JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

BEYOND THE PROXY LABEL: TESTING AUTONOMY AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN HEZBOLLAH'S RELATIONSHIP WITH IRAN

Muhammad Ali

Higher School of Economics

DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.23794330

Keywords
Hezbollah; proxy warfare; principal–agent theory; legitimacy; muqawama (resistance); non-state armed actors; Lebanon; Iran

Article History
Received: *25 June 2026*
Accepted: *16 September 2026*
Published: *30 October 2026*

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Corresponding Author: *
Muhammad Ali

Abstract

Policy debates often call Hezbollah an "Iranian proxy", but the label is seldom defined or tested. This article argues that "proxy" bundles four separate claims: the actor was created by the sponsor (origin), depends on it for resources (resourcing), takes its decisions from it (decision control), and answers mainly to it (accountability). The article tests each claim for Hezbollah between 1982 and November 2024. It uses published scholarship, English translations of Hezbollah's documents, official texts and Pew Research Center surveys. It separates documented facts, interpretations and inferences, and it grades each conclusion by the strength of its evidence. The sources used describe a mixed origin, with Lebanese Shia networks and Iranian Revolutionary Guard support, and none of them documents a purely Iranian creation. Substantial Iranian material support is reported by several sources, but its size is not measured. Whether Iran controls Hezbollah's decisions cannot be settled with public evidence. Reports of the 1991–92 decision to contest elections show internal debate and a request for the Iranian Supreme Leader's authorization. This shows that Iranian religious authority was consulted on a domestic decision. It does not show whether that authority was binding. Surveys show high Shia favourability toward Hezbollah and low favourability among Sunnis and Christians. Differences between survey waves are small, and subgroup margins of error are not available, so no change in Shia support is demonstrated. The hypothesis that legitimacy depends on ties to Lebanese grievances remains untested. Events after November 2024 are outside the empirical scope.

1. INTRODUCTION

Few non-state actors cause as much argument over definitions as Hezbollah. It is a political party with seats in the Lebanese parliament. It provides health, education and housing services. It has a large armed wing. It also belongs to a regional group of actors linked to Iran. Governments have often tried to settle this complexity by designation. The United States listed Hezbollah as a Foreign Terrorist Organization in 1997. The European Union listed its military wing in July 2013. The Gulf Cooperation Council designated Hezbollah a terrorist organisation in March 2016. The

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United Kingdom banned its External Security Organisation in 2001, extended the ban to the military wing in 2008, and banned the whole organisation in March 2019 (UK Parliament 2018; UK Parliament 2019). In policy debate, such decisions often come with a second claim: that Hezbollah is an "Iranian proxy", and that Tehran's preferences mainly explain what it does.

The scholarly literature does not speak with one voice (Section 2). Two problems remain. First, the word "proxy" is seldom defined, so the debate cannot be decided. Second, arguments from local roots to autonomy do not follow, because an agent can also have local roots. The disagreement is therefore a problem of concepts as much as a problem of facts.

The article asks: what exactly does the proxy label claim about Hezbollah, and how well does the public evidence support each part of that claim between 1982 and November 2024?

Contribution.

The main contribution is a way to test the proxy claim. The article breaks the claim into four propositions, states in advance what evidence would support each of three competing explanations, and grades every conclusion by evidence type. It uses legitimacy (Beetham 1991) only as a measuring tool for one proposition, accountability, and for a hard case, the Syrian intervention. It does not offer a separate thesis about legitimacy.

Scope and caution.

The argument is limited on purpose. It does not say that Hezbollah is morally legitimate, and it does not say that Iranian influence is small. No internal Hezbollah or Iranian records are used, Arabic-language speeches are not analysed, and no data on who receives Hezbollah's services exist in the sources used. Section 4 explains how these gaps limit the conclusions, and Section 9 returns to them. The article proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the literature. Section 3 sets out the framework. Section 4 explains the evidence and method.

Section 5 discusses how the proxy label is used. Sections 6 and 7 test the propositions and assess legitimacy. Section 8 discusses results and later events, Section 9 states limits, and Section 10 concludes.

2. Literature and Research Gap

Five bodies of work matter for the proxy question (Table 1). They do not only disagree about facts. They also disagree about what the same facts mean. I describe each source only by what I was able to check, and I note where I relied on an abstract or publisher description and not on the full text.

Table 1. Accounts of Hezbollah and what each cannot show alone

Account	Main claim	Sources used	What it cannot show on its own
1. Control (proxy)	Iran decides Hezbollah's main choices.	Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (ITIC 2007); policy discourse	Shows reliance on Iran (and Syria), but control is asserted. Support does not prove command. The source is linked to Israeli intelligence circles.
2. Sponsorship and delegation	Sponsors delegate to clients, and control is variable.	Byman (2005); Mumford (2013); Salehyan (2010); Salehyan, Siroky and Wood (2014)	General claims. These works are not tests of one case.

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3. Origins, ideology and local context	Hezbollah drew on Lebanese Shia networks and Iranian support. Its ideology changed with context and survival needs.	Bursać and Terzić (2025); Alagha (2006); Al-Aloosy (2020); Norton (2007)	Local roots and ideological change do not exclude control. Several of these works also stress strong Iranian influence.
4. Labels and discourse	"Terrorist" and "proxy" are political acts with real effects.	Harb and Leenders (2005); Cheaito and de Freixo (2025)	Shows what labels do, not whether they are accurate.
5. Resistance and consent	The resistance frame builds a national-popular will.	Kanaaneh (2024)	Describes the narrative. It does not measure how different audiences receive it.

2.1 Sponsorship, control and delegation

ITIC (2007) is a hostile example of the control account. It speaks of Hezbollah's "complete dependence" on Iran and Syria, and it treats Hezbollah's media and welfare work as a battle for hearts and minds. The report shows how the claim is made but supplies no evidence about decisions. Principal–agent studies give the control claim a general form. A sponsor (the principal) delegates tasks to an actor (the agent) and then tries to control it (Salehyan 2010). Control is a variable and not an assumption. Salehyan, Siroky and Wood (2014) argue that sponsor type and the number of sponsors change how well a sponsor can restrain a client. Byman (2005) studies why states sponsor terrorist groups, including a chapter on Iran and Hezbollah, and why sponsors are hard to push to end support. Mumford (2013) explains why proxy war appeals to sponsors. I use these works for the idea that sponsorship and control are separate questions. I do not attribute to them a specific claim about Hezbollah that I did not check.

2.2 Origins, ideology and local context

Bursać and Terzić (2025) describe Hezbollah as formed from the consolidation of smaller Lebanese Shia groups, such as Lebanese al-Da'wa, the Association of Muslim Ulama and the Association of Muslim Students, after the 1982 Israeli invasion (p. 112, citing Ranstorp 1997). They also report that Iranian Revolutionary Guard units deployed to the Bekaa Valley to train and organise local fighters (p. 111). They call Iranian support a "key catalyst" (p. 111) and describe a "direct dependence on Iran" (p. 113). It is therefore wrong to read this source as an argument against the proxy label. It is a peer-reviewed article, but it is a secondary synthesis that relies on other authors, and its framing treats Hezbollah mainly as a terrorist actor. I use it as a source for descriptive background, and I count it as one source and not as independent confirmation. Al-Aloosy (2020) argues, according to the publisher's description, that Hezbollah's ideology changes with context, with events in patron states and with the survival needs of the movement, and the book examines Hezbollah's relations with Syria and Iran. Al-Aloosy's own later statements stress how close Hezbollah is to Iran's rulers, so the book cannot be placed in a camp that rejects the proxy label. Alagha (2006) traces shifts in Hezbollah's religious and political ideology. Norton (2007) is a short history, and I used it only through Alagha's review and Bursać and Terzić's citations (Section 4.3).

