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The Impact of Lebanon's Economic and Social Crisis on Voters' Preferences and Choices for the Parliamentary Elections in 2022

Mohammad Hammoud & Nadim El Kak

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Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Introduction

In October 2019, mass protests erupted against Lebanon's sectarian regime and demanded political change. The uprising distinguished itself through its decentralized character, cross-sectarian makeup, and class-based nature. It mobilized hundreds of thousands at its peak and made people believe in the possibility of a radically different reality. Through numerous acts of solidarity and resistance, hope was reignited and communal bonds formed across Lebanon's squares. With time, however, organizational and strategic weaknesses within the movement became more glaring and could not overcome the range of counterrevolutionary mechanisms it faced. Indeed, the regime and its allies deployed a range of tools to defeat the uprising. These included violent repression from state and non-state actors, co-optation by regime-affiliated groups and figures, and campaigns to undermine the credibility of the movement. While this counterrevolutionary effort was certainly effective, it was also aided by a descent into one of modern history's worst financial and socio-economic collapses. Each ruling party quickly absolved itself of any responsibility in producing the collapse, instead blaming others for corruption and mismanagement, or attributing the crisis to outside factors such as the influx of Syrian refugees.

In reality, as many analysts attested, Lebanon's crisis is a result of its political and economic systems, which can only be understood by reexamining the foundations and trajectory of the postwar regime. Lebanon's civil war officially ended in October of 1990, but the arrangement that would shape the nation's future came a year earlier in Saudi Arabia with the Taif Agreement. At the surface, the Agreement ended the war by adjusting the balance of power between Christians and Muslims from a 6:5 ratio in Parliament, in favor of Christians, to an even split. It even envisaged the establishment of a council to abolish the sectarian system, which was never implemented. In truth, however, the war ended by promising militias they would be granted amnesty, guaranteed regional autonomy in their sectarian strongholds, and be integrated into state institutions of which they could exploit and reap the spoils. One of the architects of this pact was the billionaire Rafic Hariri who had the financial backing of the Saudi Arabian regime and would serve as Prime Minister from 1992 to 1998 and again from 2000 to 2004.

Hariri's approach to the economy was neoliberal par excellence: He prioritized the financial and service sectors over the productive economy, favored capital and rent-appropriation mechanisms over labor and welfare claims, and accumulated state debt to finance the corrupt clientelistic practices of parties in power. In fact, during Hariri's first premiership, the public debt rose from $1.5 billion in 1992 to $18 billion in 1998. Throughout the 1990s, average citizens dealt with rising inflation, local currency depreciation, a lack of safety nets, and regressive taxes. This angered workers and triggered a backlash from the labor movement, spearheaded by the General Labor Confederation, which organized strikes and protests between 1992 and 1997 to oppose the government's neoliberal policies and the lack of a welfare state. Despite valiant efforts, during the 1997 elections of the Genera Labor Confederation’s leadership, the labor movement was co-opted by the regime through violent repression and intimidation, as well as fraud and manipulation.

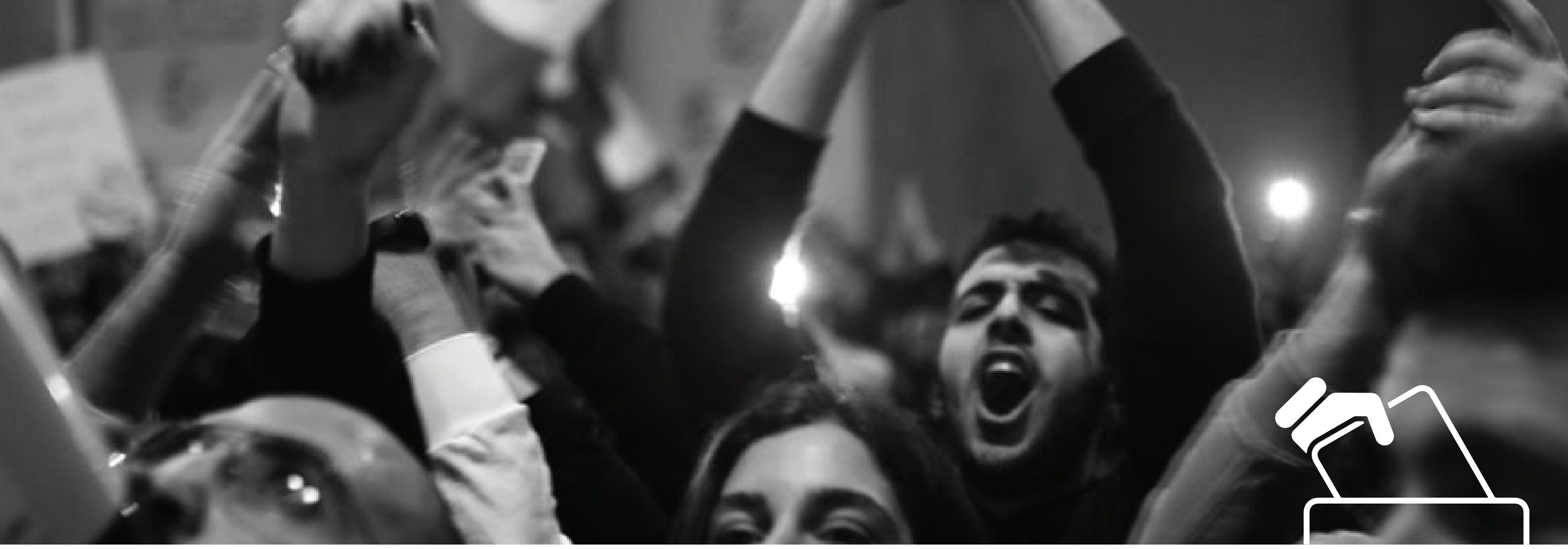
Although it had purged and co-opted the opposition, by the end of the century, the regime still had substantial economic problems to deal with. In order to contain a currency crisis that was threatening the system as a whole, in 1997 the government decided to peg the Lebanese Lira to the US Dollar. This decision would come at massive future costs, for sustaining the peg required constant foreign currency borrowing. To maintain this model and extend the life of the faltering regime, Hariri's second premiership was defined by austerity measures and the Paris 1 and Paris 2 conferences, which lent the Lebanese government $4.5 billion between 2001 and 2002. These loans did not serve to reform the public or financial sectors, nor did they finance public investments. Instead, they helped expand clientelistic networks through more public sector hiring and corrupt dealings. Once these funds dried up, the state began borrowing foreign currency from commercial banks at high-interest rates, increasing the profits of the financial elites allied with the political establishment. By 2007, the public debt had reached $41 billion, which was equivalent to a debt-to-GDP ratio of 178%.

Fortunately for the regime, the 2008 global financial crisis and increase in oil prices rescued Lebanon’s financial system by bringing in over $50 billion into its banks between 2008 and 2012. However, this period of financial stability was short-lived, as foreign currency deposits that had entered the country began to exit Lebanese banks once the global economy started recovering. By 2016, the Central Bank was running out of the foreign currency reserves it needed to maintain the dollar peg and cover its exorbitant trade deficit. This was when Central Bank governor Riad Salameh began implementing his notorious "financial engineering" scheme, which provided commercial banks that lent dollars to the state with interest rates as high as 32%. This scheme was financed by accumulating more debt and resulted in the four largest Lebanese banks collecting astronomical profits that amounted to $1.39 billion in 2018.

