



REPORT WORLD

Machine Politics in Lebanon's Alleyways

MAY 6, 2016 — SIMA GHADDAR

This May, Lebanon is holding its first municipal elections in six years, the only meaningful exercise of democratic choice in a country where legislative elections are gerrymandered beyond recognition and the office of the presidency has stood empty for nearly two years. Twice already, the 2009 Lebanese parliament has unconstitutionally extended its own mandate. Since 2011, a caretaker government has run the country, sidestepping divisive issues and leaving Lebanon in a state of political deadlock and economic drift.

In this dysfunctional political climate, municipal elections are perhaps the only process that actually provides feedback between citizens and those who govern them. While local authorities possess limited power, municipal elections provide clues about public opinion and the resilience of a Lebanese system dominated by local bosses and political machines.

This report presents a textured study of the city of Sidon, showing in sordid detail how the boss system has embedded itself inextricably in the essential functions of daily life. In a state with weak central authority, power and wealth flow through patronage networks that connect the richest elite to the poorest neighborhoods, extending the system's reach even into quarters that receive only a pittance in terms of actual resources.

Sidon is the home base of the Hariri family and its political party, the Future Movement. The Future Movement is often understood as the dominant Sunni power and the vehicle of former prime minister Saad Hariri; but it should also be understood as one of many “boss” enterprises, which compete with each other but all rely on the same overarching system. The mechanics of patronage—the politics of the alleyways—reveals a prosaic but important unit of analysis. A local family boss, Bahia Hariri, runs a tight operation of municipal control and patronage in Sidon. It is at the municipal level that the national Hariri dynasty perpetuates its power.

In principle, the Future Movement's constituents desire a strong traditional state. In practice, the Future Movement's political bosses (known colloquially as *zaims*) subordinate financial, economic, and social development to party loyalty and communal identity. If the state's governing bodies are not in harmony with the governing *zaims*, then citizens suffer neglect until their many bickering bosses resolve their differences. When “quorum is complete,” the boss's political interests still take precedence. The mechanics of the Hariri dynasty in its home city of Sidon show how a dysfunctional national order is built block by block, neighborhood by neighborhood, political broker by political broker—and explain how the entire country of Lebanon remains under the control of a small number of powerful families, and why it is so difficult for new entrants to compete independently, even at the municipal level.

The 2016 Municipal Elections

Jaundiced voters view municipal elections like they do the rest of the Lebanese political process: with a high degree of

skepticism. Sectarian warlords from the 1975–1990 Lebanese Civil War, along with a group of ultra-wealthy families, form a tiny “political boss” class that dominates the entire political process in Lebanon, from the presidency and cabinet all the way down to neighborhood ward. A close look at the municipal level, where most government development projects are actually implemented, reveals a milieu dominated by sectarian personalities whose first priority is to consolidate networks of patronage and control.

This month, establishment coalitions are trying to fend off unprecedented electoral challenges from independent reformers in Lebanon’s largest and most pluralistic cities, especially in the capital Beirut. Unpopular power brokers face a new threat, but with the solid foundation of the Lebanese “boss system” they appear comfortably positioned to survive because their system is integral to the country’s most essential daily functions.

One key reason why political bosses remain so resilient in the face of public discontent is the structure of local networks of patronage and control. Local gatekeepers exercise almost total power over the expenditure of public funds in the areas under their control. They use this power locally to build blocs of loyalists and punish challengers. And patronage networks create the strongest link to voters, who can then be mobilized for other purposes, including strikes, demonstrations, and riots.

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Understanding Lebanese politics is important, because the country often serves as a showcase for the great regional struggles of the day: sectarianism, the competition for influence between Saudi Arabia and Iran, corruption, and shared governance in a slowly failing state. Gaining this knowledge, however, also requires a deep understanding of the corrupt, personality-driven mechanisms of local control, which form the foundation of the country’s sectarian political system.

The role that patronage networks play in Lebanese politics is laid bare by examining the mechanics of one network in particular in the southern city of Sidon (also known as Saida), a Sunni-majority port city that is home to the country’s dominant Sunni political family, the Hariris. The Hariri’s use of corruption, patronage, and misuse of public works money to coerce compliance from citizens in Sidon may be par for course in regional politics, but Lebanon’s unusual

confluence of openness, competition, and democratic pretense offers a rare and detailed glimpse of how this process unfolds—and explains why Lebanon and its neighbors suffer such a low level of human development relative to their national wealth. This case study focuses on a relatively homogenous Sunni city that is home base to one dominant political party. Further study of other comparable enclaves in Lebanon can explore the similarities between Sidon and similar mechanisms of political patronage in other parts of Lebanon, dominated at the local level by other sects and factions (Hezbollah and Amal in Shia areas, the Progressive Socialist Party in Druze areas, or the Lebanese Forces and Free Patriotic Movement in Maronite areas).

The Rise of the Hariris in Sidon

In a region beset by despots and sectarian warlords, Lebanon has emerged, sadly, as a trendsetter. Political bosses—known colloquially as *zaims* and feudal lords—openly divide the country's spoils, from political offices to set shares of graft schemes. Some of the *zaims* are direct descendants of Ottoman-era feudal landowners. Others rose to power as militia leaders during the Lebanese Civil War, or as emissaries of a regional power in the war's aftermath. All of them rely on local bases: small populations in cities, villages, and neighborhoods whose loyalty can be counted on during elections and times of conflict. This popular and highly localized base is often assumed but rarely studied and discussed.

The founder of the Hariri family dynasty, Rafik Hariri, rose to prominence after the end of the Lebanese Civil War in 1990, and led the dynasty until his assassination in 2005. He was considered Saudi Arabia's most trusted ally in Lebanon, and earned billions of dollars as a contractor while making himself the unchallenged kingpin among Sunni family heads in Lebanon. At the time of his death, Rafik Hariri exerted power across the Arab region as a businessman, statesman, and Saudi consigliere, with a larger-than-life reputation. His son, Saad Hariri, inherited his father's political mantle and established a political organization in his name, known today as the Future Movement.

Today, the Hariri empire is verging on financial insolvency, and political challengers have contested its primacy among Sunnis.¹ Lacking his father's charisma and popularity, Saad Hariri has become a symbol of the declining fortunes of once-dominant Sunnis throughout the Levant. The Sunni elite that in living memory called the shots in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine today is in disarray.

