

The Economic Legacy of the French Mandate in Lebanon

Joelle M. Abi-Rached and Ishac Diwan



THE ECONOMIC LEGACY OF THE FRENCH MANDATE IN LEBANON

Joelle M. Abi-Rached¹ and Ishac Diwan²

Working Paper No. 1614

November 2022

We thank Denis Cogneau for introducing us to the data and for his generous advice and comments on various drafts, Marianne Nabha for her research assistance early on in the project, and, last but not least, Chibli Mallat, Mouhoub El Mouhoud, and Nawaf Salam for their friendship and inspiring conversations over the years. Of course, all shortcomings are ours alone.

Send correspondence to:

Ishac Diwan

Director of Research, Finance for Development Lab, Paris School of Economics

ishac.diwan@ens.fr

¹ Harvard University, Cambridge, USA.

² Ecole Normale Supérieure, Paris, France.

First published in 2022 by
The Economic Research Forum (ERF)
21 Al-Sad Al-Aaly Street
Dokki, Giza
Egypt
www.erf.org.eg

Copyright © The Economic Research Forum, 2022

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher.

The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this publication are entirely those of the author(s) and should not be attributed to the Economic Research Forum, members of its Board of Trustees, or its donors.

Abstract

The paper examines public budgets (tax revenues and expenditure patterns) in Lebanon and the four Syrian states that were created during the French Mandate (1920-1943). To do so, we reconstruct fiscal accounts through the annual reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission that the French authorities were required to publish. We then focus on the educational policies and achievement of the French Mandate in Lebanon. Our empirical work reveals clearly (i) how the French authorities used funds raised through local taxes to finance the French military and its security apparatus rather than infrastructure and social services; (ii) that education and health were made the prerogatives of private and missionary endeavors; and (iii) that a consequence of this laissez-faire policy was a private educational system tilted towards the education of Christians with a startlingly underserved Muslim population. We also compare these budgets with other French colonies in Africa and Asia. This sheds additional light on the rudimentary developmental effort that characterized French rule. What transpires is that compared to the North African colonies, the Mandate's economy in Lebanon was over-taxed, but that a smaller part of these revenues was spent on development. It is precisely this lack of strong public foundations of the state that put Lebanon on a path of privatization of essential social services.

JEL Classification: I0, I1, I2, N0; N01, N40

Keywords: French Mandate, Lebanon, Syria, economic history, public budgets, education, fiscal accounts, French Empire

ملخص

تبحث هذه الورقة في الميزانيات العامة (الإيرادات الضريبية وأنماط الإنفاق)، في لبنان والولايات السورية الأربع التي تم إنشاؤها خلال الانتداب الفرنسي (1920-1943). وللقيام بذلك، نعيد بناء الحسابات المالية من خلال التقارير السنوية المقدمة إلى لجنة الولايات الدائمة التي طلب من السلطات الفرنسية نشرها. ثم تركز على السياسات التعليمية وتحقيق الانتداب الفرنسي- في لبنان. ويكشف العمل التجريبي بوضوح عما يلي: (1) كيف استخدمت السلطات الفرنسية الأموال التي جمعت من خلال الضرائب المحلية لتمويل الجيش الفرنسي- وأجهزته الأمنية بدلا من الهياكل الأساسية والخدمات الاجتماعية؛ (2) أن التعليم والصحة قد جعلتا من صلاحيات المساعي الخاصة والتبشيرية؛ و(3) أن نتيجة لسياسة عدم التدخل هذه كانت نظاما تعليميا خاصا يميل نحو تعليم المسيحيين مع السكان المسلمين الذين يعانون من نقص الخدمات بشكل مذهل. كما تقارن الورقة البحثية هذه الميزانيات مع المستعمرات الفرنسية الأخرى في أفريقيا وآسيا. وهذا يلقي مزيدا من الضوء على الجهود التنموية البدائية التي ميزت الحكم الفرنسي- ما يحدث هو أنه بالمقارنة مع مستعمرات شمال أفريقيا، كان اقتصاد الانتداب في لبنان خاضعا لضرائب مفرطة، لكن جزءا أصغر من هذه الإيرادات أنفق على التنمية. هذا النقص في الأسس العامة القوية للدولة هو بالضبط الذي وضع لبنان على طريق خصخصة الخدمات الاجتماعية الأساسية.

Introduction

In a prescient assessment of the economic situation in Syria and Lebanon on the eve of the French Mandate, Paul Huvelin, a professor of law in Lyons who led a scientific “mission” (*Mission française en Syrie*) on behalf of the Chambers of Commerce of Lyons and Marseille, wrote that Syria's future economic viability could only rest on two pillars: justice and education.³ Yet, he added, “I do not know if we have understood this enough.”⁴

If Lebanon was at an important turning point at the end of the First World War, as Huvelin and the silk entrepreneurs were acutely aware of,⁵ we argue that Lebanon was at an even more critical juncture during the Mandate (1920-1943),⁶ where policy direction and macro-economic decisions mattered in the context of the path the country ended up following. It is also our contention that on several accounts, the French failed in their “tutoring” process, which, according to the League of Nations, consisted of “advising, assisting, and guiding” the nascent State of Greater Lebanon.⁷

The reasons for their failure are complex, but one guiding thread, as Huvelin noted, is the lack of appreciation that French interests lied in the interests of their “friends,” that is in their economic and intellectual flourishing.⁸ Indeed, French authorities were driven by several goals: (1) pacifying a rebellious region coming out the Syrian war;⁹ (2) preparing Lebanon and Syria for independence in line with France’s “*mission civilisatrice*” and the Covenant of the League of Nations; and (3) protecting French commercial interests (as French investments dating from the capitulation system under the Ottomans were significant in this region).¹⁰ These are contradictory goals that require hefty funds. Yet, given that the French were not willing to spend their own budget (their own “routes to India” being in North Africa),¹¹ they ended up de facto applying a long-standing myopic principle of colonial rule: profit as much as you can, spend as little as possible.¹²

³ Paul Huvelin, “Que vaut la Syrie?” Congrès français de la Syrie, Section économique et compte rendu de la Mission française en Syrie (Paris and Marseille: Chambres de Commerce de Marseille, May-September 1919), 55.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For more, see Dominique Chevallier, “Lyon et la Syrie en 1919. Les bases d’une intervention,” *Revue historique* 224, no. 2 (1960): 275–320.

⁶ As Henry Laurens rightly noted there is no consensus on the end of the Mandate, some say 1943, others 1946, see Henry Laurens, “Le Mandat Français sur la Syrie et le Liban,” in *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946 : Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, ed. Nadine Méouchy, Études arabes, médiévales et modernes. (Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013), 409–15, <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3204>.

⁷ Preamble, “Mandat de la SDN, Syrie, Liban, 1922,” *Digithèque de matériaux juridiques et politiques*, accessed July 21, 2022, <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/sy1922.htm>.

⁸ Huvelin, “Que vaut la Syrie?” 56.

⁹ For more, see Philip S. Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism 1920-1945* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014).

¹⁰ For the latter, see William I. Shorrock, “The Origin of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon: The Railroad Question, 1901-1914,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 2 (1970): 134; Mohammed Ali Al-Saleh, “Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946,” in *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946 : Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, ed. Nadine Méouchy (Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013), 197–210, <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3182>.

¹¹ René La Bruyère, “Les routes des Indes,” *Revue des deux mondes (1829-1971)* 30, no. 3 (1935): 556.

