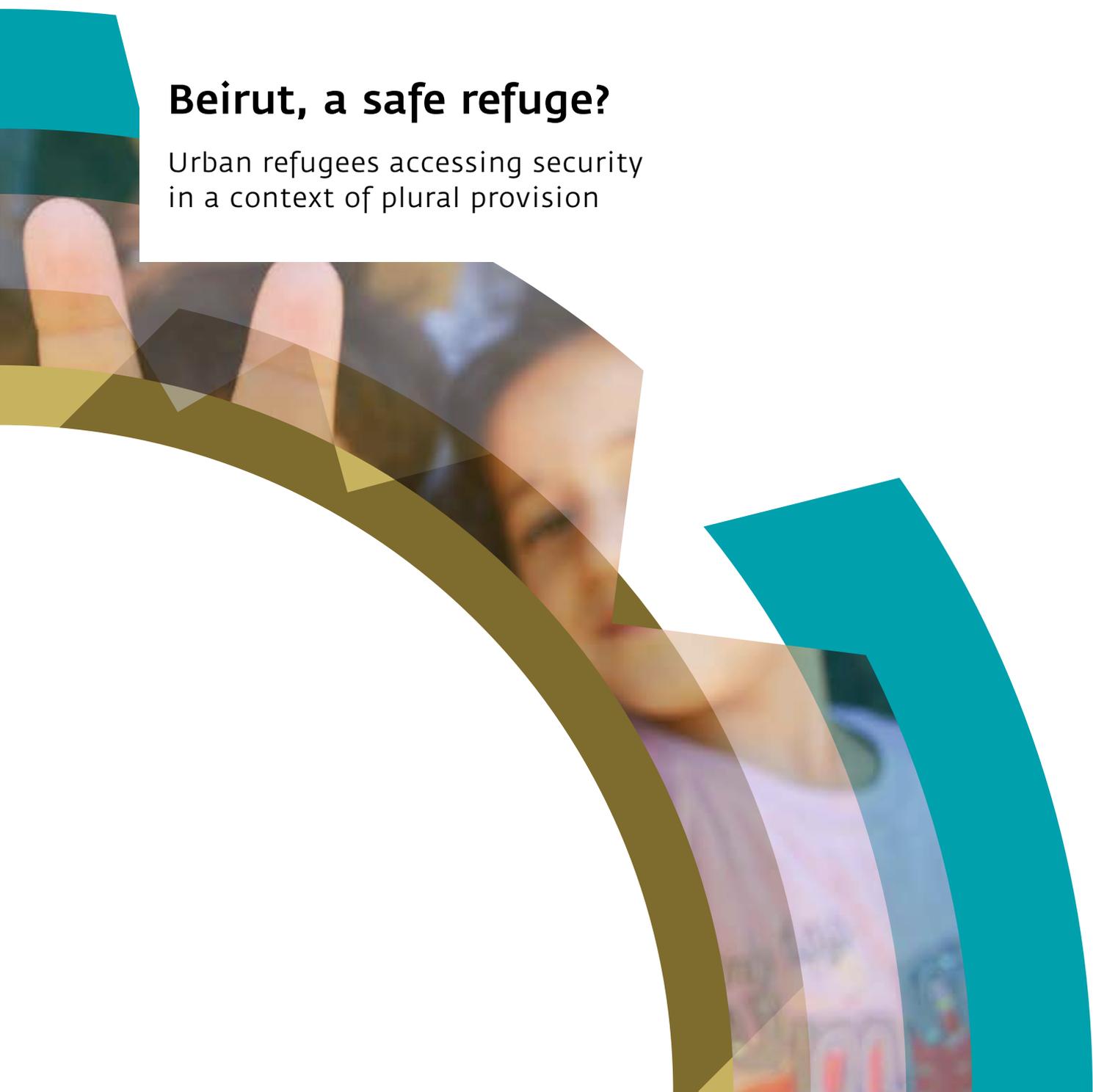


Plural  
Security  
Insights

## Beirut, a safe refuge?

Urban refugees accessing security  
in a context of plural provision



## SECURITY PLURALISM IN THE CITY

This paper, funded by the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), seeks to foster effective security and rule of law policy and practice by producing empirically-based insights into how structures of local governance might interact with plural security providers in ways that deliver improved security outcomes for urban residents. This approach privileges a bottom-up perspective, challenging both conventional state-centric international security and rule of law assistance and local policymakers to better engage with modes of security provision that people view as legitimate, effective, or at least the best available. More can be found at [www.pluralsecurityinsights.org](http://www.pluralsecurityinsights.org).

Comparative research was conducted in three urban contexts: Beirut, Lebanon; Nairobi, Kenya; and Tunis, Tunisia. These cities are characterised by differing degrees of security pluralism, unequal levels of human development, distinct historical trajectories of state formation, and diverse patterns of social cleavages. As such, they reflect a range of contextual factors, and a microcosm of a larger global set. Insights drawn from individual case studies will inform preliminary research agenda-setting and recommendations for policymakers to respond more effectively to security challenges in urban settings.