The Uncertain Future of the Future Movement in Lebanon

The Future Movement is typically discussed as a reflection of Saudi Arabia's political and financial patronage in Lebanon. And in fact, foreign funding and backing help all of Lebanon's political bosses maintain control. But foreign sponsorship alone cannot explain how the Sunni Future Movement—and its opposition, the Shia Hezbollah—became Lebanon's main rival parties. Their power and wealth must be cultivated and distributed through networks that extend to the very bottom of the political pyramid in order to be effective.

Under Saad Hariri's leadership, however, the Future Movement has been under a lot of scrutiny over his failure to maintain the same level of political influence and communal control exerted by his father. Once the poster child of the Sunni community in Lebanon, Saad Hariri's sad decline signals the end of Sunni primacy. The national trauma that followed his father's assassination, especially among Sunni-majority districts such as Sidon, brought an "overpowering instinct of communal solidarity"² that sooner or later was bound to end. Syria's assumed guilt for his assassination, according to the International Crisis Group, "prompted the community's stark political realignment and led to new, unorthodox alliances," however there was nothing much else that had united the Sunni community.³



SAAD HARIRI IN A CAMPAIGN POSTER FOR CENTRAL BEIRUT MUNICIPALITY ELECTIONS. TEXT: "I AM LIKE YOU, WITH THE BEIRUTI LIST." MAY 1, 2016. BEIRUT, LEBANON. PICTURE BY AUTHOR.

Multiple factors have contributed to the apparent vulnerability of the Future Movement including financial insecurity, a leadership vacuum, Sunni-Sunni bickering, and the rise of militant Islamic groups due to the Syrian civil war raging next door. However, those factors do not operate in a vacuum. Local political bosses and business elites in northern Lebanon have long jeopardized the party's patronage networks there. The Future Movement's rivals had their own tough and loyal ward heelers, local "political brokers" who earned them fearsome reputations in some Sunni areas. Zeina Helo, a researcher at the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), defines political brokers as representatives of small geographic areas who are used to mobilize political support and maintain political allegiance. These local brokers proved every bit as enduring in their power as the *zaim* political bosses who strove to coopt them. The Future Movement had to surrender some of its authority to the rising power of these political brokers, or in some instances, to weaker rivals who over time rose to become equals. Competitors became, at times, senior officials, decision-makers at the top of the

political power pyramid, or security chiefs, all of them outside the purview of the Future Movement. As Hariri's power dwindled over the past six years, Sunni-Sunni competition accelerated the demise of the Future Movement as the sole representative of the Sunni community. In the northern city of Tripoli, a fragmented Sunni leadership brought instability, communal violence, and impoverishment.⁴ At the local level, a power-sharing accord—based on assigned quotas for each political boss—led to political deadlock, perpetuated social grievances, and bred pockets of militant Islamism. Soon enough, the Future Movement was losing its local popularity, political influence and Saudi patronage.

To wield power in Lebanon, the Future Movement, like its competitors, must play a complex three-level game, juggling international patronage, national alliances, and networks of control over individual citizens at the block and neighborhood level—a game it is mostly losing outside Sidon.

As the party's network in the North weakened, it redoubled attention to its stronghold in the southern city of Sidon. Symbolically, Sidon is the second largest Sunni-majority city and the main gate to Shia-dominated south Lebanon. Sidon carries disproportionate symbolic importance as a symbol of the Future Movement's political heft. For leaders like Saad Hariri, clientelism lies at the heart of political power. A close look at Sidon, at this moment of historic tension in the region's politics, offers a raw portrait of the way power and influence are built in Lebanon's trend-setting political milieu. To wield power in Lebanon, the Future Movement, like its competitors, must play a complex three-level game, juggling international patronage, national alliances, and networks of control over individual citizens at the block and neighborhood level—a game it is mostly losing outside Sidon. To understand this failure of the Future Movement in other Sunni-majority areas, it would be helpful to take a closer look at the one place where the Future Movement has been most successful.

Bahia Hariri: “The Iron Lady Who Never Sleeps”

Even before the official establishment of the Future Movement in 2007, the Hariri family—under the auspices of Saad Hariri's aunt, Bahia Hariri—has successfully consolidated a patronage network in Sidon that controls almost all development projects in the city.

Supporters of the Future Movement and the Hariri family call Bahia Hariri the “iron-lady who never sleeps” and the champion of educational reform.⁵ A member of parliament since 1992 and former minister of education (2008–09), Bahia Hariri based her reputation on family philanthropy. In 1979, she became the president of Hariri’s first association, then known as the Islamic Association of Culture and Education (it has since been renamed The Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development). In her multiple roles, Bahia Hariri learned very well the importance of social organizations, political brokers, and development networks.

After the assassination of her brother, Rafik Hariri, she decided to capitalize on the national and communal sense of collective trauma.⁶ While her brother built no formal political organization, Bahia Hariri said she believed it was necessary to establish one after her brother’s death in order to continue the family’s role as leading Sunni *zaim*.⁷ Since then, Bahia Hariri has presided over a rash of development projects in Sidon; while many of these projects benefited city residents, they were executed with an eye toward cultivating political loyalty and patronage networks. As a result, even development projects that have brought some tangible quality of life improvement have also enshrined coercive control—rather than accountable governance—at the local level.⁸ As is so often the case in Lebanon, for Bahia Hariri, civic needs take a backseat to cultivating influence.

She has cultivated a tight personal network within the national political elite. Her mechanism of authority at the national level is opaque, but it is manifest in a clear link to the top. It is Bahia Hariri, and not the local municipal council, who gets a hearing at national ministries to release funds and legal approval for projects. It is Bahia Hariri, not the local government, who can request exceptions to laws and codes. And it is Bahia Hariri, not elected local officials, who is consulted by Lebanese authorities and *zaims* to provide backchannel approval for any decision that impacts the Sidon electorate.

Under the developmental umbrella of the Hariri Foundation, Bahia Hariri has been able to govern a network of civil society organizations and monopolize most government-funded development projects in Sidon. Like her brother before her, Bahia Hariri understands that her Sunni constituents preferred to pursue power through civic associations rather than through militant movements with armed auxiliaries. She has continued to consolidate power mainly through her welfare and development organizations rather than through her family’s political party.

