

Hezbollah Shadow Governance in Lebanon

by [Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](/experts/matthew-levitt)

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



[Matthew Levitt \(/experts/matthew-levitt\)](/experts/matthew-levitt)

Matthew Levitt is the Fromer-Wexler Senior Fellow and director of the Reinhard Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence at The Washington Institute.



Articles & Testimony

Part of a series: [Jihadist Governance and Statecraft \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/jihadist-governance-and-statecraft\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/series/jihadist-governance-and-statecraft)

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In this chapter from the *Jihadist Governance and Statecraft* compilation, Matthew Levitt examines how Hezbollah exercises authority from outside the halls of formal state power.

In many of his speeches, Hezbollah secretary-general Hassan Nasrallah highlights the system of shadow governance the group established parallel to Lebanon’s weakened political system and its inadequate social governance structures. He has even gone so far as to say that Hezbollah’s existence as a political and militant entity is strengthened by this parallel governance program, which provides the group both popular support and means of illicit funding to finance social and religious programs that make the group part of the fabric of Lebanese society. Hezbollah today has the best of both worlds—with members holding cabinet positions and seats in parliament, it is very much a part of the Lebanese state even as it remains an independent group that operates apart from the state.

By design, Hezbollah is not the de facto governing authority in Lebanon, which serves the group’s purposes. By virtue of Hezbollah not being an official government institution, it avoids the accountability that typically comes with holding elected office. It continues to function as an independent militia while maintaining its influence in Lebanon’s parliament and developing a shadow economy built on a system of political patronage. This shadow economy has allowed Hezbollah to develop a “shadow citizenry” from whom it draws political support and a measure of authority, allowing the group not only to increase its power and influence but simultaneously to undermine the legitimacy of the Lebanese state. In regions it controls—primarily in southern Lebanon, parts of Beirut, and the Beqa Valley—Hezbollah provides social services, jobs, and welfare support to its followers, fostering dependency on the group’s institutions and making it the de facto enforcer of a system that encourages political patronage.

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