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Report

Rebuilding Trust Between Citizens and Government Through Policy Implementation and Oversight

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Founded in 1989, the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies is an independently managed, non-partisan, non-profit, non-governmental think tank whose mission is to produce and advocate for policies that improve governance in Lebanon and the Arab region. LCPS's current research agenda focuses on: enhancing governance, informing the process of economic growth and sustainable development, promoting inclusive and effective social policies, and informing the development of policies for a sustainable environment. Four themes cut across the above areas of focus, including gender, youth, conflict resolution, and technology.

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Introduction

Lebanon has endured an extraordinary convergence of crises in recent years, each compounding the fragility of its political, economic, and social systems. On October 17, 2019, mass protests erupted across the country in response to long-standing grievances: widespread corruption, deepening inequality, the onset of financial collapse, loss of savings, and sharp currency devaluation.

In the years that followed, Lebanon was struck by successive shocks: the unprecedented economic and banking crisis, the COVID19 pandemic, the devastating Port of Beirut explosion in August 2020, a prolonged energy shortage, and persistent governmental paralysis. These crises unfolded against the backdrop of Lebanon hosting the highest number of refugees per capita worldwide due to the Syrian civil war, placing immense strain on already overstretched institutions and public services.

The human consequences have been severe. Families have faced record levels of multi-dimensional poverty, the erosion of savings, mass emigration, and repeated failures in the management of critical infrastructure. Citizens' access to even the most basic public services has been sharply curtailed, fueling widespread disillusionment and mistrust in the state.

The massive Israeli attacks that followed the Hezbollah support campaign for Hamas on October 8, 2023, escalated further in November 2024 and again in March 2026. Israeli strikes and ground incursions destroyed entire villages, uprooted communities far from the border, and inflicted widespread damage on infrastructure.

These successive assaults underscored the disproportionate impact of Israeli aggression on Lebanon's already fragile institutions and communities, compounding humanitarian suffering and eroding the prospects for democratic reform. Amid this deterioration, parliamentary elections scheduled for 2026 were postponed for two years, casting new uncertainty over the country's democratic trajectory.

This report seeks to address a critical gap in understanding how Lebanese citizens perceive their institutions, evaluate political actors, and envision their role in democratic processes at a time of acute crisis. Drawing on nationwide survey data and focus group discussions, it provides a grounded account of citizen priorities, frustrations, and expectations. The findings offer valuable insight into the lived experiences of women, youth, and marginalized groups, and highlight the opportunities and challenges for rebuilding trust between citizens and the state.

Research Background

The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS), with the support of the Dutch embassy in Beirut, conducted a mixed methods study between December 2025 and February 2026 consisting of a nationwide survey of 1,200 respondents and 18 focus groups discussions.

The research was conducted at a time when parliamentary elections were still officially scheduled for spring 2026 and had not yet been postponed. The data collection fieldwork took place prior to the March 2026 escalation and thus captures public sentiment in a narrow window before the war intensified.

The research was conducted against a backdrop of ongoing Israeli strikes in South Lebanon, intermittent attacks on Beirut's southern suburbs, and a generally volatile security environment that had already sown deep uncertainty. The findings therefore offer a timely snapshot of how citizens were feeling before the regional escalation, registering widespread frustration, fear, dissatisfaction with the political system, and serious doubts about whether elections and normal civic life could proceed.

Since completing the focus groups sessions for this study, parliamentary elections have been formally postponed, underscoring the fragility of the political process and making these results especially relevant as a record of public attitudes in the months leading up to what had been expected to be a pivotal electoral moment.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative tools. A total of 18 focus groups were conducted across Lebanon. Fifteen groups were held in each of the country's electoral districts with participants aged 25 and above who were eligible to vote in the 2022 parliamentary elections. Two groups targeted first-time voters (aged 21–24) who would be eligible to vote in 2026, while one group engaged pre-voter youth (aged 18–21). All groups were gender-mixed, with deliberate efforts to ensure fair representation of women's voices.

Recruitment reflected sectarian, socioeconomic, and geographic diversity. Diversity was further sought across age brackets and levels of education, to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives. While the focus group study aimed to assemble groups that were diverse and reflective of each district's demographic composition, it did not systematically account for socioeconomic background or political affiliation. Instead, recruitment focused on ensuring that participants collectively represented the heterogeneity of their electoral district, without applying rigid quotas beyond sectarian and gender considerations.

The discussions explored lived experiences, perceptions of political representation, attitudes toward the 2026 elections, and expectations for inclusion of women and youth in political life. Each session followed a structured discussion guide, beginning with personal experiences of political and economic crises, moving to reflections on the 2022 elections and current parliamentary representation, and concluding with expectations and priorities for the 2026 elections.

To complement these qualitative insights, LCPS commissioned Miners Research to conduct a nationwide survey in January 2026. The survey was designed to provide a representative picture of Lebanese citizens aged 18 and above, capturing attitudes toward socioeconomic conditions, institutional trust, political participation, diversity and inclusion, and expectations for the 2026 elections. The questionnaire consisted of 50 structured questions and was administered via telephone interviews lasting between 20 and 25 minutes.

From this frame, a sample of 1,200 respondents was drawn proportionally across all governorates: Beirut (7.1%), Mount Lebanon (42%), North (13.1%), Akkar (6.7%), South (12.1%), Nabatieh (7.9%), Bekaa (6.1%), and Baalbek-Hermel (5%). Within each governorate, respondents were further distributed across districts to reflect population size and composition. The sample achieved gender balance (48.4% male, 51.6% female) and covered all age cohorts from 18–24 to 65+, while also capturing sectarian diversity in line with the demographic realities of each district.

Fieldwork was carried out by trained teams in each governorate, supervised by experienced researchers with local knowledge of their areas. Interviewers, who conducted the survey by a Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI), underwent standardized training to ensure consistency in administering the questionnaire, adherence to ethical safeguards, and respect for respondent confidentiality. Data was coded and processed using KOBO and SPSS, with analysis conducted across explanatory variables including gender, age, governorate, education, income, and sectarian affiliation.

Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical standards across both methods: participation was voluntary with informed consent obtained at recruitment and again at the start of each focus group; confidentiality was protected by removing names and identifiers from transcripts and reports; facilitators enforced privacy and culturally sensitive safeguarding, with special attention to protecting women's and youth voices; survey interviewers introduced themselves, explained the study, and secured verbal consent while assuring

respondents of anonymity and limited use of data; and quality-control measures (monitoring, callbacks, verification) were implemented to preserve respondent anonymity and the right to decline.

Together, these procedures ensure that data collection adhered to international research ethics principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and respect for diverse voices.

Limitations

While the focus groups provide rich qualitative insights into citizen perceptions and attitudes toward political participation, several limitations should be noted.

First, the findings are not statistically representative of the entire Lebanese population; rather, they serve to complement the overall analysis by explaining patterns and positions and offering insights into perceptions and dynamics that enrich understanding of the findings. Conducted prior to the survey, they provide qualitative depth that helps interpret emerging trends and contextualize attitudes.

Second, the group setting may have influenced responses, as some participants could have felt constrained by social dynamics or hesitant to express dissenting views, although moderators were attentive to mitigating this risk and ensuring balanced participation.

Third, despite deliberate efforts to ensure gender balance and sectarian diversity, recruitment challenges in certain districts may have limited the full spectrum of perspectives.

Fourth, the sensitivity of political topics and the prevailing climate of distrust may have led to self-censorship or guarded responses.

Finally, the qualitative nature of the data means that findings should be interpreted as indicative of broader trends rather than definitive measures.

The survey also faced its own constraints. Although most respondents were cooperative and generally welcomed participation, difficulties arose with certain sensitive questions, particularly those related to the perceived impact of members of parliament, where answers tended to be cautious or guarded.

Regional variation in refusal rates was also significant: Beirut recorded among the highest levels of rejection, while Tripoli had some of the lowest. Recruiting younger male respondents aged 21–24 proved especially challenging across multiple governorates, which may have affected the balance of perspectives among first-time voters. Despite these challenges, the survey achieved its target sample and provided robust quantitative insights that, when triangulated with the focus group findings, strengthened the overall analysis.

Research Objectives

The study was designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions of citizen perceptions, attitudes, and priorities ahead of the 2026 parliamentary elections. The objectives can be summarized as follows:

1. Assess citizens' lived experiences and emotional responses
   - Understand how individuals have been personally affected by Lebanon's political and economic crises.
   - Capture emotional responses such as frustration, fear, hope, or resignation, and examine how these shape political attitudes.
   - Explore how daily conditions are linked to political leadership, governance, and systemic dysfunction.
2. Evaluate perceptions of institutions and political actors
   - Measure public views on the performance of parliament and municipal councils and assess satisfaction with the role and function of the state.
   - Examine trust in institutions and the extent to which citizens feel they benefit from state services.
   - Investigate perceptions of local parties and reformist MPs, including how their performance influences future engagement.
3. Understand motivations and deterrents to political engagement
   - Identify factors that encourage or discourage civic and electoral participation.
   - Assess levels of political activity and its impact on party relations and voting criteria.
   - Explore how trust, disappointment, or satisfaction with past choices shape future participation.
4. Gauge perceptions of the 2026 parliamentary elections
   - Measure levels of interest, optimism, skepticism, or disengagement.
   - Understand expectations regarding fairness, transparency, and credibility of the electoral process.
   - Identify what citizens hope to see from campaigns and candidates, with emphasis on concrete priorities.
5. Identify pathways for mobilization and inclusion
   - Explore effective strategies to engage voters, especially youth, women, and politically disillusioned groups.
   - Assess the perceived importance of women's role in political life and expectations for greater inclusion.
   - Focus on opportunities for independent and reformist candidates to build trust and visibility, and examine what types of messaging, outreach, and community engagement resonate most with citizens.
   - Measure citizens' needs for services and how they access them, linking these priorities to potential mobilization strategies.

Key Findings

To ensure coherence between design and analysis, the findings are presented in direct alignment with the study's research objectives. Each section corresponds to one objective and integrates the quantitative results with qualitative evidence: survey statistics are presented alongside participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and expectations, with illustrative verbatim quotes. This organization creates a clear narrative flow, from personal experiences and political perceptions, to voting behavior and representation, to outlooks on the 2026 elections, and finally to pathways for inclusion, communication, and outreach.

1. Living Through Crisis: Daily Struggles and Coping Mechanisms

Over the past five years, consecutive political and economic crises have profoundly reshaped daily life. Citizens described how low wages, currency devaluation, unemployment, and the collapse of purchasing power have eroded their ability to meet basic needs. Younger generations were particularly affected. Many lost access to education and future opportunities after their parents' jobs disappeared, or savings were trapped in banks. This inter-generational impact was a recurring theme in participants' testimonies, underscoring how the crises have curtailed mobility and aspirations.

The survey establishes the scale of economic distress: 87.3% of respondents reported their family's financial situation is worse or much worse than in 2020.

Disaggregation by district and confession reveals sharp and uneven deterioration in living conditions. In South 1 (Saida-Jezzine), only 4.8% said their situation was better than in 2020 while 69.9% said it was worse; in Bekaa 3 (Baalbek-Hermel), two-thirds (66.7%) reported a worse situation and just 3.3% said it was better; Mount Lebanon 2 (Metn) stands out with nearly 88.2% reporting deterioration, whereas Beirut 2 was comparatively less affected, with 55.7% saying their situation remained the same.

Confessional patterns mirror these regional differences: Shia respondents were most likely to report decline (41% 'much worse' and 49.2% 'worse'), most Maronites (80%) said their situation was worse (though fewer reported 'much worse'), Druze respondents showed the highest share reporting 'worse' at 87.3%, and Sunni respondents were more mixed: 23.6% 'much worse,' 56.8% 'worse,' and 18.2% reporting no change.

When asked directly whether their household income was sufficient to meet basic needs, nearly two-thirds of respondents (64.2%) indicated some degree of financial strain. The largest share stated that their income is either 'barely sufficient' (42.7%) or 'not sufficient at all' (21.5%) to meet basic

needs. Only a small minority, 5.4%, said their income partially covered needs but required frequent trade-offs. Taken together, these results underscore how widespread economic insecurity has become, lending further weight to the qualitative accounts of hardship described throughout the focus groups.

