

New Poll Shows Lebanese Frustrations with Government, Iran, and Other Powers

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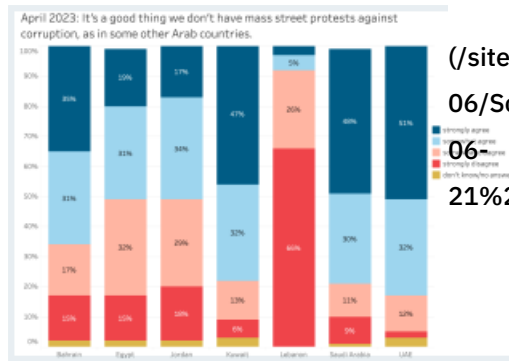
Brief Analysis

New polling results from Lebanon emphasize ways in which the country's public is frustrated domestically and at key Hezbollah ally Iran, while expressing mixed views of other powers.

This poll, commissioned by the Washington Institute and conducted in March/April 2023, emphasizes the ways in which Lebanese are out of sync with other countries polled in the region, as well as points where Lebanese views converge or diverge by sect.

Ongoing Domestic Woes

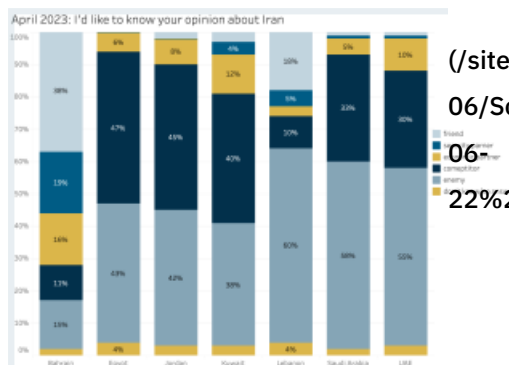
With Lebanon in a state of collapse, and the still open question of who will occupy the presidency after a months-long vacancy, Lebanese have little to be optimistic about when it comes to domestic issues. Polling over the past several years has repeatedly demonstrated that regardless of differences on other issues, Lebanese are effectively unanimous in their frustrations with their government on matters ranging from corruption to freedom of speech. And although the protests of 2019 have subsided—in part due to brutal repression—92% of respondents in this latest polling continue to reject the assertion that “it’s a good thing we don’t have mass street protests against corruption.” Such views mark the Lebanese public as an outlier in a region where many Arabs oppose large demonstrations.



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Deep Frustrations with Iran

Such frustrations appear to be spilling over into views of outside actors involved in Lebanon. Of particular note is that there is by no means a unanimous view of Iran, including among Lebanon’s Shia population. Among these Shia respondents, only 58% classify Iran as primarily a friend of the country. Meanwhile, a quarter see Iran as either an enemy or a competitor. In the case of Sunni and Christian respondents, those who see Iran as an enemy jumps to 66% and 83% respectively. Notably, the proportion of Lebanese overall who see Iran as an enemy is effectively the same proportion as in Saudi Arabia or the UAE—and a larger proportion than in Egypt, Jordan, or Kuwait. Just 18% of Lebanese overall characterize Iran as first and foremost a ‘friend.’



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Many Lebanese are also looking for movement on Iran’s position in the region. On the one hand, Lebanese are by and large supportive of the restoration of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran. 83% say that this is a positive development—compared to just 31% of Saudi citizens. On the other hand, over half of Lebanese Sunni (53%) agree with the provocative statement “Since Iran is now getting so close to having a nuclear bomb, it’s time for an Arab country to get one too.” Moreover, when asked whether they agree that “a major American or Israeli military strike on Iran would be too dangerous, and a bad idea for our country,” a similar percentage of Lebanese Sunni (54%) disagree—standing out from attitudes in other countries on the question.

Lebanese Sunni Muslims were likewise largely in favor of the anti-government protests in Iran when asked back in November 2022, with 69% suggesting that they would have a positive effect on the region. More in line with public opinion in other states is the view on the regional impact of Arab states restoring relations with Assad. In this case, views are split down the middle, with half of respondents viewing this normalization in a positive light. This

percentage jumps to 71% among Shia respondents.

Significant Antipathy against US, Russia, China

Looking towards other outside actors would be one potential avenue for addressing the country's political and economic challenges. Nevertheless, Lebanese of different confessions are divided on the roles of outside states. Significant percentages of Lebanese see the major global powers of the United States, Russia, and China as enemies of the country even as others describe them as friends.

Lebanon is the only country polled, for instance, where almost half (47%) view the United States as “an enemy of our country.” Such views are not limited to Shia Lebanese, likely the most directly targeted with Hezbollah messaging about Washington—about forty percent of Sunni and Christian Lebanese agree. In these latter cases, however, roughly one-third (34% and 33%, respectively) instead list the United States as “a friend of the country.” Relatively few see the United States as primarily either a security or economic partner.

Neither is there a consensus over an alternative ‘friend’ of the country. In the case of China, 30% of respondents are most likely to state that China is an enemy of Lebanon. And when asked the same of Russia, this is all the more so the case: 30% of Shia, 44% of Sunni, and 54% of Christians state that Russia is an enemy.

Such attitudes towards Russia spill into respondents' perception of the war in Ukraine. Of the seven countries polled, Lebanese are the public most split as to their views of a Russian military victory. Whereas about three fourths of Gulf, Jordanian, and Egyptian respondents agree that “the best outcome would be a Russian victory, including the annexation of significant Ukrainian territory to Russia,” the Lebanese public is more ambivalent. Even among Shia respondents, who are the most likely subgroup to agree with the statement, only 63% agree. Moreover, just a third of Sunni and Christian Lebanese agree. About half instead disagree strongly with this view—compared to just around 10% in other countries.

Staunch opposition to Israel—with Exception of Maritime Deal

The vast majority of Lebanese remain staunchly opposed to relations with Israel, either in the case of humanitarian aid or economic ties. And in contrast to those in the Gulf, a large proportion of Lebanese (62%) believe that Hamas rocket attacks from Gaza on their southern neighbor are a positive development for the region. Nevertheless, the Israeli-Lebanon maritime deal remains popular among more than half of Lebanese respondents (58%), though the proportion of Shia Lebanese who support the deal has dropped by about ten percentage points since last November.

Methodological Note

This analysis is based on findings from a survey among a representative, random national sample of 1,000 Lebanese citizens. Sample selection followed standard geographic probability procedures, yielding a statistical margin of error of approximately 3 percent. The survey was conducted by a highly qualified, experienced, and completely apolitical regional commercial firm. Strict quality controls and assurances of confidentiality were provided throughout. Additional details, including full question wording and data set with demographic breaks, are available on our [interactive polling platform \(https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twi-interactive-polling-platform\)](https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/twi-interactive-polling-platform). ❖

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