Weaving a Network of Political Brokers under the Watchful Eye of Bahia

As a member of parliament from Sidon, Bahia Hariri unified existing associations into networks that would make it easier to manage the city. Some of the networks she created were political and religious, while others were social and economic. The year 2007—when the Future Movement was established—witnessed a flurry of new social organization

networks. In February 2007, the Hariri Foundation formed the Network of Charities for Development in Sidon and Its Neighboring Towns, with more than twenty-two civil society organizations.⁹ Fouad Siniora, former prime minister, former minister of finance, co-founder of the Future Movement, and a member of parliament from Sidon, raises funds for two of the most important and successful charities in that network, the Social and Welfare Association (Al-Moasat)¹⁰ and Ahlouna Association. Siniora also has provided office space for these two charities. “Bahia’s job is at the local level, while Siniora has the ability to bring the financial aid from the outside,” says Tarek Baassiri, head of Siniora’s political office in Sidon.¹¹ Bahia Hariri and Siniora both keep a watchful eye to reinforce their footing in Sidon: “Siniora brings the money and Bahia brings the projects,” explains another one of the Future Movement’s officials in the city.¹² Almost all the Hariri Foundation’s projects are financed by the foundation itself from the funds it receives from the Future Movement. However, in recent years, Bahia Hariri was able to circumvent the Future Movement’s financial troubles. The Hariri Foundation is characterized as the indiscriminate, moderate, open, professional, and operative engine of the Future Movement’s philanthropic work. Bahia Hariri can rely on international grants to the Hariri Foundation (primarily from USAID), donations Siniora raises on his visits to European and Gulf States, funding and implementing partnerships with UN agencies, and Lebanese government funds through the Council for Reconstruction and Development (CDR).

Another overlooked unit of Lebanese politics that Bahia Hariri has shrewdly capitalized on is the family association. Members of extended families often number in the thousands in a given city. Their formal associations, which historically functioned as social support groups, have evolved largely as a result of Hariri policymaking into robust units of political organization, akin to civic, ethnic, or block associations elsewhere.

In March 2007, Bahia Hariri created the “The Gathering of Family Associations in Sidon,” a collection of around twenty family associations. In doing so, she may have been taking a page out of her brother’s playbook: 1997, in Beirut, Rafik Hariri revived the “Federation of Beirut’s Family Associations,” which was used to mobilize around 20 percent of Beirut’s potential voters during the 2000 parliamentary elections.¹³

In Sidon, it was not until 1998 that family associations were allowed to officially register with the state’s interior ministry. Today, each association has an elected administrative council and meets on a monthly basis.¹⁴ The president of the Al-Baassiri family and the head of Siniora’s private office in Sidon, Tarek Baassiri, explained that family associations provide basic welfare and political advocacy for their members. Aside from helping out a family member with tuition fees or medical bills, the association, he said, works to “politically unite our position.” He added matter-of-factly, “Our leaning here honestly is Hariri. Most of the families here are Hariri.” Family associations in Sidon are prevalent and have local credibility. They’ve become central arenas where parties, including the Future Movement, mobilize voter turnout and recruit candidates for local positions.

Bahia Hariri holds regular meetings of area notables at her residence in the wealthy suburb of Majdeloun overlooking Sidon. These convenings are carefully choreographed to project to Sidon residents that the Hariri residence is the center of gravity for all the city's political, religious, and social factions. According to Abed Al-Rahman Al-Bizri, former head of Sidon's municipal council and critic of Bahia Hariri's policies, "These meetings are a façade so that when Bahia wants to release a political statement, she could say she consulted the city's representatives and notables."¹⁵ (Bizri is nominally a political independent, but when he served as mayor from 2004 to 2010, he was supported by Amal and Hezbollah.) On most occasions, the Majdeloun gatherings are comprised of Hariri supporters, Future Movement employees, or political brokers.

Since the late 2000s, Bahia Hariri has hosted, on a monthly basis, the "Sidon Consultative Meetings," which are well known in the area. Key Muslim and Christian religious figures, faction leaders, civil society actors, members of the municipality, representatives from the Federation of Unions and Chamber of Commerce, heads of family associations, neighborhood officials called *mokhtars*, and other key personalities in the city¹⁶ discuss recent political developments. Not all attendees rely on Hariri patronage, but all agree that Bahia Hariri is the "big boss." The key personalities that attend those meeting are representative of the network of social organizations and political brokers that she manages and mobilizes when necessary. Some of the most effective political brokers are the small-time operators from local charities and the periphery of the state bureaucracy.

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In Sidon, an effective political broker does not only operate during election season and push citizens to vote for a particular leader in exchange for a direct payment or service, but rather also endeavors to keep citizens continuously indebted to—and even dependent on—the city's political boss and party. That debt can later translate into a vote or other service. A political broker assesses community needs: what services are missing, who urgently needs financial support, who is investing in new local businesses. The broker then reports back to his boss, and together they apportion direct aid or bureaucratic support. Common citizens typically have to go through a broker even just to communicate with their leaders.

The most effective political brokers work for the state, but do so in an extremely local capacity. For example, the *mokhtar*, a directly elected official, represents the registered constituents of his neighborhood before state administrations. In practice, the *mokhtar* must certify—for a fee—any official form a resident wants to file to a government body or agency. As an extra service, the *mokhtar* can even file applications on a citizen’s behalf. Citizens cannot renew a passport, apply for a visa, enroll in school, or conduct virtually any business that relies on the public sector without first getting an affidavit certifying their identity from the *mokhtar*. More importantly, the *mokhtar* has the full list of eligible voters in his area, identified by sect. He is aware of every family scuffle and individual complaint. Voters directly elect the *mokhtar*. Thus, the *mokhtar*’s political affiliation can attest to the leaning of his area.¹⁷

A spirited *mokhtar* in Sidon, Mohammad Ismail Baassiri, has a reputation for being lively, frank, and uncorrupt. He has been the *mokhtar* of Dikerman, Sidon’s biggest neighborhood, for eighteen years. As *mokhtar*, he represents the Al-Baassiri Family Association. A rare supporter of the Future Movement who is also publicly critical, he attends the Sidon Consultative Meetings at Bahia Hariri’s residence. “We are always asked about what is it that we see wrong in the city,” he said. Mohammad Baassiri, who had set up his tiny *mokhtar* office in the middle of his traditional barbershop, spends his day juggling small talk and paperwork.