The data also reveals sharp disparities across income levels, governorates, and confessional groups.

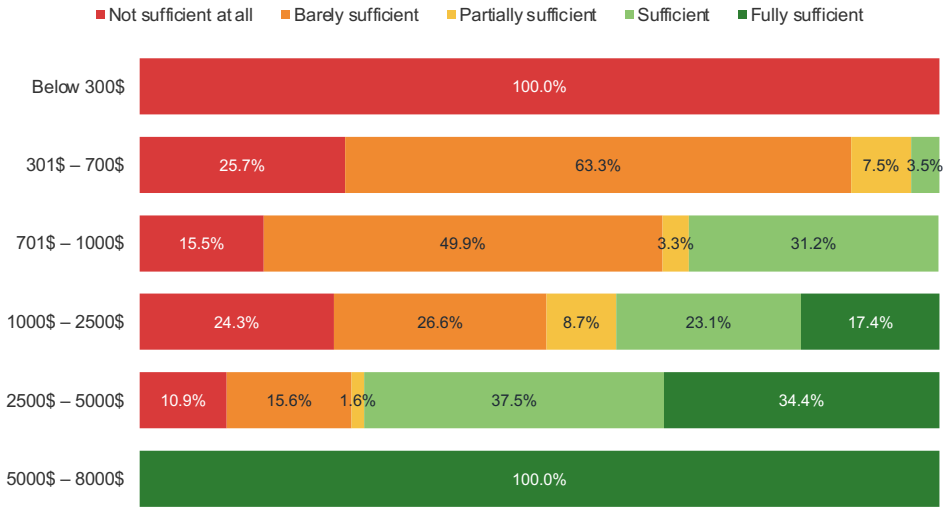
Household Income and Ability to Meet Basic Needs

At the income level, 100% of households earning $300 or less said their income was insufficient, while 63.3% of those earning $300–700 said it was barely sufficient, and only 31.2% of those earning $700–1000 considered it sufficient.

Regionally, hardship was most acute in the Bekaa and North Lebanon, where over half of households described their income as barely sufficient or not sufficient at all. By contrast, Beirut households reported far greater sufficiency: in Beirut 1, 20.8% said their income is fully sufficient and 79.2% said it's sufficient, and in Beirut 2, 8.2% said fully sufficient and 91.8% said sufficient.

Figure 1 **To what extent does your current household income allow you to meet your basic needs?**

Including food, housing, healthcare, education, transportation, and utilities · by income group



Confessional differences are equally striking: Shia and Maronite households reported the highest levels of hardship, with nearly half saying their income was barely sufficient and around a quarter saying it was not sufficient at all. Meanwhile, Orthodox and Other Christian respondents showed higher levels of sufficiency, reflecting uneven resilience across communities.

Overall, the data underscores how economic collapse has deepened inequality, leaving large segments of the population in severe distress while only a minority retains financial stability.

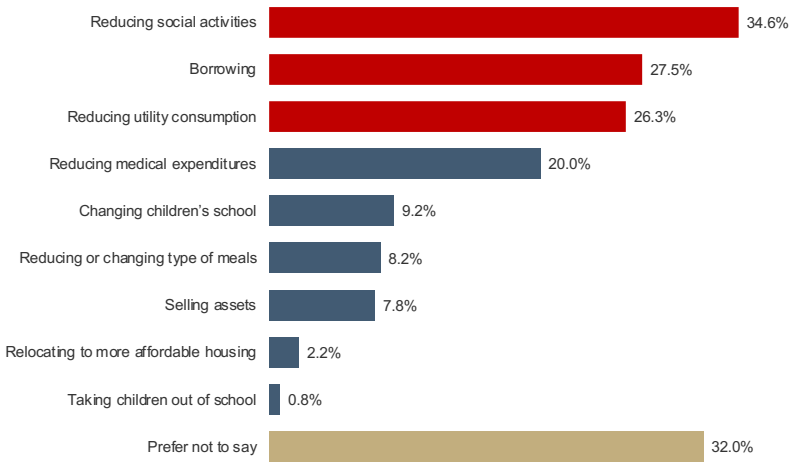
The most common coping strategies over the past year were reducing social activities (34.6%), resorting to borrowing (27.5%), and cutting energy consumption (26.3%), while 32% of respondents preferred not to answer, as shown in the graph below.

Coping Strategies Identified

The data shows that coping strategies vary significantly across Lebanon's governorates, reflecting both the severity of economic distress and the resources available to households. In Mount Lebanon, families reported the highest reliance on reducing utilities, cutting medical expenditures, and borrowing, while Mount Lebanon 2 (Metn) and Mount Lebanon 4 (Shouf-Aley) also showed notable shifts in children's schooling and relocation to cheaper housing.

Figure 2 **In the last 12 months, which coping strategies has your household used?**

Multiple answers allowed · top three in red



By contrast, North Lebanon stands out for extreme measures affecting education, with up to 30% of households withdrawing children from school, followed by Zahle (20%). North 1 (Akkar) and North 2 (Tripoli-Minieh-Donnieh) also reported particularly high levels of reducing or changing meals (26.5% and 20.4% respectively), alongside significant utility cuts. These patterns suggest that households in these regions are exhausting both short-term coping mechanisms and long-term structural adjustments, underscoring the depth of economic strain and the erosion of resilience.

In the South and Bekaa, coping strategies leaned more toward asset liquidation and relocation, shaped not only by economic collapse, but also by the devastation caused by sustained Israeli bombardments and destruction in these regions. Households in South 3 (Nabatieh, Bint Jbeil,

Marjeyoun-Hasbaya) reported high rates of selling assets and borrowing, while South 2 (Sour and Zahrani) recorded the highest relocation figures (34.6%). In the Bekaa, Baalback-Hermel (Bekaa 3) relied heavily on selling assets and reducing meals.

Across confessional groups, Shia respondents reported the greatest reliance on coping strategies, reflecting the compounded impact of economic collapse and the widespread devastation their communities endured in South Lebanon, the Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs (Dahieh) over the past two years. A significant share reduced medical expenses (36.3%), sold assets (42.6%), moved to cheaper rentals (46.2%), or borrowed money (30.3%).

Meanwhile, Beirut households reported relatively low reliance on most coping strategies, likely due to different access to services or support networks.

Financial Concerns and Anxiety Over the Future

Overall, the survey revealed that financial anxiety is widespread but unevenly distributed across Lebanon's regions and confessional groups. Nationally, 58.6% of respondents said they were worried or extremely worried about their financial future, reflecting deep uncertainty. Regionally, the highest levels of extreme worry were recorded in South 3 (70.8%), Bekaa 3 (61.7%), and Mount Lebanon 1 (Jbeil-Keserwan) and 3 (Baabda) with 75.5% and 69.3% respectively, mostly areas that have faced both economic collapse and the devastation of conflict.

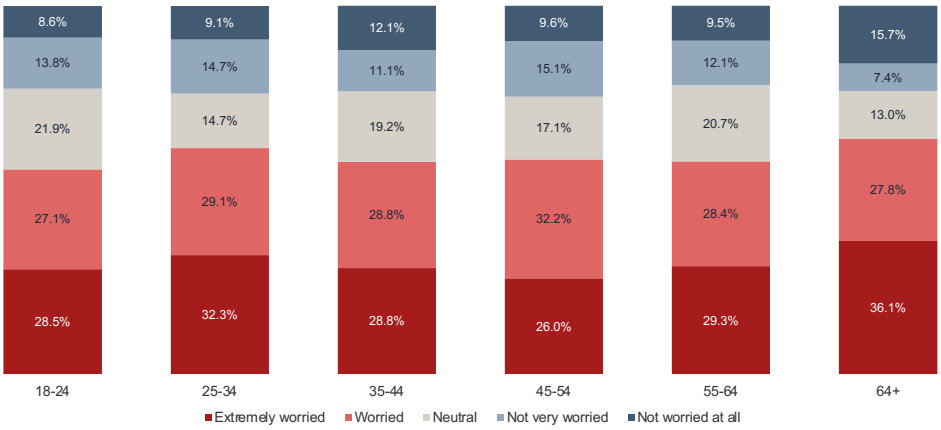
By contrast, households in North Lebanon and Bekaa 1–2 (Zahle and West Bekaa-Rachaya) reported much lower levels of worry, with large shares saying they were neutral or not worried, suggesting either resignation, different coping dynamics, or lower expectations. Beirut households also showed relatively lower anxiety, with most respondents reporting neutral attitudes toward their financial future.

Confessional differences are even more striking. Shia respondents reported the highest levels of financial anxiety (81.2%), with half saying they were 'extremely worried,' reflecting the compounded impact of economic hardship and devastation in South Lebanon, the Bekaa, and Beirut's southern suburbs. Maronites (74.5%) and Druze (76%) also reported high levels of worry, while Orthodox and Other Christian respondents showed greater resilience, with larger shares describing themselves as neutral or not worried. Sunnis were more mixed, with nearly equal proportions worried and not worried.

Overall, the data underscores how economic collapse, combined with uneven exposure to conflict and devastation, has produced intense financial anxiety among large segments of the population, reinforcing the sense of frustration, fear, and erosion of resilience documented throughout the study.

The age-based chart (below) confirms that financial worry is high across all generations, though its form shifts with life stage. Younger respondents show strong levels of anxiety, largely tied to unemployment, low salaries, and lack of opportunities. Middle-aged groups remain equally worried, reflecting the heavy burden of supporting both children's education and elderly relatives. Older participants are the most anxious overall, with retirement insecurity and the collapse of savings dominating their concerns.

Figure 3 **How worried are you about your household's financial situation over the next 12 months?** *By age group*



Participants across the focus groups described abandoned education, failed migration attempts, lost savings, and job losses, all of which mirror the survey's indicators of widespread decline and precarious household finances. One participant captured this dynamic vividly: *'My father lost his job and our savings disappeared in the bank. I had to leave university because we couldn't afford tuition anymore.'* Such testimonies highlight how economic collapse is not an abstract trend but a daily struggle that reshapes life trajectories.

For youth across the groups, the dominant theme was unemployment and the mismatch between education and available jobs. Many complained that even when work was found, salaries failed to meet the bare minimum for survival. Emigration emerged as a recurring theme across youth groups, seen as one of the few viable ways out of the crisis. Among respondents aged 18 to 24, enhanced socio-economic conditions (59.9%) and ensured safety and security from external threats (51.0%) were the top factors that would keep them from emigrating. Only 26.8% said they were not considering leaving at all; the lowest share of any age group surveyed.

While youth blamed politicians for failing to create opportunities, many still relied on them for access to jobs or connections. This paradox underscores how political patronage continues to shape economic life, even

as it fuels frustration and disillusionment. Together, the survey and focus groups reinforce one another, showing that while hardship is universal, its expression varies by age, and that financial anxiety has become a defining feature of life across Lebanon.

