



FROM REACTIVITY TO FORESIGHT

Reimagining Lebanese statecraft in the digital age

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I. STATECRAFT RECONSIDERED

Statecraft originates from the same conceptual foundation as *craftsmanship*, yet it is applied to the realm of governance. It denotes the art and skill of managing state affairs and formulating effective public policy. Although the term may sound somewhat archaic, it essentially refers to the practice of sound leadership and prudent diplomacy.

In the Lebanese context, discourse has long centered on the notion of state-building and the aspiration to reach the state, yet the concept of statecraft itself has rarely been discussed. In truth, genuine statecraft cannot disregard its three essential conditions: first, it must be firmly rooted in the society from which it emerges; second, it should learn from the experiences of others; and third, it ought to articulate a forward-looking vision grounded in the activation of national capabilities, particularly those of research centers and think tanks, so as to cultivate foresight and strategic governance within the country concerned.

Lebanon's state has often fallen short of true statecraft because several interrelated structural, political, and societal factors have weakened its ability to act as a coherent, strategic entity. State institutions have historically lacked autonomy and professionalism, often serving as extensions of factional patronage networks rather than as neutral administrators of public affairs. The confessional structure disperses authority among sectarian elites, prioritizing communal interests over collective state goals. Lebanon's geopolitical vulnerability and dependence have allowed foreign powers to influence domestic decisions, undermining sovereign policy-making and strategic continuity. The persistence of security actors operating beyond the formal structure of the state has complicated Lebanon's efforts to consolidate a coherent monopoly over power and decision-making. This diffuse security landscape limits the state's freedom to define and implement its own defense and foreign policy priorities, thereby weakening both its sovereignty and its capacity for unified strategic action.

II. THE ABSENCE OF NUMBERS

Lebanon's weakness in statecraft is also mirrored in its chronic lack of reliable data and quantitative governance capacities. The state's decisions are often made in a vacuum of numbers, indicators, or institutionalized record-keeping.

Lebanon has not conducted an official census since 1932, largely due to political sensitivities over sectarian balance. As a result, population estimates, migration figures, and socio-economic profiles are highly uncertain.

State budgets are frequently delayed or based on outdated data; comprehensive audits remain rare. Lebanon also lacks transparent, regularly updated statistics on debt composition, public expenditure, and tax collection efficiency. Key sectors such as electricity, water, and telecommunications operate without complete data systems for usage, losses, or maintenance costs, preventing rational planning and accountability. The absence of robust statis-

tical institutions and underfunded research centers limits the capacity for evidence-based policymaking and long-term forecasting.

The absence of numbers inevitably implies the absence of policy. Without reliable data, governance becomes a matter of guesswork rather than design. Sound public policy depends on accurate, up-to-date information to define problems, set priorities, measure performance, and evaluate outcomes. When a state lacks such empirical foundations, it cannot distinguish between perception and reality, or between ideological claims and material needs.

In Lebanon's case, this absence of data has turned policymaking into a reactive exercise, driven by political bargaining or crisis management rather than by strategic insight. Without numbers, there can be no clear diagnosis of economic decline, no credible poverty mapping, no rational infrastructure planning, and no accountability for spending or service delivery.

Quantification is not merely technical; it is political. A state that does not count cannot truly govern. Reliable statistics give visibility to citizens, shape policy horizons, and anchor trust in public institutions. Their absence leaves a vacuum where authority is weakened, responsibility is blurred, and rhetoric replaces informed decision-making.

III. SOVEREIGNTY IN THE DIGITAL AGE

In the digital era, the relationship between sovereignty and data has become inseparable. Whereas traditional statecraft depended on territorial control and the monopoly of legitimate force, modern sovereignty increasingly depends on the ability to collect, process, and protect national data.

For Lebanon, the lack of reliable statistics and institutional data systems is therefore not just a bureaucratic weakness; it is a loss of digital sovereignty. In the age of information warfare and platform politics, the flow of data determines how citizens perceive their institutions and how the country projects itself abroad. A state that cannot manage its data space risks becoming a passive subject in other actors' algorithms.

To achieve a genuine modernization of the Lebanese state and its statecraft in the digital age necessitates a national data strategy. Such a transformation is not a technical upgrade but a political and societal imperative.

The profound urgency felt by the Lebanese people to empower the state is more than a cry for stability; it is a demand for a total structural metamorphosis. To exit the "endless tunnel" of systemic failure, it is no longer enough to merely restore the institutions of the past. The state must be reimagined as a proactive, smart entity, one that does not simply react to the wreckage of the present but actively deciphers the currents of the twenty-first century.