When a guy comes to us, we converse with him, you know, we also pose our own questions to the citizen, we ask, “What do you think of life, what do you think of the situation, the social conditions”—We lure without him knowing, to see who he belongs to. Since we [the mokhtars] represent the state, we see if he is with the state and its apparatus. We say “a thousand times a crooked state better than open political parties” [Lebanese saying].¹⁸

Echoing the Future Movement’s official discourse, Mohammad Baassiri describes Sidon as the epitome of Islamic moderation and coexistence. At the Sidon Consultative Meetings, he reports any observed instances of radicalization, militancy, or other behavior that might jeopardize that image. The most important topics raised at those meetings, he said, are about how to prevent sectarian incitement and Islamic extremism—“the young guys that are now going into mosques, or *hussainiat* [Shia sermons], or joining political parties, and what not, this person says Allah and Ali [Imam Ali Bin Abi Taleb] and I don’t know what, this is what we want out.”¹⁹

Union heads also have proven useful to the Future Movement, sometimes to coopt working class voters and other times to marginalize them when they resist Bahia’s plans for Sidon. For example, the president of the “Federation of Unions in Sidon and the South,” Abed Al-Latif Teryaki, also happens to be a high-ranking employee at the Future Movement’s Sidon office. (Such conflicting roles are common in the Arab world, where governing parties or state security agencies have tried to infiltrate labor unions from the top down.) Teryaki manages the union federation in direct consultation

with Bahia Hariri. Bahia Hariri is not simply the financial supporter of social organizations in Sidon, Teryaki says. “She protects us, we fall into a problem, we go to her, we have a problem with someone, we go to her,” he said. The unions also benefit from direct monetary aid from the Future Movement. “Every three months we would take a sum of money and we would distribute them out to workers that most needed them—this guy needs medication, this guy needs to pay his son’s tuitions fees, that guy can’t, you know how it is,” he said.

Teryaki, an avid Bahia Hariri devotee, accepts her commanding position in Sidon. “As the son of Sidon and a member of the Future,” he explained, “there is a line that you cannot cross and that is Bahia Hariri; the work has to go through her and we accept that fact, and, on the contrary, we see this as protection and support.” Teryaki does not separate his position as the president of the union federation from his political affiliation to the Future Movement. He praises Hariri’s controversial reconstruction policies, which promoted privatization of state-owned.²⁰ Teryaki says that Hariri’s policies, which reinforced Lebanon’s financial institutions and business class, also greatly benefited unions and enhanced cooperation between workers and business owners. Hariri critics, including the Lebanese left, blame his economic policies for saddling the country with debt and worsening the crisis for the working poor. Teryaki’s views put him out of sync with his own constituents, the union rank and file.²¹ “Our project is that of the state, we work in parallel with the state,” Teryaki said of the Future Movement’s dealings with union members. He then laughed and jokingly apologized for speaking as a Future employee. “We are trying to give power and credibility back to the state and you have sides that don’t care about the state, who benefit from its absence, but with the state’s paralysis, we can’t just stop working on development. As a member of the Future Movement, now, we can’t have these areas wait.”

The Future Movement, under the slogan “Lebanon First,” has positioned itself in the last four years as the champion of a strong state, defending government institutions in the face of other factions that it accuses of undermining the state apparatus and operating outside of its institutions, especially Hezbollah. However, in many respects, the Future Movement engages in the same behavior that it decries in its rivals—sidestepping the state and setting up substitute, party-controlled social service mechanisms.

The Curious Case of the Fishermen’s Union

The Future Movement sometimes takes advantage of incompetent government or union representatives in order to tamp down public discontent. In some situations, these representatives simply will not address the concerns of their constituents if their requests conflict with the interests of the party bosses who put the representatives in office. One of the unions under the Future Movement’s control is Sidon’s Fishermen’s Union, a prototypical example of what happens to a group, albeit a weak one, that does not pledge fealty and decides to challenge the system.

The fishermen's seaside area is historically known for its support for Maarouf Saad, the founder of the Popular Nasserite Organization and main competitor of the Hariri dynasty in the city.²² Since 2005, the Future Movement has systematically ignored the fishermen and shelved projects for the renovation of their seaside port. Meanwhile major commercial projects sprout just blocks away.



THE KHAN EL FRANJ HISTORICAL RUIN ACROSS SIDON FISHERMEN SEASIDE MARKET. MAY 6, 2016. SIDON, LEBANON. PHOTO TAKEN BY AUTHOR.

A fisherman, Khalid Bawji, complained that the head of his union, Mohammad Bawji (no relation), was a weak Hariri stand-in. “He is an old man in his 80s, poor thing, he cannot do or bring us anything,” Khalid Bawji said. “If we had young union members and a president who was qualified and up for the challenge, he would have been able to collect our rights for us.” The Hariris have curtailed efforts of some of fishermen to elect younger union leaders, according to Zuhair Al-Samra, a critic of the Future Movement. Back in 2011, Al-Samra, along with eleven fishermen, ran against the Future Movement’s candidates for the union elections, and was outmaneuvered by Bahia Hariri. He said the Future movement bribed fishermen and persuaded inactive union members with no stake in the fishermen’s concerns to vote for Future’s preferred candidates.²³

Khaled Bawji, who describes himself as a disappointed Hariri supporter, expressed his frustration at the Future Movement's empty promises and indifference to the fishermen's dire working conditions. "Back in 1995, the Hariri family used to help out fishermen through direct monetary support to pay their bills or fix their boats," he said. Today, Bawji said the fishermen see no more cash aid because "they [the Hariris] are dry and the [money] faucet is now closed"—referring to Saudi Oger's near bankruptcy and rumors that Saudi Arabia has stopped pouring financing Saad Hariri. However, Bawji stopped short of blaming the Hariri family, and said there is nothing the Hariris could do in this difficult time. Instead, he blamed Hariri ally Fouad Siniora for being a "hypocritical cheat with all the money," full of empty promises.²⁴ "If he doesn't want to support us, let it be so, we don't want his support, but we don't want him to come down here to the fishermen and throw empty promises." (It is common to hear Future Movement constituents in Sidon complain about Siniora and other officials, but almost never do residents voice criticism of Bahia Hariri.) The fishermen of Sidon have been denied the right to choose their own union representation. They also have suffered steady erosion of their livelihoods.²⁵

Cheating Development: Bahia, Siniora, and Saoudi Trio

With the upcoming municipality elections,²⁶ the Municipality of Sidon has been showcasing its achievements and thanking the Hariri dynasty. The reason for this effusive public display of gratitude requires a little backstory.