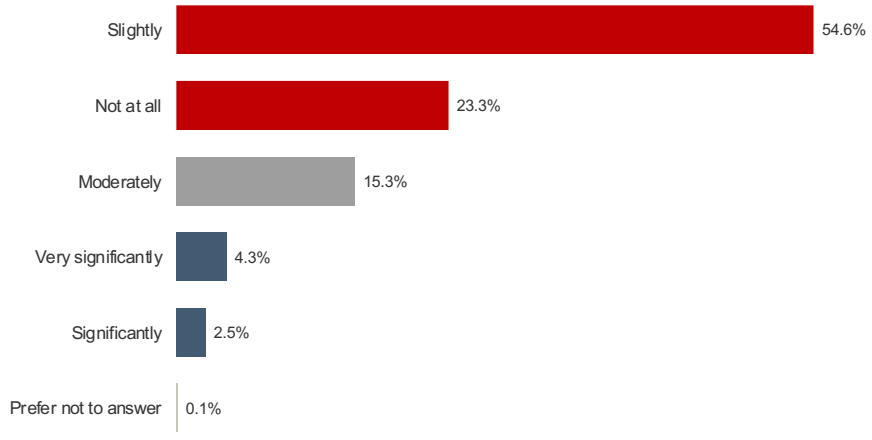
Since the completion of the research, economic conditions have further deteriorated, intensifying the hardship already documented in the survey and focus groups. The annual inflation rate rose to 19% in May 2026, easing only slightly from the peak of 20% recorded in April. While price growth slowed marginally in categories such as food, housing, and utilities, costs surged in critical areas like transportation (37.8% vs 33.3%) and recreation and culture (48.4% vs 42.2%), placing additional strain on households. On a monthly basis, consumer prices rose 0.5%, following a sharp 3.0% increase the previous month, underscoring persistent volatility.[1]

1 Trading Economics, 'Lebanon Inflation Rate,' https://tradingeconomics.com/lebanon/inflation-cpi.

2. Citizens and the State: Disconnect in Policy and Participation

Across age, governorate, and religious groups, the survey and focus-group evidence point to a pervasive sense that government policy is largely irrelevant to people's daily lives. Quantitatively, 78% of respondents say government policy has little (54.6%) or no impact (23.3%) on their socioeconomic conditions.

Figure 4 **To what extent do government policies affect people's lives?** *Share of respondents*



This broad sentiment takes different shapes. Younger respondents (18–24 and 25-34) cluster around 'slightly' (54.2% and 56.8% respectively) and 'not at all,' (23.3% and 23.2%), reflecting acute skepticism tied to unemployment and precarious wages. Middle-aged groups (35-44 and 45–54) are more likely to report 'moderately,' 22.2% among the 35 to 44 cohort, and 18.5% among the 45 to 54 cohort. This pattern reflects limited access to services, often mediated through clientelist networks rather than universal provision, as

focus groups repeatedly showed. Lastly, older respondents (55-64 and 64+) are polarized, with a minority reporting significant policy effects where pensions or public-sector ties exist, while many express abandonment and anxiety about retirement and savings.

Among the 55 to 64 group, 6.9% reported being very significantly affected, the highest share of any age group, while 28.4% reported no impact at all, also the highest figure across all cohorts. Among respondents aged 64 and above, 63.0% described policy impact as slight and 25.0% reported none at all, with only 4.7% reporting significant or very significant effects.

Regional patterns amplify this disconnect. In the Bekaa and the North, very high shares (56–68%) say policy has slight to no effect, a reflection of longstanding neglect and weak state presence. The South reports predominantly 'slightly.' Beirut stands apart: 70–75% of urban respondents report 'moderately,' suggesting a greater perception of policy impact in the capital. Mount Lebanon shows mixed results that mirror its socio-political diversity, ranging from near-total 'slightly' in some districts to unusually high 'very significantly' responses in others.

Figure 5 **To what extent do you believe government policies effect the socio-economic conditions of people?** *Government policies effect · by electoral district*

	Very significantly	Significantly	Moderately	Slightly	Not at all	Prefer not to say
Bekaa 1	0.0%	0.0%	6.8%	36.4%	56.8%	0.0%
Bekaa 2	0.0%	0.0%	3.4%	34.5%	62.1%	0.0%
Bekaa 3	0.0%	8.3%	5.0%	68.3%	18.3%	0.0%
South 1	7.2%	3.6%	2.4%	66.3%	20.5%	0.0%
South 2	0.0%	0.0%	1.6%	85.5%	12.9%	0.0%
South 3	4.2%	3.1%	5.2%	62.5%	25.0%	0.0%
North 1	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	33.8%	65.0%	0.0%
North 2	13.7%	3.2%	14.7%	30.5%	37.9%	0.0%
North 3	0.0%	0.0%	6.5%	25.8%	67.7%	0.0%
Beirut 1	0.0%	0.0%	75.0%	25.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Beirut 2	0.0%	0.0%	70.5%	27.9%	1.6%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 1	0.0%	0.0%	2.0%	96.9%	1.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 2	0.0%	9.4%	28.3%	62.2%	0.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 3	21.2%	0.0%	4.4%	48.2%	25.5%	0.7%
Mount Lebanon 4	0.0%	2.8%	31.0%	59.9%	6.3%	0.0%

Sectarian and identity differences further shape perceptions. Shia respondents clustered heavily around 'slightly' (55%) and tended to view state interaction in coercive or transactional terms, as explained in the focus groups. Sunni respondents were more evenly split, with 17.0% reporting moderate impact and 33.0% reporting no impact at all, while Maronite

and Druze groups skew toward 'slightly,' (70.4% and 63.3% respectively). Orthodox respondents show relatively higher 'moderately' (26.4%) responses and 'slightly' (50%). Alawi respondents are the most alienated, with 80% saying policy has no effect.

Qualitative narratives give texture and causal explanation to the numbers. Participants across the groups repeatedly described government decisions as detached from daily realities: '*They live in another world. Nothing they decide touches our lives*.' Across focus groups, frustration centered on the perception that political elites prioritize high-politics, most notably the question of Hezbollah's weapons, over urgent needs such as jobs, inflation, healthcare, and education.

Many participants saw this focus as driven by external pressures or elite agendas rather than by citizens' immediate priorities. As one participant in Jbeil-Keserwan district put it, '*They act as if Hezbollah is the only problem. Meanwhile, we cannot pay for medicine or school*.'

Local dynamics also matter. In Amal–Hezbollah strongholds, official actions were often described as irrelevant or even harmful: the state enforces fines and taxes but fails to deliver services. In West Bekaa and Rachaya, respondents pointed to the absence of accountability for national traumas such as the loss of bank deposits and the port explosion, and described the government as living in 'lala land.'

A minority in some Christian-dominated districts acknowledged that security-focused policies (for example, disarmament) might unlock foreign aid and reconstruction, but even these voices cautioned that such approaches do not address immediate hardships. Young participants repeatedly framed their lives around unemployment, precarious wages, and blocked opportunities. For many, education and training no longer translate into viable careers; migration is often seen as the only realistic escape, as mentioned above.

Middle-aged participants emphasized the crushing burden of healthcare and education costs and the strain of supporting children while caring for aging parents. Their responses explain why this cohort is somewhat more likely to report that policy has a 'moderate' effect: some still access services, but these are frequently mediated through patronage and clientelist networks rather than through reliable public provision.

Focus groups described how assistance, when it arrives, often depends on personal connections or local brokers, reinforcing a sense that state benefits are uneven and conditional. This conditional access deepens frustration: people recognize the state's presence but experience it as transactional and insufficient.

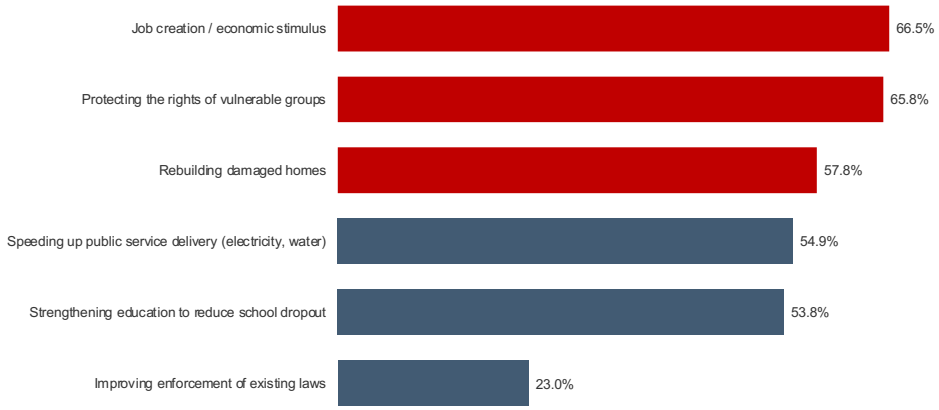
Older participants expressed acute anxiety about retirement, savings, and social protection. For many in this group, the collapse of pensions and the erosion of savings have turned longterm security into an immediate crisis. As put by a man in the Metn area, 'We worked all our lives thinking our pensions and savings would be enough. Now everything is gone, and retirement feels like a daily struggle. It's hard to live with this kind of worry at our age.'

Their narratives framed government neglect as abandonment: where younger people speak of lost opportunities, older respondents speak of lost safety nets. The emotional tenor in these groups was one of fear and betrayal, with participants describing a state that has withdrawn the basic assurances older citizens once relied upon.

Public Priorities for Reform

The disconnect is also visible in public priorities and attitudes toward reform. Citizens prioritize concrete, survival-oriented measures: job creation and economic recovery (rated 'very important' by two-thirds), protecting vulnerable groups (65.8%), and rebuilding homes (57.8%). The focus groups highlight that when citizens mention 'vulnerable groups,' they are referring specifically to poor and underprivileged people, who face daily hardships such as poverty, insecurity, and limited access to essential services, which makes them more exposed to the consequences of economic decline.

Figure 6 **Please indicate how important each of the following reforms is for your household?** *Scale 1–5: Not important at all, Slightly important, Moderately important, Important, Very important · Share who rated each reform as 'very important' · top three in red*

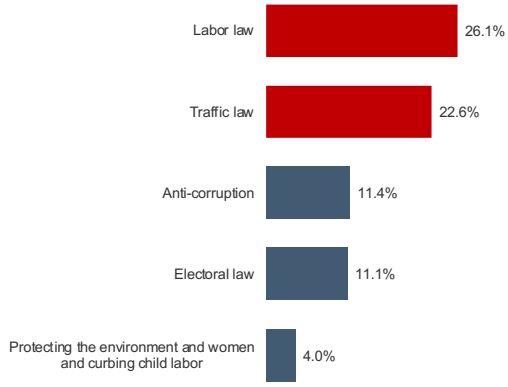


Hence, protecting them is seen not as a symbolic gesture, but as a matter of survival, ensuring food, healthcare, education, and shelter. Their prioritization reflects both the depth of deprivation and the public's recognition that recovery efforts will be incomplete if the most marginalized remain excluded. Strikingly, improving the implementation of existing

laws ranks lowest among proposed reforms with only 23% choosing 'very important' and 5.4% choosing 'important.'

Where implementation does matter to citizens, it centers on laws with direct daily impact, namely the Labor Law (26.1%) and Traffic Law (22.6%), outweighing interest in anti-corruption (11.4%) and electoral laws (11.1%). By contrast, protecting the environment, women, and children altogether matters to less than 4% of respondents, revealing how narrowly focused public priorities are: citizens overwhelmingly privilege reforms that touch their immediate livelihoods and everyday routines, while broader rights-based or institutional agendas remain marginal in public perception.

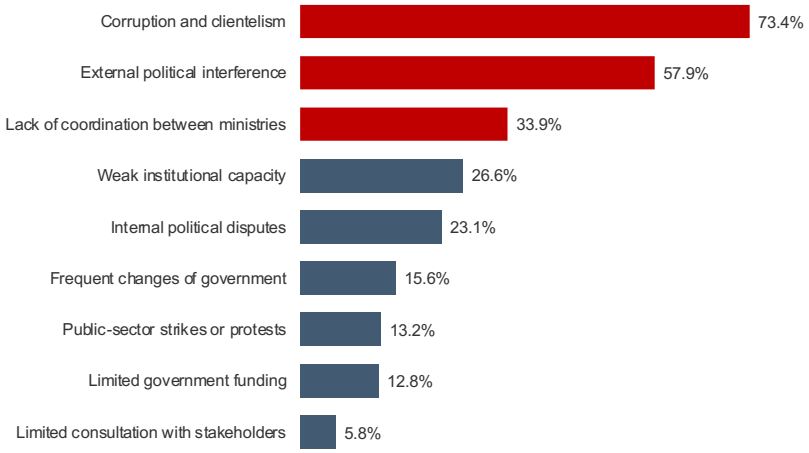
Figure 7 **Laws specified by respondents**



What is also notable is that reconstruction of damaged homes is the reform showing the sharpest geographic divide, which likely reflects where the war damage occurred. It is close to unanimous in South 2 (96.8% very important), South 3 (95.8%), Bekaa 3 (90.0%), Mount Lebanon 1 (98.0%) and Mount Lebanon 3 (97.8%). Majorities in South 1, Mount Lebanon 4, Beirut 2 and Bekaa 1 also rate it 'very important.' Beirut 1 (79.2%) and Mount Lebanon 2 (61.4%) mostly chose 'important,' and Bekaa 2 is more measured, with 48.3% choosing 'important.' The North is clearly the least concerned. 'Moderately important' leads in North 2 (44.2%) and North 3 (51.6%), and 'very important' stays between 6% and 15% across all three northern districts.