2.3 Labels, resistance and consent

Harb and Leenders (2005) argue that both the label "terrorist" and the opposite label of a "Lebanonised" political party are misleading. Their point is useful here because it also applies to "proxy" and to "resistance". Cheaito and de Freixo (2025) use securitization theory to study

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how the United States has pushed Latin American states to treat Hezbollah as a threat. They argue that Hezbollah has served as a pretext for wider monitoring and for pressure on Iran. Kanaaneh (2024) reads muqawama (resistance) through Gramsci as the building of a "national-popular will". These studies describe how labels and narratives are built. They do not measure how audiences receive them.

2.4 The research gap

Three weaknesses remain. First, "proxy" is rarely turned into measurable claims. Studies agree that Iran gives support. They disagree about what this support means, and they do not say which evidence would settle the matter. Second, arguments from local roots to autonomy are weak, because embeddedness is compatible with agency. Third, legitimacy is often asserted or denied and not measured by audience. This article responds by defining the proxy claim as four propositions (Section 3.1), by stating what three models predict (Section 3.2), and by assessing legitimacy by dimension and audience (Section 3.3).

3. Analytical Framework

3.1 Four propositions and four related concepts

Table 2. The four proxy propositions

	Claim	What would support it	Typical evidence	Status in the debate
P1 Origin	The sponsor created the actor.	Founding decisions and organisation came from outside.	Histories of 1982–85	Disputed
P2 Resourcing	The actor depends on the sponsor for material capability.	Money, arms and training come from the sponsor and cannot easily be replaced.	Histories; official and survey reports	Little disputed
P3 Decision control	The sponsor decides the actor's key choices.	Choices follow the sponsor's interests even when costly, and the actor cannot refuse.	Cases of disagreement; internal records; timing of decisions	Disputed, and hard to observe
P4 Accountability	The actor answers mainly to the sponsor, not to a local constituency.	The actor ignores local pressure. Local institutions are only cover.	Elections; services; surveys; reaction to local costs	Disputed

The four propositions are logically separate. A group created by a sponsor (P1) can later become independent. A group that depends on a sponsor for weapons (P2) can still choose its own targets. A group can answer to a local constituency (P4) and still follow outside orders, if its local institutions are only cover. None of the four can therefore be used as proof of another. P3 is the core of the strong meaning of "proxy", and the article treats it as the central test. P1, P2 and P4 serve as context and as checks on P3.

The article also keeps four concepts apart, because they are often merged. Material dependence (P2) concerns resources. Ideological alignment concerns shared beliefs, for example Hezbollah's stated acceptance of the authority of the wali al-faqih (the guardian jurist), and it is shown by Hezbollah's documents. Decision-making authority (P3) concerns who decides. Political autonomy in the Lebanese arena is an outcome of P3 and P4 together: it asks whether Hezbollah can choose and justify its course by its

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own assessment of Lebanese conditions. Dependence and alignment can both be high while authority and autonomy remain open questions. This is why Section 6 does not treat evidence of dependence or alignment as evidence of control.

3.2 Three models of the Iran–Hezbollah relationship

To test P3, the article compares three models. In Model 1 (control), Iran decides Hezbollah's main choices. In Model 2 (negotiated interdependence), each side has its own interests and needs the other, and major choices come from bargaining. In Model 3 (autonomy with external support), Hezbollah decides according to its own preferences, and Iranian help is a resource and not a command. Table 3 shows what each model predicts. These predictions are the author's analytical construction. They are not taken from a source.

Table 3. Observable implications of the three models

Implication	Model 1: Control	Model 2: Negotiated interdependence	Model 3: Autonomy with support
Disagreement on major choices	Rare, or ended quickly by Iran.	Occurs and is settled by bargaining.	Occurs, and Hezbollah usually wins.
Implication	**Model 1: Control**	**Model 2: Negotiated interdependence**	**Model 3: Autonomy with support**
Internal debate and consultation	Little. The decision comes from outside.	Debate inside and visible consultation with Iran.	Debate inside. Iran's view is one input.
Who pays the costs	Hezbollah pays for Iranian goals without compensation.	Costs are shared or compensated.	Hezbollah chooses costs for its own goals.
Reasons given in public	The sponsor's goals.	A mix of Lebanese and shared goals.	Lebanese goals.
Reaction to local pressure	Ignored when it conflicts with the sponsor.	Balanced against the sponsor.	Taken seriously.

All three models predict that Hezbollah will usually support Iran's allies, so cases of agreement tell us little. Cases of disagreement are the most useful evidence. The article ranks the evidence on P3 on a ladder. Level 1 is public statements by the actors. Level 2 is observed behaviour compared with the sponsor's known interests. Level 3 is documented internal discussion, for example from interviews or captured papers. Level 4 is direct records of orders. The sources used here reach Levels 1 and 2, and Level 3 only through other authors' reports. No source used reaches Level 4.

3.3 Legitimacy as assessed dimensions

Following Beetham (1991), power is legitimate when it is acquired and used according to rules (legality), when the rules can be justified by beliefs shared by the powerful and those below them (justification), and when there is evidence of consent expressed through action. Table 4 shows the indicators. Three rules guide its use. First, legitimacy is claimed for one dimension and one audience at a time. Second, the presence

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of institutions, such as a party office or a hospital, shows the movement's effort and not the audience's consent. Third, a persuasive narrative is a claim by the movement, and how audiences receive it must be measured separately. Accountability (P4) is assessed through consent and through justification in local terms.

Table 4. Legitimacy dimensions, indicators and evidence used

Dimension	Question	Indicators	Evidence used here
Legality	Is power held and used according to rules?	Status under the Taif Agreement and UN resolutions; official positions of states	Taif Agreement; UNSC resolutions 1559 and 1701; designation records
Justification	Do the movement's reasons match beliefs the audience shares?	Whether claims rest on grievances the audience accepts or on goals outside Lebanon	Hezbollah texts in translation; secondary studies (no systematic coding)
Consent	Do people show agreement by action or stated views?	Elections and office; favourable views by group; use of services	Pew surveys 2010–2014; Cammett (2014) (summary only); elections (limited value)

The framework gives one hypothesis. H1 (conditional legitimacy) says that consent is stronger when the resistance claim is tied to Lebanese grievances and weaker when it is extended to conflicts that serve alliance goals. Section
7.3 compares H1 with two rivals, H2 (views follow sectarian identity) and H3 (support follows services and security).

3.4 What the framework adds

The framework is not a new theory of proxy war. It adds three things to existing work. It separates origin from control, which principal–agent models often merge by assuming the principal chose the agent. It adds accountability to a local constituency as a separate question, which a one-principal model handles poorly because Hezbollah may answer to two audiences at once. It turns each claim into observable implications. It also shows that P2 does not help to separate the models, because all three accept it.

4. Evidence and Method

4.1 Case selection and scope

The article studies one case, Hezbollah, with embedded units: the four propositions and five periods, namely the founding and civil-war years (1982–1990), political entry and occupation of the south (1991–2000), deterrence and consolidation (2000–2006), regional projection (2006–2011), and the Syrian war and its aftermath (2011–2024). I treat Hezbollah as a case where the proxy claim is, on its face, plausible, because of long Iranian support and a shared religious tradition. If the claim must be divided or weakened here, that is informative, but one case cannot show that results hold for other Iran-linked actors. The Syrian intervention is used as a within-case hard test for H1.