In 2004, the Hariri list of candidates lost the municipal elections to the Popular Nasserite Organization's coalition with Abed Al-Rahman Al-Bizri, the president of the Doctor's Union and long-time local political rival of the Hariri family. Then, perhaps not coincidentally, from 2004 to 2010, many development projects stalled in Sidon. Within weeks of the restoration of Hariri municipal control in 2010, however, most of the frozen projects were approved and sent under way. Bizri claimed that his municipality simply had canceled some projects it had inherited from its predecessors because they were technically flawed. More important, however, Bizri did not have the Hariri family's blessing, and so, pro-Hariri government ministries rejected projects put forth by Al-Bizri's municipality. During his term, Bizri turned for help to his political boss, Nabih Berri, the sectarian leader of the second largest Shia political party and *zaim* of Sidon's neighboring towns, for favors.²⁷ Although Berri wields enormous power in many parts of Lebanon, he could not supplant Bahia Hariri in her home base and was unable to help his local partner in Sidon.

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Today in Lebanon, politicized party-controlled welfare networks leave municipality councils at the mercy of a given area's *zaim*. Political leaders handpick the municipality heads. For example, the current head of Sidon's municipal council, Mohammad Al-Saoudi, first sought Bahia Hariri's blessing before announcing this April that he was running for another term.²⁸ In the candidate selection process, loyalty always trumps competence, but in Sidon, Hussein Nasrallah, area manager for the south at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), claims Bahia Hariri seeks both competence and loyalty in her lieutenants.²⁹ In the process of coordinating development projects supported by the international community, Nasrallah has haggled and coordinated with many municipalities, negotiating the rules of the *zaims* to do his work. He said he has achieved the best results when a loyal and competent municipality is in sync with its political bosses. "The effect that political leaders have on municipalities can both be a curse and a blessing," Nasrallah said. "If there is no harmony between the municipality and the political leader, then nothing would work." Assessing the 2010 elections, when Siniora and Bahia Hariri both won parliamentary seats representing Sidon and the Future Movement's list won the municipal council, Bahia Hariri revealingly said: "The quorum was complete."³⁰

Today, Bahia Hariri has almost complete authority over any development project in Sidon. *Zaims* and municipality heads share a stake in the projects implemented. Together, they monopolize development. Under the current pro-Hariri municipal council, Nasrallah says, "If Bahia does not give her okay, then nothing will happen. The Hariri Foundation is the political cover for all the projects in the area and vice versa."³¹ Bahia Hariri uses the Hariri Foundation as the umbrella organization for all the development and community projects around the city. She manages the foundation the same way she manages the municipality: it always is presented as a "progressive, professional, non-sectarian association, in contrast to the social services provided by sectarian militia leaders and *zaims*."³² While other bosses and their political parties might be portrayed as sectarian, militant, or rapacious, weakening the state in pursuit of factional power, the dominant faction in Sidon—the Future Movement—burnishes an image of non-sectarian professionalism, even if its tactics are indistinguishable from those of its rivals.³³

The city has witnessed an unprecedented flow of projects since Saoudi took office, but at whose expense? Most projects implemented are narrow and tangible—street beautification or the renovation of a cultural landmark. "They like to pick the projects that people can see, anything above the ground," says Nasrallah. Having worked with mayors elsewhere who do absolutely nothing for their constituents, he said Sidon looks good by comparison: "It is still better than nothing."³⁴

Political leaders control the municipality's development strategy. During Bizri's term, Bahia Hariri had already started formulating a development manual with experts and civil society groups in her network. The resulting plan was known as the Urban Sustainable Development Strategy for Sidon City (USUDS) that the Hariri Foundation drew up with MedCities, a development initiative established in 1990 by the World Bank, the European Investment Bank, the European Commission, and the UNDP. In 2010, Bahia Hariri handed the strategy to Saoudi; it became his blueprint.³⁵

Usually, the Hariri Foundation tries to have its name on every single project in the city. For example, when UNDP proposed a community cohesion and capacity-building project named the “Community Kitchen Project”³⁶ employing Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese women, the project was not approved until UNDP agreed to hand the its management to the Hariri Foundation.³⁷

Though these projects deserve much of the praise they have received, they are indicative of a twisted approach that subverts development to political brand-building and patronage. The Hariri dynasty has long been accused of promoting a neoliberal approach to development that enriches the family and consolidates its political power without actually serving constituents. According to Crisis Group, critics believe Rafik Hariri promoted “his own business at the expense of the broader good, in particular when private companies he owned either in part or in full undertook colossal public works—not always in full transparency.”³⁸ This same strategy is still very much in effect and affects which municipal projects are approved and the manner in which they are implemented.