While banks were making record profits, the situation reached a tipping point in 2018. The debt-to-GDP ratio had exceeded 150% yet again, foreign currency reserves were being depleted by the cost of imports, the peg could not be maintained, the economy was in recession, and the unemployment rate had exceeded 25%. Promises that foreign loans would save the day yet again did not come to fruition as the government failed to meet the conditionalities set by the 2018 Paris 4 (CEDRE) conference, and Lebanon did not have a productive local economy to fall back on. In October 2019, there was nothing that could delay the looming collapse any longer. The postwar regime had managed to delay the inevitable for more than 20 years, but in the process had exacerbated the crisis and any possible solutions.

With signs of a looming collapse becoming clearer, people spontaneously took to the streets on the night of October 17, 2019 and started the revolutionary uprising. This is when commercial banks, running out of foreign currency, began implementing arbitrary capital controls and seized depositors' savings. Since the dollar peg could no longer be maintained, a parallel black market emerged to exchange currencies. The Lebanese Lira lost more than 90% of its value and the yearly inflation rate reached a record of 224% in December 2021. The central bank, also running out of foreign currency, progressively stopped subsidizing most essential goods such as fuel and medicine, leading to frequent shortages and the complete collapse of the long-neglected electricity sector. In fact, by March 2021, the United Nations estimated that 78% of Lebanon's population was living in poverty, while 36% lived in extreme poverty. The government has been asked to implement long-needed structural reforms in order to obtain an IMF rescue package, but it has failed to do so because these same reforms undermine the interests of traditional parties and their financial partners. The World Bank has hence labeled the government's response to the crisis as a "deliberate depression" resulting in the "disintegration" of Lebanon's political economy in order to avoid accountability.

In light of Lebanon's financial and economic woes, which were only compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Port of Beirut explosion, the 2022 parliamentary elections, set to take place on May 15, represent a critical juncture for the nation and its people. Back in 2018, an electoral coalition of anti-establishment actors by the name of Kulluna Watani fielded 66 candidates across 9 of 15 districts to run against traditional sectarian parties. The results were underwhelming for the coalition, which only won one seat and failed to convince voters to move away from the regime. Much has changed in the past four years, however, raising the possibility that the 2022 elections could bring about significant political changes if anti-establishment groups mobilize effectively.



Lebanon's current landscape of anti-establishment actors finds its roots in the summer of 2015 when more than 150,000 protesters revolted against the government for its inability to resolve a reemerging waste-management crisis. New activist networks emerged from this movement, setting the stage for confrontations with the regime in the 2016 municipal elections. The most notable municipal campaign was spearheaded by Beirut Madinati (Beirut is my City), which brought together students, public intellectuals, activists, and other civil society actors. The campaign had a developmental and localized agenda, avoiding engagement in more contentious national politics. It ran against a coalition comprised of the Future Movement, the Amal Movement, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Lebanese Forces, the Kataeb, and the Tashnag. Despite rival parties coming together to challenge a group of political outsiders, Beirut Madinati still managed to obtain nearly 40% of the total votes. Due to the majoritarian nature of the electoral system, however, the campaign failed to win a seat, though many found hope in the 30,000 votes it did obtain.

As a result, hopes were high heading into the 2018 general elections, but the reality would not fulfill those hopes. Traditional parties invested far more resources into their legislative campaigns and relied on all the instruments in their toolbox to secure their victories. Indeed, anti-establishment candidates were intimidated, voters and their families were bribed and threatened, and accounts of fraudulent practices inside polling centers were widespread. Despite the disappointing results, Lebanon's oppositionist movement gained experience and visibility. While some of the groups that came together for the 2018 elections fell apart, others consolidated their organizational structures and transitioned into more formal political parties. When the 2019 uprising came about, groups like Citizens in a State, LiHaqqi, Beirut Madinati, the National Bloc, and Tahalof Watani took the lead in organizing protests, marches, and public discussions. The revolutionary fervor was palpable in the streets of the uprising, raising hope that change was coming. Although opposition groups widely agreed that ruling parties needed to be replaced, disagreement emerged over the best strategy to effect political change. Some argued that change should come from the streets and be imposed by force, while others preferred constitutional approaches to change. Ultimately, most groups adopted the demand for a politically independent transitional government with legislative authorities, which would manage the economic crisis, implement structural reforms, and organize elections. The regime dismissed this demand and held firm in its counterrevolutionary effort, accurately betting that the movement would eventually lose hope and die out. With the help of the COVID-19 pandemic, the regime buried what was left of the uprising during the country's first lockdown in March 2020 by taking down tents in revolutionary squares. Since then, confrontations with the political establishment have been restricted to occasional protests, syndical elections, and student elections. The 2022 elections will thus be the first true opportunity for supporters of the October uprising to unseat sectarian parties, but will voters act any differently than they did four years ago?

On the one hand, traditional parties have lost legitimacy and proven they are unable to govern. On the other hand, many do not believe that elections organized by the regime itself can bring about change. Furthermore, various voters do not have faith in opposition actors and would rather benefit from the clientelistic services granted to them by electing traditional politicians. Considering both of these perspectives, what outcomes might one expect on May 15? This study seeks to address this question by investigating the impact of Lebanon's economic and social crisis on voters' preferences and choices for the upcoming 2022 parliamentary elections.

Methodology

This report employs a quantitative research approach based on an online survey designed by the Centre for Lebanese Studies (CLS). The survey was launched on December 7, 2021 and closed on February 9, 2022. The survey included 26 questions that control for respondents' socioeconomic status and political perceptions while capturing changes in voting preferences between the last parliamentary elections (2018) and the upcoming one (2022). The later was achieved by asking participants to indicate who they voted to in the last elections (2018) and who will they vote to in the upcoming elections (2022).

The survey was advertised on social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) and administered through Survey Monkey. Researchers reached out to CLS's network across Lebanon to encourage response rates from all eight governorates. The survey results were analyzed using STATA and Excel, where different cross-tabulations were carried out. All percentages were rounded, so the total may not add up to 100 in some cases. The following section provides a detailed overview of our research sample.

Research Sample

The online survey was filled out by 6,819 respondents. The sample covers all eight governorates in Lebanon and respondents from all 26 polling districts, as shown in Table 1. Due to data collection limitations, our sample does not perfectly represent the entire Lebanese population. However, it still offers valuable insights into the impact of Lebanon's economic and social crisis on voters' preferences and choices for the upcoming parliamentary elections.

Governorate	District	Percentage of Respondents
Akkar	Akkar	5
North Governorate	Batroun	3
	Bsharri	3
	Koura	2
	Miniyeh- Danniyeh	1
	Tripoli	2
	Zgharta	3
Beqaa	Rashaya	1
	West Beqaa	3
	Zahle	6
Baalbek-Hermel	Baalbek	7
	Hermel	1
Beirut	Beirut	10
Mount Lebanon	Aley	4
	Baabda	6
	Chouf	6
	Matn	7
Keserwan-Jbeil	Byblos	4
	Keserwan	6
South	Jezzine	3
	Sidon	3
	Tyre	3
Nabatieh	Bint Jbeil	3
	Hasbaya	1
	Marjeyoun	3
	Nabatieh	4

Table 1. Polling District Breakdown

The majority of our respondents (96%) reside in Lebanon, while only 4% are Lebanese citizens outside Lebanon, as indicated in the figure below.

