FARID CHEHAB ROY HADDAD



Éditions de La Revue Phénicienne

FUTURE READY
An Essay

FARID CHEHAB ROY HADDAD

FUTURE READY
An Essay

Éditions de La Revue Phénicienne

Copyright © All rights reserved
© Farid Chehab & Roy Haddad 2027
ISBN: 978-2-913875-79-1

Printed by RAIDY / www.raidy.com

To the Lebanese Citizen who refuses to accept that decline is destiny – and to the generation that will inherit the consequences of what we choose, or fail to choose, today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

An essay like this does not emerge from solitude. It is the product of years of conversations, sometimes structured, sometimes accidental; sometimes between allies, sometimes between adversaries who found common ground in the urgency of the moment. Ideas, however personal their origin, are ultimately shaped by the people who receive them, challenge them, build upon them, or simply sit with them long enough to make them better.

Over the past five years, a community of thinkers, practitioners, and citizens has gathered – in varying constellations and at different moments – around the questions that animate this work. Some contributed through sustained dialogue. Others through a single conversation that proved unexpectedly decisive. All of them, in ways large and small, left their mark on what you hold in your hands.

We wish to express our deep and sincere gratitude to: Imad Al Ali, Joelle Abi Hanna, Josyane Abi Saab, Maher Achi, Jawad Adra, Wassim Al Hakim, Nizar Al Awar, Ghassan Al Ghaddaf, Chadi Al Masri, Nael Al Assaad, Anita Babikian, Roy Badaro, Khaled Bohsali, Tarek Bolbol, Layal Bouraslan, Michael Chaftari, Marie-Jo Char, Samir Chahine, Dania Dandachni, Farid Fakhreddine, Pino Fakhreddine, Hadi Farah, Pierre Geara, Josette Ghafari, Wassim Ghandour, Rached Hamade, Samer Hammoud, Joe Hawa, Lina

Hamdan, Fady Khoury, Joe Issa El Khoury, Samir Kadi, Ali Khalil, Ali Khalife, Samir Lahoud, Albert Letayf, Jamil Mroueh, Fady Nahas, Brahim Najjar, Cyrille Najjar, Boutros Noujaim, Oussama Nsouli, Edmond Rabbath, Ramze Salman, Fahd Saccal, Zaher Soubra, Iman Tabbara, Serge Tor Sarkissian, Wissam Yafi, Fadi Yarak, Tania Zaroubi, and many more. Each of them brought something irreplaceable to this journey – a perspective, a question, a correction, or simply the generosity of their time and trust.

The conversation has never stopped. We hope it never will.

To all of you: this book exists, in no small part, because of you. Whatever it achieves, you share in it.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD 11

1. A COUNTRY THAT STOPPED 13
2. THE ARCHITECTURE OF A STANDSTILL 16
3. THE DISENFRANCHISED CITIZEN 19
4. BEYOND THE SECTARIAN VEIL 22
5. THREE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DRIVE CHANGE 25
6. PEACE AS A WAY FORWARD 27
7. THE SECULAR START-UP STATE 29
8. TOP-TIER COUNTRY COMMONALITIES 31
9. A LETTER FROM TALLINN 33
10. A LESSON FROM THE UNIVERSE 36
11. AN INITIATIVE 39
12. BELIEVING 45
13. MASTERING OUR DEMONS 49
14. DARE 51
15. RISING TO THE CHALLENGES 54

16. THE ACADEMY 60
17. THE FRAMEWORK PILLARS 68
18. WHERE LEBANON SHOULD BE 71
19. THE REFORMS: A WORKING AGENDA 73
20. THE POLICY LEVERS 75
21. THE POLICY CYCLE AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT 77
22. THE ISLAND THAT SAID YES 80
23. THE SQUARE-SAHA PLATFORM 84
24. FIVE REASONS IT COULD FAIL 92
25. A COMPASS FOR A LOST WORLD 95
26. THINK TOMORROW 99

APPENDIX :
-The scorecard 102
-The communication office 104
-What it costs 107

FOREWORD

This Essay is a brief. It is not a memoir, it is not a political tract, and it is not a lament for a country that once was. It is a working plan – a structured argument for how Lebanon can be rebuilt as a secular Start-Up State, governed by the rule of law, animated by social mobility and guided by the simple proposition that the state should serve the citizen first.

We have spent decades helping leaders, brands and institutions decide where the value is and how to build it. The same discipline applies to nations. A country is a brand. A government is an operating system. A constitution is a product specification. And a citizen, in the end, is the customer whose lifetime value either compounds or collapses depending on the choices the institution makes on their behalf.

Lebanon has, for too long, mistaken survival for strategy. We have managed a permanent crisis instead of resolving it. We have balanced sects instead of regulating society. We have produced rhetoric instead of outcome. The pages that follow are an attempt to change the conversation – from what we are against to what we are for; from sectarian arithmetic to civic compounding; from a republic of grievance to a republic of opportunity.

A FUTURE READY STATE

For instance, peace is not a concession. Peace is actually the operating environment inside which a modern state, a real

economy and a credible citizen contract become possible. Without it, every reform is theatre. With it, every reform becomes a project plan.

Read this essay as an invitation. The framework is here, the pillars are defined, the platform is designed, the budgets are costed. What remains is the only thing that ever mattered – the decision to build to be ready for the future.

Farid Chehab, Roy Haddad

1

A COUNTRY THAT STOPPED

It happened on a Thursday. On 17 October 2019, the Lebanese government announced a new tax on WhatsApp calls — twenty cents a day, payable through the telecom operators. The amount was small. The reaction was not. Within hours, people were in the streets of Beirut, Tripoli, Saida, Nabatieh, banging pots, blocking highways, and lighting tires. By the weekend the protest had a name — the October Revolution — and a chant that became a national hum: kellon ya'ani kellon. All of them, meaning all of them. The political class, every confession, every party, every name. Out. The tax was withdrawn before the weekend was over. But by then it no longer mattered. The protesters were not, in any serious sense, protesting a tax. They were protesting an architecture: a state in which the lights went out for hours on end; in which the rubbish, three years after the last "garbage crisis," was still stacked at the entrances of villages; in which the central bank had been quietly running a financial engineering scheme that depended, like every such scheme, on the willingness of the next investor to fund the returns of the last. The WhatsApp tax was simply the moment at which a country that had been holding its breath stopped pretending.

What followed was the worst peacetime economic collapse the World Bank has on file since the middle of the nineteenth century. Not the worst in Lebanon. The worst anywhere. The currency, anchored at 1,507 pounds to the dollar since the year before the millennium, has lost more than 95 percent of its value. The banks

closed their windows and announced that depositors could no longer have their dollars; depositors discovered that an entire generation's savings had become a paper claim on a system that had decided, unilaterally, not to honor it. The economy shrank by more than half. By 2023, the gross domestic product per Lebanese citizen, which had been just over nine thousand dollars in 2018, was three thousand two hundred and eighty. Then, on 4 August 2020, a warehouse at the port of Beirut blew up. Two thousand seven hundred and fifty tons of ammonium nitrate that had been stored there, illegally and against the warnings of every official whose signature appeared in the file, detonated at the end of a long, hot afternoon. The blast killed more than two hundred people and damaged half the city. The investigation that followed was, in the manner of Lebanese investigations, obstructed. Then, in October 2023, a new war began on the southern border, the worst since 2006. By the time it ended, in November 2024, the World Bank had counted eleven billion dollars in reconstruction needs.

By the time you read this, in 2026, the lights are mostly still not on. The war resumed in March. A new president has been elected after a two-year vacancy. A new prime minister — the former head of the International Court of Justice — has formed a cabinet in which, for the first time in over a decade, the political bloc most aligned with Iran does not hold a veto. Parliament has lifted banking secrecy. The currency has stabilized. The World Bank, in January 2026, gave its economic monitor a careful title: "A Fragile Rebound." Growth has returned, at three and a half percent. And yet. Seventy-three percent of Lebanese live in some form of multidimensional poverty. Thirty-eight percent want to leave. Among the educated young, the figure is materially higher. One in five doctors has gone or is about to. The Corruption Perceptions Index has Lebanon at twenty-two out of a hundred, the worst score it has ever received. The institutional architecture that

produced the catastrophe is still, in every essential, the architecture under which the country is now being asked to recover. This is a story about whether that is possible. It is a story about a small, plural, dangerous, beautiful country, and about a question that has been asked of it for a hundred years and never quite answered: whether it is possible to be a single state. And it is the story of a proposal — modest in resource, ambitious in scope — to begin answering that question not from the top, but from the citizen up. Through a digital platform. Through a measured restoration of social mobility. Through the slow, patient construction of what we call a secular Start-Up State or better a Future Ready Lebanon. Let's start the journey.

2

THE ARCHITECTURE OF A STANDSTILL

To understand why Lebanon collapsed, you have to understand a thing about Lebanon that is rarely said out loud: it has never quite been a country in the way that the maps suggest. It has been, more accurately, a careful arrangement among communities who agreed, in 1943, to live in the same building. The agreement was called the National Pact, and its terms were unwritten. The president would be a Maronite Christian. The prime minister would be a Sunni Muslim. The speaker of parliament would be a Shi'a Muslim. The parliament itself would be apportioned by confession, six Christians to every five Muslims, in line with a 1932 census that everyone understood was already out of date. The state would be neutral on Arab nationalism. The state would also be neutral on Western alignment. The state would, in short, be neutral on most things, because neutrality was the price the communities had agreed to pay for the right to share a roof. No one was convinced but the arrangement held for thirty-two years, more or less. Then, in 1975, it didn't. Fifteen years of civil war followed, in which roughly one hundred and fifty thousand Lebanese were killed and roughly a quarter of the population displaced. The war ended in 1989 with the Taif Agreement, which preserved the confessional architecture but rebalanced it: now the prime minister mattered more than the president, parliament was equal between Christians and Muslims, and the abolition of confessionalism itself was declared, in the new constitutional preamble, to be "a fundamental national objective." That was thirty-seven years ago. Confessionalism has not been abolished.

Here is what confessionalism does, in practice, in a country whose population is roughly the size of New Zealand's. Every senior position in the state is allocated to a particular religious community. Not informally. Formally. The army commander is a Maronite. The central bank governor is a Maronite. The chief of general security is a Shi'a. The internal security director is a Sunni. The state prosecutor is a Sunni. The constitutional council is balanced. The supreme judicial council is balanced. The cabinet, by long convention, has the same proportions as parliament.

This sounds reasonable until you trace it down to the organization chart. The deputies are allocated too. So are the directors-general. So are the heads of regulatory agencies, public hospitals, public universities, customs administrations. And below the formal allocations are the informal ones: which clerk at the land registry will process your transaction quickly, which judge will hear your case, which teacher will be hired at which school. The secular service is not, in any meaningful sense, a civil service. It is a confessional one. What this means, mechanically, is that the state is not really a single actor. It is a coalition of communal patrons, each of whom controls a piece of it, each of whom defends the right of his community to its share, each of whom uses his share to reward those who keep him in place. To get something from the state — a building permit, a job, a hospital bed, a court date, a passport — you don't go to the state. You go to your patron, who knows whom to call. The Lebanese word for this is wasta. It is the word for the personal connection without which nothing in Lebanon quite works. Everyone uses it. Everyone hates it. And everyone, when their own son needs a job, picks up the phone.

There is a name for this kind of arrangement in development economics. Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson, who won the Nobel Prize for it in 2024, call it an extractive institution: a set of rules whose purpose is not to grow the pie for everyone, but to

determine, in advance, which group gets which slice. Extractive institutions are remarkably durable, because the people who run them are also the people who would have to dismantle them, and the dismantling would cost them everything. They are also; the evidence is now overwhelming, incompatible with sustained development. Inclusive institutions — the kind that secure property rights for everyone, that enforce contracts predictably, that allow the talented child of poor parents to rise on the strength of her talent — are the institutions of countries that grow. Extractive institutions are the institutions of countries that don't. Lebanon's problem, in this frame, is not that it had bad luck. It is that it builts an architecture that produces, in every generation, the people who stabilize it and the outcomes that justify it. The political class is not the problem. The political class is the symptom. The problem is the architecture.

Douglass North, the institutional economist who won his Nobel in 1993, used to put it more simply. Institutions, he said, are the rules of the game. Change the players and the game stays the same. Change the rules and the game becomes something else. Lebanon has, for thirty-seven years, been trying to change the players. Different prime ministers, different presidents, different finance ministers, different governors. The game has not changed.

This thesis is about changing the rules.

3

THE DISENFRANCHISED CITIZEN

In the summer of 2021, a market-research company called Kantar Sofres commissioned by our very own E. Democracy foundation did something modest. It asked Lebanese citizens what they wanted. The results – based on a sample of 2500 respondents - which the foundation still cites, are unremarkable in the way that the most important findings often are. Eighty-one percent of Lebanese believed the government should do more. Seventy percent felt insecure and unstable. Sixty-eight percent were considering leaving the country. Eighty percent lived on less than eight million Lebanese pounds a month — a figure that, at the time, meant about five thousand three hundred US dollars a month, and that, in 2026, means somewhere around ninety. Ninety-two percent believed they had no real chance to grow. Read those numbers again. Ninety-two percent. That is not a country with complaints. That is a country in which one in twelve people thinks they have a future, and the other eleven are waiting for an exit.

When the same citizens were asked what they wanted from a better tomorrow, eight things come up. They are worth listing in order: Purchasing power. Work opportunities. Some kind of financial social net. Reliable utilities. Safety. Justice. Health coverage. Quality of education. There is nothing exotic about this list. It is the same list a citizen in Manchester or Mar del Plata or Manila would produce. It is the list of any human being who would like the basic terms of life to be predictable. What is striking about it is what is missing. Nobody asked for a stronger army. Nobody

asked for cultural authenticity. Nobody asked for foreign policy. Nobody asked, in particular for confessional balance. What people want from a state, when you actually ask them, is for the state to do its job. The Lebanese state has been doing the wrong job for so long that it has forgotten the right one.

There is a harder thing to say about the Lebanese citizen, and the foundation behind this thesis is willing to say it. The citizen has become, in its language, too entitled.

