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# A Survey of Lebanese Voters ahead of National Elections

## Socio-Political Profile and Voter Intentions\*

Charles Harb

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Series: **Case Analysis**

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## I - Introduction

These have been turbulent years for Lebanon: A national uprising in October of 2019 followed by an economic collapse of historic proportions, a global COVID pandemic, and an ammonium nitrate explosion destroying a portion of the capital Beirut in August of 2020. The World Bank stated that “[t]he Lebanon financial and economic crisis is likely to rank in the top 10, possibly top three, most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century” (Lebanon Economic Monitor 2021, p. xii). More than half of the population is below the national poverty line and the Lebanese currency lost over 90% of its value.

The nation is gearing towards national parliamentary elections, scheduled for May 15, 2022. This is the first national election since the 2019 uprising and subsequent collapse, and it will be an important milestone in Lebanon’s political history. Most analysts appear “pessimistic” about the election outcomes, predicting an overwhelming victory for main traditional parties and a symbolic representation of the opposition parties, and thus a de facto continuation of the status quo. This report does not aim to provide an analytic review of the political situation in Lebanon, nor does it aim to endorse a specific socio-political narrative or viewpoint. The report aims to provide an empirically supported description of the socio-political landscape and voters intentions ahead of the May 15, 2022 elections. The analyses are based on survey research of a representative sample of 1200 Lebanese nationals (2.8% margin of error) conducted between April 7 and April 15, 2022.

## II - Methods:

### A. Survey Questionnaire:

A closed-ended questionnaire was developed to assess several socio-political and psychological variables ahead of national elections. The questionnaires were distributed proportionally to the number of voters registered in each Governorate of Lebanon. The field work started on April 7, 2022, and ended on April 15, 2022. Thirty-Four (34) field workers were employed for the purpose of this survey. The questionnaire took about 20 minutes to complete and was deployed in face-to-face format using tablets for data collection.

The questionnaire used a number of literature-validated scales including a) intrinsic religiosity, b) life satisfaction, c) sectarianism, d) socio-political identities, e) global and domain specific measures of trust, f) blame attribution, g) emotions, h) political efficacy, i) political participation, j) collective action, and k) voter intentions. The questionnaire also used context specific questions addressing a) satisfaction with political parties, b) attitudes towards state secularization, c) support for a federal system, d) access to military grade weapon and readiness to use weapons, and e) emigration intentions and other questions (see Appendix A for full questionnaire).

## B. Sampling:

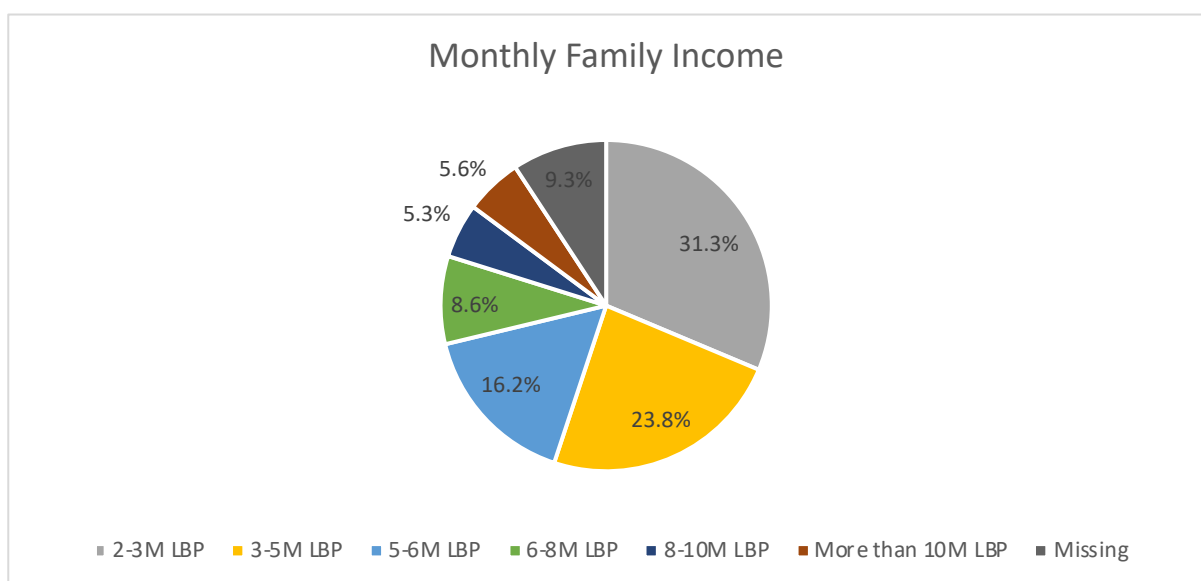
After a call to vendors, “Information International” was selected to collect the data. Information International adopted a multi-stage probability sampling to ensure a random, representative sample for identifying households and main respondents. The first stage consisted of selecting neighborhoods inside each selected area, the second stage consisted of selecting households based on a systematic random sample in each selected neighborhood according to the estimated number of buildings in the neighborhood, and, finally, the third stage consisted of sampling a primary respondent within each household based on the most recent birthday. If the selected person was not at home, a follow-up up to one time was conducted before declaring a non-response. The response rate reached 80.1%. The survey has a 2.8% margin of error (95% confidence level).

## C. Sample Descriptive:

The sample was 53.5% male and 46.5% female, with an average age of 39.6 years (SD 11.8). Approximately 60% of the sample was married, and 32% single. Some 23% of the sample worked in private organizations, 25.8% worked in liberal professions, 14.9% worked at home, and 13.7% were unemployed. About 41% of the sample had completed up to an elementary or high school education, while about 42% had a university degree.

the majority (55%) of families had an income lower than 5M LBP (i.e., less than 200 USD per month), and 71% had an income less than 8M LBP (i.e., less than 320 USD per month)<sup>1</sup>. While 45% of families reported being unable to cover their basic needs, another 45% barely made ends meet. Nearly a quarter of families have some income in cash USD (“fresh dollars”).