When asked why legislative and policy bottlenecks persist, respondents pointed first to corruption and clientelism (73.4%), followed by foreign political interference (57.9%), poor coordination between ministries (33.9%), and weak institutional capacity (26.6%). Focus group testimony reinforced and deepened these diagnoses, showing that citizens do not merely see institutions as ineffective, but they also actively distrust and disrespect their representatives, describing MPs as corrupt, incompetent, or captured by vested interests.

Figure 8 **In your opinion, what are the main causes of legislative or policy bottlenecks in Lebanon?** *Multiple answers allowed · top three in red*



Focus group insights provide a deeper reflection as to how the policy process is perceived. The current parliament was widely viewed across the groups as indistinguishable from previous ones: '*Useless and incapable of addressing everyday needs.*' Even participants who had voted for independent or reformist candidates acknowledged the limits of individual MPs within a system dominated by entrenched blocs: *'I am happy I voted for him, but what can he do by himself?*' one respondent in South 3 said speaking of a reformist MP, underscoring the structural constraints that neutralize individual efforts.

Survey data quantify and amplify this disillusionment. When asked to assess the performance of independent and reformist MPs elected in 2022, 36.3% said they were very dissatisfied and 25.1% dissatisfied, while 28.3% remained neutral; only 9.6% were satisfied and 0.6% very satisfied.

Trust in Institutions

Institutional trust measures are even starker: the Lebanese Armed Forces emerged as the most trusted institution with 68.6% of survey responses, and in most districts responses cluster at the very top of the scale. 'Complete trust' is the answer of more than nine in ten respondents in Bekaa 1 (93.2%), Mount Lebanon 1 (92.9%), and North 1 (92.5%). It remains the majority answer in Bekaa 2 (86.2%), Mount Lebanon 3 (83.9%), North 2 (69.5%), North 3 (69.4%), and South 1 (65.1%),

At the national level, trust in Parliament is very low, with responses concentrated at the negative end of the scale. More than half of respondents (57.6%) chose 'No trust' and a further 24.0% chose 'Low trust,' so more than eight in ten (81.6%) express little or no trust in the institution.

Trust in the Government/Council of Ministers follows almost exactly the same pattern as trust in Parliament. More than half of respondents (56.7%)

chose 'No trust' and 24.7% chose 'Low trust,' so 81.4% expressed little or no trust. The judiciary/courts receive the weakest overall rating of the three state institutions. 'No trust' accounts for 57.8% of responses and 'Low trust' for 25.5%, so 83.3% express little or no trust, the highest negative share of the three.

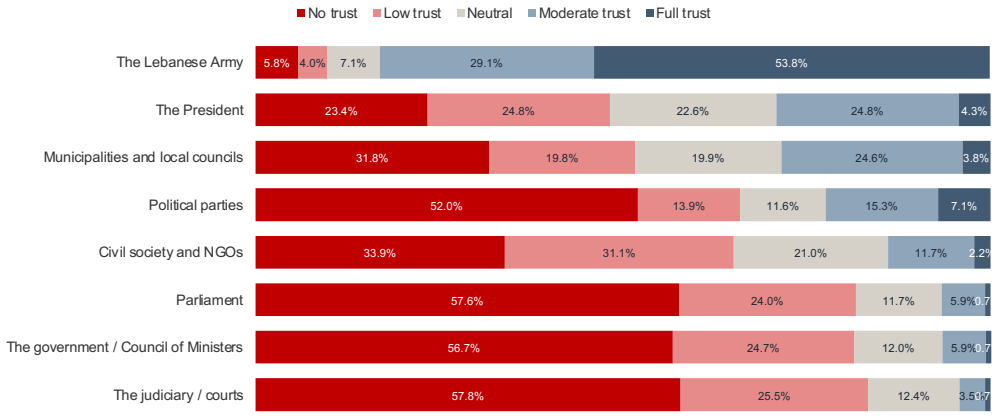
This pattern is consistent with – and appears to deepen – trends documented in prior research. The Arab Barometer's 2026 wave similarly found trust in government (22%), parliament (27%), and the judiciary (27%), remaining very low in absolute terms, with Lebanon registering among the lowest levels of confidence in these institutions of any country surveyed in the Arab region.[2]

The survey shows that 63.9% of respondents distrust political parties (52% said 'no trust' and 13.9% said 'low trust.' 'No trust' is the answer of more than nine in ten respondents in North 1 (98.8%), Bekaa 1 (97.7%), North 3 (96.8%), Bekaa 2 (96.6%), North 2 (93.7%), and Mount Lebanon 1 (91.8%).

2
Arab Barometer. (2026, April). Arab Barometer IX: Lebanon and the regional conflict. https://www.arabbarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/Arab-Barometer-IX_Lebanon_Public-Opinion-2025.pdf

Figure 9 **To what extent do you trust the following institutions to act in public interest?**

Scale 1-5: no trust, low trust, neutral, moderate trust, complete trust



At the national level, trust in the President is far more evenly divided than trust in the other state institutions. Responses are spread almost equally across the scale. 'No trust' accounts for 23.4%, 'Low trust' for 24.8%, 'Neutral' for 22.6%, and 'Moderate trust' for 24.8%, while 'Complete trust' stands at 4.3%.

Trust in the President also varies by religious community. The most trusting are 'Other Christians' (57.1% moderate or complete trust), Catholics (51.3%) and Orthodox (50.9%), among whom 'No trust' is almost absent. The least trusting are Shia, with 66.0% expressing little or no trust (45.9% 'No trust'), and Alawis, with 60.0% expressing little or no trust and none expressing any trust. Sunnis, Maronites and Druze fall in-between, with Druze respondents most often choosing 'Neutral' (40.5%).

Electoral gains by independents and reformists have not restored confidence in the legislature, leaving parliament widely perceived as ineffective. Reformist deputies are often seen as absorbed into the same paralysis they once opposed, and visible oversight efforts remain largely invisible to ordinary citizens. As one participant in Shouf-Aley put it, '*Parliament is a theater. Whether old or new faces, nothing changes for us.*' Together, the quantitative and qualitative evidence shows how institutional fragility, elite capture, and public contempt for representatives erode trust and channel political behavior toward withdrawal or transactional engagement, dynamics that, in practice, preserve the status quo.

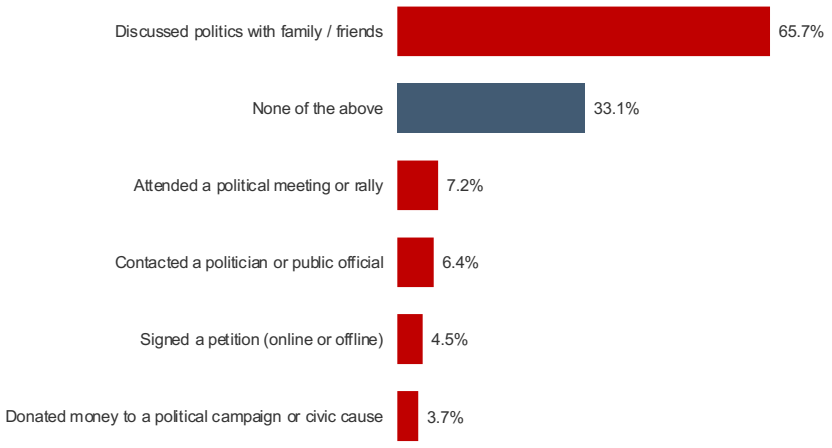
This legitimacy deficit creates a feedback loop: low trust depresses civic pressure for accountability, which in turn limits parliament's capacity to deliver visible reforms, further undermining public confidence. Section 3 examines the implications of this loop for civic and electoral participation: how it shapes voting behavior, turnout, and the prospects for mobilizing citizens beyond survival-driven strategies.

3. Elections, Political Participation, and the Erosion of Trust

Political participation in Lebanon is increasingly characterized by withdrawal and ritual, rather than sustained, civic engagement. While the actual voting turnout in 2022 stands at 49%, most political activity remains private and low-impact: 65.7% discussed politics with family or friends, while more visible forms of engagement were rare: 7.2% attended a political meeting or rally, 6.4% contacted a politician or public official, 4.5% signed a petition, and 3.7% donated to a campaign or civic cause, indicating that formal turnout has not translated into deeper public or institutional action.

When asked whether their vote can influence political change, 57.0% said no and 20.5% were unsure, so 77.5% lack confidence that their vote carries real weight.

Figure 10 **In the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?** *Share of respondents · multiple answers allowed*



This pattern of shallow, private participation helps explain the focus-group findings about political disengagement. Across groups, participants described their role in politics as minimal, viewing the political sphere as corrupt, deceptive, and useless, sentiments that fueled disengagement, with many feeling unmotivated to participate and convinced that political involvement does not lead to meaningful change. *'Politics is a game for the powerful. We are just spectators,'* one participant remarked. Another echoed this sentiment: *'I don't see myself in politics. It's all lies and corruption. Why waste my time?'*

Across the groups, it was notable that older participants, especially parents, considered it valuable to keep their children away from politics, almost in the same way they would protect them from corrupt practices. A mother explained: *'I always tell my son, it is not our job, we don't go to political parties, why would we?'* This attitude framed politics for many as a recognized harm, something that divides families and communities rather than unites them.

Youth often echoed this perspective, repeating the same cautionary stance as their parents. One young participant said: *'My parents taught me to stay away from politics. It only brings trouble and arguments.'* Among the two youngest age groups, discussing politics with family or friends is by far the most common activity, reported by 66.0% of 18–24-year-olds and 64.2% of 25–34-year-olds. About a third in each group report none of the listed activities (33.4% and 34.4%, respectively).

This pattern reveals how political disengagement is not only a product of frustration with governance, but also a form of social inheritance, passed down as a protective measure. Because distrust and political withdrawal are passed down and normalized, citizens' willingness to engage in formal consultation depends on whether local political structures still deliver tangible recognition or are seen as merely performative.

This intergenerational withdrawal helps explain the sharp regional differences in appetite for pre-policy consultation. In Bekaa III (91.7%) and South I and II (80%+), consultation is widely desired and understood as a form of political presence and recognition: in these areas, where party structures and community leaders maintain close, often clientelist ties to constituents, participation is experienced as a channel for securing attention, resources, and status.

By contrast, Beirut I (83.3% rejection) and parts of Mount Lebanon (87%+ rejection) treat consultation as futile, more like an empty ritual in a context of political pluralism, entrenched skepticism, and a pervasive belief that decisions are already predetermined.

These regional differences map onto turnout patterns in 2022: districts such as Baalbeck-Hermel (55.6%) and South II/III (48-55%) combined relatively high participation with strong demand for consultation, while Beirut I (33.4%) paired low turnout with rejection of consultative mechanisms.

Jbeil–Keserwan (62.4%) and Baabda (49.7%)[3] present notable contradictions. Despite high turnout, both districts show strong rejection of consultation (88.8% and 87.6% respectively). In Jbeil–Keserwan, this stems from intense competition among Christian parties and the decisive role of the Shia vote in determining one seat in a predominantly Maronite district. In Baabda, the explanation lies in its diverse composition—Christian, Shia, and Druze communities—where electoral mobilization remains strong but trust in participatory mechanisms is weak.

These contrasting attitudes underscore a legitimacy gap: consultation is interpreted either as empowerment or as empty ritual, highlighting the need for differentiated approaches to citizen engagement across regions.

