

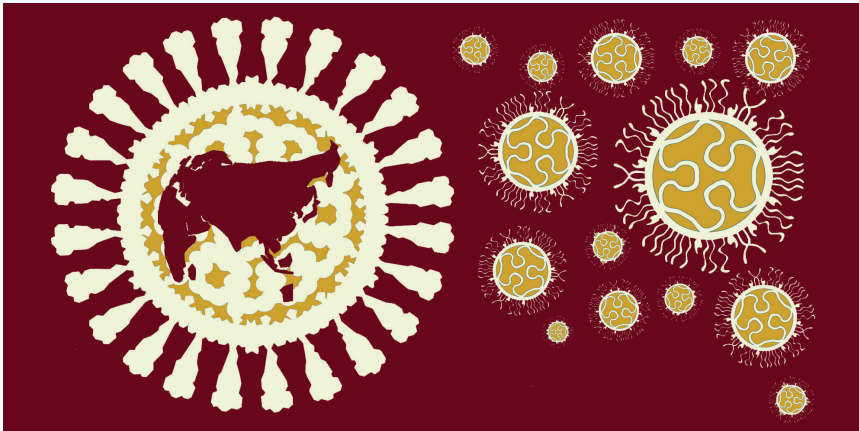
The COVID-19 Pandemic in Asia and Africa

Societal Implications, Narratives
on Media, Political Issues

edited by

Giorgio Milanetti, Marina Miranda, Marina Morbiducci

VOLUME II – SOCIETY AND INSTITUTIONS



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3. Handling the Pandemic in Times of Crises and Revolution: COVID-19 and the Reconfiguration of Lebanon's Political Relations

Rossana Tufaro

Abstract

When, in February 2020, the SARS-COVID-19 pandemic reached the Arab Levant, Lebanon had just entered the most severe socio-economic crisis ever experienced in its post-colonial history. The beginning of the economic crisis walked in parallel with the explosion, on October 17, 2019, of an unprecedented popular uprising demanding a radical redefinition of the Lebanese sectarian neoliberal order on more equal and inclusive bases. The uprising took hold of the streets for months, and radically called into question the authority of all the political forces which had been ruling the country since the end of the Civil War (1975-1990). Amid this unprecedented crisis of legitimacy, the pandemic was immediately exploited by the Lebanese ruling class to impress a severe blow to the street demonstrations, as well as to revivify the personalistic and clientelistic mechanisms of aid provision which had historically underpinned their power base. At the same time, the COVID crisis imposed a further burden on the national accounts and the average living conditions of Lebanese citizens. Building on the Gramscian notion of integral State, the following contribution aims at offering a first insight into the extent and the dynamics through which the arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Lebanon influenced the trajectories and the articulation of the process of reconfiguration of the country's socio-political order triggered by the October 17 uprising and the economic crisis. To this end, the contribution will explore in a relational perspective the dialectics between the impact of the pandemic on the uprising and the economic crisis, and, on the other hand, the impact of the crisis and the uprising on the State management of the pandemic.

Keywords: Lebanon; COVID-19; Sectarianism; Contentious politics.

3.1. Introduction

When, in February 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic reached the Arab Levant, Lebanon was walking a delicate tightrope. Since October 2019, the country had been stormed by an unprecedented popular uprising demanding, together with a drastic political reset, a radical redefinition of the existing sectarian, neoliberal order on more equal and accountable bases. The uprising sedimented against the backdrop of the collapse of Lebanon's rentier capitalist model which, by progressively eroding the material bases enabling the reproduction of Lebanon's power structure, triggered the deepest crisis of hegemony ever experienced by the post-Civil War ruling elites. The uprising found its great propulsive force in the mass transgressive activation of socio-geographical constituencies who had largely remained on the margins of post-war contentious politics, whose passive adherence to the post-war sectarian neoliberal order had represented a fundamental, yet, silent pillar underpinning the reproduction of the post-war civic order. The economic collapse of the country was officially sealed by the declaration of State default on March 14, 2020, i.e., about three weeks after the first COVID-19 case in the country was registered, and progressed according to a swirling downward spiral meant to become by the spring 2021 the third harshest economic crisis ever experienced at a global level since the mid-19th century (World Bank 2021).

Against this unprecedented revolutionary situation, the arrival of the pandemic provided sectarian elites with a timely window of opportunity to both clamp down on street demonstrations and reactivate the clientelistic mechanisms of aid provision which had historically underpinned their compromised hegemony (Muir 2020). The task was eased by the renewed centrality conferred to the sovereign and biopolitical prerogatives of the central State by the health emergency, which, in the name of the preservation of public health, got entitled to extend its disciplinary grip on the organisation of the public and private life to extraordinary levels. This played a fundamental role for sectarian elites to regain full control over the national public life, as well as to reposition themselves as key political players after the subversion of the dominant norms and forms impressed by the uprising. At the same time, the pandemic added further pressure to the crumbling socio-economic situation, whose acceleration throughout the heyday of the health emergency put economic security before the sanitary one

at the top priorities of the Lebanese citizens (“Arab Barometer” 2021; 2022). This sorted the double effect of further refraining people from the streets, while rising the material, policy and governance requirements to be fulfilled by sectarian elites to fully capitalise the health emergency and retrieve at least part of the lost consensus among the constituencies who had taken the streets (Ibid.). These requirements were further loaded by the disastrous Beirut Port explosion of August 4, 2020, whose political responsibility was attributed by the majority of the Lebanese yet again to the same corrupted and self-serving policies which had brought the country to the collapse (LCPS 2021).

Against this multifaceted impact of the pandemic on the dynamics of reconfiguration of Lebanese power relations, scholarly attention focused predominantly on scrutinising the counter-revolutionary uses of the health emergency by sectarian parties, with a specific attention to the role played by lockdowns and the clientelistic relief responses activated by the various parties (Di Peri 2020; Di Peri, Costantini 2023; Harb et al. 2021; Kassir 2022; Schoorel et al. 2020.). On the other hand, the scholarship on the State response to the pandemic predominantly focused on assessing the successes and failures in containing the spread of the virus, against the difficult economic and political situation (Bizri et al. 2021; Dandashly 2022; Hassan et al. 2023; Khoury et al. 2020; Koweyes et al. 2021). This dichotomic approach to the political management of the pandemic largely reflects the analytical separation between State and sectarianism historically characterising the Lebanese studies (Baumann, Mouawad 2017; Di Peri 2017), and, albeit for different reasons, has shared the common characteristic of abstracting the State socio-sanitary response from the variables introduced by COVID-19 on the process of re-articulation of the dominant political relations unleashed by the uprising and the economic crisis. The latter – here we argue – is of particular salience since, against the relatively good performance of the State in equipping the national healthcare sector stressed by literature, citizens’ satisfaction towards the State’s handling of the pandemic remained particularly low (“Arab Barometer” 2021, 2022).