Figure 1: Family Income (1)



<sup>1</sup> Note that in 2019, the minimum wage was about 500 USD.



## III - Results

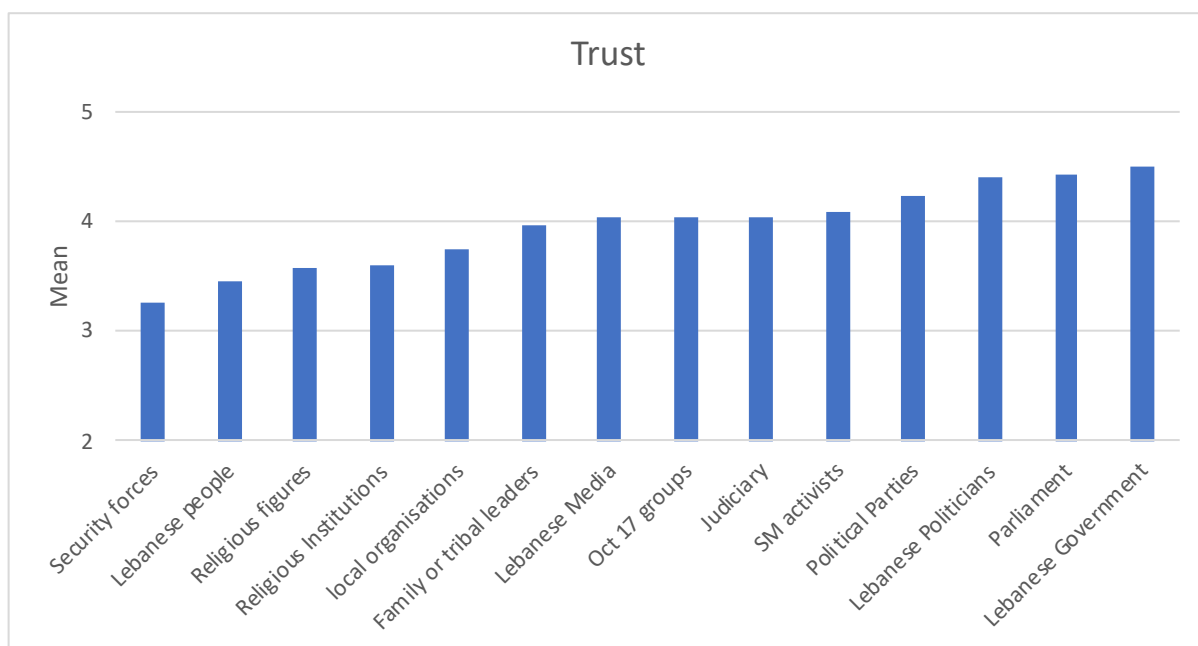
We provide two main descriptive analyses of the survey data below: the first focuses on socio-political background and the second focuses on election participation and voter intentions.

### A. Socio-Political Background

#### 1) Trust

Trust in others is often used as an indirect measure of social cohesion. Lebanese nationals showed very low levels of trust in others, with over 2 / 3 (69%) of the population endorsing statements such as “most people are not trustworthy” or “most people would try to abuse you if they get the chance”. This general mistrust extended to all social and political groups, with the highest levels of mistrust reserved for the government, parliament, and Lebanese politicians.

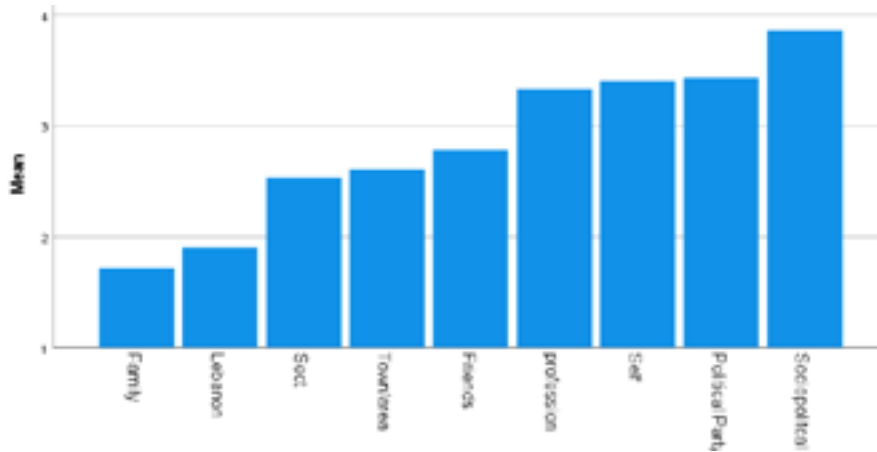
Figure 2: Domain specific mistrust



#### 2) Identities

When asked about their socio-political identities, responses appeared to cluster in 3 groups: 1) high identification with family and nation (Lebanon), 2) moderate identification with sect, region and friends, and 3) lower identification with profession, political parties or groups that are socially or politically active.