3 For voting turnout, refer to Lebanon 2022 Parliamentary Elections Report: Voter Data & Results

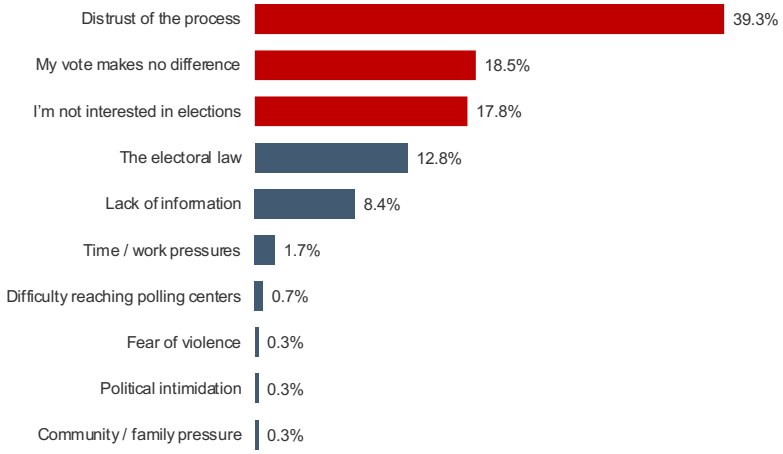
Figure 11 **Would you like citizens like yourself to be consulted before new laws or policies are made?** *By electoral district*

	Yes	No	Not sure	Prefer not to say
Bekaa 1	43.2%	40.9%	15.9%	0.0%
Bekaa 2	31.0%	41.4%	27.6%	0.0%
Bekaa 3	91.7%	3.3%	3.3%	1.7%
South 1	81.9%	8.4%	9.6%	0.0%
South 2	82.3%	8.1%	9.7%	0.0%
South 3	64.6%	31.3%	4.2%	0.0%
North 1	31.3%	56.3%	12.5%	0.0%
North 2	46.3%	30.5%	23.2%	0.0%
North 3	59.7%	30.6%	9.7%	0.0%
Beirut 1	0.0%	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%
Beirut 2	1.6%	75.4%	23.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 1	10.2%	88.8%	1.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 2	2.4%	59.1%	38.6%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 3	11.7%	87.6%	0.7%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 4	6.3%	62.0%	31.7%	0.0%

Participation in Elections

Among those who did not vote in 2022, attitudinal barriers dominated: 39.3% cited distrust of the process, 18.5% said their vote makes no difference, and 17.8% reported a lack of interest in elections; only 12.8% pointed to the electoral law. Focus groups echoed these patterns. Most participants said they had voted in 2022, while some abstained and a few were below voting age.

Figure 12 **If you did not want to vote in the 2022 elections, what were the reasons that discouraged you from doing so?** *Top three in red*



Those who voted often described it as both a duty and an opportunity to participate, noting they felt they had more choices than in previous elections. In areas dominated by Amal and Hezbollah, support for Hezbollah was described as growing and framed as an existential stance in defense of the party against Israeli targeting.

Minority Christian respondents in Muslim-majority districts explicitly linked abstention to the electoral system's perceived unfairness; as put by one participant in South 2 district, '*our vote doesn't count here … unless the law changes, why bother?*' illustrating how structural grievances and widespread perceptions of futility interact to suppress turnout.

When asked about who they will be voting for, voting intentions were sharply divided by age, region, and sectarian identity. Support for Hezbollah rises with age, from about 20.6% among 18–24 to 33.3% among 64+, and the party dominates in several southern and Bekaa districts (for example 60.7% in South 3 and 46.3% in Bekaa 3). By contrast, voting for new faces was concentrated among the youngest voters (29.7% of 18–24) and in parts of Mount Lebanon (notably 35.8% in ML1), signaling a pronounced youth tilt toward newer or independent entrants.

The Future Movement is still strong in North 1 (52.6%), although the party officially suspended its political activities in January 2022, while Amal concentrates in parts of the South and Bekaa (e.g., 53.7% in Bekaa 3).

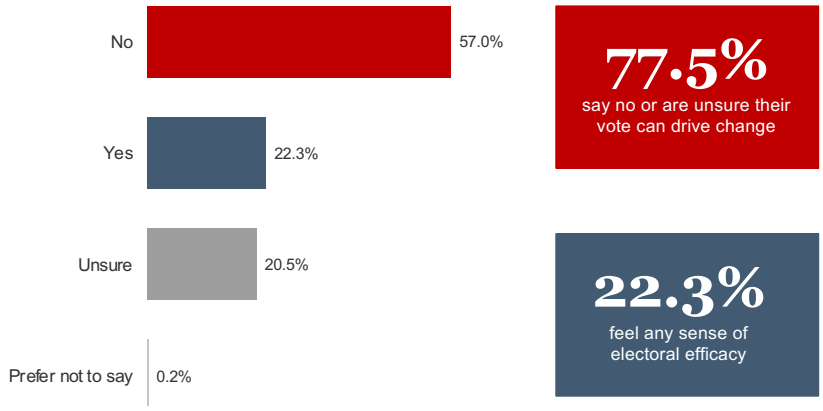
Gender differences are modest; men and women report similar first preferences, whereas sectarian cleavages are decisive: Shia respondents overwhelmingly favor Hezbollah (62.8%) and Amal (34.6%), Sunnis favor the Future Movement (43.2%), and Christian subgroups split among new entrants, the Lebanese Forces, and the Free Patriotic Movement. Several extreme district percentages likely reflect small local samples and warrant caution.

In the focus groups, participants did not provide conclusive insights on what would help them trust independent or reformist candidates, even those who said they would possibly vote for them. Overwhelmed by war, economic hardship, and daily struggles, most were unable to recall any specific campaign, message, or initiative that made them feel seen or heard.

Distrust was widespread and further exacerbated disengagement from political outreach. Even when reformist figures were described as well-intentioned, the prevailing perception was that they could not achieve significant results, leaving people disillusioned and at times feeling deceived. In that sense, framing elections as moments of democratic participation when citizens can hold leaders to account and shape policy makes widespread doubts about vote efficacy especially consequential.

A clear sense of disillusionment emerged in the study: 57.0% of respondents said their vote cannot influence political change in Lebanon, 20.5% were unsure, and 0.2% preferred not to answer, so 77.5% lack confidence that their vote carries real weight; only 22.3% believed it could. These responses mirror the reasons given for not voting in 2022 (distrust of the process and the belief that one's vote makes no difference), indicating that low perceived voter efficacy, rather than logistical or legal obstacles, is central to electoral disengagement.

Figure 13 **Can your vote influence political change?** *Share of respondents*



Taken together, these findings cast doubt on the prospects for the upcoming elections: without visible changes that restore citizens' sense that voting matters, electoral campaigns alone are unlikely to raise turnout or produce substantive political change.

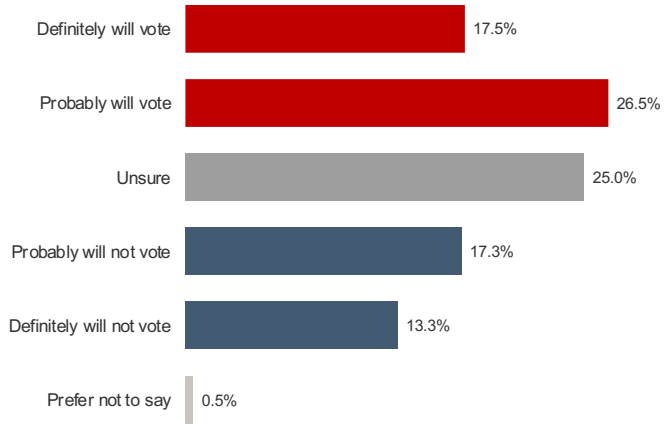
Prospects for the Upcoming Elections

At the time of this study, hence prior to the postponement of the parliamentary elections, the focus groups showed that participants did not

have strong feelings or commitment toward the upcoming 2026 elections, reflecting both uncertainty about whether they would take place and a deep lack of trust in the process.

Regarding the commitment to vote, almost half of the participants in both the survey and the focus groups indicated an inclination to participate, as shown in the graph below.

Figure 14 **How likely are you to vote in the 2026 parliamentary election?** *Share of respondents*



The regressions by electoral districts and religion reveal pronounced geographic variation and localized volatility in turnout intentions. Southern districts show the strongest committed turnout: South 1–3 have the highest 'definitely will vote' shares, yet some southern districts are also highly polarized, with large 'definitely will not' blocs. Bekaa is mixed (Bekaa 3 highly committed; Bekaa 1-2 more tentative), while the North and parts of Mount Lebanon display low definite turnout and large 'probably'/'unsure' groups, making them contestable and sensitive to last-minute mobilization.

Beirut stands out for extreme ambivalence (very high 'unsure' rates), signaling urban volatility or sampling fragility. These patterns imply that district-level dynamics (candidate strength, local services, security) will drive turnout more than uniform national trends.

Religious breakdowns reveal clear sectarian patterns in turnout intentions: Shia respondents are the most reliably committed to vote, while Sunnis, several Christian subgroups (notably Orthodox and some Maronite segments), Druze, and other minorities show much higher uncertainty or nonvoting. This divergence suggests turnout will be predictable where sectarian or ideological loyalties are strong and far less so where voters are fragmented or disillusioned.

Qualitative data deepen this picture: in Amal-Hezbollah areas participants frequently framed their vote as ideological support for the '*choice of*

resistance' amid the Israeli war and perceived external hostility, helping explain comparatively high and stable Shia turnout. By contrast, many Sunni, Christian, Druze, and other voters described voting in transactional or ambivalent terms, loyalty to *zaims (political bosses)*, pragmatic ties to patronage, or ritualized participation, making these groups more susceptible to persuasion or withdrawal.

For some young and first-time voters, casting a ballot was 'an experience' in itself, as put by one participant in the youth groups: *'I just wanted to know what it feels like to vote.'* Middle-aged respondents and recent graduates often put it bluntly: *'We vote for X so that if we ever need something, we can go to him,'* said participants in South 1 and North 3, underscoring how patronage, rather than political programs, structures electoral behavior and reflects voluntary subscription to clientelist networks.

Security and stability and improvements in services/economic relief are the dominant levers: roughly 61–65% of respondents across age groups said better security/stability would increase their likelihood to vote, and service/economic improvements register between 53–64% by age cohort. Clear issue-based platforms and a trustworthy candidate slate matter for substantial minorities 40–52% and 24–37%, respectively, while direct material inducements (jobs/support) and family or personal ties play a much smaller role (jobs/support 4.8–17.3%, family interference 0–5.3%).

Security is the top motivator for every age group (e.g., 64.9% for 18-24; 57.1% for 65+). Service and economic relief are especially salient for respondents aged 25-34 (61.6%) and 64+ (63.5%). Older voters are more receptive to clear, issue-based platforms (peaking at 52.4% for 64+), while younger voters place relatively greater weight on candidate credibility (trustworthy slate 36.6% for 18–24 versus 23.5% for 35–44). Voter mobilization campaigns have limited reach overall (roughly 16–28%), weakest among the oldest cohort.

