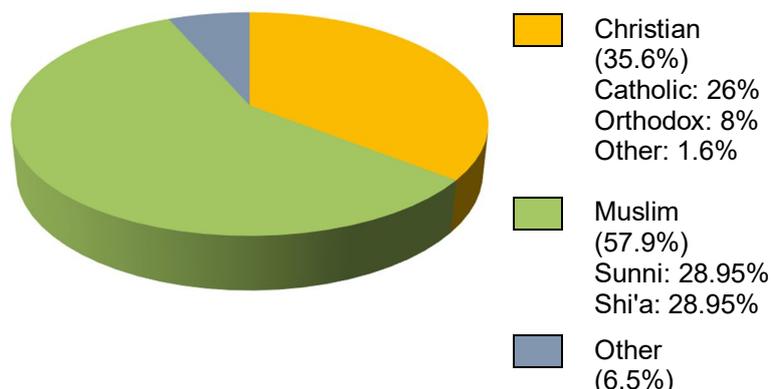
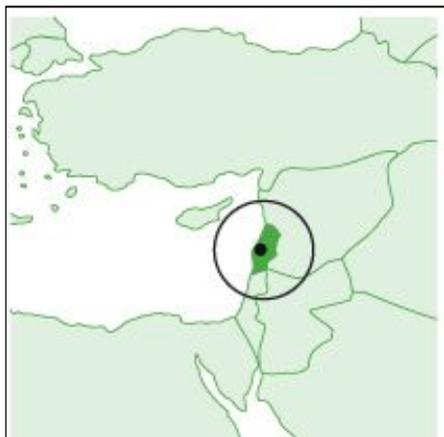


LEBANON



Area: 10,452 km ²	Population: 4.3 million	Political system: Democracy	Major Language(s): Arabic, French
--	-----------------------------------	---------------------------------------	---

Legal framework on freedom of religion and actual application

Lebanon is a republic located in the Levant on the Eastern Mediterranean. There are around 4.5 million citizens. The last official census was conducted in 1932, and therefore no accurate official estimate of the country's religious demographics exists. According to estimates non-Christians comprise more than the half of Lebanon's citizens. The largest groups are Sunni and Shi'a Muslims.

Lebanon has the highest percentage of Christian citizens in the Arab world. Christians are estimated to make up about 35 percent of the citizenry. There are 18 officially registered religious communities. The biggest Christian group amongst them is the Maronite Church. There is also a Druze minority. Particularly in the Northern city of Tripoli there is an Alawite minority. Additionally there is a very small number of Jews.

Due to the massive influx of Syrian refugees, the population is estimated to be as high as 5.8 million. Most of the refugees are Sunni Muslims. But tens of thousands of Syrian and Iraqi Christians have also sought refuge in Lebanon. There are no exact figures since a substantial number of refugees are not registered with the United Nations.

Approximately 450,000 Palestinians are registered with the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). They are almost entirely Sunni Muslims.

Lebanon is a parliamentary republic which has no official religion, and is not a formal secular state. The denominational political system assigns the highest public appointments to the various communities according to well-defined criteria: the presidency of the republic falls to a Maronite Christian, the presidency of the Council of Ministers to a Sunni Muslim and the parliamentary speakership to a Shi'a. Religious communities are represented in parliament according to fixed quotas.

Lebanon's constitution¹ provides for the liberty of religion. According to article 7 all Lebanese are equal before the law. Article 9 states that there shall be absolute freedom of conscience: "The state in rendering homage to the God Almighty shall respect all religions and creeds and shall

guarantee, under its protection the free exercise of all religious rites provided that public order is not disturbed. It shall also guarantee that the personal status and religious interests of the population, to whatever religious sect they belong, shall be respected.”

Article 10 says: “Education shall be free insofar as it is not contrary to public order and morals and does not affect the dignity of any of the religions or sects. There shall be no violation of the right of religious communities to have their own schools provided they follow the general rules issued by the state regulating public instruction.”

The Lebanese Penal Code punishes individuals who perform acts that are considered blasphemous to the name of God. It also imposes penalties against individuals who publicly insult the religious proceedings of any religion.²

Conversion from one religion to another is legal but might face strong social resistance.

Missionary activities and proselytism are allowed.

The equality of all is respected, but within a confessional and not an individual framework. Private law (marriage, parentage, inheritance) falls under the jurisdiction of each of the 18 religious communities recognised by the state (12 Christian, 5 Muslim and 1 Jewish). These possess their own proper jurisdictions and manage their own welfare organisations and educational institutions. Certain other religious communities within Lebanon (Yezidis, Baha’i, Buddhists and Jehovah’s Witnesses) are not legally recognised and therefore have no rights as institutional groups. Members of these groups are permitted to perform their religious rites freely though. Members of the non-recognised religious communities and those of no religion, may contract a civil marriage abroad, after which their union is then validated within Lebanon. But in this case the law relating to their marriage and its effects pertains to the law of the country where their civil marriage was celebrated.

