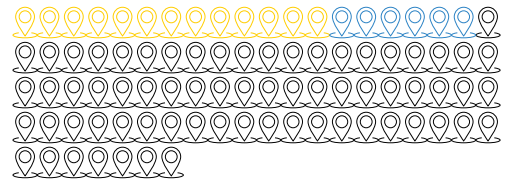


Baalbek

DISTRICT SNAPSHOT

SECTION 1: TENSIONS SUMMARY

Baalbek’s socio-political and geographic context reflects the district’s complex tensions landscape, ranking fourth in Lebanon in terms of tensions-levels. Tribal organized crime, high poverty, sectarian diversity, and proximity to the Syria border—especially the Qussayr-Qaa-Baalbek and Aarsal corridors - are key triggers of instability. Drug trade and widespread presence of weapons further exacerbate violence and insecurity. Additionally, Baalbek hosts the Lebanese Armed Forces’ largest barrack, reflecting the district’s importance for security operations.



19 cadastres out of **87** are characterized as **high** or **moderate** tensions levels as of Q4 2024

The tensions landscape is mainly characterized by:

- **Clan feuds and intra-sectarian tensions:** Tribal dynamics and sectarian divides often lead to localized conflicts.
- **Economic hardships:** Extreme poverty and limited resources fuel frustration and social unrest.
- **Prevalence of weapons:** The widespread presence of arms contributes to frequent clashes and insecurity.
- **A large presence of displaced Syrians:** Resource competition and strained services heighten inter-communal tensions.


SECTION 2: TENSIONS OVERVIEW

In Baalbek, intra-Lebanese tensions are primarily driven by organized crime rooted in tribal affiliations, often supported by political parties. The high presence of weapons often leads to frequent armed clashes, coupled with high number of military operations. Around half of these incidents are concentrated along a north-south corridor from Baalbek City to Haour Taala, including impoverished areas such as Douris, Taybeh, and Britel. In border regions, tribal clashes over control of informal crossings and the drug trade add to the volatility. These crossings are economically significant as they facilitate trade and illegal migration, with disputes often resolved through locally mediated truces involving political representatives and security forces.

The geopolitical developments and escalation in hostilities have introduced new dynamics in Baalbek, an important stronghold of Hezbollah. The district was targeted by severe Israeli airstrikes and armed clashes, leading to v large-scale destruction and casualties. Pro-Palestinian demonstrations also surged, particularly near the Al-Jalil refugee camp and Baalbek City, placing the district fourth nationwide in terms of such demonstrations. Economic struggles have long fuelled tensions. High unemployment, inflation, and deteriorating public services have led to protests and strikes, including prolonged action by Union of Municipality staff and municipal workers. While relative economic stability since 2023 has reduced public unrest, public sector strikes remain common, highlighting the lingering effects of the crisis. Local authorities, with backing from political parties, have established alternative safety nets and services, reducing the frequency of socioeconomic-related incidents compared to other regions.

Inter-sectarian tensions are limited despite the district’s diversity. Different religious communities coexist relatively peacefully, with isolated clashes, typically diffused by community leaders. Shared economic interests, such as participation in the drug trade, may also contribute to the lack of significant conflict.

Due to its geographic location, Baalbek hosts a large displaced Syrian population which increases pressure on resources and services and often leads to heightened social tensions. Such pressure on resources often prompts Lebanese authorities to restrain displaced Syrians, with some measures also affecting Lebanese citizens. Aarsal, a Sunni-majority town bordering Shiite areas, remains a longstanding tensions hotspot. Hosting numerous informal settlements, Aarsal has seen recurrent tensions since 2012, often due to competition over limited services, poor infrastructure, and high competition for jobs.