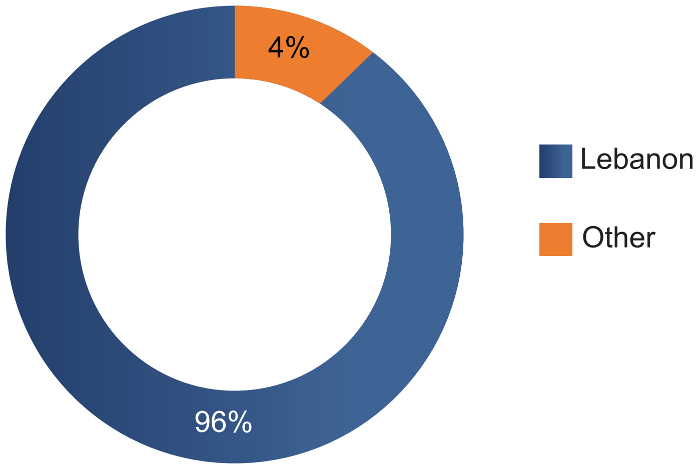


Figure 1. Country of Residence

The figure below shows the gender breakdown of the sample. Males constitute 79% of our sampled respondents, while only 21% are female respondents.

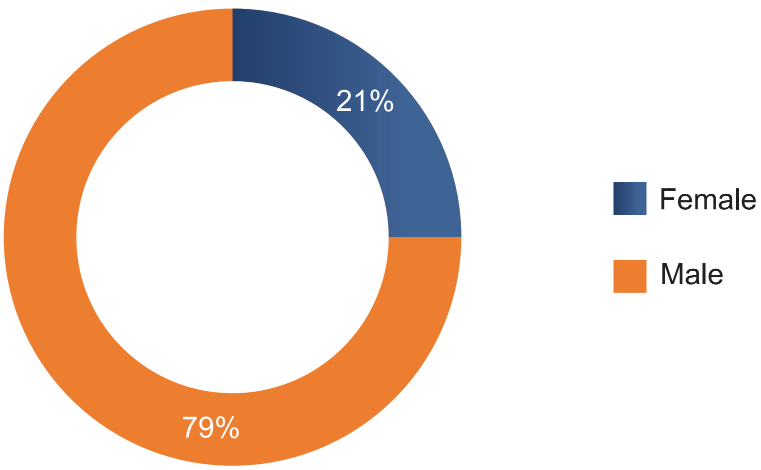


Figure 2. Gender Breakdown

The research sample covers a wide range of age groups. The figure below shows that most of the sampled respondents (55%) are between 31 and 50 years.

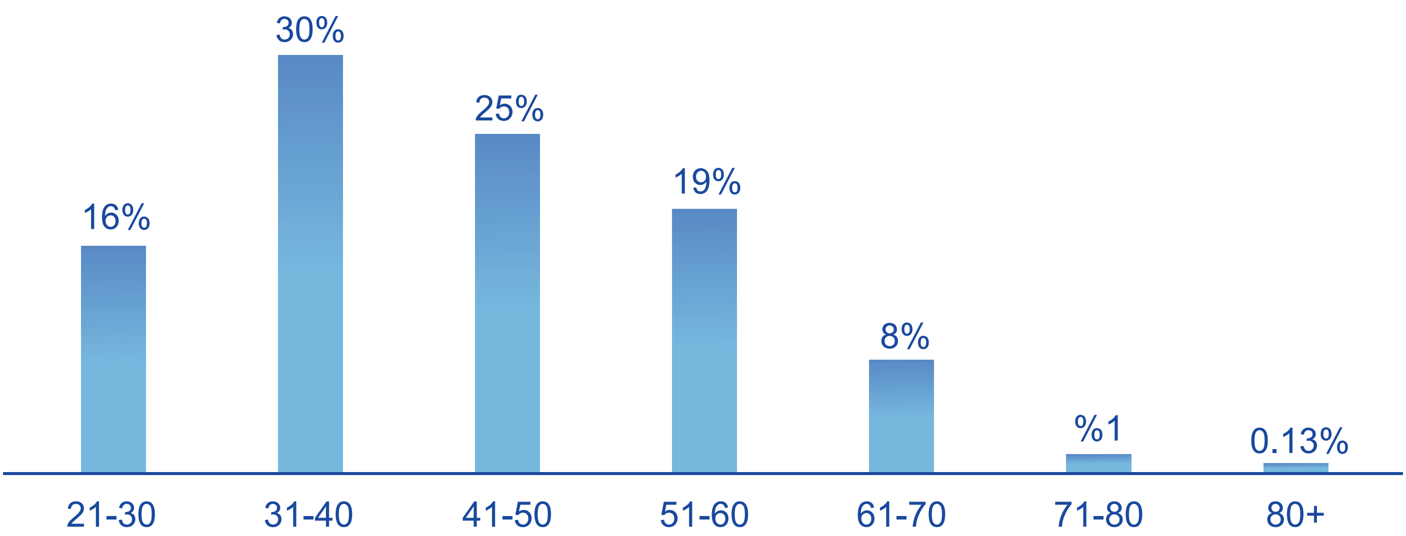


Figure 3. Age Breakdown

The following figure shows the breakdown of the sampled respondents by educational attainment. Most respondents (53%) have a post-secondary education, while less than 4% have no education or primary education.

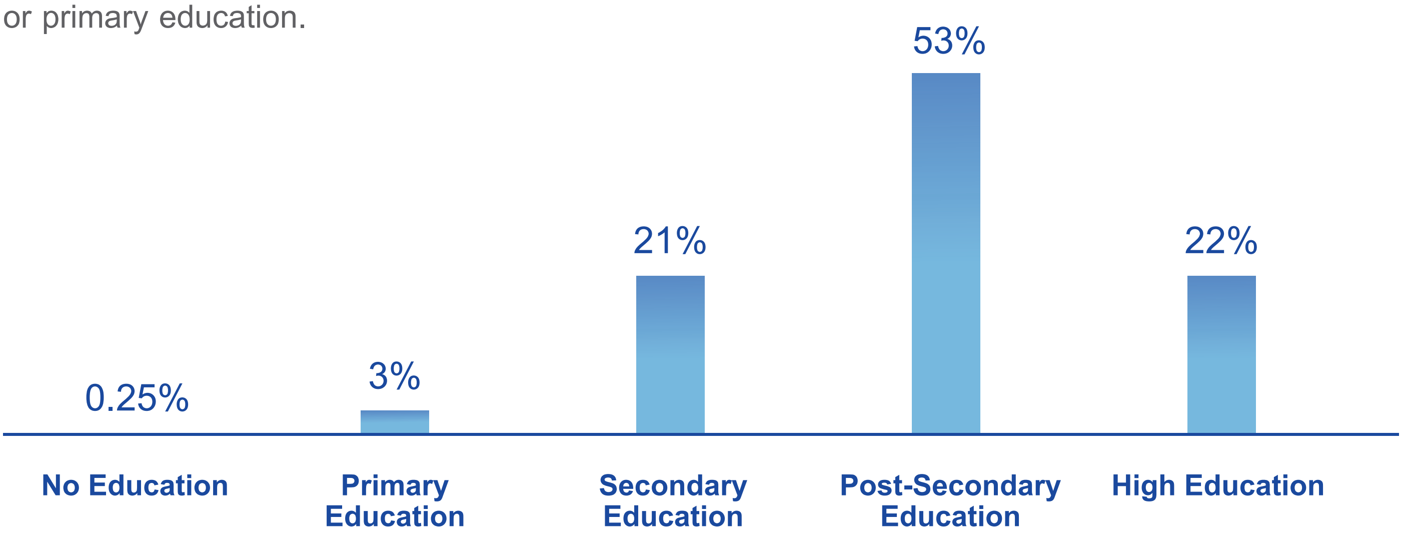


Figure 4. Educational Attainment Breakdown

The figure below shows our sample's breakdown by marital status. Most of our respondents (71%) are married, while a quarter (25%) are single.