Incidents

In early July 2014 Islamists carried out grenade attacks on the few restaurants and cafés in Tripoli that remained open and served food and beverages during the fasting hours of Ramadan. Four suspects were arrested. Before Ramadan, Tripoli’s Mayor Nader Ghazzal had requested that restaurants and cafés close during the fasting hours of Ramadan, but following the attacks noted that his request did not have the force of law nor was it mandatory. The press reported in August 2014 that several Islamists toured jewellery stores in Tripoli, demanded owners stop selling jewellery with Christian icons, and removed existing pieces from their displays, threatening those who continued to sell such items. Unknown perpetrators painted graffiti threats against Christians on two churches in Tripoli on 1st September. The messages read, “The Islamic State will break the cross” and “We came to slaughter you, you worshippers of the cross.” These incidents were reportedly (and widely perceived as being) in retaliation for the burning of the Islamic State (aka Daesh) and Al-Nusra flags by youth in Sassine Square, in Achrafieh, Beirut on 30th August.³

In September 2014, the new Sunni Mufti of the Republic of Lebanon Sheikh Abdel Latif Deria, who was elected in August, assumed his duties. In an unprecedented show of cross-sectarian unity, religious and political leaders from all of Lebanon’s major religious groups attended Deria’s inauguration ceremony. His first speeches after his election explicitly condemned the Shi’a and Sunni conflict, which he characterised as contributing to bloodshed and destabilisation throughout the Middle East: “Relations between Shi’ite and Sunni Muslims in Lebanon are not as they should be... What we are doing to each other in Syria, Iraq, in Lebanon and in Yemen and Libya, is far

worse than what the Israelis have done in Gaza and in Palestine". The new Mufti also drew attention to the forced uprooting of local Christian and other minority communities: "In less than five years wars between us have left half a million persons dead and 12 million displaced, not counting the oppression and uprooting of Christians and other communities. Phenomena which must be combatted day after day".⁴

In January 2015 a suicide bomb attack in the northern Lebanese city of Tripoli killed at least seven people. Al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's Syrian affiliate, said it was behind the attack, which also injured 30 people. A cafe in a predominantly Alawite neighbourhood was attacked. There has been tension in the past between Tripoli's Sunni Muslim majority population and its Alawite minority. Lebanon's *National News Agency* said the attack was carried out by two men from Tripoli, where longstanding religious tensions have been exacerbated by the war in neighbouring Syria. In a statement, Al-Nusra Front said the attack was "in revenge for the Sunnis in Syria and Lebanon". The war in Syria has pitted the government of President Bashar al-Assad, an Alawite, against an insurgency dominated by Sunnis. In October 2014 fighting broke out in Tripoli between Sunni militants and government troops, killing 11 soldiers, five civilians and about two dozen militants. Prime Minister Tammam Salam said the bombing was "a new attempt to spread the seeds of strife" in Tripoli but insisted that it would not "weaken the determination of the state to confront terrorism and terrorists". Lebanon's security has been severely damaged by the Syria crisis.⁵

Local bishops stated religious tensions have been exacerbated by the influx of refugees. In individual cases, Muslims from Syria, especially Sunnis, have defiled Christian symbols in acts of blasphemy, Maronite Archbishop Simon Atallah from Deir Al Ahmar told Aid to the Church in Need in March 2015. "They defile crosses, statues of the Virgin Mary, and so on. Anti-Christian slogans have also been painted on walls. This leads to tensions in the region," said the Archbishop.

A further concern is the import of security problems caused by Sunni extremists from Syria who have found refuge among their co-religionists in Lebanon. "The Lebanese Shi'ites are in favour of the Syrian regime, but the Sunnis are on the side of Daesh. In the region where I work there are some Sunni villages such as Aarsal and others. The Sunnis provide an inviting environment for Daesh. The members of Daesh can therefore penetrate into the region and find refuge among the Sunnis", Archbishop Attallah added.⁶

In August 2015 Makassed, a Sunni philanthropic association close to Dar el-Fatwa, Lebanon's highest Sunni authority, issued the Beirut Declaration on Religious Freedom. In the declaration, dated 20th June, the Sunni group reiterated the moderate Islamic position, stating the desire of Muslims to live peaceably alongside Christians, noting that no one can be forced to convert or be persecuted for holding different beliefs. The Declaration stated: "no one has the right to wage war against someone because of his beliefs or against a people or a community to drive them from their homes, or deprive them of their land".⁷

A twin suicide bombing in Beirut in November 2015 killed 43 and wounded 239. The Islamic State claimed responsibility. The target was the "apostate" Shi'a and Hezbollah, who support Syrian President Bashar Assad militarily. According to police, a suicide bomber with an explosive belt blew himself up in a shopping area. Several minutes later another suicide bomber blew himself up, leading to more casualties. The body of a third candidate bomber was found dead, but he failed to detonate his explosive belt. Hezbollah took to the field in support of President al-Assad in 2013, gaining significant military successes. Between July 2013 and February 2014, there were at least nine attacks on Hezbollah locations.