Building on the Gramscian notion of integral State, the following chapter aims at bridging the aforementioned ontological separation to provide an integrated and comprehensive overview of the political implications of the pandemic conjuncture in Lebanon and its dialectical interaction with the shrinking structural context. To this aim,

after defining the theoretical framework, the chapter will first focus on sketching a genealogy of the Lebanese uprising and its structural triggers. It will proceed scrutinising the trajectories and rationales of the counter-revolutionary exploitation of the health emergency by sectarian elites, within the framework of the broader dialectics between revolution and counter-revolution accompanying the uprising since day one. Finally, it will provide a critical assessment of the governance shortcomings in handling the pandemic and their socio-economic implications. The analysis focuses on the heyday of the health emergency in Lebanon (February 2020-December 2021) and combines together a variety of qualitative and quantitative sources inclusive of newspapers articles, opinion polls, and official reports and datasets elaborated by governmental and international institutions. The chapter contends that while the counter-revolutionary exploitation of the pandemic by sectarian elites undoubtedly played a central role to halt mobilisations and to keep alive the dependency relations between sectarian organisations and their loyalist constituencies, on the other hand it was not alone self-sufficient to compensate for the governance shortcomings accumulated before and during the pandemic. The result was to restore a situation of domination without hegemony, whose ultimate outcome was to consolidate, rather than repair, the deep fracture between ruling elites and the multitude of citizens who took the streets displayed by the uprising.

3.2. Why Gramsci: Defining the Lebanese Power System

In political science literature Lebanon is conventionally defined as a sectarian State, i.e., a parliamentary republic where State offices and powers and the parliamentary seats are distributed among the seventeen official religious communities defining its demographic fabric according to a consociational power-sharing rationale (Lijphart 1969). Historically, the terms of distribution have been established through a succession of corporate inter-elite power-sharing arrangements, whose earliest forms date back to the late 19th century (Makdisi 1996; Salloukh et al. 2015, pp. 13-32).

Until recent years, its peculiar power structure has been predominantly studied by political scientists according to normative and elite-centred approaches focusing on the institutional characteristics of its power-sharing formulas and how the latter succeeded or – especially

after the outbreak of the Civil War – failed to produce of a fully functional modern, democratic, and plural State (Di Peri 2017; Fakhoury 2014a; Jabbara, Jabbara 2001; Salamey 2009). Within these interpretative frameworks, until the outbreak of the Civil War (1975-1990) Lebanon was generally considered a successful example of consociationalism, due to the alleged capacity of sectarian elites to accommodate potential ethno-religious conflicts within parliamentary politics (Hudson 1969; Messarra 1983). This positive evaluation of Lebanese consociationalism began to be questioned after the outbreak of the Civil War (Dekmejian 1978; Hudson 1976), leaving room to the progressive consolidation of a scholarly framing of Lebanon as the archetype of a weak, failed or absent State, i.e., a State unable to both penetrate the structures of society and fully affirm its sovereignty within and outside of its territory (Atzili 2010; Betz 2021; Farida 2020; Moubarak 2003). Evidences of these deficiencies are to identify, according to the scholars, in the continuative operationality on the Lebanese territory of non-State armed groups (es: Hezbollah or, during the war, the Palestinian resistance), the rampant corruption of State institutions, the cyclical resurgence of sectarian tensions, and the recurrent institutional paralyses.

As pointed out by Baumann and Moawad (2017), the reconsideration of the qualities of Lebanese consociationalism moved from Weberian and Westphalian approaches identifying in the post-war power-sharing formula (the so-called Taif Agreements) the main root for the permeability of the Lebanese State to the influence of non-State actors – most notably, sectarian parties – and foreign powers, and, together with reducing political sectarianism to its institutional expression, it also subsumed a neat separation between State and society. This approach and its core postulates have been thoroughly questioned in the past fifteen years by a growing number of scholars who, from a variety of disciplinary, theoretical, and empirical vantage points, have showed how, on the contrary, not only the Lebanese State intervenes extensively in society, but also the irreducibility of political sectarianism to its sole institutional expression. To give some examples, approaches to sectarianism from the vantage point of the political economy have stressed how the direct access to State power by sectarian elites has played a pivotal role in both shaping Lebanon's economic policies and, from there, its class and sectarian structure (Baumann 2016b; Majed 2017; Salloukh 2019; Traboulsi 2013). The same centrality has been emphasised by a variety of cultural, urban, welfare, gender, and security

studies which, together with further pointing out the socio-economic, political, and biopolitical pervasiveness of the Lebanese State, have also helped to relocate State and political sectarianism within a broader, integrated power dispositive headed by the dominant sectarian elites shaping every nook and cranny of the Lebanese life (Cammett 2014; Fregonese 2012; Hazbun 2016; Nagel 2002; Mikdashi 2022; Nucho 2016; Verdeil 2018).

This has contributed to enlarge the understanding of the Lebanese (sectarian) State towards what the Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci defines as integral State, i.e., as the dialectical union between the "State" and the "civil society". While the former is defined as the union between the bureaucratic-coercive and the so-called hegemonic apparatuses – i.e., the ensemble of organisms aiming at creating consensus in favour of the dominant groups – the latter represents "the ensemble of the 'so-called' private institutions" (e.g., political parties, religious institutions, cultural associations, schools, charities, etc.) where hegemony is acted and located (Gramsci 1996, pp. 458-459). Their mutual relation is not one of separation, but one of constant dialectical interaction played on the terrain of coercion and consent (Liguori 2016). The State is also, according to Gramsci, the site where the historical unity of the dominant groups occurs, whose ensemble of theoretical and practical activities makes the very essence of the State, and serves to simultaneously legitimise and reproduce their dominant position, including from a class point of view. Within this framework, the State is not an autonomous entity separated from society, neither a sheer guardian of the established order (the so-called "Stato carabinieri"), but a historicized site of social (re)production aiming at actively integrating large masses of citizens within the hegemonic apparatuses finalised to realise the interests and goals of the ruling groups (Ibid.). This allows us to both grasp and keep together the complex interaction between formal and informal sectarian structures, discourses and practices defining the Lebanese power system, as well as to relocate the alleged Weberian deficiencies of the Lebanese State (clientelism, corruption, lack of sovereignty, poor State services, to cite the most important) within broader dispositives of hegemonic incorporation (Chalcraft 2016) enforced by sectarian elites to reproduce their dominant position. Equally importantly, Gramsci's understanding of the State re-historicizes and re-centralizes the agency and the dialectical interaction of dominant and subaltern groups, whose desires, structural changes, and contentious

activations constantly redefine the terrain upon which the dominants' hegemony needs to engraft. The crisis of the integral State occurs, in fact, or "because the ruling class has failed in some major political undertaking for which it has requested, or forcibly extracted, the consent of the broad masses, or because huge masses [...] have passed suddenly from a state of political passivity to a certain activity, and put forward demands which taken together, albeit not organically formulated, add up to a revolution" (Gramsci 2000, pp. 217-18). This will help us to better frame the reticulate of stresses and relations defining the Lebanese political context on the eve of the pandemic, as well as to make sense of the rationales informing the political responses, and the latter's ultimate political outcomes.

3.3. Historicizing the System: The Making of Lebanese Sectarian Neoliberalism

Albeit the first forms of sectarian power-sharing in Lebanon date back to the 19th century, the first corporate arrangement defining the distribution of powers among sects in the post-colonial State was the so-called National Pact of 1943. The Pact perfected the power-sharing formula first tested during the French Mandate, and established a six-to-five Christian-Muslim ratio in the distribution of the spoils of offices and the parliamentary seats, as well as the attribution of the three highest State offices, i.e., presidency of the Republic, premiership, and presidency of the parliament, to the Maronites, Sunna, and Shia, respectively, within a presidential republican framework (Salloukh 2015). The Pact also defined the long-debated identity of independent Lebanon as a Mediterranean State with an "Arab face", in the attempt to harmonise the two main nationalist tendencies (Arabist vs "Lebanonist") emerged during the Mandate period (Firro 2004).

