

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

YOUTH AND THEIR POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN LEBANON

Voices of a Generation: Exploring Political
Engagement Among Lebanese Youth Amid
Crisis

Nadine Khayat, Lubna Halabi

January 2025



This report examines Lebanese youth political engagement amid the crises, including the 2019 uprising, Beirut Port explosion, economic collapse, and 2024 Israeli war. It analyzes shifting political attitudes, activism trends, and perceptions of governance and reforms.



Findings reveal deep disillusionment, with 70% disengaged from politics and over 90% dissatisfied with the system. While economic hardships and sectarianism hinder participation, alternative activism—grassroots movements, digital campaigns, and student initiatives—is growing.



The study calls for policies that enhance youth political inclusion, strengthen civic engagement, and address structural barriers. It urges reforms that promote accountability, increase youth representation, and create pathways for meaningful participation.

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Voices of a Generation: Exploring Political Engagement Among Lebanese Youth Amid Crisis examines how Lebanon's overlapping crises—the October 17, 2019 uprising, the Beirut Port explosion, economic collapse, and the 2024 Israeli war—have shaped youth political attitudes and activism. This study, based on 1,330 quantitative surveys and four qualitative roundtable discussions, uncovers a growing divide between disengagement and alternative activism, highlighting how young Lebanese navigate a fragmented political system.



Findings reveal deep frustration: 70% of youth express little or no interest in politics, and over 90% are dissatisfied with governance. Sectarianism, economic hardship, and systemic corruption fuel disillusionment, with many opting for migration over participation. Yet, new forms of engagement are emerging. While social media amplifies youth voices, it also fosters "slacktivism," where activism remains largely symbolic. Meanwhile, grassroots movements, university initiatives, and independent advocacy offer pathways for renewed engagement, though significant barriers persist.



This report is a critical resource for policymakers, civil society, and academics seeking to understand and support Lebanese youth. It provides data-driven insights and recommendations to foster meaningful participation, bridge generational divides, and promote inclusive governance. With half of Lebanon's youth considering emigration, addressing their concerns is vital. **Can this generation reclaim its political agency and shape Lebanon's future? This report offers key insights into that urgent question.**

Further information on the topic can be found here:
<https://lebanon.fes.de>

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In partnership with



Table of contents

1.	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
2.	INTRODUCTION	3
3.	LITERATURE OVERVIEW	4
3.1	Lebanon's political landscape: Knowledge, youth's perception, and the rise of the political activism	4
3.2	Channels of influence and youth's navigation of political engagement in a fragmented socio-political landscape	5
3.3	Intersecting identities: the role of socioeconomic and religious factors in lebanese youth politics	7
3.4	Youth in transition: national pride and immigration preferences in lebanese politics	8
4.	METHODOLOGY	10
4.1	Study design	10
4.2	Quantitative strategy	10
4.3	Qualitative study.....	12
5.	ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS	13
5.1.1	Interest, knowledge and digital activism	13
5.1.2	Perspectives On Political Corruption, Reform, And Advocacy	15
5.1.3	Sense Of Belonging And Religiosity	17
5.1.4	Political Views, Uncertainty, And Preferences	18
5.1.5	Political Affiliations And Struggles	20
5.1.6	Engagement On Campus	24
5.1.7	Intergenerational Transmission Of Political Views And Patterns	24
5.1.8	Perspectives On Emigration	27
5.1.9	Challenges In Engaging With Politics	27
6.	RECOMMENDATIONS	29
6.1	Recommendations For The Government	29
6.2	Recommendations For Political Parties And Groups	29
6.3	Recommendations Universities	30
6.4	Recommendations NGOs.....	30
7.	CONCLUSION	31
	References	32

1

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"Voices of a Generation: Exploring Political Engagement Among Lebanese Youth Amid Crisis," is a report investigating the evolving political engagement of Lebanese youth from 2019 to 2024 against a backdrop of multifaceted crises. Over this period, Lebanon faced significant political, economic, and social upheavals, including the October 17 uprising, the Beirut Port explosion, the ongoing financial collapse, and the Israeli war and invasion of 2024. These events have profoundly shaped youth attitudes, behaviors, and aspirations, making this report particularly timely and critical.

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating 1,330 quantitative surveys collected on the selected campuses across Lebanon between February and April 2022, and 4 qualitative roundtable discussions in December 2024 after the Israeli war, to provide an overview of Lebanese youth's political engagement. This project was financed by Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES).

In 2022, ARAA & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) conducted a quantitative survey examining political engagement among Lebanese youth. In 2024, The Socio-Economic Justice Initiative – MAAN, in collaboration with Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), expanded on this work by analyzing the quantitative findings in greater depth and contextualizing them within the evolving socio-political landscape. Additionally, MAAN initiated a qualitative research phase, focusing on key questions emerging from the initial data to provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of youth political participation.

Key findings reveal a decline in interest in traditional political systems, with 70% of youth expressing minimal or no interest in politics, with over 90% expressing dissatisfaction with Lebanon's current governance framework. This disillusionment is exacerbated by systemic corruption, sectarian divisions, and ineffective leadership. Social media has emerged as the dominant channel for political information and engagement; however, its dual role as both a mobilizer and a conduit for superficial "slacktivism" highlights the fragmented nature of youth participation.

Intersecting identities such as religion, socioeconomic status, and regional disparities significantly influence political attitudes and behaviors. For instance, while 81% of youth advocate for secularism, they remain skeptical about its feasibility within Lebanon's sectarian framework. Economic hardships further exacerbate this discontent,

with 55% of youth expressing a desire to emigrate, particularly among financially vulnerable groups. Young peoples' visions for Lebanon's future remain divided, with preferences for secularism, federalism, or other reform models reflecting the lack of a unified strategy for systemic change.

This report concludes with actionable recommendations to foster youth engagement that is impactful, purposeful, and empowers young people to contribute actively and sustainably to decision-making processes. It also emphasizes the importance of youth participation in the implementation of policies that directly affect them and their vital role in rebuilding their country. By addressing systemic inequities, amplifying youth voices, and creating enabling environments for participation, NGOs, universities, and the government can transform disillusionment into constructive action, enabling youth to transition from passive stakeholders to active contributors, and paving the way for a more inclusive and representative political future.

2

INTRODUCTION

Youth movements have long been catalysts for political change. However, in recent years, we have seen a setback in the youth political movement, despite the history of successful protests among youth (Meyer, 2009). These days, youth political movements in MENA and other countries have been hindered, disheartened, and dispersed, allowing us to witness a slowdown in protests, with other means becoming popular with youth, such as social media campaigns and smaller grassroots projects (Harb, 2021). Studies have shown that the use of the internet has favorable outcomes in terms of political involvement (Majid, Zainullah, 2023), particularly by increasing access to information and facilitating digital activism. However, the extent of its impact may vary depending on factors such as digital literacy, socio-economic background, and the political environment (Majid, Zainullah, 2023). In Lebanon, according to Michel Doueihy (2022), a significant majority of youth (89%) report little to no interest in politics, with most not actively staying informed, reflecting an increase in disinterest since 2016. This is particularly notable in post-uprising Lebanon - the period following the mass protests that erupted across the country in October 2019 - where initial enthusiasm for large demonstrations has diminished, leading to a sense of political powerlessness (Gallagher, 2022).

This literature review aims to explore the landscape of youth political engagement, progressing from foundational understandings to the complex dynamics of identity, activism, and systemic issues that influence young people's political participation. The literature examines variables that shape young people's political behaviour and the broader societal structures that impact their engagement. It provides an in-depth understanding of how young people in Lebanon navigate their political identities, aspirations, and actions within a multifaceted socio-political environment. Our exploration includes themes gathered from literature addressing youth activism in MENA and Lebanon, along with data analysis, such as Lebanon's political context, the rise of political activism, the channels of influence, and youth's navigation of political engagement in a fragmented socio-political landscape. We will also examine the role of socio-economic and religious factors in Lebanese youth politics. Additionally, we will discuss youth political transitions, their national pride, and organisational preferences. By systematically examining these interconnected layers, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of youth political engagement and identify key areas for further research, including the evolving impact of digital activism,

the role of political socialisation within families and educational institutions, the effectiveness of youth-led political movements, and the influence of economic precarity on political participation.

This study explores Lebanese youth political engagement amidst economic crises, sectarianism, and activism, including the 2019 uprising and the 2023 Israeli invasion. Using a mixed-methods approach, it combines a survey of 1,330 university students aged 20–22 with insights from four roundtable discussions. Findings indicate declining political interest, low institutional trust, social media's central role, and the influence of religion and socio-economic status.

We acknowledge the vital contributions of Nicole Bou Khalil, MAAN Programme Manager, Kassem Afara, Outreach Officer, and Diyaa Mouthafar, Communication Officer, who played a crucial role in structuring and coordinating the study and expanding participant outreach. Joanna Daher drafted the report, reviewed by Karim Khansa and edited by Nadine Khayat. ARAA designed the survey, analyzed by Lubna Halabi, while Karim Khansa facilitated roundtable discussions, and Mostafa Fayad designed the layout.

3

LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 LEBANON'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE: KNOWLEDGE, YOUTH'S PERCEPTION, AND THE RISE OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM

This section looks at trends to explain the decline in youth political engagement in Lebanon according to the literature, highlighting the shift from activism to resignation amid ongoing crises. It examines how economic collapse, governmental inefficiency, and sectarian constraints have deepened youth disillusionment, diminished civic participation, and intensified migration trends. Additionally, it explores the post-uprising political landscape, the evolving nature of youth mobilization, and the challenges of sustaining momentum for systemic change.

There is a growing sense of apathy and disengagement, where youth participation in traditional forms of political activism has faded in the past year, giving way to a more “resigned approach” to the country's challenges (Doueihy, 2022). This sense of apathy reflects a sense of defeat or hopelessness, where the belief in the possibility of meaningful change has diminished. It is clear that the daily lives of young people in Lebanon are deeply intertwined with the broader crises affecting the nation. They navigate through a landscape marked by economic instability, political uncertainty, and social unrest; their experiences reflect the complex and multifaceted challenges that Lebanon faces.

Youth engagement in politics is a critical element in shaping the future of any nation, and Lebanon is no exception. A pervasive sense of insecurity affects all aspects of youth life in Lebanon, rooted in decades of political instability and compounded by events such as the 2015–2016 “You Stink” protests over government inefficiency and corruption, a presidential vacuum that had lasted for over two years since 2014, the October 2019 nationwide uprising, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Beirut port explosion in August 2020, and another presidential vacuum in 2022 that also lasted two years, compounded by the Israeli war and invasion in 2024. These crises, alongside intermittent armed conflicts driven by political tensions—particularly during the investigation of the port explosion—have severely impacted the country, especially its politically engaged youth (Chatham House, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021). The interference of politics in the judiciary system has hindered the course of justice, creating a profound sense of disillusionment among youth. This erosion of accountability exacerbates their frustration and

and demotivation, as they witness transgressions that undermine trust in state institutions and the rule of law (Chatham House, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Lebanon's multiple crises have severely disrupted the personal lives of its youth, diminishing their sense of fulfillment, economic stability, and mental well-being. This has fostered widespread hopelessness and uncertainty, prompting many young Lebanese to reconsider their future in the country. According to a 2024 United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report, youth aged 15-24 are increasingly driven to emigrate due to a lack of opportunities, insecurity, and poor living conditions. This trend is especially pronounced among educated youth, who face high unemployment and economic instability. A 2017 Lebanese American University study found 35% of Lebanese youth unemployed, with university graduates disproportionately affected, intensifying the emigration propensity. The United Nations estimates nearly 2 million Lebanese emigrants globally, many of whom are young adults. Economic hardship, limited job prospects, and political instability continue to push the youth abroad. Additionally, disenchantment with Lebanon's political system and worsening conditions have eroded civic engagement. Many young people feel unheard, their attempts to enact change thwarted by entrenched political elites. As a result, youth are driven to adopt passive attitudes or shifting focus to personal survival, short-term goals, or grassroots activism, rather than addressing Lebanon's systemic challenges.

Contextual Overview of the Lebanese Crisis: Economic Collapse and the Rise of Political Activism

UNDP indicates that young people are more likely to become politically active during times of economic and social hardship as they seek to tackle the issues directly affecting their lives (UNDP, 2019). The various crises have disproportionately impacted youth, making it crucial for them to engage politically and advocate for systemic change. Young people in Lebanon have been at the forefront of recent protests, demanding government accountability and economic reforms (BBC, 2020). The ongoing Israeli invasion of 2024 has further intensified youth mobilization, as many young people have engaged in grassroots activism, humanitarian aid efforts, and political advocacy in response to the conflict's devastating impact (Amnesty International, 2024). Youth were promi-

-inent participants in the 17 October Revolution, drawing inspiration from the Arab Spring uprisings and calling for democracy and social justice. However, political demonstrations diminished after Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri resigned in November 2019, alongside the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted political organization. Prime Minister Najib Mikati's government has been unable to achieve economic recovery due to political deadlock. The crisis has also led to increased sexual harassment and assault against women, violence in refugee camps, suppression of LGBTQ+ activities, and limited opportunities for marginalized communities (Doueihy, 2022). This political engagement among youth is not only a response to the current crisis but also reflects their desire for a more just and equitable society. The youth's proactive stance in the political arena underscores their needs and harnesses their potential to drive transformation in Lebanon.

The Complex and Sectarian Nature of Lebanon's Political System

Lebanon's entrenched sectarian political system institutionalizes power-sharing along religious lines, ensuring that key government positions and parliamentary seats are distributed based on sectarian affiliation rather than merit or national interest (Doueihy, 2022). This system reinforces clientelism, where political parties—tied to sectarian leaders—act as gatekeepers to resources, employment, and social services, fostering dependency rather than civic engagement. For youth, this creates significant barriers to meaningful political participation, as joining the political sphere often means aligning with sectarian parties rather than advocating for policy-based change. As a result, independent youth activism struggles to gain traction, and political engagement is often confined within the boundaries of sectarian loyalty rather than national reform. This has led many young people to view politics as synonymous with corruption and inefficiency, resulting in low levels of political engagement among the youth. Re-evaluating the political system and Constitution to incorporate young people's aspirations and political knowledge is essential for fostering informed participation.

Youth Perceptions and Efficacy in Politics: The Impact of October 17 Protests on Political Activism in Post-Uprising Lebanon

The October 17 protests in Lebanon marked a pivotal moment in the nation's political landscape, reshaping how young people engage with politics and view their role in societal change. In the post-uprising period, however, the initial optimism and mobilization gave way to discouragement and political paralysis. The uprisings not only catalyzed a surge in political activism among the youth but also highlighted the evolving channels through which they sought to influence the political discourse. As the initial wave of protests gave rise to new forms of participation and expression, it became evident that the methods by which Lebanese youth access information

and participate in political dialogue were undergoing significant transformation - from digital media to grassroots organizations, university campuses and student movements, community networks, public gatherings, and creative expressions (Al Jazeera, 2021). Yet, as historian Kamal Saliba notes in *A House of Many Mansions*, the fragmented nature of Lebanese identity—rooted in decades of sectarian and regional exclusivity.

Despite the significant turnout during the protests, the old sectarian political structure largely remained intact, and many of the hopes for reforms have not materialized. Additionally, the political landscape remains fractured, with traditional parties retaining significant power despite losing some ground to independent candidates in subsequent elections (Human Rights Watch, 2024). This period is marked by a deepening crisis in governance, where the hopes for substantial change have been met with continued resistance from the entrenched political elite, leading to a widespread sense of despair and frustration among the Lebanese population (Doueihy, 2022). Therefore, many young people associate politics with "corruption" and "problems," contributing to their disinterest.

The deeply entrenched political system and elite, combined with the lack of tangible reforms, and an ideologically divided youth movement, and the double disappointment of youth - both in the old leadership and in the absence of new, organized leadership emerging from the uprising capable of steering the country toward rooted reforms - led to widespread frustration and a feeling of powerlessness among the population, particularly the youth (Gallagher, 2022).