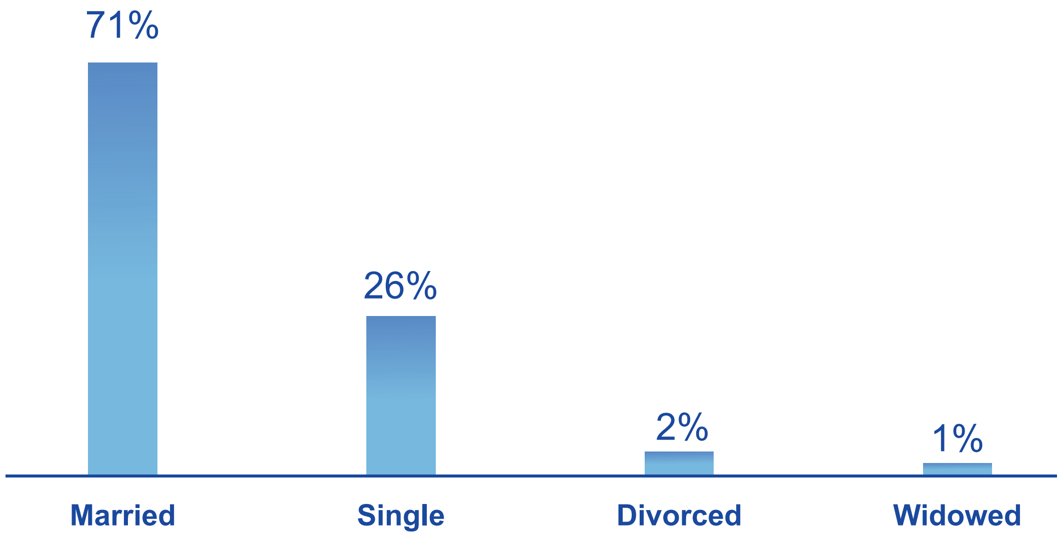


Figure 5. Marital Status Breakdown

Over two-thirds (68%) of our respondents are employed, while almost a quarter (23%) are unemployed. On the other hand, only 2% of our respondents are students, and 7% are retired individuals, as indicated below.

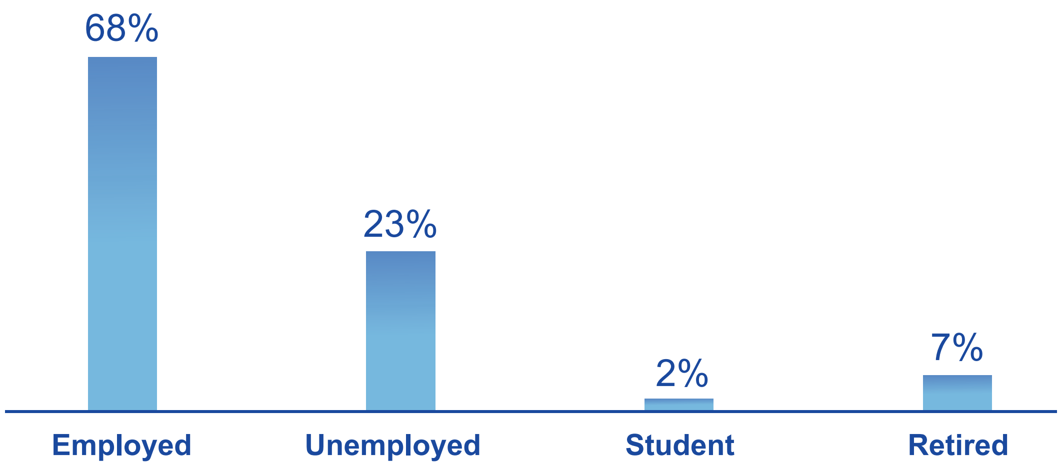


Figure 6. Employment Status Breakdown

The sample covers the most common religious sects in Lebanon. Maronites constitute 39% of our sample, while 21% of our participants are Shiite and 15% are Sunni. Similarly, 9% of our respondents are Greek Orthodox, and 6% are Greek Catholic. The remaining 10% are distributed between 5% Druze and 5% for other religious minorities.