Key Tensions Drivers	Analysis
 <p>Intra-communal tensions marked with violence</p>	<p>Baalbek is characterized by high levels of violence and a high prevalence of weapons. The district's propensity for violent incidents is driven by various factors, including clan feuds, economic hardships, and geopolitical dynamics. The presence of armed groups and frequent clashes make the security situation volatile, often leading to violent clashes amongst communities and between communities and security forces.</p>
 <p>Impact of geopolitical dynamics</p>	<p>The proximity of Baalbek to the Syrian border and political affiliation of its population, increases the risk of geopolitical developments' impact. Such dynamics result in the influx of displaced persons, disruptions to local economic activities, and increased security challenges. The district's strategic importance amplifies the tensions factor, as geopolitical conflicts directly influence social stability.</p>
 <p>Economic related tensions</p>	<p>Baalbek district faces significant economic tensions stemming from extreme poverty, further impacted by the compounded crisis, which have led to deteriorating living conditions and high unemployment. The influx of many displaced Syrians has strained local resources, heightening competition for essential services and creating social friction between displaced Syrians and residents. Furthermore, conflicts over control of informal border crossings, which are crucial for trade, have exacerbated these economic tensions. While local authorities and political parties have implemented social safety nets to alleviate some socioeconomic struggles, the overall situation remains challenging, with frequent protests and strikes related to economic grievances.</p>
 <p>Inter-communal tensions</p>	<p>The large presence of displaced Syrians in Baalbek, coupled with pre-existing vulnerabilities, leads to high pressure on resources and jobs, which are key triggers for inter-communal tensions. The constraints on Syrians, driven by strained local resources and economic competition, also fuel inter-communal tensions. The latter not only affects Syrians but also has effects on Lebanese citizens, sometimes leading to increased feelings of resentment and tension within the local community.</p>
 <p>Service-related tensions</p>	<p>Service-related tensions in Baalbek district are exacerbated by significant electricity shortages, with power being available for only up to two hours a day. Several cadastres also face solid waste management (challenges, primarily due to a lack of fuel and maintenance for waste management machinery, compounded by frequent strikes among municipal workers. Furthermore, communication and banking services in Baalbek are among the lowest rated in the country, further complicating residents' access to essential services and contributing to overall dissatisfaction within the community.</p>

SECTION 3: TENSIONS HOTSPOTS

In Baalbek, some 13 and 6 cadastres out of 87 were ranked as tensions hotspots and areas of concerns due to a range of various factors and triggers. Six of these tensions' hotspots include:

Arsal

Arsal is a border area and is regarded as one of the largest in Lebanon, hosting the highest number of displaced Syrians in the district. Notably, it is a Sunni area situated within a predominantly Shia majority region, which has further complicated local dynamics. As a border area, it experiences significant illegal entry of Syrians and smuggling of goods leading to security interventions. The high concentration of displaced Syrians in the area has intensified competition for jobs and resources in an already strained environment. Intra-communal tensions are prevalent, stemming from familial and personal disputes, as well as political differences, sometimes escalating into armed clashes. The environmental situation is critical due to solid waste management and wastewater-related challenges, which contribute to both intra- and inter-communal tensions arising from the large number of informal settlements in the area.

Baalbek

serves as the capital of the district, characterized by a Shia majority alongside a presence of Sunnis and Christians, which leads to political differences tensions. The area hosts a significant number of displaced Syrians in urban settings, putting significant pressure on local infrastructure and resources, while also contributes to negative perceptions of aid organizations and increasing biases regarding the distribution of assistance. Certain neighbourhoods within the city face security challenges due to the influence of powerful clans and drug lords, resulting in frequent altercations with security forces. Armed clashes among these clans are also common, further destabilizing the area. The perception of state neglect of the area, combined with prevailing power dynamics, is contributing to rising tensions, leaving citizens feeling sidelined and cultivating mistrust in formal authorities.

Brital and Hour Taala

Brital and Hour Taala are areas known for the dominance of clans engaged in illegal activities, including smuggling, drug manufacturing, and weapons trading. The Lebanese Armed Forces frequently conducts raids in the area and establishes checkpoints, leading to clashes and a high sense of insecurity among residents. As a result, these areas are largely inaccessible to many organizations, putting additional pressure on local resources and increasing perceptions of bias in the distribution of aid.