Figure 15 **What would increase your likelihood of voting in 2026?** *Multiple answers allowed*

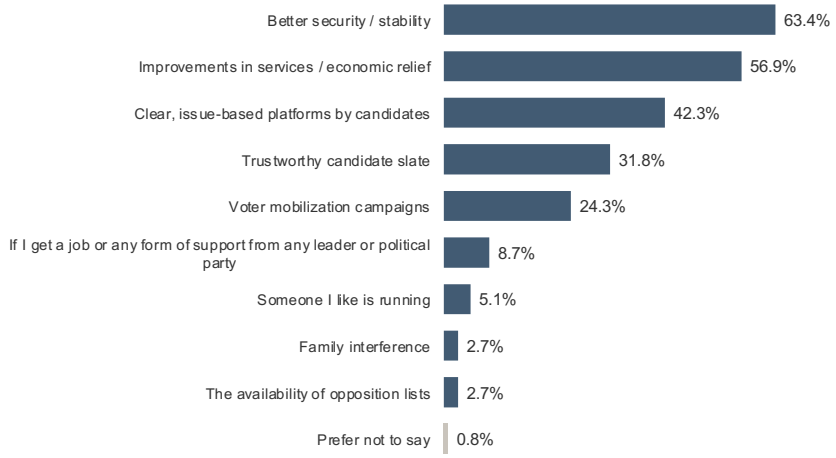


Figure 16 **What would increase your likelihood of voting in 2026?** *By age group*

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	64+
Better security / stability	64.9%	64.8%	62.6%	61.3%	65.1%	57.1%
Improvements in services / economic relief	53.4%	61.6%	52.2%	57.3%	57.1%	63.5%
Clear, issue-based platforms by candidates	39.8%	37.7%	46.1%	44.0%	42.9%	52.4%
Trustworthy candidate slate	36.6%	34.0%	23.5%	32.0%	34.9%	23.8%
Voter mobilization campaigns	26.2%	27.7%	24.3%	20.0%	23.8%	15.9%
If I get a job or any form of support from any leader or political party	6.3%	6.9%	11.3%	17.3%	4.8%	9.5%
Someone I like is running	4.7%	3.8%	6.1%	5.3%	6.3%	6.3%
Family interference	2.1%	3.1%	1.7%	5.3%	4.8%	0.0%
The availability of opposition lists	3.7%	2.5%	4.3%	0.0%	0.0%	3.2%

Demand for services is extreme in several districts: Bekaa 1 (94.1%), Bekaa 2 (91.7%), North 1 (92.9%), and Mount Lebanon 1 (97.8%) report very high responsiveness to service improvements. Beirut districts stand out for security salience (Beirut 1: 95.5%, Beirut 2: 94.3%) and unusually high responsiveness to mobilization campaigns (Beirut 1: 81.8%, Beirut 2: 83.0%). South and Bekaa districts show mixed patterns, some prioritize reconstruction and protection, and others show greater sensitivity to clientelist offers.

Security is especially salient among several Christian and minority groups (Orthodox 86.0%, Other Christians 85.7%, Catholics 81.0%, Alawi 75.0%). Sunnis report strong interest in both security (63.3%) and services (60.7%), while Shia show lower sensitivity to security (47.8%) but remain responsive to services (55.1%). Clear, issue-based platforms are particularly important for Sunnis (51.5%) and Orthodox respondents (67.4%).

Citizen priorities reinforce why turnout is fragile. Concerns are overwhelmingly economic and social: job creation, healthcare, education, and reliable public utilities (electricity and water), with security, especially in southern Lebanon, also ranking highly. These needs extend beyond livelihoods to basic survival and the state's capacity to protect communities affected by conflict and corruption; respondents repeatedly highlighted displaced people, destroyed housing and infrastructure, and the absence of effective government protection in violence-exposed areas.

Focus group participants also overwhelmingly emphasized economic concerns. In South Lebanon, ending hostilities, stopping Israeli attacks, and ensuring reconstruction and return were major points. In Tripoli and parts of the Bekaa, security and road safety were highlighted. These demands reveal a misalignment between citizens' expectations and the actual role of parliament.

Many participants hoped MPs could directly deliver jobs, address the socioeconomic crisis, or provide electricity, all of which fall outside parliamentary responsibilities. These misunderstandings underscore both the

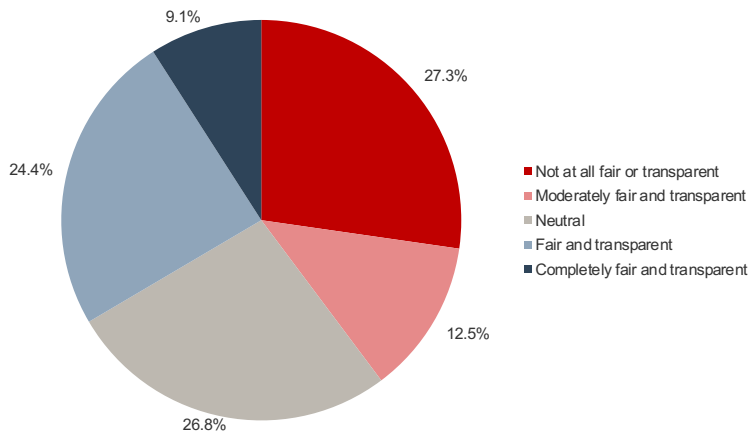
depth of citizens' needs and the absence of a clear vision or road-map from political actors. As one participant put it: *'We don't care about speeches, we want someone to fix our livelihoods.'*

Perceptions of Fairness and Confidence in the 2026 Elections

When asked whether the 2026 elections will be fair and transparent, survey respondents expressed pronounced skepticism. 27.3% said the elections would be 'not at all fair or transparent,' the single largest response, and 26.8% remained neutral. Smaller shares expressed positive expectations: 24.4% said the elections would be fair and transparent, 12.5% moderately fair and transparent, and 9.1% completely fair and transparent.

Altogether, 54.1% of respondents either doubted the fairness of the process outright or withheld judgment, while only 33.5% expressed confidence (from moderate to complete) in the elections' procedural integrity. These results reinforce the qualitative finding that expectations for 2026 are shaped less by faith in the democratic process than by accumulated disappointment with past electoral cycles.

Figure 17 **Do you believe the 2026 elections will be fair and transparent?** *Share of respondents*



While a majority indicated they would vote, expectations for fairness, transparency, and credibility were consistently low, rooted in past experiences of disappointment. For many, elections were seen as a ritual rather than a democratic contest, with little hope that they could produce meaningful change. *'It will be the same as before, nothing fair, nothing democratic,'* one participant remarked. A few respondents said the process was '*okay,*' but even these voices carried modest expectations, limited to hoping that candidates would at least address their immediate priorities.

What emerged clearly is that people are more aware of the electoral system than of the actual process of election management. The discourse

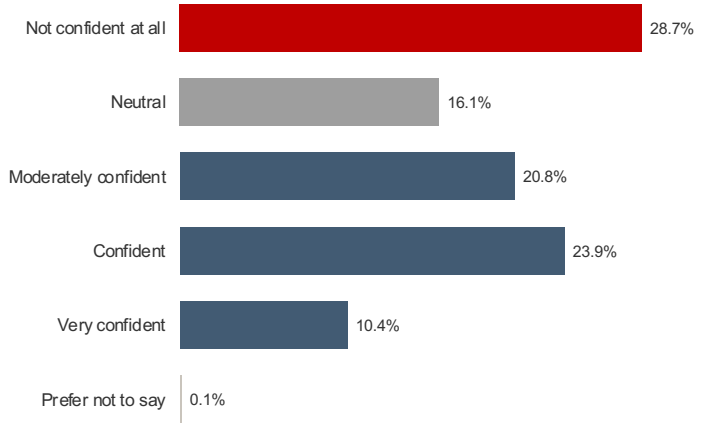
among citizens tends to revolve around districting, proportional versus majoritarian systems, and the way electoral laws shape representation. The sometimes-heated debates over the system, while often simplistic, prevail over concerns about flawed administration, professionalism, or even abuse of power in election management.

This emphasis reveals a paradox: while citizens recognize the structural biases embedded in the electoral law, they pay less attention to the integrity of how elections are run. Oversight, impartiality, and professionalism of election officials, in addition to procedural safeguards are rarely mentioned, suggesting that the public has internalized the idea that politics dominates everything, including how elections are run. Ultimately, this shows that expectations for the 2026 elections are not only low but also shaped by a discourse that privileges political structures over administrative integrity.

Yet when asked whether the 2026 elections will bring meaningful political change, responses were more ambivalent and, in one respect, surprisingly hopeful. The largest single share of 28.7% said they were not confident at all, and 16.1% were neutral, but a combined majority – 55.1% - expressed some degree of confidence (23.9% confident; 20.8% moderately confident; 10.4% very confident).

The coexistence of majority doubt about procedural fairness and majority conditional confidence in outcomes is striking: many citizens appear to separate ends from means, holding out hope that elections might produce change, even while doubting how they will be run. This divergence suggests both opportunity and risk: latent optimism can be mobilized if campaigns and reform-minded candidates deliver credible, tangible gains and visible procedural improvements, but if the process proves flawed or reforms remain cosmetic, the mismatch between hope and perceived fairness could deepen disillusionment and depress turnout.

Figure 18 **How confident are you that the 2026 elections will bring meaningful political change?** *Share of respondents*



In conclusion, past trust, disappointment, and satisfaction with electoral choices shape prospects for upcoming elections in contradictory ways. Many 2022 voters expressed personal satisfaction with their MP, yet doubted parliament's ability to deliver systemic change, while disappointment with specific figures pushed others toward disengagement or pragmatic voting to maintain patronage ties.

Satisfaction, when present, is fragile and conditional, often in the form of recognition of individual services rather than confidence in institutional impact, so elections often function as ritualized acts of loyalty to clientelist networks rather than genuine opportunities for accountability.

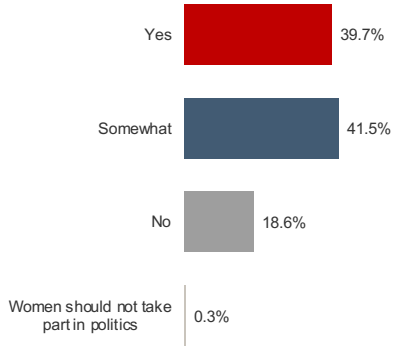
On the eve of the scheduled 2026 elections, before they were officially postponed, the outlook was one of conditional participation: mobilization where personal or sectarian ties remained strong, and withdrawal where voters saw no credible pathway to change.

Converting fragile satisfaction into durable confidence would have required visible reforms and tangible policy gains; absent those, turnout was likely to remain precarious and uneven. However, this assessment reflected the moment and should not be read as a forecast for 2028, since political alignments, security conditions, economic shocks, or meaningful reforms between now and then could substantially alter attitudes and behavior.

4. Participation of Women and Youth in Politics: Symbolic Support and Structural Barriers

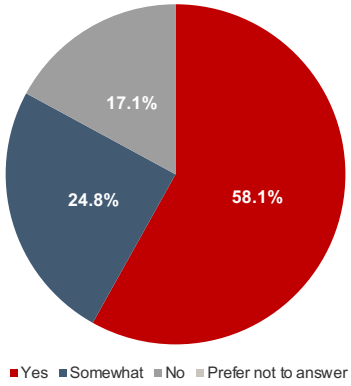
Support for inclusion is widespread in principle but largely symbolic in practice. More than eight in ten respondents endorse women's political participation – 58.1% saying 'yes' and 24.8% 'somewhat' – yet nearly six in ten believe women's voices carry little real influence (39.7% 'yes,' 41.5% 'somewhat'). Women were considerably more likely than men to answer 'yes' (64.1% compared with 51.6%), while men more often answered 'somewhat' (28.6% compared with 21.2% of women) or 'no' (19.6% compared with 14.7%).

Figure 19 **Do you think women have an influential voice in politics today?**



"Prefer not to answer" has no value in the source pie; entered as 0.

Figure 20 **Do you think women should be represented in politics?**



When asked why women do not participate, the most common response was framed as personal disengagement: 50.4% pointed to a general disinterest in politics (52.0% of men and 48.9% of women). Far fewer identified structural constraints as primary obstacles: 32.1% cited the economic burden of unpaid care (30.3% of men and 33.8% of women), while 30.5% cited disillusionment with political institutions (26.9% of men and 33.9% of women).

Moreover, 28.7% noted the absence of a national gender quota (27.9% of men and 29.4% of women) as the primary barrier for women participation. Lastly, 28.3% pointed to a lack of mentorship or role models (27.4% of men and 29.2% of women), and 26.6% flagged sectarian quotas that limit representation (26.9% of men and 26.3% of women).