3.2 CHANNELS OF INFLUENCE AND YOUTH'S NAVIGATION OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN A FRAGMENTED SOCIO-POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

This section explores how Lebanese youth acquire political information, engage in political discourse, and express their views within a fragmented socio-political landscape. By examining the role of social media, educational institutions, and informal discussions, it investigates how these factors shape youth political engagement, influence participation strategies, and contribute to the evolving nature of activism in Lebanon. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for assessing the challenges and opportunities faced by youth as they navigate political participation amidst sectarian divides, socio-economic hardships, and state-imposed restrictions.

To foster a more optimistic view of their capacity to effect change and actively participate in politics, it is crucial to understand the channels through which Lebanese youth acquire information, engage, and express their views. Social media platforms have become the primary means for Lebanese youth to access political news, participate in discourse, and organize collective actions. Additionally, educational institutions and informal political discussions

significantly influence young people's political attitudes and engagement strategies. Therefore, the multifaceted nature of political engagement among Lebanese youth emphasizes the importance of information sources, active participation, and freedom of expression in shaping their political identities and actions.

Political Interest and Information Sources

Social media has provided Lebanese youth with new avenues for political participation and increased their access to information; however, the challenges posed by the fragmented political landscape, sectarianism, and socio-economic hardships continue to impede effective political engagement. Despite this, the persistence of youth activism and the innovative methods by which young people are engaging with politics indicate that they will remain a vital force in the ongoing struggle for political change in Lebanon.

In this context of a rapidly evolving political landscape, the political engagement of youth in Lebanon is profoundly influenced by their sources of information and the level of political interest that these sources generate. According to the FES MENA Youth Study Results Analysis by Michel Doueihy, among the 16% of youth who remain informed about politics, social media is the primary source (73%), followed by television (53%), the internet (46%), and face-to-face conversations (27%). In recent years, social media has played a pivotal role in mobilizing youth political engagement (Doueihy, 2022). Platforms like X, Instagram, and Facebook have equipped young activists with tools to organize, share information, and rally support both locally and internationally, enabling them to bypass traditional media, often controlled by political elites (Harb, 2021).

The 2019 protests exemplify how social media has empowered Lebanese youth to challenge the status quo. It facilitated the rapid dissemination of information and enabled the organization of large-scale demonstrations. These platforms allowed youth to bypass traditional media gatekeepers and create a new space for political activism (Harb, 2021). However, while social media was instrumental in mobilizing youth, it also led to the phenomenon of "slacktivism", where minimal online activism, such as sharing posts or changing profile pictures, replaced more substantial forms of political action (Piat, 2019). It played a significant role in mobilizing support for the protests; however, this digital engagement often supplanted more active forms of participation, such as attending protests, organizing grassroots initiatives, or engaging in community-based advocacy, resulting in frustration among more committed activists who viewed online support as insufficient for driving real change. While slacktivism raised awareness, it also fostered a sense of contentment, where the ease of clicking a "like" or sharing a post was mistaken for meaningful political involvement (Kozbar, 2020). Thus, "slacktivist" began to be used somewhat pejoratively to describe those who seemed to support the revolution but were unwilling to take greater risks or invest time in on-the-ground activism.

The increased accessibility of political information through media does not necessarily lead to effective political engagement. Divisions along sectarian lines often hinder the formation of a unified youth movement capable of driving significant political change. Furthermore, the overwhelming amount of information, coupled with the prevalence of misinformation on social media, can result in confusion and political apathy among young people (Harb, 2021). Algorithm-driven echo chambers further reinforce pre-existing beliefs, limiting exposure to diverse perspectives and discouraging critical engagement with alternative political narratives. This fragmentation not only deepens sectarian and ideological divides but also undermines the potential for collective youth mobilization and meaningful political discourse. Many young people believe that their participation in the political process is unlikely to foster meaningful change, leading to a preference for informal political activities such as protests, online activism, and community organizing over traditional political engagement (Harb, 2021). These forms of participation provide greater flexibility and allow youth to express their political identities in ways that do not conform to the rigid sectarian structures of Lebanon's formal political system.

Political Discussions and Educational Influence

Politically engaged youth are increasingly focusing on alternative forms of political participation, such as grassroots movements, civil society initiatives, and the multi-level dismantling of established authority. These forms of engagement underscore the growing disillusionment with the current political system, where many young people in Lebanon question the effectiveness and legitimacy of democratic processes. This scepticism, driven by perceptions of ineffective democratic mechanisms and selective law enforcement, often leads to a lack of respect for the rule of law and electoral entitlements, as many youths view these institutions as illegitimate. Consequently, disengagement from formal politics and alternative forms of activism further weakens the culture of law (Doueihy, 2022). These dynamics highlight how young people in Lebanon have utilized a variety of venues for political engagement and the diverse ways in which they contribute to the political landscape, whether through formal channels like political parties or alternative political groups.

As highlighted by Doueihy (2022) and El Homssi (2023), Lebanese schools and universities frequently reflect the country's complex sectarian landscape, which can either promote political awareness or deepen sectarian divides. Educational institutions often emphasize the importance of national identity and political awareness; however, their influence varies depending on the curriculum and the socio-political context in which they operate. Moreover, informal political discussions among peers, family members, and community leaders are integral to shaping young people's political views. These discussions provide a critical space for the exchange of ideas and opinions, which can either stimulate political activism or contribute to disengagement, depending on the nature of the discourse (Mouawad, 2021). The interplay between educational experiences and informal political discussions creates a

multifaceted environment where Lebanese youth navigate their political identities and engagement strategies.

Political engagement and participation among Lebanese youth manifest through involvement in student groups, unions, collectives, voting in student elections, and active participation in community service or volunteer activities. Historically, university campuses have served as hubs for political organisations, leading movements such as the 2005 Independence Uprising, the 2011 anti-sectarian movement, the 2015 garbage protests, and the 2019 uprising. Today's university clubs, including those affiliated with political parties, past movements, and ideological groups like communist or feminist clubs, draw inspiration from this history. Notably, "Secular Clubs" have developed sophisticated political positions and contributed to campaigns such as Beirut Madinati in 2016 and numerous 2022 parliamentary election campaigns. These clubs have challenged the dominance of traditional political parties on campuses, winning majorities in student elections and advancing demands to a national level (Doueihy, 2022).

Political Participation and Freedom of Expression

Lebanese youth, whether challenging or supporting traditional political parties, operate within a restrictive political system that limits their influence. Despite these constraints, they adapt with resilience and ingenuity, using digital platforms to amplify their voices, organise movements, and mobilize support. Concurrently, they engage in grassroots initiatives, ranging from community organising to protest actions, creating alternative spaces for political expression and activism. Their efforts reflect a response to institutional barriers and a commitment to reshaping Lebanon's political landscape. However, the risks of surveillance and repression pose significant barriers to their freedom of expression. Their willingness to publicly criticise political leaders and institutions plays a critical role in shaping the political agenda. Yet, this is complicated by the state's surveillance tactics and repressive measures, which create a climate of fear and self-censorship (Merhej/Qureshi, 2020). Authorities monitor online activity, summoning activists and journalists over social media posts deemed critical of political leaders. Defamation and libel laws are frequently weaponised to silence dissent, with individuals facing legal action, detention, or pressure to remove content. Beyond digital repression, security forces have resorted to arbitrary arrests, intimidation, and excessive force to suppress protests, especially since the uprising on 17 October 2019. Protesters have encountered tear gas, rubber bullets, and violent dispersals, while bureaucratic obstacles, such as delays in granting protest permits, further restrict civic engagement (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Additionally, reports of unauthorised phone tapping and surveillance of public spaces underscore the state's broader efforts to control dissent. These tactics not only restrict youth participation in political life but also pose direct risks to those seeking to challenge the status quo.

The 2019 uprising, dubbed the "WhatsApp Revolution", exemplifies the central role of digital communication in youth activism. WhatsApp was instrumental in organising protests, coordinating sit-ins, and disseminating informa-

tion among activists. However, these tools also exposed young activists to risks, as security forces accessed chats to identify and target protest leaders, creating an atmosphere of surveillance.

Despite these challenges, Lebanese youth have grown willing to engage politically. Participation in demonstrations and strikes has risen significantly, and alternative forms of activism, such as boycotting goods linked to political figures and engaging in grassroots movements, have gained prominence.

3.3 INTERSECTING IDENTITIES: THE ROLE OF SOCIOECONOMIC AND RELIGIOUS FACTORS IN LEBANESE YOUTH POLITICS

This section explores how the interplay of socioeconomic status and religious affiliation shapes the political engagement of Lebanese youth. Given Lebanon's deeply entrenched sectarian system and widening economic disparities, these identities serve as both personal and structural determinants of political participation. By analysing how economic struggles influence political disillusionment and how sectarian frameworks dictate political affiliations, we examine both the barriers and opportunities for the political agency of youth. Understanding these intersecting factors is essential for assessing how young people navigate, resist, or reinforce existing political structures in their pursuit of change.

Understanding the political engagement of Lebanese youth requires a nuanced examination of the intersecting identities that shape their experiences and perspectives. In Lebanon, where sectarianism profoundly influences both social structures and political institutions, the identities that youth carry with them—particularly socioeconomic status and religious affiliation—are not merely personal attributes but also markers of their place within a complex and often contentious societal framework (Doueihy, 2022). Socioeconomic factors and religious identity shape their identities and often dictate political allegiance and the channels through which young people can engage in politics. According to the 2016 FES MENA Youth Study, the intersection of these identities creates a multifaceted landscape where some youth may find themselves empowered to engage, while others face significant barriers. Delving into the complex interplay between socioeconomic disparities, religious differences, and their influence on political engagement is an essential examination of how systemic inequalities and sectarian affiliations shape political opportunities, perspectives, motivations, and the strategies employed to influence change.

Socio-economic Struggles: A Multifaceted Crisis

Gertel and Hexel (2018) illustrate the economic struggles in Arab states, including Lebanon, where the lack of welfare systems, increasing privatization, and neoliberal policies have eroded job security and exacerbated income inequality. Factors such as payment systems, income sources, access to healthcare, and the security of the

labour market (Doueihy, 2022) reflect the broader issues faced by this generation. The Lebanese youth, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, have been severely impacted by the financial and liquidity crises, with their experiences varying based on gender, education level, and place of residence. Economic disparity is also mirrored in the labour market, where job opportunities are often linked to political connections, further entrenching the influence of the ruling class (Doueihy, 2022). High inflation has rendered saving nearly impossible, and access to health insurance remains alarmingly low, with many youths lacking coverage and most unable to afford free healthcare services (World Bank, 2021). Additionally, the reliance on remittances from the Lebanese diaspora, often a lifeline for many families, has been strained due to global economic conditions, further exacerbating the challenges faced by youth in Lebanon (World Bank, 2021). These economic hardships could influence political views and engagement as the lack of job opportunities, income inequality, and financial instability fuel resentment towards the ruling elite and the clientelist system. Some youth respond by actively participating in protest movements and demanding systemic reform, whilst others disengage completely, feeling that political participation yields no tangible change. Moreover, reliance on political connections for employment reinforces allegiance to traditional parties for some, whilst those excluded from such networks may seek alternative political frameworks or consider emigration. The economic and educational instability contributes to a sense of disenfranchisement among the youth, diminishing their trust in political institutions and limiting their participation in civic life (Doueihy, 2022).

Interplay of Religion and Political Identity

Lebanese youth navigate the intersection of religion and politics in complex ways, with many challenging sectarian identities by advocating for secularism, civil rights, and reformist movements that transcend religious divides. The sectarian political system, which allocates power among religious groups, ties political engagement to religious identity, with leaders and institutions wielding significant influence over youth political behavior (Chatham House, 2021; Gadzhimuradova/Rabat, 2020), making it difficult for the youth to forge their own path through new secular political parties. While this structure reinforces sectarian allegiances, it also inspires counter-movements among youth seeking a political system centered on national unity rather than religious affiliation, highlighting the dual role of religion as both a mobilizing force and a source of resistance in Lebanese politics.

3.4 YOUTH IN TRANSITION: NATIONAL PRIDE AND IMMIGRATION PREFERENCES IN LEBANESE POLITICS

Amid ongoing economic hardship and political instability, many young people struggle to reconcile their sense of belonging with the increasing desire to leave the country in search of better opportunities. By analyzing how these dynamics shape youth activism, organizational preferenc-

es, and visions for an ideal political system, we highlight the broader implications of migration trends on Lebanon's political future and the potential for sustained youth-driven change.

In Lebanon, the intertwined issues of national pride and migration trends, along with the evolving organizational preferences and visions for an ideal political system, highlight the complex realities faced by the country's youth. There exists a tension between national pride and the increasing allure of migration among young Lebanese, spurred by deep-seated political and economic instability, which reveals how disappointment with the current state is fragmenting national identity and influencing the decisions of many young people (Doueihy, 2022). Furthermore, the ongoing crisis in Lebanon has shaped the organizational preferences and visions of an ideal political system among the youth (Doueihy, 2022). Their organizational preferences and visions for an ideal political system are not merely reactions to the immediate crises they encounter but also reflect a deeper yearning for a more just, equitable, and stable society. Understanding these dynamics is essential for assessing how the current political framework affects the engagement and activism of Lebanon's younger generation.

National Pride vs. Migration Trends

According to Doueihy, the tension between national pride and migration trends among Lebanese youth reflects the deep-rooted challenges they face in a country fraught with political and economic instability. As Doueihy argues in the FES MENA Youth Study Results Analysis (2022), the intersection of economic hardship, political disillusionment, and social fragmentation has not only strained the social fabric but has also deepened sectarian divisions, exacerbating feelings of exclusion and marginalization among various groups. As young people navigate these complex realities, this environment has resulted in a fragmentation of national identity, with many feeling increasingly disconnected from the broader political and social discourse (Doueihy, 2022). Therefore, the concept of a unified national identity becomes more abstract as these youth struggle to reconcile their local affiliations with a sense of belonging to the nation as a whole.

The way Lebanese youth identify with their local and national communities—whether their village, town, city, or country—offers valuable insights into how they express national pride and shape personal identities amid ongoing political and social change. As highlighted in the 2016 FES MENA Youth Study, significant political events in recent years, such as the October 2019 protests and the August 2020 explosion in Beirut, have profoundly impacted these young individuals, influencing their decisions regarding migration and political engagement. The October 2019 uprising, largely led by youth activists and student groups, underscored a growing demand for political reform, including a prominent call to lower the voting age from 21 to 18 (BBC News, 2020). This movement initially instilled a sense of hope and vitality among the youth; however, the severe economic downturn, worsened by the Beirut port explosion and ongoing political deadlock, has since

resulted in widespread despair and frustration As a result, there has been a significant decline in youth interest in formal politics, partly driven by the association of politics with corruption and social issues (Doueihy, 2022). However, this has not led to total disengagement; instead, many young individuals have moved towards more spontaneous, non-institutional forms of political involvement. This includes participation in demonstrations, strikes, and online mobilisations, reflecting a trend towards unstructured political engagement motivated by personal interests rather than formal group commitments (Harb, 2021). This trend has impeded the formation of cohesive oppositional groups or political parties, often resulting in a protest movement that seems directionless or anarchic. Yet, this spontaneity also signifies a deep-rooted desire for change, even if it lacks a united front. Therefore, the choices made by Lebanese youth—whether to remain in Lebanon and continue the struggle for reform or to migrate in search of better opportunities—are profoundly influenced by their sense of national pride, or the absence thereof, and their personal experiences with the country's political and socio-economic challenges. As they grapple with the realities of their present and the uncertainties of their future, the tension between national pride and the allure of migration will continue to shape their role in Lebanon's evolving political landscape. This intersection of political and personal factors not only influences their immediate decisions but also has long-term implications for the country's social cohesion and stability.

Despite these challenges, a strong undercurrent of political engagement persists among Lebanese youth, driven by a desire for real change in their country. This engagement is often expressed through non-institutional, spontaneous actions, such as protests, strikes, and online activism (Doueihy, 2022). These aspirations are likely to play a crucial role in shaping the future of political engagement and reform in Lebanon, as young people continue to seek ways to overcome the limitations of the current system and build a better future for themselves and their country. However, the lack of a unified vision and the absence of cohesive organizational structures have made it difficult for these efforts to coalesce into a sustained movement capable of effecting meaningful change. The ongoing struggle to define an ideal political system reflects the broader complexities of youth political engagement in Lebanon, where the intersection of political, social, and economic factors creates a challenging environment for activism.