Figure 3: socio-political identities

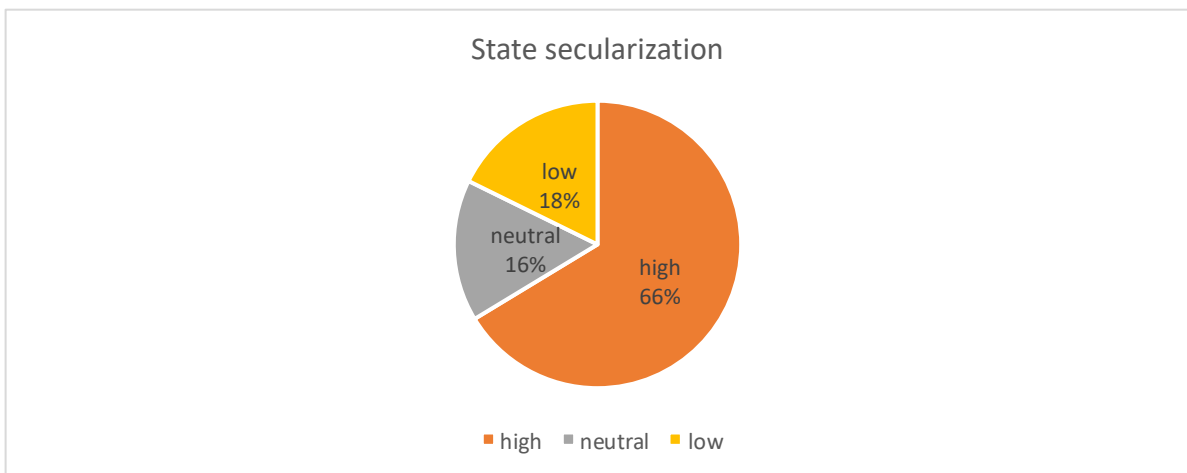


### 3) Sectarianism and State Secularization

70% of the Lebanese respondents would be considered sectarian (defined as bias towards one’s own sect), and about 23% showed low to no bias towards their sect. while sectarianism remains high in Lebanon, it appears to be decreasing significantly when compared to similar representative surveys conducted 10 and 15 years ago (e.g., Harb 2006, Harb 2010). There are no statistically significant differences between the sects on sectarianism levels.

Interestingly, an absolute majority (66%) of Lebanese nationals unambiguously support the secularization of the state (e.g., abrogation of sectarian quotas in political and administrative appointments (إلغاء المحاصصة الطائفية للمناصب السياسيّة والإداريّة), establishing a civil status legal code (إنشاء قوانين مدنيّة اختيارية للأحوال الشخصيّة)). Interestingly, while a majority across sects supported the secularization of the state, Christian and Druze respondents showed statistically higher levels of endorsement than Shia and Sunni respondents. There was no gender difference.

Figure 4: secularization of the state:



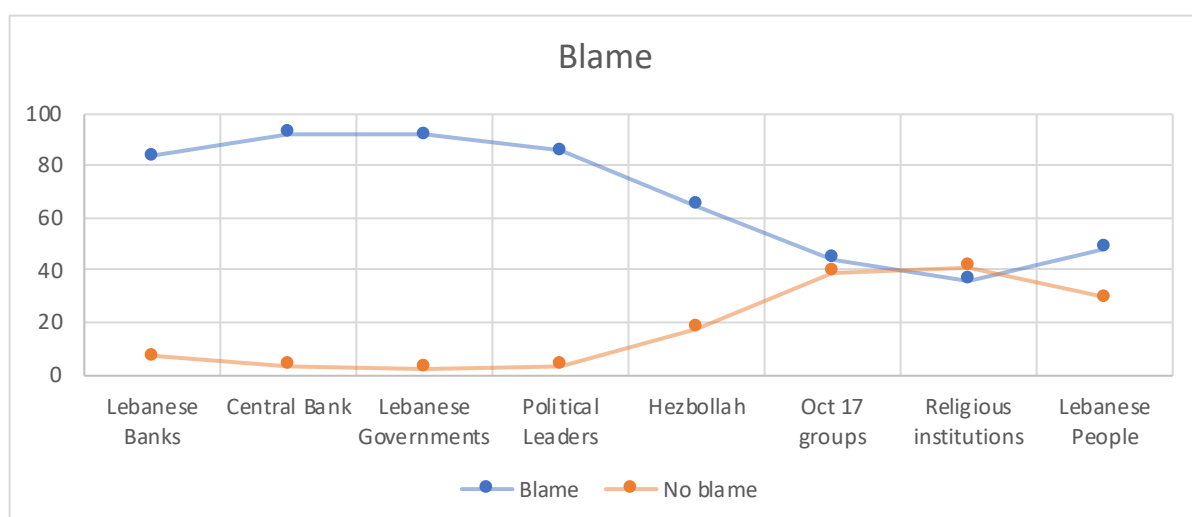
#### 4) Emotions

The absolute majority of Lebanese respondents reported high levels of despair (70%), humiliation (74%) and anger (85%) when they reflected about conditions in Lebanon. Barely 17% reported feeling hopeful.

#### 5) Blame

When asked about who was responsible for the deterioration of conditions in Lebanon, Lebanese respondents appeared to blame everyone. There was however absolute consensus (>85%) across social demographics in blaming: 1) the central bank, 2) Lebanese governments, 3) political leaders and 4) Lebanese banks. Opinions were more varied about other targets, with religious institutions and October 17 groups blamed the least. A majority of respondents also blamed external parties (e.g., Israel, Syria, Iran, GCC and Western countries). Interestingly, 57% of Sunni respondents blamed GCC countries, and nearly half of Shia respondents blamed Iran (47%) and Syria (55%).

Figure 5: Blame – Internal Actors



#### 6) Safety and Security

Nearly half of all respondents (46%) do not feel safe in their area of residence, and 70% fear a security deterioration in the near future. These numbers are worrisome when we consider that nearly 40% of respondents reported having access to military grade weapons, and over a third (37%) declared their willingness to use weapons if conditions in Lebanon deteriorate. Three quarters of respondents (75%) believe that “others” are willing to use weapons, indicating alarmingly high levels of existential intergroup threat perceptions.