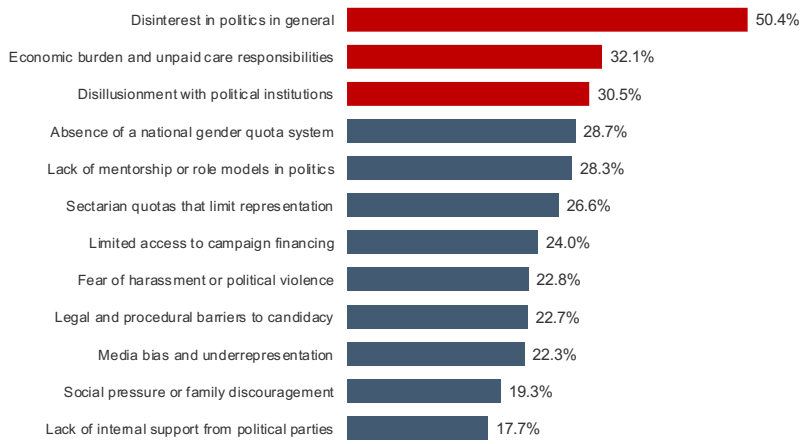
Overall, the obstacles women face are perceived in much the same way by men and women alike, with the two groups' answers differing by less than four percentage points for most obstacles.

Taken together, these responses reveal a public tendency to reduce women's exclusion to individual choice or family obligations, rather than to recognize the legal, institutional, and cultural barriers that systematically constrain women's political participation.

Obstacles Preventing Women from Participating in Politics

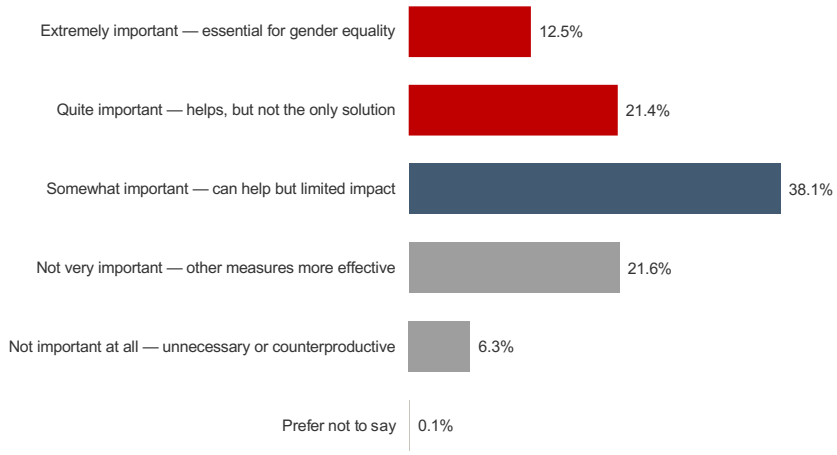
When asked how important a gender quota is for ensuring decent women's representation, responses clustered around moderate endorsement rather than strong commitment. The largest share (38.1%) called it 'somewhat important,' useful but limited in impact; 21.4% described it as 'quite important,' an improvement though not a complete solution; and only 12.5% regarded quotas as 'extremely important' and essential for achieving gender equality. On the skeptical side, 21.6% said quotas were 'not very important' and 6.3% deemed them 'not important at all.'

Figure 21 **What are the three biggest obstacles preventing women from participating in politics?** *(5 answers allowed) · Share of respondents selecting each · top three shown in red*



In sum, 72.0% of respondents assigned at least some importance to quotas, confirming majority support for the idea, but the concentration of answers in the 'somewhat important' category suggests that this support is cautious and conditional. This pattern aligns with the report's broader finding that backing for women's political inclusion is often rhetorical: many endorse the principle of quotas while remaining uncertain about their effectiveness or preferring complementary measures to address deeper structural barriers.

Figure 22 **How important is the implementation of a gender quota to ensure decent women representation in politics?**



A similar gap exists for youth, where support for lowering the voting age (56.3% of respondents said they support it) coexists with the perception that young people remain politically marginal.

Figure 23 **Do young people (18–29) have a meaningful voice in politics?**

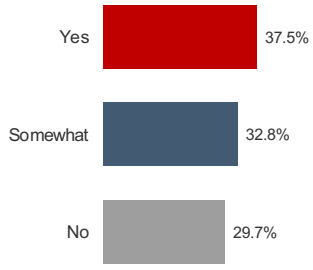
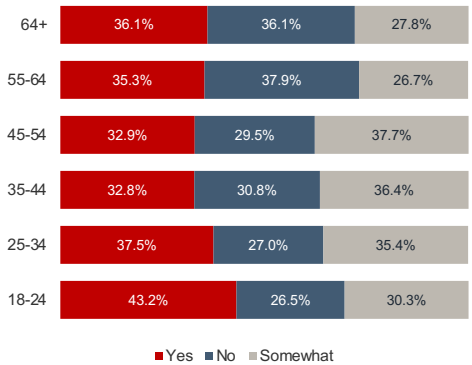


Figure 24 **Do young people (18–29) have a meaningful voice in politics?**

By respondent age

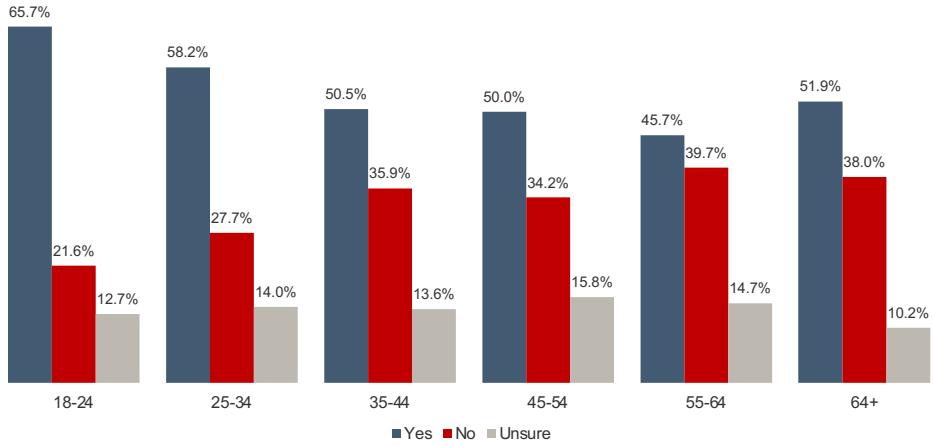


The youngest respondents (18–24) are the most likely to feel youth have a voice — confidence others perceive less.

Younger respondents are the most likely to say youth already have a meaningful political voice, 43.2% of 18–24 answer 'yes,' with support declining by age and older cohorts showing greater skepticism. Across most age groups a large 'somewhat' segment (roughly 27–38%) signals conditional or partial belief that youth influence exists rather than broad confidence. The pattern implies a generational gap in perception: youth report greater influence, while middle and older voters require more concrete, institutional evidence of impact.

Support for lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 is strongest among the youngest voters and weakens with age. The 18-24 group shows the highest approval at 65.7%, followed by 58.2% among 25-34; middle cohorts are split (about 50% yes in 35-44 and 45-54) with higher opposition (~36%) and steady uncertainty (~14%); older voters are least enthusiastic (55–64: 45.7% yes, 39.7% no; 64+: 51.9% yes, 38.0% no).

Figure 25 **Do you believe the voting age should be changed from 21 to 18 years old?** *By age group*



The pattern reveals a clear generational divide: strong youth support, conditional or cautious middle cohorts, and greater resistance among older respondents, implying that converting ambivalence into broader approval will require concrete evidence of responsible youth participation and institutional safeguards.

In addition, the recognized barriers to youth participation are multifaceted and structural, encompassing corruption, economic hardship, disappointment with previous reform efforts, social constraints, and authoritarian practices within political parties, reflecting the nature of Lebanon's sectarian and clientelist political system.

This stands in contrast to the obstacles cited for women's participation. While respondents often framed women's exclusion as stemming from personal disinterest or family obligations, respondents were more likely to identify

structural gaps as the main impediments for youth engagement. In other words, women's political disengagement is frequently reduced to individual choice, obscuring systemic inequality, whereas people seem to be more aware of the institutional and structural barriers that constrain youth participation.

The focus groups consistently showed that participants expressed strong rhetorical support for women's and youth participation in politics, even if they struggled to outline practical pathways for inclusion, most respondents endorsed women's political involvement and backed the introduction of quotas in parliament and municipalities. While they could not identify concrete obstacles beyond entrenched societal norms, they recognized that women should have greater space and support to play an active role.

Similarly, youth were widely acknowledged as important actors in political change, but participants found it difficult to articulate specific avenues for their engagement beyond voting. Older groups often discouraged their children from political involvement, framing politics as harmful or divisive.

Taken together, data sources reinforce that while rhetorical support for women and youth is evident, it is not matched by actionable strategies. This gap between recognition and implementation underscores the need for systemic reforms and cultural shifts, ensuring that quotas, youth initiatives, and inclusive policies are not only endorsed in principle but also translated into meaningful opportunities for participation and leadership.

Media Use and Message Credibility in a Polarized Context

The data shows that news consumption is highly generational and regionally fragmented. Among youth aged 18–24, 51.3% rely on messaging apps and 54.5% on online news sites, while only 15.6% use national television. By contrast, among those 55–64, 70.7% depend on national TV and just 17.2% on online sites. Social media use declines sharply with age: Facebook drops from 48.1% among 18–24 to 5.6% among 64+, and Instagram from 25.6% to zero. TikTok is used by 13% of 18–24 but disappears entirely among older groups.

Regional variation is equally pronounced. In Beirut 1 and 2, 100% of respondents report messaging apps as their source, with national TV reaching 54.2% in Beirut 1 and 78.7% in Beirut 2. In Bekaa 3, 78.3% rely on messaging apps, while 60% use regional TV. In South 1, 77.1% use messaging apps and 67.5% regional TV, showing a dual reliance. North 3 leans toward online sites (61.3%) and national TV (43.5%).

Figure 26 **Which sources do you rely on most for news about politics?** *3 answers allowed · by electoral district*

	Messaging apps	Online news sites	TV (satellite / national)	TV (satellite / regional)	Facebook	Friends / family word-of-mouth
Bekaa 1	34.1%	45.5%	47.7%	40.9%	27.3%	11.4%
Bekaa 2	27.6%	34.5%	65.5%	41.4%	41.4%	13.8%
Bekaa 3	78.3%	20.0%	18.3%	60.0%	25.0%	18.3%
South 1	77.1%	14.5%	16.9%	67.5%	43.4%	6.0%
South 2	79.0%	12.9%	14.5%	48.4%	37.1%	14.5%
South 3	52.1%	28.1%	18.8%	37.5%	24.0%	16.7%
North 1	38.8%	58.8%	45.0%	38.8%	30.0%	6.3%
North 2	35.8%	40.0%	33.7%	38.9%	40.0%	16.8%
North 3	14.5%	61.3%	43.5%	33.9%	29.0%	6.5%
Beirut 1	100.0%	54.2%	54.2%	37.5%	33.3%	20.8%
Beirut 2	100.0%	65.6%	78.7%	16.4%	19.7%	19.7%
Mount Lebanon 1	1.0%	53.1%	49.0%	41.8%	39.8%	23.5%
Mount Lebanon 2	83.5%	66.9%	35.4%	4.7%	37.8%	48.0%
Mount Lebanon 3	0.0%	39.4%	46.0%	43.1%	32.8%	22.6%
Mount Lebanon 4	40.1%	59.9%	48.6%	26.8%	31.7%	50.7%

	Instagram	Télé Liban & National Radio	TikTok	X / Twitter	Radio	Newspapers / print
Bekaa 1	13.6%	6.8%	18.2%	6.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Bekaa 2	10.3%	10.3%	13.8%	3.4%	0.0%	3.4%
Bekaa 3	8.3%	10.0%	1.7%	1.7%	13.3%	1.7%
South 1	22.9%	19.3%	8.4%	6.0%	9.6%	0.0%
South 2	30.6%	16.1%	11.3%	6.5%	4.8%	4.8%
South 3	15.6%	4.2%	4.2%	4.2%	6.3%	1.0%
North 1	8.8%	12.5%	8.8%	3.8%	0.0%	0.0%
North 2	10.5%	6.3%	17.9%	5.3%	0.0%	0.0%
North 3	14.5%	21.0%	11.3%	17.7%	0.0%	0.0%
Beirut 1	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Beirut 2	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 1	9.2%	0.0%	1.0%	6.1%	0.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 2	0.0%	5.5%	0.8%	0.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 3	25.5%	0.0%	2.2%	9.5%	0.0%	0.0%
Mount Lebanon 4	7.7%	4.9%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.0%

Trust levels are fragmented. Distrust is highest for TikTok (61.4% no trust among 25–34; 76.9% among 64+) and Twitter/X (47.3% no trust among men; 73.1% among 64+). Facebook and Instagram also attract high distrust, with 41% of men reporting no trust in Facebook and 47.8% in Instagram. By contrast, national TV retains relatively higher complete trust, reaching 18.5% among 64+. Télé Liban and radio also gain more trust among older groups, with complete trust in Télé Liban rising to 21.3% among 64+. Online news sites are widely used, but only 5.2% of 18-24 express complete trust, dropping to 0.9% among 55–64.