4

METHODOLOGY

4.1 STUDY DESIGN

Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies, the study captures the political behaviors, attitudes, and aspirations of university students aged 18 to 24, reflecting their responses to national upheavals, including the October 2019 uprising, the subsequent political and economic crisis, as well as the most recent Israeli war and invasion in 2024. Both components include participants according to the following regional distribution: 25% from Mount Lebanon, 25% from Beirut, 15% from South Lebanon, 10% each from Baalbek and Beqaa, and 15% from Akkar, Nabatieh, and the North.

A quantitative study was conducted by ARAA Research and Consultancy between February and April 2022 to explore the political behaviours and attitudes of Lebanese university students in the context of the October 17, 2019 uprising. Data collection took place on selected campuses across Lebanon using the Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) methodology. Although the sample captured a diverse demographic of students, it was not nationally representative due to reliance on participant availability, which limited randomization. The data were initially processed using ASKIA software and subsequently imported into SPSS 25 for further cleaning and analysis. Tables were generated, and variables were presented using percentages. Where applicable, a significance level (alpha) was employed for statistical tests to ensure rigorous analysis.

The study aimed to:

- to understand the crisis impact by investigating the influence of Lebanon's ongoing crises on youth responses to state-led political frameworks,
- to explore new activism modalities by examining the emergence of youth-led political movements and adaptations in activism strategies under crisis conditions, and
- to assess policy influence by evaluating the impact of 2023/2024 political reforms, particularly those emphasizing electoral inclusivity and accountability, on youth perceptions and engagement.

4.2 QUANTITATIVE STRATEGY

The survey developed by Araa followed a two-level sampling strategy to ensure diversity and representation:

- **Sampling Approach:**
 - **Primary Level:** Quota sampling targeted a diverse range of universities, including private

institutions and regional campuses of the Lebanese University (LU), ensuring representation across gender, age, and geographic distribution.

- **Secondary Level:** Within selected universities, participants were chosen based on availability and willingness, enabling a broad demographic range despite limited randomization.

- **Sample Size:**

The initial target was 2,000 participants based on 2017–2018 university enrollment statistics. By April 2022, 1,330 surveys were completed, meeting 75% of the target for private universities and 42% for LU.

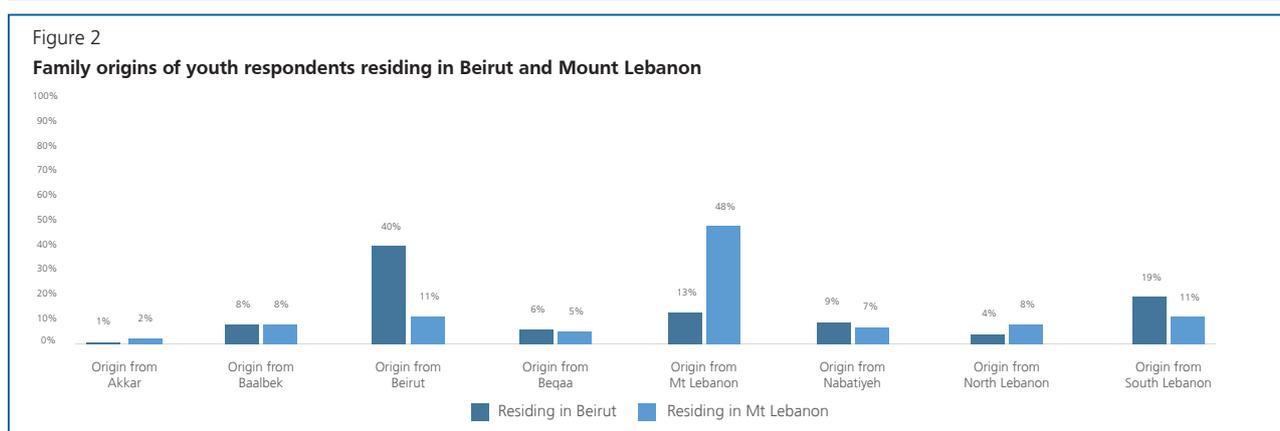
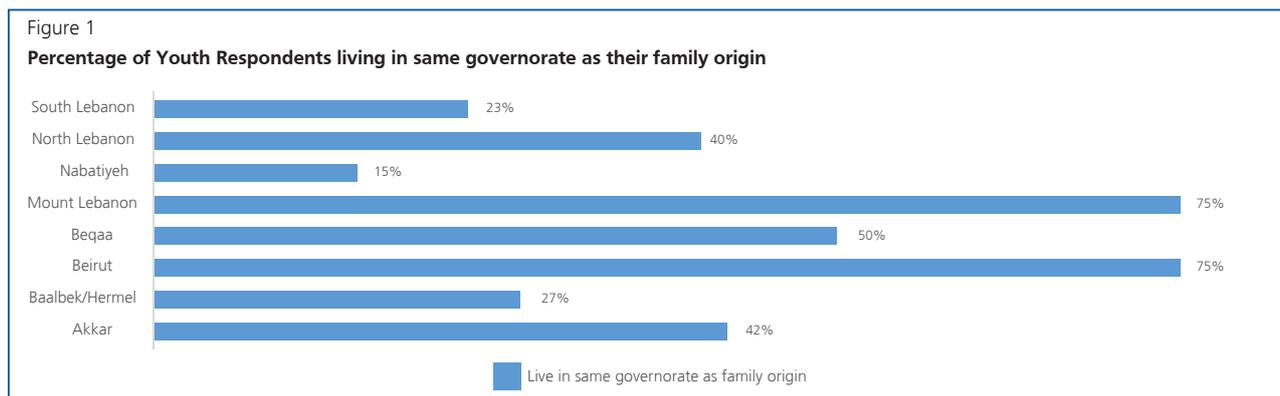
- **Demographics:**

- **Age:** 50% were aged 20–22, with the remainder split between 18–19 and 23–24 years.
- **Gender:** 50% male and 50% female.
- **Residence:** 40% from Beirut, 40% from Mount Lebanon, and 20% from other regions, including Akkar, Baalbek, Beqaa, Nabatieh, and South Lebanon.
- **Social Class:** 50% middle class, 25% upper class, and 25% lower class.
- **Living Arrangements:** 90% lived with parents.
- **Origins:** 25% from Mount Lebanon, 25% from Beirut, 15% from South Lebanon, 10% each from Baalbek and Beqaa, and 15% from Akkar, Nabatieh, and the North.

This survey design provided insights into the political behaviors and attitudes of Lebanese youth, highlighting the intersection of demographic factors, and evolving political engagement during a period of national crisis. Sample size calculation resulted in a minimum of 339 respondents, given an expected response rate of 50%. A sample of 500 was considered sufficient; the 421 responses collected met the minimum threshold but did not achieve complete national representativeness. The survey conducted by ARAA Research and Consultancy encompassed nine themes, including demographics, political engagement, civic activities, and views on emigration. It was carried out electronically using CASI methodology across selected campuses between February and April 2022. Data from 1,330 respondents, predominantly aged 20 to 22, was analysed in SPSS 25 using descriptive statistics and visual summaries.

Table 1
Final distribution of sample with planned and achieved sample size.

University	Kaza	Planned Sample size	Achieved sample size
AUB - American University of Beirut	Beirut2	83	82
AUST - American University of Science and Technology	Beirut & Zahle	92	73
Balamand	North	61	68
BAU - Beirut Arab University	Beirut2	106	107
LAU - Lebanese American University	Byblos & Beirut	87	218
LIU - Lebanese International University	Beirut2	100	103
NDU - Notre Dame University	Keserwan & Chouf	62	20
USJ - University Saint Joseph	Beirut1	122	123
ULS - University La Sagesse	Metn	43	34
UPA - Antonine University	Zahle	48	27
USEK	Keserwan	94	0
AOU - Arab Open University	Beirut2	25	2
IUL - Islamic University	Aley	60	52
AUL - Arts, Sciences & Technology University in Lebanon	Beirut2	53	0
Lebanese University Branch 1	Beirut 2		421 289
Branch 2	Baabda (Hadath)	1,015	86
Branch 3	Baabda (FC)		13
Unified	Metn		33
Total		2,051	1,330



4.3 QUALITATIVE STUDY

Following the Israeli war and invasion in 2024, The Socio-Economic Justice Initiative - MAAN organised four roundtable discussions with university students to ensure continuity in research design. In addition to facilitating these discussions, MAAN played a crucial role in managing the data received from ARA Research and Consultancy, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced. This process helped align the qualitative methodology with expert recommendations, enhancing the coherence of the study. A purposive sampling approach was employed to intentionally select participants relevant to the study, organised into two major categories: politically active and non-politically active. The research process encountered significant challenges due to the war and its aftermath, necessitating a reiteration of the questions to adapt to these new realities. This adjustment redirected the research to encompass the war's impact on youth, the post-war situation, and their feedback on the evolving socio-political landscape, further bridging quantitative and qualitative methods.

Criterion and homogeneous sampling were subsequently employed to capture in-depth insights and nuanced variations in youth political engagement and non-engagement in Lebanon. Key variables were aligned as closely as possible with the quantitative analysis to ensure consistency in the findings:

- **For age:** 50% between 20 and 22 years old, and 50% for 18-19 and 23-24 years old.
- **For gender:** 50% male and 50% female.
- **For social class** (which covers the source for funding, employment status, and household income): 50% middle class, 25% upper class, and 25% lower class.

- **For living with the parents/or not:** 90% living with parents, 10% living alone.
- **For place of origin** (which covers the religion): 25% Mount Lebanon, 25% Beirut, 15% South Lebanon, 10% Baalbek, 10% Beqaa, and 15% between Akkar, Nabatieh, and the North.

The study's quantitative and qualitative methods encountered several limitations. The quota sampling approach and participant selection based on availability introduced potential biases, which limited the randomness and representativeness of the data. Furthermore, while efforts were made to achieve a diverse sample, disparities, such as reaching only 42% of the target for Lebanese University students, may have affected regional and social class representation. In the qualitative phase, purposive sampling ensured the selection of relevant participants but constrained generalizability. The 2024 war necessitated adjustments to the research design, potentially creating inconsistencies and overshadowing pre-existing trends. Bridging quantitative and qualitative findings presented challenges in alignment, further complicating the integration of insights. These factors underscore the difficulties of conducting comprehensive research in a complex, multi-faceted crisis-affected context.

5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

5.1.1 INTEREST, KNOWLEDGE AND DIGITAL ACTIVISM

POLITICAL KNOWLEDGE, DISINTEREST, AND AWAKENING

The quantitative study highlighted significant disinterest in politics among the surveyed youth, with 70% indicating minimal or no interest, particularly in Lebanese politics. A majority reported never having been interested, with only 10% expressing a high level of engagement. Among those who reported a complete lack of interest in Lebanese politics (39%), 90% stated they were never interested, while 10% noted that their disinterest developed after key events such as the uprising on 17 October 2019 or the Beirut blast. For those expressing some level of interest, political engagement often began during their education. More than half (52%) reported that their interest started during university years, while 29% traced it back to their school days. Interestingly, 18% of respondents claimed they have always been politically interested. Major national events such as the uprising of 17 October 2019 (35%), the 2018 parliamentary elections (18%), and earlier events prior to 2015 (17%) played a significant role in igniting political interest. Despite these trends, many young people recognize the need for greater political awareness and participation. As one active participant (Male, 19, North) stated, "The youth are the future of this nation, and it is the state's duty to create political awareness among them so they can take the next steps. But political awareness doesn't just come from education—it also comes from experience. Young people need to be given actual opportunities to participate in political life, whether through student elections, civil society initiatives, or government programmes." Engagement in politics—whether active or passive—was strongly correlated with higher self-reported knowledge across all age groups. For instance, among disengaged youth aged 18-19 years, 72% reported low knowledge compared to 28% among engaged youth. The survey revealed that self-assessed political knowledge among youth was generally low, with 60% considering themselves less knowledgeable, particularly in the broader domains of politics and the Lebanese Constitution. Youth aged 23 and above reported better knowledge (58%) compared to those aged 18-19 years (39%). However, there was a relative increase in perceived knowledge specifically in Lebanese politics, where 32% considered themselves knowledgeable and 12% very knowledgeable. Factors such as age, interest in politics, and engagement

level (either active or through social media) were positively correlated with higher self-reported political knowledge. Participants across all regions emphasized the importance of youth-led initiatives in driving Lebanon's recovery, with many advocating for the establishment of youth councils to provide a platform for young voices in policymaking. Others suggested creating mentorship programmes to connect youth with experienced leaders and foster intergenerational collaboration. These recommendations highlight the role of youth as both stakeholders and drivers of recovery. By empowering young people as agents of change, Lebanon can leverage their energy, creativity, and resilience to build a more inclusive and sustainable future.

NEWS SOURCES, FAMILY AND SOCIAL INFLUENCE, AND DIGITAL ACTIVISM

Social media has emerged as the primary source of information on Lebanese politics for young people, with 57% relying on it, followed by television at 31%. Members of active political groups displayed greater diversity in their information sources, with 20% relying on news websites and 5% on printed press. The frequency of news consumption varied, with 26% of respondents claiming to "never" follow political news, while another 25% do so "often" or "very often". Politically engaged youth were significantly more frequent news consumers, with 73% following political news "very often" or "often". Among respondents, 11% expressed their political opinions on social media without being members of political groups. This form of engagement was highest among respondents aged 23 and above (14%) and lowest among those aged 18-19 (10%). Regarding youth engagement on social media before and after the uprising on October 17, 2019, the event was a significant catalyst for increased political activity. Before the uprising, only 9% of respondents used social media for political engagement, which rose to 15% afterward. Alongside this trend, new forms of activism, particularly those leveraging digital platforms, were frequently mentioned during discussions, with participants highlighting their transformative potential and inherent challenges. One active participant (Male, 22, Mount Lebanon) noted, "Another phenomenon gaining ground in Lebanon, which has impacted political activism, is the organization of debates. I participated in several, and they helped me develop my ability to engage in civilized discussion. One of the most important aspects of debates is that they compel you to search for evidence, understand history, and construct logical arguments." Social media

was recognized as a double-edged sword—lauded for amplifying voices, connecting individuals across geographic divides, and enabling large-scale mobilizations, yet critiqued for fostering superficial engagement, divisive rhetoric, and the rapid spread of misinformation. Participants emphasized that social media has allowed a new wave of activism that bypasses traditional gatekeepers, enabling marginalized voices to be heard in unprecedented ways. However, concerns were raised that reliance on digital platforms often leads to performative actions that lack meaningful follow-up or tangible impact. To address these shortcomings, participants stressed the importance of integrating digital activism with offline efforts, creating hybrid models that combine the accessibility of online platforms with the depth and sustainability of grassroots initiatives. Face-to-face interactions and community-driven activism were essential for fostering trust, collaboration, and long-term engagement. Examples of creative activism included community forums, interactive workshops, and local campaigns that merge online mobilization with on-the-ground activities. Geographical variations in the adoption and effectiveness of digital activism were also apparent. Urban youth, particularly in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, demonstrated a stronger reliance on digital tools such as crowdfunding campaigns, online petitions, and virtual town halls, which enable broader participation while overcoming logistical challenges. Rural participants, conversely, preferred community-based initiatives that emphasize direct interaction and locally driven solutions, highlighting the limitations of digital platforms in areas with poor internet connectivity or limited technological literacy. These differences underscore the need for context-sensitive strategies that bridge digital activism with traditional forms of engagement. Parents and family emerged as the most significant influences on political choices for youth, followed by social media. Specifically, 24% of respondents identified parents as the top influence, with 18% citing family. Social media influenced 19%, while friends and universities each contributed 7%. Discussions about politics were slightly more frequent with parents than with friends, with 25% of respondents engaging “often” or “very often” with parents compared to 23% with friends. Political discussions increased with age. For instance, 18% of youth aged 18-19 reported discussing politics frequently with friends, rising to 31%

among those aged 23 and above. The frequency of discussions also varied by region, with Nabatieh showing the highest engagement, where 34% of youth discussed politics with their parents and 29% with friends. The findings from the roundtable discussions align with the quantitative data, confirming the increasing prevalence of digital activism among Lebanese youth while highlighting concerns about its limitations. The qualitative insights expand on this by emphasizing the necessity of a more balanced approach that leverages the strengths of both online and offline activism. Participants advocated greater investment in digital literacy and critical thinking skills to combat misinformation and promote more substantive engagement. They also called for developing inclusive digital spaces that encourage collaboration and amplify diverse voices, ensuring the benefits of digital activism are equitably shared across different demographics and regions. By integrating these insights, it becomes evident that while digital activism represents a powerful tool for change, its true potential lies in complementing and enhancing traditional advocacy methods. For Lebanon’s youth, this means embracing a multifaceted approach that harnesses technology while remaining deeply connected to the realities of community needs and local contexts.