The agreement fell on the heads of the Lebanese as a *fait accompli* against the backdrop of the elite-driven national independence process, and represented a direct emanation of the interests and aspirations of the two social groups who brokered it: on the one hand, the powerful commercial-financial oligarchy organically linked to the French capital, embodied by the future first President of the Republic Bechara al-Khoury; on the other, the Sunna urban commercial bourgeoisie tied to the emerging Arab markets, embodied instead by the future Prime Minister Riad al-Solh. Their agreement exchanged the

integration of the Sunna bourgeoisie in the ruling leadership of the independent State without compromising the inherited Maronites' lion's share, and answered to the common urgency to get rid of the French domination and secure themselves a dominant position in the post-colonial order (Traboulsi 2012, pp. 105-115). The Pact was revealed only at independence achieved, and was ultimately endorsed by the rest of non-hegemonic sectarian elites – i.e., rural notables of the peripheral regions, bureaucrats of the mountain, old Ottoman aristocracy – for, the predominance endowed to the commercial-financial alliance notwithstanding, it guaranteed in any case to the dominant strata of each sect a fast lane to access political power and participate to the division of the resources and the spoils of office mediated by the power-sharing formula. The first consequence of this process of State-building was the subjugation of the economic policies of independent Lebanon to the direct interests of the hegemonic commercial-financial oligarchy, which led to the quick affirmation of the so-called “Merchant Republic” economic model as blueprint for its capitalist development (Gates 1998). The second consequence was to consolidate a dominant pattern of political relations bounding sectarian leaders to their constituencies according to sectarian, highly personalistic patron-client dynamics exchanging political loyalty for benefits and protection, may it be real or alleged (Binder 1966; Šā'igh 1962, p. 2). Propaedeutic to the affirmation of the post-colonial “merchant-sectarian” order was the deliberate maintenance of a “light” central State, especially on the terrain of welfare services and wealth distribution, which served the double aim of constantly feeding the reproduction of sectarian patronage and expanding the self-serving development of the hegemonic commercial-financial sector. The ideological legitimation was provided by Michel Chiha's nationalist myth-making (Hartman, Olsaretti 2003), and was armoured by ad hoc personal status, electoral, and labour laws – to cite the most important – discouraging as much as possible the emergence of non-sectarian collective forms of organisation and subjectification (Hudson 1966; Mikdashi 2015; Tufaro 2021).

The formula sealed by the National Pact underwent an important re-adjustment in 1989 with the so-called Taif Agreement, i.e., the document of national understanding preparing the end of the fifteen-years-long Lebanese civil war and the re-organisation of the post-war State. The document reflected the new power balances and the no victor no vanquished outcome of the conflict, and redistributed powers among sects

in favour of the Muslim communities by fixing the Christian-Muslim ratio to a fifty-fifty proportion, and by transferring some of the legislative and executive presidential prerogatives to the Council of Ministers and the presidency of the parliament (Bogaards 2019; Nagle, Clancy 2019). The new system became fully operational with the elections of 1992, and was capitalised by the two main groups of sectarian elites who came out ahead from the last phase of the Civil War. The first group was represented by the so-called “contractor bourgeoisie”, a tiny but powerful oligarchy of *retournés* Sunna affluent businessmen who built their economic empires in the Gulf during the oil boom especially in the banking, real estate, and telecommunication sectors (Knudsen, Kerr 2013). Thanks to combination between a changing local and global economic context and the political vacuum left by the war within the Sunna community, starting from the mid-1980s were able to progressively unseat the pre-war oligarchy of traders, bankers and brokers at the top of the national economic pyramid, and affirm themselves as the new political leaders of their community. The epitome of this group was the billionaire-politician Rafic Hariri who, thanks also to his close ties with the Saudi crown, was able to both hegemonize the Sunna camp with his Mustaqbal Movement and impose himself as one of the main political players of the post-war period (Baumann 2016a). The second and largest group was the array of ex-militias and warlords emerged as not defeated at the end of the conflict which, thanks to the general amnesty law approved in 1991, were able to easily reconvert themselves into political parties and re-capitalise in the civil State the political power earned – or, in some cases, maintained or enhanced – by arms.

Until 2005, their capturing of State power was strictly dependent on the mediation of Syria which, in the wake of the Taif Agreement, seized the opportunity of the transitional mandate over Lebanon allowed by the international community to impose a veritable military occupation meant to last for fifteen years (El-Husseini 2012). The Syrian evacuation was triggered by the outstanding wave of popular mobilisations sparked by the assassination of Rafic Hariri, on February 14, 2005, whereof the Damascus regime was considered the main responsible (Clark, Zahar 2015; Kurtulus 2009). Henceforth, the institutional political spectrum got monopolised by six main parties, divided into two pitting coalitions defined by the respective international alignment: on the one hand AMAL (Shia), Hezbollah (Shia), and Michel Aoun’s Free Patriotic Movement (Maronite), grouped in the Syrian-lining March 8 coalition; on the other the Lebanese Forces,

(Maronite), the Progressive Socialist Party (Druze) and Hariri's Mustaqbal (Sunna), grouped instead in the Saudi-lining March 14 coalition. Their monopolisation of institutional politics was simultaneously mediated and armoured by the so-called Doha Agreement, i.e., the subsidiary power-sharing pact brokered by the dominant sectarian elites and their regional peers in 2008 to put an end to the long triennium of instability and sectarian strife which followed the Syrian evacuation. The Agreement re-designed the electoral districts to favour the largest sectarian parties, and introduced the principle of assignation of a "blocking third" to the parliamentary minority in the composition of the cabinets to come, which *de facto* bounded parliamentary politics to governments of "national unity" regardless of the electoral results (Salloukh 2015).

This process of reconfiguration of State powers and the sectarian ruling elites had a profound impact on the functioning and the articulation of the sectarian ruling dispositive inherited by the war and the First Republic. The first and most important consequence was a substantial scaling up of the role of State bureaucratic-administrative (infra)structures in both the process of economic appropriation and the exercise of sectarian patronage enforced by the sectarian ruling block. This scaling up built upon a precise informal division of the State offices between warlords and contractor bourgeoisies assigning the tacit control over the so-called "left hand" of the State (i.e. developmental and regional agencies, and the ministries concerned with the provision of public services) to the former, and of the "right" one (i.e. Central Bank, ministries of economy, finance, and telecommunication) to the latter, and was executive enforced through two main channels (Baumann 2019). The first one was the post-war reconstruction which, as we will better see in the next paragraph, enabled sectarian elites to both expand the active economic role of the State, and exploit this expansion to serve their own economic interest or those of their cronies (Leenders 2012). The second one was the expansion of the direct patronage functions of the State, enforced through both the clientistic channelling of public funds, and, above all, the sustained clientistic expansion of the employment capacities of the public sector (Salloukh 2019; Salti, Chaaban 2010). This was paralleled by the equally significant upgrading and scaling up of the tight networks of personal or party-sponsored charities, welfare agencies, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities originally set up during the Civil War (Cammett 2014) which, thanks yet again to the deliberate disempowerment of the welfare, sovereign, and redistributive

capacities of State institutions, enabled sectarian elites to fully collimate the ideal-practical functions of the central State with their own agency. This assimilation also included the management of security in the controlled areas, the organisation of the built environment, up to the informal access to water and electricity (Akar 2018; Fregonese 2012; Hazbun 2016; Nucho 2016; Verdeil 2018). These processes walked in parallel with the promotion of State-sponsored “politics of amnesia” of the conflict which served the double aim of hindering the development of a genuinely inclusive national discourse and consciousness, while keep feeding the particular political-sectarian identity discourses pursued by each party or leader (Haugbolle 2010; Launchbury et al. 2014). Last but not least, post-war sectarian elites engaged a broad-based work of penetration of the structures of civil society, including via the incorporation or the co-optation of a variety of movements or organisations who had arisen transgressive stances (Baroudi 1998; Kingston 2013), which further hindered the emergence of counter-hegemonic actors large enough to consistently challenge the post-war sectarian hegemony.