¹² Coquery-Vidrovitch Catherine, *Le choix de l’Afrique: Les combats d’une pionnière de l’histoire africaine* (Paris: La découverte, 2021), 161.

Budgets needed to be raised locally to finance not just civilian governance, but also an expansive and expensive security apparatus. To raise sufficient funds, the economy was overtaxed. The priority given to security depleted funds for local development. This contrasts with what happened in the French colonies, where conquest wars were generally a thing of the past by the 1920s, and where France typically paid all military expenditures. Moreover, monopolies, mostly owned by French interests, were protected. All this was detrimental to local economic development.

There are, however, other views. Before the 1960s, the literature tended to argue enthusiastically that the Mandate paved the way for the fast growth of the early independence period, especially in Lebanon. For Brigadier Stephen Hemsley Longrigg (who served in the British administration of Iraq and later in the Iraqi petroleum company), Syria and Lebanon experienced “progress” under the French and public finance, which was “under close French guidance” and was “prudently administered.”¹³ If there is any critique to be made, Longrigg argued, it is that the French had “overemphasized their own contribution and assumed excessive control.”¹⁴ Such a critique did take shape in the years following decolonization.

While more nuanced than Longrigg, Kamal Salibi also acknowledged the “political progress” made by the Lebanese in laying out the foundations of the modern state (including the constitution that was adopted in 1926, which transformed the State of Greater Lebanon into a Lebanese Republic).¹⁵ However, Salibi prudently did not make any pronouncement on the economic consequences of the French policies. Recent studies, which draw on declassified archival documents, more forcefully and convincingly condemn the economic policies of the French Mandate qualifying them as exploitative.¹⁶ In the late 1970s, the late Roger Owen argued that the French marginalized the agricultural and industrial economy of the Lebanese mountain at the expense of the financial and economic hegemony of banking and trade activity in Beirut.¹⁷ In the 1980s, Philip Khoury further characterized the French fiscal policy in education, industry, and agriculture as “tightfisted” as opposed to its profuse spending on “the repressive arms of the State.”¹⁸

While Longrigg believed that French activity in education in Syria and Lebanon was “one of imperfect balance and distribution,”¹⁹ recent studies also show how education was not

¹³ Stephen Hemsley Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate* (London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 364.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 365.

¹⁵ Kamal S. Salibi, *The Modern History of Lebanon* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965), especially 165-68.

¹⁶ Al-Saleh, “Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946,” 197-210.

¹⁷ Roger Owen, “The Political Economy of Grand Liban, 1920-70,” in *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon*, ed. Roger Owen (London: Ithaca, 1976), especially 23-24.

¹⁸ Khoury, *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*, 93.

¹⁹ Longrigg, *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*, 289.

disinterested as he assumed it to be, but rather instrumental in creating a middle class, which became a reservoir of the needed bureaucrats and other professionals that turned out to be vital for the maintenance of the Mandate.²⁰ Therefore, despite being necessary for the very survival of the Mandate, the French did not encourage the nascent states (which they were mandated to support) to invest directly in education. In spite of this, education was dynamic and grew during the Mandate, and, as this paper argues, it was the private sector that became the backbone of education, which exacerbated communal inequalities.

However, the literature, be it on economic history or education, does not provide us with a concrete sense of the fiscal choices and economic policies and their implications for the formation of the state and for what it has become, namely a “Merchant Republic” (*République marchande*) in the words of the Lebanese politician and banker Michel Chiha.²¹ That is, a republic that we could further qualify as having a very weak public sector and a highly unequal society across social classes and communitarian groups.

Hence, this paper proposes examining public budgets (tax revenues and expenditure patterns) more closely in Lebanon and the four Syrian states that were created during the Mandate. To do so, we reconstruct fiscal accounts through the annual reports to the Permanent Mandates Commission that the French authorities were required to publish (hereafter referred to as Reports).²²

We also probe into the educational policies and achievements in Lebanon. To do so, we tabulate various measures of the performance of the educational system, also drawing on data provided in the Reports over the years.

Our empirical work clearly reveals the following:

- (i) How the French authorities used funds raised through local taxes to finance the French military and its repressive security apparatus rather than infrastructure and social services;
- (ii) How education and health were made the prerogatives of private and missionary endeavors; and
- (ii) How a consequence of this laissez-faire policy was a private educational system tilted toward the education of Christians, with a startlingly underserved Muslim population.

²⁰ Fawwaz Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon* (London: Pluto Press, 2007), 92. Also see Elizabeth Thompson, *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon* (Columbia University Press, 2000); Jennifer Marie Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2010).

²¹ Michel Chiha, *Politique intérieure* (Paris: Éditions du Trident, 1964), 196. For the financial foundations of Lebanon in terms of monetary policy and the banking sector under the Mandate, see Hicham Safieddine, *Banking on the State: The Financial Foundations of Lebanon* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019), especially 14-42.

²² Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Rapport à la Société des Nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale) for the years 1924 to 1938. These reports were consulted at the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.

Looking at budgets – especially from a comparative perspective with an emphasis on North Africa and other French colonies in Africa and Asia – sheds additional light on the rudimentary developmental effort that in the end characterized French rule. To do so, we rely on the recent pioneering work of Denis Cogneau and his associates (hereafter referred to as CDMS).²³ What transpires is that, compared to the North African colonies, the Mandate's economy was overtaxed, but a smaller part of these revenues was spent on development. It is precisely this lack of strong public state foundations that put the country on the path of privatization of essential social services.

Budget exercise

Following the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire after its defeat in 1918, the conference held by the Allies at San Remo (April 1920) instigated the Mandate system, dividing the Mashreq into states under British control (Iraq, Palestine, and what later became Jordan) and others under French control (what later became modern Syria and Lebanon). By 1925, France had reorganized its mandate into five states: Lebanon (*État du Liban*), Syria (*État de Syrie*), the State of Alawites (*État des Alaouites/Lattaquié*), the State of Druzes (*État des Druzes*), and the Sanjak of Alexandretta.

Since the analysis is comparative, it is important at this stage to differentiate between what John Spagnolo calls the different “styles of imperialism.”²⁴ For the sake of this paper, the difference between the Mandate and the Colony (we will leave aside the other legal category that was created in the nineteenth century, namely the “Protectorate”).²⁵ First, according to the Covenant of the League of Nations (an organization born in the aftermath of the First World War), the type of Mandate applied to Syria and Lebanon (in contrast to a colony) was meant to be transitory, i.e., a phase of preparation for the independence of the mandated territory, which was considered incapable of self-governance.²⁶ A Mandate did not sanction settlement because the mandated territory was not supposed to be a possession or an annexation. Moreover, the role prescribed to the Mandatory Power was allegedly to “advise, assist, and guide” the mandated territories, not to govern and rule (directly or indirectly) like in the case of a Colony.²⁷

Yet, both forms of imperial control had at least one principle in common, namely that these territories should (if anything) be sources of profit and enrichment for the metropole (be it monetary, politically/symbolically, or resources wise) and not vice versa. The decree of 13 April

²³ Denis Cogneau, Yannick Dupraz, and Sandrine Mesplé-Somps, “Fiscal Capacity and Dualism in Colonial States: The French Empire 1830–1962,” *The Journal of Economic History* 81, no. 2 (2021): 441–80, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050721000140>.