In December 2015 Maronite Bishop Hanna Alwan was stopped at gunpoint while travelling from the Maronite Patriarchal See in Diman (northern Lebanon) to Deir el-Ahmar, near the Ainata Pass. A known outlaw, Mohammad Dourra, asked the bishop to get Patriarch Bechara Boutros Rai to intercede with authorities to release his wife, who is being held in connection with a kidnapping. Bishop Hanna Rahme of Deir el-Ahmar said that Dourra threatened to abduct Christians in the Bekaa Valley if his wife was not released within two hours. The bishop said, "Anarchy is at its peak. The state has ceased to exist. This is the end of everything. Roads are safe no more and our lives are in danger." "In response the Jaafar tribe, which Dourra belongs to, denounced his "aggression and threats," and tried to reassure Christians that it was safe to travel in the region.⁸

In February 2016, the Maronite Bishops expressed concerns that Christians were being discriminated against in access to public offices and state financial resources. Their concern emerged during the monthly meeting of the Assembly of Maronite Bishops under the presidency of Patriarch Rai. According to the bishops the Christian presence in state roles has been silently eroded over the years to the benefit of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims. Christians are reported to be underrepresented in the ministry of finance, and according to a journalistic investigation only 27 percent of projects recently implemented by the Ministry for public works have impacted areas inhabited by Christians. The Maronite Bishops called on politicians and institutions to abide by Article 95 of the Constitution, which states that different religious communities must be "equally represented" in the public administration. Similar concerns were also expressed by the Melkite Greek-Catholic Church.⁹

In April 2016 two Islamic State fighters, including Nayef Shaalan (aka Abu Fouz), a leader of the extremist organisation, were killed in Lebanon as the army clashed with the group on the outskirts of Aarsal, where members of the Islamist group were based. A third man, a Syrian national named Moustafa Mousalli, was arrested. "The targeted terrorists had participated in fighting against the army in 2014, and they are responsible for rigging a number of cars and causing several explosions that targeted army posts and civilians in Aarsal and its surroundings," a Lebanese army representative said. Aarsal had been a base for Al-Nusra Front and Islamic State for almost two years, since the groups kidnapped 30 members of Lebanese security forces in the town in August 2014. The extremists used their captives as leverage to ensure freedom of movement in Aarsal and the surrounding region.¹⁰

Prospects for religious freedom

Maronite Archbishop Simon Attallah fears for the future of Lebanon's Christians, because of the shift in the country's demographic balance due to the large number of Syrian refugees in the country. The former Maronite Archbishop of Baalbek-Deir Al Ahmar described his concerns during an interview with Aid to the Church in Need in March 2015. "We have two million Syrians in the country as refugees. Many will return to their homeland when the war is over. But many refugees will remain in the country and apply for Lebanese citizenship in ten years. What will become of us Christians then?" asked Archbishop Attallah. "Lebanon is marked by a very delicate religious composition. Those Syrians who will remain in the country are mostly Sunnis. And the religious balance will thus be destroyed. That is a problem for us." Archbishop Attallah added that his remarks should not be misunderstood as showing a lack of solidarity with the refugees. "We show much solidarity. We want to act in solidarity. But we have obvious problems before our eyes. There is a question mark over our future."¹¹ Broadly speaking, the country's existing sectarian problems are under constant pressure.

¹ <http://www.presidency.gov.lb/English/LebaneseSystem/Documents/Lebanese%20Constitution.pdf>

-
- ² <http://www.loc.gov/law/help/apostasy/>
- ³ <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper>
- ⁴ http://www.fides.org/en/news/36348-ASIA_LEBANON_New_Mufti_installed_a_man_of_dialogue#.Vym3gp3wCM8
- ⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30765820>
- ⁶ <http://members4.boardhost.com/acnaus/msg/1440022026.html>
- ⁷ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Muslims-defend-Christians'-freedom-in-Beirut-Declaration-35135.html>
- ⁸ <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Maronite-bishop-stopped-at-gunpoint-in-a-country-where-anarchy-reigns-35027.html>
- ⁹ http://www.fides.org/en/news/59345-ASIA_LEBANON_Lebanese_Churches_concerned_about_religious_discrimination_with_regards_to_access_to_functions_and_public_resources#.Vxt9jZ3wCM8
- ¹⁰ <http://www.ibtimes.com/isis-leader-security-official-killed-lebanese-army-raid-2361146>
- ¹¹ <http://members4.boardhost.com/acnaus/msg/1440022026.html>