Figure 3
Levels of perceived knowledge about Lebanese politics among youth respondents, segmented by their type of political engagement

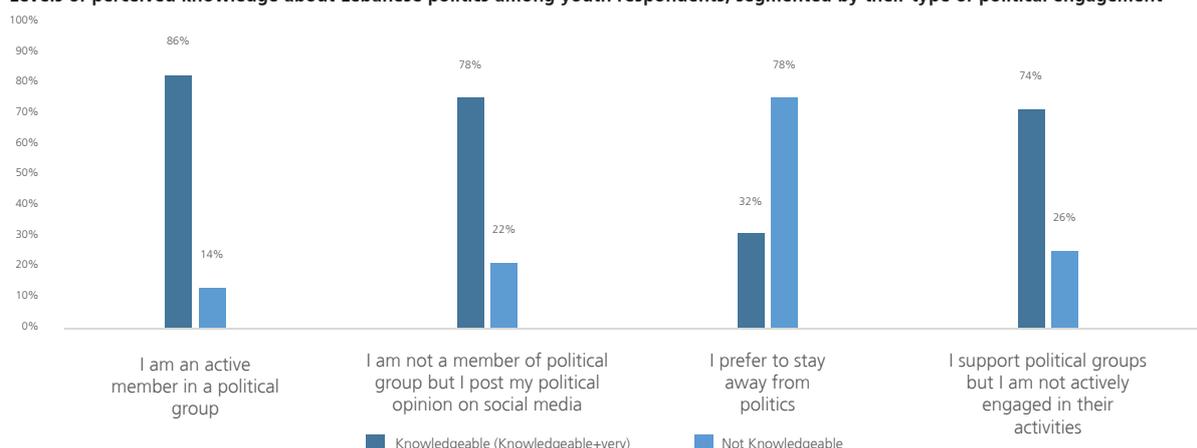


Figure 4

Primary sources of political information for youth respondents based on their level of political engagement

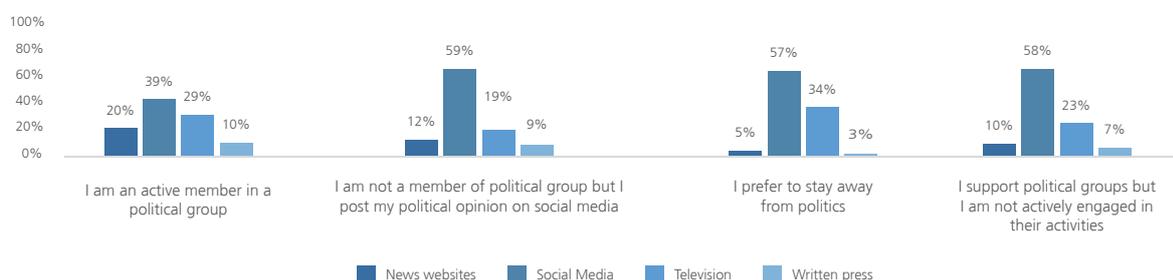
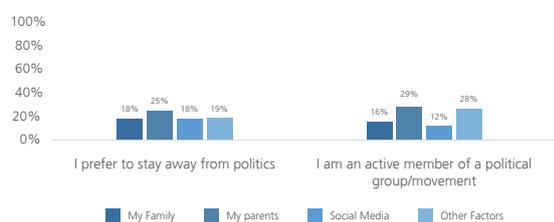


Figure 5

Main influences on political engagement among youth, comparing those actively involved in politics versus those disengaged



5.1.2 PERSPECTIVES ON POLITICAL CORRUPTION, REFORM, AND ADVOCACY

INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS AND SYSTEMIC DISTRUST

The survey highlighted political corruption, the ruling class, and systemic issues as the primary sources of Lebanon's current crisis. Specifically, 25% of respondents identified political class as the major cause, followed by corruption and clientelism (23% each). Other contributors included foreign interference (13%), the economic system (7%), and armed parties (10%). These findings align with the deep distrust in political institutions expressed during roundtable discussions, where participants frequently cited the domination of political discourse by sectarian parties as a key barrier to independent political action. The monopolization of power by entrenched parties restricts opportunities for new political actors, while institutional failures—such as the lack of transparent governance and equitable representation—fuel widespread alienation. Many young people perceive Lebanon's political system as serving elite interests rather than addressing public needs. This skepticism was reflected in the quantitative data, which revealed high dissatisfaction with institutional transparency and governance. However, qualitative discussions provided additional insights, illustrating how these systemic barriers manifest in everyday experiences, including the suppression of dissent and the marginalization of youth voices in formal political processes. Participants shared personal experiences of political suppression, highlighting how institutional distrust is both a structural and experiential challenge. A student from Beirut recounted how their attempt to organize a student-led protest against corruption was met with administrative roadblocks and veiled threats from university officials affiliated with political parties. Similarly, a young Tripoli activist described how

local power brokers who co-opted their initiatives thwarted efforts to establish an independent youth platform. Participants familiar with student activities at the Lebanese University noted that elections in Lebanon's largest educational institution are often heavily influenced by sectarian and political affiliations—if they are held at all. These examples illustrate how deeply embedded political patronage limits youth-led political initiatives. Despite these challenges, participants emphasized the crucial role of NGOs and educational institutions in fostering alternative spaces for youth engagement. Through grassroots initiatives and humanitarian programs, NGOs provide young people with opportunities to engage in civic responsibility and activism outside traditional political structures. Meanwhile, educational institutions—through secular university clubs, debate programs, and student elections—serve as vital platforms for leadership development and critical discourse. These spaces empower youth to challenge entrenched societal norms, advocate for systemic reform, and develop the skills needed for political participation. To address institutional distrust, participants suggested several pathways for reform. They proposed the establishment of independent youth councils with diverse representation and legal authority to influence policy making, as well as creating digital and physical platforms for civic dialogue, including online forums, community centers, and media partnerships, to foster inclusive and meaningful public engagement. Community-led monitoring mechanisms were also emphasized as essential for promoting greater transparency and accountability within political institutions. However, while these solutions were considered crucial steps toward rebuilding trust and encouraging participation, many participants remained skeptical about their feasibility, given the deeply entrenched nature of political patronage networks. The discussions underscored the urgent need for systemic change to create a more inclusive and accountable political environment, reinforcing the quantitative data's emphasis on institutional reform as a priority for re-engaging Lebanese youth. Youth perceptions of politics were predominantly negative, with 88% describing politics as corrupt or unethical, viewing it as a "dirty game." Meanwhile, 64% agreed that "the personal is political," reflecting an understanding that politics extends beyond formal institutions to personal and social issues. However, 36% disagreed, seeing politics confined to government and official settings. Additionally, 57% believed that areas like economics, culture, and art are influenced by politics, highlighting their awareness of the pervasive nature of political impact. Results highlighted significant dissatisfaction among Lebanese youth regarding

democracy, the political system, and government performance, with disapproval rates exceeding 87%, 92%, and 94%, respectively. Among the respondents, 52% reported being "unsatisfied at all" with the state of democracy, 59% with the political system, and 61% with government performance. Dissatisfaction was notably higher among those who have never been involved or have left political groups. Among youth who have never participated in political groups, 54% reported being "unsatisfied at all" with democracy, 61% with the political system, and 63% with government performance. Among former members of political groups, these rates increased to 67%, 71%, and 71%, respectively. In contrast, dissatisfaction was lower among current members of political groups, at 27%, 28%, and 42%, respectively. Survey results showed widespread distrust among Lebanese youth toward governmental institutions, with exceptionally low confidence in the government and parliament, at 84% and 81%, respectively. While political engagement slightly mitigated distrust, particularly toward parliament, overall skepticism remained high across most entities, including the judiciary and political groups. 58% of respondents expressed distrust in the judiciary, with the politically active showing slightly less distrust (45%) than the disengaged (62%). Higher trust levels were observed in the army, and slightly more favorable views toward NGOs and traditional media were observed, though the majority still expressed significant distrust. The army had 35% of respondents expressing "no confidence at all," while the police had 50%. NGOs and traditional media were distrusted by 52% and 57% of respondents, respectively. Trust in political groups, including Pro-October 2019 groups and established parties, was also low, at 59% and 74%, respectively. Distrust toward established political parties was lower (64%) among respondents with politically engaged parents compared to 84% among those with non-politically engaged parents. Geographically, Beirut respondents showed the highest distrust in political groups (80%), while Baalbek-Hermel reported the lowest (67%).

RESISTANCE TO REFORM, POLITICAL ADVOCACY, AND INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

Youth respondents exhibited strong resistance to maintaining the existing political system or class, with 87% opposing the notion of preserving the system while altering the political elite. Similarly, 86% rejected federalism, and 81% opposed decentralization, while 73% disagreed with maintaining a neutral stance in foreign affairs, and 59% opposed the separation of religion from politics. However, disagreement was less pronounced regarding some proposed reforms. For instance, only 44% opposed initiatives to end corruption, making it the least resisted reform, with regional variations in support. The highest backing for ending corruption was observed in Mount Lebanon (59%) and South Lebanon (64%), while the lowest was in Akkar (30%). Social justice and strengthening the army also garnered varied support, with higher approval in Mount Lebanon and Beirut compared to Akkar and Beqaa. A central theme in the roundtable discussions was the role of youth movements in political advocacy, particularly among young people in urban areas like Beirut and Mount Lebanon. These youths regarded advocacy-driven movements as essential

vehicles for systemic change, particularly in anti-corruption campaigns, electoral reforms, and governance accountability. The Lebanese October 17 Movement (2019 uprising) was cited as a significant example, with its protests leading to the resignation of the Prime Minister. Additionally, Palestinian refugee advocacy in Lebanon showcased the power of collective action to challenge legal barriers and improve labour rights and residency conditions. Despite these successes, doubts remain regarding the capacity of youth movements to influence entrenched political structures. Participants noted the lack of cohesive strategies, long-term objectives, and funding, which often hinder their sustainability. While quantitative data indicated considerable support for the advocacy role of youth movements, it also highlighted scepticism about their scalability. The roundtables elaborated on these concerns, pointing out the absence of institutional support and a unified vision as key obstacles. Urban participants emphasized the visibility achieved by advocacy efforts in cities while recognizing their failure to penetrate rural regions where systemic issues remain entrenched. When it came to institutional reforms, participants widely agreed on the importance of rebuilding trust in public institutions, particularly the judiciary. Calls for judicial independence were prominently voiced, with youth stressing the need for an impartial legal system to hold corrupt officials accountable. Urban participants, especially those in Beirut, discussed the significance of anti-corruption frameworks and independent oversight bodies. Rural participants echoed the necessity for reforms but underscored the neglect of state institutions in their regions, proposing decentralized governance structures to facilitate more equitable resource distribution. Suggestions included the establishment of regional councils to address localised needs and foster greater accountability. Furthermore, many participants argued that eliminating arms held by non-state actors is crucial for restoring state authority and ensuring national security. In this context, some participants suggested the creation of a transitional government with exceptional powers, capable of making bolder decisions than those permitted under the current political system. This proposal arose from the perception that Lebanon's entrenched political parties cannot enact the necessary reforms due to conflicting interests within their ranks, such as the tension between bank owners and customers within the same political party. This divergence in perspectives underscores the need for governance reforms that address Lebanon's diverse socio-political landscape while tackling institutional distrust and systemic barriers to change.

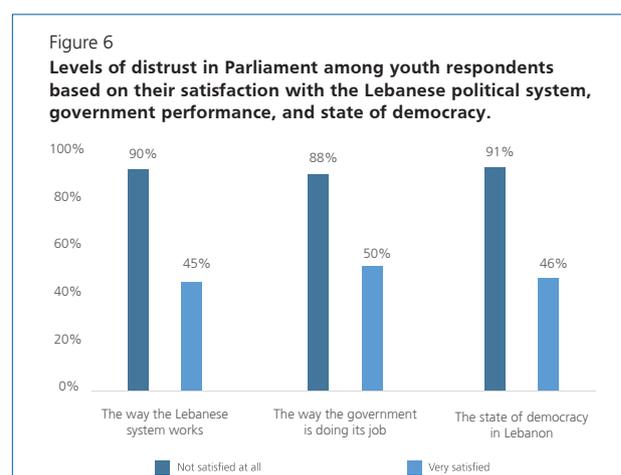


Figure 7

Comparison of distrust levels in Parliament between actively engaged youth and those supporting political groups, highlighting differences between established and alternative political parties

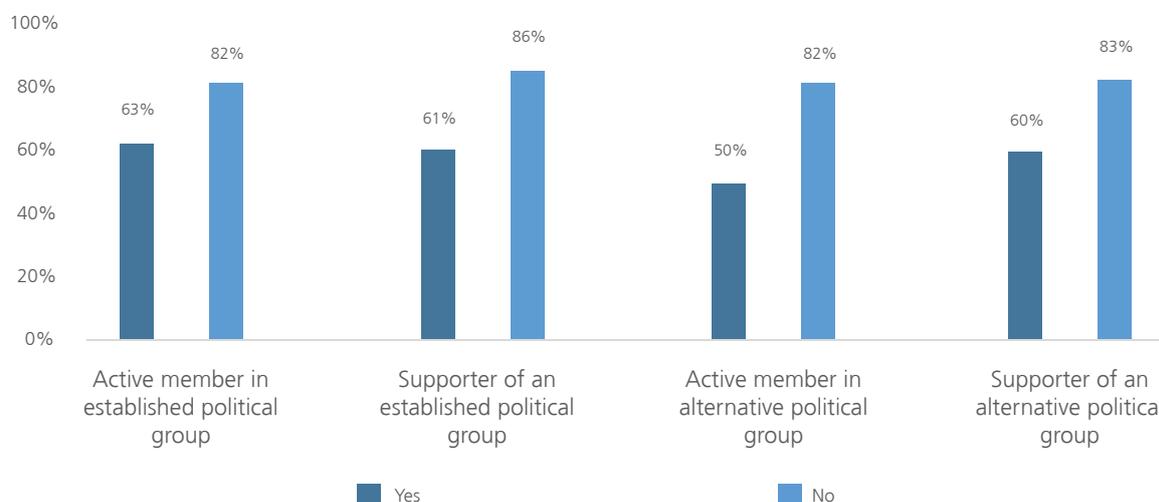
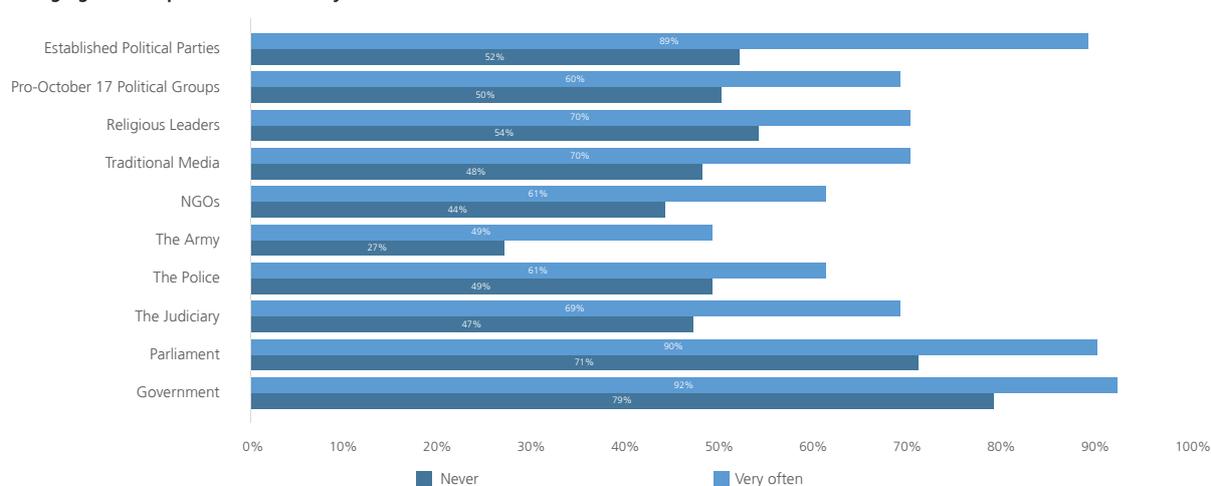