The word lands awkwardly, because the citizen has every reason to feel aggrieved. His currency was destroyed. His savings were stolen. His port was blown up. His government, for two of the most consequential years of the crisis, did not exist. To call him entitled is to risk sounding like someone who hasn't been paying attention. But the foundation is not talking about grievance. It is talking about a particular shape that grievance has taken. The Lebanese citizen has come to expect, from the state, three things: a public-sector job, if he can get a wasta to it; a subsidy on his fuel and his bread, if the state can find the dollars; and a patron who will fix things for him, if things go wrong. He expects these things because they are the things the state has, historically, provided. He has not been trained — because there has been no one to train him— to expect a state that provides predictable rules, transparent procedures, and equal access.

He has been trained to expect a state that provides favors. The trouble with a state that provides favors is that the favors must come from somewhere. The somewhere is the public purse. The public purse, in Lebanon, has been empty for some time. The favors, accordingly, have stopped. The citizen, with his favors denied becomes angrier with his patron — but he does not become an advocate for the rule of law, because the rule of law has never done anything for him. He becomes, more often, an

advocate for a different patron. This is the trap. Wasta produces dependency. Dependency reproduces wasta. The Lebanese citizen, in his dealings with the state, has been kept in a particular kind of relationship with it: not a relationship of rights and duties, but a relationship of need and favor. To rebuild Lebanon, you must rebuild that relationship. The buildings come later.

4

BEYOND THE SECTARIAN VEIL

The dominant story we tell ourselves about Lebanon is that the country is held hostage by sectarianism. The story is wrong, not because sects are unimportant, but because sects are a symptom, not the disease. The disease is the collapse of the Moral Authority of the State. Once that authority falls, the sect becomes the cheapest available shelter; once shelter is found, the population is too exposed to give it up. The Lebanese citizen does not retreat into community because community is preferred. The Lebanese citizen retreats into community because nothing else is left standing.

There is nothing uniquely Lebanese about this. More than a century ago, the French sociologist Emile Durkheim gave the condition a name: anomie, the state of a society whose norms no longer regulate the lives of its members. Durkheim observed that sudden economic upheaval – a crash but also a boom – throws people out of the expectations that once ordered their lives. Without the authority to set limits, he argued, human desire has no ceiling, and a society without limits produces not freedom but disorientation and despair. Durkheim also saw what holds a modern society together between the individual and the state. Lebanon's confessional architecture hollowed out the State's authority and laid the ground for today's collapse.

Three forces have produced this collapse. The first is economic deregulation. The banking sector imploded, lifetime savings

evaporated, and with them the purchasing power of the entire middle class. The implicit social contract – work hard, save, advance – was annulled overnight. When the work-reward bargain disappears, the citizen is left with no economic reason to trust the institution that broke it.

The second is the institutional void. Every functioning society depends on what the political scientists call intermediate bodies – judiciary, regulators, professional associations, an independent educational system, a credible press. In Lebanon these intermediates have been paralyzed. The population no longer knows which laws to follow, which currency to use, which authority to trust, or what the future "normal" is supposed to look like. Without intermediates, the citizen has only two options: the family and the sect. both are private. Neither is a state.

The third is the youth bulge. The traditional pathway to adulthood – employment, marriage, home-ownership – is blocked. A generation has discovered that the desires it was promised cannot be satisfied by the existing structure. The outcomes of blocked desire are well documented. Some choose apathy and emigrate; this is the brain drain. Others choose radicalization and search for an often-violent order. Neither outcome rebuilds a country.

Totalitarian doctrines understand this mechanism precisely. They provoke progressive impoverishment in order to manufacture vulnerability among the population and then channel that vulnerability through a narrative of victimization in which an external enemy is always to blame. The result is a citizenry that is too anxious to resist, and leadership that is too useful to displace. Lebanon has been on the receiving end of this script for years. The first task of any serious reform agenda is to refuse the script.

The sectarian veil hides the real diagnosis. Lift it, and what is revealed is a country whose citizens broadly want the same things across confessional lines: dignity, opportunity, security, and a future for their children. The work of this essay is to build the institutional architecture that gives those citizens somewhere credible to go.

5

THREE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DRIVE CHANGE

Every reform program rests on assumptions about how change happens. Lebanon's failed reform attempts have rested on assumptions that did not survive contact with citizens. The Future Ready framework rests on three that have been tested in mature economies and that hold up under scrutiny.

The first assumption is that e-government enablement reduces corruption and increases efficiency, productivity and transparency. This is not a theoretical claim. Estonia, Singapore, Korea and the Gulf states have demonstrated it at scale. When a citizen can complete a transaction with the state through a verified digital channel, the discretionary touchpoint where corruption lives are removed. When the data is logged, the audit trail is automatic. When the workflow is standardized, the queue collapses. Digital government is not glamorous; it is plumbing. But it is the plumbing on which trust depends.

The second assumption is that there is a very strong correlation between the quality of regulation and institutions on the one hand, and economic development on the other. Capital does not move toward natural resources or even toward cheap labor; it moves toward predictable rules. An investor's return calculation begins and ends with institutional risk. Lebanon's investment drought is not a marketing problem. It is an institutional problem. Until the legal, political, economic, social and cultural institutions of the country are credible, returns will not justify risk, and capital will continue to discover that it has somewhere else to go.

The third assumption is that societies which index high on social mobility are more creative and happier. Social mobility is not a left-wing preoccupation; it is the operating signal of any healthy economy. When citizens believe their effort can change their status, they invest in skills, take risks, start businesses, raise children, and tolerate the inevitable inequalities that a market economy produces. When that belief is broken, the same citizens disengage, emigrate, or radicalize. Economists have documented how inequality and stalled mobility come together – a relationship, Alan Krueger named the Great Gatsby curve, drawing on the work of Miles Corak. The World Economic Forum, which began ranking countries on social mobility in 2020, argues that greater mobility strengthens social cohesion as well as growth.

These three assumptions converge on a single conclusion. The environment for doing business matters – and it matters a lot. That environment is what we call institutions. The most important reason that investments does not get materialized in Lebanon is not absence of opportunity. It is the institutional and regulatory environment of the country. Return and risk are ultimately determined by a list of factors that we put together under the label of institutions. Legal, political, economic, social, cultural. Institutional quality drives growth. The reform agenda must therefore be, before anything else, an institutional agenda. The three assumptions won't be enough if the other political environment is not.

6

PEACE AS A WAY FORWARD

Most of the public debate about Lebanon's future is organized around the wrong question. It asks whether we should or should not have peace, and if so, what kind. The framing is sectarian by reflex; peace as a concession to a neighbor, or as a betrayal of a cause, or as a transactional bargain among warlords. Inside that frame, peace is a price to be paid. The frame is wrong.

Peace is not a concession. Peace is the operating environment inside which a modern state, a real economy and a credible citizen contract become possible. There is a need to develop a new narrative of why peace serve the citizens first and foremost. This requires moving beyond flights of sectarian desperation and focusing on the foundation of a new social contract. At the heart of every citizen's demand is equal opportunity, social mobility and a clear perspective of what the future holds to liberate him or her from this anxiety of tomorrow that we all share.

The discipline of the new narrative is to flip the question. The current debate asks: peace on whose terms. The honest question is: progress on whose terms. Once the conversation is reframed around progress – the citizen's progress, measured in jobs, savings, schools and futures – peace becomes the precondition rather than the prize. No country has delivered durable prosperity inside a chronic conflict frame. None will. Lebanon cannot be the exception.

Most content today seems to address what people are against, but none mentions what they are for. That asymmetry is fatal. A political project organized around what it opposes will produce opposition; a political project organized around what it builds will produce builders. Peace must therefore be positioned not as a treaty or a tactic, but as a vision for the future, a societal choice. It must be made simple and personal: peace makes school possible, peace makes savings possible, peace makes a job possible, peace makes a future possible.

Peace, in this framing, is transformational. It is the disruptive solution that allows pragmatic concepts to address the social realities around us. Without peace, every reform is theatre, because the assumption underneath it stops being negotiable on demand.

Peace will make Lebanon Future Ready. It will help cultivate a secular and common good society with equality of opportunity for all – a society that believes in individual pursuit, intellectual accomplishment and financial reward, regulated only by what is beneficial for the common collective good. That is not a slogan. It is a constitution for a working country.

7

THE SECULAR START-UP STATE

If peace is the operating environment, the Secular State is the operating system. Lebanon today runs on what can only be described as a schizophrenic structure – a confessional architecture that lacks cohesion and resilience, in which transitional solutions have repeatedly failed and in which, in the most recent elections of consequences, 94 percent of voters voted for their own community. The price of this structure is paid by citizens.

The Secular State proposes a different organizing principle: unity of purpose, celebration of diversity, rule of law. It is a state in which religious identity is respected as private and secular identity is enforced as public. It is a state in which the citizen is the primary unit of political address, not the sect. it is a state whose legitimacy derives from delivering on the citizen's needs, wants and desires – not from balancing the demands of the militias that grew up in its absence.

The start-up suffix is not a marketing flourish. It is a method. A start-up state begins from a blank page where it must run on lean and accountable institutions. Ships products like clockwork, measures outcomes obsessively, iterates quickly, and refuses to be sentimental about structures that no longer serve users. Lebanon does not need another grand bargain. It needs the discipline of product. It needs courage to deprecate. It needs humility to measure.

The Secular Start-Up State exists to do four things at once. It defines policy and its impact on citizens' needs, wants and desires. It builds a framework that can transform the nation by delivering on its dimensions without losing sight of the difficulty of depoliticizing the judiciary and the civil service. It creates the platforms – analogue and digital – through which citizen voice becomes citizen agency. And it commits, publicly and measurably, to two national indexes against which its progress can be judged.

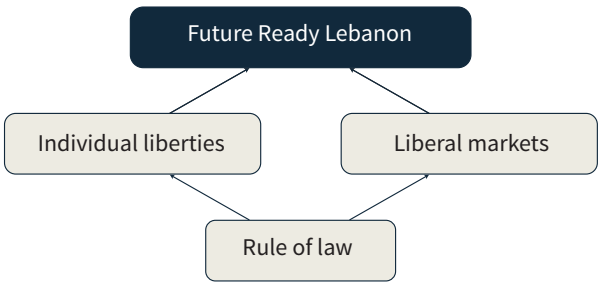
The two indexes are the Country Brand Index and the Social Mobility Index. The first tracks Lebanon's global image and the confidence it commands among investors, tourists and partners. The second measures upward mobility for citizens and reinforces trust in government performance. Both are public. Both are tracked annually. Both are designed so that a citizen can answer, in a single sentence, whether the state is delivering or not. More on this later.

This is what a Secular Start-Up State looks like in practice. It is not utopian and it is not unprecedented. Singapore, Estonia, Ireland and the United Arab Emirates have each, in different ways, demonstrated that a small country with weak natural endowments can compound advantage when its institutions are clear, its rules are predictable, and its citizens are the customer.

8

TOP-TIER COUNTRY COMMONALITIES

When the World Bank, the IMF and serious comparative political economists look at the countries that consistently outperform on growth, mobility and citizen satisfaction, they find a remarkable convergence. The top-tier countries do not share a religion, a language, a region or even a system of government. What they share is a triangle.



The triangle has three sides. The first side is individual liberties – freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to choose how to live, freedom from arbitrary state action. The second side is liberal markets – open competition, private property, secure contracts, the right to start and close a business, the right to fail without disgrace. The third side, which holds the other two together, is the rule of law – courts that work, regulators that regulate, contracts that are enforce, and a constitution whose terms apply to the powerful as well as to everyone else.

No country gets to the top tier without all three sides. Liberal markets without the rule of law collapse into oligarchy. The rule of law without individual liberties collapses into authoritarianism. Individual liberties without the rule of law collapse into chaos.

The triangle is closed, and a country either holds it together or it does not.

This is the trellis on which Lebanon's reform must climb. Every policy, every reform, every law, every institutional reorganization must be tested against the triangle. Does it expand individual liberty? Does it make markets more liberal and more competitive? Is it consistent with – and enforceable by – the rule of law? If a proposal fails any of these tests, it is not a reform. It is a deal.

The Secular Start-Up State is, in this sense, the triangle made operational. Its purpose is to instantiate individual liberties, liberal markets, and the rule of law inside a republic that, historically, has improvised around all three. The improvisation is over. The discipline begins now.

9

A LETTER FROM TALLINN

In the spring of 1991, an Estonian diplomat named Toomas Hendrik Ilves was sitting in Washington watching his country come apart from a Soviet collapse. Estonia had been Soviet for fifty years. It had a population of one and a half million. Its economy ran on a currency that was about to cease to exist. Its industrial base was rusted Soviet machinery in factories no one had wanted to buy for a decade. Its administrative class spoke Russian. Its phone lines, in the rural districts, were on hand-cranked exchanges. Ilves — who would later become president — had a particular idea about what to do. The idea, in retrospect, looks obvious. At the time it looked eccentric. He thought Estonia should skip a generation. It should not, he argued, try to build the kind of physical bureaucracy that Western European states had spent the twentieth century building. It could not afford it, and by the time it had finished, the world would have moved past it. It should, instead, put the state directly into computers. All of it. The tax records, the property registries, the medical files, the school transcripts, the criminal records, the electoral roll. Everything. And it should give every Estonian a digital identity — a single key — with which they could unlock any of it. By 1997, ninety-seven percent of Estonian schools were on the internet. By 2002, every Estonian had a digital ID card. By 2007, you could vote from your couch. By the time anyone in Western Europe had noticed, Estonia had moved ninety-nine percent of its public services online. By 2024, the United Nations ranked Estonia second in the world for digital government, behind only Denmark, and ahead of every

state with a hundred times its budget. The Estonian state estimates that it saves the equivalent of eight hundred working years a year through reduced bureaucracy. Tax returns are filed in three minutes. Companies can be registered, by foreign nationals who have never set foot in the country, in fifteen minutes. The corruption indices are among the cleanest in Europe.

Why does this matter to Lebanon?