Our partner:



### **Plural Security Insights**

Clingendael Conflict Research Unit  
Zeestraat 100  
P.O. Box 93080  
2509 AB The Hague  
The Netherlands

T +31 (0)70 314 1962  
E [info@pluralsecurityinsights.org](mailto:info@pluralsecurityinsights.org)  
[www.pluralsecurityinsights.org](http://www.pluralsecurityinsights.org)

# Beirut, a safe refuge?

## Urban refugees accessing security in a context of plural provision

June 2016

Marwa Boustani, Hayat Gebara, Gabriella Romanos, Anna L. Strachan & Michael J. Warren

### Summary

In contexts of plural security provision, security is produced and distributed by an array of actors asserting claims on the use of force, operating simultaneously and with varying relationships to the state. This paper describes how a vulnerable urban population, Syrian refugees in Beirut, Lebanon, realises its security interests within plural provision arrangements. Since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, as many as 1.5-million Syrians have fled into Lebanon. Fieldwork in the Beirut neighbourhoods of Naba'a and Sabra revealed that refugees experience a precarious security environment in the city, characterised by constant fear of harassment and detention, lack of protection, and limited mobility. Research identified a diverse repertoire of strategies upon which Syrians draw to access security, from avoidance to reliance on in-group problem-solving and affiliation with sympathetic local security providers.

The paper concludes that Lebanon's current policy framework exacerbates the vulnerability of Syrian refugees, and that the very nature of security pluralism in Beirut is unlikely to promote equitable distribution of security as a public good, especially to newcomers. It proposes changes to the regulatory and security regime applied to control Syrian communities, and advises the Lebanese state to address the security gap for refugees within the parameters of the existing consociational power-sharing framework.

### Acknowledgments

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## Introduction

**This paper explores on how one of the most vulnerable populations in Beirut, Syrian refugees,<sup>1</sup> realise their security interests in the face of both the threat and actuality of violence, within plural provision arrangements.**

It focuses on the local dynamics in two neighbourhoods of metropolitan Beirut, which are not necessarily found elsewhere in Lebanon; contrasts Syrian security perceptions and practices with those of Lebanese citizens in the same urban spaces; and highlights the role of local governance actors in the politics of security provision, specifically their role in facilitating access to security and the accountability of security providers.

The provision of security through the maintenance of order, prevention of crime, and restoration following violations and disorder involves practices, discourses, and modes of governance that affect how power is exercised, by whom and for whose benefit. In fragile and conflict-affected contexts, security is often provided by an array of actors asserting claims on the use of force, operating simultaneously and with varying relationships to the state, a situation described here as *plural security provision*.<sup>2</sup> In contexts of security pluralism, both uniformed security providers directly authorised by the state (police, army) and a multitude of other coercive actors engage in producing and reproducing order based on end-user demand, and enjoy contingent and mutable degrees of public authority and local legitimation.

In a context of pluralism, providers of security may acquire legitimacy by proving more effective, efficient, and culturally relevant to the needs of local populations, as well as cheaper and more proximate than state alternatives. Notwithstanding these advantages, the risks to local populations associated with this form of security provision include perverse and symbiotic interface with the state, and an almost ineluctable tendency toward net production of insecurity over time; plural security providers may undermine state consolidation by engaging in "competitive state-building" that tests the legitimacy of formal structures.<sup>3</sup> Plural security provision has also been associated with the perpetration of abuses against subaltern and marginalised communities.

### Methodology

Conducted in March and April 2016, fieldwork consisted of semi-structured key informant interviews in Beirut, covering representatives of central and local government, community-based organisations, think tanks, the UN, and international organisations. Focus group discussions and randomised interviews with respondents (including both Lebanese citizens and Syrian refugees) were conducted at two sites in metropolitan Beirut. Fieldwork was carried out by a mixed team of international and Lebanese experts in security, conflict, and urban governance, and complemented by an extensive desk review of relevant academic and policy literature.

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1 The term "refugee" is used here in line with common usage by Lebanese and Syrians to describe the predicament of the majority of Syrians currently residing in Lebanon as a result of the war in Syria, rather than as a term with particular legal meaning in Lebanon or in relation to international law.

2 See the early definitional work of Baker (2008), who deploys the term multi-choice policing.

3 See, for examples, Albrecht & Kyed (2015), Schuberth (2013), Felbab-Brown (2012).

The sites at which focus groups and randomised interviews with respondents were conducted are:

- Naba'a, a low-income and heterogeneous neighbourhood in the municipality of Bourj Hammoud, to the east of Beirut. Naba'a is the closest slum to downtown Beirut, historically a destination for newcomers, and characterised by very high population mobility and poor integration with the rest of Bourj Hammoud. Residents hail from many parts of Lebanon and include Armenians, Kurds, South Asian migrant workers, and a large population of Syrian guest workers and refugees.<sup>4</sup>
- Sabra, a mixed neighbourhood in Tarik Jdidi, West Beirut. The population of Sabra includes mainly Sunni Lebanese as well as many Palestinian and Syrian refugees. Sabra abuts a major Palestinian refugee camp, Shatila, secured by Palestinian armed groups, and which Lebanese security forces seldom enter.

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4 For more on Naba'a, see Fawaz et al. (2014).



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