







Towards Comprehensive Human Security in Tripoli



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Author: Barik Mhadeen, based on field research and summary of findings by LCPS team.

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1. Contextualisation

With an estimated population of 500,000, the northern city of Tripoli is the second largest in Lebanon. Since the outbreak of the Syrian crisis, the city has also received a large number of Syrian refugees fleeing the war, estimated at 246,996. Underserved and marginalised by the central government for decades, Tripoli suffers from a lack of strategy for human security programmes that provide equal opportunities for its residents, whether in the job market, or in terms of education and healthcare.²

The findings in this policy brief are based on data collected between 23 July 2018 and 28 February 2019. They are part of a region-wide research project titled "Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia" supervised by the West Asia and North Africa (WANA) Institute, and implemented in Lebanon by the Lebanese Centre for Policy Studies (LCPS). The project examines the human security, state-centric security, and violent extremism nexus in these countries, with the aim of developing a Theory of Change for human security programming that is better suited to respond to the emergent threat of violent extremism.

The data was collected via three types of qualitative research activities: interviews with key stakeholders, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and workshops. In total, 94 participants took part in these research activities, split between 51 female and 43 male participants. Throughout the research process, the team ensured a diverse representation of different stakeholders in Tripoli including governmental, nongovernmental, security actors/implementers, national / international / civil society actors, with careful diligence to ensuring equal gender representation.

Beyond the city's deficient human security, Tripoli is also known for fierce competition over political leadership between local Sunni leaders. Often, those leaders engage their groups in street battles to expand their territory of influence.³ Many neighbourhoods of Tripoli are densely populated, which makes such street battles costly and difficult for the Lebanese Armed Forces to penetrate or mediate. This constitutes an additional layer of challenges for traditional security and law enforcement efforts.

Two key security dimensions set Tripoli apart from the other communities in Lebanon considered for this project.⁴ First, with the onset of Daesh, many of the group's militants found refuge in Tripoli's neighbourhoods and garnered support from some factions of society (as well as protection from some political figures). Two specific factors attracted Daesh to come to Tripoli: the presence of a Shiite component known for its support for Hezbollah and al-Asad's regime, along with a Sunni component suffering a long history of unaddressed political grievances. This culminated in the bombing of the Al-Taqwa and Al-Salam mosques in August 2013, claiming 47 lives and injuring tens.⁵ Such recent experiences with questions of security and violent extremism

¹ UNHCR, Syrian Regional Refugee Response, UNHCR, April 30, 2019, accessed via: https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/syria/location/71

² Khaled Ismail, Claire Wilson and Nathan Cohen-Fournier, Syrian Refugees in Tripoli, Lebanon, (Massachusetts: Tufts University, 2017), accessed via: https://fic.tufts.edu/assets/Tripoli-FINAL-5-July.pdf

³ Carole Kerbage, The Battles for Bab Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen, (Amman: ARIJ, 2013), accessed via: https://en.arij.net/report/the-battles-for-bab-tabbaneh-and-jabal-mohsen-banter-and-barter-and-bullets

⁴ For more details on the project, see: http://wanainstitute.org/en/project/towards-more-effective-human-security-approaches-context-emerging-threat-violent-extremism

⁵ "Scores Dead in North Lebanon Twin Blasts," *Aljazeera*, August 24, 2013, accessed via: https://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2013/08/201382311249855388.html and "Car Bombs Kill 47 in Tripoli as

explain the participants' marked awareness of human security issues when compared to other communities outside Lebanon.⁶

The second dimension which distinguishes Tripoli is the ongoing conflict between *Jabal Mohsen* and *Bab Al Tabbaneh*. The former is an Alawite area known for its strong support for the Syrian President Bashar Al-Asad, enclaved in the heart of Tripoli. The latter is considered one of the most impoverished Sunni neighbourhoods in Tripoli where Sunni political competition is one of the fiercest. From 2011 to 2015, sectarian and political battles between these two adjacent neighbourhoods were frequent, and were only heightened with the peak of the Syrian crisis. Later, violence was to a certain degree reduced with the enactment of the 2014 Security Plan by the Lebanese Armed Forces. In November of that year, the government declared the entire city a "military zone"—thus placing all security agencies under the overall command of the LAF and allowing Lebanese troops to deploy, even though it did not go as far as detaining the heads of major militias, the LAF nonetheless seized weapons caches and arrested a number of Sunni and Alawite militants.⁸

A separate security plan was established to counter the rise of extremists in the streets of Tripoli and was also effectively managed by the Lebanese Armed Forces. At the time of fieldwork, the city was relatively stable, although its socio-economic prospects are some of the lowest in the country (36% of the North governorate population lives in poverty).

