

**From a Shattered Mosaic to a Masterpiece: The Day Lebanon Wears the Color of
Citizenship**

Ahmad Machmouchi

American University of Beirut

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Dr. Helena Karakazian

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What changes in Lebanon's governmental policies can strengthen national citizenship, leading to the country's socio-economic development?

Lebanon has always been a vibrant mosaic—a canvas of various distinctly colored parts which either look magnificent when unitedly put together, or just a form of chaos. Every Lebanese “wishes” to see the colors of their country shine, but as ironically as it could be, what prevents the colors of its beauty are other colors- colors of separation and division. A simple walk through our landscapes reveals breathtaking views and cultural richness, yet it also prompts other unfortunate questions: "Which sect does this color represent? Whose flag is this? Isn't this city X-colored?"

Unfortunately, instead of using our rich society with various backgrounds and traditions to do what is good, we have divided ourselves into countless sects, too many that we don't have enough colors anymore! For generations, we have embraced the ideal of "All for the country"—a refrain from our national anthem—yet our reality shows, “my sect, then, my country.” The true problem lies in our conception of citizenship. While citizenship may have several definitions, the definition I believe fits best is the mutual-benefit relationship between residents in a country and its authorities, filled with a sense of belonging to the land.

As with any profound challenge, transformation is possible only if we dare to reimagine our foundational principles and believe in the change. Theoretically, it's easy: we'll only see the true colors of Lebanon, when we prioritize it above all other colors. Nevertheless, the actual effective question with practical implications is: What changes in Lebanon's governmental policies can be made to strengthen national citizenship, leading to the country's socio-economic development?

The most famous Lebanese symbol is with no doubt the Cedar, the resilient beautiful tree everyone aspires to be like. The secret to this tree's uniqueness is the strong roots it creates in its early years. Just like that, my first thought was to understand the problem from its roots, education. Till this day I remember the super bad-quality pictures we had in our civics book which got me thinking, "could our education system be more outdated than that?"

A recent scholarly article by Prof. Maria Ghosn-Chelala titled, "Global Citizenship Education in Conflict-Affected Settings: Implications of Teachers' Views and Contextual Challenges for the Lebanese Case," resonates deeply with my personal experience. The study highlights how teachers, burdened with an outdated and divided curriculum, struggle to convey a cohesive understanding of global and national citizenship (Ghosn-Chelala, 2020). It poses vital questions: How can children develop a robust sense of national identity when the very textbooks they rely on are scattered with conflicting narratives? Why do our schools continue to fail in providing the ethical and historical grounding necessary for our citizens to feel truly Lebanese?

Indeed, as Ghosn-Chelala explains, the LNC (Lebanese National Curriculum) reflects a "fragile political landscape somewhat paralysed by its past" (Ghosn-Chelala 2020). For example, "attempts to produce a standardised history textbook covering Lebanon's civil war period were unsuccessful owing to the absence of political agreement upon its content" (Abouhedid, Nasser, & Blommstein, 2002 as cited in Ghosn-Chelala 2020). Religion is likewise "excluded from the LNC," even though it is essential for reconciliation and intercultural understanding (Ghosn-Chelala, 2020). These present core barriers in the current curriculum to the integration of healthy citizenship for changing the situation of the country for the better. Nevertheless, what are issues now are also opportunities for growth when tackled.

Personally, I believe in the power of learning from the to reshape future. A great inclusion of a fair neutral insight into how the concept of citizenship was absent in the times of war would ultimately create generations who refrain from repeating the same mistakes. Therefore, it's never too late for the government to take the initiative of grouping several scholars of different sects and views to craft a curriculum as described. While this has been tried before, and the ministry of education is still trying to update the curriculum (Ghosn-Chelala), the updates will not come to life before making this issue a priority. Furthermore, in citizenship, knowing how to deal with others who might have different ideologies or backgrounds is a main pillar. Prof. Ghosn-Chelala highlights a few key actions that should be taken to strengthen the civics curriculum- the LNC program for teaching citizenship- such as teachers' training and benefitting from technology (2020). The study which focused on teachers' perspectives showed that they themselves aren't satisfied with the current methodology of teaching which is "far from reality". Thus, a newly developed approach is a must.

While I was researching the best methods of education, I encountered Singapore several times. This took me back to a documentary I watched years ago about Singapore- which had blossomed from similar circumstances as Lebanon. This opened a room for researching the core of the question: the actions that should be done, based on learning from example. From the documentary I found an insight of possible policies which can reform citizenship and the country. Titled "The Secrets of Singapore" and part of the series "Thoughts" (Khawatir translated), the episode shows Ahmad al Shugairi, a famous Arab influencer focused on social dilemmas, studying the reasons behind the advancement of Singapore. The ironic part is that the episode was published around 12 years ago, and, yet had portrayed a country much more

advanced than the current Lebanon, so how about the gap now? Nevertheless, the gap could be filled, should we follow the steps of what proved successful.