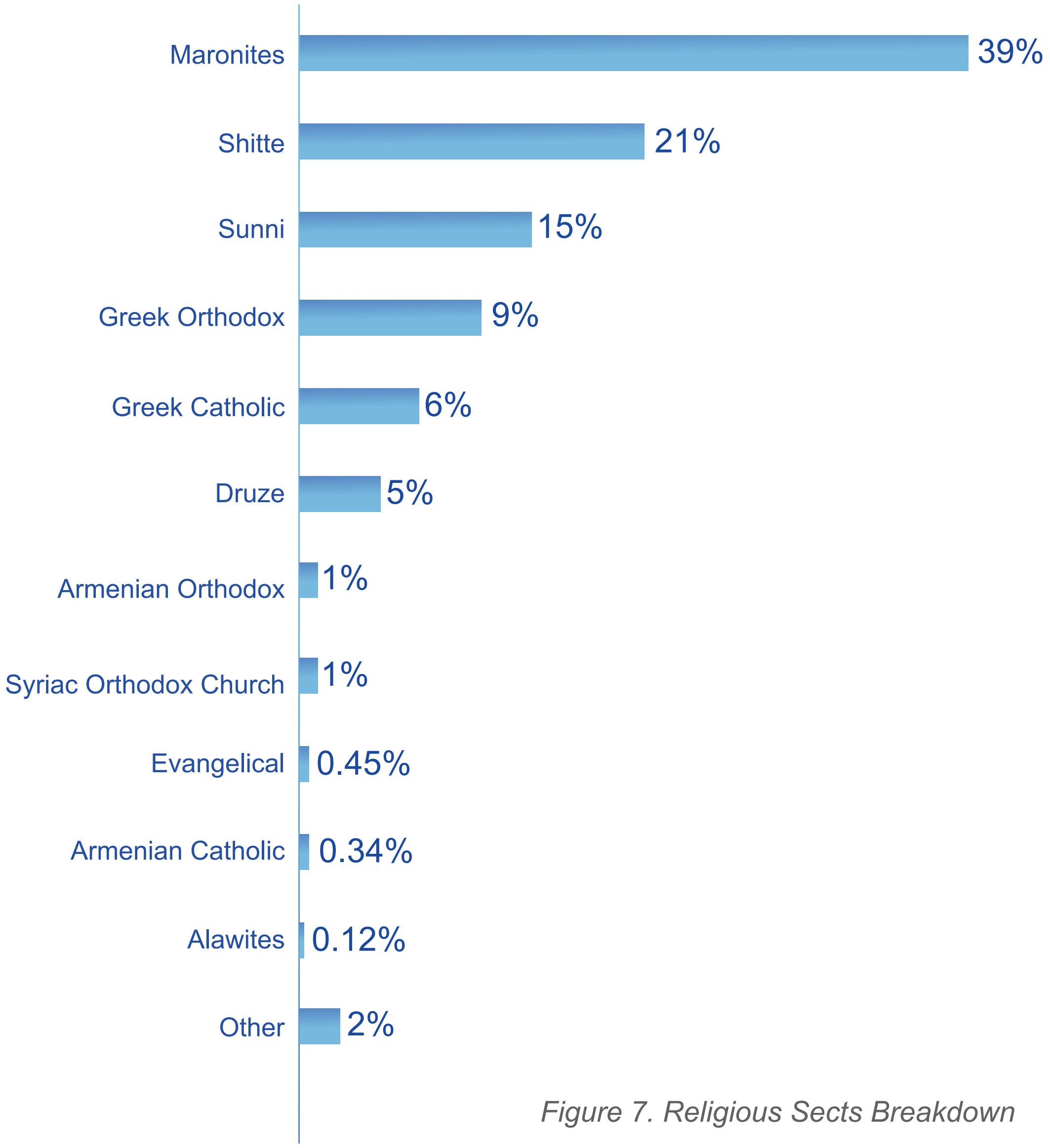


Figure 7. Religious Sects Breakdown

The following figure shows that 54% of our respondents participated in demonstrations opposing the current government or rejecting the economic deterioration. In comparison, 46% did not participate in any demonstration opposing the current government.

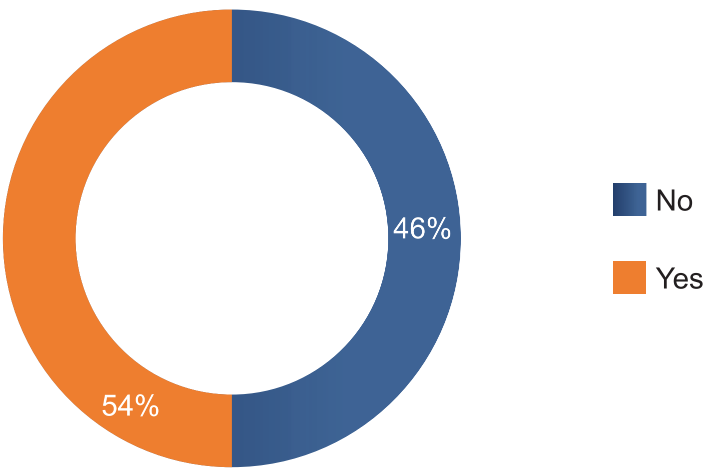


Figure 8. Participated in Demonstrations Opposing the Current Government

Research Ethics

This study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Lebanese American University (LAU). Further, all researchers participating in this study have a certificate from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI), a research ethics and compliance training program. In addition, all participants provided an online consent prior to filling out the survey. No personal information was documented in the survey that enables the identification of the participant.

Limitations

Our data collection approach was limited to online surveys. Therefore, online methods restricted the ability to represent the entire Lebanese population by limiting our reach to people with certain demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. The greatest drawback of the online method was the under-representation of vulnerable individuals, some religious sects, individuals with no education, and the female population.

Survey Findings

To investigate the impact of Lebanon's economic and social crisis on voters' preferences and choices for the upcoming 2022 parliamentary elections, we analyze our quantitative survey data at three main levels. First, we examine voters' turnout rates for the last and upcoming parliamentary elections while highlighting the main reasons for not participating. Second, we portray voters' perceptions and opinions on the forthcoming elections. Finally, we reveal changes in voting preferences by pointing out differences in voters' choices in the last parliamentary elections (2018) to those expressed for the upcoming elections (2022). **It is worth mentioning that the entire dataset analyzed in this section is based on our survey findings in 2022.** Our data on voters' choices for the last parliamentary elections (2018) were provided by the same individuals who participated in 2022. Therefore, our participants were asked to indicate who they voted to in the last elections (2018) and who will they vote to in the upcoming elections (2022) in the same survey.

Turnout Rates

According to the Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 3,746,483 citizens registered to vote in the 2018 parliamentary elections resulting in a turnout rate of 49.68%. According to the figure below, 83% of our respondents voted in the last parliamentary elections. Therefore, our overestimated turnout rate indicates that our survey was filled mainly by respondents who participated in the last elections.

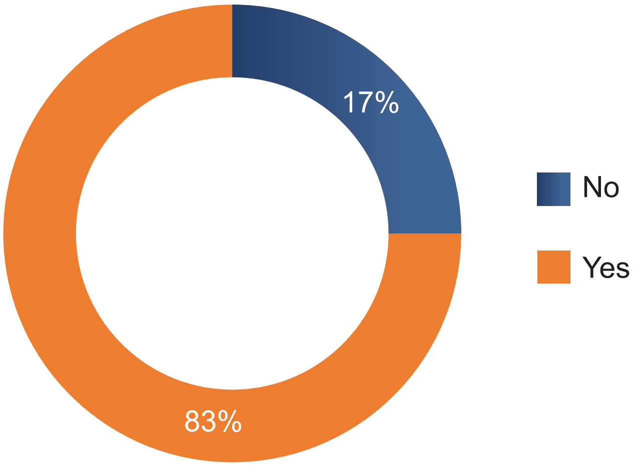


Figure 9. Voting Decision in Last Elections (2018)

Similarly, as shown in the figure below, 83% of our respondents indicate that they would vote in the upcoming elections. However, 10% indicate that they might vote, meaning that the participation of this group in the next elections might increase turnout rates.

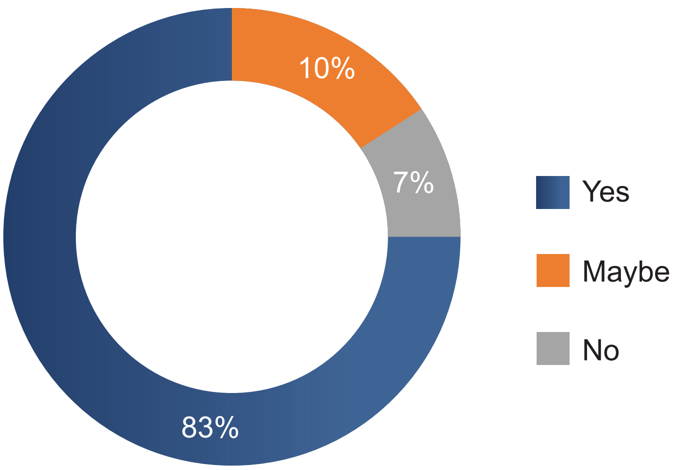


Figure 10. Voting Decision in Coming Elections (2022)

As shown in the figure below, most respondents (87%) who voted in the last elections indicate that they would vote in the coming elections. On the other hand, 65% of those who abstained during the previous elections indicate that they would vote in the forthcoming elections. It is worth noting that this group is underrepresented in our sample. Therefore, despite the consistent turnout rates indicated in figures 9 and 10, in the upcoming elections turnout rates might increase due to the significant percentage (65%) of respondents who indicated that they abstained in 2018 but will vote in 2022.

