and Syrian producers.

CYBER-DEPENDENT CRIMES

Cyber-dependent crime poses a challenge in Lebanon. The majority of cyber-attacks in Lebanon originate from the US, alongside Russia and Vietnam. Lebanon's Hezbollah is believed to regularly weaponize cyberspace for strategic purposes. Their cyber-attacks have long been a source of concern, not only within Lebanon but also among neighbouring countries in West Asia, including Israel, as well as in Western nations. The Iranian-backed group regularly launches attacks on financial targets in the Gulf states and other critical infrastructure in the region and elsewhere, specifically focusing on gas and oil companies, telecom companies, and internet providers that host infrastructure for multiple countries.

FINANCIAL CRIMES

Financial crimes are a widespread phenomenon in Lebanon, believed to play a considerable role in the country's economic and financial meltdown. Misuse of funds is central to the government's functioning. In addition, tax evasion is a large component of the shadow economy, depriving the government of income, increasing public deficit and hindering development. Although there is no consensus on the magnitude of tax evasion, recent estimates suggest it is a sizeable issue. There is a notable intersection between the political elite and criminal networks in carrying out these illicit activities. Another example of the grey area surrounding the perpetrators of financial crimes is the discovery that many of Lebanon's EU-funded waste management projects turned out to be fraudulent and most of the funds were embezzled. It is not uncommon for illegal financial schemes to receive protection from the political elite, despite being considered illegal by general standards.

CRIMINAL ACTORS

In Lebanon, organized crime is driven by political insecurity, creating an environment where state-connected actors engage in criminal activities. Political parties and militias that emerged during the civil war have primary control over the country's illicit economies. While they maintain a separation between their party operations and criminal elements, these groups exert political influence to protect their members and manipulate security and judicial systems. Hezbollah, the dominant political-military force in Lebanon, plays a significant role in the country's criminal landscape. Some high-ranking politicians are suspected of providing protection to criminal enterprises, particularly those involved in cannabis production in the Beqaa Valley. There have also been cases of security department members facing charges related to currency forgery, smuggling, and operating networks of sex workers. At a lower level, security forces have been implicated in extortion and racketeering.

Regarding foreign actors, Syrian criminal groups often collaborate with Lebanese counterparts in human smuggling and trafficking. Palestinian contraband networks operate within refugee camps with limited scrutiny. Criminal networks within Lebanon are active in almost all organized

crime, especially in human trafficking, smuggling and drug trafficking markets, taking advantage of Lebanon's porous borders. While criminal networks are spread all across the country, they are mostly active in Beirut, the Beqaa Valley, and near the Syrian-Lebanese border. Although some networks project their reach more freely into Syria, others use foreigners from Gulf countries or Eastern Europe, or link with Lebanese mafias in Europe and South America. Recent crises, such as the oil shortage and the COVID-19 pandemic, have created further opportunities for these networks to thrive.

Criminal actors have deeply infiltrated Lebanon's private sector, particularly in areas dominated by Hezbollah, such as parts of the Beirut district, southern regions, and the eastern Beqaa Valley. In these areas, legitimate business operations take a secondary role to criminal activities. In the Beqaa Valley, families and armed clans exercise territorial control over cannabis farms and engage in violence associated with their criminal endeavors. This region operates under a leadership structure known as woujah, where families function as criminal organizations with defined membership and territorial influence, some of whom have links to criminal groups in Syria.

RESILIENCE

LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

Lebanon's governance is characterized by the dominance of the elite, which results in limited opposition and a relatively lax approach to organized crime. The country's economic decline and political turmoil have further hindered its capacity to effectively combat organized crime. The overall governance environment in Lebanon has created conditions favorable to organized crime, as criminal networks exploit weaknesses within the system. While there have been some attempts to address specific issues, a comprehensive government strategy is lacking. Additionally, Lebanon's political system has been closely associated with political corruption, particularly concerning the distribution of state resources among different sects. Despite the adoption of anti-corruption laws, the government's actions against corruption have been minimal, and state entities often obstruct corruption investigations.