3.4. At the Deep Roots of the *Thawra*: The Political Economy of Sectarian Neoliberalism

Together with the reconfiguration of the scale and the dominant modes of articulation of sectarian governance, the renewal of the post-war ruling elites impressed an important readjustment also to Lebanon’s socio-economic structure.

Historically, the economic structure of independent Lebanon revolved around activities of international trade and financial intermediation between the Western and the booming Gulf markets, with Beirut banks, trading agencies, and insurance companies as its “jewel in the crown” (Gaspard 2004). The consolidation of this economic model walked in parallel with the monopolistic concentration of profits and the strategic assets of each economic sector in a handful of politically-connected entrepreneurs, at full detriment of the development of productive activities. This system also produced profound sectarian and socio-geographic inequalities whose contradictions, once the Merchant Republic entered an irreversible structural crisis, came to represent one of the main domestic triggers of the Civil War (Nasr 1978). The extraverted, monopolistic, and tertiarised economic orientation consolidated during the Merchant Republic remained the basic blueprint also of the militia economy

emerged during the conflict, whereby militias captured the control of the distribution of services and basic goods in the controlled areas, against a primary source of capital accumulation located in the so-called “protection moneys” and the import-export of licit and illicit goods alike (Nasr 1990; Traboulsi 2012). This system walked side by side with the full operability of the banking sector, whose intermediary role continued to prosper thanks to the emerging transnational networks of capital circulation linked to the militia economy (Hourani 2010). Last but not least, the 1980s saw the early attempts of penetration of the emerging contractor bourgeoisie in the key financial, telecommunication, and real estate sector, the latter within the framework of the first State-sponsored projects of neoliberal reconstruction of the damaged areas promoted under the presidency of Amin Gemayel (Hourani 2015).

The embryonic neoliberal readjustment of the Lebanese capitalist model got fully implemented throughout the 1990s, following the consolidation of the ruling partnership between ex-warlords and contractor bourgeoisies mediated by the new Taif civic order. The great architect of this upgrading was Rafic Hariri who, thanks to the new prerogatives of the executive and the avail of his ruling peers and international sponsors, was allowed a fundamental directive control over the restructuring of the Lebanese economy. The core of its policies based on the aggressive deregulation of the real-estate and the financial sector, with the immediate goal of quickly attracting foreign investments to feed the post-war reconstruction. The latter, in turn, was pivoted around private-led projects of neoliberal re-development of the damaged areas, thought as linchpin of a broader, ambitious economic project aiming at making again Beirut a prominent regional financial and touristic centre integrated in the global economy. The second pillar was the stabilisation of the national currency against the USD, conceived by Hariri as a fundamental precondition to achieve macroeconomic stability and boost the trust of foreign investors (Baumann 2019). Hariri’s vision answered to self-serving rationales and was fully endorsed by the ex-warlords, who saw in the economic turn envisaged by the Prime Minister a profitable business to co-participate to. A pivotal role for the executive implementation of his project was played by the Council of Development and Reconstruction (CDR), and the Central Bank (BDL) which, in the wake of his first election, got fulfilled of loyal technocrats to manage the reconstruction and provide the country with the necessary financial and monetary instruments to achieve his macroeconomic goals (Dibeh

2005). On the other hand, no serious initiatives were undertaken to boost the industrial and agricultural sectors which, as a consequence, kept remaining the tail-end of Lebanon's economic system.

Hariri's neoliberal restructuring of Lebanese capitalism undoubtedly succeeded in prompting a rapid inflow of foreign capitals in the national financial and real estate circuits, whose exponential expansion throughout the 1990s boosted an equally rapid growth of the GDP. On the other hand, it shifted the main site of wealth-creation from the former intermediary activities to external rents and debt speculation, to whom the majority of Lebanese could not participate. Furthermore, the transition failed to produce a labour market heterogeneous and dynamic enough to decently absorb the ensemble of new actives produced every year. The first consequence of this transition was the rapid polarisation of the Lebanese social structure. In 2018, 0.2% of the adult population hold alone 48% of the national private wealth, and about 30% was estimated to live below the poverty line (Assouad 2019). These super rich consisted for the most part in a narrow network of bankers, brokers and real estate developers which, thanks to their inherited position and/or the right political connections were able to participate to the post-war schemes of rent-creation and accumulate outstanding wealth (Chaaban 2016; Daher 2016; Traboulsi 2013). The burden of social inequalities was further amplified by the lack of consistent State redistributive and welfare policies which, together with amplifying the social costs of a low income, further enhanced the weight of sectarian patronage and diaspora remittances to access basic services. Furthermore, while the post-war public expenditure rose exponentially, most of the disbursements were addressed to finance the massively hiring of employees, leaving public services and utilities dramatically poor and unequipped (BLOMINVEST 2015). Emblematic of this abandon is the public electricity service which, while absorbing alone 9% of the State budget on the eve of the uprising, was able to satisfy only 60% of the national power needs, since the national power grid was never adequately recovered after the war (Verdeil 2016). Last but not least, due to the significant expansion of informal labour, on the eve of the uprising only about 45% of the Lebanese citizens were estimated to have a health insurance, and only about 53% were covered by social security (ILO 2021a; Khalife et al. 2017). Said otherwise, the transition consolidated a deeply unequal social system, whose dynamics of class mobility and hierarchization were strictly dependent on the access to external rents and patronage networks, the stronger the strongest the position of the patron in the ruling block was.

The second major consequence of post-war rentierism was the hypertrophic growth of the public debt which, from the end of the conflict to the eve of the uprising spiked from almost zero to 150% of the GDP, i.e., the third highest global ratio after Japan and Greece (Credit Libanaise 2016). To feed its growth were primarily the monetary policies implemented by the BDL to stabilise the currency and peg it to the dollar at a fixed exchange rate which, so to obtain the necessary inflow of hard currency, were based on the massive sale of Treasury Bills and Eurobonds at overpriced interest rates (Gaspard 2004). The main beneficiaries of this sale were the Lebanese commercial banks, who came soon to hold most of the Lebanese debt and feed the speculation. At the same time, most of these external capitals came from – or was generated in – the Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia, who also provided the BDL with several extraordinary capital injections to avoid currency depreciations in times of stress (Daher 2022). Lebanon's external dependence was further enhanced by the underdevelopment of the national productive sectors, which made Lebanon reliant on imports for about 80% of its consumption needs, including on basic items such as flour, oil and medical products.