Overall, the numbers highlight a generational split: youth are digital-first but skeptical of their sources, while older cohorts remain TV-centric and more trusting of traditional broadcast media. Regionally, Beirut is dominated by messaging apps, the South and Bekaa combine apps with regional TV, and the North leans toward online sites. This fragmentation means no single source commands broad confidence, and political communication strategies must adapt to these divides.

Having said this, the focus groups revealed that what truly shapes credibility is the language, tone, and content of political messages, irrespective of the medium or tool of communication. Participants consistently expressed a preference for discourse that is moderate, respectful, and free from insults, inflammatory rhetoric, or hate speech.

They described a strong sense of fatigue with polarizing language, noting that constant exposure to divisive speech has deepened mistrust and widened social fractures. In contrast, messages that acknowledge citizens' struggles, economic hardship, insecurity, and political stagnation, without exacerbating divisions were perceived as far more credible and constructive.

The discussions highlighted that respectful and empathetic language is not merely a matter of style but a marker of seriousness and responsibility. When leaders adopt such a tone, participants felt they were more likely to be sincere and connected to people's realities. Aggressive or derogatory speech, by contrast, was often dismissed as manipulative or disconnected. Several participants even linked respectful discourse to the possibility of restoring social cohesion, suggesting that tone itself can either reinforce fragmentation or open space for dialogue. They emphasized that citizens want communication that validates their concerns and offers tangible solutions, rather than slogans or attacks on opponents.

5. Competing Narratives Between Two Wars

At the heart of these findings lies a paradox that defines Lebanon's political consciousness. A strong majority (74%) prioritizes institutional reform and anti-corruption efforts over ideological debates, and nearly 70% support ending hostilities with Israel through direct or indirect negotiations, with the state holding exclusive control over arms. Yet at the same time, 79% affirm that protecting their sect is essential to their family's security, almost exactly matching the 79% who support abolishing political sectarianism and building a civil state.

Figure 27 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following political visions as they relate to your situation and priorities?** *Percentages combine 'somewhat agree' and 'strongly agree' responses*

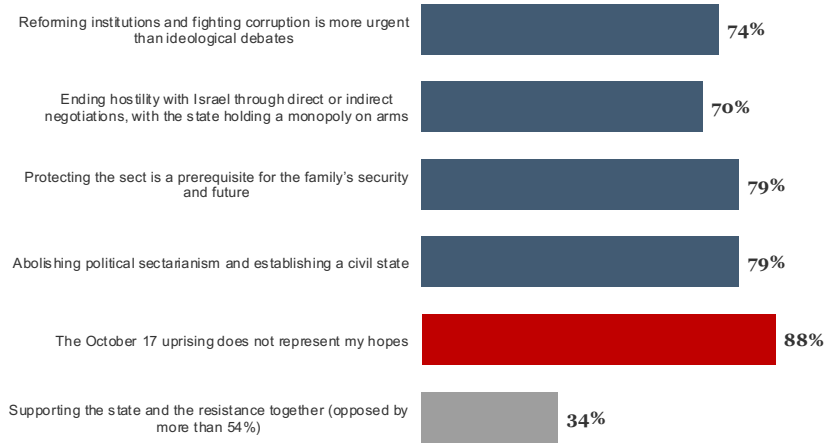
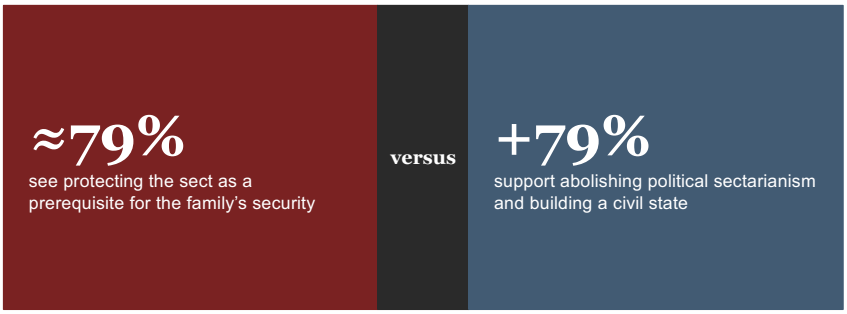


Figure 28 **Protecting the sect versus building a civil state**



This contradiction illustrates the trust deficit running through the study. Citizens aspire to move beyond sectarianism, but in the absence of a credible and trusted state, sectarian identity, reinforced by clientelist structures and the patronage networks of sectarian leaders that actively shape electoral behavior, remains their most reliable source of protection.

Reformist aspirations coexist with entrenched sectarian loyalties because people cannot yet imagine the state as a dependable guarantor of security and welfare. The disillusionment is further underscored by the fact that 88% of respondents said the October 17, 2019 uprising did not represent their hopes, signaling a collapse of faith in protest movements as vehicles for change. Meanwhile, opinion on the state–resistance relationship remains deeply fragmented, with 55% opposed and fewer than 34% in support, highlighting how unresolved and polarized this issue is.

It is a reminder that the study was conducted prior to the 2026 March escalation and prior to the postponement of the elections. The subsequent devastating Israeli attacks, with occupation, widespread deaths, displacement, and destruction, likely magnified these tensions. On one side,

the trauma of war reinforced reliance on sectarian identity and patronage networks as immediate sources of protection and survival. On the other, the scale of devastation may have deepened recognition that sectarian politics cannot shield citizens from catastrophes, strengthening calls for a civil state and systemic reform.

In essence, the timing of the study highlights how Lebanon's political consciousness is suspended between reformist aspirations and survivalist sectarian loyalties. The second war escalation likely intensified this fragmentation, leaving citizens oscillating between the desire for systemic change and the compulsion to rely on sectarian structures for protection, thereby widening the gap between political ideals and lived realities.

Key Takeaways and Implications for Reform

1. Deepening economic precarity threatens youth futures and accelerates emigration.

   Implication: Reform-minded politicians should legislate targeted social protection and education safeguards, such as temporary cash transfers, school retention subsidies, and legal incentives for youth hiring, to stabilize households and reduce push factors.

2. Total political disconnect undermines legitimacy and risks social breakdown.

   Implication: Politicians should institutionalize citizen engagement and transparency through statutory and incentivized participatory mechanisms, mandatory public reporting of decisions, and legal channels for citizen petitions with required government responses.

3. Elections are reinforcing clientelism rather than renewing leadership.

   Implication: Reform-minded elected representatives should legislate clear oversight mechanisms for the pre-election and election periods, such as mandatory public disclosure of service delivery and beneficiary lists and independent electoral audits, while building a robust legal infrastructure to monitor and regulate party financing; these measures must be backed by a strengthened, impartial judiciary to enforce rules and prevent impunity, and be complemented by statutory social-protection guarantees (targeted cash transfers and education safeguards) so that essential services cannot be weaponized for electoral gain.

4. Partisan life is stigmatized, especially among youth, weakening accountability.

   Implication: Lawmakers should adopt a compact legal package that protects political pluralism and lowers the real costs of participation by reducing hate speech and party stigmas. They should encourage youth

political caucuses and civic associations, granting them protected meeting spaces, eligibility for small competitive grants, capacity-building support, and guaranteed consultative roles in municipal and sectoral decision-making so that young organizers move from informal, risky activism into accountable, visible channels of influence, thereby reducing stigma, increasing oversight, and making partisan life safer and more transparent.

5. Growing intercommunal fragmentation threatens social cohesion.

   Implication: Policymakers should enact a concise legal framework that institutionalizes joint governance of shared public goods, establishing representative boards, transparent budgeting, and dispute-resolution mechanisms, to ensure equitable service delivery across communities. At the same time, hate speech and incitement laws must be clarified and narrowly strengthened with independent oversight and proportionate enforcement to curb organized, harmful rhetoric while protecting legitimate expression. These legal measures should be paired with social-cohesion activities, including bonding and reconciliation projects and joint infrastructure initiatives, to reduce grievance drivers and create durable incentives for cross-community cooperation.

6. Women's exclusion is structural, not a matter of personal choice.

   Implication: Reform-minded politicians should push for the adoption of special temporary measures to accelerate women's political participation, including an enforceable gender quota with clear targets, deadlines, and sanctions for non-compliance, while pairing that quota with complementary legal reforms that remove structural barriers, such as statutory childcare support, paid parental leave, and targeted campaign-finance relief or seed grants for women candidates, to ensure quotas yield substantive representation rather than tokenism.

   They should also mandate gender-disaggregated data collection and public reporting across electoral processes and public institutions, and push for internal reforms within political parties to require political parties to implement gender action plans, and codify capacity-building programs for female members, so that legal obligations are matched by dedicated resources, monitoring, and enforcement mechanisms that produce durable increases in women's representation and influence.

7. High digital news consumption coexists with low trust, producing a credibility crisis among youth.

   Implication: Legislators should mandate comprehensive media-literacy education across school curricula and fund public awareness campaigns to equip citizens, especially youth, with skills to evaluate information, require platforms to disclose sponsored content and political advertising

through clear provenance labels and searchable ad libraries, and impose transparency obligations on algorithms that amplify content along with enforceable penalties for non-compliance. In addition, they should require regular public reporting on misinformation trends and the impact of interventions so that policy, platforms, and civil society can jointly rebuild trust in the information ecosystem.

8. Protest fatigue has hollowed out mobilization and increased demand for tangible governance wins.

   Implication: Legislators should take measures to restore trust and reengage citizens by demonstrating that collective action can produce real change through a national performance-charter law that sets clear service delivery standards and measurable indicators for ministries and agencies, obliges them to publish results on an accessible public portal, and requires independent audits alongside citizen-led verification mechanisms such as scorecards, community monitoring, or third-party spot checks. A portion of discretionary public funds and transfers should be tied to demonstrable, verified results, creating direct incentives for performance.

9. Sectarianism is widely rejected in principle yet still relied upon in practice.

   Implication: Reformers must focus on gradually dismantling the need for sectarian protection rather than entrenching it. This shift requires building credible state institutions that can deliver security and services equitably, expanding inclusive safety nets that reduce dependence on clientelist networks, and creating pathways for citizens to transfer loyalty from sectarian leaders to public institutions. By strengthening the state's capacity and legitimacy while offering viable alternatives, communities can move beyond sectarian reliance without coercion and begin to embrace more inclusive forms of belonging.

10. The study is an interwar baseline and post-conflict dynamics require adaptive sequencing.

    Implication: Policymakers should mandate rapid attitudinal assessments after crises, enshrine adaptive sequencing in law, prioritize humanitarian stabilization first, then legislate pilot windows for governance reform, and require periodic public reporting on transitions. This ensures reforms remain responsive to shifting realities and that citizens can track progress across phases of recovery and governance transformation.

This research underscores what has been consistently highlighted in earlier studies: the urgent need for genuine state-building that guarantees people access to basic services, enjoyment of fundamental rights, and a sense of fairness, social justice, and equality before the law. A state

perceived as capable of protecting its citizens and delivering on their everyday needs is the cornerstone of trust and stability.

In its absence, the vacuum is filled by sectarian patronage ties, structures that are neither well regarded nor truly desired, but often relied upon survival, leaving many citizens feeling hopeless, helpless, and viewing emigration as the only escape.

Perhaps now is the right moment to take decisive steps, moving beyond temporary fixes toward building a state that can credibly safeguard its people, restore confidence, and re-anchor citizens in a shared national covenant.



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