The empirical analysis ends in November 2024. Section 8.4 explains why later events are described but not analysed.

4.2 Three kinds of claim

Every conclusion in Sections 6 and 7 is marked as one of three kinds. A **documented fact** is something a source I accessed states directly, for example a treaty clause or a survey figure. An **interpretation** is a reading of documented facts, and other readings are possible. An **inference** is a conclusion about something that cannot be observed, such as Hezbollah's internal decision-making. Inferences are never presented as established facts. Each conclusion also receives a

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grade: Established (several independent sources agree and none I accessed disputes it), Supported (consistent evidence from limited or indirect sources), Contested (credible sources disagree), or Unresolved (the evidence cannot separate the explanations). The article uses two simple tests (Van Evera 1997; Collier 2011). In a hoop test, a model that fails is weakened, but passing does not prove it. In a straw-in-the-wind test, evidence gives only a small push for or against a model.

4.3 Evidence base and how each source was used

The evidence has five types: (A) English translations of Hezbollah's documents, namely the 1985 Open Letter and, indirectly, the 2009 Political Document; (B) official and international texts (the Taif Agreement, UN Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701, and UK parliamentary records of designations); (C) scholarship; (D) Pew Research Center survey reports; and (E) think-tank and government briefings. I accessed the following in full or in substantial part: Bursać and Terzić (2025), the Pew reports and methods pages, the UN resolutions, the House of Commons Library briefings and the Open Letter translation. I accessed only abstracts, publisher descriptions or short excerpts for Al-Aloosy (2020), Alagha (2006), Cammett (2014), Cheaito and de Freixo (2025), Harb and Leenders (2005), Kanaaneh (2024), Byman (2005), Mumford (2013), Beetham (1991), Salehyan (2010) and Salehyan, Siroky and Wood (2014). I could not read Norton (2007) or Alagha (2006) themselves. For Norton I rely on Alagha's published review of the book and on Bursać and Terzić's citation of it. Claims attributed to sources I did not read are limited to what the abstract, description or citing source states. The 1985 and 2009 Hezbollah documents were read only in translation or through secondary summaries, and the 2009 text was not read at all. Page numbers appear only where I saw them in the source or in a citing source, and each such case is marked.

4.4 What the missing evidence means

Table 5. Missing evidence and its effect on the conclusions

Missing evidence	Effect on the conclusions
Internal Hezbollah or Iranian records	No claim about who decided any specific matter can be made as fact. All P3 conclusions are inferences from public behaviour, and the article cannot rank Models 1–3 on regional war decisions.
Arabic-language speeches and media	The justification dimension is not coded. Statements in Section 7.2 about how Hezbollah justifies its actions rest on translated documents and secondary descriptions, and they may miss variation across audiences or periods.
Beneficiary data on Hezbollah's services	The article cannot separate reciprocal obligation from clientelism, and it cannot say how far services reach beyond the Shia base. Conclusions on welfare are limited to ties between the movement and a constituency.
Survey sub-group sizes and margins of error	Small differences between survey waves cannot be interpreted as change. Only large and consistent gaps, such as the gap between sects, support firm statements.
Primary Arabic texts of 1985 and 2009 documents	Statements about what the documents contain rest on translations or secondary summaries, and where those summaries conflict, the article makes no claim.

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5. How the Proxy Label Is Used

Western governments and policy writers often use a small set of terms for Hezbollah: "terrorist organization", "Iranian proxy", "militia" and "destabilizing force". Each carries a hidden claim. "Proxy" claims outside control, and "terrorist" claims illegitimate violence against civilians. Harb and Leenders (2005) show why such labels can mislead. Cheaito and de Freixo (2025), using securitization theory, argue that designation has effects that go beyond describing a threat, because it has been used to justify monitoring and pressure in Latin America and to contain Iran. ITIC (2007) shows the same logic in another form when it presents Hezbollah's social and media work as a battle for hearts and minds.

This section relies on existing studies and one hostile report. It does not offer a new discourse analysis. It explains why the proxy claim is widely repeated, and it shows that labels have political effects. It cannot show whether a label is accurate. A label can serve political interests and still be partly correct, and the counter-label "resistance" is also a political claim. The next sections therefore test the propositions directly.

6. Testing the Proxy Propositions

6.1 P1: Origin

Documented. Bursać and Terzić (2025, pp. 111–112) report that the Iranian Revolutionary Guard sent about 800 members to the Bekaa Valley after 1982, that Hezbollah emerged from the consolidation of smaller Lebanese Shia groups, and that Iranian support was a key catalyst. They also report that Ayatollah Fadlallah denied direct involvement in the formal founding (p. 112). The 1985 Open Letter calls Hezbollah the party whose "vanguard" God made victorious in Iran and says its members obey the orders of one leader, Khomeini, as faqih (Hezbollah 1985, translation). That is Hezbollah's own statement of identity, and it is not evidence of who founded the movement.

Interpretation. The sources used fit a mixed origin: Lebanese organisational material combined with Iranian ideological and material input. This is not compatible with a purely Iranian creation, but it is fully compatible with strong sponsorship. **Not known.** Who took the founding decisions is not documented in the sources I used, and the early years are thinly documented. The account also comes from one secondary synthesis. Hezbollah's own accounts and hostile accounts are not compared here. **Grade: Supported (limited sources).**

6.2 P2: Resourcing

Documented. Pew describes Hezbollah as dependent on Iranian financial backing and on Syria as a supply route (Drake 2013). Bursać and Terzić (2025, p. 119) call Iran the primary and most dependable source of funds. They cite a US official's estimate of 700 million dollars for 2018, which they take from a news report that I did not check, and they also note diaspora funds. Not known. The sources used do not give a reliable breakdown of Iranian funds, diaspora money and the movement's own revenue. Whether Iranian support could easily be replaced, which Table 2 treats as part of P2, is not measured. The article therefore makes no claim about the size of any source or about replaceability. Grade: Established for the existence of substantial Iranian material support; not measured for size and replaceability. P2 does not separate the three models, because all accept it. It shows that Iran has the means to influence Hezbollah, not that it does.

6.3 P3: Decision control

(a) Ideological alignment and religious authority

Documented. The 1985 Open Letter states obedience to Khomeini as wali al-faqih (Hezbollah 1985, translation). Bursać and Terzić (2025, p. 115) report an oath of allegiance to the Supreme Leader, citing Jaber (1997), which I

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did not check. They say the 2009 Political Document kept a "more subtly expressed" loyalty (p. 117). Because I did not read the 2009 text and secondary readings of it may differ, the article makes no claim about what it says on the wali al-faqih. **Interpretation.** Alignment is established as a statement of Hezbollah's doctrine, but it is not evidence of command. Critics read it as a chain of command. Hezbollah's side presents it as religious guidance. All three models accept alignment, so it does not separate them.

(b) The 1991–92 decision to contest elections

This episode is the most direct public evidence on the Iran–Hezbollah relationship in a domestic decision. Table 6 sets out what the sources support and how far I could verify it.