The reproduction of this fragile system began to crack from 2012. Following the outbreak of the Syrian crisis and its regionalization, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries began to progressively halt its economic and financial aid to Lebanon. This was paired by the significant contraction of foreign direct investments, and by overtly hostile economic initiatives, such as the touristic ban on Lebanon for Gulf nationals. These actions were part of a broader Saudi-led – indeed, failed – pressure strategy against Hezbollah to discourage the latter's participation in the Syrian conflict on the regime's side, and leveraged on the tight dependence developed by the Lebanese economy on Gulf rents produced by the post-war neoliberal transition. This inaugurated a long decade of economic stagnation where the contraction of public expenditure – and, hence, of the State-led mechanisms of sectarian incorporation enforced through the public employment and the allocation of public funds – walked hand in hand with rising unemployment, inflation, and increasingly crumbling public services. At the same time, the contraction of rentier profits put increasing stresses on the national accounts and the financial sector, currency included, whose collapse was temporarily delayed only thanks to unscrupulous and untransparent operations of financial engineering by the BDL's director Riad Salameh (Mazzucotelli 2020). This fragile

house of cards definitively collapsed in the late summer 2019, when the debt crisis reached its no-way back and the currency started to show the first tangible signs of an impending devaluation. This prepared the terrain for all the stresses, frustrations and disillusionments accumulated in the previous decade to deflagrate across classes and sects in the widest anti-systemic popular uprising ever experienced by Lebanon in its post-colonial history.

3.5. The Revolution and the Pandemic: A Timely Counter-Revolutionary Conjuncture

When, in March 2019, the first COVID-19 case was detected, Lebanon's uprising was up to enter its fifth month. The uprising – or *thawra*, revolution, as labelled by the multitude of mobilised citizens who embodied it – broke out on October 17, 2019, and found its immediate trigger in the government proposal to introduce a new package of indirect taxes, including a tax on the voice-over-internet protocol calls (the so-called WhatsApp Tax) (“Time Magazine” 2019). The uprising exploded in the wake of a steady peaking of socio-economic and environmental mobilisations throughout the summer, triggered predominantly by State austerity, the degradation of living standards and public services, and a number of controversial infrastructural projects affecting peripheral regions (Lebanon Support 2022). These disaggregated protests acquired a more voiceful and collective dimension at the beginning of the autumn, following the first important currency devaluation in a long chain against the USD, after over twenty years of pegged rate (“Al-Arabiya English” 2019).

Throughout the first half of the year, a variety of financial institutions had repeatedly warned Lebanon about the risk of an upcoming financial collapse (“Fitch Ratings” 2019). The warnings had been constantly under-dimensioned by Lebanese decision-makers, who rushed to curb any risk of dollar shortages or State default despite the accumulation of evidences suggesting the opposite (“Reuters” 2019). In mid-September, for instance, several importers' associations threatened or went on strike to denounce the growing difficulty to obtain hard currency to purchase goods. Soon after, Lebanese commercial banks began to impose stringent weekly limitations to small depositors on the withdrawals of USD from their own accounts. The withdrawals of USD became increasingly difficult also from ATMs.

A first glimpse of the changing popular mood was offered on September 29, as a day of demonstrations against the rising cost of living escalated into violent riots and confrontations with the security forces in different localities (“al-Monitor” 2019). The two slogans informing the protests were the notorious *aš-Ša‘ab Yurīd Isqāt an-Nizām* (the people want the downfall of the system), which had been marking the rhythm of the revolts in the region since 2011, and *Ir7alū!* (Go away!) addressed to the whole post-war ruling class, judged as corrupted and responsible for the country’s collapse. This rejecting *j’accuse* was to be better encompassed in the overarching slogan *Killūn ya ‘nī Killūn*, *All (of them) means all (of them)*, meant to become within few weeks the undisputed leitmotif of the uprising (Halabi 2019).

The uprising first sparked in Beirut to quickly propagate across the country according to a disruptive snowball effect cross-cutting classes, sects, generations, and gender boundaries. Much of its propulsive force came from the political activation of socio-geographical constituencies who had largely remained on the margins of post-war transgressive contention, such as impoverished petty bourgeoisie of self-employed, urban poor, and the peripheral provinces, pushed together to the streets by reverberation and identification mechanisms grounded in the everyday experience of impoverishment and marginalisation. These first-timers included regions and target constituencies considered until that moment as inviolable sectarian strongholds, such as Tripoli or the Shia south and the Beqaa valley, where citizens fearlessly destroyed all the visual signs deployed by the dominant parties and leaders to mark what they considered as their own territory (Lebanon Support 2022). The sensation that something extraordinary was happening pushed also rooted anti-systemic activists and organisations to join in, and enlarge the political scope of the uprising to the ensemble of socio-economic, political, civil and environmental struggles which had defined the national contentious arena in the previous years (IFI 2020).

As stressed by Majed and Karam, albeit the uprising did not bring about a regime change, it represented an unfolding *revolutionary situation* whereby, thanks to the simultaneous transgressive mobilisation of an unprecedented mass of citizens, the grassroots reappropriated the control over politics and society and repositioned the power dynamics of the country (Karam, Majed 2022, p. 4). The main mean through which this situation was created was the transgressive reappropriation of public spaces, most notable via roadblocks and the construction of tent cities,

which served the triple aim of expressing and organising dissent, exercise political pressure, and halt the country (Fawaz, Serhan 2020; Harb 2022). The minimal common demand converged on the resignation from the parliament of the entire post-war ruling class, set as unnegotiable precondition to both demobilise and achieve that radical reconfiguration of the post-war order more equal, inclusive, and accountable bases which, in a way or another, all the participants were aspiring to. These spaces also became vivid sites of subversion of the dominant norms, forms, symbols, and discourses defining the legitimate articulation of socio-sectarian hierarchies and modes of interaction, as well as sites of production of counter-hegemonic societal models and national discourses (Rakickaja 2021).

Against this surprising and unprecedented revolutionary situation, sectarian elites deployed since day one a variety of counter-revolutionary strategies and practices to contain, delegitimise, and possibly clamp down on the squares, according to two distinct, yet complementary, trajectories (Daher 2022). The first one, adopted at State level, aimed primarily at renormalising the everyday life of the country, and witnessed a progressive shift from persuasive (e.g.: partial accommodation of the popular demands, attempts of inclusion of the protestors in the formation of a new government) to coercive tactics (e.g.: violent repression of the demonstrations, targeted arrests) to clear the streets and halt mass protests. The second one was a sectarian one, pursued instead by the single parties, and was addressed to domesticate the transgressive activation of their target constituencies, each one according to the respective characteristics and political urgencies (della Porta, Tufaro 2022; Osman 2022). In the case of AMAL and Hezbollah, for instance, the privileged strategy consisted in leveraging on the respective loyalist bases to foster street intimidation, including physical one, and dissuade more partisans or sympathisers to take the streets by framing the protestors as unruly citizens manipulated by foreign embassies to destabilise the country (della Porta, Tufaro 2022; Saab 2019). Other parties, such as the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb or Mustaqbal, opted instead for maximising the protests to enhance their political positioning by trying to appropriate popular grievances and penetrate the mobilised squares in the respective historical strongholds (Jalkh 2021).