Because the Estonian experiment proved something the institutional economics literature had long suspected but had never been able to demonstrate so cleanly. It proved that digital infrastructure, when properly designed, does not merely make a state more efficient. It changes the relationship between citizen and state in a way that closes off the most common pathways for corruption. The mechanism is mundane. Most corruption is not the dramatic kind. It is not suitcases of cash. It is the small, daily extraction of advantage — the clerk who needs a tip to process your paperwork, the inspector who needs a gift to certify your building, the judge who needs a friend in common to take your case. Each of these transactions depends on the clerk, the inspector, the judge having personal discretion over an outcome the citizen needs. Take away the discretion — by routing the paperwork through an algorithm that the clerk cannot bend, by digitizing the inspection record so the inspector cannot misplace it, by automating the case assignment so the judge cannot be chosen — and you take away the rent.

The clerk doesn't become more honest. The clerk loses the opportunity to be dishonest. This is the same thing, from the citizen's point of view, and a much more durable thing from the systems. Transparency International, in its 2024 assessment of the Middle East and North Africa, made the point explicitly. The improvements it could measure in the region were almost entirely

in the small Gulf states that had invested seriously in e-government. Bahrain. Kuwait. The United Arab Emirates. In each case, digitization had removed the middlemen. In each case, the corruption scores had improved.

The United Arab Emirates is, for the Lebanese reader, the more uncomfortable comparator. In 1971, when the seven emirates federated, the new country was, in income terms, comparable to Lebanon. The UAE had oil. Lebanon had bankers, lawyers, surgeons, journalists, novelists, restaurateurs, hoteliers, university professors. The two countries were not, by any reasonable assessment of human capital, in the same league. Today the UAE ranks ninth in the world on the Country Brand Index, just behind Switzerland, just ahead of the United States. Lebanon does not rank. The UAE's digital identity system covers every resident. Its visa applications are processed by algorithm in minutes. Its courts publish their judgements within days. Its long-term residency visas — the famous "golden visa"— are now being offered to Lebanese professionals, on the explicit calculation that the Lebanese brain drain is the UAE's gain. It would be polite to leave the comparison there. It would also be cowardly. The UAE has many things Lebanon will never have — hydrocarbons, demographic flexibility, a particular kind of political settlement — but the gap between the two is no longer explainable by endowments. The gap is explained by institutions. The UAE chose, repeatedly and with discipline, to invest in the boring institutional work that makes a country function. Lebanon chose, repeatedly and with discipline, to invest in the management of its confessional balance. The results are the results.

10

A LESSON FROM THE UNIVERSE

"Taking the same path to solve the same problem leads to the same failure."

— Albert Einstein—

The laws of universal thermodynamics tell us that entropy is relentless. The principle of entropy states that every entity—mineral or living—is a reservoir of fundamental energies that begin to alter their original order from the moment the entity is formed.

To illustrate this, imagine perfectly aligned cubes forming a flawless larger cube. Entropy tells us that even if left untouched, without any external interference, the structure will inevitably disintegrate over time.

Another example is a newborn. From the moment it separates from its mother, it begins to destabilize its original energies according to the same laws of entropy. We call this process "aging." A baby begins to age from birth. Aging from birth may seem counterintuitive, yet it is a fact that grounds us in reality.

The principle of entropy also applies to everything that accompanies our existence including economic evolution. Before the many agricultural cycles that spanned millennia, entropy brought an end to the last civilizations that had endured for centuries: the Middle Ages. This was followed by the first industrial

revolution, then the second with the steam engine, and the third with the combustion engine and electricity. Each of these lasted roughly three centuries before weakening.

We then responded by creating the fourth industrial revolution with the advent of digital technology — a process that began in the last quarter of the 20th century.

It took only 50 years for the fourth industrial revolution to begin losing momentum as well. In response, humanity created a new tool to counter the entropy threatening it: artificial intelligence AI. The fifth industrial revolution is already marked by an exponential acceleration of its own evolution. Yet entropy is already looming over it. It will eventually destabilize our civilization and force us to invent a new system of existential self-governance.

Our survival instinct once again guides us—but how? As always, through the mobilization of our fundamental energies. Productivity and creativity are prime examples.

Being productive mobilizes our energies to sustain our means of existence. Being creative mobilizes them to optimize those means. Without even realizing it, this process ensures our continuity.

However, it is evident that the scale of time is shrinking with progress. Our responsiveness to emerging challenges must be more present, faster—indeed, more urgent. Political chaos is already taking hold, economic systems are searching for direction, the sense of free will is eroding, and the question of personal freedom is increasingly pressing.

Farid's personal struggle against his own entropy led him to write, in 2011, *"Bet for a National Conscience."* At that time, the uncertainty surrounding our destiny as Lebanese was enough to stir his energy.

Today, at the end of 2026, 15 years have passed.

The various pressures, the existential risks of the fifth industrial revolution, and an increased awareness of the complexity of the challenges tell us that the thought must be revisited, updated, and improved.

One way to reactivate our energies was to align them with others - fresher and, above all, different. This new Essay is co-written because, simply, we have decided to bring together our knowledge and experience to this endeavor.

Building on the experience gained with *"A Bet for a National Conscience"*, and enriched by our mutual expertise, ***FUTURE READY*** is our shared offering to Lebanon – a country we love deeply and refuse to abandon to entropy. It is an attempt to propose a new way of thinking, a new narrative, new solutions to rekindle the spirit of enlightenment, and chart a credible roadmap for the immediate future. This is badly needed.

11

AN INITIATIVE

Back to 2010 A particular exhaustion that comes not from a single blow, but from the relentless accumulation of crises: crisis fatigue. A condition that numbs the will, erodes the sense of urgency, and gradually transforms suffering into something resembling normalcy. It is, in many ways, a collective Stockholm Syndrome – one that makes us bow our heads and accept, almost as a blessing, a fate that force us into submission without protest. We accept it so deeply that, over time, we have become synonymous with resilience. The resilience of the Lebanese people is, if you will, a perfect illustration of the ravages of entropy on an entire population facing adversity.

This feeling led to write *"A Bet for a National Conscience."* The idea is simple: to awaken a national consciousness centered around a federative economy, driven primarily by Water, Electricity, Agriculture, and Transport.

The originality of the book lies mainly in its mode of distribution. It was the era of the internet's expansion, and the book was interactive. Readers could access it online and add their comments, creating a participatory cycle. At the time, the website received 7,200,000 visits, and more than 15,000 copies were read online.

More importantly, the book attracted the attention of a group of activists. Together, we decided to start an NGO called Civic Influence Hub.

What followed became one of the most compelling proofs that structured civic mobilization can produce real results. We achieved the remarkable feat of bringing together 40 men and women from the private sector and raising $2,000,000, each contributing $50,000 which we invested in developing Lebanon's first five-year water plan: *Blue Gold*. Twenty-four water resource experts were mobilized and began their work, with CIH investing $500,000 in the study. This was not merely a planning exercise. It was a demonstration that when citizens organize around a shared idea, with clear structure and genuine commitment, they can move institutions. It is precisely this logic – mobilization as a civic force – that continues to underpin our belief in participatory platforms as engines of national transformation.

Blue Gold was launched during a ceremony attended by key public and private sector figures at the Hotel Phoenicia Beirut, under the patronage of the President of the Republic, Michel Sleiman.

Through 15 integrated and coordinated initiatives, the five-year plan demonstrated the potential to accumulate 500 million cubic meters of water per year by 2020, and up to 1 billion cubic meters once the system is fully operational by 2030. It also projected annual revenues of $1 billion for the State through exports starting in 2020.

The plan further recommended the essential creation of a National Water Council, a mixed public/private body. This independent entity would manage water resources autonomously, with the State represented on a national public/private board of directors.

You can explore all the details of the *Blue Gold* plan by scanning the barcode.

CIH also raised an additional $1,000,000 from the private sector banks and corporations and launched an unprecedented national multimedia campaign in Lebanon's history. More than 150,000 Lebanese citizens signed their support on a dedicated website created for this purpose.

CIH then mobilized the remainder of its capital for lobbying efforts aimed at initiating the necessary draft law to be voted on by Parliament. However, 2013 marked the beginning of the end of what had been a remarkable journey. We shall revisit it in detail in this essay.

Building on the lessons of the past, ***FUTURE READY*** is intended to update, evolve, and carry forward this saga fifteen years on.

We are witnessing the surge of the Fifth Industrial Revolution. Artificial Intelligence is evolving exponentially, heralding a profound shift in the way we live, think, produce, and consume. The world is accelerating. Donald Trump seeks to reshape the global balance established at Yalta Conference and reposition the role of the United States in relation to Europe, the BRICS, and what is now called the Global South. Alongside heads of state, a new class of actors has entered the arena: tech oligarchs, whose platforms, capital, and technological reach now rival the influence of sovereign governments – reshaping policy, public discourse, and the very architecture of power. We are witnessing the rise of new Digital Empires which borders and territories are still being drawn. Their quest is not gold or silver but data.

Data is the new currency and the base of the new power.

In our region, the established order is undergoing deep transformation. The forces born from oil economies and the Sykes-Picot Agreement are unraveling. Israel, once on the defensive,

has become a true regional power and seeks to redraw the map of the Middle East. The rise of fanaticism and religious political orders of all kinds is flourishing. At home, 50 years later, the Lebanese Civil War still bears its scars. Yet recently, an important shift seems to be emerging. The weakening of Hezbollah, the end of the Assad regime in Syria, and the election of Joseph Aoun along with his team of young, professional ministers offer us an opportunity we must seize. For too long, the Middle East has been defined by its instability. That narrative must change. A region of 450 million consumers cannot afford to remain a theater of conflict – it must become an engine for growth, for trade, for innovation, and for a new model of regional cooperation and interdependence.

This is one of the reasons that drives us to write this book as a team.

The goal remains to preserve the economic approach, but to take on the challenge where CIH fell short: to create genuine citizen participation a bottom-up movement capable of initiating the governance required so that no single minister can derail a meaningful project; where technology catalyzes civic engagement; where a strong national consciousness emerges and asserts its influence virtually at first, and tangibly over time.

The path is long and complex, but digital tools make it more accessible. The ambition is to build a virtual Lebanon through the active participation of a virtual citizen. Not merely to suggest change in a book, but to directly contribute in shaping the Lebanon of tomorrow.

This would take the form of a digital platform projecting both the Lebanon of today in its current reality and a vision of its future. A virtual Lebanon with its government, institutions, chambers, and discussion forums. A platform that presents the plans of a federative economy and much more: the design of

governance aligned with the digital age and the challenges of AI. A format that encourages citizen participation and, beyond that, fosters the creation of a new age Digital Democracy.

Today, the screen reigns supreme. Young generations operate almost entirely through social media. There is urgency in embracing the paths that technology is imposing upon us.

We must believe in it. Lebanon is home to 18 communities coexisting in a delicate balance few nations can claim the same. And the Lebanese are present all over the world. Our diaspora of 10 million plus is deeply integrated and widely accepted across continents. It is a dormant powerhouse that must be leveraged.

The paradox is that Lebanon's institutions, either weakened or broken, offer a rare opportunity to build from zero-based. Something no other established democracy can do without dismantling its own system. All democracies today are struggling with this.

Lebanon could pioneer a new approach to political participation. It was the Phoenicians who created the first code of human communication –the alphabet – the foundational system from which virtually every written language in the world descends. Our ancestors contributed to the creation and spread of the three monotheistic religions. Today, we have the potential and the opportunity to invent not a religion but a new form of governance. A reinvention of democracy in the age of AI.

To initiate a bold and necessary vision, you need dreamers. But a dreamer can only begin to articulate its outlines. You also need pragmatists. Along this uncertain journey, we connected despite being once competitors, during our respective long careers. We spoke the same language of communication through different

lenses, Roy through strategy, Farid through creativity. Even as competitors, we respected one another. Today, we are partners in what feels like the pitch of a lifetime: winning the project of a new governance capable of building a future-ready Lebanon, through a new vision of democracy; Digital Democracy that could one day serve as a model for the world.

We are ten, hoping that ten will become one hundred, one thousand, one million – to build the Lebanon of the future.

Believing is enough to act.

12

BELIEVING

In the BET of 2011 (*PARI*), each letter carried meaning: P for Passion, A for Action, R for Resistance, and I for Integrity. ***FUTURE READY*** preserves the essence of this acronym but enriches it. P now emphasizes Partnership - essential to activate ideas in times of chaos. A evolves into Agility: The world is changing at an exponential pace, and agility is required to keep up. R must become Readiness - no longer bowing our heads but responding. I, for Integrity remains, but in the age of technology it takes on a new dimension in light of the immense challenge posed by AI. Integrity begins with us: being lucid, curious, and willing to understand what is happening to us. It means ending our tendency to hide behind resilience as an excuse and having honesty to admit that no one can face these challenges alone.

The bet of 2026 can succeed if it is built on partnership, agility, reactivity, and integrity. These four principles call for a new attitude toward the future. By instinct, our consciousness always pushes us toward our comfort zone which has become resilience. But that is no longer enough. As Fifi Aboudib wrote in a recent article, *"Between power and action: dare."* Even acting is no longer sufficient; now, we must dare.

Why dare? Because there is a rupture in the cycle of our evolution. A paradigm shifts in the way we think, live, work, produce, and consume.

We must dare because we are in a phase of reinvention. The solutions drawn from our previous experience are becoming obsolete. We need to imagine new ones. We must dare without fearing failure because failure is how we learn, so we can start again, better. With agility. With tenacity.

The good news is that our DNA helps us. Our ancestors were adventurers. Sailing in small crews on fragile vessels taught them the meaning of partnership. They succeeded or perished together. Little by little, crew by crew, they managed to exchange their wealth, spread their knowledge, disseminate their values, and build cultures that transformed the world.

Later, scattered and in loose formations, our forebears repeated the journey. Ships replaced galleys, airplanes replaced trains. In small groups, they settled across the world. Meanwhile, those who remained in the Levant were organized into Emirates then into two *Caïmacamats*, then into a *Mutasarrifiya*, and eventually into a Nation. Each of these forms of governance reflected the constraints and ambitions of its era. Today, we face a different imperative: to evolve beyond the inherited architecture of siloed institutions and fragmented authority, toward a model built on connectivity – one where governance is networked, collaborative, and designed for the complexity of the digital age.