2. Defining Human Security

Tripolitans offered a comprehensive and holistic understanding of human security. The different nuances in their understanding of the concept reflected their immediate concerns and shared grievances. But it is worth noting that compared to others in Lebanon, research participants in Tripoli focused on a gradual conception of human security. Moreover, their conception of human security featured localised definitions reflecting their immediate needs—for example, the religious and environmental dimensions of human security explored below.

For Tripolitans, human security "starts from childhood and includes childcare and financial, personal, and psychological stability. It also includes ensuring all rights, from [accessing] education and environmental security to the care provided for the elderly. Further, human security entails the protection against violence and the prevention of hazards [including environmental]."¹¹

Obama Calls Developments in Syria 'Grave Concern' (Live Blog)," PRI, August 21, 2013, accessed via:

https://www.pri.org/stories/2013-08-21/car-bombs-kill-47-tripoli-obama-calls-developments-syria-grave-concern-live-blog for instance, see: Neven Bondokji, Barik Mhadeen and Lina AlHaj, Determinants of Human Security and Hard Security in Ajloun, (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), accessed via: http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/determinants-human-security-ajloun

⁷ "Tripoli's Security Plan a Success, So Far," *The Daily Star*, April 4, 2014, accessed via: http://ftp.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2014/Apr-04/252251-tripolis-security-plan-a-success-so-far.ashx and male interviewee from Local Government, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 30 July, 2018.

⁸ Raphael Lefevre, The Roots of Crisis in Northern Lebanon, (Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center, 2014), p. 20, accessed via: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/crisis_northern_lebanon.pdf
⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ World Bank Group, Jobs for North Lebanon, (Washington: World Bank Group, 2017), p. 15, accessed via: http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/800821506102645484/pdf/119940-WP-PUBLIC-sept-27-3am-v2-Leb-Jobsfor-North-Full-report.pdf

¹¹ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

This holistic and gradual understanding of human security as a journey (starting with childhood and developing with civic and political rights as the individual becomes integrated in society, until reaching old age and enjoying proper elderly care) explains an emphasis on family, childrearing techniques, and civic consciousness during workshop discussions.¹²

The demographic makeup of different participant groups affected the nuances in local definitions of human security. For example, participants in the FGDs were selected to be socially and economically vulnerable individuals. Their discussion focused on two basic human needs: health and economic security. But CBO actors, local leaders, and security officials put forth different understandings of human security, beyond health and economic security, like spiritual security.

3. Spiritual and Religious Security

Some research participants in workshops insisted that a **spiritual element** must feature in the definition of human security. For them, "religious commitment/piety" is a prelude to achieving human security in Tripoli. That is, achieving human security requires a religious discourse that emphasises equality and ensures basic rights and services for all. ¹⁴ This carries a strong resonance to similar conceptualisations of human security in Jordan, whereby religious texts and prophetic sayings (hadith) were tapped into to better articulate a conception of human security, one anchored in justice and human dignity. ¹⁵

Further, Tripoli participants were predominantly socially and religiously conservative. This should not be confused with support for extremist groups, but rather serves to highlight that human security to Tripolitans includes freedom of expressing political and religious opinions. ¹⁶ This is not surprising given Tripoli's long history of political marginalisation in Lebanon. Added to that is the fact that Tripoli has a Sunni majority at a time when Lebanon is locally perceived to be swaying towards Shiism and Shiite political power. In this context, Tripolitans aspire to establish and express their social and political power. ¹⁷

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Neven Bondokji, Barik Mhadeen and Lina AlHaj, Determinants of Human Security and Hard Security in Ajloun, (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), accessed via: http://wanainstitute.org/en/publication/determinants-human-security-and-hard-security-ajloun Barik Mhadeen and Neven Bondokji, Human Security in Tafileh: Trends and Perceptions, (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), accessed via: http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publication HSKarak English.pdf
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<a href="http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publicatio

¹⁷ Fakhoury Tamirace, "Debating Lebanon's Power Sharing Model: An Opportunity or An Impasse for Democratization Studies in The Middle East," *The Arab Studies Journal*, Vol. 22, 2014, accessed via:

https://www.jstor.org/stable/24877905?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents and Vloebeghs Ward, "Dynastic Dynamics in Lebanon: The Familial Transmission of Political Power," *Presses de Sciences Po*, 2016, accessed via: https://www.cairn-int.info/article-E_CRII 073 0071--dynastic-dynamics-in-lebanon-the.htm

4. Environmental and Health Security

Compared to findings from Jordan and Tunisia, one could argue that the environmental dimension of human security was paid special heed in Tripoli. Participants explained this emphasis by pointing to Tripoli's high levels of pollution, limited garbage collection, and poor development of public spaces (like beaches). Participants explained this emphasis by pointing to Tripoli's high levels of pollution, limited garbage collection, and poor development of public spaces (like beaches).