The documentary highlights three citizenship-related concepts, national unity, laws, and corruption. After the separation from Malaysia in 1965, Singapore was no more than a space for race-backed clashes, and fragmentation of community (Aram TV, 2013), in a great analogy to Lebanon. The prime minister Lee Kuan Yew's main goal was to foster national unity. He disallowed any advantage of one sect over another, and even made English, a neutral language not confined to a certain race, the official language. While such action will not be of benefit in Lebanon, the key takeaway is that all sects are part of the country equally. An alternative implication would be studying the dismantling of the current confessional system: instead of administration seats being split by sects to be split by qualifications (Haidar, R., 2022). While this solution is complex and might not be effective, just putting it on the table and studying it could enhance development and opportunities.

Back to Singapore, what made the country progress is the strict implementation of laws and regulations especially when fighting corruption. "Lee Kuan Yew understood that the citizens lack the background and culture of development, and that this can only be achieved in enacting strict laws that apply to everyone with no exception (Aram TV, 2013)". The presenter was dressed up in a special style saying these words. He was wearing a shirt with a bunch of fines, brought from a touristic place. This pride in the laws lit up my jealousy as the situation in my country is 180 degrees around. Just like Singapore's fines became a core part of its identity, enforcing the mentality of development and active citizenship laws and regulations should be a red line, not to be crossed, especially by people in power in Lebanon.

But laws alone are only half the story. As Vinay Bhargava notes in the ADB Governance Brief, “the effectiveness of good governance and anticorruption programs needs improvement”. He goes on to explain that “development policy makers are recognizing that engaging citizens and civil society can complement government efforts to promote good governance” (Bhargava, 2015). In other words, even the clearest anti-corruption statute or the fairest recruitment system will remain a hollow promise if people don’t believe in it or feel they can’t take part. In Lebanon, where distrust runs deep, policies will have no effect unless citizens themselves are given the tools, and the invitation, to step forward.

Bhargava lays out an emerging “theory of change” that underlines a major point: “Provision of information and capacity development support to citizens and civil society leads to ... increased citizens’ and civil society awareness, capability, and willingness to participate” (2015). Let’s imagine Lebanese town halls where budgets, project plans, and performance data are shared in clear language; imagine digital platforms where any citizen can flag a pothole or suspect crimes without fear. When people see what’s happening and understand how to influence it, they stop being passive observers and become active guardians of the public good.

Of course, context can make or break these efforts. Bhargava warns that initiatives often stumble because “citizens do not have sufficient information to participate and monitor,” “authorities are hostile to civil society,” and “opportunity costs of participation are high” (2015). In Lebanon, where speaking out can carry real risks and time is a luxury few can spare, we must build safe, accessible channels. Only when government reforms meet a ready and empowered citizenship will Lebanon’s mosaic truly unite into a masterpiece.

Finally, it's essential to note the current phase Lebanon is passing through, which might be historical if well exploited. For the first time in years, I have heard the words "I'm optimistic" echoing in my circle. In his post on the "Middle East Council for Global Affairs", former minister of economy and trade and minister of industry of Lebanon Nasser Saidi says, "With a new reform-minded government at the helm, there is a chance the country—with help from the GCC [Gulf Cooperation Council]—can finally put its house in order (Saidi, 2025)." This opinion has been spreading to many economic and social experts, in what is being labelled as "Lebanon's new era". Nevertheless, what makes this opportunity special is the belief and will of the people to change their country. The promises the novel faces in authority are accompanied by the excitement of the communities to develop their country. Hopefully, this time we'll see the changes rather than hearing them, in an era full of advancements, satisfaction, and unity.

Lebanon's colors will only blend when every person sees themselves as a vital thread in our national development. We've traced citizenship from the pages of dusty textbooks to the heart of civic engagement and learned that neither top-down laws nor inspiring examples can succeed alone. True transformation blooms only when bold policy meets empowered people. Throughout the journey of this essay, research went overly smooth, as if the answer to the question is given on a gold plate. This is because words are abundant and what should be done is known, but pointing it is not nearly as hard as applying it. Today, as optimism flowers in our streets and hearts, let us plant the seeds of unity in every classroom, every town hall, and every open platform. Let us water them with transparency, accountability, and the quiet courage of citizens who refuse to be inactive participants. When Lebanon's government and its people walk hand in hand, our vibrant mosaic will shine not as scattered fragments, but as the masterpiece we were always meant to be.

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