The disaggregating intervention of counter-revolution undoubtedly played a certain role in limiting the further spread of the uprising, and forbidding to develop its full counter-hegemonical potential. However, it failed to impress a major seatback to the mobilisations which, despite

a physiological downsizing compared to the earliest weeks, kept unfolding from North to South for over four months. The situation drastically changed with the arrival of the pandemic, which finally provided the ideal window of opportunity for sectarian elites to both clear the streets— and, hence, forcibly re-normalise the everyday-life of the country – and re-activate the clientelistic distributive mechanisms underpinning sectarian loyalties. The main weapon enabling to definitively impose a “normalisation from above” was the sanitary lockdown enforced on March 21, 2020. The lockdown was enforced about four weeks after the first positive case was detected to last for almost two months and, following the widespread fear of contagions, the congruence of the initiative with the official sanitary protocols followed worldwide, and the limited duration originally foreseen by the ministerial decree, found little popular opposition. The opportunity of the first lockdown was also seized to promptly clear the streets from the revolution camps and roadblocks under the pretext of sanitation, as well as to justify the repressive patrolling of the streets by the army, ban any form of public demonstration, and push forward arrests (Daher 2022). This did not prevent Lebanese citizens to periodically defy the restrictions and keep mobilising according to new modalities, such as via web or through scooter and car rallies. Nevertheless, as much as Algeria and Iraq, the health emergency succeeded to impose an abrupt caesura to the revolutionary situation which had been unfolding for months which, henceforth, were never be able to reconstitute themselves in the same form and scale. The sense of setback was further amplified by the counterrevolutionary exploitation of the pandemic by sectarian parties and leaders, who took the chance of the health emergency to reactivate their patronage machines by jumping in the emergency response arena (Karam, Majed 2022). The reaction was prompt and widespread: as a mapping elaborated by the American University, Beirut, shows out of 381 responses to the pandemic by non-State actors recorded between March and July 2020, about 50% were provided by sectarian parties (“Beirut Urban Lab” 2021). The territorial spread fully reflected the political geographies of each organisation, with a number and type of interventions directly proportional to the specific weight of each leader and party. The most common one was the direct distribution of aids, most notably food boxes, protective equipment, and *una tantum* cash assistance. Another important set of interventions was conducted in collaboration with the controlled municipalities, and included the promotion of risk reduction initiatives such as the disinfection of roads and

public places, the predisposition of isolation centres, and awareness campaigns, as well as the implementation of local curfews and lockdowns. Finally, as the vaccination campaign was inaugurated in late February 2021, vaccine batches too became integral part of the game (“France24” 2021a). In late March 2021, for instance, the outgoing PM and leader of the *Mustaqbal Movement* Saad Hariri (Sunna) announced the purchasing of 20.000 batches of Sputnik V vaccine to be inoculated for free to its target constituencies (Lewis 2021a). A similar initiative was undertaken by the *Lebanese Forces* (Maronite) in the stronghold of Bcharre through a partnership between the municipality and *The Cedar’s Foundation*, a prominent charity headed by the party leader Sathrida Geagea (Lewis 2021b). The *Lebanese Forces* (LF) carried out a vaccination campaign also in the Baalback-Hermel district, per initiative of the LF MP Antoine Habchi (“L’Orient Today” 2021). Further 100.000 batches were purchased by the founder of the *National Democratic Party* Fouad Makhzoumi, and the MP Elias Bou Saab, associated to the *Free Patriotic Movement* (Maronite) rented out a whole private hospital for vaccination purposes in the periphery of Beirut (“The961” 2021a; 2021b). The vaccine zeal was strictly related to the upcoming parliamentary elections, held in May 2022, and was enabled by the State liberalisation of the vaccine purchasing to speed up the immunisation campaign.

This ensemble of initiatives undoubtedly played an important role in re-vivifying sectarian geographies after the “debordering” momentum of the uprising. At the same time, however, the limited, episodic, and piecemeal response offered fell short from compensating the devastating impact that the rapid degeneration of the economic crisis exerted on citizens’ living conditions, as well as the poor State performance in providing an adequate the socio-economic and sanitary response to the pandemic.

3.6. One Crisis Engulfing the Other: The Pandemic and the Financial Meltdown

Together with the aforementioned revolutionary situation, Lebanon’s response to the pandemic had to cope with another and, possibly, much severe variable.

Following the first signs of currency crackdown at the end of the summer of 2019, Lebanon’s economic and financial meltdown underwent a rapid, exponential acceleration (World Bank 2022). The most

impactful consequence of this speeding up was the unstoppable devaluation of the national currency against the USD, which progressively wrapped the country in a tremendous hyper-inflationary spiral, compounded by a directly proportional loss of the real purchase power of wages. The devaluation walked in parallel with a sharp acceleration of the debt crisis, ultimately sealed in March 2020 by the declaration of a technical State default (“The Economist” 2020), which further hampered the limited capacity of the State to guarantee the provision of basic services, adjust salaries, and put in place effective price control mechanisms. This ensemble of stresses was amplified by the direct and indirect effects of the pandemic which, among the most important consequences, added more pressure on the crumbling State budget and the healthcare sector, enlarged and exasperated the country’s socio-economic inequalities, increased unemployment, and further burdened the precarious living conditions of the most marginalised and refugee communities, the latter accounting alone for about 30% of the resident population (Abi-Rached, Dlwan 2020).

Against this precarious and rapidly crumbling context, when COVID reached the country, the newly appointed government headed by Hassan Diab found himself in front of two major challenges. The first and most impending one was to find the adequate resources to rapidly equip the national healthcare system to face the spread of the virus, which, despite the appointment of an ad hoc task force at the end of January, got caught completely unprepared (Mehdi 2020). This unpreparedness was strictly related to the aggressive privatising sanitary policies promoted in the past thirty years, whereby public hospitals arrived to account for only 18% of the available hospital beds, and were characterised by a structural lack of resources and facilities compared to the flourishing private ones (Khalife et al. 2017). The second and most delicate one was the difficult balancing act between economic and public health urgencies, made the more complicated by the impossibility of the central State to provide adequate compensations to the wide basin of workers and businesses potentially affected by the imposition of protracted sanitary restrictions, including the army of informal workers accounting for over the half of the active population.

Facing this double challenge, on March 10, 2020 the government issued a national response plan based on the close cooperation between the central State, the private sector, and, above all, the World Bank and the UN agencies, which provided Lebanon with the bulk of resources

and know how to equip hospitals, purchase protective equipment, and implement the adequate sanitary protocols (Republic of Lebanon 2020). Within this framework, on March 21, 2020, the first national total lockdown was enforced, with the double aim of containing the spread of the virus while buying time until the national testing, treatment and risk-management capacities would have been adequately enhanced. The enhancement entered its operational phase throughout the month of April (See Box 3.1.), paving the way for the gradual reopening of the country, despite the exponential rise of contagions. The deconfinement was based on the bet that, given the relatively low absolute number of daily infections detected at the time, the enhancement of the testing and case management capacities would have been alone sufficient to handle the pandemic while avoiding the full paralyses of the national economic life. The decision to push for a deconfinement was also deeply influenced by the coeval explosion of a new wave of violent popular protests, against the backdrop of the rapid deterioration of the socio-economic conditions ("Al-Jazeera English" 2020). Against this protest upsurge, the State first sought to appease the popular anger by launching a phased-out cash assistance programme (ILO 2021b) envisaging the *una tantum* payment of 400.000 LBP (roughly 140\$ according to the parallel market rate of the period) to vulnerable households, and a number of workers' groups the most directly affected by the pandemic (front-line healthcare workers, civil defence, taxi and bus drivers). The programme envisaged an initial budget of 75 billion LBP, and reached by July 2021 about 290.000 households receiving one up to four *una tantum* each. However, due to the limited amount of the *una tantum* compared to the rising cost of living, and the limited reach of the initiative against the constantly enlarging basin of people needful of assistance, the programme consistently fell short of providing adequate relief to socio-economic backlashes of the pandemic. This played a central role in discouraging the government to implement new protracted lockdowns, in favour of scarcely effectively short, intermittent, ones enforced in moments of spiking of contagions. The strategy revealed to be disastrous.