Today, few Lebanese know their own history or realize that in antiquity, as partners, they were the source and disseminators of the alphabet, and instigators of the Hellenistic culture that has shaped the West to this day. Yet the spirit of enterprise and creativity has never left our DNA.

Consider Carlos Slim, who developed a vast GSM network in Central and South America; the Mikati brothers, who built another one across the Middle East and Africa; the Eddé

brothers, who created Murex, a software company powering thousands of banks worldwide; Rodolphe Jacques Saade who made CMA CGM one of the world's leading shipping and logistics groups; and Tarek Mansour and Antoine Jebara, whose venture Kalchi and Jumpcloud stand as a testament to Lebanese entrepreneurial spirit thriving on the global stage.

And then there is art and culture: Elie Saab dressing movie stars; Gabriel Yared composing Oscar-winning film scores; Fairuz enchanting the East; Nabil Nahas exhibiting in renowned galleries; our cuisine gracing tables across the globe; and Khalil Gibran translated into every language.

No one doubts the universality, craftsmanship, culture, and talent of the Lebanese individual. But the world - and ourselves - underestimate what can be achieve together, united as partners around a shared mission.

Today, few nations can claim the universality we have. Our culture is richly versatile. We are naturally trilingual. Our multi-communal fabric sharpens our understanding of nations, religions, and peoples. We are great travelers. Successive crises and wars have taught us mobility, adaptability, creativity, calculation, openness, hospitality, generosity and above all, a unique intuitive intelligence among the peoples of the world.

And yet, numbed by our resilience, we refuse the necessary introspection. We retreat into opaque individualism, which is topped with a destructive egocentrism undermining any chance of uniting around a shared project.

We astonishingly underestimate the rare advantage of being a nation that has lost everything and can rebuild from zero. No other country can say the same. Every other nation has

something to lose in order to deconstruct and adapt to the digital age.

Lebanon has a golden opportunity to wipe the slate clean of 75 years of repeated failures and to create a vision for a nation aligned with the 21st century and its new paradigm, its new values, its long-term sustainability, and a system of governance compatible with the digital era.

We are capable of doing it because we have the DNA, experience, intellect, and the opportunity required to succeed.

But how?

Many groups are currently gathering to propose their vision. They are defined mainly by their analysis of the recent past and by attempts to fix a model that has already proven deficient. They are also marked by the omnipresence of their leadership. Their projects often seem to conceal the ambition of an individual, rather than the power of an idea. And even when the idea exists, people and their egos are there to undermine it.

The most meaningful experience in this regard was the Blue Gold Project.

13

MASTERING OUR DEMONS

Blue Gold proved something essential: that the Lebanese, when they genuinely commit to a shared idea, are capable of remarkable things. For a time, 40 people held together around a common purpose – and moved institutions. That is not a small feat in a country where collective action has so often dissolved into personal agendas. But it is also not enough to celebrate it. What matters is understanding why it held, why it broke, and what a more resilient model would look like.

Our demons awakened quickly. Strengthened by the initial success, and at the first signs of resistance, the personal agendas of some members began to surface. The cohesive team started to fracture, and the Vision was lost. Today, the association that created Blue Gold survives to serve narrow political objectives that are vague and questionable.

In reality, this merely reflects the broader mindset of the country. For 75 years of citizen practice, the Lebanese individual has pledged allegiance first to themselves, then to their community, perhaps to their region, barely to a portion of their province not even to their neighborhood, their street, or their shared civic space.

Incivility has become institutionalized. There is little respect for others, for the pedestrian crossing on a green light, for right of way, for the environment, for the building across the street, or for the

neighbor downstairs. In reality, the only voluntary commitment is toward one's own personal space.

The result is what we have all become: non-citizens of a non-country still searching for itself.

Faced with this, lucidity and discernment call for a new path. One that is fundamental, and visionary.

14

DARE

The message is this:

A Bet for a National Conscience sought to bring together individuals, within a tangible framework, around a federative economy using water as its primary driver - then ***FUTURE READY*** is written so that an IDEA can unite, at least 10 people to begin with. Ideas are fragile. They can be diluted, co-opted, or abandoned at the first sign of friction. And yet history is consistent on one point: nothing is stronger than an idea whose time has come. That time is now.

With the conviction that the model becomes contagious drawing in 100 more. And 100 can become 1,000, and then it can snowball exponentially.

Why would they join?

Because first and foremost, the initiative is essentially virtual and participatory.

The first 10 members commit to never appear publicly. Their strength lies in their invisibility. Their reason for existing is the ideas they share. Their tool is a platform that communicates those ideas not through them personally, nor through any spokesperson but through Avatar-Ambassadors, representing working teams.

These avatars disseminate messages, bring together real citizens equipped with digital identities, create virtual interactivity.

Citizen participation enriches the substance of ideas. Debates emerge. Models evolve. Proposals are refined and ultimately submitted to virtual voting.

A model capable of responding to the challenges imposed by our political and geographical environment, as well as by artificial intelligence and the Fifth Industrial Revolution.

Millions of individuals already engage in debates across social media. X, Meta, Instagram, and TikTok have become our daily companions' spaces where we share impulses, tastes, social activities, and trivialities. Occasionally, political discourse seeps in; and when it turns violent, it is moderated or censored by algorithms.

So why shouldn't there be a platform dedicated to a new political narrative one capable of functioning? One aimed at building a viable State, institutions that protect us and safeguard our future, and an educational system that instills the rights and duties of citizens in the digital age?

Why not wager on dissolving the egos of self-proclaimed elites in a new ocean of exchanges a digital forum where the best idea prevails through virtual voting? Where future political leadership emerge not from birth right, party, money, or ego but from the uncompromising clarity of data generated by millions of individuals finally empowered to express themselves directly?

Why not go even further, and evolve the concept of democracy toward a new meritocracy?

There are many ways to group individuals into citizens of a nation: conquest, tyranny, party systems, one-party rule, democracy. Likewise, there are ways to gather followers: faith, dogma, religion.

Here, we seek neither. We aim to assemble an initial group of individuals to spark a meaningful transformation of our future.

“Birds of a feather flock together”, ***FUTURE READY*** contains substantial material around which people can unite. It does not rely on demagoguery or slogans capable of instantly mobilizing the masses. It chooses a more demanding path: a new narrative capable of convincing open, curious minds those able to awaken the spirit of Enlightenment.

The formula may not take hold immediately. It may take time. But if it succeeds in forming a core of committed participants, it will evolve irreversibly.

Still, the rules of the game must be established. Starting from the reality imposed by certain parameters, ***FUTURE READY*** makes rational choices dictated by logic alone. These choices allow us to initiate dialogue, shape a roadmap, refine its foundations, and ultimately open the path toward this new Enlightenment one that could transform Lebanon into a laboratory for a new form of governance.

A governance capable of restraining egos. Compatible with artificial intelligence, containing the rise of fanaticism, the excesses of capitalism and the emergence of digital empires. In short, a system aligned with the New Age, its anxieties and its challenges.

And why not go further still? Why not make it the founding act of a new Age Democracy.

15

RISING TO THE CHALLENGES

Since we are few, we might as well unite around values that must—and will—make a difference in the times ahead. Some will likely generate consensus; others will be questioned, challenged, rejected, or perhaps adopted. But none will leave citizens indifferent.

Freedom of Expression is rooted in the idea of an inclusive digital platform open to all, we establish freedom of expression as our first core value.

Today, truth is eroding – and more troubling, it is being actively redefined and framed. The more lucid we become, the more we realize that its force is confined within tunnels carved by social media, trends of all kinds, ideological extremism, religious fanaticism, and, of course, what we call “fake news”. Truth is no longer simply obscured; it is shaped, packaged, and distributed with intent. Narratives are engineered. Perception is manufactured. In this environment, the very concept of a shared reality is under siege.

Here, we advocate for a critical, constructive, lucid, curious, open, and deeply humanistic freedom of expression.

Yes, humanistic. Because of the rise of AI, the very notion of humanism is being questioned. Where does humanism stand? What will it become? To what extent will algorithms dictate our lives, shape our consciousness, and write our destiny?

Let us agree that the ***FUTURE READY*** platform exists to protect and nurture freedom of expression and the future of humanism at the dawn of this great rupture.

This space will allow us to define, through constructive dialogue the boundaries of individual freedom, the scope of human rights and the rights of Lebanese citizens within their national framework

It will naturally lead to consensus on civic duties, individual liberties, and the creation of a necessary and mandatory civic education from an early age.

It also entails a commitment to limiting the destructive effects of "fake news." This challenge will only intensify. Soon, the pursuit of truth may resemble a quixotic battle—but awareness itself is already a necessary awakening.

This platform aspires to be a space where freedom of expression flourishes—and where the defense and pursuit of truth are upheld.

The second unifying value is the **Environment.**

It transcends all divisions. We all live it. We breathe the same air. We share the same forests, suffer from the same drought, depend on the same nature and the same water resources.

Discussing these shared realities on a common platform can only awaken a new national consciousness leading to a shared civic code of conduct, with common rights and responsibilities: the right to consume, the duty to recycle, the responsibility to protect our environment. We claim the right to draw from our shared oxygen yet often ignore the CO_2 we return without accountability.

From this emerges the idea of carbon taxation and the broader imperative to tax consumption – tied to demographic impact. These are powerful and engaging topics that could significantly increase civic participation, forcing citizens to confront the real cost of their choices on shared resources and their impact on future generations.

The third value is **Education**.

Recognizing the urgent need to reform education in the age of AI is fundamental. The State must awaken and act immediately within its sphere of responsibility.

This dialogue must lead to the establishment of a governing body tasked with ensuring that every Lebanese child has access, as quickly as possible, to an education aligned with the AI era.

This means embracing new standards built around new competencies the 4Cs: Curiosity, Creativity, Cooperation, Communication.

This is a transformative subject. It will spark debate and unite citizens to make them aware that their children's future is being decided now starting as early as age five.

The fourth value is **Secularity.**

In this Essay, secular in Arabic is understood علمانية from علم meaning knowledge and enlightenment.

Building a nation ready for the future requires religious neutrality in the shared civil / public space. We must first unite around this principle even if it requires lengthy debates.

A secular civil framework does not restrict freedom of expression. It ensures that secular expression is prioritized within state and

educational institutions, an approach that naturally applies to this platform.

Secularity inevitably raises questions about citizenship. Today, citizenship is often accessed through communal belonging. Secularity challenges this by addressing personal status laws and their implications: civil marriage, birth, divorce, child custody, inheritance. It raises a fundamental question: should citizenship be governed by the State rather than by communities? The question it poses: can citizen equality be achieved if citizens submit to different status laws.

The answer points towards a principle that must accompany secularity: subsidiarity. The two go hand in hand. Subsidiarity upholds that decisions should be made at the most local level capable of addressing them effectively – empowering communities, municipalities, and individuals without surrendering the coherence of the national framework. Together, secularity and subsidiarity create the conditions for genuine social mobility: a system where a citizen's prospects are no longer determined by their sect, their family name, or their geographic origin, but by their contribution, their merit, and their engagement with the shared civic project. This is not an abstract ideal. It is the structural foundation without which any reform of Lebanese governance will remain cosmetic.

Debates will follow.

The intersection of environment and secularity reveals common ground: logically, we share equal rights and duties within the cycle of consumption and sustainability. No major religion opposes environmental stewardship yet climate change forces us to confront deeper issues, including demographic challenges.

The right and responsibility to regulate population growth may become essential. A secular State would need to define

demographic policy for the collective good – and that conversation cannot stop at birth rates. It must extend to the full arc of life. Questions once confined to religious or medical spheres are increasingly entering the domain of civic policy: among them, euthanasia. The right to a dignified death, under clearly defined legal conditions, is a question that secular democracies in the 21st century, can no longer avoids. A secular framework does not impose answers – it creates the space where issues can be debated honestly, free from doctrinal prohibition.

Similarly, education and secularity are interconnected. Nation-building requires civic consciousness beyond religious frameworks. Alongside AI-driven educational reform, there must be mandatory civic education - necessarily secular - across all institutions.

We are not there yet.

The fifth value around which we can unite is **Science**.

Artificial Intelligence will trigger a profound rupture in the cycle of our civilization. Genetic engineering will transform *Homo sapiens*, reshape medicine, and likely extend human lifespan. Nanotechnology will revolutionize industry. Together, these forces may eliminate more than 800 million jobs worldwide by 2050.

To ignore this reality today would be a clear sign of irresponsibility. To face it with lucidity, on the other hand, is to recognize that Science will also open the door to new professions in future. Many of which we cannot define yet.

Science may even help address our spiritual needs. Quantum physics and astrophysics invites us to rethink Creation, Eternity,

and our place in the Universe across space, time, and potentially multiple universes.

These are the foundational terms and values needed to form the essential core from which this journey can begin.

If you agree - let's come together.



16

THE ACADEMY

Today, the opportunity to create a new Lebanon, a new Syria, or a new regional order, remains constrained by the weight of the past. Current strategies of the global powers, and the narrow interests of regional actors will need to be overcome.

Political leaders have yet to grasp the magnitude of the rupture brought about by AI.

We are witnessing a new divide between layered ignorance and Enlightenment: this needs a clear vision.

Hubris vs. the common we all witness it in real time. Such as the dynamics of the relationship between Donald Trump and Elon Musk. On the surface, it appears to be an alliance of power – political authority meeting technological dominance. But look closer, and what emerges is a collision of two distinct forms of hubris, each feeding the other while pointing in opposite directions.

Trump seeks to secure and restore a conservative legacy rooted in the founding mythology of the United States – a nation built, in his visions on sovereign exceptionalism, economic nationalism, and the primacy of American will on the world stage. His is a hubris of the past: the belief that greatness is something to be reclaimed rather than reimagined.

Musk, by contrast, is thinking about colonizing Mars. His is a hubris of the future: the belief that the constraints of Earth – its

politics, its institutions, its collective agreements – are obstacles to be bypassed rather than systems to be improved. He does not seek to reform democracy; he seeks to make it irrelevant by rendering the planet itself optional.