The genius of a nation often resides in the periphery of its formal institutions. A smart state distinguishes itself by its ability to harvest the intellectual capital emerging from its own society. In a pluralistic and highly educated environment like Lebanon, the state must act as a platform that integrates the ideas of its thinkers, engineers, and citizens into the machinery of

governance. This creates a feedback loop where policy is continuously refined by the lived experience and innovation of the community.

In the modern era, data is the raw material of sovereignty. Proper investment in data analytics is the only way to navigate the complexities of Lebanon's current geography. Precise data on population shifts, migration, and displacement allows the state to allocate resources with surgical accuracy rather than sectarian guesswork. Investing in data enables the state to identify emerging sectors and global niches, ensuring that Lebanon does not just "survive" the century but masters its flow.

A state that remains trapped in a reactive mode is a state that is perpetually governed by crisis. In the digital age, vital functions, ranging from economic regulation to social welfare, require a foresight mechanism. Being "smart" is not a decorative technical layer; it is the capacity to process social and economic variables in real-time to anticipate shocks before they paralyze the nation. To secure a "prominent place" in this century, the state must transition from an observer of its own decline to an architect of its own recovery.

IV. THE CRISIS OF REACTIVITY

In the twenty-first century, the complexity and volatility of global systems demand that states transition from reactive governance toward a proactive and anticipatory model. Strategic foresight has emerged as a critical mechanism for enhancing the resilience, adaptability, and effectiveness of modern governance.

The boundaries between domestic and international threats have become increasingly porous, and contemporary crises now unfold as complex adaptive systems: interwoven social, technological, and biological networks that resist linear or siloed management. In this interconnected environment, shocks propagate across domains with unprecedented speed, transforming localized disruptions into global challenges.

Applying strategic foresight in an ethnically pluralistic state requires a departure from one-size-fits-all forecasting. In these contexts, the goal is not just to predict the future, but to ensure that the process of imagining the future does not itself become a source of communal friction. Strategic foresight acts as a stabilizing force by shifting the national conversation from zero-sum competition over the present to collaborative navigation of the future.

Instead of seeking a single "preferred future," the process should explore how different scenarios impact various ethnic groups. A high-growth tech future might benefit urban centers while further marginalizing rural indigenous communities. Pluralist states must specifically model scenarios where ethnic tensions are weaponized by external actors or exacerbated by resource scarcity. This allows for the development of de-escalation triggers within the governance framework.

Foresight helps identify which shocks, such as economic downturns or pandemics, are most likely to be interpreted through an ethnic lens. Governments can then design neutralizing

policies that ensure aid and resources are distributed through transparent, algorithm-based models to preempt accusations of favoritism.

In Lebanon, the application of strategic foresight is not merely a technical exercise in governance; it is a vital necessity for navigating the polycrisis that has defined the early 2020s. The contemporary Lebanese state operates in a mode of perpetual reaction, a condition that can be described as a crisis of reactivity. This pattern, deeply entrenched in the administrative and political fabric of the Levant, reflects a structural incapacity to engage with crises prospectively. Rather than anticipating, preventing, or strategically managing crises, the Lebanese state has functioned primarily as a retrospective apparatus: a mechanism of damage control rather than foresight. Within this paradigm, governance becomes an exercise in containment, the art of managing debris once catastrophe has already taken place.

This reactivity is not accidental. It arises from a historically sedimented interplay of sectarian fragmentation, institutional fragility, and external dependency. The Lebanese political system, structured through consociational power-sharing, disperses authority across sectarian enclaves that operate with limited coordination or unified state vision. Each crisis (economic, political, or infrastructural) therefore summons not a coherent state response but a mosaic of conflicting micro-interests. The result is administrative paralysis disguised as pluralism: a state that manages difference without mastering direction.

Moreover, the administrative machinery of Lebanon embodies what might be called bureaucratic backward temporality. Policy-making is reactive not merely in practice but in ethos; reforms are drafted in hindsight, budgets follow collapse, and regulation trails transgression. The state's temporal horizon is perpetually belated; it looks backward to explain rather than forward to anticipate. This structural belatedness aligns with a broader regional pattern, where governance systems, beleaguered by conflict, indebted to external patrons, and trapped in historical cycles of reconstruction, are conditioned to operate under emergency logic.

Such a condition signals a deeper philosophical crisis: the collapse of the state's capacity to inhabit future time. Political theorists such as Reinhart Koselleck have argued that modernity entails a widening "horizon of expectation," where states act upon an imagined future. In Lebanon, however, the collapse of institutional continuity and public trust has reversed this dynamic; the horizon has narrowed to survival. Governance becomes an act of temporal maintenance rather than transformation, a politics of *now* without a politics of *next*.

