

The NATIONAL INTEREST FOUNDATION

[Protests Erupt in Lebanon Over Plans to Impose New Taxes](#)

Protests erupted in Lebanon last week after a proposed 20-cent tax on all WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger calls was made public. The protests have largely united all sectors of the population to protest the ineffectiveness and corruption of the current government, a shift from the more politically divisive protests that have occurred in the past. In recent years, the country has been facing an economic downturn, weak currency, failing crops and gas supply, and an inability to effectively combat national disasters.

Quiet resentment and tensions boiled over in Lebanon on October 17th as protests erupted in response to a proposed tax on WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger calls in the country. Lebanon already has some of the world's most expensive cellular plans and the proposed 20-cent tax, meant to boost the ailing economy, proved to be the spark that united the public in the Middle Eastern nation.

Cities across the country were taken over by thousands of protesters who chanted anti-governmental messages and blocked streets with burning tires. Many amassed outside the government palace in downtown Beirut, marched on the presidential palace in Baabda, and blocked access roads to the airports. The protests have largely remained peaceful though there have been a few contained incidents of violence. Demonstrators have come from a wide swath of the public including the younger generations, families with young children, and the elderly.

Many of the protesters have remarked that while previous protests have been heavily politicized and dominated by groups of people dedicated to one specific political party, in these current protests, everyone is united behind a stable Lebanon. The protests are in response to years of government corruption that protesters believe contributed to a stagnant economy, faltering currency, and crises with wheat and gas. There has also been anger in the country after the government was unable to fight forest fires in certain regions, leading them to call on neighboring countries to help contain the brush fires. Many protesters are present in the country, but the protests have spread around the world as Lebanese citizens who left the country for better economic opportunities and people of Lebanese descent have been protesting in solidarity as well.

The protesters have also forced some government officials to voice their concerns. Lebanese Prime Minister Saad Hariri has given his parliament a 72-hour deadline to come up with constructive and conducive solutions to fix the deteriorating economy. Protesters outside of Hariri's office were forcibly dispersed with tear gas after his speech, where he called on the government to find a solution. Lebanese Foreign Minister Gebran Bassil says the government must not impose any new taxes and must work to stop corruption and enact reforms. Both government officials have warned that further protests could cause the already debilitated economy to collapse completely. However, the promises and warnings have done little to quell the protesters, who continue to protest and are now demanding the current government administration step down.