²⁴ John P. Spagnolo, “The Definition of a Style of Imperialism: The Internal Politics of the French Educational Investment in Ottoman Beirut,” *French Historical Studies* 8, no. 4 (1974): 563–84, <https://doi.org/10.2307/285853>.

²⁵ For more on the notion of the “protectorate” (as applied to Tunisia and Morocco) see, Farid Lekéal and Annie Deperchin, “Le protectorat, alternative à la colonie ou modalité de colonisation? Pistes de recherche pour l’histoire du droit,” *Clio@Themis. Revue électronique d’histoire du droit*, no. 4 (June 29, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.35562/cliiothemis.1347>.

²⁶ Pierre Viénot, “Le Mandat français sur le Levant,” *Politique étrangère* 4, no. 2 (1939): 104, <https://doi.org/10.3406/polit.1939.5986>.

²⁷ Preamble, “Mandat de la SDN, Syrie, Liban, 1922.”

1900 was very explicit about the financial autonomy of French colonies; the budget of colonies had to be funded entirely from local taxes in the colonies themselves, except for the military, which was funded by the metropole.²⁸ However, as we will also see in this paper, the Mandate managed to finance part of its military and other expenditures from local taxes in an attempt to keep direct contributions from the metropole as minimal as possible.

Each local government managed its local budget under the supervision of the French High Commissioner.²⁹ Local states financed local administration, justice, the police, and state services, such as health, education, infrastructure, and support for local production. However, there was also a common budget for the five states that was managed by the High Commissioner. The first “Common Budget” (*Budget commun*) was created in 1921 and was later renamed the budget of “Common Interests” (*Compte d'intérêts communs*, or CIC).³⁰ The CIC contributed massively (up to 70 percent) to the expenses of the mandatory power, and especially its military (*Armée du Levant*, or ADL).³¹ Its revenues were largely raised from customs revenues collected directly by the *Office des douanes* under the direct control of the High Commissioner (between 80 and 90 percent).

All in all, the CIC was a major mechanism allowing the French to exercise direct influence in the five states.³² Besides its fiscal role, the CIC was also in charge of regulating French holding companies (*sociétés concessionnaires*), which were remnants of the Ottoman Empire reinforced during the French Mandate. These firms were empowered to monopolize large swaths of the economy, and in particular, the sectors of transportation (*Régie générale des chemins de fer Damas-Hama*), electricity (*Compagnie des tramways et éclairage de Beyrouth*), and tobacco consumption and production (*Régie co-intéressée libano-syrienne des tabacs et tombacs*).³³ These economic privileges were alienating the rest of the population to such an extent that major strikes, boycott movements, strikes and protests frequently broke out in the 1930s.³⁴

²⁸ Article 33 of the decree of 13 April 1900 published in the *Journal Officiel* on 14 April 1900, no. 103, p. 2312, also available on the official website Légifrance of the French Republic: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTE XT000000314852> (accessed July 6, 2022).

²⁹ Jean-David Mizrahi, “Armée, état et nation au Moyen-Orient. La naissance des troupes spéciales du Levant à l’époque du mandat français, Syrie, 1919-1930,” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 207, no. 3 (2002): 107, <https://doi.org/10.3917/gmcc.207.0107>

³⁰ Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, *Rapport à la Société des Nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban* (année 1930) (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1931), 152; Al-Saleh, “Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946.”

³¹ Al-Saleh, “Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946.”

³² Jean-David Mizrahi, “La France et sa politique de mandat en Syrie et au Liban (1920-1939),” in *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, ed. Nadine Méouchy, Études arabes, médiévales et modernes (Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013), 35–71.

³³ Traboulsi, *A History of Modern Lebanon*, 91 and 96.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 96–97; Carla Eddé, “La mobilisation ‘populaire’ à Beyrouth à l’époque du Mandat, le cas des boycotts des trams et de l’électricité,” in *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, ed. Nadine Méouchy Études arabes, médiévales et modernes (Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013), 349–75.

Data methods

The goal of the paper is to evaluate the capacity of the French Mandate to deliver public goods and services with an emphasis on education. After all, according to Article 8 of the Mandate covenant by the Council of the League of Nations: “The Mandatory shall encourage public instruction.”³⁵

To do so, we evaluate the Mandate's ability to raise revenue and how much of its expenditures went to the delivery of social services. Given the raw data at our disposal, we do this for each of the five states for the years 1927 to 1938. In addition to comparing revenues and expenditures over time and across the five states (more specifically the states of Lebanon and Syria), we also compare the Mandate with all other French colonies and protectorates using CDMS data. To make revenue and expenditure measures comparable over time and in countries, we extract raw data from the annual budgetary tables (published in the Reports) for the five states and the CIC.

Studies in the past have looked at the CIC and state accounts separately. This does not allow for gauging the real fiscal effort and putting the various sectors of spending in perspective. We aggregate the CIC with the five states to produce the Mandate's overall consolidated budget. By consolidating spending at the various levels into one account, it becomes possible to compare the public effort in the five states with that of other French colonies.³⁶

Various adjustments were needed to produce the tables in the paper. We converted the “Livre Libano-Syrienne” (LLS), which was the local currency used during 1928-31, into “Francs Français” (FF) at a rate of 20 to one. When calculating figures in real terms, we reported these at 1937 prices using the inflation figure for metropolitan France, as reported in CDMS. In building consolidated budgets, there are several complexities that one needs to deal with. When lagged tax revenue is reported, we recorded it for the previous years where it belongs. The CIC accounts show some primary surpluses in some years, which go into reserves, and deficits in others (financed by loans and drawdown from reserves). We did not count drawdowns from reserve funds as current revenue to avoid double-counting.

Unfortunately, there are no data available on GDP. This has severely limited the development of the economic history of the region and its comparison with the rate of progress in other regions. Instead, we resort to per capita cross-country comparisons. Data on the population is, however, very spotty, but there were several censuses done during the Mandate that can anchor our estimation of the population for all the years (see Appendix). We construct a series for the five

³⁵ “French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon,” *The American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 3 (1923): 177–82, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2212963>.

³⁶ For the latter, we rely on the comprehensive work recently published by CDMS.

states based on data from several sources (listed in the Appendix), and by making reasonable assumptions about demographic developments.³⁷

Extractive capacity

Our estimates of total consolidated tax revenue show that revenue per capita was quite higher in the Mandate in 1928, at FF 210, than among the richest colonies, which are the North African French possessions of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia (hereafter referred to as NA) at FF 149 (Table 1). The estimated Mandate's revenues per capita were around four times those in the African and Asian colonies.

Table 1. Public revenue level and structure, 1925 (in 1937 FF)

	Mandate	NA	Indochina	WCA	Madagascar	France
Tax revenue per capita	210	149	42	30	56	N/A
	Composition of tax revenue (in % of total)					
Capitation and monopolies	6%	14%	47%	37%	49%	9%
Intermediate	15%	38%	39%	26%	27%	49%
Trade	46%	18%	12%	36	25%	6%
Modern taxes	33%	29%	0%	0%	0%	36%

Sources: Data for the Mandate are from 1928 and computed by authors from information taken from the Reports. Data for NA, Indochina, WCA, Madagascar, and France are from CDMS.

Notes: NA stands for North Africa and WCA stands for West Central Africa.