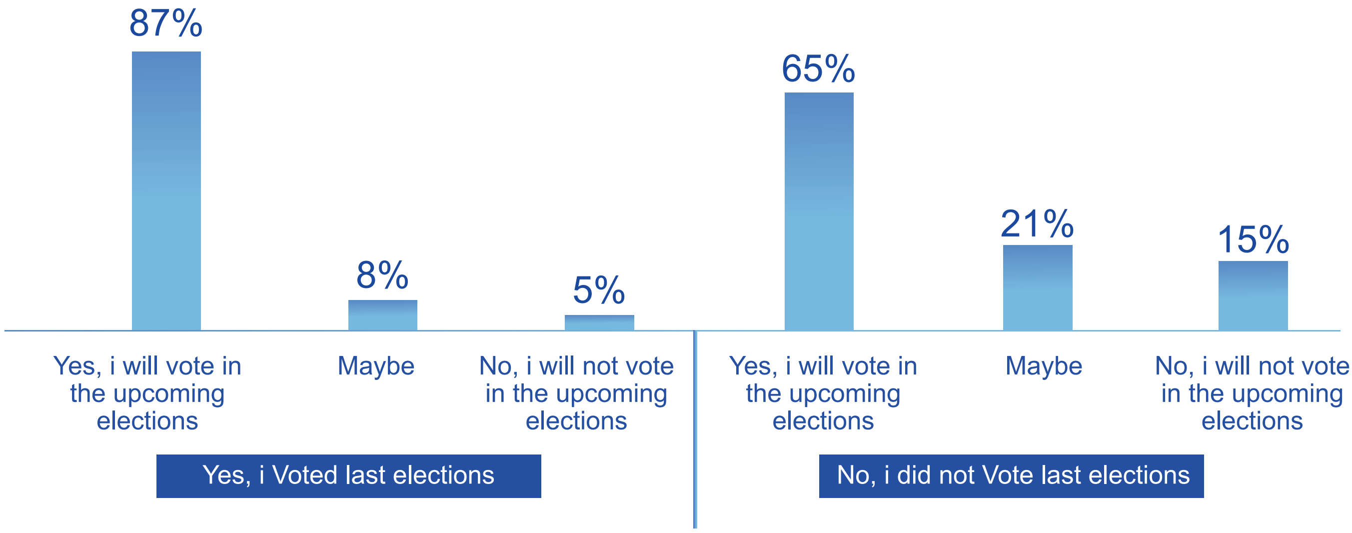


Figure 11. Voting Decision in Coming Upcoming Elections Based on Last Election's' Decision

As indicated in Table 2, among the top reasons respondents abstained in both the 2018 and 2022 elections include doubt that voting would achieve the political life that respondents aspire to, and the presence of electoral law and electoral lists do not meet their expectations.

	2018	2022
The polling stations were/are not accessible	1%	1%
The elections were/are not fair and transparent	12%	19%
The adopted electoral law did/does not meet my expectations	15%	22%
Voting would/will not affect the political life that I aspire to	19%	28%
The electoral list did/will not include candidates according to my expectations	21%	18%
I have not reached the legal voting age (21 years)	16%	-
Other	16%	13%

Table 2. Reasons for Voter Abstention

Voters' Perceptions and Opinions on the Upcoming Elections

According to Transparency International, field observations in key electoral districts during the 2018 parliamentary elections revealed a series of electoral law violations and mismanagement. Our results show that only 16% of respondents expect the upcoming elections to be fair and transparent, as indicated in the figure below.

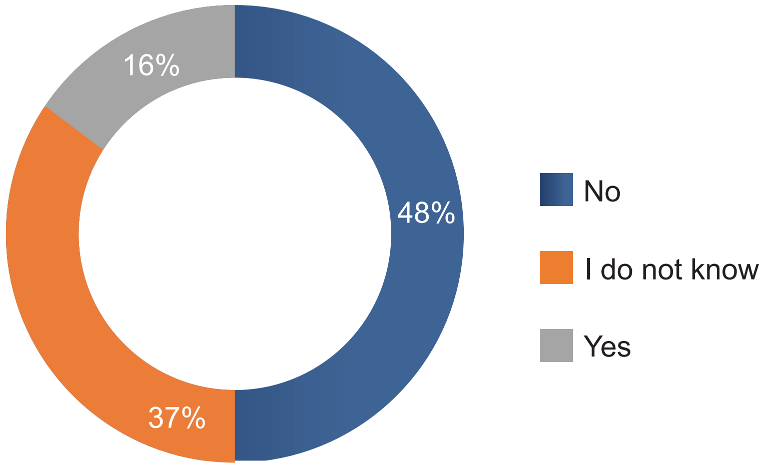


Figure 12. Percentage of Respondents Who Think that the Upcoming Elections Will be Transparent and Fair

In addition, only 15% of surveyed respondents expect that the upcoming elections will lead to a change so that the parliament will be represented by a political elite from outside the current ruling parties. On the other hand, 49% expect that change might happen to some extent, as indicated in the figure below.

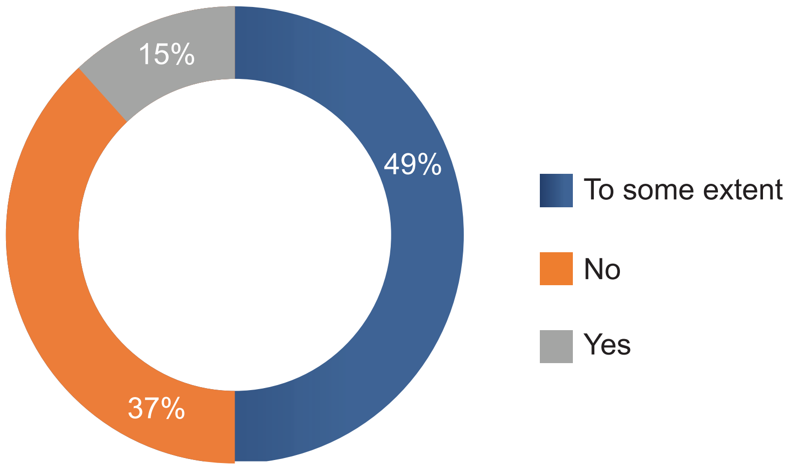


Figure 13. Percentage of Respondents Who Think that the Upcoming Elections Will lead to Change

Over the past three years, Lebanon has witnessed increasing protests calling for social, economic, and political desectarianization and a non-sectarian electoral law. Our survey findings reveal that 62% of respondents favor the transition to non-sectarian elections, while 28% do not favor non-sectarian elections, as indicated in the figure below.