Figure 8

Comparison of political distrust levels among youth respondents based on their frequency of following political news, ranging from respondents who 'Very Often' follow news to those who 'Never' do



5.1.3 SENSE OF BELONGING AND RELIGIOSITY

NATIONAL PRIDE, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND INFLUENCING FACTORS

The survey revealed a strong sense of national pride among Lebanese youth, with 79% expressing pride in their country, 77% feeling connected to it, 74% indicating strong ties to their local community, and 70% feeling close to their community of origin. However, a notable minority, ranging from 21% to 30%, reported feeling detached from these connections. Feeling of connection varied by religious affiliation, with youth identifying as Christians, Muslims, or Druze reporting the strongest ties to their country (82%), village or town (79%), and community of origin (75%), compared to atheists and agnostics, whose connections were weaker — atheists reported ties between 54% and

60%, and agnostics between 38% and 47%. Regional disparities also surfaced, with youth from Baalbek-Hermel, Mount Lebanon, and Nabatieh reporting the highest levels of connection (80% closeness to Lebanon), while youth from Beirut and Akkar showed lower levels of attachment to their community of origin (63%). Similarly, middle-class youth reported stronger connections to their village, town, and country compared to their lower or upper-class counterparts. Youth living with their parents demonstrated stronger ties to their country, local community, and community of origin, with 85% of females and 73% of males feeling connected to their country, compared to 53% and 56% among those living independently. Additionally, youth who did not plan to emigrate demonstrated stronger connections, with 92% of males aged 18–19 intending to stay feeling connected to their country, and 90% to their village, compared to 79% and 75%, respectively, among those intending to emigrate. The survey also highlighted varying levels of religiosity, with 40% of youth considering

themselves moderately religious, 30% slightly religious, 10% very religious, and 18% not religious. Religion was deemed important by 50% of respondents, while 28% found it very important. Attendance at religious services differed, with 40% participating sometimes, 30% rarely, 16% often, and 14% never. Youth perceived their parents as generally more religious, with 51% describing them as moderately religious compared to 42% for themselves. While most youth shared political views with their parents, those from non-religious families reported greater differences, with 18% indicating radically different opinions compared to 8%–9% among youth from more religious families. Opinions on inter-religious marriage were mixed, with 35% open to marrying someone from a different religion, 40% unwilling, and 25% hesitant.

5.1.4 POLITICAL VIEWS, UNCERTAINTY, AND PREFERENCES

POLITICAL ALIGNMENT, PREFERENCES, AND VIEWS ON LEBANON'S GOVERNANCE

The analysis revealed significant uncertainty in political alignment, with 64% of respondents unsure of their positions, particularly among the 18-19 age group (69%). Among those with defined stances, 17% identified as centrist, 10% leaned left, and 9% leaned right. Political knowledge played a key role, as 36% of politically knowledgeable youth were uncertain, compared to 69% among those less informed. Politically engaged youth were less uncertain (41%) and displayed a more even distribution across the spectrum, with 20% centrist, 17% left, and 21% right. When considering the balance between personal freedom and equality, opinions were nearly evenly split and influenced by economic stability. Of the respondents, 52% prioritized personal freedom, while 48% favored equality. Financial status also played a role, with 58% of those struggling financially preferring equality, while 55% of the financially stable gravitated towards freedom. Politically knowledgeable youth leaned more towards freedom (61%), while those less knowledgeable leaned towards equality (53%). Policy preferences were divided, with 56% supporting equitable policies aimed at reducing disparities, whereas 44% favored rewarding individual effort. Lower social class respondents supported equity (57%), while upper-class respondents preferred merit-based policies (57%). Regional preferences for equitable policies were strongest in Akkar (66%) and Beqaa (63%), with more balanced views in other regions. On legal reforms, youth expressed varying opinions. Regarding the Civil Personal Status Law, 57% supported civil marriage in Lebanon, with the highest support in Mount Lebanon (67%), Nabatieh (69%), and North Lebanon (66%), while opposition was strongest in Akkar and Baalbek-Hermel (34%). Support varied by religiosity, with 46% of very religious respondents opposing the law. With regard to nationality law amendments, 64% supported allowing Lebanese mothers to pass nationality to their children, with higher support in Beirut (69%) and among knowledgeable youth (67%). Decriminalizing homosexuality divided opinions, with 42% in favour, 36% against, and 22% unsure. Support was higher in Mount Lebanon (51%) and North Lebanon (49%), while opposition was

higher in Akkar 42% and Baalbek-Hermel 45%. Younger respondents under 23 were less supportive 38% than those 23 and above 49%, and religious youth were more opposed. Regarding governance, 88% of youth found living in a democratic country important, with 53% considering democracy "very important." Support was strongest in Beirut 54%, Mount Lebanon 55%, and South Lebanon 49%, and lower in Akkar 26% and Baalbek-Hermel 33%. Politically knowledgeable and financially stable youth were more likely to prioritize democracy. Very religious respondents rated democracy as very important 44% compared to 57% of slightly religious youth. Preferences for political systems were diverse, with 48% favoring a secular state, 31% supporting federalism, and 21% advocating consociationalism. Support for secularism was high in Mount Lebanon, South Lebanon, and Nabatieh, while Akkar leaned towards consociationalism (44%). Non-religious respondents overwhelmingly favored secularism (59%), while very religious youth showed mixed preferences: 39% for federalism, 33% for consociationalism, and 28% for secularism. Politically engaged youth exhibited more balanced preferences: 39% for federalism, 35% for secularism, and 26% for consociationalism. On sectarianism, 68% of youth identified socio-economic disparities as a more significant issue than political or religious differences, with more disagreement in regions such as Nabatieh (50%). Moderately or slightly religious youth were more likely to emphasize socio-economic disparities (69%–77%) compared to non-religious youth (48%).

POLITICS, RELIGION, AND SOCIAL COHESION

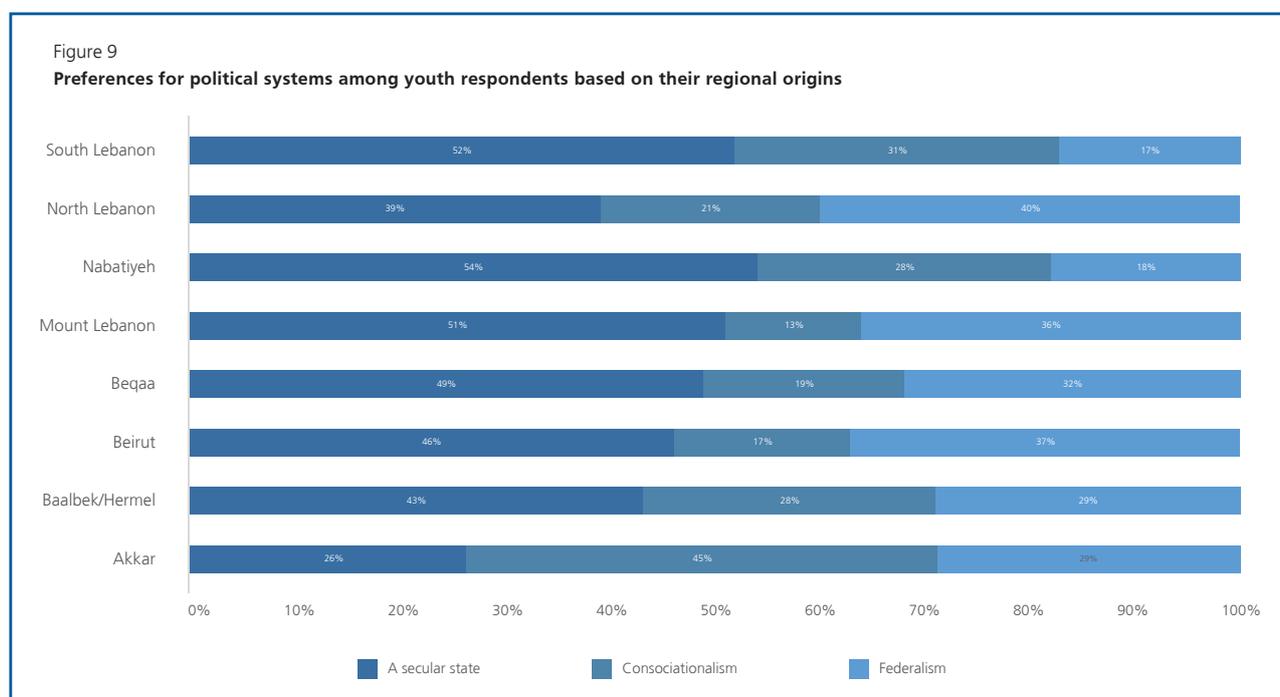
The survey highlighted that youth respondents strongly favoured separating religion from politics, with 81% supporting this separation and many endorsing a shift towards a secular state. Despite the widespread backing for secular principles, 60% of respondents questioned the feasibility of these reforms in Lebanon. The statement "One should not mix religion and politics" garnered 81% agreement, with slightly lower support (69%) among those who identified as very religious. Alongside these calls for secular reforms, fostering social cohesion emerged as another crucial priority, as many participants acknowledged the necessity of bridging Lebanon's sectarian divides. One non-active female participant from Baalbek reflected on her experiences during the war and displacement, remarking, *"Everything we experienced was a lie, and we saw this during the war and the displacement. We, along with our families, existed in the illusion of sectarianism, and we were unaware of what was occurring—we were blind to the reality."* She noted, however, that during the war, she witnessed authentic social cohesion, where individuals once divided by sectarian and political identities aided each other, opened their homes to displaced families, and stood united. This experience led her to realise that sectarian divisions are artificially constructed, and with effort, Lebanon could forge a different future. In line with these reflections, many participants advocated for community-driven initiatives that promote dialogue and collaboration across sectarian lines. Participants also emphasized the importance of cultural and artistic initiatives in fostering unity. Youth proposed supporting local art projects, festivals, and workshops as platforms for cross-community engagement.

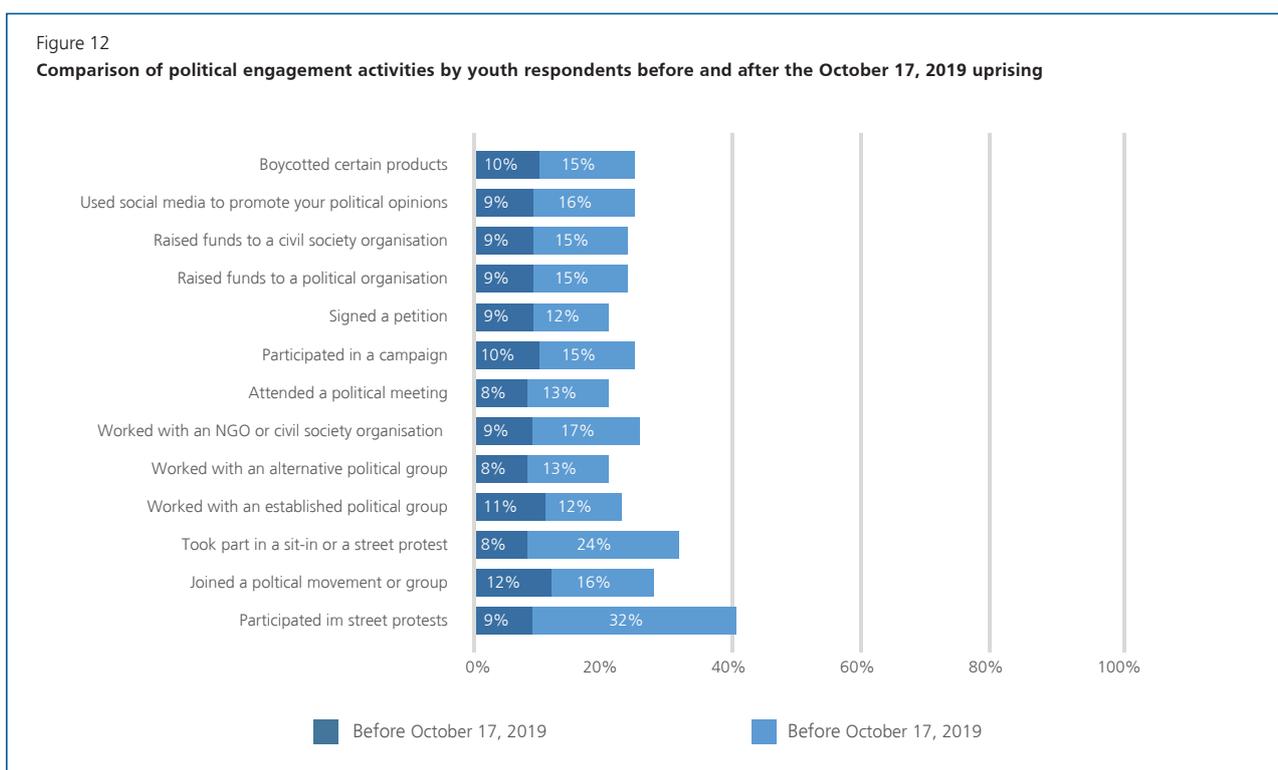
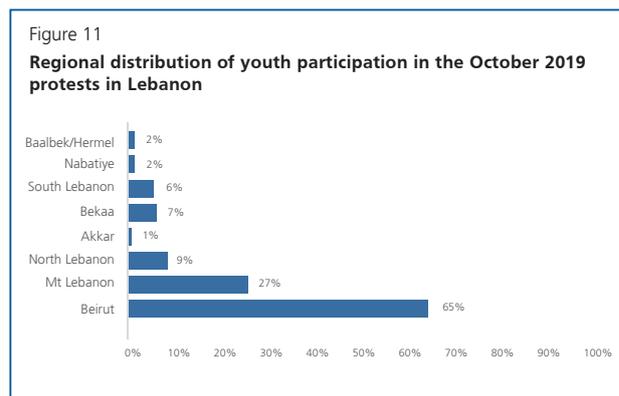
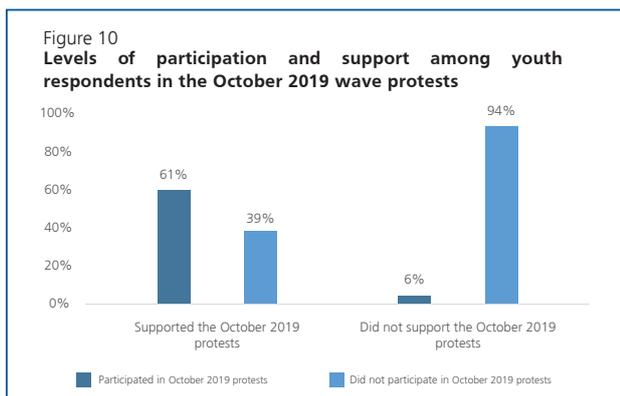
These efforts were deemed essential for rebuilding trust and solidarity, particularly in regions that have witnessed heightened sectarian tension.