Another dimension was **health security,** as Tripoli's public hospitals are underfunded, and many of them require patients to pay deposits of settle bills upfront upon arrival, before treatment. Additionally, clinics opened by the Ministry of Health hold limited hours and do not operate for several days a month.²⁰ The lack of access to good healthcare services was also cited during the focus group discussions in Tripoli, with a specific focus on the absence of solid monitoring mechanisms for hospitals.²¹

An extension of this dimension is the **need for psychological well-being.**²² Having been through multiple episodes of violence, Tripoli's residents highlighted their desire for improved mental health services to contribute to long-term peacebuilding in the area.²³

5. Job Opportunities

In addition to health care, respondents in FGDs, the most pressing human security component was **access to job opportunities.**²⁴ Most of the female participants were homemakers and many of the male participants were unable to provide for their families. In this context, a strong emphasis on unemployment, along with a lamenting of political networks (i.e. wasta) and their role in securing jobs for people of all ages, were only fitting.

Job creation was seen as a key prerequisite to achieving **social justice** -an overarching theme throughout the discussions. ²⁵ According to participants, if social justice is ensured, intra-group competition between political actors will decrease, and persistent grievances such as unemployment and nepotism would be addressed. ²⁶

¹⁸ Barik Mhadeen and Neven Bondokji, Human Security in Tafileh: Trends and Perceptions, (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), accessed via: http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publication_Tafileh_English_0.pdf and findings from field research in Ben Guerdene and Dowar Hicher in Tunisia to be published later in 2019.

¹⁹ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Females' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

²² Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

²³ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018; and male interviewee from Local Government, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 30 July, 2018.

²⁴ Females' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018; and Males' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

²⁵ Verification Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 28 February, 2019.

²⁶ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

6. Civil Society: An Active Actor

Based on the interviews, local civil society boasts a very service-oriented mentality, in contrast to the failure of the Lebanese government to provide basic services for its citizens.²⁷ As such, civil society actors become the provider of human security programmes in lieu of the state. This explains why participants in the FGDs, both males and females, when asked about what needed to be done to enhance human security programmes, called upon "civil society organisations to meet their promises."²⁸ This implies that civil society is the de facto sole service-provider on the ground, ²⁹ signalling the absence of government in Tripoli.

However, this situation is not unique to Tripoli. Across the 18 communities examined for this project in Lebanon, Jordan, and Tunisia, findings indicate the shrinking role of the state as provider of human security programming, leading to a sense of marginalisation among citizens.³⁰

In Lebanon, the civil society landscape is shifting from relief aid to long-term development, and human security programmes are at the core of these projects.³¹ Different civil society actors such as local CBOs do not necessarily operate within a Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) framework, but they recognise the importance of addressing health services, mental health, and unemployment to enhance communal security. Beyond civil society actors, INGOs also seem to be shaping this new landscape. This sound, forward-looking approach has the potential to successfully enhance human security in Tripoli.

While the municipality of Tripoli also runs programmes, it remains heavily funded by UN agencies and does not offer a long-term vision for providing employment opportunities. For these reasons, reliance on political parties for human security is very common in Tripoli, strengthening long-standing clientelist relationships.

7. State-Centric Security and the Preventing Violent Extremism

Participants in Tripoli consider violent extremism to be inflicted by the "state against the people," by way of policies that lead to depravation, poverty, and marginalisation. In their view, state policies have turned citizens into victims of oppressive power structures that further marginalise citizens. Lack of any reform in prisons, 4 widespread inequality, and the sectarian stigmas

²⁷ Male interviewee from Local Government, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018; male interviewee from CBO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018; and female interviewee from INGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 8 August, 2018

²⁸ Females' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

²⁹ Males' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018; and Females' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

³⁰ Workshop's participants, Karak, 16 – 18 September, 2018; Workshop's participants, Ajloun, 15 – 16 August, 2018; Workshop's participants, Tafileh, 15 – 16 July, 2018; and Workshop's participants, Ben Guerdene, 15 – 16 November, 2018.