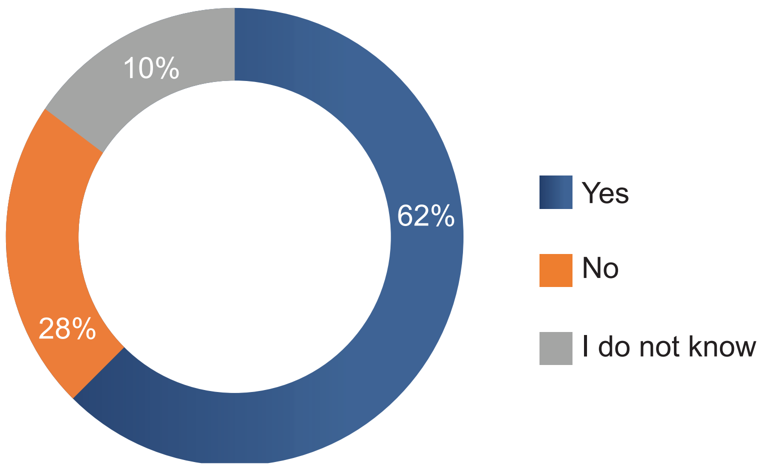


Figure 14. Percentage of Respondents Who Favor the Transition to Non-Sectarian Elections

Furthermore, although our sample underrepresents Lebanon’s female population, almost three-quarters (72%) of surveyed respondents reported that they support the adoption of a quota that guarantees women's representation with a minimum number of parliamentary seats.

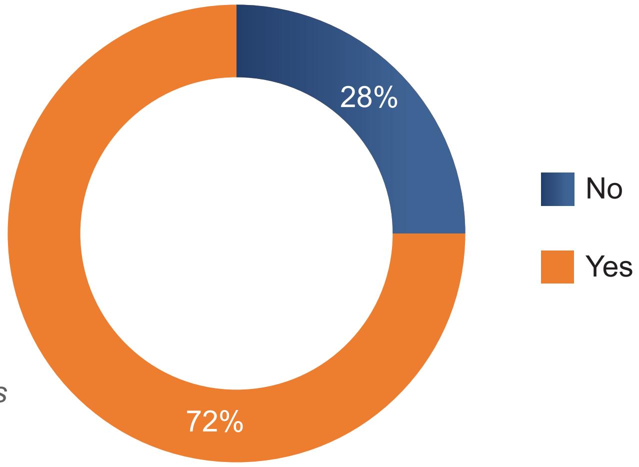


Figure 15. Percentage of Respondents Who Favor the Adoption of a Parliamentary Gender Quota

Changes in Voting Preference

This section reveals changes in voting preference by pointing out differences in voters' choices in the last parliamentary elections (2018) to those expressed for the upcoming elections (2022). We conduct distinct cross-tabulations that reveal changes in voting choices by different political, demographic, and socioeconomic factors. For simplicity reasons, we define voting choices as follows:

1- **Current political parties:** political parties currently participating in the government
2- **Opposition political parties:** opposition political parties not currently participating in the government
3- **Independent opposition:** independent opposition groups and civil society
4- **Blank voters:** blank vote

The table below shows a significant decrease in the percentage of voters supporting current political parties for the upcoming 2022 elections (30%) compared to 2018 (53%). On the other hand, the percentage of voters supporting opposition political parties only decreased by 1% between the last (31%) and upcoming (30%) elections. The decrease in the percentages of the first two groups is translated into an increase in the rate of voters supporting independent opposition (increased by 20%) or blank voters (increased by 3%).

	2018	2022
Current political parties	53%	30%
Opposition political parties	31%	30%
Independent opposition	11%	31%
Blank voters	6%	9%

Table 3. Voting Choices for Last and Upcoming Elections

The following table shows changes in voting choices for the upcoming elections based on previous voting choices. Our results reveal that only 57% of respondents who voted for current political parties in the 2018 elections plan to do the same in 2022. In contrast, a significant percentage (23%) will no longer vote for current political parties and plan on voting for independent opposition instead. Similarly, 80% of respondents who indicated that they voted for opposition political parties in the 2018 elections are planning to do the same in the 2022 elections. On the other hand, a significant percentage (17%) will no longer vote for opposition political parties and plan on voting for independent opposition instead.

The findings presented in tables 3 and 4 reveal significant changes in voting preferences, mainly a switch in voters' choices from political parties (current and opposition) to independent opposition. However, the loss of supporters for current political parties seems to be greater than opposition political parties since the latter offsets their losses by gaining new supporters, mainly from previous blank voters (12%) and previous supporters for currently participating parties (10%).

		2018			
		Current political parties	Opposition political parties	Independent opposition	Blank voters
2022	Current political parties	57%	1%	3%	6%
	Opposition political parties	10%	80%	5%	12%
	Independent opposition	23%	17%	88%	44%
	Blank voters	9%	2%	4%	38%

Table 4. Changes in Voting Choices Based on Previous Voting Choices

Furthermore, our findings reveal a significant decrease in the percentage of both male (decreased by 22%) and female (decreased by 26%) supporters for current political parties, as indicated in the table below. The decrease in the percentage of male and female supporters for current political parties is translated into an increase in the rate of voters supporting independent opposition (increased by 18% and 25% for males and females, respectively) or blank voters (increased by 3% for both males and females).

	Current political parties		Opposition political parties		Independent opposition		Blank voters	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
Males	53%	31%	32%	32%	11%	29%	5%	8%
Females	52%	26%	27%	24%	13%	38%	8%	11%

Table 5. Changes in Voting Preference by Gender

In addition, our findings reveal that supporters for current political parties have significantly decreased across all age groups, as indicated in the table below. Specifically, our results indicate that this decrease is mainly significant among respondents between the ages of 61-70 (decreased by 26%). It is worth noting that Lebanon's economic crisis severely affected this age group after losing almost their entire retirement savings. On the other hand, our results reveal that supporters for independent opposition have significantly increased across all age groups.

	Current political parties		Opposition political parties		Independent opposition		Blank voters	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
21 – 30 Years	57%	34%	23%	24%	12%	32%	7%	9%
31 – 40 Years	54%	31%	29%	29%	12%	32%	5%	8%
41 – 50 Years	57%	32%	28%	30%	11%	28%	5%	10%
51 – 60 Years	47%	25%	40%	38%	8%	29%	5%	8%
61 – 70 Years	48%	22%	33%	32%	12%	37%	8%	9%
71 – 80 Years	40%	19%	26%	19%	28%	57%	6%	4%
80+ Years	56%	33%	33%	11%	11%	44%	0%	11%

Table 6. Changes in Voting Preference by Age

The following table shows changes in voting choices for the upcoming elections by respondents' financial struggle. Our findings reveal that supporters for current political parties have significantly decreased across all socioeconomic groups. However, the decrease in supporters for current political parties is more prominent among those who always struggle to pay their bills. Only 25% of respondents who always struggle to pay their bills reported that they would vote for current political parties, a 30% reduction compared to the 2018 elections (55%). We also observe a significant increase in supporters for independent opposition by almost threefold across all socioeconomic groups for the upcoming elections compared to the 2018 elections.

	Current political parties		Opposition political parties		Independent opposition		Blank voters	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
I Always Struggle to Pay my Bills	55%	25%	25%	26%	10%	35%	10%	14%
I Sometimes Struggle to Pay my Bills	52%	31%	33%	33%	11%	29%	4%	7%
I Never Struggle to Pay my Bills	51%	33%	33%	30%	12%	31%	3%	5%

Table 7. Changes in Voting Preference by Financial Struggle

Furthermore, our results reveal that supporters for current political parties have significantly decreased among all educated respondents irrespective of their educational attainment. On the other hand, the support for current political parties has increased among respondents with no education by 10% for the upcoming elections (31%) compared to the 2018 elections (21%). Moreover, for the forthcoming elections, we observe a significant increase in supporters for independent opposition across all educational levels, compared to the 2018 elections.