After the progressive deconfinement of late April 2020, the number of deaths and positive cases underwent a constant, exponential growth (See Tab. 3.2. and 3.4.). Fundamental to this growth was the premature full reopening of restaurants and bars to save the touristic season, which was not underpinned by adequate monitoring and risk reduction practices, including the correct use of masks, the respect of

capacity restrictions of public places, and the isolation protocols. The propagation underwent another steady acceleration after the tremendous Beirut Port explosion of August 4, 2020, whereby, so to ease the rescue operations, all the COVID restrictions were lifted at the national level for two weeks (Hashim et al. 2022). The explosion was provoked by the deflagration of over 2.700 tons of poorly stored ammonium nitrate and, together with severely damaging most of the eastern side of the city, provoked about 300.000 displaced, over 200 deaths, and thousands of injured. Furthermore, the explosion severely damaged two of the main hospitals of the city, and overloaded the remaining ones. This did not dissuade political decision-makers to stick to the same lockdown policies, despite the latter had already shown their numerous loopholes well before the explosion. The continuity was favoured by the deep political crisis ignited by the events of August 4 whereby, following a wave of outraged demonstrations demanding political accountability for the disaster and the negligence which triggered it, Hassan Diab resigned from the position of Prime Minister inaugurating a long phase of institutional paralyses meant to last for over one year (Macaron 2021).

The health crisis touched its zenith in January 2021, when, against an unprecedented spiking of contagions, the assistance capacity of the Lebanese healthcare system ultimately reached saturation (“Associated Press” 2021). The spiking was strictly related to the government decision to ease yet again the sanitary restrictions during the holiday season, despite the alarming daily increase of infections, deaths and ICUs occupation rate experienced between November and December. This ultimately compelled the government to drastically revise its containment strategies and enforce a new protracted total lockdown. The lockdown remained fully enforced from January 7 to February 8, to leave room to a phased-out deconfinement plan which, this time, followed stricter protocols compared to the first one (IDAL 2021). Furthermore, so to avoid the risk of repeating another New Years’ Eve scenario, preventive total lockdowns were enforced on the occasion of major religious celebrations. The monitoring and testing policies were also improved (See Box 3.1.). This impressed a drastic curb on the contagions curve, which, despite another significant increase throughout the summer 2021 for the arrival of the Omicron variant, did not put the national healthcare system under pressure anymore (See Tab. 3.1.). The inauguration of the vaccination campaign in late March 2021

also played an important role. This comparatively better performance, however, did little to recompose the deep fracture between citizens and ruling elites unveiled by the uprising.

First, despite the improvements experienced throughout 2021, the overall State response to the health crisis remained tentative and piecemeal, with severe backlashes on both the sanitary and, above all, socio-economic point of view. To give some examples, following the unscrupulous containment policies pursued in 2020, the first bimester of 2021 recorded alone 3237 COVID deaths, against 818 of the previous one, and, by March 2021, at least 19% of workers reported having permanently lost their job because of the pandemic ("Arab Barometer" 2021). Second, the positive implications of the scaling down of the health emergency got *de facto* nullified by the parallel sharp acceleration of the economic meltdown which, despite the full reopening of the economic activities, pushed about 80% of the residents in conditions of severe economic vulnerability (ESCWA 2021). The acceleration was triggered by the sudden lifting of the subsidising mechanisms enforced by the BDL on the eve of the crisis to contain the inflation on selected basic goods, and, together with consistently speeding up the downfall of the currency, made the country deeply vulnerable to periodical shortages on food, medicines, and energy, including the daily supply of electricity. Third, most of the fatal delays in providing an adequate sanitary and socio-economic response to the pandemic depended on poor and corporatist decision-making, elite competition over the remnants of the spoils of office, and the recurrent political paralyses (Mehdi 2020). A case in point in this sense was the floundering of the COVID-19 Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN) programme (World Bank 2020). The ESSN aimed at providing cash assistance to over 700.000 Lebanese citizens living in extreme poverty as a prompt and quick response to the new urgencies provoked by the crisis and the pandemic. The plan was approved in December 2020, and relied on a 246 million USD loan by the World Bank as the main source of financing. However, due to the numerous attempts by political elites to exploit the plan to refuel their clientelistic patronage mechanisms, its enforcement was delayed for over two years, failing to provide effective relief against the shrinking economic situation (Maktabi et al. 2022). As a result, while the harshening of the financial crisis and its backlashes definitively placed the economic situation as the main concern of the Lebanese, the poor State management of the pandemic got

perceived as nothing but further evidence of the corruption and incompetence of the ruling elites, who remained solidly perceived as the main responsible of the national economic meltdown.

In conclusion, through our integrated analysis of the State and sectarian response to COVID-19, we have sought to provide a comprehensive overview of how the interplay between the counter-revolutionary exploitation of the pandemic by sectarian elites and the State response to the health emergency intervened on the process of reconfiguration of the dominant political relations unleashed by the economic crisis and the uprising of 2019. More specifically, we have seen how while the arrival of the pandemic undoubtedly played a fundamental role in halting street protests and re-establishing sectarian domination, the harshening of the economic crisis and the poor State handling of the pandemic severely hindered the capacity of sectarian ruling elites to fully seize the opportunity of the health emergency to re-establish their compromised hegemony. Fundamental to this failure was the reiteration of self-serving policies by sectarian ruling elites, considered by citizens as the main root of the country's economic and financial meltdown. Furthermore, while the pandemic enabled sectarian parties to reactivate their clientelistic mechanism of aid provision, the aid provided remained largely insufficient to compensate for the actual people's needs, and served primarily to refurbish the relation with the respective loyalist constituencies. Last but not least, the pandemic further burdened the effects and the progression of the socio-economic crisis. The result was the restoration of a domination without hegemony, whose ultimate outcome was to consolidate, rather than repair, the deep fracture between ruling elites and the multitude of citizens who took the streets displayed by the uprising.