What is absent from both visions is the Common Good. Neither framework considers the citizen as such – the billions of people who will never reach Mars. For their dignity and survival, they depend on functioning institutions, fair systems and the idea that power exists to serve rather than to dominate. When hubris – whether nostalgic or futurist – displaces the Common Good as the organizing principle of governance, what follows is not leadership. It is a masquerade.

This is the trap Lebanon must consciously refuse. The temptation to organize around a charismatic individual, a powerful family, or a dominant faction is not unique to us – it is a human pattern. But we paid a higher price for it than most. The lesson of the past 75 years is unambiguous: governance built on ego, whether dressed in nationalism, religiosity, or technocratic ambition, produces the same outcome. The Common Good is not a sentiment. It is a design principle. It must be the founding principle of everything we build next.

At the same time the European Union faces existential challenges and rising extremism. Russia seeks to revive its imperial ambitions. Turkey dreams of restoring Ottoman influence. The confusion is global.

In Economics, capitalism is losing its bearings, facing disruption from cryptocurrencies. Meanwhile, China demonstrates resilience leading in AI, with fully automated factories operating 24/7 in total darkness, redefining productivity itself.

And us? We are still struggling to patch together a fragile republic armed only with a recent history of repeated failures, marked by short-sightedness and a complete absence of a future vision.

The only logical way forward and inevitable conclusion is this: A necessary Break.

We must wipe the slate clean of past experiences and align ourselves with a Vision compatible with the future and with the challenges of AI. This Vision cannot belong to a single individual. It must emerge from collective reflection through the richness of open minds generating algorithms of ideas, tested in a virtual space by virtual citizens.

These “virtual citizens” are, in reality, Lebanese individuals who choose to participate through interaction, commentary, and voting, enabled by modern technologies. As we do so, we must not forget that the Lebanese constitution is 100 years old – unique in the region, and remarkable in its longevity, but also a document conceived for a world that no longer exists. A century of political, technological, and social transformation has rendered many of its assumptions obsolete. The virtual citizen we are building onward deserves a constitutional framework as forward-looking as the platform that will give them voice.

This is the essence of the STATE ACADEMY proposed in this book. Building a Virtual Nation.

The concept of a virtual Lebanon begins with a clear definition of the destination, a roadmap submitted to public debate, voting on each building block of the system, the creation of a virtual public opinion, the emergence of a virtual citizen majority supporting its construction.

To prevent this dialogue from devolving into the same chaotic electoral behaviors of today, the Academy introduces a new democratic model to achieve meritocracy and social mobility.

The State Academy is not simply a platform for debate. It is a laboratory for a new civic order – one where participation is earned, influence is proportional to contribution, and mobility is structural rather than inherited.

The core is meritocracy: the principle that the weight of a citizen's voice reflects the substance of their engagement with the common project. This is not a system designed to exclude but rather to participate, it is a system designed to elevate. A first-time participant has a voice. A long-term contributor, a builder, an educator, a social entrepreneur – each earns progressively greater stake in the direction of the collective. Influence is not given, it is cultivated.

But meritocracy without social mobility is merely a new hierarchy – and Lebanon has suffered enough from those. The two must be inseparable. Social mobility is the mechanism that ensures meritocracy remains open: that a young woman from a rural village, a second-generation diaspora member in Sao Paolo, or a first-time voter in Tripoli can rise through genuine contribution rather than connection. The platform must be designed so that the path upward is always available and always earned.

This matters especially in the Lebanese context, where social mobility has historically been captured by sect, family, and geography. The Academy's meritocratic model deliberately bypasses these filters. Your CV is not your community. Your contribution is not your confession. The data generated by your engagement – your ideas, your votes, your participation in

working groups, your records of civic action – becomes your license to influence.

In this sense, the State Academy proposes something genuinely radical for Lebanon: a system where the question is not who you are, but what's your contribution? The answer to that question is visible, verifiable, and consequential. A forum where the best ideas rise not because of the power behind them, but because of their own merit.

FROM STATE ACADEMY TO POLITICAL ACADEMY

The State Academy reaches full capacity. The platform gathers one million virtual citizens. Meritocratic voting is active. Interactions are visible, however identities remain largely anonymous.

Through this process, the platform accumulates data, contributions, influence and impact.

At a certain threshold, algorithms identify individuals suited for political roles (if they choose to pursue them).

At this stage selected participants reveal their identities, dedicated discussion spaces emerge, public debates combine identified leaders and anonymous citizens, the platform evolves into a full political ecosystem: Drafting a virtual constitution, Designing governance systems aligned with AI, creating economic, educational, and social frameworks, proposing laws on labor, child protection, and beyond. Everything is filtered through virtual citizen voting.

Eventually, virtual campaigns emerge, virtual elections take place, a full governing body is formed (president, parliament,

ministers, etc.) This creates a credible political simulation one capable of influencing real-world elections.

Optimistically, this could even shape candidate polls for upcoming elections.




Imad Al Ali
Jawad Adra
Nael Al Assaad
Michael Chaftari
Farid Chehab
Maher Achi
Nizar Al Awar
Khaled Bohsali
Marie-Jo Char
Dania Dandachi
Wassim Al Hakim
Chadi Al Khet
Tarek Bolbol
Samir Chahine
Farid Fakhreddine
Hadi Farah
Pierre Geara
Josette Ghafari
SECULARITY
Samir Kadi | Ali Khalil
Samir Lahoud | Albert Letayf
Jamil Mroueh | Fady Nahas
Cyrille Najjar
Coutros Noujaim
PASSION
READINESS
PARTICIPATION
ENVIRONMENT
Josyane Abi Saab
Lina Hamdan
Joe Hawa
Joe Issa El Khoury
Edmond Rabbath
Fahd Saccal
Iman Tabbara
Fadi Yarak
Rainze Salman
Zaher Soubra
Serge Tor Sarkissian
Tania Zaroubi
VALUES


Roy Haddad
Rached Hamade
Imad Al Ali
Jawad Adra
Nael Al Assaad
Michael Chaftari
Farid Chehab
Maher Achii
Wassim Al Hakim
Nizar Al Awar
Khaled Bohsali
Marie-Jo Char
Dania Dandachri
Chadi Al Hakim
Tarek Bolb'ol
Samir Chahine
Farid Fakhreddine
MOBILITY
ACTION
INTEGRITY
PB X OSTI X
PARTNERSHIP
Samir Kadi
Ali Khaiil
Samir Lahoud
Albert Letayf
Jamil Mroueh
Fady Nahas
Cyrille Najjar
Boutros Noujaim
Oussama Nsouli
Edmond Rabbath
EDUCATION
MERITOCRACY
Roy Haddad
Rached Hamade
Dania Dandachri
Hadi Farah
Pierre Geara
Josette Ghafari
Josyane Abi Saab
Joe Issa El Khoury
Fahd Saccal
Serge Tor Sarkissian
Joe Hawa
Edmond Rabbath
Zaher Soubra
Fadi Yarak
Lina Hamdan
Ramze Salman
Iman Tabbara
Tania Zaroubi

17

THE FRAMEWORK PILLARS

A country brand is more than a logo, a slogan or a marketing gimmick. It is the sum of the operational dimensions that determine whether the country works. If it works, it attracts investment, builds human capital, retains its talent and its soft power occupies a space in the global imagination.

Our present architecture, rather than being lean and agile, has institutionalized a cumbersome, uncollaborative silo structure – the infamous Taef accord where each minister has, in practice, a total independence. The ***FUTURE READY*** framework borrows from modern management techniques of horizontality and connectivity, to question the traditional structure of government and advocate a new form of public administration that is collaborative, holistic and integrated. It benchmarks global best practice by regrouping key modernization reforms into six working pillars. Each pillar is a portfolio of policies. Each portfolio is governed by measurable indicators. Each indicator rolls up into one of the two national indexes – the Country Brand Index and the Social Mobility Index: our adopted scorecards (see appendix).

The first pillar is Social Reform. It responds to the citizens' demand for a State that cares. It makes sure that no citizen does not have enough, that he cannot be unjustly rewarded and his social security is well managed and that women have the same rights as men. Basic, yes, but needed to be revisited.

The second pillar is Infrastructure. For fifty years, we scarred our nature, we wildly build eyesores with no accountability, we have allowed our water resources to go untapped (visit Blue Gold) polluted by a disastrous waste management and we are still trying to find solutions to our energy problem forgetting that without it we shall miss the AI train that already left the station. Planning is all what is needed.

The third pillar is Financial Reforms. Who pays for what? Where did all this money go? Who is responsible for what? All these questions remain unanswered while it is only Math. Conflict of interest, lack of transparency and compliance are the symptoms that hide what we already covered: an architecture that promotes extractive institutions.

The fourth pillar is Sustainability. It is where creativity and human capital come together. Where environment and health go hand in hand. It is soft power in action. It is timeless. It is the equity advantage that Lebanon has in comparison to all the neighboring countries. The long-term stewardship of these assets is what distinguishes a country from a quarry. It must be preserved as ruthlessly as it is celebrated.

The fifth pillar is Economic Development. It includes a "good for business" climate, capital formation, foreign direct investment attraction and the stable legal and regulatory environment – taxation, customs, IP protection, sectoral incentives – that determine whether an entrepreneur can build a company in Lebanon at all. It is simply the bloodstream of jobs and prosperity.

The sixth pillar is Rule of Law. First and foremost, it is about ease of doing business. It is not rocket science. It starts with digitalization of the state for transparency – remember Tallinn - It is about putting in place anti-corruption mechanisms and the depoliticization of the civil service.

Governance is upstream of everything else. Without governance reform, no other pillar can be delivered. It will all be wishful thinking.

Lebanon has always punched above its weight. With its active diaspora, its history, its food, its art and culture, all help to magnify its voice and contribute to its standing. The pillars formalize these advantages and translate them into export, foreign exchange and reputation. Each pillar carries its own working group, its own quick wins and its own measurable targets. Together, they constitute a coherent and interdependent whole whereas silos failed to perform.

Social Reform Minimum Wage Unemployment Labor Laws Social Security Women's Rights	**Sustainability** Culture Education Health Environment Heritage New Technology	**Infrastructure & Utilities** Waste Management Electricity Water Renewable Energy Energy (Fossil) Urban & Rural Planning
Economic Development Tourism ICT Agriculture Creative Industries Industry Investment Climate	**Financial Reforms** Reorganization of the Territory Audit Independence Banking Regulations Customs & Excise Central Bank Reforms	**Governance & Rule of Law** E-Governance Freedom of Speech Political Freedom Anti-Bribery Civil Law Justice Constitution

18

WHERE LEBANON SHOULD BE

A reform program needs a destination. The destination proposed by the Secular Start-Up State is captured in a single working diagram: ***FUTURE READY*** Lebanon, built on three foundations — the Social Contract, Social Mobility, and the Rule of Law. Each foundation reinforces the others; remove any one and the structure falls.

The Social Contract is the explicit agreement between the citizen and the state about what each owes the other. Today that contract is dead. Citizens owe taxes, compliance and patience; the state owes services, justice and opportunity. When the state defaults on its side, the citizen rationally defaults on theirs, and the loop deepens. The Secular Start-Up State proposes to renegotiate the contract publicly, with citizen participation, and to honor it measurably.

Social Mobility is the lived experience of the social contract. It is the answer to the question every parent asks: will my child have a better life than I have? When the answer is yes, every other political tension becomes manageable. When the answer is no, no political settlement holds. Lebanon's task is to rebuild the ladder. The Social Mobility Index is the instrument by which the rebuilding is tracked.

The Rule of Law is the precondition that makes both above credible. Without it, a social contract is a piece of paper and social mobility is a slogan. With it, every other reform compounds. The Rule of Law in this framework is not abstract; it is operational. It

means independent courts. It means an enforceable commercial code. It means accountable security services. It means a constitution whose protections apply to the wealthy and the connected as they apply to everyone else.

When the three foundations are in place, Lebanon becomes *FUTURE READY*. Not in the sense of the brochure, but in the operational sense — capable of educating its youth, recovering its banking system, attracting its diaspora capital, protecting its environment, and projecting its culture. The diagram below is its illustration:

Future Ready Lebanon



Social Contract

Rule of Law

19

THE REFORMS: A WORKING AGENDA

Frameworks without execution are decorations. The Future Ready agenda is structured around a small number of concrete moves that can begin immediately and that compound over time. They are organized into four working clusters: governance reforms, social-contract reforms, communication and outreach, and platform delivery.

On governance, the first move is to adopt the Country Brand Index as a national development indicator. This is unfashionable precisely because it is honest. By committing to be measured externally, the state commits to perform externally. The second move is to appoint a credible lead on each of the six pillars. The third is to develop white papers, circulated publicly and revised on a published calendar. The fourth is to engage civil society as a structural partner, not as a stakeholder to be managed. The fifth is to identify quick wins — short-cycle reforms that produce visible improvements in citizen experience inside ninety days, building the political capital required for longer-cycle reform. The sixth is to demand the cancellation of all special tribunals that operate outside the constitutional judiciary; the rule of law has no carve-outs as values are absolute and cannot be relativised.

There is also the need to revive the social contract by introducing the concept of social mobility into the public domain — to make it a measured, named, debated objective of policy rather than an unspoken hope. The second is to enshrine equality of opportunity

through meritocracy as a working principle in education, hiring and promotion within the public sector. The third is to create public-private collaboration mechanisms that drive equal regional development, so that the periphery is not perpetually subsidized by the center but is empowered to produce. The fourth is to focus relentlessly on education, because no social-mobility strategy survives a failed school system.

On communication and outreach, the agenda is to deliver a mix of analogue and digital initiatives that drive the transformation. The analogue side is the media outreach, the public debates, and the convening of credible voices. On the digital side, it is an open platform to engage the debate: a virtual agora where ideas are proposed, refined, contested and voted on by citizens. The instrument is detailed in the chapters that follow.

The agenda is to build, test, launch and operate multiple platforms, powered by citizens, that together constitute the operating system of the Start-Up State. Each plays a distinct role, and each depends on the others. Together they convert dialogue into data, data into awareness, and awareness into national transformation.