³¹ LCPS and Oxfam, Making Aid Work in Lebanon: Promoting Aid Effectiveness and Respect for Rights in Middle-Income Countries Affected by Mass Displacement, (Beirut: LCPS and Oxfam, 2018), accessed via:

https://d1tn3vj7xz9fdh.cloudfront.net/s3fs-public/file attachments/bp-making-aid-work-lebanon-050418-en.pdf

³² Males' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

³³ Ihid

³⁴ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

strengthen this sense of victimisation.³⁵ In response to these policies, people resort to violent extremism that can take different forms such as "engaging with [radical] parties and groups"³⁶ and joining "fights on sectarian basis."³⁷

One participant argued that "the local political leaders are the real terrorists. They provide violent extremist groups, whose members are usually the marginalised groups, with weapons and financial means." Beyond the factual accuracy of this statement, one should read an implicit reflection: ill-designed and/or mis-implemented state policies, particularly security policies, could be just as responsible for driving individuals to extremism as could contextual grievances. In fact, some participants argued that contextual grievances are a direct result of state policies in the first place. ³⁹

Beyond the responsibility of the state, the views of Tripolitans enrich the literature on the radicalisation process itself. For instance, they reflect how Tripolitans consider extremism a final resort when an individual is faced with innumerable structural inequalities and lack of opportunities that make him/her feel insecure. To the participants, insecurity leads to violent extremism, which is a phenomenon that does not carry serious ideological meaning inasmuch as it is driven and rooted in contextual grievances. Equally important, it is a phenomenon that is more likely to materialise with the support of certain political actors who make the means (mostly money and weapons) available.

One retired army General explains:

"When people are provoked [mobilised/brainwashed] and given access to money, they would do anything [radicalise]. For instance, the fights between *Jabal Mohsen* and *Bab Al Tabbaneh* were prolonged because ammunition and weapons were plenty and available. After the ammunition was cut, calm was restored back to the streets and [radical] individuals went back to doing their business [as usual]."⁴⁰

More broadly, the research sample in Tripoli also shed light on a crisis in national identity. Neighbourhoods such as *Wadi al Nahle* and others are clearly so far off-the-radar that some inhabitants have never been exposed to any official state structures. At best, this negligence leads to citizens' socio-political disengagement, and at worst it creates deep animosity against the state—weakening people's sense of belonging and national identity in either scenario.

8. State-Centric Security Policies

It was clear that the community in Tripoli has had a generally complicated relationship with the state and its security policies. In simple terms, state-centric security (SCS) policies were equated with "security plans, 41 the appearance/use of weapons, raids, and [military] checkpoints." A

³⁵ Ihid

³⁶ Female interviewee from INGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 8 August, 2018.

³⁷ Female interviewee from NGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 12 February 2019.

³⁸ Ihid

³⁹ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018; male interviewee from Local Government, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018; and female interviewee from NGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 12 February, 2019.

 $^{^{40}}$ Male interviewee from Security, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018.

⁴¹ In brief, security plans refer to periods of increased presence of military personnel in residential areas to quell unrest and achieve certain security objectives such as the eradication of a violent extremist threat. For more, see: Barik Mhadeen and LCPS, Human Security: Localised Insights from Baalbek, (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), accessed via:

 $[\]underline{\text{http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/WANA\%20Balbaak\%20english.pdf}$

 $^{^{\}rm 42}$ Male interviewee from Security, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018.

general consensus emerged among participants that any SCS policy could produce counterproductive results if it was unfairly applied or acerbated feeling of injustice.⁴³ Opinions were split over the extent to which such policies have been effective in helping sustain communal peace or containing the threat of violent extremism.

On one hand, people initially welcomed such policies, insofar as they controlled immediate clashes. However, the official promise was that the 'security plan' was to come hand-in-hand with a 'development plan,' but the government did not deliver on this.⁴⁴ This created a sense of mistrust in both the government and SCS policies in general.⁴⁵ As such, it is no wonder that participants in Tripoli feel oppressed and need time to regain trust in state institutions.⁴⁶

On the other hand, SCS policies were negatively received due to the manner in which they were implemented. As one interviewee observed, "when [these policies] do not respect the privacy and sanctity of homes, especially in areas with significant overpopulation,"⁴⁷ they will have a counterproductive impact. The almost exact remark was made in the community of Russeifa in Jordan.⁴⁸

Other reservations included the incongruity between post-conflict development plans and the fierce security measures during the conflict itself. For example, buildings that were heavily impacted by shelling and firearms, be it by the groups fighting in *Jabal Mohsen* and *Bab Al Tabbaneh* or by the Lebanese Armed Forces, remain unrepaired today. The physical damage left visible to this day does not send a positive message regarding development prospects in the city of Tripoli, nor does it make 'security plans' appealing.