This may be partly related to higher incomes in Lebanon and Syria than in North Africa. While we do not have the GDP data to make this comparison, it is also clear that this argument should not be exaggerated: Lebanon and Syria were devastated during the First World War with a severe economic crisis ensuing.³⁸ Instead, it is more likely that the extractive effort was higher than that in other colonies. High tax extraction must have been especially painful to the population considering the low level of the settler population, compared to NA, which is richer and easier to tax.

The conclusion that taxation was high is reinforced by looking at the structure of taxes. The share of “modern” taxes (taxes on income and expenditures) is high compared to the French colonies. However, and more strikingly, unlike the colonies and France itself, much of the revenues came from customs (46 percent in the Mandate states, as opposed to only six percent in France and 18 percent in NA) (Table 1). Indeed, the average custom rate was 35 percent for the Mandate's custom

³⁷ These estimates are likely to be imprecise, as censuses are likely to underestimate the size of the population. This means that our estimates of revenue and spending per capita, as well as our estimates of school enrollment rates, are all likely to suffer from a positive bias. However, there are no reasons to believe that censuses taken in Lebanon and Syria during the French Mandate period were more imprecise than those administered in French colonies, so these comparisons should remain, on balance, valid.

³⁸ Charles Issawi, “Economic Development and Liberalism in Lebanon,” *Middle East Journal* 18, no. 3 (1964): 283; Melanie S. Tanielian, *The Charity of War: Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018).

union compared to 15-20 percent in other countries of the region, such as Egypt, Palestine, or Iraq.³⁹ It is very likely that the custom tax rates – which were the remit of the CIC – were kept high in order to raise funds as much as possible to help defray the costs incurred by the ADL.

Spending capacity

In other colonies, the French authorities financed local expenditures from local taxes. But, as mentioned earlier, the French treasury financed military expenditures. In the Mandate states, in contrast, the French did not have this legal constraint, and they tried as much as possible to finance these expenditures through the CIC. This not only encouraged high levels of extraction, as seen above, but it also crowded out civilian expenditures. Table 2 looks at the evolution of civilian and military spending during the Mandate over time.

Public expenditures in the Mandate states were characterized by a high level of military spending, especially in the earlier years after the Syrian revolts (see Table 2). Surprisingly, military expenditures remained high throughout the period, decreasing only marginally until 1935 before dipping in 1936-37 (see Table 2). The estimated number of the ADL in 1926 was 40,000 men.⁴⁰ This did not include the “irregular” armed forces (*forces mobiles irrégulières*), which were called upon when needed for “counter-guerrilla” operations.⁴¹ The CIC also financed various experts, bureaucrats, administrators, politicians in military clothes, and local recruits from minority groups (the Syrian legion). The broader “security apparatus” also included the gendarmerie, the police, and the judiciary, which are part of the civilian expenditures reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Per capita expenditure, revenue, and contribution to military spending

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Civilian expenditure	182.2	182.9	167.7	176.1	144.9	127.8	134.7	139.9	136.2	114.8
Debt service (DS)	9.3	17.0	22.9	27.9	26.5	30.1	30.5	18.2	16.8	13.2
Military expenditure (CIC)	162.2	166.5	140.1	142.2	129.6	143.9	131.3	117.9	103.0	63.1
Tax revenue	210.0	215.4	198.4	202.9	191.4	183.9	190.9	199.5	177.6	167.6
Mandate contribution to military and DS %	16%	18%	19%	16%	30%	32%	35%	44%	35%	69%

Source: Data for the Mandate are computed by the authors based on information taken from the Reports.

Debt service was also an important part of the expenditures, especially in the early years of the Mandate. This included 164 million Francs paid by the CIC between 1929 and 1934 (Reports, various years). In contrast to the Turks who managed to reduce by half the Ottoman debt of the

³⁹ Al-Saleh, “Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946.”

⁴⁰ Mizrahi, “Armée, état et nation au Moyen-Orient. La naissance des troupes spéciales du Levant à l’époque du mandat français, Syrie, 1919-1930,” 112.

⁴¹ For more, see Maurice Albord, “La période du changement 1936-1939,” in *L’armée française et les États du Levant: 1936-1946* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2013), 25–68, <http://books.openedition.org/editions-cnrs/578>.

new Turkish Republic, Syria and Lebanon had to continue repaying their share of the Ottoman debt, which was mostly owed to French financiers.⁴²

As a result, on a per capita basis, military and civilian expenditures were of the same order of magnitude for much of the Mandate period. At the same time, civilian expenditures were kept lower than the tax revenue. This civilian surplus was used to contribute to military expenditures and debt service. While the contribution was initially low (16 percent in 1928), it rose fast to around 30-40 percent by the mid-1930s and close to 70 percent in 1937 (Table 2).

When we compare civilian and military expenditures between the Mandate states and other French colonies, we find that both types of expenditures were higher on a per capita basis in the Mandate than in NA (Table 3). The fact that civilian expenditure was higher is not surprising since, as we saw earlier, the revenue effort was larger in the Mandate. However, what we can deduce is that civilian expenditures could have been even higher had it not been for the extra-high level of spending on the military. In other colonies where French rule was already consolidated, less was spent on security by the 1920s.⁴³ Moreover, the military effort was financed in larger proportion by local taxes. Comparing Tables 1 and 3, it is apparent that in the colonies, local taxes were about equal to civilian expenditures, but in the Mandate states the tax revenue was much larger than civilian expenditure, thus producing a surplus used to finance the military. From Table 2, it becomes apparent that this is not specific to 1927; this surplus only increases over time.

Table 3. Total state expenditure per capita (in 1935 FF) for civilian and military, 1925

	Mandate	NA	Indochina	WCA	Madagascar	France
Civilian	182	143	68	24	58	703
Military	162	107	7	6	13	334

Sources: Data for Mandate are from 1928 and are computed by the authors from information from the Reports. Data for NA, Indochina, WCA, Madagascar, and France are taken from CDMS.

Notes: NA stands for North Africa and WCA for West Central Africa.

The conclusion is clear: the economies of the Mandate states were overtaxed in order to finance a significant military and security apparatus that the Mandate needed to sustain itself and which the French treasury pushed largely on the mandatory taxpayers. The high custom rates as well as the high income and business taxes must have been a burden for economic growth, especially in the State of Lebanon, which was already playing the role of a trade entrepot. At the same time, civilian expenditures were constrained. As we will see below, little was spent to deliver state services and support economic production. Nevertheless, the focus on security did manage to pacify the country and instill a sense of security, which must have advantaged economic and social development, including outside the state, through the activities of associations and the private sector.

⁴² Al-Saleh, "Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946."

⁴³ See CDMS.

Composition of spending

While there is a long literature on the history and politics of missionary education in the Near East, none of the statistics provided in the official reports of the Mandatory power give us a precise sense of the kinds of budgetary choices that were made over the entire duration of the Mandate or a comparison to the other colonies of the French Empire. Our reconstruction of the data in ways that are comparable across time and regions allows for a more granular picture of the priorities of the French authorities, suggesting path-dependency dynamics in the way education and health ended up being privatized in the case of Lebanon at the expense of a more robust public system for these essential social goods.

In Table 4, we compare social spending in the French Empire in 1925 (as reported by CDMS) to that of the Mandate in 1928 (the first year for which our series is available).