Both the Sidon Commercial Port Project³⁹ and the Rehabilitation of Sidon Dumpsite Project⁴⁰ were managed by the contracting company known as Jihad Al-Arab, owned by the brother of Saad Al-Hariri’s head of personal security.⁴¹ The trash project was intended to remove a mountain of trash that had amassed on Sidon’s waterfront. Activists and financial experts argue that the dumpsite rehabilitation project would have cost far less than its \$40 million budget had another company been contracted.⁴² On December 2, 2015, an investigation authorized by the UNDP administrator Helen Clark, the UN office of Audit and Investigation, and UNDP country director Luca Renda revealed the rampant corruption at the core of the project.⁴³ The investigation report said the bidding process raised suspicions, while the project mishandled waste with possibly disastrous environmental consequences. “The treatment process did not respect by far the requirements, be it the treatment techniques or waste separation, and the contractor landfilled the major part of the waste in the sea, in preparation for a real estate project extending over a land reclamation from the sea,” the report stated.⁴⁴ When journalists asked about the bidding process, Al-Saoudi dismissed rumors of favoritism and said that Jihad Al-Arab was the best and cheapest option.⁴⁵ Later, when media outlets began criticizing the project⁴⁶ for its environmentally dubious landfilling techniques, Al-Saoudi said he was proud the project could weather “smear campaigns” which he dismissed as the work of jealous political rivals.⁴⁷

In addition, the December 2015 report called for an investigation “concerning the role of the UNDP and its staff in covering waste management corruption” in the Solid Waste Dump Municipality project that helped remove Sidon’s trash mountain. The report revealed that a caretaker national government unconstitutionally approved the project. The Minister of Environment at the time, Nazem Al-Khoury, a centrist close to former president Michel Sleiman, overruled his technical staff’s warnings to approve the project. The fact that Bahia Hariri could afford such a maneuver to obtain legal approval for the project highlights Bahia’s power at the national level.



GOVERNOR OF ROTARY INTERNATIONAL CLUB IN LEBANON HONORS MAYOR MOHAMMAD AL SAUDI (RIGHT) FOR HIS WORK. BAHIA HARIRI (MIDDLE) ATTENDS CEREMONY TO SHOW SUPPORT FOR THE WORK OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS. MAY, 2016. SIDON, LEBANON. PHOTO TAKEN BY AUTHOR.

Notwithstanding the flawed process, today, most Sidon residents are extremely grateful the municipality succeeded in getting rid of the trash mountain. Now that the smell is gone, no one revisits the dirty details. On Thursday April 21, 2016, the municipality celebrated the grand opening of the public park that now sits atop the onetime garbage pile. It was named the “Mohammad Al-Saoudi Garden,” in celebration to all the good work Al-Saoudi had done for the city.

Similarly, the Commercial Port of Sidon, funded by the Ministry of Public Works and Jihad Al-Arab, benefits the financial interests of both the municipality and its political bosses.⁴⁸ But contrary to what Al-Saoudi professes, the project did not improve the livelihood of fishermen.⁴⁹ Fishermen complain that the municipality has done little to improve their living and working conditions. Khalid, the fisherman, said the new port caters to rich people with yachts who pay top dollar for moorings. In 2013, the fishermen protested against the lavish commercial port being constructed next to their decaying docks,⁵⁰ claiming that it would damage the marine environment. The Hariri-allied Internal Security Forces and political leaders Oussama Saad and Fouad Siniora rushed to meet with the fishermen persuaded them to cease their protest. According to the fishermen, they were promised compensation which never materialized. “The days went by and the fishermen grew tired, and we saw nothing,” Khalid said with dismay. At the time, Al-Saoudi told a

reporter, “The one that stands in the way of constructing the commercial port that Sidon deserves does not deserve to be part of the devoted and good people of Sidon.” He dismissed the protest as a power play by the envious Hezbollah-affiliated Nasserites.⁵¹

Abed Al Latif Teryaki bragged about the 2011 “Takaful Fund” project, set up at BankMed by Al-Saoudi, Bahia Hariri, and Siniora, to help the fishermen after a storm had destroyed some of their equipment. The fund distributed \$100 each to 336 fishermen. This form of patchwork welfare—cash money—is the only “development” the fishermen have seen in years. Future Movement supporters routinely dismiss those who question the municipality’s approach with the same argument: “There are those that do not want us to succeed.”⁵²

During the brief voting season, the Hariri Foundation is preparing a reception to showcase what the municipality has achieved under the auspices of Siniora and Bahia Hariri, and what it still plans to achieve.⁵³ “During elections, political leaders love to show off success and what they have done,” said UNDP official Nasrallah. Through publicizing the work of the municipality, he said, local officials are trying to telegraph to their political bosses: “Look, we could not have done it without you.”

Conclusion

In Lebanon, clientelism, sluggish voter turnout, allegations of vote buying, and regular outbreaks of public anger reflect the increasing alienation of citizens from their elected government. As the example of Sidon shows, even at the local level, where officials can and sometimes do deliver on bread-and-butter development issues, voters could be excused for believing that they have no power to change the rules of the game. Just as in national politics, sectarian politics and patronage networks control the political process at the local level. Political brokers enforce the will of their bosses, as people become inured to the *zaim’s* corrupt methods of control. Political figures who try to oppose the power of the *zaim* only do so by constructing their own patronage networks at the local level—beating the *zaims* at their own game. Smaller rivals have supplanted the Future Movement in the north, but employ the same local approach. Even emerging independent reformers who have tried to distance themselves from sectarian political affiliations have found it difficult to penetrate tight local networks of control.

The mechanics of building a patronage network are complex, requiring financial power and a high degree of initiative and management. In Sidon, Bahia Hariri fared better locally than her nephew Saad did nationally. She avoided the Future Movement’s financial problems by relying on international funds and donations to the charitable Hariri Foundation. She also made sure to maintain her power in the family’s home base of Sidon, brooking no challenge, however small. Her sustained attention to detail kept Bahia Hariri visible as a boss; constant attention and management

is a sine qua non for maintaining a personal power-patronage network. Bahia Hariri is all at once the manager of the networks of civil society organizations and family associations, the arbiter of all her city's political and religious disputes, the guardian of coexistence and security, and the champion of social and economic development. In Sidon, indisputably, she is the *zaim*, the boss.

In Lebanon, all politics is local, and when politics revolves around cults of personality, sectarian affiliations, and most importantly, patronage networks, it is exceptionally difficult to dislodge the dominant boss.

Bahia Hariri's multiple roles enabled her to build a welfare network that supplants the weakened Lebanese state and at the same time crowds out any possibility that a reconstituted state could step back into its proper role. While touting a strong state, rhetorically, her efforts do a great deal to keep the state at bay. In Lebanon, all politics is local, and when politics revolves around cults of personality, sectarian affiliations, and most importantly, patronage networks, it is exceptionally difficult to dislodge the dominant boss. Although it might sometimes be possible to unseat a *zaim* whose power base is fragmenting, it is nearly impossible to change the system through which the bosses rule.