Table 6. The 1991–92 episode: claims, sources and verification

Claim	Sources	Verification and limits
Hezbollah decided to contest the 1992 parliamentary elections.	Bursać and Terzić (2025, p. 116), citing Norton (2007, p. 98); other sources agree.	Documented. Norton not read directly.
There was an internal debate, and a minority led by Subhi al-Tufayli opposed participation.	L'Orient Today (n.d.); Wilson Center (n.d.).	Reported by journalistic and policy sources. I could not confirm it in Norton (2007) or Alagha (2006). Treated as Level 3 evidence at second hand.

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Claim	Sources	Verification and limits
Hezbollah sought and received the Supreme Leader's authorization.	Norton (2007, p. 100) says Khamenei "gave his blessings", and Alagha (2008) says Hezbollah asked Khamenei for a formal legal opinion (istifta') and he authorized participation. Qassem's account is reported in FDD (2011). L'Orient Today (n.d.) adds that participation was limited to Parliament.	Multiple consistent reports. Alagha's review was seen only as an excerpt, and Norton's page number is as cited there. Qassem's account is Hezbollah's own, at second hand. The "Parliament only" limit rests on one journalistic source.
The authorization was binding, so Iran controlled this decision.	No source I accessed.	Not supported. No source shows what Hezbollah would have done if authorization had been refused.

Interpretation. The sources support a reported internal debate and a documented request for Khamenei's authorization. A request for a formal legal opinion fits Hezbollah's stated doctrine, in which Khamenei is the religious authority, so it may reflect religious-legal practice and not political direction. It is also what Model 1 would predict for a controlled agent. A report of limits placed on participation, if accurate, would suggest Iranian conditions, but it rests on one source. The reported internal debate is compatible with Model 2, but a controlled agent might also debate before accepting a decision. **Inference.** Model 3, in which Iran's view is only one input, is strained for this case, because Hezbollah consulted the Supreme Leader before acting. Models 1 and 2 remain open, and the sources cannot separate them. The earlier version of this article said this episode "fits Model 2 better". That claim went beyond the evidence and is withdrawn.

(c) Change in published positions

Documented. The 1985 Open Letter called on people to choose an Islamic regime and rejected the existing order (Hezbollah 1985, translation). Hezbollah contested the 1992 election (Table 6) and later gained cabinet posts (Bursać and Terzić 2025, p. 116). A Lebanese commentator's review of the 2009 Political Document describes a shift away from the call for an Islamic state in Lebanon and an unequivocal adherence to the Lebanese political system (Traboulsi 2009), and Bursać and Terzić (2025, p. 117) say the same. **Interpretation.** Model 3 can explain this by Lebanese conditions. Model 1 can explain it if Iran wanted domestic cover, and Iran's own policy also became more pragmatic after 1989, so the changes could reflect Iranian preferences. This rival reading cannot be excluded with the sources used. Documents are statements and not behaviour, and they are available only in translation or through summaries. **Grade: Unresolved** between the three models. The change in position is a documented fact. Its cause is an inference.

(d) Military doctrine and Syria

Documented. Bursać and Terzić (2025, p. 118) describe a council structure with a Shura Council and a Jihad Council, and they note that Hezbollah does not publish all names. They report involvement in Syria from 2011 and a full-scale commitment by 2013 (p. 121). Pew notes the announcement in late May 2013 by Hassan Nasrallah that Hezbollah would join the fighting for President Assad (Drake 2013). Hezbollah describes its arms as part of a

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resistance role (Bursać and Terzić 2025, pp. 120–121). Al-Aloosy (2020) is described by its publisher as arguing that ideology changes with context, with events in patron states and with the survival needs of the movement. **Interpretation.** All three models predict support for the Assad government. Iran was its close ally, and Syria was a route for supplies. The intervention also served Hezbollah's own survival interests as some scholars argue. Cost alone does not separate the models, because a sponsor can impose costs on an agent and an actor can choose costs for its own goals. **Inference.** Organisational capacity does not show autonomy from Iran, because a controlled agent can also be well organised. **Grade: Unresolved.** Public sources cannot show who decides on escalation, and decisions on war and peace are the least visible to outside researchers.

Table 7. How well each model fits the evidence on P3

Evidence	Model 1: Control	Model 2: Negotiated interdependence	Model 3: Autonomy with support
Doctrinal alignment with the Supreme Leader	Fits	Fits	Fits with strain
1992 decision: debate (reported) and authorization sought	Fits (authorization sought)	Fits (debate and consultation)	Fits with strain (Supreme Leader consulted)
Evidence	**Model 1: Control**	**Model 2: Negotiated interdependence**	**Model 3: Autonomy with support**
Change in published positions, 1985–2009	Fits with strain (content moved away from the revolutionary model; Iranian pragmatism is a rival reading)	Fits	Fits (Lebanese conditions)
Military organisation and doctrine	No separation	No separation	No separation
Syria, 2013 onward	Fits	Fits	Fits

"No separation" means that all three models expect the evidence. "Fits with strain" means that the model explains the evidence only with extra assumptions. These ratings are the author's judgements.

Result for P3. The public evidence does not allow a ranking of the three models for domestic or regional decisions. It weakens only Model 3 for the 1992 case. The claim in the earlier version that the evidence "weakens full control" is withdrawn, because the reasons given for it were also compatible with Iranian preferences. **Grade: Unresolved** among Models 1 and 2, with Model 3 strained for 1992. What the evidence does show is a documented Iranian religious-authority role in at least one major domestic decision, and a documented change in Hezbollah's published positions whose cause is not known.

6.4 P4: Accountability

Elections and office. Hezbollah contested elections from 1992 and later held cabinet posts (Bursać and Terzić 2025, p. 116). This shows investment in Lebanese institutions. The evidence is weak on its own, because a sponsor could tell an agent to build domestic cover, and

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in a confessional system seat counts say little about free consent. Reported seat figures for 1992 differ between sources, so I use the election only as evidence of participation.

Welfare. Bursać and Terzić (2025, pp. 113–116) describe hospitals, schools, housing and support for the families of fallen fighters in Shia areas and say these services built loyalty and dependency. Cammett (2014), according to the publisher's summary, shows that Lebanese sectarian organisations use welfare for goals such as attracting marginal voters, solidifying support in their own community, mobilizing mass support and supporting militia fighters, and that non-state welfare can create or deepen social divisions. An excerpt I accessed also reports that doctors at a Hezbollah-run hospital admit that members and their families receive priority treatment. These findings support two readings. In the first, services create duties in both directions. In the second, services are clientelism, a way of buying loyalty. **Not known.** A test would ask whether support continues among people who do not use the services or falls when services fall. No such data exist in the sources used, and no beneficiary data were available. Claims about reconstruction speed after 2006 are not used, because no source for them was verified.

Surveys. Pew surveys give the best available measure of audience views. Among Lebanese Shia, 94 per cent had a favourable view of Hezbollah in 2010, 89 per cent in March 2013 and 86 per cent in 2014 (Table 8). Such views show a strong tie to a local constituency. They do not show that the constituency can change Hezbollah's decisions.

Result for P4. The evidence supports real ties between Hezbollah and a Shia constituency **(Grade: Supported)**. Whether these ties limit Hezbollah's decisions is **Unresolved**. The reading that local institutions are only cover is weakened by the scale and length of the ties, but it is not removed. P4 is not used as evidence for P3, which avoids inferring autonomy from local roots.