Table 4. Share of spending in main sectors (% total expenditures, 1925)

	Infrastructure and production	Education	Health	Government
Mandate with ADL	15.6	3.8	1.5	74.0
Mandate without ADL	28.2	6.8	2.8	48.4
NA	49.8	9.1	6.7	24.7
Indochina	37.6	6.7	4.3	41.6
WCA	46.4	3.6	5.8	30.7
Madagascar	32.5	6.4	11.5	27.8
France	41.8	20.3	5.9	31.9

Sources: For the Mandate, data are for 1928 and are computed by the authors based on information taken from the Reports. Data for NA, Indochina, WCA, Madagascar, and France are taken from CDMS.

Notes: ADL stands for Armée du Levant, NA for North Africa, and WCA for West and Central Africa. Government includes judiciary, administration, and security. Production refers to support for the productive sectors.

As a share of expenditures, spending on education and health was low everywhere, but they were even lower in the five states (6.8 percent and 2.8 percent expenditures) compared to 9.1 and 6.7 percent in NA, even when ADL costs are *not* considered part of total expenditure. When adding the cost of the ADL to get a picture of the full range of expenditures made by the Mandate, these figures go down even more dramatically to 3.8 percent and 1.5 percent of expenditures, now way below NA levels and closer to the level of African and Asian colonies when it comes to education.

The low developmental effort in the Mandate states is even starker when we look at spending on infrastructure and on support for local production. Here, spending was much lower at 15.6 percent of expenditures, respectively, in the five states, as opposed to 49.8 percent in NA, 46.4 percent in WCA, and 41.6 percent for Indochina (Table 4). Clearly, spending on the ADL squeezed what could be spent in other sectors. However, it is interesting to note that spending on the non-ADL part of the security apparatus (including the judiciary, the police, and various security forces) was also extremely large at 48 percent of civilian expenditures. Including ADL boosts the share of the whole security apparatus in total spending to the astounding level of 74 percent. To make sure that 1928 is a representative year, we look below at the evolution of state spending per capita on health

and education during the whole period of the Mandate (Table 5). There is no clear trend; expenditures remain stagnant over the whole period of the Mandate.

Table 5. Spending per capita on health and education, and infrastructure and production (real FF, 1937)

	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937
Lebanon										
Health and Education	37.4	52.2	50.9	52.9	41.5	28.7	45.6	41.5	48.7	50.7
Infrastructure and Production*	27.6	32.4	29.2	35.7	35.5	32.9	30.1	28.1	25.6	29.5
Syria										
Health and Education	27.0	41.2	35.7	33.2	20.0	13.6	17.3	19.5	23.3	23.4
Infrastructure and Production	31.0	35.8	23.2	21.9	13.4	11.0	10.2	9.3	10.2	8.3
Mandate (five states)										
Health and Education	18.7	18.5	19.3	21.4	20.9	20.2	20.1	21.0	18.9	17.4
Infrastructure and Production	55.5	72.0	70.4	67.1	46.9	41.4	50.5	50.0	52.6	38.3

Notes: Production refers to support for the productive sectors. Syria refers to “État de Syrie” as defined by the Mandate, not modern Syria.

Education policy in Lebanon

While social expenditures were low and stagnant across the period under study, including in education, primary school enrollment expanded over time in the Mandate states. This was the case in Lebanon in particular, where primary enrollment nearly doubled between 1927 and 1938 (from 76,649 to 142,549 students) (Table 6). In contrast, there were fewer students in the much larger State of Syria, with the number of primary-level students rising from 52,000 to 108,000 during the same period.

In order to compare enrollment in Lebanon to those in the French colonies, we develop estimates of enrollment rates using our population estimates (see Appendix). Given the dearth of knowledge of the demographic characteristics of the population, these estimates contain a large margin of error. We use two assumptions. First, we follow CDMS in taking the reference as children aged six to 12 years old (measure 1). This allows for a direct comparison between the Mandate and the French colonies. Second, we alternatively use a larger denominator of all children aged six to 18 years old (measure 2). This is likely to produce a more realistic measure of the enrollment rate, given that since schooling was predominantly at the primary level, primary school students were not exclusively young children.⁴⁴

In spite of the wide range of our estimates, it is clear that the enrollment rate was already much higher in Lebanon by 1927 than in any other colony (as well as in Syria). This must have reflected

⁴⁴ Moreover, like CDMS, we take the group of children aged six to 12 years old to represent 18 percent of the population, and the larger group of children aged six to 18 years old to represent 28 percent of the population.

the social progress achieved during what could be called the golden period of education after the 1860s in the *Mutasarrifate* of Mount Lebanon and partly maintained despite the disruption caused by the First World War.⁴⁵ More pertinently, we also see significant progress during the Mandate's decade. As seen in Table 6, by 1938, the primary enrollment rate is estimated to be between 55 percent (85 percent by measure 1).

Table 6. Primary school enrollment rates in percentage by year

	1927	1938
Five states	25/39	32/50
Syria	10/16	16/25
Lebanon	38/59	55/85
	1925	1955
French Empire	3.5	14.5
NA	4.1	17.2
Indochina	4.7	no data
WCA	1.7	12.4
Madagascar	no data	32.2
France	135	110

Sources: Data for Lebanon, Syria, and the five states are computed by the authors based on information taken from the Reports for 1927 and 1938. Data of the comparators for 1925 and 1955 are based on CDMS.

Notes: NA stands for North Africa and WCA stands for West Central Africa.

This performance stands in sharp contrast to the slow progress in the rest of the Mandate states, including the larger Syrian state, where the primary school enrollment rate remained low by the end of the Mandate period (at 25 percent for measure 1). The fact that these rates were still above NA's enrollment rate (of 1925) reflects the overly rural nature of these latter societies, compared to more urbanized *bilad al-sham*. In the cases of Syria and North Africa, however, progress was slow.

The same conclusion about the exceptional nature of Lebanon's educational performance is reached when we compare it to the progress in French colonies between 1925 and 1955, the period studied by CDMS and termed the “developmentalist” period of colonialism.”⁴⁶ In all the French colonies, enrollment was extremely low in 1925, suggesting the low interest by the French authorities in its supposed “*mission civilisatrice*.” There is, however, marked progress by 1955, reflecting the real effort made in the last phase of colonialism (Table 6). Even by then, however, only Madagascar reached an enrollment rate close to what Lebanon had reached decades earlier.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ The mid-to-late nineteenth century is considered a “watershed” moment in the history of missionary work with an intensification of schools opened by various Catholic and Protestant missionaries as well as locals; the National School founded by the Nahda intellectual Butrus al-Bustani, the Maqasid school founded by the Sunni bourgeoisie in Beirut, and the Collège de la Sagesse founded by the Maronites. For more, see Joelle M. Abi-Rached, *‘Asfuriyyeh: A History of Madness, Modernity, and War in the Middle East* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020), 12 and 50-76; Donald J. Cioeta, “Islamic Benevolent Societies,” *Islamic Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1982): 44-55.

⁴⁶ CDMS, 443.

⁴⁷ Madagascar, like Lebanon, had a high share of private missionary education (see Table 4 in CDMS).

In order to explore the reasons behind the Lebanese exception, we exploit the detailed account of students that the Mandate's statistical services compiled, and which it duly reported in the annual Reports. Table 7 shows the distribution of students across public, private, and foreign schools. Table 8 reports the students' religion and cross tabulates this with the type of schools they went to. The results are illuminating.