20

THE POLICY LEVERS

Governments have four primary instruments by which they shape citizen behavior and societal outcomes. Lebanon has historically used the first two. The next phase will require all four.

The first lever is Control. It is the classical apparatus of legislation, regulation, subsidies and taxes. Used well, it sets the rules and incentives inside which everything else operates. Used badly, it becomes a tool of patronage and a barrier to entrepreneurship.

The second lever is Incentives. It is the design and direction of subsidies, benefits, tax credits and policy determination that nudges citizens toward outcomes the state wants — savings, investment, training, family formation, public service.

The third lever, often missing in failing states, is Design. It is the structuring of choices so that the easy path and the right path are the same. Pension defaults, organ-donor registration, retirement enrollment, banking access, civic registration — these are not technical details. They are the architecture inside which citizens make a thousand decisions a day. Good design quietly produces good outcomes.

The fourth lever is Influence. It is the deliberate cultivation of citizen participation, education, social movement and partnership. Influence cannot be commanded. It must be earned through credibility, dialogue and demonstrated competence. It is

the lever that produces durable cultural change — the kind that survives the next election.

The Secular Start-Up State will use all four levers in deliberate combination. The reason is structural. Government alone cannot solve many of the challenges facing modern societies. Traditional levers — legislation, regulation, taxation — were designed for compliance, not for partnership. The problems Lebanon faces today require mass citizen mobilization and long-term sustained changes in social norms and behavior. Government must work in partnership with citizens. The four levers, used in combination, are how that partnership is operationalized.

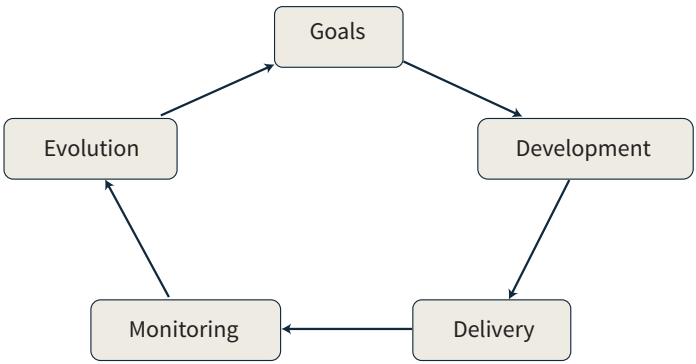
21

THE POLICY CYCLE AND CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT

A modern policy cycle is not a one-shot transaction. It is a continuous loop with five stages: policy goals, policy development, policy delivery, monitoring, and evolution. Each stage admits citizen input. Each stage produces measurable artefacts. Each stage feeds the next.

A cycle, not a transaction

A modern policy is not a one-off announcement. It is a loop.



At the goals stage, the question is what the state is trying to achieve and against which indicator success will be judged. Goals must be specific, measurable, time-bound, and published. Without that, every subsequent stage drifts.

At the development stage, the question is which combination of the four levels: control, incentives, design, influence — will produce

the goal at acceptable cost and acceptable side-effects. Development is the stage at which expert input, citizen consultation, and pilot testing matter most.

At the delivery stage, the question is whether the policy is being executed as designed. Delivery is where most failing states fail. Lebanon's delivery deficit is the single largest gap between its policy ambitions and its citizen experience. Closing it requires public-sector execution capacity that does not currently exist and must be deliberately built.

At the monitoring stage, the question is whether the indicators are moving in the right direction at the right speed. Monitoring is the discipline by which the cycle becomes self-correcting rather than self-congratulating.

At the evolution stage, the question is what should be kept, what should be retired, and what new goals should be set in light of what has been learned. Evolution is the stage at which the cycle either compounds or stagnates.

However, this cycle is not enough. It demands five disciplines that, taken together, determine whether the Secular Start-Up State works in practice.

The first is Trust. More than 80 percent of the population does not trust politicians. Trust will not be won by speeches; it must be earned by visible, repeated, measurable delivery. Every quick win the foundation ships is a deposit in the trust account. Every missed deadline is a withdrawal. The foundation operates as if every commitment is being watched – because it is.

The second is Audiences. One size does not fit it all. The country is a mosaic of regions, generations, education levels and economic

conditions. Community mapping and audience segmentation are not marketing techniques; they are operational requirements. A national message that does not adapt to its audience does not reach its audience.

The third is Conversation. The sender- receiver broadcast model is dead. The Initiative does not lecture citizens; it engages with them, listens to them, and adjusts in response. Legitimacy and credibility come from dialogue and exchange, not from announcement.

The fourth is Influence. Like respect, it is earned rather than granted. We do not assert influence; it demonstrates competence and let's influence follow. The end game – the improvement we will bring to society – is described plainly, repeatedly, and in citizen-facing language.

The fifth is Capability. Behind every process are people, structures and tools that are fit for purpose. An outreach architecture needs to be built in a way that every component serves an objective, and reviewed against one question: are they doing the work it was designed to do?

These five challenges are not obstacles to the cycle. They are the cycle's actual subject matter. The framework that addresses them is the platform stack described in the next chapters.

22

THE ISLAND THAT SAID YES

The best way to predict the future is to create it.

—Peter Drucker—

Taiwan's transformation did not begin in a server room. For four decades after World War II, the island was governed by the Kuomintang under martial law — one of the longest in modern history. When it was finally lifted in 1987, Taiwan had to build democratic culture almost entirely from scratch. Its first direct presidential election was held in 1996, the same year the internet arrived in meaningful numbers. Democracy and the web grew up together, fusing in ways neither Europe nor Asia had anticipated.

By the 2010s, that fusion had produced a highly connected civil society — but also deep political fractures. They reached a flashpoint in March 2014, when students occupied Taiwan's parliament to block a sweeping trade agreement with mainland China, negotiated in secret with no public scrutiny. Within days, half a million people filled the streets. What distinguished the protest was its infrastructure: embedded among the activists was g0v — 'gov-zero' — a community of civic hackers who built the movement's entire communication backbone in days. Live streams, donation coordination, legal monitoring, police-tracking: all volunteer-built, all open-source. One of those hackers was a twenty-three-year-old self-described conservative anarchist named Audrey Tang.

"In Taiwan, the internet and democracy evolved and spread in tandem. Citizens understood that democracy — like any social technology — is enriched when people work together to improve society."

— Audrey Tang, former Digital Minister of Taiwan

When the DPP won the 2016 elections, the new government made an extraordinary decision: instead of treating g0v as an adversary, they invited it inside. Audrey Tang was appointed Taiwan's first Digital Minister, with a mandate to reverse-mentor the government on digital civic participation.

How Democracy Became a Tool

The most consequential innovation to emerge from this period was not software. It was a process. vTaiwan — launched in 2014 — became an open consultation platform operating in four stages: a topic is proposed by any citizen, ministry, or civil group; the public engages via Pol.is, an AI-powered tool designed to surface consensus rather than amplify conflict; facilitators map the agreements and divisions; and the government acts on the result, explaining publicly how citizen input shaped the final policy.

Pol.is is the engine. Unlike social media, which rewards provocation, Pol.is allows no replies — only agree, disagree, or write a new statement. Machine learning then clusters participants in real time, revealing where large groups actually agree across factional lines. The result is not a poll. It is a map of genuine public opinion, tensions and all.

In its first decade, vTaiwan facilitated more than twenty-eight contested national issues, and over eighty percent led to decisive government action. The Uber case is instructive: rather than impose a solution, the government opened a vTaiwan process.

Four thousand participants produced a consensus that crossed the pro-Uber and anti-Uber divide — a framework Uber publicly accepted. A parallel platform, join.gov.tw, let any citizen lodge a petition; 5,000 signatures triggered a mandatory ministerial meeting. A seventeen-year-old used it to ban plastic straws. It passed into law.

The Architect and the Conditions

Taiwan's digital democracy had an architect. Audrey Tang — self-taught programmer, retired by thirty-three, transgender woman, conservative anarchist — negotiated unusual terms when offered the Digital Minister role: every meeting she attended would be publicly transcribed and released. She would be available to any citizen for forty-five minutes, no agenda required. Her governing philosophy rested on a single principle she called radical transparency: opacity is the engine of distrust, and the only way to break the cycle is to flood the system with light.

She described the state not as a manager of citizens but as a platform — its job is not to produce solutions but to release data, remove barriers, and get out of the way. What Tang demonstrated, above all, was that reform systems are fragile. They can be built with great care and undone in a single administration. The answer is not to rely on good people but to distribute power so widely that no single actor can easily dismantle what has been made.

Taiwan succeeded because five conditions held: the state chose to trust citizens rather than manage them; civil society had already built the infrastructure before the government arrived; the process was designed to make consensus more rewarding than confrontation; participation was made genuinely easy, for everyone; and results were visible and binding. When vTaiwan produced a consensus, the government acted — and explained

why. In a context of deep institutional distrust, that visibility was not cosmetic. It was the foundation on which trust was rebuilt, one policy at a time.

Taiwan's digital democracy was not built in a year, or even five. What was built was not a campaign. It was infrastructure.



23

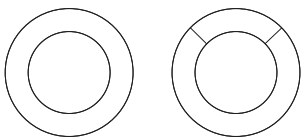
THE SQUARE-SAHA PLATFORM

In 1882, the French thinker Ernest Renan asked what makes a nation. Not race, he argued, nor language, religion or geography. A nation exists because its people keep consenting to live together. Its existence, he said, is " a daily plebiscite".

Lebanon has never held that plebiscite. Its communities consented once, in 1943, and have been renogotiating the terms ever since. Saha is built to let citizens do what the architecture never allowed: to consent, every day, across every community, to the shared things that make a country.

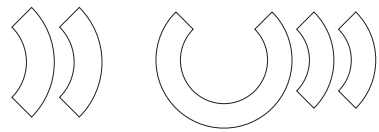
SAHA is a national civic initiative to rebuild Lebanon through collaboration, and dialogue. It is the agora celebrating equality and a common purpose. It is where ideas flourish and are developed to build and support the Secular Start-Up State.

Welcome to SAHA !



Core (The Circle)

- Symbolizes *Saha*, a meeting ground of equality & dialogue.
- Inspired by **king Arthur's Round Table,** where every voice has an reach opportunity.
- Represents unity, openness, and shared purpose.



Waves

- Represent influence, communication, and social impact.
- Each wave reflects how one voice creates ripples of change.
- Symbol of movement, momentum, and awareness.

Meaning

Together, they embody *Saha's* mission → "A space where voices meet, ideas spread, and society grows".

The name and the symbol are deliberate. Saha is the public square – the space where citizens have historically met to debate, decide and announce. The visual identity draws on the circle, which is symbolically inspired by King Arthur's Round Table – a meeting ground where every voice has reach and opportunity. The circle is surrounded by waves, which represent influence, communication and social impact. Each wave reflects how a single voice creates ripples of change. Together, the circle and the waves embody Saha's mission: a space where voices meet, ideas spread, and society grows.

SAHA's core principles are non-negotiable and clarifying. Inclusion and diversity without ideology. Dialogue and respect, even where disagreement is sharp. Shared national goals as the basis of conversation. Modernization through technology. Accountability and measurable impact at every stage.

The intention is not that Saha replaces the parliament. The parliament will, in the foreseeable future, continue to be where laws are made. The intention is that Saha changes the cost calculation of the parliament. When a proposal has been debated by ten thousand citizens, has been refined by experts who have nothing to gain from a particular outcome, has accumulated public endorsement that cross confessional lines, the parliamentarian who opposes it without explanation has, for the first time, to pay a price.

This is not how reform usually works in Lebanon. Reform usually is a behind-the-scenes negotiation between communal leaders, in which the citizen is told the outcome after the fact and asked to be grateful. Saha proposes to invert the sequence. The citizens are in negotiation. The leader is the one who comes in at the end. It will simply introduce a new narrative in opposition to the current political court and waffling.

It is worth noting what this architecture is not subversive. It is not a political party. It is not, in any sense, an opposition movement. It does not endorse candidates. It does not organize campaigns. It refuses, by design, to position itself as the alternative to the political class, because positioning itself in that way would convert it into the very thing it is meant to outflank.

It is something stronger and, in the Lebanese context, more useful. It is a secular infrastructure: a piece of common plumbing, owned by no one, that any Lebanese citizen with a phone and an opinion can use. The political class is welcome to use it too. The foundation's wager is that, given a sufficient visible piece of common plumbing, the political class will eventually have to cave in.

And most importantly, it would challenge the status quo, and it introduces, at its heart, a new political consciousness establishing the prime and only measure of politics: the citizen's social mobility.

SAHA is built on four operational pillars, each with a distinct role and a distinct identity color. Saha itself is the secular platform – the structured space for citizens, experts and professionals to discuss ideas and projects, share knowledge, advance proposals, and pursue social mobility. Sawtak is the national sentiment engine – a WhatsApp-based daily polling and dashboard system that gives policymakers, NGOs and media a real-time read on what citizens are thinking and how priorities are moving. Sada is the social media and awareness arm – the storytelling layer that promotes civic awareness through video and content on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook, mobilizing youth and inspiring national pride. Hiwar is the national roundtable – a weekly talk show that brings policymakers and citizens to the same table, half and half, to discuss the country's hardest problems and surface workable roadmaps.

Together, the four pillars deliver the same loop in four registers. Saha is people and ideas. Sawtak is data and truth. Sada is awareness and voice. Hiwar is leaders and accountability. The loop converts dialogue into data, data into awareness, awareness into mobilization, and mobilization into national change. Each pillar amplifies the others; none can be removed without breaking the loop.

THE FOUR PILLARS



The four civic platforms: SAHA (the square), Sawtak (the voice), Sada (the echo), Hiwar (the dialogue).

SAHA – THE SECULAR PLATFORM

SAHA, the platform, is the digital meeting ground at the center of the system. Its objective is to encourage civil participation and innovation. Its identity color is green – for growth and collaboration.

The platform exists to make four things easy. First, citizens, experts and professionals can discuss ideas and projects in

structured groups organized by sector, theme and initiative. Second, knowledge can be shared across communities that, in the analogue world, rarely meet. Third, proposals can be advanced, refined and voted on inside a transparent process. Fourth, social mobility is enabled by exposure – to mentors, to opportunities, to communities of practice – that the existing social infrastructure does not provide.