7. Assessing Legitimacy

7.1 Legality

Documented. The Taif Agreement of 1989 called for the disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and the transfer of their weapons to the state within six months of the steps it set out (Taif Agreement 1989, as quoted in UN Secretary-General 2004). The same part of the agreement also calls for all necessary measures to liberate Lebanese land from Israeli occupation. Security Council Resolution 1559 (2004) calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. Resolution 1701 (2006) calls for implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and resolutions 1559 and 1680 that require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon, so that there are no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese state. Resolution 1559 does not name Hezbollah. Resolution 1701 names Hezbollah only to call for an end to its attacks. Hezbollah says its arms serve a resistance role (Bursać and Terzić 2025, pp. 120–121).

Interpretation. The texts call for the disbanding or disarmament of all militias or armed groups and contain no exemption for Hezbollah. The Taif liberation clause gives Hezbollah's side an argument for a resistance exception, and I have not analysed Hezbollah's legal statements or Lebanese cabinet declarations that bear on it. Grade: Established that the texts call for disbanding or disarming all militias or armed groups. Contested whether Hezbollah's arms fall under these provisions. The framework therefore does not simply favour the movement. It shows where its claim is most open to challenge. Designation records (UK Parliament 2018; UK Parliament 2019) show how states treat

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Hezbollah, but they are acts of foreign governments and do not measure domestic legality.

7.2 Justification and consent, by audience

Table 8. Views of Hezbollah among Lebanese groups (per cent)

Group and measure	Spring 2010	March 2013	Spring 2014
Shia: favourable	94	89	86
Sunni: unfavourable	84	94	88*
Christian: unfavourable	not retrieved (20 favourable)	about 60 ("six-in-ten")	69*

Sources: Pew Research Center (2010) for 2010; Drake (2013) for March 2013; Pew Research Center (2014a) for the 2014 Shia figure.
*These 2014 figures are taken from a secondary report (Times of Israel 2014), because I could not retrieve the Sunni and Christian figures from the Pew report itself. The 2010 survey was fielded 12 April–7 May 2010, and the 2014 survey 10 April–25 May 2014. The 2013 survey was conducted in March 2013, before Hezbollah's acknowledgement of its role in Syria in late May 2013. Wave-to-wave differences in wording, sampling and sample composition were not checked.

Margins of error. The Pew methods page for the spring 2014 survey gives a Lebanon sample of 1,000 with a margin of error of ±4.1 points for the full sample (Pew Research Center 2014b). I could not retrieve full-sample details for 2010 and 2013, and I could not find sub-group sample sizes or sub-group margins of error for any wave. Sub-group margins are larger than the full-sample margin. As an illustration only, suppose each Shia sub-sample were about 300 respondents. This size is an assumption, not a finding. Under simple random sampling the 95 per cent margin for the difference between two such waves would be roughly ±5 points, and a clustered design would make it larger. An eight-point gap between 2010 and 2014 would then not clearly exceed sampling error. The article therefore does not read the drop from 94 to 86 as a real change, and it does not read the drop from 94 to 89 as meaningful.

Documented and interpreted. First, consent is highly audience-specific. Shia favourability is high in every wave. Sunni unfavourable views are high in every wave, and about six in ten Christians in 2013 and 69 per cent in 2014 were unfavourable, so these data do not support a claim of national legitimacy. Second, a favourable view is not agreement with arms, with Syria or with any one policy. Third, cross-sect support at the level of elites exists in some periods, but it is not measured here. **Justification** is not tested. The expectation that Hezbollah's reasons are accepted when they use Lebanese grievances and less accepted when they refer to regional alliances would need systematic coding of Arabic-language speeches. That coding is not done (Section 9).

7.3 Syria: a change in legitimacy, or a change in scope and justification?

The two things must be separated. A change in scope and justification concerns what the movement does and says, and can be observed in its behaviour. A change in legitimacy concerns how audiences respond, and needs audience evidence.

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Scope and justification. Hezbollah moved from a claim of defending Lebanon against Israel to fighting in a neighbouring civil war, and its leader publicly acknowledged this in May 2013 (Drake 2013; Bursać and Terzić 2025, p. 121). **Grade: Established** for the change in scope. The content of the new justifications is not coded here. Whether this "stretched" the resistance frame is an interpretation, and I do not attribute it to a source.

Table 9. Three explanations of audience consent after Syria

Explanation	Main idea	Predicted pattern	What the evidence shows
H1 Conditional legitimacy	Consent falls when the claim moves away from Lebanese grievances.	Some fall among Shia, larger fall among former sympathisers.	Shia favourability: 94 (2010), 89 (March 2013, before the acknowledgement), 86 (2014). The changes are small, and margins for them are unknown. In the Palestinian territories, 43 per cent were favourable and 49 per cent unfavourable in March 2013 (Drake 2013). A comparison with earlier years was not verified.
H2 Sectarian identity	Views follow sect, and Syria changes little within each sect.	Shia high and stable, Sunni low and stable.	Shia support stayed high. Sunni views were already negative in 2010 (84 per cent unfavourable). Consistent with the data.
H3 Services and security	Shia support follows services and protection.	Support is stable while services continue and changes when they change.	Not tested. No data link services to views.

Result. Within Lebanon, the available data are consistent with H2, but they do not rule out H1 or H3. Shia support stayed high in every wave, and Sunni views were already negative before the intervention, so Syria cannot be shown to have changed either. The only wave after the public acknowledgement is 2014. A fair test would need a before-and-after design with the same audiences, sub-group margins, and questions on Syria, services and arms. **Grade: Unresolved** for legitimacy. H1 remains a hypothesis. The article answers the question this way: Syria demonstrates a change in scope and justification, and it does not demonstrate a change in legitimacy among the Shia base.

8. Discussion

8.1 Summary of results

Table 10. Results by proposition, with grade and what would change the conclusion

Question	Best-supported reading	Grade	What would change it
P1 Origin	Mixed origin: Lebanese networks plus Iranian help. A purely Iranian creation is not documented.	Supported (limited sources)	Primary records of 1982–85

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P2 Resourcing	Substantial Iranian material support is reported.	Established (existence); not measured (size)	Financial data
P3 Domestic decisions	Iranian religious authorization was sought for the 1992 decision. Internal debate is reported. Published positions changed. Control is neither shown nor excluded.	Unresolved (Model 3 strained for 1992)	Internal records; cases of open disagreement
P3 Regional decisions	Cannot be assessed with public sources.	Unresolved	Internal records; disagreement cases
P4 Accountability	Real ties to a Shia constituency. Effect on decisions is unknown.	Supported (ties); Unresolved (constraint)	Beneficiary studies; behaviour under constituency pressure
Legality	Texts call for disarming all armed groups. Application to Hezbollah is disputed.	Established (texts); Contested (application)	Lebanese legal and political texts
Consent	High among Shia, low among Sunnis and Christians. Change not shown.	Supported (levels); Unresolved (change)	Repeated surveys with sub-group data
Syria: scope	Scope and justification changed.	Established	Coding of speeches
Syria: legitimacy	No clear change shown among Shia.	Unresolved	Before-and-after audience data

8.2 Answers to the publication questions

1. What does the framework explain that existing theories do not? It separates origin, resourcing, control and accountability, and it ties each to observable implications. Applied to Hezbollah, it shows that the evidence is strongest on P2 and weaker on P1 and P4, and that it is weakest on P3.

2. What evidence distinguishes autonomy from interdependence or control? For domestic decisions, the 1991–92 reports show internal debate and consultation of Iranian religious authority, and Hezbollah's published positions changed. None of this separates control from interdependence, and it strains only full autonomy in the 1992 case. For regional decisions, no public evidence separates the models. The clearest future test is a case of open disagreement between Iran and Hezbollah, backed by internal sources.