ACTION ON THE POLITICAL LEVEL POST-2019

The survey uncovered varied opinions and levels of involvement in the October 2019 protests in Lebanon, with 31% of youth participating, the vast majority of whom (79%) indicated it was their first protest experience. Support for the protests was evenly split, with 50% in favor and 50% against. Most protests occurred in Beirut (65%), but 18% of participants were involved in protests across multiple regions. Political activism surged after October 17, 2019, as street protest participation rose from 9% to 32%. Additionally, activities such as sit-ins climbed from 8% to 24%, petition signings from 9% to 16%, and NGO work from 9% to 17%. A key point raised in roundtable discussions was the vision for meaningful political participation, centered on accountability, inclusivity, and youth empowerment. Many participants emphasized the necessity to evolve from passive critique to active engagement, advocating for youth representation in decision-making roles and the establishment of platforms for dialogue and collaboration. A significant majority of youth respondents (66%) favored non-violent methods of political and social activism, with only 10% actively endorsing violence. This preference was also reflected in the regional differences in how youth envisioned political action—those from Beirut and Mount Lebanon focused more on institutional reforms

and policy advocacy, while those from Beqaa and South Lebanon highlighted grassroots organizing and community-driven solutions. These regional disparities underscored the differing capacities and priorities across the country, reiterating the need for regionally tailored approaches to political engagement. Furthermore, 23% of respondents believed that violence might be necessary in certain circumstances, with politically active youth, particularly those in alternative political groups (34%) and established parties (28%), exhibiting slightly higher support for violence. A significant theme in discussions was the need for youth to engage with broader political issues, rather than solely "youth politics," with an emphasis on governance, economic policies, and social reforms. Participants articulated that young people should leverage their capabilities to address real issues, rather than be confined to matters exclusively related to youth. They also underscored the importance of promoting political education and awareness to prepare the next generation for leadership. Specific actions proposed included the establishment of youth councils and the integration of political education into school curricula, deemed essential for bridging the gap between youth aspirations and political realities while empowering young people to become agents of change.





5.1.5 POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS AND STRUGGLES

ACTIVISM VS. DISILLUSIONMENT

Political disengagement among Lebanese youth is prevalent, with 72% of respondents indicating a preference to avoid political involvement altogether. This trend spans various age groups, with 77% of those aged 18-19, 72% aged 20-22, and 63% aged 23 and above opting to avoid politics. Active participation in political movements remains limited, with only 4% of respondents involved in political groups or movements, a figure slightly higher among those aged 23 and above 7% compared to the 18-19 age group 3%. The results revealed a greater attraction to established political parties than to alternative groups, with 21% supporting established parties versus 8% backing alternatives. However, a significant majority, 95%, have never been members of any established political party, underscoring widespread disengagement influenced by recent events such as the Beirut blast and the October 2019 uprising.

Even among those who supported political groups or movements without active participation 13%, this preference was highest among older respondents 16% compared to younger ones 10%. Youth perspectives on political engagement reveal a wide range of attitudes, significantly shaped by their experiences during and after the October 17 uprising. Among youth actively involved in politics, engagement is often regarded as a means to effect change through incremental victories and organized activism, with many citing grassroots movements, protests, and participation in issue-based campaigns as avenues for creating tangible impacts. However, frustration is evident within this group regarding the slow pace of change and the systemic barriers to broader reform. Despite their eagerness to make a difference, many young people hold unrealistic expectations for swift solutions, but the complexity of the Lebanese context often makes such expectations unachievable, underscoring a discrepancy that fuels much of their disillusionment. In contrast, widespread disillusionment persists among non-engaged youth, many of whom perceive traditional political structures as sectarian and self-serving. These

individuals are skeptical about the efficacy of political action, often turning to community work or humanitarian efforts as more impactful means to address societal needs. The divide between activism and disillusionment highlights a core tension: while some youth see potential in collective political action, others feel that systemic stagnation renders such efforts futile. This duality aligns with the quantitative findings, which indicate that only a small percentage of young people trust in the effectiveness of traditional political parties. Concerns about criticism from political leaders for expressing views on social media are minimal, with only 18% of respondents expressing discomfort. The majority of those uneasy with criticism also preferred to distance themselves from politics, though a minority were actively engaged as members (4%) or supporters (14%) of political groups. These insights from the roundtable discussions highlight how this distrust shapes behavior, with some youth opting to withdraw from formal politics altogether, prioritizing local activism—such as community-based initiatives, environmental activism, social media campaigns, and volunteering in local NGOs or initiatives, as well as civic education—that is viewed as more actionable and less reliant on flawed institutional frameworks.

POLITICAL ADVOCACY, HUMANITARIAN ACTION, AND COMMUNITY SERVICE

Youth involvement in community service and volunteer work is nearly evenly divided, with 51% reporting engagement. However, most respondents indicated minimal participation in organizations outside their educational institutions. Notably, youth who engaged in politics—whether passively via social media or actively through political groups—were more inclined to partake in community service or volunteer efforts. The tension between humanitarian action and political advocacy emerged as a central theme during the roundtable discussions, primarily driven by the ongoing Israeli war and invasion, which significantly shaped participants' priorities at the time. One activist shared, *"When the war occurred, we set politics aside. The urgency of humanitarian relief became the priority. The critical timing forced us into this. I agree that we can't disregard politics forever, but at this moment, our focus must be on providing immediate relief—clothes, food, and housing for displaced families. We weren't able to pursue both simultaneously. The person managing relief doesn't inquire about your identity or background. Right now, it's essential to continue with the relief efforts and then return to political matters. The war is somewhat over, yet not entirely concluded. The priority now is to reclaim our previous role, which necessitates the state's return, establishing its sovereignty, and reviving political life."* This sentiment reflects the broader debate among participants about whether youth movements should prioritize providing immediate relief or focus on advocating for systemic changes to tackle the root causes of Lebanon's crises. Those in favor of a humanitarian-first approach emphasized the urgency of meeting basic needs in a nation at war, which has witnessed immense human and material losses. Participants underscored how humanitarian efforts offer a lifeline to marginalized communities in regions such as the South and Beqaa, where the absence of state support is acutely felt. Conversely, advocates for prioritizing political

advocacy argued that without addressing systemic issues, humanitarian efforts risk perpetuating a cycle of dependency. Participants from urban areas like Beirut highlighted the importance of leveraging the momentum generated by humanitarian action to galvanize political support for reforms. They cited examples of youth movements that have successfully transitioned from crisis response to sustained advocacy, although these were noted as exceptions rather than the norm. The quantitative analysis aligns with this duality, indicating widespread youth recognition of the importance of both roles. However, the data also reveals skepticism about the ability of youth movements to balance these priorities effectively. Roundtable discussions provided further nuance, illustrating how regional and resource disparities influence this balance. For instance, urban youth often have greater access to advocacy platforms, whereas rural youth movements are more entrenched in direct service provision due to pressing local needs.

REGIONAL DISPARITIES, AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT VS. INFRASTRUCTURAL DEFICITS

Political engagement among youth in Lebanon reveals significant regional disparities, with varying levels of participation and distinct challenges across different areas. In regions such as Akkar (79%) and Beirut (78%), political disengagement rates are notably high, while the rates are lower in Baalbek-Hermel (69%) and Nabatiyeh (62%). Active political membership is slightly higher in North Lebanon (6%) compared to South Lebanon (5%), and in Baalbek, Nabatiyeh, and Beqaa (4%). Support for political groups without active engagement is highest in Nabatiyeh (19%) and Baalbek-Hermel (17%) but lowest in Akkar (5%) and Beqaa (7%). The qualitative roundtable findings underscored regional disparities in how youth perceive and engage with politics. Urban youth from Beirut and Mount Lebanon are more likely to engage through institutional channels such as university clubs, political organizations, and professional associations. They often focus their activism on systemic change, emphasizing policy advocacy and reform-oriented initiatives, as urban contexts provide greater access to resources, networks, and platforms. In contrast, rural youth from Beqaa and South Lebanon face significant barriers due to sectarian affiliations and the dominance of entrenched political elites, which stifle independent political action. These participants highlight limited access to resources and platforms, describing their political participation as constrained by local power dynamics and infrastructural challenges. Despite these obstacles, some rural youth emphasized localized activism, such as community organizing and small-scale advocacy, as a means to navigate these barriers. Quantitative findings further reveal that youth in urban centers are more likely to engage in institutional political activities, while rural youth perceive structural challenges like inadequate transportation, communication networks, and unreliable internet connectivity as insurmountable obstacles to political engagement. These infrastructural deficits uniquely disadvantage rural communities, with youth from the Beqaa recounting how they had to travel long distances on foot to attend political events, only to find them cancelled due to logistical issues. Moreover, rural youth emphasized the need for localized solutions, such as regional development

initiatives and community-driven political platforms, to address these regional disparities. The roundtable discussions also revealed that urban youth face psychological and financial burdens when engaging in activism, citing high living costs, economic pressures, and the competitive environment of urban centers. Conversely, rural youth are primarily concerned with infrastructural development and essential service provision. One participant from Mount Lebanon stated that political engagement is about governance and equitable growth, requiring a clear political and economic plan that includes all regions, not just Beirut. To bridge these disparities, youth from urban and rural areas suggested adopting regionally inclusive approaches, such as establishing regional development funds and public-private

partnerships, while ensuring security through disarmament of non-state actors. These measures would foster a safer environment for development initiatives and ensure that recovery efforts are not concentrated in urban centers, leading to a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities across Lebanon.

Figure 13
Political engagement preferences among youth respondents segmented by age groups

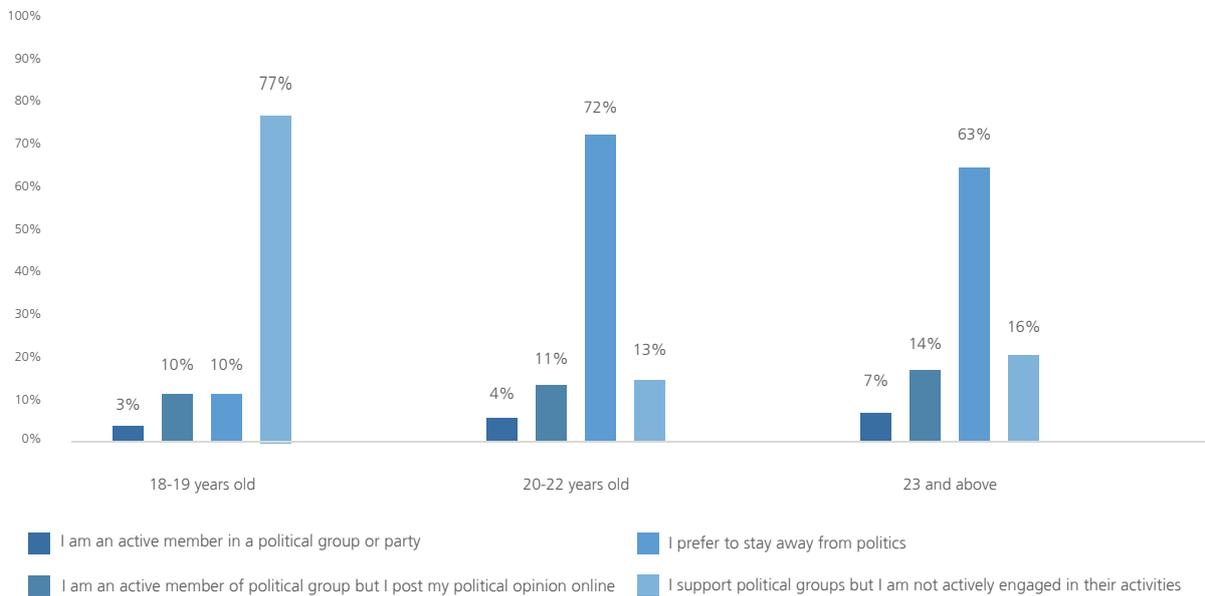


Figure 14
Popularity of established political parties among politically engaged youth respondents

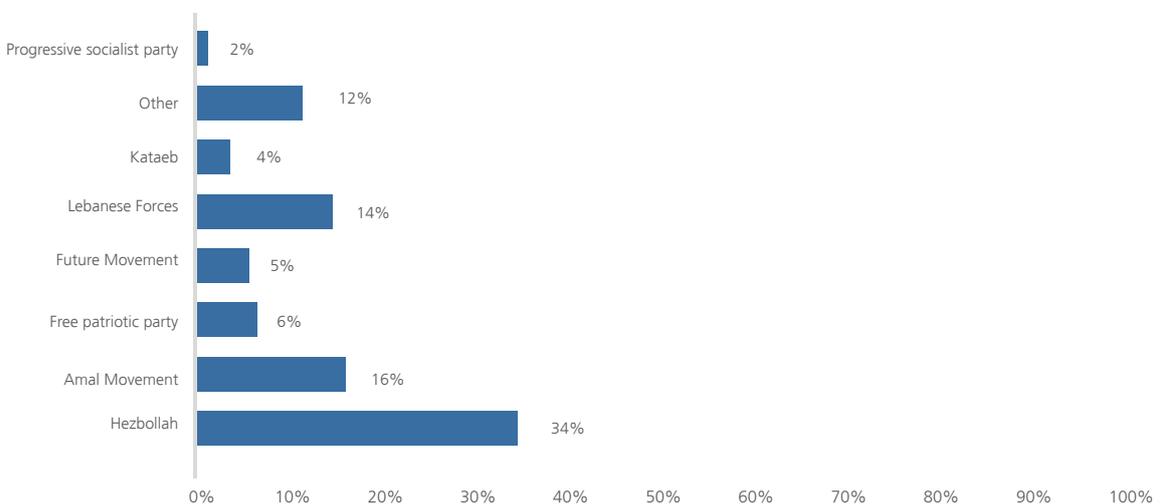


Figure 15
Timeline highlighting key political events as turning points when Lebanese youth stopped being active members or supporters of established political parties

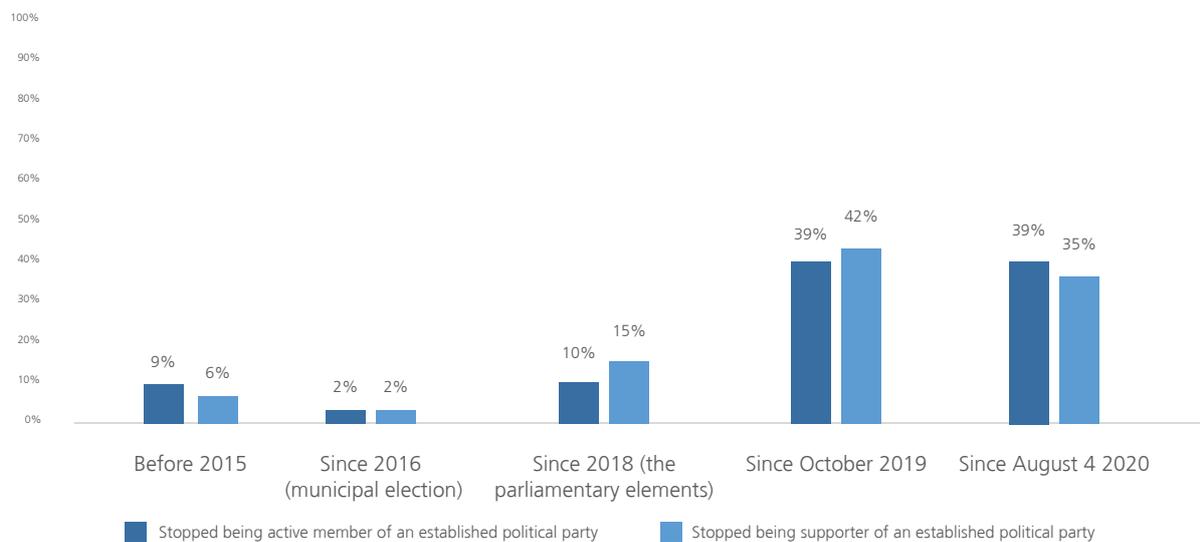


Figure 16
Participation rates of youth respondents in various organizations outside university campuses, highlighting active involvement across different types of entities