Notes

1. The family company, Saudi Oger, has had trouble paying its workers. Some reports suggest it will soon be forced to declare bankruptcy. Maysam Risk, "Saudi Oger Employees: Without Future," *Al Akhbar*, January 21, 2013, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/14723>, and "Saudi Oger in Spotlight as Ministry Investigates Delayed Salaries," *Arabian Business*, March 8, 2016, <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-oger-in-spotlight-as-ministry-investigates-delayed-salaries-624084.html>.
 2. International Crisis Group (ICG), *Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community and Hariri's Future Current* May 26, 2010, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/syria-lebanon/lebanon/096-lebanons-politics-the-sunni-community-and-hariris-future-current.aspx>.
 3. ICG, "Lebanon's Politics: The Sunni Community," 7.
 4. Adib Nehme, regional advisor on peace building, transition, and governance at the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), interview with author, Beirut, April 13, 2016.
 5. Abed Al Latif Teryaki, president of the Federation of Unions in Sidon and the South, employee of Future Movement Sidon and Beirut Office, interview with author, Sidon, April 5, 2016.
 6. Ibid.
 7. Bahia Hariri, a member of parliament of Sidon and president of the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human
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Development, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016.

8. On social service provision for in-group (same sect) versus out-group (different sect) constituencies see Melani Cammett and Sukriti Issar, "Bricks and Mortar Clientelism: Sectarianism and the Logics of Welfare Allocation in Lebanon," *World Politics* 62, no. 3 (2010): 381–421. doi:10.1017/s0043887110000080.

9. Bahia Hariri, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016. Other networks created by the Hariri Foundation include the "School Network of Sidon and Its Neighboring Town," [source in Arabic] <http://www.hariri-foundation.org/details.php?cat=MzEz&parent=MTM5>; the "Civil Network for Development," and "The Children's Municipal Council," <http://www.hariri-foundation.org/details.php?cat=MzEw>.

10. The president of the Moasat, Arab Kalash, is also a member of the current Sidon Municipality council. She ran on the Future Movement list. The Kalash family is also the founder of Ahlouna Association; see Malena Carmen and Dany Haddad, *Enhancing Social Accountability in Saida*, May 2013, [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:54907-](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:54907-AvFWAJ:cmimarseille.org/sites/default/files/newsite/library/files/en/09_Saida%2520_Social%2520Accountability%2520Report)

[AvFWAJ:cmimarseille.org/sites/default/files/newsite/library/files/en/09_Saida%2520_Social%2520Accountability%2520Report](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:54907-AvFWAJ:cmimarseille.org/sites/default/files/newsite/library/files/en/09_Saida%2520_Social%2520Accountability%2520Report)

11. Tarek Baassiri, president of the Baassiri family association and the head of Siniora political office in Sidon, confirmed that Moasat and Ahlouna are one of the two biggest service non-governmental organizations that Siniora has financially supported. Tarek Baassiri, interview with author, Sidon, April 5, 2016.

12. Abed Al Latif Teryaki, interview with author, Sidon, April 5, 2016.

13. ICG, "Lebanon's Politics," 2.

14. Tarek Baassiri, interview with author, Sidon, April 5, 2016.

15. Abed Al Rahman Al Bizri, head of the doctor's union in Sidon and former head of the Sidon municipal council, interview with author, Beirut, April 11, 2016.

16. The usual attendees are: the Mufti of Sidon, the three key Bishops of the city, representative of the Higher Islamic Sharia Court, key representatives of the Future Movement office, head of the Chamber of Commerce, Agriculture, and Industry in the South, Organization of Sidon Merchants, head of the federation of unions in Sidon and the South, Al Jamaa Al-Islamiyya, head of the municipality, representatives of Fouad Siniora office, among many other key personalities in Sidon.

17. Hussein Nasrallah: "The *mokhtar* helps in getting the services of the party across and the mokhtars that get elected are a 'sign of who is with me.'" Nasrallah, Hussein, UNDP area manager for the south of Lebanon, interview with author, Beirut April 5, 2016.

18. Baassiri, Mohammad Ismail, *mokhtar* of Dikerman neighborhood in Sidon, interview with author, Sidon, April 5, 2016.

19. Baassiri, Mohammad Ismail, *mokhtar* of Dikerman neighborhood in Sidon, interview with author, Sidon, April 5, 2016.

20. See Hannes Baumann, *Citizen Hariri and neoliberal politics in postwar Lebanon* PhD Thesis, SOAS, University of London, 2012, <http://eprints.soas.ac.uk/14240>.

21. For example Khalid, a fisherman at Sidon's seaside port refers to Abed Al Latif Teryaki as "that Hariri guy."

22. For a telling article on the role of patronage, clan, and family loyalties during the 2009 fishermen's union elections, see Chip Cummins, "In Lebanon's Election, Reeling in the Fishermen Is Key," *Wall Street Journal*, June 4, 2009, retrieved

April 25, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB124406116325882375>.

23. Author conversations with fishermen on the Sidon seaside fishermen market, April 20, 2016.

24. Khaled Bawji, fisherman on the Sidon fishermen's seaside port, interview with author, Sidon, April 23, 2016.

25. The seaside renovation project was part of the Urban Sustainable Development Strategy (USUDS) for Sidon City that Hariri Foundation drew up with MedCities and handed to the municipality in 2010; see "Renovation of the old fishermen's port and improving the sustainability of the fishermen livelihoods," <http://www.medcities.org/-/project-submitted-fishermen-port-saida>.

26. Beirut votes in the first round of municipal elections on May 8. Sidon will vote on May 22.

27. Abed Al Rahman Al Bizri, interview with author, Beirut, April 11, 2016.

28. Bahia Hariri, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016.

29. Hussein Nasrallah, interview with author, Beirut, April 5, 2016.

30. Bahia Hariri, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016.

31. Hussein Nasrallah, interview with author, Beirut, April 5, 2016.

32. Hannes Baumann, "The Ascent of Rafiq Hariri and Philanthropic practices in Beirut," in *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Frank Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012).

33. On the relationship between Rafik Al-Hariri, the Hariri Foundation, and Sectarian politics, see Hannes Baumann, "The Ascent of Rafiq Hariri and Philanthropic practices in Beirut," In *Leaders et partisans au Liban*, ed. Frank Mermier and Sabrina Mervin (Paris: Karthala, 2012).