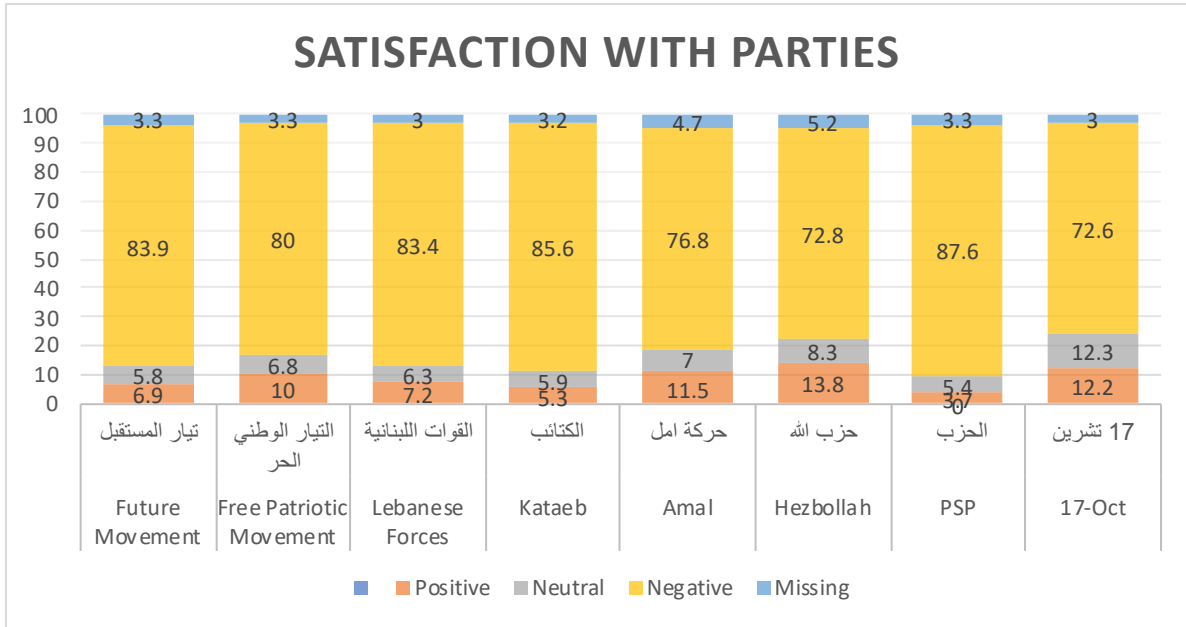
#### 7) Political Party Evaluations

When looked at a national aggregate level, the absolute majority of respondents are dissatisfied with the performance of all parties (“كلن يعني كلن – بما فيهم مجموعات الثورة”). Six of the main



political parties have strictly negative evaluations by more than 80% of the people. Only Hezbollah and the October 17 groups have positive or neutral evaluations that cross the 20% threshold.

Figure 6: Satisfaction with the performance of political parties



Considering the sectarian nature of political parties in Lebanon, we conducted an evaluation by sect and found that: 1) None of the political groups are positively evaluated by a majority of Maronite respondents. Oct 17 groups receive the highest percentage of positive or neutral performance evaluations (34%), followed by the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM, 29%) and the Lebanese Forces (LF, 29%). Hezbollah was positively evaluated by 15% of Maronite respondents; 2) Oct 17 groups are also rated highest among Christian Orthodox respondents (37%), followed by the LF (27%), the FPM (21%) and Kataeb (18%); 3) The FPM is rated highest (54%) among Armenian respondents, followed by Oct 17 groups (42%); 4) Among Sunni respondents, the Future Movement was evaluated favourably by 33% of respondents, and the Oct 17 groups ranked second (with 25%). All other groups received less than 10% positive or neutral evaluations; 5) Among Shia respondents, 58% provided provided positive and neutral evaluations of Hezbollah and Amal, and 20% rated FPM positively. Oct 17 groups were rated favourably by only 10% of respondents; 6) Druze respondents provided favourable evaluations of the PSP (60%), and Oct 17 groups (37%). Interestingly, Kataeb (nearly 30%) and LF (nearly 20%) also received some favorable ratings among Druze respondents.

**In sum:**

- None of the main Christian and Sunni traditional parties (FPM, LF, Kataeb, FM) received a majority of favorable evaluations within their own sect. Only the PSP, Hezbollah, and Amal received a slim majority of favorable (including both positive or neutral) evaluations within their sects. Even within the latter grouping, more than 40% of Shia and Druze respondents evaluated their parties clearly negatively.



