

# Lebanon

## OVERVIEW

### Lebanon Program Summary

Lebanon has faced many challenges in establishing a stable and democratic political system. The country had been steadily recuperating after a devastating civil war that lasted from 1975-1990 when the 2006 war with Israel broke out. Millions of dollars in damage and thousands of homeless Lebanese emerged in the aftermath of these hostilities. A series of political assassinations, including Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 and Pierre Gemayal in November 2006, underscored the potential for instability and the ongoing role of external forces in domestic politics. The Cedar Revolution, in the aftermath of the Hariri assassination, forced Lebanon's long-time occupier Syria to withdraw its forces in the spring of 2005, but lingering questions regarding Syria's proxy Hezbollah have contributed to Lebanon's continued political uncertainty.

By 2007, all optimism resulting from the Cedar Revolution had faded. The government's inability to meet public expectations for political reform revealed glaring weakness in Lebanon's central state. The result was a significantly weakened March 14 coalition government and a powerful new political opposition led by Hezbollah called March 8 that trapped the country in a government stalemate. Despite these setbacks, in 2009, the March 14 coalition surprised the March 8 opposition maintaining its parliamentary majority and formed a unity government.

In January 2011, the March 8 coalition withdrew from the unity government following controversy in the Special Tribunal of Lebanon, which was charged with investigating the assassination of Rafik Hariri. The withdrawal toppled the unity government, further weakening Lebanon's central state. Prime Minister Najib Mikati was charged with forming a new government, which formed in June 2011 and is led by March 8. Despite March 14 walking out, March 8 solidified its leadership in the National Assembly by winning a parliamentary vote of confidence on July 7, 2011.

The International Republican Institute's (IRI) first activity in Lebanon took place during the 2005 parliamentary elections when IRI supported Lebanon's first-ever exit polling. Since then, IRI has assisted Lebanese civil society in developing the tools necessary to establish a stable and democratic system.

With elections scheduled for 2013, IRI's current work is focused on increasing the capacity of civil society within Lebanon to encourage open political dialogue by engaging decision-makers and citizens in debates relating to corruption, democratic governance and economic development. Open political dialogue on these topics is crucial for Lebanon to turn the page on its past and build institutions that are responsive to current citizen demands for accountability and democracy.