The platform is deliberated neutral. It does not endorse parties or candidates. It does not amplify identity politics. It applies to civility's rules consistently and transparently. Its credibility depends on being the venue that any Lebanese citizen of any background, can enter on equal terms.

The platform is also instrumented. Every discussion produces data on what citizens are arguing about where consensus is forming, and where blockers persist. That data feeds the Communication Office and, through it, the policymaking apparatus. The platform is, in this sense, both an end (the venue of civic life) and a means (the input layer of an evidence-based policy cycle).

SAWTAK – THE NATIONAL SENTIMENT ENGINE

SAWTAK is the country's living heartbeat. Its objective is to give Lebanon a real-time read on what its citizens are thinking, feeling and prioritizing. Its identity color is yellow – for awareness and clarity.

The mechanism is intentionally simple. SAWTAK runs WhatsApp-based daily polls, with results aggregated into dashboards that are accessible to policy makers, NGOs and media. Citizens opt- in. questions are short, neutral and clearly framed. Responses are anonymous in aggregate but

representative at the segment level – by region, age, education, employment status and other indicators that matter for policy.

SAWTAK does three things at once. It collects accurate, real-time citizen feedback on the issues that matter. It provides a credible, non-political evidence base for policy makers. And it gives the public a transparent view of where the country stands on the questions of the day. Sentiment that was previously assumed becomes measured. Decisions that were previously rhetorical become data anchored.

The platform's discipline is independence. SAWTAK is run by the *FUTURE READY* Foundation, not by any government, party or donor. Its methodology, its sample frames and its results are published in full. Its credibility is the asset; that credibility is protected obsessively.

SADA – AWARENESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA

SADA is the storytelling arm of SAHA. Its objective is to spark social awareness and civic change through media. Its identity color is red — for action and passion.

SADA produces and distributes video and content across the four channels where Lebanese audiences — and especially Lebanese youth — actually spend their time: TikTok, Instagram, YouTube and Facebook. The content is not abstract policy. It is short, sharp, and translates the character-driven storytelling that framework into language that lands. A reform becomes a face. A statistic becomes a story. A demand becomes a movement.

SADA exists to do three things. It mobilizes youth — the segment most likely to disengage, emigrate or radicalize, and the

segment whose engagement is most strategically valuable. It inspires national pride — the precondition for any civic project that asks citizens to invest, take risks, and stay. And it converts the discussions that take place inside SAHA and the data captured by SAWTAK into narratives that travel.

SADA also serves a defensive role. Lebanese public discourse is saturated with manufactured outrage, sectarian provocation and disinformation. SADA contests that space with discipline, accuracy and craft — the same craft that has built durable consumer brands in far harder markets.

HIWAR – THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE

HIWAR is where dialogue becomes accountability. Its objective is to enable transparent and balanced dialogue for national reform. Its identity color is purple — for wisdom and equality.

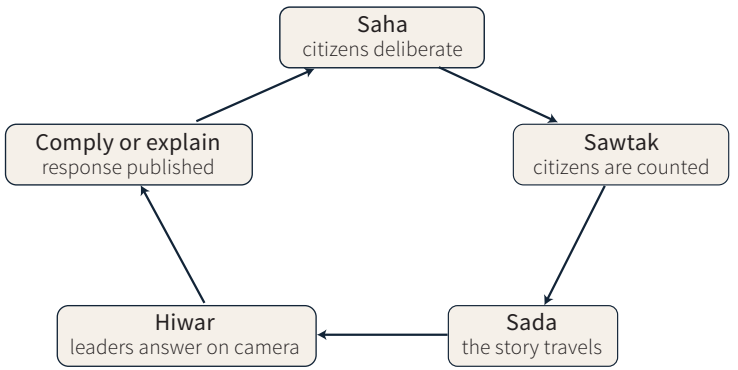
The format is a weekly talk show that brings policymakers and citizens to one table — literally and figuratively. Half the seats are occupied by elected officials, ministers, mayors and MPs. The other half are occupied by citizens — chosen to reflect the actual demographic, regional and sectoral composition of the country, not the producer's preferences.

The discipline of HIWAR is what makes it different from existing political television. Discussions are structured around problems and roadmaps, not personalities. Time is split equally between policymakers and citizens. Outcomes - actions, commitments, follow-ups —are documented and published. The audience can see whether the people in power return to honor what they said on air.

HIWAR closes the loop. SAHA surfaces what citizens are debating. SAWTAK measures were the consensus lies. SADA

carries the story to the public. HIWAR brings the people who can change the law into the same room as the people who will live with the law, and asks them, on camera, what they intend to do about it.

Together the four instruments form one loop:



24

FIVE REASONS IT COULD FAIL

There is a kind of advocacy that pretends nothing could go wrong. This thesis is not that kind. Five things could derail what has been described in these pages. Each is plausible. Each has, in the history of Lebanese civic initiatives, happened. The honest version of this proposal is the version that names them and proposes how the project might survive them.

The first risk is co-optation. Every Lebanese civic initiative of any visibility has, at some point, been approached by a political faction with an offer of support. The offer is always reasonable on its surface. “We agree with what you’re doing. We’d like to help.” We can connect you to funders. We can give you airtime on our channels. We can, perhaps, host you in our offices. The offer is also, always, the beginning of the end. The initiative becomes associated with the faction. The opposing factions denounce it. The citizens, who are very good at reading the signals, conclude that this is another communal project dressed up in civic language. The initiative loses its standing, and the political faction has neutralized a competitor for the price of an office. The defense against co-optation is institutional. Funding has to be visibly diverse, with no single donor exceeding a stated cap. The donor list has to be public. The editorial code has to prohibit paid content from political actors. An external auditor, drawn from outside the country, has to certify the independence of the operation on a regular basis. None of this is exotic. All of it is standard practice for serious civic organizations. It works.

The second risk is sectarianism. In a confessional society, any project that does not visibly belong to a community will, within weeks, be assigned one. The assignment will be done by the political class's media operations, and it will be done deliberately. The project's founders are Christians; therefore, the project is Christian. The project's funders include diaspora figures; therefore, the project is foreign. The project is critical of Hezbollah's positions on disarmament; therefore the project is hostile to the Shi'a community as everything is instrumentalized in Lebanese politics. The defense is operational. Staffing must visibly draw from every community, every region, every social class, on a basis that an outside observer can verify. Programming must address issues that matter to every community, not only the issues that matter to the founders' community. Hiwar in particular must hold its round table without flinching from the hard questions for every community, including the questions that the founders find uncomfortable. The project will be accused of bias regardless of what it does; the defence is that the accusation, when it comes, must be visibly false.

The third risk is disinformation. Sawtak's polling is, by design, exposed. Any actor with the resources to coordinate ten thousand responses can, on a given day, manipulate the dashboard. The risk is not theoretical. State and non-state actors across the region have invested seriously in the manipulation of public-opinion measurements. The defence is technical and procedural. Phone-number verification weeds out the simplest attacks. Geographic and demographic balancing detects coordinated responses from a single area. Statistical methods flag patterns that don't look like organic opinion. The methodology is published, so external researchers can verify it. The results, when they look anomalous, are flagged as anomalous. Honesty about the limits of the polling is the foundation of its credibility.

The fourth risk is citizen disengagement. The Lebanese citizen has been promised reform many times. The reform has rarely arrived.

The citizen, accordingly, has developed an immune response to civic initiatives. The slick logo, the optimistic press release, the well-funded launch event — all of it triggers, in the experienced Lebanese citizen, a wariness she has earned. The defence is delivery. The platform has to ship visible, useful things in its first six months. A policy paper that actually changes a debate. A poll result that actually surfaces in a parliamentary discussion. A Hiwar episode that produces a quote a minister cannot walk back. The reform will be measured against milestones the platform itself has announced. If the platform delivers, the citizens will lend their attention. If the platform does not deliver, no slogan will recover them.

The fifth risk is the obvious one. Money runs out. First-year funding for an initiative of this size is, as the budget chapter showed (in the appendix), easy to assemble. Half a million dollars from twenty diaspora donors, two foundations, and three corporate sponsors who care about Lebanon. The harder problem is year three. The harder problem is whether the project has built, by then, the kind of constituency — of citizen users, of subscribers to Hiwar, of foundations who have come to trust its methodology — that allows it to fundraise as an established institution rather than as a hopeful startup. The defense is to build that constituency from day one. Every operational decision should be evaluated, in part, against whether it strengthens the project's capacity to sustain itself. This is uncomfortable advice; it implies that a project ostensibly devoted to public good must, simultaneously, be obsessive about its own institutional survival. The alternative is the alternative every Lebanese civic project has lived through a brilliant first year, a competent second year, and a third year in which the lights are turned off.

25

A COMPASS FOR A LOST WORLD

Imagine, for a moment, that this works. It is the spring of 2035. The Lebanese Country Brand Index has climbed into the top forty, ahead of where it was in 2014. The Social Mobility Index, now in its ninth year of public publication, has improved measurably in education and access to technology, and modestly in the conditions of fair work. The Corruption Perceptions Index, having reached its historic low of twenty-two in 2024, is now thirty-one. Lebanon ranks among the most improved countries in the Middle East and North Africa region. The improvement is small in absolute terms. It is the first improvement in any direction in fifteen years. The economy is growing at four percent annually, as it has been since 2025. GDP per capita has recovered to its 2018 peak but moving. Remittances, which were the economy's life support during the worst years, are no longer thirty percent of GDP; they are sixteen percent, because the domestic economy has grown around them. The currency is stable. The banks have been restructured painfully, with losses distributed by a formula that the parliament debated, in public, across eighteen months. Banking secrecy was lifted in 2025 and has not been reinstated. A new generation has begun to come back. Not all of them.

Not most of them. But some. The software engineers and the doctors and the architects and the academics who left between 2019 and 2024 have begun, in their thirties, to consider whether they could raise their children in Beirut after all. The numbers are

still small — the diaspora is still three times the size of the resident population — but the slope has changed. Saha has a hundred and forty thousand registered users. Sawtak's daily polls reach three hundred thousand citizens by WhatsApp. Sada's short videos average eight hundred thousand views in their first week. Hiwar is, by audience, the second most-watched political programme in the country. None of these is a revolution. All of them, together, constitute a fact: that a citizen who wants to know what the country thinks, and to participate in shaping what the country does, has, for the first time, a place to go.

The civil state, in 2035, has not yet arrived. Confessionalism is still in books. The president is still a Maronite; the prime minister is still a Sunni; the speaker is still a Shi'a. Senior office is still allocated by confession. The constitutional transition that this essay describes — the abolition of political confessionalism in favor of civic citizenship — has been debated repeatedly, in Saha and in Hiwar, but has not been legislated. And yet the ground beneath the system has shifted. The civil-service appointments of 2028 were, for the first time in living memory, competed openly, with examination results published.

The judicial appointments of 2029 followed the same pattern. The cabinet of 2030, formed after the parliamentary elections in May, contains four ministers who are not affiliated with any of the historic confessional parties — a small number, but a number that would have been zero a decade earlier. The habit of equal citizenship is being built, by practice, before the law catches up. This is how institutions actually change. Not in a single legislative moment, but in a slow accumulation of small departures from precedent, each of which becomes the new precedent for the next small departure. The civil state will not be voted into existence. It will be built, transaction by transaction, until one day someone notices that it is already there.

All of this is conditional. None of it is inevitable. The country could just as easily lose its 2025 reform government to the next external shock, the next regional war, the next collapse of the central settlement. The civic platform could be smothered in its first year by a coordinated political attack. The diaspora could give up. The young could continue to leave. The Corruption Perceptions Index could continue its long descent. Saha could fail to find its users. Sawtak could be manipulated. Sada could be drowned out. Hiwar could be cancelled. The history of Lebanese reform is overwhelmingly the history of brilliant proposals that did not survive contact with the country they were proposed for. And yet. The argument of this thesis is not that the proposal will succeed. The argument is that the proposal is the right one to attempt, because the alternative — another decade of the architecture that produced the catastrophe — is not survivable.

The choice is not between reform and stability. There is no stability on offer. The choice is between reform and continued, possibly accelerated, decline. In that choice, a privately funded, citizen- facing, digitally enabled civic infrastructure is among the more promising bets available, because it does not require the political class to act first. It requires the political class to act second, after the citizens have done the work that confessionalism has prevented them from doing.

The Initiative has a tagline. It comes at the end of every document it produces, and it is the tagline with which this thesis will end. Think Tomorrow. It is not a slogan. It is an instruction. The Lebanese political conversation has, for thirty years, been a conversation about yesterday — the war, the assassination, the previous prime minister, the lost decade, the missed opportunity. Yesterday has earned every word that has been written about it. But yesterday is not, any longer, where the country is going to be repaired. Repair will happen in the country's tomorrow, in the

country its children will inherit, in the institutions those children will inhabit when the current generation of politicians is, finally, finished. To think tomorrow is to refuse the comfort of grievance. Thinking tomorrow is to accept that the architecture this country has lived under is not, after all, the only architecture available to it. To think tomorrow is to do the unglamorous work of building, in advance of the constitutional moment, the habits, the data and the public expectations that the moment, when it comes, will require. The civil state is not yet here. But the materials are on the ground. The square is being swept. The voice is being tested. The echo is being tuned. The dialogue is being scheduled. The citizens, despite every reasonable temptation to give up, are still here, and still talking. That is more than this country had in 2019. It might, with care, be enough.

26

THINK TOMORROW

This book has argued one thing throughout. Lebanon's recovery is not a matter of fortune. It is a matter of choice. The framework, the platforms, the indexes, the budget and the communication architecture are all designed and costed. The question that remains is whether the country will build them.

The deadline embedded in this framework is 2035. The horizon is deliberate. Eight years is long enough for institutional change to compound and short enough that an entire generation of Lebanese can hold its leaders to account inside that window. Vote for Lebanon 2035 is not a slogan. It is the contract.