3. How is legitimacy assessed? By dimension and audience (Table 4), with institutions and narratives treated as claims and audience views taken from surveys.

4. Does Syria show a change in legitimacy? It shows a clear change in scope and justification. It does not show a change in legitimacy among the Shia base.

5. Can another researcher trace each conclusion? Each conclusion has a grade, a claim type and a stated source status (Section 4.3, Tables 6–10, and the audit report that follows this article).

8.3 Implications

For the proxy debate, the article suggests replacing the single label with separate claims, each with its own evidence. A movement can be rooted in a community and well supported by it, depend on a sponsor for resources, and still be weak on legality. For critical terrorism studies, a label can be political and partly accurate, so critical work should test labels against evidence and not only deconstruct them.

8.4 Developments after November 2024

Events after the November 2024 ceasefire bear on P3 and on legitimacy, but they are not analysed

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here. They are described briefly, using only reports I could check. In 2025 the Lebanese cabinet worked on a plan for the army to bring weapons under state control. On 5 September 2025 it welcomed the army's plan, and five Shia ministers, including Hezbollah's and Amal's, walked out of the session (Al Jazeera 2025). Hezbollah said it would not disarm while Israeli forces remained in Lebanon (House of Commons Library 2025). After United States and Israeli strikes on Iran began on 28 February 2026, Hezbollah fired on Israel overnight on 1–2 March 2026. It said the attack was retaliation for the killing of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ali Khamenei, and was also "in defense of Lebanon" (Al Jazeera 2026). On 2 March the Lebanese cabinet banned Hezbollah's military and security activities (Al Jazeera 2026). A US–Lebanon–Israel framework reached on 26 June 2026 includes phased disarmament of Hezbollah, and Hezbollah continues to reject disarmament (House of Commons Library 2026). The article does not treat these events as findings. The situation is still changing, the sources are mainly news reports and government briefings, and no peer-reviewed analysis was available for this study. Interpretations of Hezbollah's March 2026 decision conflict. A press report said Hezbollah had earlier reassured Lebanon's parliamentary speaker that it would stay out of a war involving Iran (Middle East Eye 2026), and an Israeli minister said Iran had pressured Hezbollah's leader to join (ITIC 2026, reporting Israeli media). Both are second-hand and unverified, and neither is evidence of what happened inside Hezbollah. The stated reason also joins an Iranian grievance, the killing of the Supreme Leader, to a Lebanese justification, so it does not separate the models. These events suggest a test for later work. If Model 1 is right, Hezbollah's choices should follow Iran's war timetable and ignore constituency costs. If Model 2 is right, there should be visible coordination with Iran and also Hezbollah's own conditions. If Model 3 is right, choices should follow Hezbollah's own assessment of Lebanese conditions. The test needs evidence not yet available: internal sources, Arabic-language statements and new survey data from Shia communities.

9. Limitations and Research Agenda

First, the evidence is mostly English-language and secondary. Claims about internal decision-making are inferences from the public record, and no source reaches direct records of orders. Second, Hezbollah's Arabic-language speeches and media are not analysed, so the justification dimension is not coded. Third, I could read only some sources in full (Section 4.3), and several were used through abstracts, publisher descriptions or reviews. Fourth, evidence on audience views comes from three survey waves, sub-group sample sizes and margins of error were not available, and part of the 2014 data comes from a secondary report. Fifth, welfare accountability is inferred from published research and not from beneficiary data. Sixth, one case cannot show whether the framework applies to other Iran-linked actors, such as the Houthis or Iraqi armed groups. Seventh, the findings stop at November 2024.

The research agenda follows from these limits: (a) code Arabic-language speeches by justification type and period;

(b) collect cases of open disagreement between Iran and Hezbollah and trace them with interviews and any available internal documents; (c) use repeated surveys with sub-group data to test H1, H2 and H3 on the same audiences; (d) study beneficiaries of Hezbollah's services to separate accountability from clientelism; (e) read the primary texts of the 1985 and 2009 documents in Arabic and check the 1992 accounts in Norton (2007), Alagha (2006) and Qassem's own writings; (f) compare Hezbollah with other Iran-linked actors; and (g) analyse the post-2024 period when peer-reviewed and primary sources are available.

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10. Conclusion

The proxy label is analytically weak, not because Iranian support is small, but because the label mixes four different claims. When the claims are separated, the evidence shows an uneven pattern. The sources used describe a mixed origin and do not document a purely Iranian creation. Substantial Iranian material support is well reported, although its size is not measured. Whether Iran controls Hezbollah's decisions cannot be settled with public sources. The best-documented case, the 1991–92 decision to contest elections, shows internal debate and a request for the Supreme Leader's authorization, and it fits control or interdependence better than full autonomy. It does not show who would have prevailed in a disagreement. Hezbollah has real ties to a Shia constituency, but it is weak on legality and has little support among Sunnis and Christians. The Syrian intervention changed what Hezbollah did and how it justified it. The available data do not show that it changed Shia support, and they cannot separate an identity-based explanation from the conditional-legitimacy hypothesis. This is a narrower result than a choice between "proxy" and "resistance", but other researchers can check and challenge it. The most useful next steps are tests built on cases of disagreement, audience-specific measures of consent, and the use of internal and Arabic-language sources.

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Audit Report

This report records what was checked, what was changed and what remains only partly verified. "Accessed" means I opened the source or a search excerpt of it during this revision. I did not have access to library or publisher paywalled full texts for books. Where only a catalogue entry, abstract or publisher description was available, I say so.

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A. References Removed

Reference in the original	Reason for removal
Shalabi (2015), Bachelor's thesis, Lund University	Identified: Samir Shalabi, "Hezbollah: Ideology, Practice, and the Arab Revolts – Between popular legitimacy and strategic interests", Lund University student publication for a Bachelor's degree. The summary I accessed concerns ideology and practice in the Arab revolts using framing theory and a materialist view of ideology. It does not support the claims attributed to it (uneven use of "terrorist" and "proxy" labels; "constitutional opposition"; "ideological instrumentalization"; stretching of the resistance frame). The thesis was not read in full. Removed, and the affected claims were deleted or re-sourced to Harb and Leenders (2005).
Zafar and Shahzadi (2025), "Hezbollah's Dual Identity"	Exists: Annals of Human and Social Sciences 6 (1): 290–302, https://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2025(6-I)26. The authors are listed as MPhil scholars at Minhaj University Lahore, and I could not establish the journal's standing. I saw only excerpts, which themselves describe Hezbollah as a major proxy of Iran. The original cited it for a divide "citing Bakir", which I could not check. Removed as a source for the argument.
El-Khazen (1998), Lebanon's First Postwar Parliamentary Election, 1992	The book is not in question. The specific claims attributed to it (eight seats, four party members and four allies; effect of armed presence on the campaign) could not be verified, and other sources I saw give different seat figures. Removed. The article now uses the 1992 election only as evidence of participation.
Blanford (2011), Warriors of God	Claims attributed to it (Quds Force provision of money, arms and training; decentralised command in 2006) could not be checked. Removed. Support for P2 now rests on Pew (Drake 2013) and Bursać and Terzić (2025).
Norton (1987), Amal and the Shi'a	Used only for background on Shia marginalisation. Not accessed. Removed. Bursać and Terzić (2025) supply the background.
Siboni (2008); Yedioth Ahronoth (2008) (Eizenkot interview)	Siboni exists (INSS Insight No. 74, 2 October 2008) but is a reserve colonel's think-tank paper, not an "Israeli army study". The Eizenkot interview was known only through secondary mention (INSS Insight No. 76). Both gave only an adversary's assumption. Removed as low-value evidence.
Hezbollah (2009), Political Document	Not read. Removed as a reference. The article now cites translations or summaries only for what they show (Traboulsi 2009; Bursać and Terzić 2025) and makes no claim about 2009 wording on the wali al-faqih.
Qassem (2005), Hizbullah: The Story from Within	Not accessed. Removed. Qassem's account of the 1992 consultation appears only through FDD (2011) and is labelled as reported.
Benford and Snow (2000); Buzan, Wæver and de Wilde (1998); Eckstein (1975); Gerring (2007); Levy (2008)	Not verified in this session, and no longer needed after the Shalabi material and the case-selection citations were removed. Removed.