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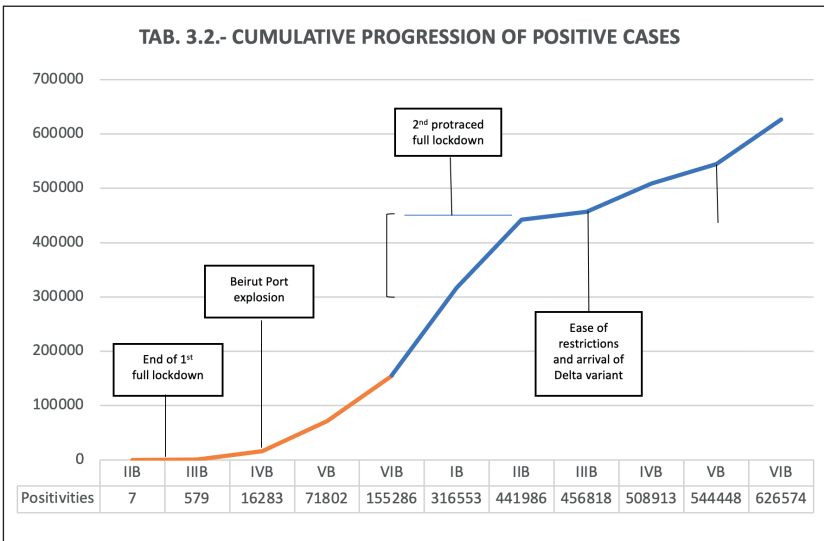
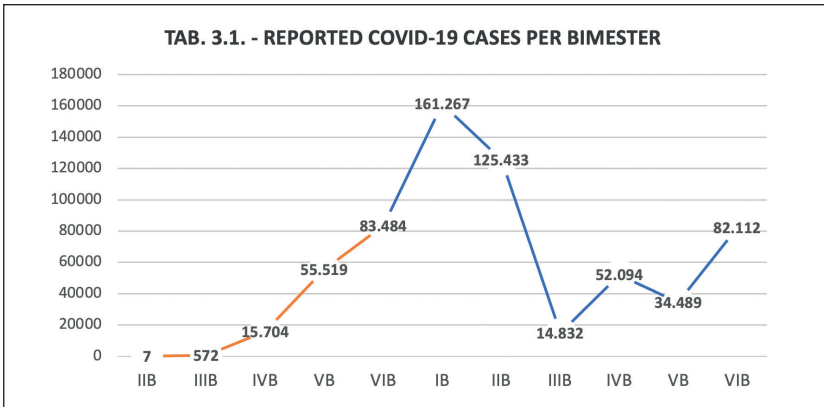
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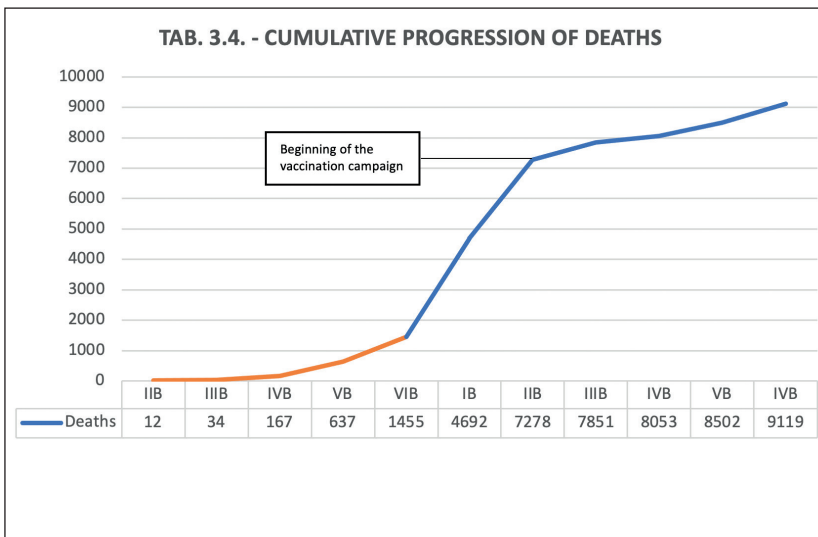
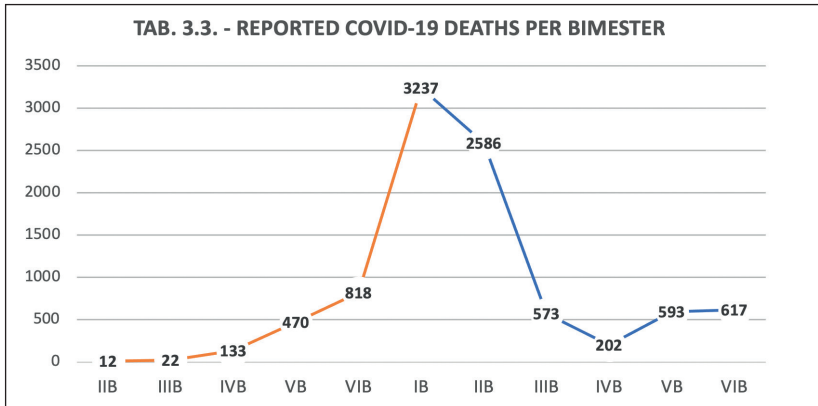
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Box 3.1. – Lebanon COVID-19 Lockdown Timeline

- **Feb. 21, 2020** – Detection of the first positivity
- **Feb. 22, 2020** – Shutdown on public transportations and selective flight restrictions
- **Feb. 26, 2020** – Closure of schools, public offices,
- **Mar. 10, 2020** – Presentation of the National Response Plan
- **Mar. 21, 2020** – *Enforcement of the first national total lockdown, including total border closure*
- **Apr. 04, 2020** – Enforcement of night curfew and stay-at-home policies
- **Apr. 27, 2020** – Beginning of the gradual easing of lockdown measures
- **May 13 – 18, 2020** – *Enforcement of a one-week total lockdown to contain the peaking of new cases and conduct random testing and tracing*
- **Jun. 14, 2020** – Lifting the restrictions on car circulation
- **Jun. 21, 2020** – Re-opening of bars, nightclubs, parks and markets, event halls and ballrooms with reduced capacity
- **Jul. 1, 2020** – Re-opening of Beirut Airport for commercial flights
- **Jul. 20, 2020** – Beginning of food deliveries to 50,000 vulnerable households
- **Jul. 30 – Aug. 10, 2020** – *Enforcement of a short total lockdown to contain the peaking of new cases*
- **Aug. 4, 2020** – 48h lifting of restrictions; Beirut Port Explosion
- **Aug. 4 – 2020** – Emergency suspension of all the lockdown measures to respond to the Port explosion
- **Aug. 21 – 28, 2020** – *Enforcement of a one-week national total lockdown to contain the peaking of new cases*
- **Sep. 18, 2020** – Re-opening of leisure activities
- **Oct. 4, 2020** – *Enforcement of a one-week total lockdown in 100 villages*
- **Oct. 11, 2020** – *Enforcement of a one-week total lockdown in 160 villages; Obligation to wear masks in public places*
- **Nov. 14 – 29, 2020** – *Enforcement of a two-weeks national total lockdown to contain the peaking of new cases*
- **Dec. 13, 2020** – Re-opening of leisure activities and authorization of public and private gatherings with restricted capacities
- **Jan. 7, 2021** – *Enforcement of the second long national total lockdown*
- **Jan. 11, 2021** – Reduction of air traffic and imposition of the obligation of PCR test and home quarantine to all the incoming passengers
- **Feb. 8, 2021** – Beginning of the gradual easing of containment measures

- **Mar. 26, 2021** – Suspension of curfews and extension of the opening hours of commercial activities
- **Apr. 3-6, 2021** – *National circumscribed lockdown and reintroduction of curfew to prevent contagions during the Easter weekend*
- **APR. 12, 2021** – Re-introduction of a one-month night curfew
- **MAY 1-3, 2021** – *National circumscribed lockdown to prevent contagions during the Orthodox Easter*
- **MAY 13-15, 2021** – *National circumscribed lockdown to prevent contagions during the celebrations of Eid al-Fitr*