Table 7. Students by types of schools in Lebanon, 1927-1938

	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Students	76,649	80,024	86,725	98,982	103,795	104,133	106,754	107,508	115,975	122,640	132,838	142,549
Composition: students by type of schools												
Private	47%	44%	50%	50%	51%	51%	50%	50%	53%	54%	55%	56%
Foreign	43%	41%	40%	37%	35%	34%	34%	34%	33%	33%	32%	31%
Public	10%	15%	10%	14%	14%	15%	16%	16%	14%	13%	13%	13%

Source: Data compiled by the authors from the Reports, various years.

Between 1927 and 1938, only a small share of students was enrolled in public schools, with the figure fluctuating between 10 and 16 percent, with an average of 13 percent. Therefore, the low level of public expenditure in education shows up in a public school system of modest size. Most students went to non-public schools, which are classified in the Reports as private or foreign, with the two systems being of broadly equal size, each educating about 40 percent of the student body. In Lebanon, most private schools were (and still are) owned, operated, and financed by religious groups as well as some foreign support. As reported in Table 7, private schools grew faster than foreign schools over a decade, enrolling 56 percent of the students, with 31 percent going to foreign schools, which perhaps became more focused on serving the elite.

Besides the dominance of the private sector, the other noteworthy characteristic of the student body that stands out is that it is largely made up of Christian students (Table 8). In 1927, around 57,000 Christian students were enrolled in schools, and this figure nearly doubled to around 103,000 by 1938. Over the same period, the number of Muslim students also doubled but from much lower levels; from about 15,000 to about 30,000. In terms of share, 75 percent of students were Christians in 1927, and by 1938, not much had changed, as their proportion remained preponderant at 72 percent. This is much more than the estimated proportion of Christians in the population, which in 1932 was estimated at a bit more than 50 percent (see Appendix).

Table 8. Students by religion and types of schools in Lebanon 1927-1938

	1927	1928	1929	1930	1931	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938
Students	76,649	80,024	86,725	98,982	103,795	104,133	106,754	107,508	115,975	122,640	132,838	142,549
Composition: by student religion												
%												
Christians	75%	72%	73%	69%	69%	68%	68%	68%	70%	71%	72%	72%
%												
Muslims	19%	22%	20%	24%	24%	25%	25%	25%	24%	23%	23%	22%
% Others	6%	6%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	7%	6%	6%	5%	6%

Table 8. Students by religion and types of schools in Lebanon 1927-1938 (contd.)

Religious composition by type of school												
<i>Public</i>												
%												
Christians	23%	19%	22%	21%	24%	24%	24%	25%	25%	29%	26%	28%
%												
Muslims	70%	73%	69%	72%	69%	69%	68%	68%	68%	64%	66%	65%
<i>Private</i>												
%												
Christians	77%	76%	74%	70%	70%	69%	69%	70%	70%	72%	74%	75%
%												
Muslims	18%	18%	20%	22%	23%	24%	24%	24%	23%	23%	22%	20%
<i>Foreign</i>												
%												
Christians	86%	85%	85%	86%	86%	85%	86%	86%	88%	87%	88%	86%
%												
Muslim	8%	8%	8%	8%	7%	7%	8%	8%	6%	7%	7%	7%

Source: Data compiled by the authors from the Reports, various years.

These figures hide a major distinction in the type of schools Christian and Muslim students went to. Around 70 percent of Muslim students enrolled in public schools compared to only 30 percent of Christians. The Muslim community also operated private schools, but not as many as Christians did. Overall, only 20 percent of Muslim students went to private schools compared to 70 percent of Christians (Table 8). Finally, a very small share of Muslim students was admitted into foreign schools; it must have taken extraordinary levels of discrimination to ensure that only seven to eight percent of their student body were Muslims throughout the period (Table 8).

In other words, Muslims, who were (ironically) already underserved by the education system under Ottoman rule, continued to be so under the French Mandate.⁴⁸ There are indications that the High Commissioner provided some (albeit meager) budgetary subsidies for both Christian missionary and Christian private schools.⁴⁹ Some have speculated that it was strategically more advantageous to educate Francophile Christians than rebellious anti-French and pan-Arab proto-urban Muslims.⁵⁰ What is clear, however, is that Christian private and foreign schools were the driver of this growth in student enrollment during the Mandate.

In contrast to the Maghreb, the French authorities prioritized security in the Levant, leaving education and health in the hands of private initiatives, including communitarian and missionary

⁴⁸ Annette Renee Chapman-Adisho reached a similar conclusion, though she does not say that Muslims per se were underserved but that there was a “large population of unserved children.” See Annette Renee Chapman-Adisho, “Mission Civilisatrice to Mandate: The French and Education in Syria and Lebanon” (M.A., United States -- Kentucky, University of Louisville, 1998), <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/304426774/abstract/EC3B77CDEDC46ACPO/11>, 104. For the lack of Ottoman investment in public education see, Cioeta, “Islamic Benevolent Societies,” 40-55.

⁴⁹ “Écoles privées subventionnées par le Haut-Commissariat,” p. 188, Syrie-Liban-Cilicie (50CPCOM/104), Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Archives Diplomatiques, La Courneuve, Paris.

⁵⁰ This can be insinuated from the analysis of the restricted and “cautious” development in education by the French Mandate in Syria before 1936. See Annette Renee Chapman-Adisho, “Mission Civilisatrice to Mandate: The French and Education in Syria and Lebanon,” 137.

ones, somewhat like the case of other French colonies in SSA.⁵¹ Missionary activities in Lebanon, however, were more prolific and influential to the extent of dominating the field of education, including higher education.

Lebanese exceptionalism

Even though public investment in education was low in the French colonies as well as in Lebanon and Syria (as shown in Table 4), education remained dynamic in Lebanon. What explains this “Lebanese exceptionalism”? Is it an intensification of the competition and the long-standing rivalry between the various missionary and religious groups and communities (local and foreign) that began (in the mid-nineteenth century) a network of schools and services that were very well developed in Mount Lebanon?

This foundational period of nation-building (Lebanon gained its independence in 1943 and Syria in 1946) put the country on a trajectory of privatization for both health and education. While scholars have tended to argue that it is the period of sociopolitical unrest caused by the civil war in 1975 that led to the “fragmentation of State power” undermining “the ability of the State to develop and maintain a State-controlled higher education system,”⁵² we argue that we should locate the roots of this poorly developed public education (and public healthcare system) in the Mandate period, a crucial period of state formation and nation building.

An aspect of the literature on the politics and role of education under the Mandate, which is relevant for our analysis, builds on another literature that frames education as part of a “style” or “tool” of imperialism and a proselytizing instrument by foreign actors during the Ottoman period.⁵³ Along this general framework, Jennifer Dueck speaks of schools as “spheres of politics” during the Mandate.⁵⁴ She shows how “French schools became a symbol of privilege for Francophile Christian elites and of oppression for Muslim or pan-Arab groups disaffected with the regime.”⁵⁵ This might explain why more Muslim students were getting their education in public schools rather than foreign or missionary schools or why so many of them chose the Protestant American University of Beirut over the French Jesuit Université Saint Joseph for their university studies

⁵¹ David E. Gardinier, “The Impact of French Education on Africa, 1817-1960,” *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 5 (1980): 70–82; Henry H. Bucher, “The Village of Glass and Western Intrusion: An Mpongwe Response to the American and French Presence in the Gabon Estuary: 1842-1845,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1973): 363–400, <https://doi.org/10.2307/216608>.