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Taif Agreement and UN texts as bare citations	Kept, but with the access route stated (see D).

B. References corrected, replaced or added

Item	Change
Bursać and Terzić (2025)	Corrected first author: Boris Bursać (not Bojan). Verified in full text: Policy of National Security, Year XVI, vol. 30, no. 3/2025, pp. 105–132, DOI 10.5937/pnb30-60750; labelled "Original scientific paper"; authors at the Institute for Serbian Culture (Priština-Leposavić) and the Institute for Political Studies (Belgrade); received 10 August 2025, accepted 15 October 2025. Credibility assessment: peer-reviewed regional journal, but the article rests on secondary sources by its own account, treats Hezbollah mainly as a terrorist actor, and repeats a paragraph in its funding section. It does not argue against the proxy label and describes Iranian support as a "key catalyst" and a "direct dependence". It is now used only for descriptive background, with page numbers I saw.
Cheaito and de Freixo (2025)	Verified: Middle East Critique, online 30 June 2025, DOI 10.1080/19436149.2025.2520648. Full title corrected. The earlier "34 (4): 771–790" could not be confirmed and was dropped. The study is about US-led securitisation in the Triple Frontier, not about Latin American diplomacy in general, and the text was corrected accordingly.
Kanaaneh (2024)	Verified: Middle East Critique 33 (1): 3–24, with the full subtitle added. A DOI for the article was seen in the journal's crossmark data and is not given in the list because I did not confirm it against the publisher page.
Item	**Change**
Al-Aloosy (2020)	Author name corrected to Al-Aloosy. Verified: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, DOI 10.1007/978-3-030-34847-2. The book's claims about "three phases of military doctrine" could not be checked and were removed. The book was moved out of the group of works that "reject the proxy view", because its author's later statements stress Hezbollah's closeness to Iran.
Alagha (2006)	Full title restored with subtitle. Publisher page checked. Book not read. Added Alagha (2008), a review of Norton's book, because it is the only source I accessed that speaks directly to Norton's statement about the 1992 decision.
ITIC (2007)	Title corrected from "The Battle for Hearts and Minds" to "Hezbollah as a Case Study of the Battle for Hearts and Minds" (June 2007). The phrase "complete dependence" appears in the report's summary in the form "complete dependence on Iran (and Syria)", not as dependence of Hezbollah's ideology on Khomeinism, and the text was corrected. The centre is linked to Israeli intelligence circles, and this is now stated.
Pew (2010), Pew (2013), Pew (2014)	Replaced the generic "Pew Global Attitudes Project, 2010 survey" entry with the specific report. Added Pew (2014a) and the 2014 methods page. The Times of Israel (2014) is kept only as a secondary source for two 2014 figures.
Hezbollah (1985)	Now cited to an English translation reprint (Wilson Center / USIP Iran Primer). Cited as "as described in Alagha (2006) and Al-Aloosy (2020)" was dropped, because I did not read those books and could not confirm they describe it.

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House of Commons Library (2026)	The original gave a publication date of "2 October 2026", which I could not confirm. The PDF I saw is dated 25 June 2026, and the web page appears to have been updated later. The list now says so.
Added	UK Parliament (2018, 2019) for designations; Al Jazeera (2026), ITIC (2026), Middle East Eye (2026) for March 2026; Traboulsi (2009), FDD (2011), L'Orient Today (n.d.), Wilson Center (n.d.), Alagha (2008) for the 1992 episode; UN Secretary-General (2004) for the Taif wording; Pew (2014a, 2014b); Harb and Leenders (2005) as a labelling source.

C. Claims qualified, deleted or withdrawn

Original claim	Action
Many scholars reject the proxy view (Al Aloosy; Kanaaneh; Bursać and Terzić; Cheaito and de Freixo)	Deleted. Of these, Bursać and Terzić describe strong Iranian dependence, Al-Aloosy stresses closeness to Iran, and Cheaito and de Freixo study designation. The introduction and Table 1 were rewritten.
Accounts of the 1991–92 debate "fit Model 2 better than Model 1 or Model 3" (Norton 2007; Alagha 2006)	Withdrawn. See E. The article now says the evidence strains Model 3 for 1992 and cannot separate Models 1 and 2.
Domestic evidence "weakens Model 1" and gives "Supported against full control"	Withdrawn. The grade is now Unresolved among Models 1 and 2. The earlier reasoning was also compatible with Iranian pragmatism.
1992 result: eight seats (El-Khazen 1998)	Deleted. Sources differ, and the article uses only the fact of participation.
Hezbollah's 2006 understanding with the Free Patriotic Movement	Deleted from the P3 argument. I did not verify its source.
Hezbollah's texts state that its link to the wali al-faqih is religious guidance, not daily command (Qassem 2005)	Deleted. Not verified. The article says critics and Hezbollah's side read the link differently.
The 2009 document kept a loyalty to the Supreme Leader / dropped it	Qualified. Bursać and Terzić say it kept loyalty in a "more subtly expressed" form. I could not read the text, so the article makes no claim.
Quds Force provides money, arms and training; decentralised command in 2006 (Byman 2005; Blanford 2011)	Deleted. Replaced by what Pew and Bursać and Terzić state, and by an explicit statement that size and replaceability are not measured.
P2 graded "Established"	Qualified: Established for existence, not measured for size and replaceability.
P1 "not supported" as created by Iran	Reworded. The sources used describe a mixed origin and none documents a purely Iranian creation. Graded Supported (limited sources), because it rests on one secondary synthesis.
Israeli "army study" (Siboni) shows Hezbollah responds to costs on Lebanon	Deleted.

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Palestinian favourability fell from 61 to 43 per cent between 2011 and 2013 (Drake 2013)	Deleted. I verified only the 2013 figures (43 favourable, 49 unfavourable). The 2011 figure was not found in the source.
"Shia support fell by eight points"; H2 "fits best"	Qualified. The article states the figures, explains that margins are unknown, and says the data are consistent with H2 without ruling out H1 or H3. The 2013 wave predates Hezbollah's acknowledgement of Syria, and this is now noted.
Original claim	**Action**
Resolution 1701 and Taif "conflict with" Hezbollah's position; a Lebanese "resistance role has a domestic basis" in dispute	Qualified. The texts are quoted and do not name Hezbollah as the object of disarmament. The Taif liberation clause is noted. The grade is split into Established (texts) and Contested (application).
Post-2024 events: 1 March 2026 attack; Hezbollah did not take part in talks; framework in June 2026	Corrected to "overnight 1–2 March", with the stated reason and the cabinet ban. The claim about non-participation in the talks could not be verified and was deleted. The Khamenei killing, which was omitted from the original, is now included, because it is part of the stated reason.
Assad government fell in December 2024	Deleted from the text, because I did not retrieve a source for it in this revision.