For these reasons, people of Tripoli are strong proponents of long-term human-security programmes that tackle the root causes of poverty, instability, and economic and health insecurity. The 'security plans' implemented in Tripoli are seen as part of larger political agendas that do little to achieve long-term security or prevent extremism. This perception is intensified by the lack of transparency surrounding the goals of these security measures in the first place.⁵⁰ As one participant put it: "fighting extremism does not require security plans, it rather requires building citizenhood [a state for its citizens] ... that is, a state of meritocracy not of *wasta*."⁵¹

⁴⁶ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018; Males' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018; and Females' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

⁴³ Female interviewee from INGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 7 February, 2019.

⁴⁴ Male interviewee from Security, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018.

⁴⁵ Ihid

⁴⁷ Male interviewee from INGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 8 August, 2018.

⁴⁸ Neven Bondokji and Lina AlHaj, A Read of Human and Population Security: Russeifa as a Case Study, (Amman: WANA Institute, 2019), accessed via: http://wanainstitute.org/sites/default/files/publications/Publication Russeifa English.pdf

⁴⁹ Male interviewee from INGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 8 August, 2018.

⁵⁰ Female interviewee from NGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 12 August, 2018.

 $^{^{51}\,\}text{Male}$ interviewee from Security, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 31 July, 2018.

9. Recommendations

Research participants offered the following recommendations to advance human security programmes in their community. They relate to the priority areas of human security explored earlier, but the recommendations are generic in nature.

- Developing clear economic plans for youth empowerment in markets that are relevant to Tripoli and have potential to create jobs. Building on this, ensuring that recruitment is based on skills and not *wasta* connections, which, as the participant in question admitted, requires a very dramatic change of mentality in Tripoli.⁵² Additionally, instituting monitoring mechanisms for development projects that are implemented by local CBOs operating in the city.⁵³
- Implementing programmes that teach civic duty to students and teachers alike, to be able
 to function respectably in society. In particular, to address the violence against children that
 is occasionally practiced at certain schools. This recommendation came as part of a broader
 call for mandatory education and support for official (public) schools, especially in remote
 areas.⁵⁴
- Overseeing the reintegration of prisoners and convicts back into society. Participants
 emphasised that this must be done professionally, according to rigorous methods that
 would prevent hostile retaliation against the state after their return. This is based on the
 conviction that "prison [alone, without proper rehabilitation,] will increase radicalisation."⁵⁵
- Addressing corruption within the medical and pharmaceutical trade market. Ideally, this
 should lead to more affordable alternatives and less costly medicines (given the monopoly
 that regulates this market).⁵⁶
- Initiating advocacy campaigns to offer psychological support, stress relief, and raise awareness among youth about the dangers of joining violent extremist groups. These campaigns must provide alternatives that could fill young people's idle time and lessen the appeal of radicalisation.⁵⁷
- Involving the municipality in human security projects in order to ensure local buy-in. As participants explained, the municipality works on vocational training but currently there is a heavy reliance on funds from the UN and other INGOs. As a result, the municipality ends up catering to these agencies' needs and vision and not necessarily the city's. In the same vein, increased coordination between local and international non-governmental actors is highly needed.⁵⁸
- Regulating mosques, sermons, and any activities involving religious rhetoric through Dar el Fatwa, Lebanon's Sunni authority. This, in order to curb violent speech and any radical ideologies to which youth could be exposed. As one participant explains: "there is a responsibility that falls on the shoulders of religious men/actors. Many of them, who take the pulpit in a number of mosques, preach against [the spirit and teaching] of Islam." 59

⁵² Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

⁵³ Verification Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 28 February, 2019.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Male interviewee from INGO, interviewed by LCPS in Tripoli, 8 August, 2018.

⁵⁶ Workshop's participant, Tripoli, 30 – 31 July, 2018.

⁵⁷ Ihid

⁵⁸ Males' Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 23 July, 2018.

⁵⁹ Verification Focus Group Discussion, Tripoli, 28 February 2019.