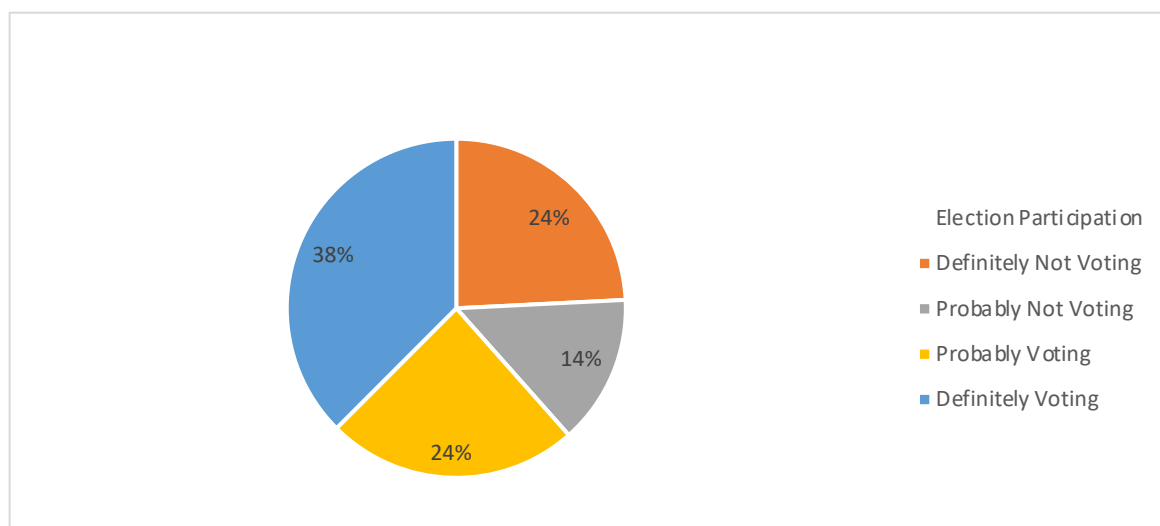
- October 17 groups were rated more positively than traditional parties among Christian respondents (both Maronites and Orthodox), and were evaluated positively by a quarter of Sunni respondents and a third of Druze respondents. Only 10% of Shia respondents provided a positive or neutral evaluation of Oct 17 groups.

## B. Elections

### 1) Election Participation

As of April 15, nearly a quarter (24%) of all respondents reported being sure they will not participate in or are boycotting the elections. In contrast, 38% are certain they will be voting in the elections, and the remaining 38% are still undecided.

Figure 7: Voter participation intentions



### 2) Voting Intentions:

In table 1 and 2, while 42% of eligible voters intend to elect traditional or main parties, 34% intend to vote for new or other parties, and 24% are not going to vote<sup>2</sup>.

Table 1: Voting Intention – short sample

Voter intention		
	N	%
Main Parties	506	42.2%
New Parties	203	16.9%
Other	207	17.3%
Not Voting	284	23.7%

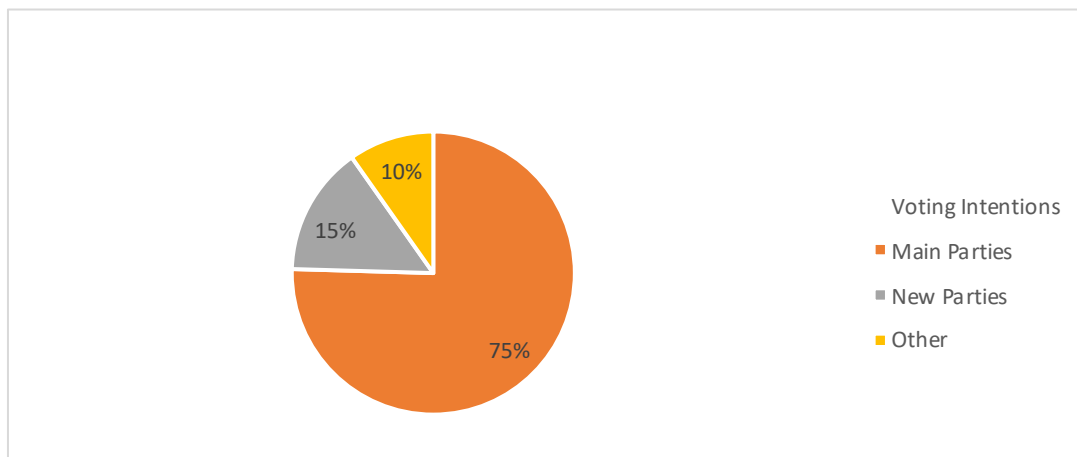
If we select the 38% who are certain to vote (i.e., exclude the undecided and those who will not be voting), then 75% of respondents intend to vote for main or traditional parties.

<sup>2</sup> Original phrasing in Arabic: “قوى وأحزاب سياسية رئيسية;” “قوى وأحزاب سياسية نشأت حديثاً;” “غيره”

Table 2: Voting Intention – full sample

If you intend to vote in the next elections, who will you vote for?		
		Percent
Maronite	main parties	54.7
	new parties	14.0
	other	8.9
	not applicable	22.5
Orthodox	main parties	38.5
	new parties	17.7
	other	21.5
	not applicable	22.3
Armenian	main parties	50.0
	new parties	6.3
	other	18.8
	not applicable	25.0
Sunni	main parties	26.1
	new parties	25.6
	other	26.7
	not applicable	21.6
Shi'i	main parties	49.7
	new parties	12.2
	other	13.1
	not applicable	25.0
Druze	main parties	44.1
	new parties	8.8
	other	14.7
	not applicable	32.4

Figure 8: Respondents who state they are certain to vote (38% of total)





If we exclude those who will not be voting (i.e., 24%), then a slight majority (55%) of voters state their intention to vote for main/traditional political parties, and 45% state their intention to vote for new or other groups.