Therefore, Lebanon's predicament is not simply administrative or economic but temporal and existential. The state's reactivity reflects its dislocation from futurity, its confinement to the reactive management of its own decline. To restore political agency in such a context requires more than reformist tinkering; it demands a reclamation of temporal sovereignty, the ability of the state to act before, not after, history happens.

V. ARCHITECTURE OF THE SMART STATE

Building a smart state in the digital age is no longer a technological luxury; it is an existential necessity to redefine sovereignty and administration, especially in pluralistic and complex societies like Lebanon. A smart state is not merely the digitization of bureaucracy, but a proactive entity that utilizes technology to understand profound shifts before they manifest.

To transition toward a smart state is not merely a technical upgrade; it is a fundamental shift in the social contract. It requires transforming the state from an embattled workshop of conflicting interests into a laboratory of predictive governance. The construction of a smart state is ultimately a project of sovereign data. Lebanon cannot afford to navigate twenty-first-century speeds with twentieth-century tools. The workshop of traditional, reactive politics, with all its noise and artisanal failures, must be closed to make way for the laboratory of digital reason.

This is not a technocratic takeover, but the birth of a new social contract: one where the state is an invisible but omnipresent guarantor of stability, using the very complexity of its pluralistic geography to fuel a more resilient and enlightened future.

The ontological shift of the smart state lies in its ability to inhabit the future. By employing digital twins, the state creates a virtual replica of the nation's demographic and social reality. In this virtual space, the impact of a tax reform or a subsidy adjustment is not guessed at but modeled. This pre-testing of reality allows for the identification of friction points before they manifest in the streets. AI crisis-prediction algorithms do not merely observe economic shocks; they decode the noise of big data to anticipate social tensions. By the time a crisis becomes visible to the human eye, the smart state has already initiated preventive interventions, replacing the traditional curative politics of emergency with a politics of stewardship.

Lebanon is currently defined by demographic fluidity, a constant state of flux driven by displacement, economic migration, and regional instability. In this context, population geography is not just a census; it is an active security and developmental database. Through remote sensing and anonymized mobile data, the state can track the pulse of displacement. In the face of sudden population shifts, the smart state does not wait for a census; it visualizes the maps in real-time, allowing infrastructure (water, schooling, aid) to flow precisely where the pressure is greatest. By integrating demographic data with labor market analytics, the state can manage the complexities of migration, both inward (refugees) and outward (emigration), ensuring that these movements do not lead to structural collapse, but are integrated into a sustainable national plan.

In the specific context of Lebanon's current exhaustion, the smart state serves as a reconnecting tool. Digital tools allow for the organization of internal displacement, ensuring that host communities are not overwhelmed by the randomness of human movement. It provides a structure of quietude in a time of chaos.

VI. CONCLUDING

The modernization of Lebanese statecraft is not about escaping the past; it is about digitally translating its lessons into foresight. Sovereignty today belongs to those who can see further, analyze faster, and act before the storm breaks.

Lebanon's journey toward state renewal hinges not merely on political reform or economic rescue, but on reimagining the very grammar of governance. The crisis of reactivity that has long defined the Lebanese state, its habit of managing collapse rather than anticipating it, must give way to a new logic of foresight, precision, and integration. In this transformation, data becomes the architecture of sovereignty, and digital capacity the medium through which political will translates into effective, anticipatory action.

The emergence of the smart state offers Lebanon a path out of its suspended temporality. By mastering data analytics, remote sensing, and predictive modeling, the state can begin to inhabit the future rather than merely endure the present. Such a transformation redefines governance from a reactive exercise in damage control to a proactive framework of stewardship, one that safeguards plurality through transparency, and stability through intelligence.

In this vision, digitization is not an end in itself but a philosophical shift: from opacity to visibility, from fragmentation to system, from survival to renewal. The smart state functions as a living organism, absorbing information, learning from its environment, and adjusting with agility to new shocks. For Lebanon, embracing this model is not a matter of technological imitation but of existential necessity.



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ABOUT CORE GROUP

Core Group is a Beirut-based strategic foresight house. We produce decision-ready analysis and advisory for governments, diplomatic institutions, and strategic investors navigating Middle Eastern complexity. Our work integrates structured analytical products, applied strategic advisory, and analysis-informed mediation; delivered on daily and weekly cycles calibrated to the speed at which the situation changes.

We are based in Beirut. In environments where official data is systematically unreliable and remote analysis inherits every distortion in its source material, physical proximity is not a logistical convenience but an epistemological foundation of our methodology. We verify what others can only estimate.