



## Lebanon's Upcoming Election Highlights How the Country's Economic Crisis Has Been Exacerbated by Destructive External Forces and Conflict Between Pro-Saudi and Pro-Iranian Factions

Lebanon's upcoming election on May 15th is set to take place amid a backdrop of criticism towards the country's political elite, and highlights how the major economic crisis fueling discontent has been exacerbated by destructive external forces and conflict between pro-Saudi and pro-Iranian factions. The disapproval, which has grown even further since the 2020 Beirut explosion exposed dangerous government incompetency and corruption, has also expanded to a general frustration with the political establishment's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic and the catastrophic economic crisis. The World Bank has outlined the severity of the financial meltdown, labelling it as one of the three most dire economic crises currently unfolding. Meanwhile, longstanding foreign interference and conflict between Saudi-backed and Iranian-backed factions, who are both poised to gain additional seats, has propelled skepticism as well. The potential for prolonged governmental gridlock has many Lebanese feeling pessimistic about the upcoming election and its chances of helping alleviate the country's economic woes.

The sense of skepticism stems from the fact that destructive outside actors like the Saudi and Iranian governments have manipulated the country into this economic devastation. Iran, which has propped up Hezbollah into a strong political force, has prompted the Saudi regime and its allies in the United Arab Emirates to take hardline positions in Lebanon in the hopes of having the government expel Hezbollah completely. Regrettably, it is the Lebanese people who suffer the consequences of this foreign interference. As Lebanon already faces economic ruin, the behavior of Saudi and Iranian-backed factions will only exacerbate this further by leading to more gridlock which will harm ordinary citizens.

Over the past couple of years, the Thawra seemed poised to be the next notable political phenomenon in Lebanon. A continuation of the grievances expressed during the Arab Spring, the Thawra was a growing movement that expanded its focus to strong and broader critiques of the Lebanese government and a lack of fundamental services. The movement, which grew from protests against the WhatsApp tax and the Beirut explosion, had successes including the peaceful removal of Hassan Diab, the former prime minister who oversaw Lebanon during the Beirut port explosion that killed more than 215 people. Diab only spent one year in office and resigned due to the growing pressure against him and outrage over the disastrous explosion.

Despite this success of the movement in Lebanon, growing frustration from voters has caused experts and analysts to be skeptical of any fundamental change in the political landscape. The current premier who took over post-Diab, long-term politician and billionaire Najib Mikati, has largely been met with stiff opposition as well. Mikati has failed to regrow the economy and has been accused of widespread corruption.

While Saudi Arabia briefly halted ties with Lebanon over remarks pertaining to the calamitous Saudi-led war in Yemen, as the upcoming May 15th election in Lebanon nears, the Saudi and UAE governments have kick-started back their efforts to influence the political environment. Thus, impartial analysts lament the fact that these foreign entities have played such a damaging role in Lebanon's internal affairs. This persistent behavior has resulted in many Lebanese feeling disillusioned and pessimistic with the state of the country's political landscape and the upcoming election.