Figure 9: all respondents who might vote (76%)

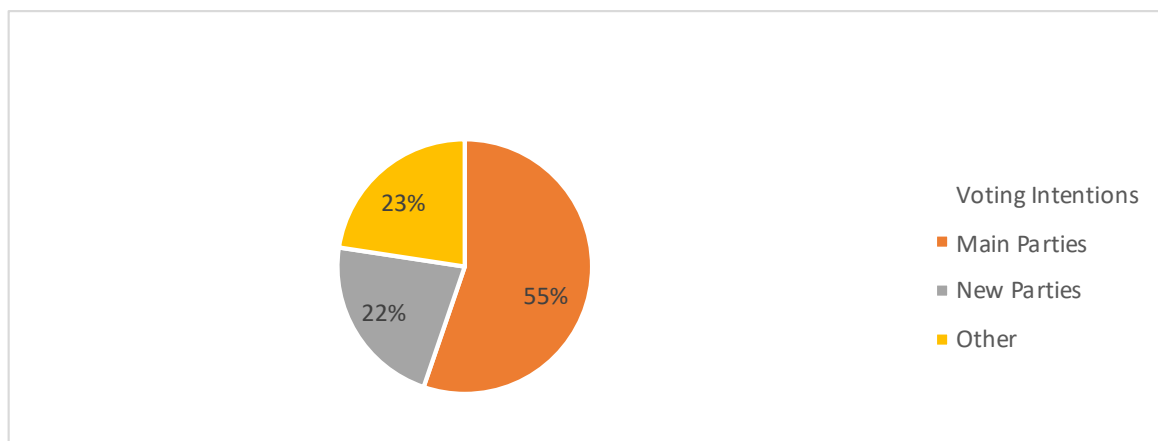


Table 3: Voter intention by Voting District– full sample

If you intend to vote in the next elections, who will you vote for?		
constituency	parties	percent
Beirut I	main parties	53.7
	new parties	14.6
	other	2.4
	not applicable	29.3
Beirut II	main parties	24.3
	new parties	24.3
	other	22.5
	not applicable	28.8
Mount Lebanon I	main parties	73.2
	new parties	5.4
	other	8.9
	not applicable	12.5
Mount Lebanon II	main parties	66.7
	new parties	12.3
	not applicable	21.1
Mount Lebanon III	main parties	69.8
	new parties	1.9
	other	3.8
	not applicable	24.5



Mount Lebanon IV	main parties	47.6
	new parties	10.5
	other	6.7
	not applicable	35.2
North I	main parties	50.0
	new parties	14.9
	other	26.6
	not applicable	8.5
North II	main parties	14.2
	new parties	27.4
	other	33.6
	not applicable	24.8
North III	main parties	34.6
	new parties	17.9
	other	15.4
	not applicable	32.1
Beqaa I	main parties	21.4
	new parties	58.9
	other	14.3
	not applicable	5.4
Beqaa II	main parties	8.5
	new parties	8.5
	other	80.9
	not applicable	2.1
Beqaa III	main parties	35.3
	new parties	33.3
	other	2.9
	not applicable	28.4
South I	main parties	36.8
	new parties	15.8
	other	26.3
	not applicable	21.1
South II	main parties	65.0
	new parties	7.0
	other	14.0
	not applicable	14.0
South III	main parties	47.0
	new parties	3.4
	other	12.8
	not applicable	36.9



## In Sum:

- Nearly 24% of registered voters residing in Lebanon do not intend to vote at all, while 38% are committed to voting, and another 38% remain undecided.
- Depending on voter turnout during election day, opposition and other groups will obtain anywhere between 25 and 45% of cast votes, while traditional parties will obtain anywhere between 55% and 75% of cast votes.
- If turnout in 2022 is similar to the turnout in 2018 (i.e., approximating 72% of eligible voters) then election results can be expected to approach the 40 - 60 split noted above.
- Note that such nation-level results do not imply a similar distribution of parliamentary seats (e.g., 40-60) as electoral laws and the multiplicity of competing lists require a voting district level of analysis (see conclusion and limitations section)

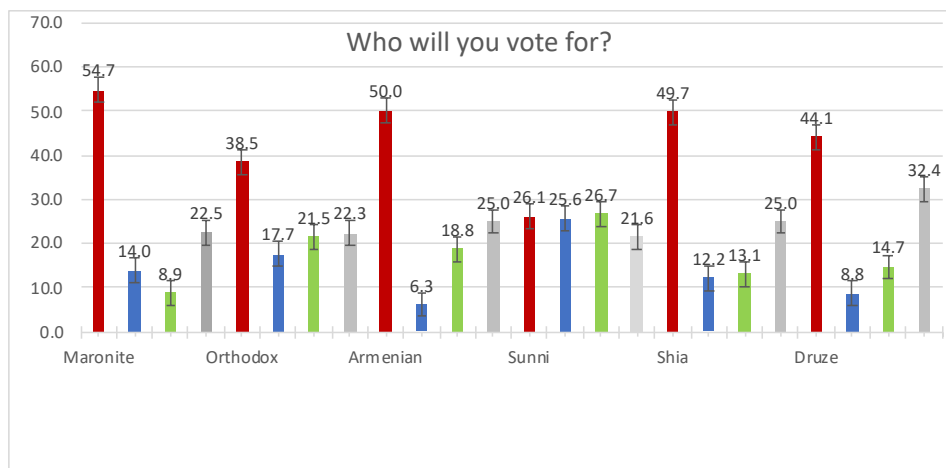
### 3) Disaggregated Analyses

#### 3.1 Disaggregation by Sect:

A disaggregated analysis by sect shows that:

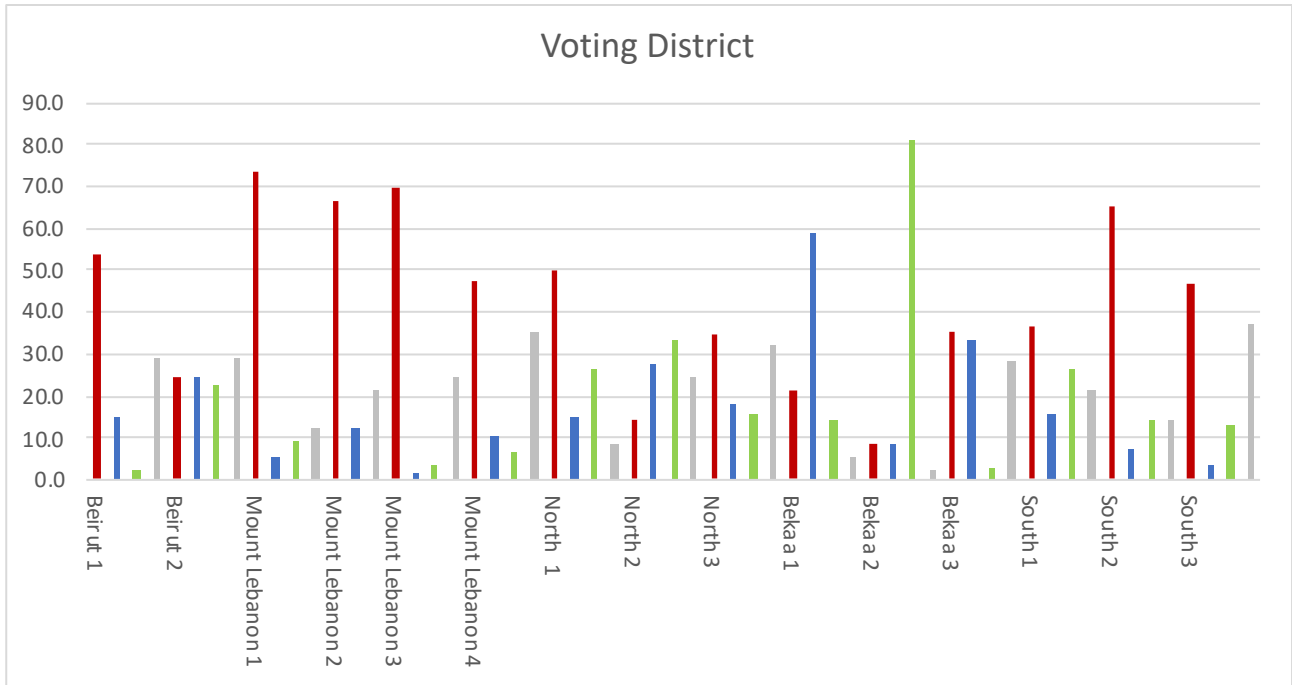
- Maronites and Armenians are the only sects where a slim majority of respondents reported their intention to vote for main traditional parties (55 and 50% respectively). About 25% of the votes will go to “Other” and Oct 17 groups, and nearly 25% do not intend to vote.
- Nearly half (49.7%) of Shia respondents stated they will vote for main traditional parties. 25% stated their intention to vote differently (12 and 13%). A quarter of the respondents do not intend to vote.
- Orthodox respondents’ voter intentions are divided, with 38% of vote intention going to main traditional parties, and 39% voting for new (18%) or other groups (21%). 22% do not intend to vote.
- Sunni respondents were equally divided between main traditional parties, new parties and other groups (26%, 26% and 27% respectively).
- 44% of Druze respondents stated their intention to vote for main traditional parties, and only 9% stated their intention to vote for new parties. Importantly, a third of Druze respondents stated they will not be voting this election.

Figure 10: voter intention disaggregated by Sect



### 3.2 Disaggregation by voting district

Figure 11: voter intention disaggregated by Voting District



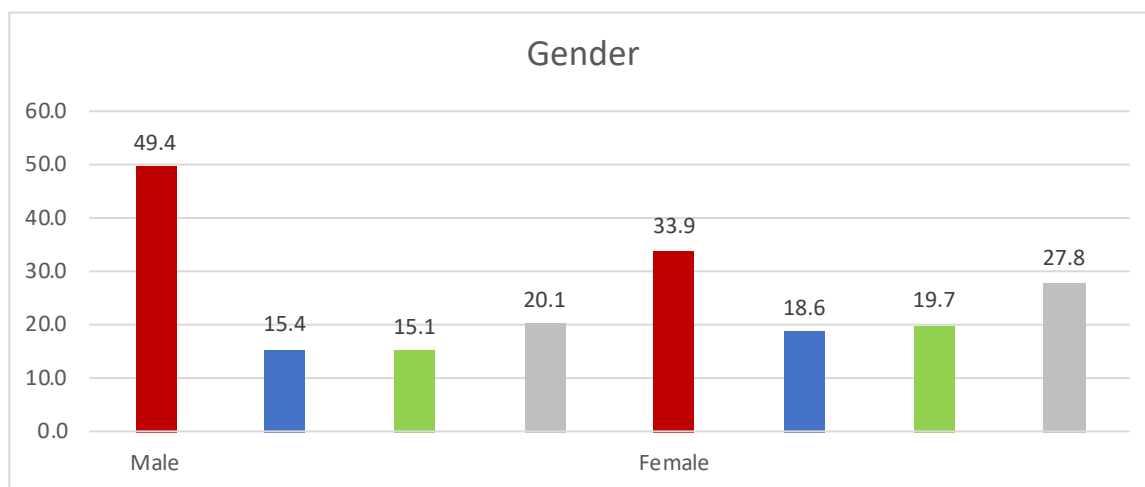
Analysis at the voting district is degraded due to smaller samples and larger margin of errors per district (average 12%). As such, analyses should be considered as trends rather than accurate statistics.

#### Key Observations:

- In the four voting districts of Mount Lebanon 1, 2 and 3 (Jbeil/Keserwan, Matn, Baabda) and South 2 (Tyre), main traditional parties receive clear majorities of voter intentions
- In all three voting districts of the Bekaa Valley, voting intentions clearly disfavor main and traditional parties. In Beqaa 1 (Zahle), the majority of voting intentions is going to new groups, while in Beqaa 2 (Rashaya West Beqaa), an absolute majority is voting “other”. In Beqaa 3 (Baalbaek-Hermel), votes are equally split between traditional parties, new parties, and abstention votes.
- Voting intentions are distributed across competing parties (traditional, new, other) in the Northern governorate (particularly North 2 (Tripoli) and North 3 (Batroun-Koura)).
- Note that there are noticeably large abstentions in Mount Lebanon 4 (Chouf), North 3, and South 3.