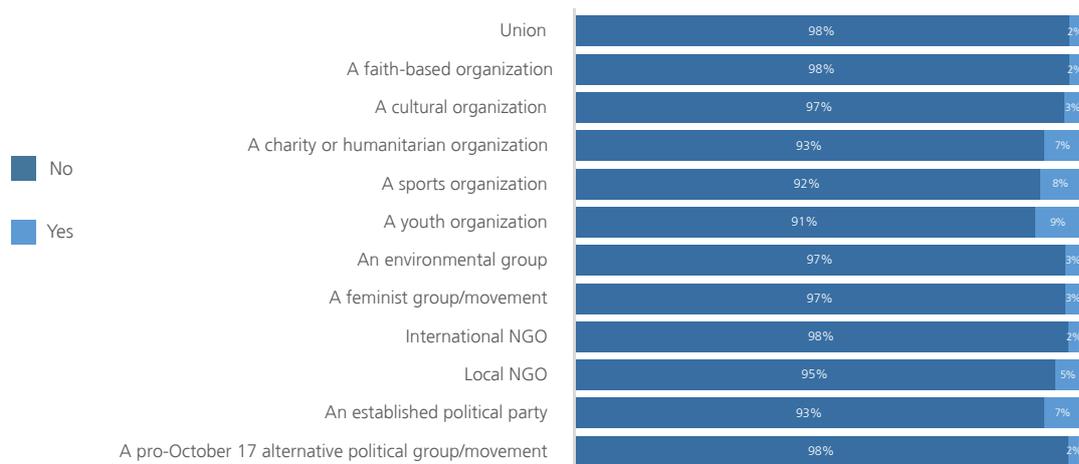


Figure 17
Correlation between political engagement and participation in community service or volunteer activities among youth respondents

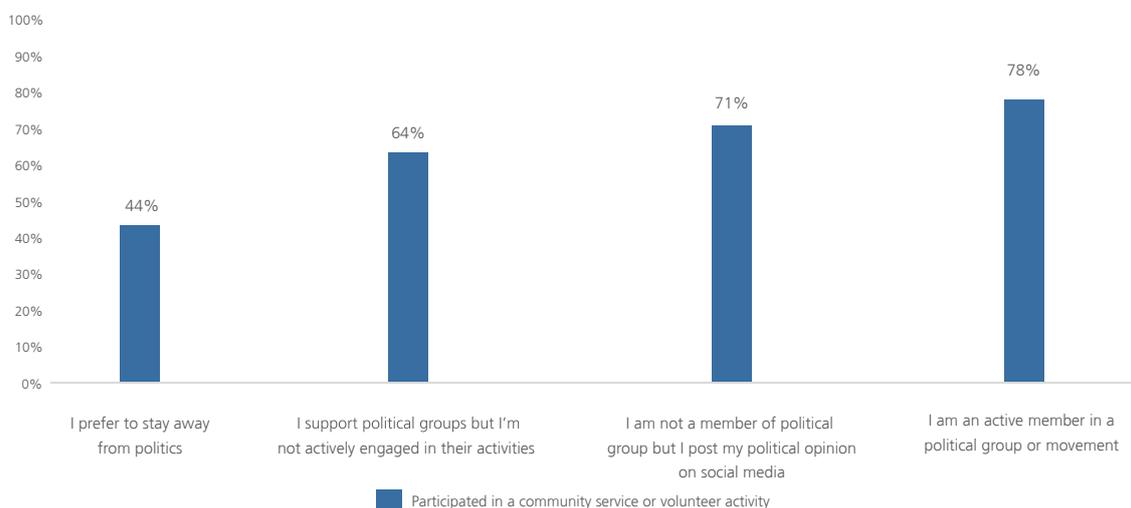
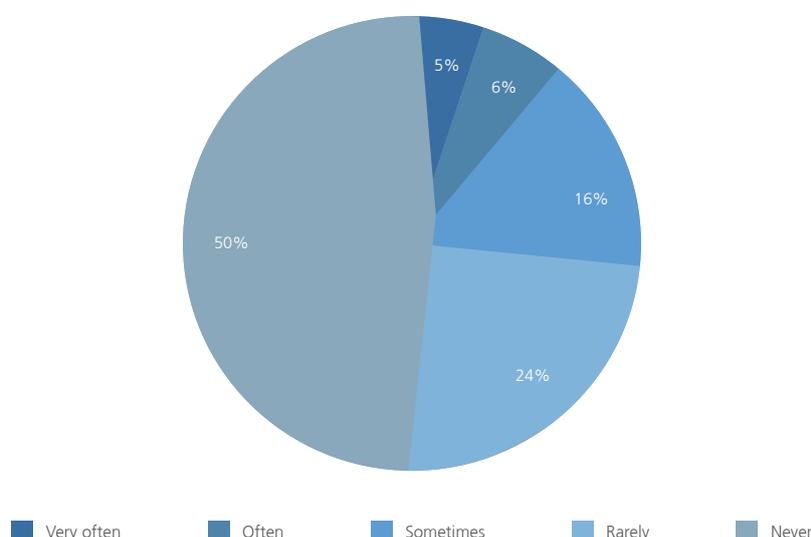


Figure 18
Frequency of sharing political opinions on social media among youth respondents



5.1.6 ENGAGEMENT ON CAMPUS

ENGAGEMENT IN STUDENT GROUPS AND VOTING BEHAVIOR ON CAMPUS

The results revealed that a substantial majority of respondents (81%) were not engaged in student groups, primarily due to lack of interest (45%) and time constraints (28%). Additionally, 13% of students reported not finding a group that matches their interests. Among the minority actively engaged on campus, more than one-third (33%) were members of multiple groups simultaneously. The most cited groups for active participants are highlighted in the accompanying graph. Regarding voting behavior, 44% of students participated in student elections at universities that held them, although participation rates varied significantly across age groups and institutions. Among 18–19-year-olds, 37% participated, with university-specific rates ranging from 33% at LAU to 44% at AUB and USJ. For those aged 20–22, the participation rate increased to 52%, with university rates of 46% at LAU, 58% at USJ, and 62% at AUB. Students over 22 reported a participation rate of 47%, with the lowest at 36% in USJ and the highest at 56% in LAU. The primary reasons for not participating in elections were a lack of interest (63%), followed by not finding a suitable representative (9%), other reasons (21%), and the absence of elections (7%).

5.1.7 INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF POLITICAL VIEWS AND PATTERNS

PARENTAL INFLUENCE ON POLITICAL CHOICES AND PATTERNS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

The results revealed that while a small fraction of respondents reported significant parental influence on their

political choices, the majority felt only some or minimal influence, with many experiencing none at all. Specifically, 15% of respondents acknowledged significant parental influence, while 27% perceived some influence, 18% reported little influence, and 38% felt no influence whatsoever. When asked about differences in political opinions, most youths closely aligned with their parents' political views; 38% stated their views were not different at all, and another 35% felt slightly different. However, 17% described their perspectives as quite different, and 10% as radically different. Interestingly, the degree of parental influence was linked to a stronger connection to respondents' birth community. Among those reporting high parental influence, 40% felt "very close" to their community, compared to only 16% among those reporting little influence. Conversely, 11% of respondents with low parental influence felt "very distant" from their community. The data also indicated regional differences, with 9% of respondents in Bekaa reporting significant parental influence compared to 17% in Beirut and 19% in Baalbek-Hermel.

When it comes to political engagement, most youth closely align with their parents' political views, demonstrating strong intergenerational continuity in political opinions. The survey showed a greater likelihood of active political participation among respondents whose parents backed a political party. Specifically, 34% of respondents noted that their parents supported an established political party, and in 89% of these instances, both parents supported the same party. Conversely, 55% of respondents reported that neither parent supported an established political party, which was associated with a higher chance of political disengagement. Furthermore, among those whose parents ceased their support for political parties, 56% indicated that this change occurred after the October 17, 2019, uprising, while 44% revealed that the shift happened earlier.

Regarding parents' historical and current engagement, 82% of respondents indicated that their parents were not active members of political parties during the Lebanese Civil War, while 18% were. Among those whose parents were politically active during the war, 50% continued to support a party, while 30% withdrew their support.

The most frequently mentioned political party affiliations for fathers included Hezbollah 23%, Amal Movement 13%, Lebanese Forces 12%, Future Movement 8%, and Free Patriotic Movement 6%. Similarly, mothers' affiliations reflected these trends, with Hezbollah 25% being the most mentioned. Notably, 20% of respondents preferred not to disclose their parents' affiliations.

Figure 19

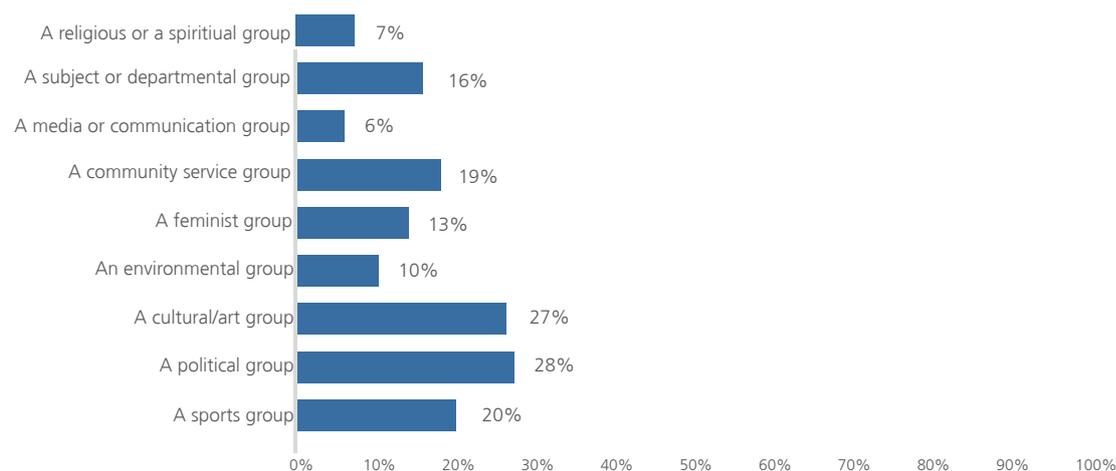
Participation rates in various types of student groups among youth respondents

Figure 20

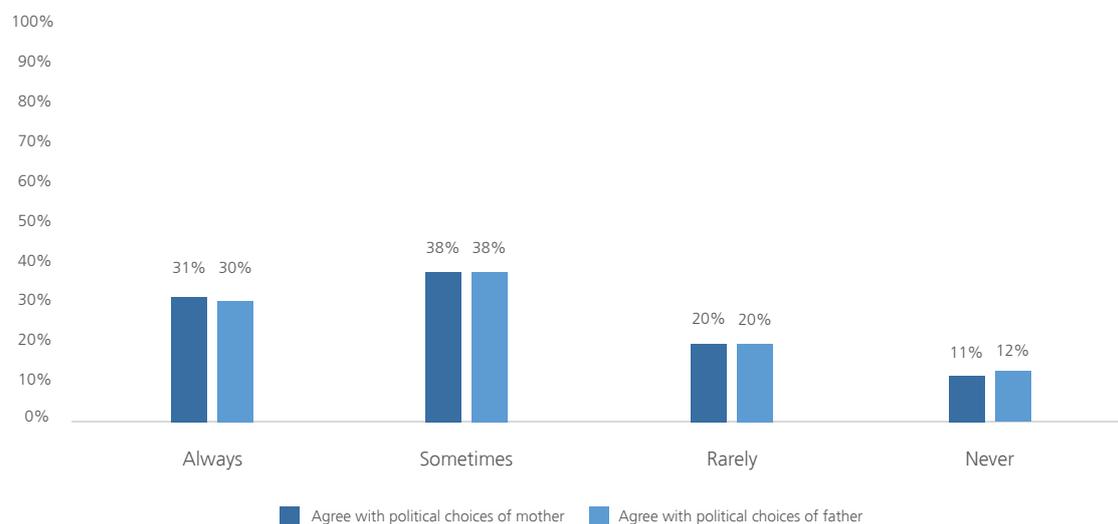
Youth agreement with their parents' political choices, differentiated by mother and father

Figure 21

Correlation between parent's influence and youth's disengagement from politics

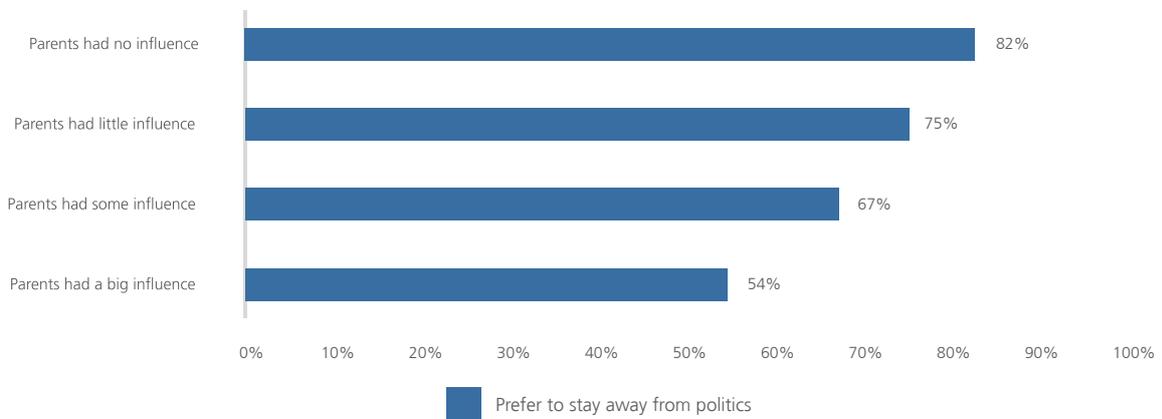


Figure 22

Influence of parental support for established political parties on youth political engagement

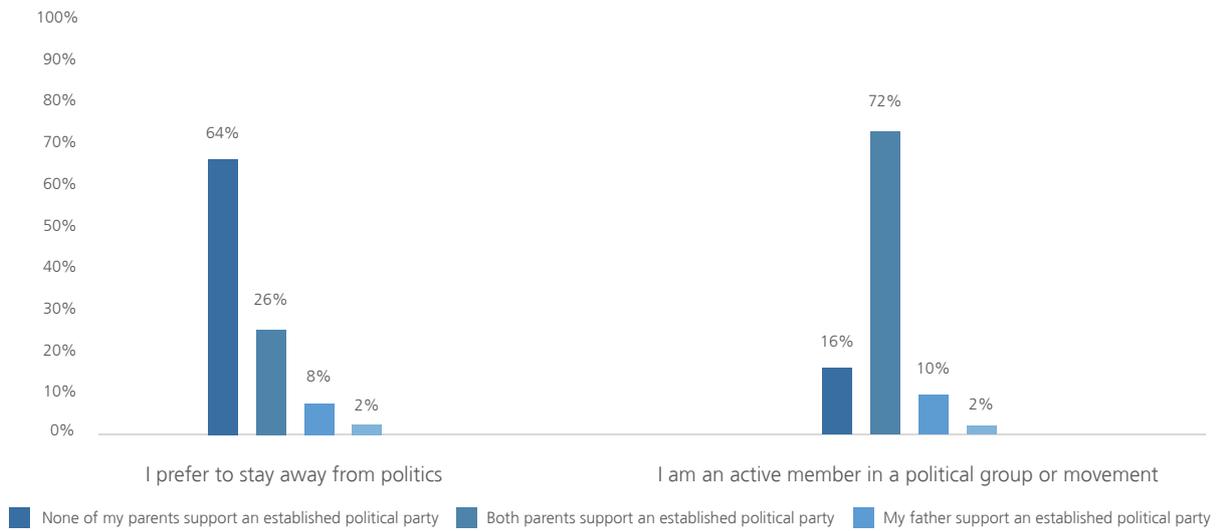
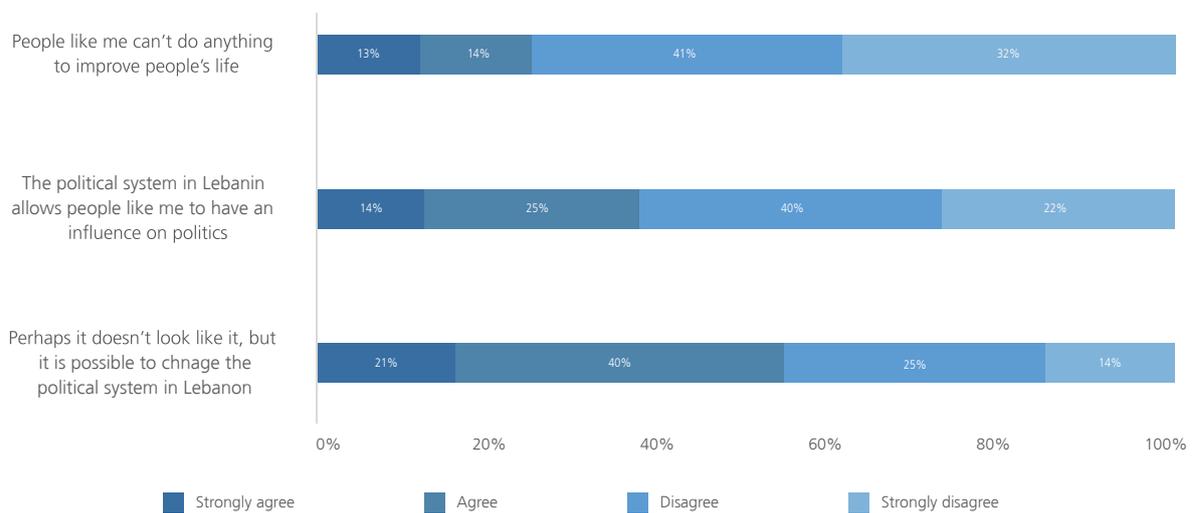