	Current political parties		Opposition political parties		Independent opposition		Blank voters	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
No education	21%	31%	43%	31%	7%	13%	29%	25%
Primary Education	58%	33%	27%	26%	7%	31%	8%	11%
Secondary Education	55%	32%	31%	32%	8%	28%	5%	9%
Post-Secondary Education	52%	30%	32%	32%	11%	29%	5%	9%
Higher Education	51%	28%	28%	25%	16%	40%	6%	7%

Table 8. Changes in Voting Preference by Educational Attainment

Our results also reveal that the percentage of supporters for current political parties has significantly decreased across all religious sects, as presented below. The decrease in supporters for current political parties is more prominent among Alawites (decreased by 43%), Armenian Orthodox (decreased by 40%), Druze (decreased by 39%), Armenian Catholic (decreased by 38%), and Sunni (decreased by 35%). Furthermore, the loss of supporters for current political parties is translated into an increase in supporters for mainly the independent opposition, as presented below.

	Current political parties		Opposition political parties		Independent opposition		Blank voters	
	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
Armenian Orthodox	73%	33%	14%	20%	14%	30%	0%	17%
Armenian Catholic	69%	33%	13%	24%	6%	24%	13%	19%
Evangelical	50%	36%	31%	21%	15%	32%	4$	11%
Druzee	54%	15%	13%	14%	27%	63%	6%	8%
Greek Orthodox	55%	29%	31%	33%	10%	31%	4%	8%
Greek Catholic	43%	23%	41%	38%	11%	32%	5%	6%
Syriac Orthodox Church	22%	17%	69%	64%	9%	19%	0%	0%
Sunni	57%	19%	18%	16%	19%	55%	7%	11%
Shiite	75%	49%	5%	6%	10%	29%	10%	17%
Alawites	71%	29%	14%	29%	0%	29%	14%	14%
Maronites	43%	27%	47%	48%	7%	22%	3%	4%

Table 9. Changes in Voting Preference by Religious Sect

Our findings on changes in voting preference by polling districts are consistent with our results by religious sects. The table below shows that supporters for current political parties have significantly decreased across all polling districts. However, the decrease in supporters for current political parties is more prominent in Rashaya (decreased by 42%), Miniyeh-Danniyeh (decreased by 37%), Hasbaya (decreased by 35%), Koura (decreased by 34%), Tripoli (decreased by 33%), and West Beqaa (decreased by 33%). Again, the loss of supporters for current political parties is translated into an increase in supporters for independent opposition, which gained a significant percentage of supporters in all polling districts.

		Current political parties		Opposition political parties		Independent opposition		Blank voters	
		2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022	2018	2022
Akkar	Akkar	59%	29%	25%	30%	5%	32%	11%	9%
North Governorate	Batroun	41%	30%	46%	39%	12%	25%	2%	6%
	Bsharri	28%	12%	62%	56%	5%	28%	5%	4%
	Koura	68%	34%	23%	30%	4%	29%	6%	7%
	Miniyeh-Danniyeh	69%	33%	14%	15%	11%	43%	6%	10%
	Tripoli	53%	20%	22%	23%	23%	51%	3%	6%
	Zgharta	50%	24%	35%	33%	12%	38%	3%	4%
Beqaa	Rashaya	69%	27%	9%	6%	14%	55%	9%	11%
	West Beqaa	63%	30%	23%	27%	8%	28%	6%	14%
	Zahle	49%	25%	37%	37%	10%	31%	4%	7%
Baalbek-Hermel	Baalbek	54%	35%	32%	30%	7%	24%	7%	11%
	Hermel	45%	32%	35%	22%	14%	33%	6%	13%
Beirut	Beirut	51%	26%	22%	23%	23%	41%	5%	10%
Mount Lebanon	Aley	48%	20%	29%	33%	21%	40%	3%	7%
	Baabda	50%	31%	35%	33%	11%	29%	5%	8%
	Chouf	50%	23%	29%	28%	17%	41%	5%	9%
	Matn	54%	22%	49%	48%	8%	25%	3%	4%
Keserwan-Jbeil	Byblos	42%	33%	49%	44%	5%	18%	4%	6%
	Keserwan	51%	37%	40%	42%	7%	20%	2%	3%
South	Jezzine	70%	42%	25%	28%	1%	43%	5%	10%
	Sidon	60%	31%	15%	13%	10%	28%	15%	13%
	Tyre	77%	47%	3%	7%	9%	35%	11%	17%
Nabatieh	Bint Jbeil	67%	39%	10%	15%	11%	46%	12%	12%
	Hasbaya	53%	18%	21%	28%	16%	46%	9%	8%
	Marjeyoun	66%	44%	21%	17%	7%	24%	6%	15%
	Nabatieh	70%	44%	7%	9%	11%	29%	12%	19%

Table 10. Changes in Voting Preference by Polling District

The findings presented in this section reveal significant changes in voters' choices, indicating that Lebanon's economic and social crisis did indeed affect voters' preferences and choices for the upcoming elections. Our results show that traditional political parties that have been ruling for almost three decades are losing popularity against independent opposition groups and members of civil society. With the latter accusing the former of corruption and mismanagement while promising to implement policy reforms that would lift the country from its dire financial and economic crisis.

Conclusion

This study investigates the impact of Lebanon’s economic and social crisis on voters’ preferences and choices for the upcoming (2022) parliamentary elections. The study is based on an online survey filled out by 6,819 participants distributed across Lebanon’s 26 polling districts. We conducted distinct cross-tabulations that reveal changes in voting choices by different political, demographic, and socioeconomic factors.

The survey results reveal that turnout rates for the upcoming elections might not be significantly different from last elections’ rates since an almost identical percentage of respondents who indicated voting in the previous elections also plan on voting in the upcoming elections. Furthermore, most respondents who are abstaining in the upcoming elections expressed that voting would not affect the political life that they aspire to and that the current electoral law and electoral lists do not meet their expectations.

In addition, most participants do not expect that the upcoming elections will be fair and transparent nor that it will lead to a change so that the parliament will be represented by a political elite from outside the current ruling parties. The findings reveal that most participants favor the transition to non-sectarian elections and support the adoption of a quota that guarantees women's representation with a minimum number of parliamentary seats.

Furthermore, our survey results reveal significant changes in voters’ choices, thus indicating that Lebanon’s economic and social crisis did indeed affect voters’ preferences and choices for the upcoming elections. Our analysis shows a decrease in the percentage of supporters for current political parties across all age groups, socioeconomic groups, religious sects, and polling districts. Most respondents who no longer support current political parties became supporters of independent opposition groups. Therefore, the percentage of supporters for independent opposition has increased significantly across all age groups, socioeconomic groups, religious sects, and polling districts. On the other hand, the percentage of voters supporting opposition political parties for the upcoming elections did not significantly change compared to the last elections.

This study does not intend to forecast the upcoming elections’ results, as much as observe if the elections will carry any changes to Lebanon’s rigid political structure. Our survey findings provide enough evidence that the severity of the economic and social crisis has led to changes in voting preferences and choices. These changes could lead to a change in Lebanon’s political system if independent groups and members of civil society mobilize effectively against traditional political parties. Therefore, change cannot be solely predicted by observing voters’ preferences and choices. It also depends on how effectively independent groups and members of the civil society can mobilize against the well-organized and deeply rooted ruling regime.

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