### 3.3 Disaggregation by Gender and Age:



Women are less likely to vote for traditional/main parties compared to men (1/3 vs 1 / 2 respectively). Interestingly, there appear to be no statistically significant differences between age groups and intentions to vote for specific parties.

## IV - Conclusion

We conducted a nationally representative survey of 1200 Lebanese and explored socio-political orientations and voting intentions a month prior to the national elections scheduled for May 15, 2022. The survey showed a severe deterioration of socio-economic conditions, with a majority of families earning less than 200 USD per month (compared to a minimum wage of 500 USD prior to the 2019 crash). Some 45% of families reported being unable to meet their basic needs, and another 45% reported barely making ends meet. Nearly a quarter of families have some income in “fresh dollars.” A third of respondents were actively seeking emigration, and a majority have seen a person close to them emigrate since January 2020.

The absolute majorities of Lebanese respondents reported feeling anger (84%), humiliation (74%) and despair (70%). Very few reported being hopeful (17%). Social trust, an indirect measure of social cohesion was extremely low, with 2 / 3 of the population expressing little trust in others. Over 75% of respondents had no trust in the government and its institutions. There is absolute consensus among respondents in blaming the central bank, Lebanese governments, political leaders and the banks as the primary parties responsible for the 2019 collapse in Lebanon. Most respondents also blamed external parties for the collapse.

Half of respondents reported not feeling safe in their areas, and 70% fear security deteriorating significantly in the near future. Nearly 40% of respondents have access to military grade weapons, and a third are willing to use them should conditions deteriorate in the country.

While 70% of respondents are sectarian (i.e., show ingroup biases towards their own sect), 66% of respondents unambiguously supported the secularization of the state (abrogation of sectarian



quotas, civil personal status laws etc.). This support is more pronounced among Christian and Druze respondents.

At the national level, Lebanese respondents were clearly dissatisfied with the performance of all major political parties, including the Oct 17 groups. However, this global dissatisfaction masks sectarian differences. None of the main Christian traditional parties were evaluated favorably by more than a third of respondents within their own sect. Only a third of Sunni respondents rated the performance of the Future Movement favorably. Shia and Druze respondents were the only groups to evaluate the performance of their parties relatively favorably (slim majorities). However, more than 40% of Shia and Druze respondents provided explicitly negative evaluations of Hezbollah, Amal and the PSP respectively. Oct 17 groups were rated more favorably than traditional parties within Christian communities and were rated favorably by a quarter of Sunni respondents and a third of Druze respondents, but only 10% of Shia respondents.

A month before the elections, nearly 24% of registered voters residing in Lebanon did not intend to vote at all. Meanwhile, 38% expressed their commitment to voting, and another 38% remain undecided. Depending on voter turnout on election day, opposition and other groups may obtain anywhere between 25 and 45% of the total votes cast inside Lebanon, while traditional parties could obtain anywhere between 55% and 75% of cast votes. If turnout in 2022 is as high or higher than the turnout in 2018, then election results closer to the 40 - 60 split noted above can be expected. Interestingly, women are less likely to vote for main traditional parties compared to men, and age had no significant impact on voter intention preferences.

Around 50% of the intended votes within Maronite, Armenian, Shia and Druze communities are geared towards main or traditional parties. Sunni participants' votes are equally split between abstention, traditional parties, new parties and other groups. Orthodox participants are split between traditional parties and new/other groups.

Main traditional parties are likely to dominate in some voting districts (e.g., Mount Lebanon 1, 2 and 3; South 2), while opposition and new groups are likely to dominate in the Beqaa (particularly Beqaa 1 and 2), and split the votes in Beqaa 3. A number of voting districts have no clear dominant voter intentions, particularly in the North and Beirut.

Some Important Caveats:

While the present survey has a high accuracy rate at the national level (a 2.8% margin of error) when describing the socio-political profile of Lebanese respondents, the analysis degrades significantly when we explore voting intentions at the voting district level.

Furthermore, the survey is a snapshot in time (cross-sectional survey), and as such the analyses do not capture trends over time (e.g., is support for opposition parties increasing or decreasing as we near election day).



The current analysis of voter intention and participation is limited to nationals residing within Lebanon, and as such does not include the expat vote. The size of the expat votes in 2022 – assuming high turnout - is substantial and likely to impact election outcomes in several voting districts.

While voter tendencies are clearly identified within the report, much is likely to change by election day. The final stretch that occurs within the last 2 weeks leading up to election day sees a frenzy of actions and events, and massive distribution of funds to influence election turnout and outcomes. Money will play a crucial role in the last days of an election occurring in times of financial distress.

An important reason for the weakened support for the main traditional parties in voting intentions in some districts (e.g., North, Beqaa, Beirut) can be attributed to the Future Movement's demobilization ahead of this election. The "Sunni vote" is scattered without an identifiable direction.

Finally, and most importantly, voter intentions and the eventual split in outcomes of the total vote (20-80, 30-70, 40-60) is not equivalent to the same split in the distribution of parliamentary seats. The election law requires competing lists to meet a minimum quota of votes to be eligible for representation. In some voting districts (for example Beirut 2), new and other parties may have a plurality of voter intentions but could end up without adequate parliamentary representation if the votes are scattered across competing lists. On the other hand, in some districts (e.g., South 3) where main traditional parties have an absolute majority of voter intentions, a weak but consolidated opposition can reach the minimum vote required and thus ensure parliamentary representation.