D. Verification status of primary documents and designations

Item	Status
Hezbollah 1985 Open Letter	English translation reprint accessed. Confirms: self-description as the party whose vanguard God made victorious in Iran; obedience to one leader, Khomeini, as faqih; call for an Islamic regime; the aim of a "state of resistance". The Arabic original and translator were not identified. The translation may differ in wording from other translations.
Hezbollah 2009 Political Document	Not read. Described by Traboulsi (2009) and by Bursać and Terzić (2025). A secondary reading of whether it mentions the wali al-faqih differs from Bursać and Terzić's, so I make no claim.
Taif Agreement 1989	English excerpts accessed (UN Secretary-General 2004, quoting the agreement; reproduction in the AUB Almashriq archive). Disbanding of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias and surrender of weapons within six months, and measures to liberate Lebanese land, are confirmed. Full official text not consulted.
UNSC Resolution 1559 (2004)	Text accessed (UN press release SC/8181 and the UN Digital Library record). Confirmed: calls for the disbanding and disarmament of all Lebanese and non-Lebanese militias. It does not name Hezbollah.
UNSC Resolution 1701 (2006)	Text accessed (UN document and Security Council Report reprint). Confirmed: the quoted disarmament-of-all-armed-groups provision, and the call on Hezbollah to cease attacks.
US designation, 1997	Date corroborated in UK parliamentary records (UK Parliament 2018). The State Department listing itself was not opened.

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EU designation of the military wing, 2013	Date corroborated in UK parliamentary records and a think-tank summary (July 2013). The official EU act was not opened. Note that another source gives "July 2012" for an asset-freezing step, so the exact legal step was not resolved. The article says only "July 2013".
GCC designation, 2016	Corroborated in UK parliamentary records (March 2016). The GCC text was not opened.
UK designation	Hansard and a House of Lords Library page confirm: External Security Organisation 2001, military wing 2008, whole organisation March 2019.

E. The 1991–92 claim: what the sources support
Finding. The claim that Hezbollah consulted Iranian religious authority before contesting the 1992 elections is supported by several consistent reports. Norton (2007, p. 100), as cited in Alagha's review, says Khamenei "gave his blessings". Alagha (2008) says Hezbollah asked Khamenei for a formal legal opinion and that Khamenei authorized participation. FDD (2011) reports that Qassem described consultation and permission. I could not read Norton (2007) or Alagha (2006) directly, so these are second-hand confirmations. The claim that there was an internal debate with a minority opposed is reported by L'Orient Today and the Wilson Center. I could not confirm it in Norton or Alagha. The original sentence cited Norton (2007) and Alagha (2006) for both parts. The authorization part is supported by them at second hand, and the debate part is not verified in them. The inference drawn in the original, that this evidence "fits Model 2 better", is not supported, because a request for authorization is predicted by Model 1 and fits Model 2, and it strains Model 3, while a debate is predicted by Models 2 and 3 and is compatible with Model 1. The article therefore reports the episode, states its verification level and no longer uses it to separate autonomy from interdependence.

E. Pew data check

Figure in the original	**Result**
2010: Shia 94 favourable; Sunni 84 unfavourable	Confirmed in Pew (2010). Also in that report: Sunni 12 and Christian 20 favourable. Survey dates 12 April–7 May 2010. The report covers Muslim publics and, for Lebanon, includes Christians.
Figure in the original	**Result**
March 2013: Shia 89 favourable; Sunni 94 unfavourable; Christian 60 unfavourable	Confirmed in Drake (2013). The Christian figure is given as "six-in-ten", so "about 60" is used. Survey conducted in March 2013, before the late-May announcement.
2014: Shia 86; Sunni 88; Christian 69	Shia 86 confirmed in the Pew report (Pew 2014a). Sunni 88 and Christian 69 appear in Times of Israel (2014) and a second secondary summary, and I could not retrieve them from the Pew report. They are marked as secondary. Fieldwork dates 10 April–25 May 2014.
Palestinian territories 61 (2011) to 43 (2013)	43 favourable and 49 unfavourable in 2013 confirmed. The 2011 value was not confirmed. Deleted.

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Margins of error and sub-groups	Lebanon 2014 full sample 1,000, ±4.1 (Pew 2014b). 2010 and 2013 full-sample details and all sub-group sizes and margins were not retrieved. The article states this and treats small differences as uninterpretable.

F. Reference status summary

Status	Sources
Accessed in full or substantial part	Bursać and Terzić (2025); Pew (2010, 2014a, 2014b); Drake (2013); UN resolutions 1559 and 1701; Open Letter translation; House of Commons Library (2025, 2026, partly); Al Jazeera (2025, 2026)
Abstract, publisher record, excerpt or review only	Al-Aloosy (2020); Alagha (2006, 2008); Beetham (1991); Byman (2005); Cammett (2014); Cheaito and de Freixo (2025); Collier (2011); FDD (2011); Harb and Leenders (2005); ITIC (2007, 2026); Kanaaneh (2024); L'Orient Today (n.d.); Middle East Eye (2026); Mumford (2013); Salehyan (2010); Salehyan, Siroky and Wood (2014); Taif Agreement; Times of Israel (2014); Traboulsi (2009); UK Parliament (2018, 2019); UN Secretary-General (2004); Wilson Center (n.d.)
Not read at all	Norton (2007) (used through two other sources); Van Evera (1997) (corroborated only through a citing source); the 2009 Political Document; the Arabic 1985 original
Needs checking before submission	Volume, issue and pages of Cheaito and de Freixo (2025); DOI of Kanaaneh (2024); direct reading of Norton (2007) pp. 98–100 and Alagha (2006) on 1992; the 2014 Sunni and Christian figures in the Pew original; full-sample sizes and margins for Pew 2010 and 2013

G. How the revisions address the methodological and evidentiary limits

Facts, interpretations and inferences. Section 4.2 defines the three kinds of claim, and Sections 6 and 7 mark them. Statements about Hezbollah's internal decision-making are labelled inferences and graded Unresolved. **Missing evidence.** Section 4.4 (Table 5) states what is missing (internal records, Arabic speeches, beneficiary data, sub-group sizes) and how each gap limits the conclusions. The results shifted accordingly: the main P3 claim is now Unresolved, the strongest claims are those that rest on documented texts and survey levels, and no claim is made about change in Shia support. **The 1992 claim.** It is reported with its verification level, and it no longer supports an "interdependence fits best" conclusion. **Pew data.** Every figure was traced to a Pew page or marked secondary, small differences are not read as change, the 2013 wave is placed before the Syria announcement, and the missing margins are stated. **Documents and designations.** Each is classed by access level (Section D), and claims that could not be supported were removed or limited. **Argument.** The central question and the four-proposition framework remain. The distinctions between political autonomy, ideological alignment, material dependence and decision-making authority are now explicit (Section 3.1). Arguments that rested on unverified sources were dropped, and the conclusion is narrower as a result.

Remaining weaknesses the author should know about. Most book-length sources were not read in full. The article's strongest empirical anchors are the Pew data, the UN and Taif texts and one verified secondary synthesis (Bursać and Terzić

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2025). Several 1992 details depend on excerpts. These should be checked against the books before submission.