⁵² Elizabeth Buckner, “The Role of Higher Education in the Arab State and Society: Historical Legacies and Recent Reform Patterns,” *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* 3, no. Spring (2011): 21.

⁵³ For example, see Spagnolo, “The Definition of a Style of Imperialism: The Internal Politics of the French Educational Investment in Ottoman Beirut.” Also see the pioneering work of Abdul Latif Tibawi, *American Interests in Syria, 1800-1901: A Study of Educational, Literary and Religious Work* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). There are many aspects of the literature on the Mandate that go beyond the scope of this paper and are hence not mentioned.

⁵⁴ Jennifer M. Dueck, “Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936–1946,” *French History* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 442–59, <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crl023>; Jennifer Marie Dueck, *The Claims of Culture at Empire’s End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule* (Oxford; New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2010).

⁵⁵ Dueck, “Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936–1946.”

(something that French diplomats frequently deplored in their correspondences).⁵⁶ This is despite the fact that French authorities made a lot of effort to attract Muslim students to their institutions by making for example, the Jesuit Medical School in Beirut more attractive for Muslim students than its Protestant rival at the American University of Beirut.⁵⁷

An important specificity of Lebanon was indeed the dynamic competition between various foreign powers to develop their own relations with elite groups. This must have been related to the fact that, unlike in a colony, the future of the Mandate was open-ended, incentivizing British, American, and other foreign interests to invest their influence in its future. One of the authors of this paper showed how in the case of medicine and psychiatry, for example, competition between the various missionary schools of medicine was “productive” in the sense that it led to the expansion of education through the creation of new schools, chairs, academic positions, lectureships, courses, and new clinical training, networks of professionals, professional elites, medical services, etc.⁵⁸ There was also competition among the French missionary groups, which were losing their ability to operate schools in France following the new law of 1905 on the separation of Church and State. These groups, however, were not just “proxies,” “intermediaries,” or a mere extension of the French Empire; recent literature has shown how some of these religious institutions, while close to centers of power, had their own priorities and agendas and were able to exercise some amount of independent decision-making.⁵⁹

Similar conceptual frameworks have been applied to health more broadly. Healthcare-related institutions (hospitals, pharmacies, medical schools, etc.) have been examined within the frameworks of religious proselytism, the civilizing mission, a drive for modernization, paternalistic benevolence, or rivalry between various imperial powers.⁶⁰ Yet, it is more useful to think of these institutions as the product of competition with local as well as foreign agencies, interests, actors (intellectual and professional elites – some of whom were formed and graduated from these schools – notables, politicians, religious figures, and ordinary people) and especially local circumstances (sociopolitical turmoil and war).⁶¹ Perhaps this is what characterizes Lebanese exceptionalism after all: a crowded territory, where, as the French ambassador to Lebanon said in 1956, “one feels so many foreign hands ready to cheat.”⁶²

⁵⁶ Abi-Rached, *‘Asfūriyyeh*, 90.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, especially 50-76.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 49-76.

⁵⁹ For instance, see Idir Ouahes, “Catholic Missionary Education in Early Mandate Syria and Lebanon,” *Social Sciences and Missions* 30, no. 3-4 (2017): 225-53, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748945-03003005>; Abi-Rached, *‘Asfūriyyeh*,

⁶⁰ For instance, see Sylvia Chiffolleau, “Entre bienfaisance, contrôle des populations et agenda international : la politique sanitaire du Mandat français en Syrie et au Liban,” *Bulletin canadien d’histoire de la médecine* 30, no. 2 (2013): 1-30; Jens Hanssen, *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Abi-Rached, *‘Asfūriyyeh*.

⁶¹ Abi-Rached, *‘Asfūriyyeh*, 7-10.

⁶² Louis Roché cited in Abi-Rached, *‘Asfūriyyeh*, 49.

Conclusion

After the Mandate, the country emerged as an underdeveloped state. It also emerged paradoxically with a much-improved level of education, but this was largely confined to the Christian community. Public education in particular was so rudimentary compared to the private sector that it was unable to catch up even under the presidency of Fouad Chehab (1946-1958), who was keen on reinforcing public institutions. The very biased nature of the performance of the education sector was also reflected in the economy and in other fields, and it later also came to deeply influence the social and political evolution of the country.

One pervasive theme that continues to attract scholars of the French Mandate is that education and health were tools of control and colonial expansion (even though the Mandate is not a typical form of colonialism, as mentioned earlier). Have these scholars exaggerated the power and influence of the French authorities? To some extent, they have, as the empirical evidence does not support these claims; it turns out that the French *neglected* education and health despite their slogans, claims, and propaganda.

Nevertheless, the Mandate was influential but not for the reasons frequently mentioned in the literature (strategic control). As we argued in this paper, their influence lays paradoxically in their *failure to “guide, assist, and support”* (the roles ascribed to them by the League of Nations) the nascent states in building state institutions and moving away from the Ottoman millet system. As Germaine Tillion famously said in her 1957 ethnographic study of Algeria, the French were “conspicuous by their absence.”⁶³ Although these shortcomings were characteristics of Ottoman governance, they ended up being consolidated in this foundational period for Lebanon.

⁶³ Germaine Tillion, *L’Algérie en 1957* (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958).

Bibliography

Primary sources/Archival documents

- “Digithèque de matériaux juridiques et politiques.” Mandat de la SDN, Syrie, Liban, 1922, Digithèque MJP. Accessed August 23, 2022. <https://mjp.univ-perp.fr/constit/sy1922.htm>.
- “French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon.” *The American Journal of International Law* 17, no. 3 (1923): 177–82. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2212963>.
- Huvelin, Paul. *Que vaut la Syrie?* Congrès français de le Syrie. Section économique et compte rendu de la Mission française en Syrie. Paris et Marseille: Chambres de Commerce de Marseille, September 1919.
- Journal Officiel de la République Française*. Loi du 13 avril 1900 portant fixation du budget général des dépenses et des recettes de l’exercice 1900 (n.d.). Accessed August 23, 2022. Official website of the French Republic for legal publications: <https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/jorf/id/JORFTEXT0000000314852>.
- Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. *Rapport à la Société des Nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale), 1924-1938, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris.
- Ministère des Affaires Étrangères. Archives Diplomatiques, La Courneuve, Paris, Syrie-Liban-Cilicie (50CPCOM/104).
- Viénot, P. “Le Mandat français sur le Levant.” *Politique étrangère* 4, no. 2 (1939): 103–21. <https://doi.org/10.3406/polit.1939.5986>.

Secondary sources

- Abi-Rached, J. M. *‘Asfūriyyeh: A History of Madness, Modernity, and War in the Middle East*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2020.
- Albord, M. “Chapitre premier. La période du changement 1936-1939.” In *L’armée française et les États du Levant: 1936-1946*, 25–68. Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2013. <http://books.openedition.org/editionscnrs/578>.
- Al-Saleh, M. “Introduction de partie. Les aspects économiques généraux de la relation mandataire France, Syrie et Liban, 1918-1946.” In *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, edited by Nadine Méouchy, 197–210. Études arabes, médiévales et modernes. Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013. <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3182>.
- Bucher, H. “The Village of Glass and Western Intrusion: An Mpongwe Response to the American and French Presence in the Gabon Estuary: 1842-1845.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 6, no. 3 (1973): 363–400. <https://doi.org/10.2307/216608>.
- Buckner, E. “The Role of Higher Education in the Arab State and Society: Historical Legacies and Recent Reform Patterns.” *Journal of Comparative and International Higher Education* 3, no. Spring (2011): 21–26.