Lebanon is a party to treaties addressing organized crime, corruption and terrorism, although the ongoing supply of Iranian weaponry to Hezbollah contradicts these commitments. The country receives aid primarily from the US and European countries to enhance the capabilities of the Lebanese armed forces. Lebanon has faced scrutiny

from the Gulf states regarding drug trafficking and has collaborated with international organizations to combat human trafficking and smuggling. At the domestic level, the controversial Kafala system, which regulates the employment of migrant domestic workers, has faced criticism for its exploitation of vulnerable individuals. While some measures have been taken to address this issue, the system persists. Legal frameworks exist to regulate and criminalize most organized crime activities, including arms trafficking, drug trafficking, flora and fauna crimes and trade in counterfeit goods. However, enforcement remains weak, resulting in impunity and an ineffective fight against organized crime. Nevertheless, significant efforts have been made to tackle cybercrime, including the establishment of a dedicated office within the internal security forces.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND SECURITY

The judicial system suffers from a lack of judges, slow proceedings, and case backlogs, leading to lengthy pre-trial detentions and overcrowded prisons. The independence of the judiciary and efforts to combat corruption have shown limited progress. Political interference along sectarian lines undermines the impartiality of the judiciary,

and corruption within the system further hampers its integrity. Law enforcement agencies, including the police force, face challenges such as corruption, inadequate funding, personnel, and equipment. Units dedicated to combating organized crime lack the necessary resources and workforce, limiting law enforcement capacity. Corruption within law enforcement agencies is high, and employment practices based on power-sharing arrangements make them susceptible to criminal infiltration.

Certain areas of Lebanon's territory are influenced by sectarian or tribal militias. The Syrian-Lebanese border is a hotspot for various types of trafficking, and control over this region is complicated by the challenging terrain and police corruption. The Lebanese army struggles to control smuggling activities and lacks authority over Palestinian refugee camps. Political and sectarian interference have an impact on border security, with some areas lacking full territorial control. The economic collapse in Lebanon has contributed to an increase in smuggling activities. Disputes between Hezbollah and the Syrian regime along the Lebanese-Syrian border have escalated tensions, and Hezbollah's control over certain smuggling routes hampers effective border security. The establishment of new military points by Hezbollah near smuggling crossings adds to the complexities of the situation.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL ENVIRONMENT

Lebanon is confronted with significant challenges relating to money laundering. The country's banking system has faced allegations that it has facilitated money laundering, resulting in increased international scrutiny. While efforts have been made to address these issues, concerns remain regarding the effectiveness of anti-money laundering measures and the implementation of international standards.

The country's economy has been profoundly affected by an ongoing economic crisis, leading to a sharp devaluation of the Lebanese lira and high inflation. This crisis has caused shortages of essential goods, soaring unemployment rates, and increased levels of poverty. The country's substantial debt and large budget deficit have made it increasingly difficult to tackle these economic challenges. Corruption represents a major obstacle in Lebanon, with allegations of misconduct within the central bank and other sectors. The lack of accountability and transparency has impeded progress in combating corruption and implementing necessary reforms. Moreover, the close ties between the political and private sectors have further fueled corruption and hindered economic development. Lebanon's financial system has encountered difficulties, including limitations on customer withdrawals and transfers, which have eroded trust in the banking sector. The country's foreign exchange reserves have been depleted, making it challenging to stabilize the economy and attract crucial investments.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND SOCIAL PROTECTION

Lebanon's judiciary has failed to adopt a victim-centred approach that provides compensation and accountability for victims. Instead, the country's response to exploitation often involves forcibly removing victims under the guise of irregular immigration. Civil society organizations, particularly in Beirut, are widespread and often the sole providers of services to victims of abuse and trafficking. Treatment for drug abusers and trafficking victims is offered by NGOs, private clinics, and hospitals, while the government's efforts to address exploitation have been criticized for lacking sufficient support and compensation for victims who are forced to leave the country. Furthermore, the effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes is hampered by inadequate data gathering.

Despite some prevention measures implemented by government ministries and security agencies, their impact remains limited compared to the scale of the problems. The implementation of the national hotline to report migrant workers and trafficking crimes, which receives low call volumes, is an example of the limited effectiveness of these efforts. Moreover, awareness-raising campaigns on drug abuse and trafficking are primarily developed and implemented by NGOs, churches, and religious institutions.

While NGOs and charities play a significant role in the socio-economic landscape, their operations are sometimes driven by political motivations based on sectarian lines. Even though NGOs are particularly active in victim support and preventative measures, they mostly remain under-capacitated and insufficiently supported by the state. Lebanon's media landscape faces challenges regarding press freedom, with outlets often serving as extensions of political parties or businesspeople. The sector is deeply intertwined with the sectarian system, and laws related to defamation and the dissemination of false information frequently impede freedom of press. Violations of freedom of expression, particularly targeting journalists, have been documented.

This summary was funded in part by a grant from the United States Department of State. The opinions, findings and conclusions stated herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Department of State.