By 2035, the Country Brand Index will have moved measurably. By 2035, SAHA will have become the venue where Lebanese civic life actually happens. By 2035, the e-government layer will have replaced the patronage layer that has corrupted public service for a generation. By 2035, the diaspora will have begun to return – not as remitters, but as builders.

None of this guaranteed. None of it is unfounded either. Countries with worse starting conditions have done harder things in shorter timeframes. Rwanda recovered from genocide. Ireland recovered from emigration and stagnation. Estonia recovered from Soviet occupation. The United Arab Emirates built a federation out of a confederation of villages in a single generation. In each case, the recipe was the same: a clear vision, a credible institution, a

disciplined plan, a measured score, and the courage to keep going when the comfortable alternative was the stop.

Lebanon has the people. Lebanon has the diaspora. Lebanon has the soft power. Lebanon has the natural endowment. Lebanon has, in defiance of every reason it should not, the appetite. What Lebanon has lacked is the architecture. The architecture is in this Essay.

The way forward is open. The framework exists. The question is no longer what to do. The question is whether to begin thinking about tomorrow.



APPENDIX

THE SCORECARD

A *FUTURE READY* Lebanon needs a scorecard. Reforms that are not measured drift. Indexes that are not published cannot be defended. The Civil Start-Up State commits, publicly, to two indexes whose movement determines whether the state is delivering or not.

The first is the “Country Brand Index”. It tracks Lebanon's global image— how the country is perceived by investors, tourists, diaspora and partners across the dimensions of governance, investment climate, human capital, growth, sustainability and influence. The index is global, comparable, and externally referenced. It is the public-facing proof that the country is moving toward the top tier of nations rather than sliding away from it. The Country Brand Index strengthens confidence and attracts foreign investment by giving outside capital a common, recognizable yardstick. Furthermore, it becomes a participative tool that encourages every citizen to participate and take pride in the National progress.

The second is the Social Mobility Index. It measures the citizen-facing reality of the reforms. It tracks upward mobility for the population — whether a Lebanese child born in a low-income household has a real chance of reaching a higher one, whether educational attainment translates into employment, whether employment translates into savings, and whether savings translate into wealth and household formation. The Social Mobility Index reinforces trust in government performance and national opportunity. Citizens know whether the ladder is real because the index reports on it annually.

Together, the two indexes create a public dashboard against which every minister, every reform, every budget allocation and every

parliamentary vote can be evaluated. They make the framework honest. They make underperformance visible. They make progress credible. And they ensure that the agenda is judged on the only criteria that ultimately matter: are investors coming, and are citizens advancing?

The outcome is a Future-Ready Lebanon built on transparency, merit and shared prosperity.

Index	What it answers	Built from	Who publishes the inputs
Country Standing Index	Is Lebanon governed well, and seen to be?	Governance indicators; digital government; perceived corruption; global reputation	World Bank; United Nations; Transparency International; Brand Finance
Social Mobility Index	Can a Lebanese child rise?	Learning outcomes; youth employment and inactivity; access to formal jobs; education mobility between parents and children; citizens' own sense of opportunity	National statistics and labour surveys; Sawtak's quarterly panel; independent surveys

THE COMMUNICATION OFFICE

The Communication Office is the operating engine of the strategy. It is structured as a matrix of subject-matter expertise supported by best-in-class capabilities.

Subject-matter expertise is organized around the six pillars of the framework: Rule of Law and Governance, Economic Development, Financial Reforms, Infrastructure and Utilities, Social Reform, and Sustainability. Each subject has a dedicated lead and a dedicated content roadmap. No reform is communicated without its substantive owner.

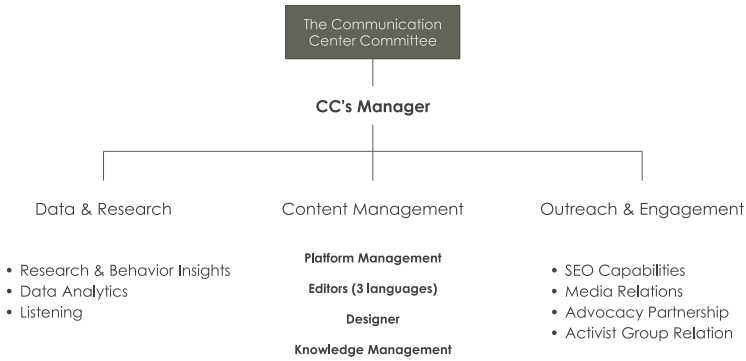
Capabilities are organized into three functions. Content Management runs editorial across three languages — Arabic, English and French — with a design discipline, a knowledge management practice, and a platform management capability that keeps the digital surface area coherent. Data and Research runs research and behavioural insights, data analytics, listening across the open web and social platforms, and data capturing and analytics that feeds back into the policymaking cycle. Outreach and Engagement runs SEO, media relations, advocacy partnerships and activist group relations — the human networks through which the agenda actually moves.

The office is governed by a Communication Center Committee that protects strategic alignment and signs off on the calendar. Operational delivery sits with the CC's Manager. The structure is deliberately lean. The discipline of a small high-quality team is preferred to the politics of a large mediocre one.

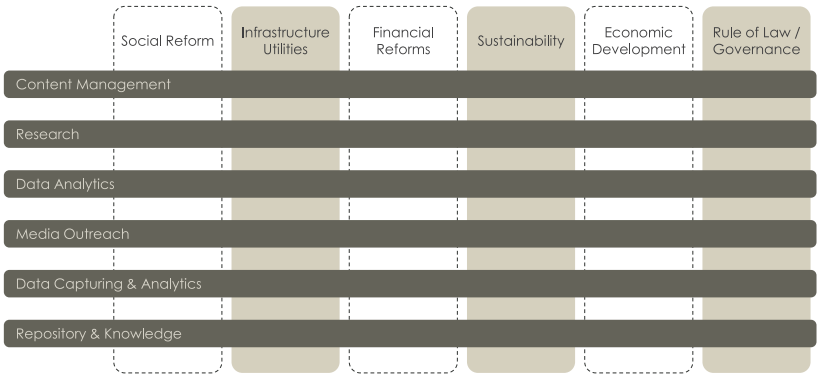
The cost model is detailed in the budget chapter that follows. Inside one year of operations, the Communication Office is forecast to deliver the analogue and digital deployment of all four

SAHA pillars, the rollout of the strategy across the three communication dimensions, and the build-out of a knowledge repository that becomes the institutional memory of the Civil Start-Up State.

COMMUNICATION OFFICE

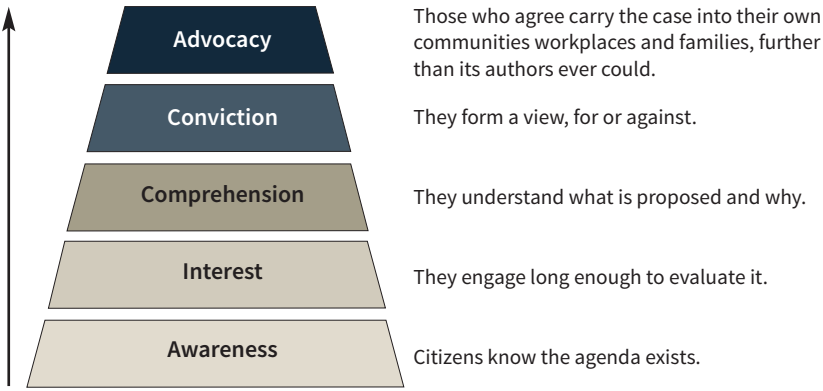


A Matrix Subject matter expertise supported by best-in-class capabilities



For the advocacy team, the principle is simple: one strategy, one voice. A reform agenda this ambitious requires a communication discipline more rigorous than any political campaign Lebanon has run.

We borrow a ladder from our own profession, with one correction. A citizen is not a prospect to be converted. The aim is not agreement with us; it is participation in the decision. The ladder has five rungs:



One message everywhere

The strategy is calibrated by subject and by audience: a pensioner and a student need different examples. But in a country where regions too often map onto sect, one rule is absolute. The message is the same in every governorate. The examples changes – a school in Akkar, a clinic in Nabatieh, a water network in Zahle – but the substance never does. A project that says different things to different communities is just another commune project.

WHAT IT COSTS

Here is the part of every proposal that the reader skips. This thesis is going to ask you not to.

The first-year operating budget of the entire architecture described in this book – Saha, Sawtak, Sada, Hiwar, the communication office that runs them, the branding, the polling infrastructure, the video production, the data analysis, the editors, the cloud servers – is approximately four hundred and fifty-seven thousand United States Dollars.

Read that figure again. Less than half a million dollars. For a year of operations of a civic infrastructure intended to do, for a country of five and a half million people, what nothing else in that country has done in thirty years.

By comparison, the World Bank, in June 2025, approved a quarter of a billion dollars for the first phase of Lebanon's post-war reconstruction, with another seven hundred and fifty million expected to follow. The estimated reconstruction need is eleven billion. The Central Bank holds reserves, the last time anyone counted publicly, of around ten and a half billion. The financial gap in the banking system is around eighty billion.

Against any of these numbers. Half a million dollars is a rounding error.

The budget breaks down approximately as follows, Saha, the platform, costs eighty-eight thousand five hundred dollars to redesign, host, and maintain for a year. Sawtak, the sentiment engine, costs sixty-one thousand four hundred, of which twelve thousand is the WhatsApp messaging at one cent per message. Sada, the social media arm, costs seventy-two thousand, mostly for video production at three videos a month. Hiwar, the talk show, costs thirty thousand

to design and team up, with production budgeted separately depending on sponsorship. Branding costs five thousand. The communication office, which staffs all of it, runs at two hundred thousand four hundred for the year.

Already invested, in the years leading up to this proposal: a hundred and twenty thousand on the foundational social mobility study, twenty-five thousand on an earlier version of the e-democracy platform, and thirty thousand on two short films that have been used to seed the conversation.

Why is it so cheap?

Because the architecture is digital, and digital is cheap once you stop trying to do everything yourself. Saha runs on a standard cloud infrastructure that costs three and a half thousand dollars a year. Sawtak runs on a WhatsApp business API that costs cents per message. Sada runs on platforms (TikTok, Instagram, YouTube) that distribute content for free. Hiwar, the most expensive component, runs on a broadcast model that has been priced for thirty years.

And because the staffing is lean. The communication office is designed to fit on the back of one organization chart: a manager, a small data and research team, a content management team with editors in three languages, an outreach and engagement team.

Total monthly cost, including overhead: sixteen thousand seven hundred dollars. Fewer than fifteen people, doing the work that, in a state-led version of this project, would absorb a ministry.

The lesson is one the Estonian state learned thirty years ago. If you build the right plumbing, you do not need a lot of plumbers. The plumbing does the work.

A NOTE ON SOURCES

This book is a work of advocacy. It is also a work of evidence. The numbers in it are real, and they come from named places. They are listed here for the reader who wants to check. The economic figures — GDP per capita, growth rates, poverty rates, multidimensional poverty, the geography of poverty — come from the World Bank: the Lebanon Economic Monitor (Winter 2025 edition, January 2026), the Lebanon Poverty and Equity Assessment (May 2024), and the Lebanon Systematic Country Diagnostic (2024). The figures on reconstruction costs come from the Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment published by the World Bank in November 2024. The corruption scores come from Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index 2024, released in February 2025. The political-economy account of confessionalism and its consequences draws on the academic literature surveyed in publications including the Baker Institute's work on political sectarianism, the New Global Order's analyses of confessional dynamics, and the work of the Arab Center in Washington on the failure of political sectarianism. The figures on emigration come from the Arab Barometer's Lebanon migration insights factsheet, published in August 2024 after a wave of fieldwork conducted between February and April of that year. The earlier emigration desire figure of A SECULAR START-UP STATE.

Seventy-seven percent of Lebanese youth comes from the Arab Youth Survey conducted by ASDA'A BCW. The figures on doctor's emigration come from reporting in Foreign Policy and the Borgen Project. The

Estonia material draws on the United Nations E-Government Survey 2024, the Frost & Sullivan Institute's 2026 study of Estonian e-governance, and the Hertie School's analysis of the X-Road interoperability system. The Country Brand Index rankings come from FutureBrand's 2020 publication. The theoretical framework draws on the work of Douglass North (Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance, 1990), Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson (Why Nations Fail, 2012, and the 2024 Nobel citation), Raj Chetty and colleagues on intergenerational mobility, and Miles Corak's formulation of the Great Gatsby Curve. Albert Hirschman's Exit, Voice, and Loyalty (1970) supply the framework used in the discussion of emigration as institutional signal.

The proposals at the centre of this book — the six-pillar framework, the four-pillar civic platform, the budget, the governance arrangements — come from the working documents of the ***FUTURE READY*** Lebanon Foundation, including the May 2026 deck on which this book is based. Any errors in the rendering of those proposals are the rendering's, not the foundation.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Farid Chehab is a talented speaker. He has given several regional and international conferences to the communication industry. Among them: “The knife and the Sharpener”, “Nobel or Cannes”, “The Mother-of-all-Integration”, “Welcome to the 21st Century”, “10 ways for one million returns”, “Chief Inventor Officer” and the most recent one in Harvard: “From Chaos to Creativity”.

He wrote A Bet for a National Conscience in 2011, Of Happiness and Ideas in 2016, A Bridge Over 21st Century in 2018, and Of Intelligence in 2023.



A passionate believer in the notion of “Happy dissatisfaction”, **Roy Haddad** has used this motivation to question the readiness of Governments and Companies in a constantly evolving world. This led him to advocate in all his engagements that citizens or consumers build relationships based on experiences derived from a cluster of value satisfactions that are never static.

In many conferences and white papers, such as “The times they are a-changing, are we?”, or “From Broadcast to Narrowcast”, or the provocative “Death of the Target Audience" as well as Oxford Said Business School's now-famous “The Unseen opportunities”, he radically transformed the standards by which we should communicate.



"Think Tomorrow" is the simple thought that this essay advocates. It argues that Lebanon's repair will not arrive through the next political settlement, the next donor conference, or the next sectarian bargain. It will be built – quietly, digitally, citizen by citizen – by credible institutions animated by citizen participation that holds the State accountable.

ISBN 978-2-913875-79-1