- Chapman-Adisho, A. "Mission Civilisatrice to Mandate: The French and Education in Syria and Lebanon." M.A., University of Louisville, 1998. <http://search.proquest.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/docview/304426774/abstract/EC3B77CDEDC46ACPQ/11>.
- Chevallier, D. "Lyon et la Syrie en 1919. Les bases d'une intervention." *Revue historique* 224, no. 2 (1960): 275–320.
- Chiffolleau, S. "Entre bienfaisance, contrôle des populations et agenda international: la politique sanitaire du Mandat Français en Syrie et au Liban." *Bulletin canadien d'histoire de la médecine* 30, no. 2 (2013): 1–30.
- Chiha, M. *Politique intérieure*. Beyrouth: Éditions du Trident, 1964.
- Cioeta, D. "Islamic Benevolent Societies." *Islamic Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1982): 40–55.
- Cogneau, D., Dupraz, Y., and Mesplé-Somps, S. "Fiscal Capacity and Dualism in Colonial States: The French Empire 1830–1962." *The Journal of Economic History* 81, no. 2 (2021): 441–80. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022050721000140>.
- Coquery-Vidrovitch, C. *Le choix de l'Afrique: Les combats d'une pionnière de l'histoire africaine*. Paris: La découverte, 2021.
- Dueck, J. "Educational Conquest: Schools as a Sphere of Politics in French Mandate Syria, 1936–1946." *French History* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2006): 442–59. <https://doi.org/10.1093/fh/crl023>.
- . *The Claims of Culture at Empire's End: Syria and Lebanon under French Rule*. Oxford, New York: Published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Eddé, C. "La mobilisation 'populaire' à Beyrouth à l'époque du Mandat, le cas des boycotts des trams et de l'électricité." In *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, edited by Nadine Méouchy, 197–210. Études arabes, médiévales et modernes. Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2013. <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3200>.
- Gardinier, D. "The Impact of French Education on Africa, 1817-1960." *Proceedings of the Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* 5 (1980): 70–82.
- Hanssen, J. *Fin de Siècle Beirut: The Making of an Ottoman Provincial Capital*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.
- Issawi, C. "Economic Development and Liberalism in Lebanon." *Middle East Journal* 18, no. 3 (1964): 279–92.
- Khoury, P. *Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987.
- La Bruyère, R. "Les routes des Indes." *Revue des deux mondes (1829-1971)* 30, no. 3 (1935): 556–69.
- Laurens, H. "Le Mandat français sur la Syrie et le Liban." In *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, edited by Nadine Méouchy, 409–15. Études arabes, médiévales et modernes. Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2013. <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/3204>.

- Lekéal, F. and Deperchin, A. “Le protectorat, alternative à la colonie ou modalité de colonisation ? Pistes de recherche pour l’histoire du droit.” *Clio@Themis. Revue électronique d’histoire du droit*, no. 4 (2021). <https://doi.org/10.35562/cliiothemis.1347>.
- Longrigg, S. *Syria and Lebanon under French Mandate*. London, New York: Oxford University Press, 1958.
- Mizrahi, J. D. “Armée, état et nation au moyen-orient. La naissance des troupes spéciales du Levant à l’époque du mandat français, Syrie, 1919-1930.” *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 207, no. 3 (2002): 107–23. <https://doi.org/10.3917/gmcc.207.0107>.
- “La France et sa politique de Mandat en Syrie et au Liban (1920-1939).” In *France, Syrie et Liban 1918-1946: Les ambiguïtés et les dynamiques de la relation mandataire*, edited by Nadine Méouchy, 197–210. Études arabes, médiévales et modernes. Beyrouth: Presses de l’Ifpo, 2013.
- Ouahes, I. “Catholic Missionary Education in Early Mandate Syria and Lebanon.” *Social Sciences and Missions* 30, no. 3-4 (2017): 225-53. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18748945-03003005>.
- Owen, R. “The Political Economy of Grand Liban, 1920-70.” In *Essays on the Crisis in Lebanon*, edited by Roger Owen, 23–32. London: Ithaca, 1976.
- Safieddine, H. *Banking on the State: The Financial Foundations of Lebanon*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2019.
- Salibi, K. *The Modern History of Lebanon*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965.
- Shorrock, W. “The Origin of the French Mandate in Syria and Lebanon: The Railroad Question, 1901-1914.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 2 (1970): 133–53.
- Spagnolo, J. “The Definition of a Style of Imperialism: The Internal Politics of the French Educational Investment in Ottoman Beirut.” *French Historical Studies* 8, no. 4 (1974): 563. <https://doi.org/10.2307/285853>.
- Tanielian, M. *The Charity of War: Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2018.
- Thompson, Elizabeth. *Colonial Citizens: Republican Rights, Paternal Privilege, and Gender in French Syria and Lebanon*. Columbia University Press, 2000.
- Tibawi, A. L. *American Interests in Syria, 1800-1901: A Study of Educational, Literary and Religious Work*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- Tillion, G. *L’Algérie en 1957*. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1958.
- Traboulsi, F. *A History of Modern Lebanon*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

Appendix

Table 9. Demographics

Population estimates (in '1000s)						
Year	Lebanon	Syria	Alexandretta	Latakia Alaouite	Djebel Druze	References
1921	558.9 Muslims: 225.0 Druzes: 39.9 Christians: 285.7 Others: 8.2					Official census of 1921 as reported in Ministère des affaires étrangères, <i>Rapport à la société des nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban</i> , (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1932), 139.
1922	609 Muslims: 229.7 Druzes: 43.6 Christians: 335.7	987	212	261	50	For Lebanon: S. Himadeh, <i>Economic organization of Lebanon and Syria</i> , 1936; cited in Youssef Courbage and Philippe Fargues, <i>La situation démographique au Liban</i> (Beyrouth: Publications de l'Université Libanaise, 1974), 21. For the rest: Samman M., <i>La population de la Syrie-Etude géo-démographique</i> (Paris: ORSTOM, 1978), cited in Youssef Courbage, <i>Évolution démographique et attitudes politiques en Syrie</i> , Population 49, no. 3 (1994): 726.
1925	637.0					Ministère des affaires étrangères, <i>Rapport à la société des nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban</i> , (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1926).
1926	597.8	1249.5		277.9	50.3	Ministère des affaires étrangères, <i>Rapport à la société des nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban</i> , (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1926).
1928		1135.3				Raymond O'Zoux, <i>Les états du Levant sous mandat français</i> , Collection "France d'outre-mer" (Paris: Larose, 1931), 74.
1932	793.4 Muslims: 333.1 Druzes: 53.3 Christians: 396.9 Jews: 3.6 Others: 6.4					Official census of 1932 as reported in Ministère des affaires étrangères, <i>Rapport à la société des nations sur la situation de la Syrie et du Liban</i> , (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1932), 139.
1936			220			Based on the UK's Foreign Office archives cited in Philip Khoury, <i>Syria and the French Mandate: The Politics of Arab Nationalism, 1920-1945</i> , 495.
1938		2,500				<i>Office national arabe de recherches et d'informations, Syrie 1938: La situation en Syrie après la conclusion du traité franco-syrien: réponse aux campagnes de MM. Jérôme et Jean Tharaud</i> (Damas: Office national arabe de recherches et d'informations, 1939), 19.