Qaa Baalbek

Qaa is a boarder cadastre characterized by a predominantly Christian population and a high concentration of displaced Syrians. This demographic situation has led to ongoing inter-communal tensions, resulting in various restrictive measures by the municipality such as curfews, movement restrictions, and work-related regulations due to a heightened sense of job competition. As a result, some organizations operating in the area encounter access challenges, especially concerning shelter-related activities. Additionally, altercations with the Syrian army have been reported, specifically regarding disputes over water resources and border markers. Communal tensions also arise from political differences, further complicating the social dynamics in Qaa.

Deir El Ahmar

is a cadastre with a predominantly Christian population and a significant concentration of displaced Syrians, many of whom are working in the agricultural sector. The influx of displaced Syrians has prompted the municipality to implement various restrictive measures, including movement restrictions, job-related limitations, and security raids on informal tented settlements by local authorities. While there is a heightened sense of security in the area, these measures have also contributed to inter-communal tensions. Additionally, environmental tensions related to solid waste management are considerable, further complicating the social and environmental landscape of Deir El Ahmar.

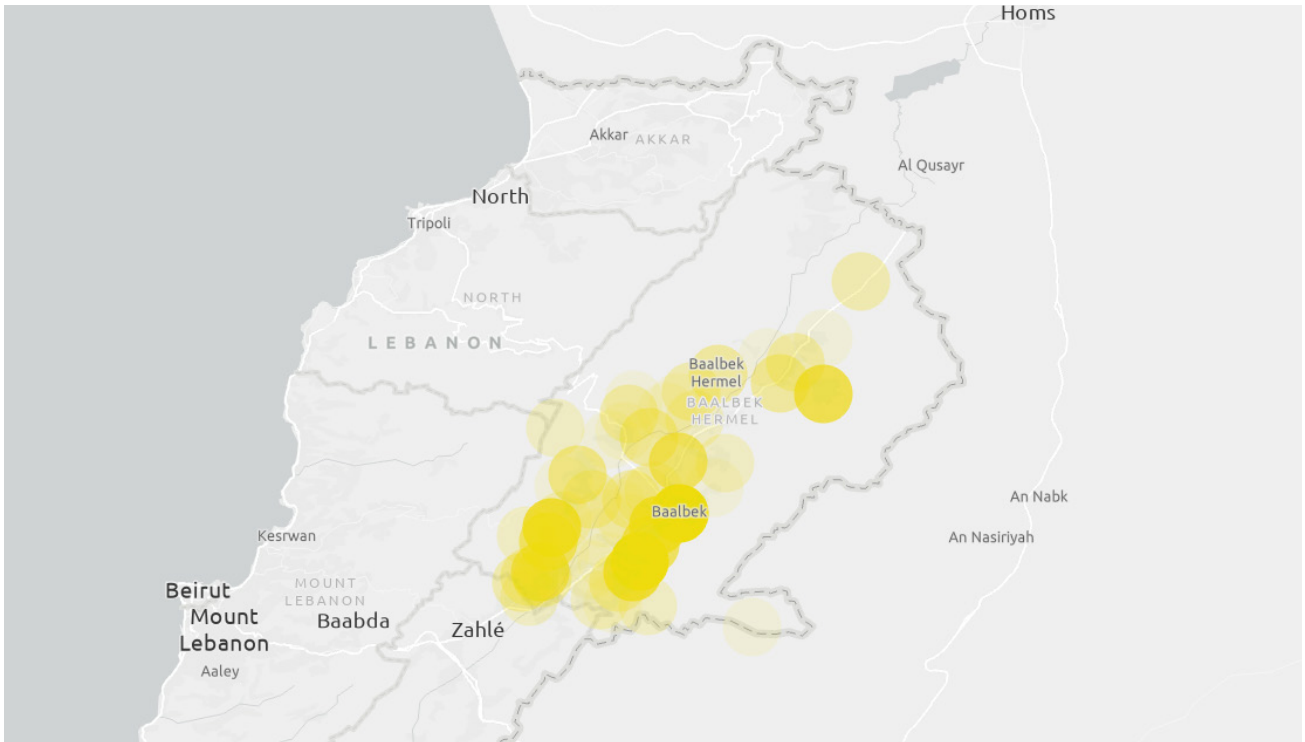


Figure 1: Heat map of reported safety and security incidents