34. Hussein Nasrallah, interview with author, Beirut, April 5, 2016.

35. Bahia Hariri, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016; Hiba Honeine, acting manager of youth and civic engagement program at the Hariri Foundation for Sustainable Human Development, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016. See also "Monographic City Profile," *MedCities*, <http://www.medcities.org/web/saida>, and "Urban Sustainable Development Strategy for Saida City," *MedCities*, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:Ke2a4brMdhIj:www.medcities.org/documents/22116/0/USUDS%2BBrochure_eng.pdf.

36. "Community Kitchen," https://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:uXG8Fxa1r6AJ:https://www.aub.edu.lb/fafs/esdu/PublishingImages/Community%2520Kitchen%2520Overview_ESDU

37. Hussein Nasrallah: "The projects are determined according to the political trajectory of the leader so that during elections, the party leader can say 'Look, I found the funds for this and brought this project into the city' or 'Look what I did.' You want to show success but the success has to be necessarily related to that 'Look I am from this movement or that and that is why this worked.'" Interview with author, Beirut, April 5, 2016. See also praise for Hariri Foundation, Bahia Hariri, and Fouad Siniora, in article by Mohammad Zaatari, "Mayor Al Saudi Praises Sidon Development Success" *The Daily Star*, January 18, 2016, <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/Jan-18/332466-mayor-saudi-praises-sidons-development-successes.ashx>.

38. ICG, "Lebanon's Politics," 3.

39. "Commercial Port of Saida," *Jihad Al Arab*, accessed May 4, 2016, <http://jcc.com.lb/default.aspx?MenuId=4&ContentId=22>.

40. The total UNDP budget breakdown indicated the project required \$25,000,000. Funding source indicated is as the Saudi Walid Bin Talal Humanitarian Foundation and the Government of Lebanon. See “Dumpsite Rehabilitation Project,” *United Nations Development Programme*, accessed May 4, 2016, http://www.lb.undp.org/content/lebanon/en/home/operations/projects/environment_and_energy/project-id—00083622—the-rehabilitation-of-saida-dumpsite.html.
41. On Jihad Al Arab for Commerce and Contracting: “Jihad is the brother of Abed al-Arab, the head of Hariri’s personal security, and relative of Yehia al-Arab who was killed alongside Rafik Hariri. He had started out in the contracting business, before taking care of large projects related to clearing rubble and building roads. He eventually became a prominent financier who profited immensely from close ties with the Hariri family.” Rizk, Maysam. “Future Movement: When Will We Get Paid,” *Al Akhbar*, August 11, 2012, <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/11008>.
42. See testimonials and interviews, “In Lebanon, a garden blooms on former ‘trash mountain,’” *Middle East Eye*, December 12, 2014, <http://www.middleeasteye.net/in-depth/features/lebanon-garden-blooms-former-trash-mountain-1901252065>; Interviewees Tarek Baassiri, Abed Al Latif Teryaki, Mohammad Ismail Baassiri, and Khaled Bawji, all noted that Fouad Siniora secured \$22 million in financing from Saudi Arabia for the trash mountain project; none indicated it was from Walid Bin Talal Foundation. Interviews with author, Sidon.
43. “Request for clarifications, investigations and appropriate disciplinary measures concerning the role of the UNDP and its staff in covering waste management corruption in Lebanon,” United Nations Development Programme, December 22, 2015, http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:oDTDe6WHsoAJ:www.al-akhbar.com/sites/default/files/pdfs/20151229/2015_12_02_Letter_UN_eng.pdf. The report is based on a letter with the same subject dated September 22, 2015, prepared by the following signatories: Bassel Abdallah, Lawyer, Dr. Ali Darwish, Green Line, Hanna Gharib, Head of the Independent Syndical Movement Dr. Naji Kodeih, Environmental Expert, Dr. Charbel Nahas, Former Minister, Nizar Saghie, Lawyer, Yaacoub el Sarraf, Former Minister of Environment.
44. “The bidding process was subject to many doubts and suspicions. Facts and testimonials of directly involved persons indicate that the treatment process did not respect by far the requirements, be it the treatment techniques or waste separation, and that the contractor landfilled the major part of the waste in the sea, in preparation for a real estate project extending over a land reclamation from the sea of a surface of 634,000 m² approved by Decree no. 5790 of 06/04/2011 (Annex 5). It should be noted that this decree was also passed without due discussion and approval in the Council of Ministers, given that it was issued after the Government had resigned. The allegation that such a decree falls under the jurisdiction of a caretaker government represents an extremely vivid and ironic example of bad governance.” UNDP, “Request for Clarifications,” *ibid*. For more investigations on the corruption and money embezzlement through the Sidon Landfill Project see <http://www.elnashra.com/news/show/628455/صيدا-نورماندي-نفسه-صيدا> and <http://english.al-akhbar.com/node/12403> [source in Arabic]
45. AFP, “In Lebanon: Garden blooms on top of former ‘trash mountain.’”
46. Nadine Elali, “In Sidon: something smells bad,” *NOW Lebanon*, August 4, 2013, <https://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reportsfeatures/in-saida-something-smells-bad>.
47. Al Saoudi, Mohammad, current head of Sidon municipality, interview with author, Sidon, April 20, 2016.

48. Hussein Nasrallah: "Al-Saoudi has his hand and a lot of interest in the Port project and so does Siniora and this makes the process easier because Al-Saoudi is the municipality head." Interview by author, Beirut, April 5, 2016.
49. Mohammad Al Saoudi, interview with author, Sidon, April 20, 2016.
50. Khaled Bawji, interview with author, Sidon, April 23, 2016. See also "Seaside construction in Saida: Fishermen demand compensation," October 2, 2013, <http://www.saidaworld.com/News-10716> [source in Arabic].
51. "Al Saoudi announces the formation of *takaful* fund for the sons of Sidon to face emergency situations," January 5, 2011, [source in Arabic] <http://www.saidacity.net/news/67262/>.
52. Bahia Hariri, and Abed Al Latif Teryaki, interviews with author, Sidon; both interviewees said critics want the Future Movement to fail and Sidon to stay in the black.
53. Bahia Hariri and Hiba Honeine, interview with author, Sidon, April 6, 2016.
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