Figure 23

Youth perceptions on the potential for social and political change in Lebanon



5.1.8 PERSPECTIVES ON EMIGRATION

EMIGRATION INTENTIONS AND THE CALL FOR EDUCATION REFORM

Results showed that over half of the respondents (55%) were considering emigrating from Lebanon, with economic factors, particularly social class and financial difficulties, playing a significant role in this decision. Among these respondents, 43% would leave at the earliest opportunity, 40% intended to emigrate after completing their education, and 17% remained uncertain about the timing of their departure. Regional disparities also emerged, with youth from Nabatieh, South Lebanon, and North Lebanon exhibiting the highest intentions to emigrate. Approximately 69% of respondents from North Lebanon, 66% from South Lebanon, and 65% from Nabatieh expressed interest in emigration, while other regions showed slightly lower rates, ranging from 50% to 55%. The timing of when youth began to contemplate emigration varied based on significant national events. Among those considering emigration, 39% had started pondering it before October 17, 2019, 30% did so shortly after that date, and 31% after August 4, 2020. Participants consistently highlighted education reforms, with many advocating for modernized curricula and greater access to quality education. One participant, a 23-year-old non-active female from Beqaa, underscored that the most essential reforms should concentrate on education, specifically in history, civics, and geography, noting that the current history books are either outdated or biased and that civic education is lacking. She argued that the younger generation requires a stronger foundation in these subjects to grow up prepared to engage in politics and society meaningfully, expressing concern that this issue is being overlooked and that with each passing year, education becomes increasingly neglected. We asserted that Lebanon cannot anticipate long-term political or social progress without reforming the education system. Additionally, youth participants advocated integrating civic education into school curricula to nurture political awareness and engagement from a young age. They also suggested that capacity-building initiatives by NGOs and vocational training programs could provide immediate economic advantages by equipping youth with marketable skills, emphasizing the importance of co-producing these programs with NGOs.

ECONOMIC FACTORS AND SOCIAL CLASS

The majority of respondents from lower economic classes and those facing financial hardships were more inclined to consider moving abroad compared to their wealthier counterparts. Specifically, 74% of respondents from the lower class and 64% from the lower-middle class contemplated emigration, in contrast to only 39% of those from the upper class and 50% from the upper-middle class. Furthermore, 63% of individuals who found it difficult or very difficult to make ends meet expressed a desire to relocate, compared to 49% of those who could meet their financial needs. Tackling economic disparities emerged as a cornerstone of recovery efforts, with participants stressing the urgent need for policies that stimulate job creation and attract foreign investment. A 24-year-old male from Akkar,

currently politically inactive, emphasized the necessity for vocational training and job programs that prepare individuals for the workforce, rather than a system in which sectarian and political affiliations determine employment opportunities. He contended that if job creation is not prioritized, economic recovery will remain unattainable, adding that the government should also invest in preserving heritage and history, as younger generations are growing up without understanding Lebanon's past. Rural youth, particularly from the South and Beqaa, called for investment in agriculture and local industries as avenues for economic revitalization, suggesting that strengthening Lebanon's agricultural sector could decrease reliance on imports, create jobs, and stabilize rural economies. Urban participants, in contrast, concentrated on fostering innovation and entrepreneurship, proposing incentives for startups and small businesses, along with tax reforms and streamlined business registration processes to encourage economic activity. Youth across regions agreed that addressing unemployment is crucial to curbing emigration, which has already depleted Lebanon of much of its skilled workforce. Participants also deliberated on the impact of ongoing instability on economic recovery, with several noting that addressing the security situation—including resolving conflicts over arms held by non-state actors—is vital for creating a stable environment that attracts investment and promotes economic growth. The emphasis on linking economic recovery to national security underscores the interconnectedness of Lebanon's challenges.

5.1.9 CHALLENGES IN ENGAGING WITH POLITICS

GENDERED EXPERIENCES AND BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Gender dynamics and gender-specific barriers significantly shape youth experiences of political engagement, with the impact varying by region. Female participants, particularly in rural areas like Baalbek and Beqaa, frequently highlighted the intersection of political and social challenges, noting how patriarchal norms and societal expectations limit their political agency. One participant from Baalbek explained, "In Baalbek, the tribal mentality dominates, and both gender and age are huge factors in determining the degree of involvement. Women face additional societal pressure to stay out of political affairs, and even within student activism, I saw how young women were discouraged from taking on leadership roles." Many women expressed frustration with the lack of platforms to address issues such as gender-based violence, economic marginalization, and limited representation in decision-making processes. Their engagement was often relegated to advocacy for social justice and community welfare, reflecting the gendered constraints they face within Lebanon's political landscape. Another participant shared her experience of being dismissed in political discussions, stating, "As a woman, engaging in politics is not encouraged, and even when I tried to participate in political discussions, I was often overlooked. It's as if women's political opinions are not taken seriously." Female participants from rural areas, such as Beqaa, reported feeling increasingly marginalized, with one noting, "There is a marginalization of women in

political circles, making it even harder for young women to participate or be heard.” In contrast, male participants concentrated on systemic issues, framing their political engagement in terms of structural reforms and systemic change. Their discussions typically focused on governance, accountability, and anti-corruption measures, reflecting an emphasis on institutional and policy-level interventions. These differences underscore the broader freedoms men experience in political expression while also highlighting the varied priorities and challenges faced by male and female youth in Lebanon. The quantitative analysis supports these observations, revealing that male youth are slightly more likely to engage in traditional political activities compared to females, but the roundtable discussions offer a deeper understanding of the systemic and cultural barriers disproportionately faced by women. Regional disparities were also evident in the roundtable discussions, which highlighted how women in rural areas, like Beqaa, face more significant gender-specific barriers due to patriarchal norms and clan-based politics, while urban women, especially in Beirut, contend with institutionalized repression, including university officials blocking female-led initiatives. This emphasizes the need for targeted interventions, including the establishment of safe spaces for women in political activism and the integration of gender equity into broader political reforms. Participants advocated for greater female representation in decision-making roles as a means of challenging entrenched gender norms and promoting inclusive political participation. This dual focus on both systemic and gender-specific barriers reinforces the connection between the qualitative insights and quantitative findings, underscoring the critical importance of equitable and inclusive political reforms in Lebanon.

6

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this report emphasize a critical need to reimagine and prioritize youth political engagement in Lebanon. Disillusioned by systemic failures, pervasive corruption, and entrenched sectarian divides, Lebanese youth increasingly distance themselves from traditional political institutions. This alienation is not a sign of apathy but rather a response to a system perceived as resistant to change and disconnected from their lived realities. Despite this, many young people remain committed to envisioning and advocating for a more just and equitable society. Their involvement in alternative forms of engagement—ranging from grassroots movements to digital platforms—demonstrates both their resilience and their potential to drive meaningful transformation. However, the fragmented nature of these efforts highlights the urgent need for cohesive strategies and supportive structures to channel their aspirations effectively. To catalyze this potential, stakeholders must tackle the systemic barriers that inhibit youth engagement and create pathways for their active participation in governance and decision-making.

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE GOVERNMENT

- **Implementing electoral reforms**
Lower the voting age from 21 to 18 to enhance youth representation and involvement in shaping Lebanon's future. Implementing youth quotas within political parties and electoral lists can also amplify their voices.
- **Promoting Secular Governance**
Commit to gradual secular reforms by diminishing the influence of religion in politics, responding to youth demands for a system founded on merit and inclusivity rather than sectarian loyalty.
- **Addressing Economic Disparities**
Develop targeted economic programs focusing on job creation, education, and entrepreneurship for young people. These initiatives should prioritize rural areas and economically disadvantaged communities.
- **Enhancing Transparency and Accountability**
Strengthen anti-corruption frameworks and ensure greater accountability in governance. Public institutions must rebuild trust by demonstrating tangible reforms and responsiveness to youth concerns.
- **Mainstreaming Youth across ministries and policies**
Youth is a multi-ministerial responsibility, and youth rights are mainstreamed in each ministry's plan. Establish a youth council under the Prime Minister's office and give this body a role in the CES (Economic and Social Council of

Lebanon).

- **Adopting Hiring Policies aimed at Youth**
The Lebanese government is encouraged to reform labor laws to ensure fair wages, protections for informal workers, and equity in public sector hiring. To help aid in combating youth unemployment, the government should develop a unified youth employment database and national job portal to track opportunities locally and abroad, with the ancillary aim of promoting youth employment in the public sector.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES AND GROUPS

- **Enhance Youth Participation and Representation**
Political parties should actively create space for youth involvement in decision-making, ensuring meaningful participation that goes beyond mere tokenism. Establishing independent youth councils within party structures can provide young people a platform to influence policies and advocate for reforms that reflect their priorities.
- **Promote Civic Dialogue and Cross-Sectarian Engagement**
To address institutional distrust, political parties should support platforms for civic dialogue that bring together youth from diverse backgrounds. Initiatives that foster discussions on political reform, governance, and policy solutions can help bridge sectarian divides and cultivate a more inclusive political landscape.
- **Adopt Transparent and Accountable Practices**
Given the deep-seated skepticism toward traditional political structures, parties must commit to transparency in their operations, funding, and decision-making processes. Implementing internal reforms, such as open policy discussions and participatory budgeting, can show a commitment to accountability and integrity.
- **Support Alternative Forms of Activism and Mobilization**
Many young people are moving away from traditional party politics and embracing grassroots activism and digital movements. Political groups should acknowledge and support these alternative forms of engagement by collaborating with youth-led initiatives, advocating for policy changes that reflect grassroots demands, and utilizing digital tools to enhance broader political mobilization.
- **Address Socioeconomic Concerns to Rebuild Trust**
Economic instability is a significant driver of youth disengagement and emigration. Political parties must prioritize policies that tackle unemployment, education reform, and social protection. Concrete initiatives, such as youth employment programs and affordable housing

initiatives, can show a genuine commitment to enhancing young people's livelihoods.

6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE UNIVERSITIES

- **Integrating Civic Education**

Universities should integrate courses on governance, civic responsibility, and political literacy into their curricula. These courses can promote critical thinking and prepare students to engage meaningfully with Lebanon's socio-political challenges.

- **Support for Independent Student Movements**

Universities should support the establishment and functioning of independent student unions and clubs dedicated to issue-based activism. Resources like funding, mentorship, and logistical support can enhance their effectiveness.

- **Research and Knowledge Production**

Universities can utilize their academic expertise to conduct comprehensive studies on youth political engagement. The findings should be disseminated widely to inform policy, advocacy, and public discourse. Furthermore, universities should encourage student involvement in cultural and scientific activities by creating funding pools for youth-led initiatives.

- **Encouraging Participation Through Campus Elections**

Ensure fair and inclusive elections to promote greater student involvement in campus governance. This can serve as a microcosm for democratic participation, encouraging broader civic engagement. Some universities, like the Lebanese University, may suspend or not conduct campus elections due to various factors, such as the political environment or administrative decisions. This can significantly impact student representation and participation.

- **Lebanese University**

The role of the Lebanese University (LU), as envisioned by young people, is to be an institution open to everyone, embodying inclusivity and accessibility. However, their perspective highlights two critical challenges: the university's lack of adequate financial resources and the absence of independent student unions.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NGOS

- **Capacity Building and Skill Development**

NGOs should focus on programs that equip youth with vital skills in leadership, advocacy, and policymaking. Training workshops designed for grassroots mobilization, capacity building, digital activism, and conflict resolution can empower young people to tackle Lebanon's urgent challenges.

- **Facilitating Independent Youth Platforms**

Establish youth-led councils and forums that foster inclusive discussions on critical issues such as electoral reform, economic justice, and secularism. These initiatives can encompass campaigns promoting cultural activities, youth clubs, and public spaces aimed at social integration, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. These platforms can serve as safe spaces for dialogue and collaboration across sectarian and regional divides.

- **Localized and Region-Specific Programs**

disparities. For instance, initiatives that enhance access to education, technology, and transportation in rural areas can reduce barriers to participation.

- **Advocacy for Systemic Change**

NGOs should advocate for policies that tackle youth issues, including anti-corruption measures, transparency, and inclusive governance. Advocacy campaigns must emphasize the significance of incorporating youth voices into national decision-making processes. They ought to also confront youth unemployment through career guidance, promoting entrepreneurship, and reforming unpaid internships.

By embracing these recommendations, Lebanon's stakeholders have the chance to turn the existing climate of disillusionment into one filled with hope, empowerment, and constructive action. Acknowledging the resilience, adaptability, and innovative potential of its youth is vital for building a society that values equity, inclusivity, and democracy. With sustained efforts, Lebanon can progress toward a future where young people are not merely observers but active participants in national advancement. This transformation necessitates commitment, collaboration, and a readiness to tackle the root causes of systemic failures, ensuring that the voices of the next generation are heard and appreciated in shaping the nation's pathway forward.

7

CONCLUSION

The political engagement of Lebanese youth is undergoing a significant transformation, influenced by economic hardship, systemic corruption, and ongoing crises. While traditional political participation has decreased, young people are actively seeking alternative avenues for activism, including grassroots movements, digital mobilization, and civic initiatives. Nevertheless, the persistence of institutional distrust, fragmentation of reform efforts, and absence of unified leadership have impeded sustained political change.

Findings reveal a generation that is politically aware yet deeply skeptical of existing structures. Despite widespread disillusionment with political parties and state institutions, many young people still believe in their collective ability to influence policy and governance. Movements like the October 17 uprising and refugee advocacy initiatives showcase the potential of youth-led action, but without systemic reforms and inclusive engagement strategies, their impact remains limited.

To foster meaningful political participation, political actors—including parties, NGOs, and government institutions—must prioritize transparency, accountability, and youth representation. Establishing independent youth councils, supporting nonpartisan civic dialogue, and addressing socio-economic grievances are critical steps in rebuilding trust and ensuring long-term engagement. Additionally, acknowledging the role of digital activism while bridging the gap between online mobilization and tangible policy change is essential for sustaining momentum.

Lebanon finds itself at a political crossroads, with its future hinging on the ability to harness the energy, aspirations, and demands of its young population. Without meaningful reforms, disillusionment among youth will deepen, exacerbating the ongoing wave of emigration and political disengagement. However, by fostering a political culture that values inclusivity, participation, and accountability, Lebanon can transform its current crisis into an opportunity for long-awaited democratic renewal.

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