

# Who are Lebanon's First-time Voters?

RESULTS OF A COUNTRYWIDE VOTER PROFILE SURVEY ON THE ATTITUDES AND OPINIONS OF THE LEBANESE YOUTH TOWARDS THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS

The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has commissioned a survey to investigate the attitudes and opinions of youth towards elections specifically targeting first time voters aged between 21 and 29 years old. This survey was conducted by Statistics Lebanon Ltd between 15.03.2018 and 02.04.2018. The sample size for this survey was n=1,200 equally distributed across gender. The sample was drawn using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling technique. It covered all Lebanese governorates and socio-economic groups. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. Statistical data analysis was accomplished using SPSS 22 and the survey's margin of error is  $\pm 2.83\%$ .

## Youth Participation in Elections

Almost half of the respondents (51%) had already previously participated in the municipal elections. Only 25% chose not to vote although they were registered on the lists. The intention to vote in the parliamentary elections (76%) is substantially higher than during the municipal elections. It is clear that those who did not vote in the municipal elections because their names were not listed on the voters list are intending to vote in the forthcoming elections and almost all of those who want to vote (75%) have confirmed that their names are on the voter lists of 2018. The main reasons that drove the youth to participate in the elections are the national right/duty to vote, and the right to express an opinion. On the other hand, the main reasons for not voting are lack of trust and uselessness of the elections. With respect to the electoral choice the vast majority (83%) has already chosen the list they will vote for. Their voting choice is mainly based on loyalty to parties (66%) or candidates (26%). The minority will be voting for a civil society list (6%). The main stream (88%) of those who intend to vote will still vote for their party even if the electoral list includes other parties whom they object. The majority of the respondents supported the idea of women (74%) and youth (79%) participation in the election as candidates. However voting for a candidate from another sect has shown less agreement (55%) among the youth. The top influences on electoral choices are the services offered (69%), political party (66%) or personality (68%), and family (60%). The single most compelling influence is the political party (25%) just slightly ahead of the "person providing services" (21%). The youth had high levels of agreement that the participation in the voting process is the duty of every person to communicate their opinion (83%), contribution to decision-making (74%), and type of accountability (69%). The new parliamentary electoral law is almost clear to 77% of the respondents with regard to how to vote (77%) however it is less clear how the votes are sorted (57%). The representation under new law has been improved according to 56% of the respondents and a near third (29%) did not agree.

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Lebanese youth seemed to have diverse opinions regarding whom they consider as their ideal public figure. In addition to that 27% of the respondents do not have any ideal public figure. The top 3 political figures who express the Lebanese youth opinions are: Hassan Nasrallah (22%), Nabih Berri (16%), and Saad Hariri (11%). However, a considerable number of respondents (24%) believed that none of the political figures express their opinions. Moreover, the top 3 political parties which express the Lebanese youth opinions are: Hizbullah (12%), Amal movement (11%), and Lebanese Forces (10%). Nevertheless, 27% stated that none of the political parties express their opinion. The vast majority of the respondents (91%) are not members of any political party. The minority of the respondents (9%) are members either because they (28%) or their family (27%) support the party leader or because the idea of the party convinces them (25%). The majority of the Lebanese youth (89%) do not aspire to participate in public affairs. The minority (11%) who want to participate in the public affairs are equally interested in either parliament (52%) or municipality (48%). According to the Lebanese youth the first most supporting country is Saudi Arabia (30%) followed by Iran (22%).

**Sources of Information**

The majority considered TV as their main source of information (79%). Followed by social media (30%) and websites (24%). Only 1% rely on the press. The vast majority (93%) uses independent accounts and pages to get the news from the social media. Almost half of the respondents (48%) stated that they partially trust these sources, 27% showed a lot of trust and 10% had little trust. The Primary channels are New TV (25%), closely followed by MTV (24%), and LBC (23%).

**Concerns and needs of the Lebanese youth**

The most important problems facing Lebanon today according to the youth are the 'Economic situation' for 45% followed very closely by 'Unemployment' for 43%. The Delivery of essential services was also relevant to the Lebanese public according to youth like water crisis (25%), electricity (18%), and infrastructure (8%). The most important problem faced by youth is unemployment (90%). Probed issues highlighted additional areas of concern to youth like the presence of a large displaced refugee community (86%), collapse of the national economy (84%), the housing crisis (84%), and the environmental pollution (82%). Taking into consideration the problems facing Lebanon and the youth today only 38% are considering emigration mainly for economic reasons. Despite all of this, the young remain fairly positive, 62% are optimistic and 48% see their life as good.

**Personal opinions**

The majority of the respondents (59%) considered themselves somewhat religious and 27% are believers but not religious. The Lebanese youth (88%) do not mind dealing with people from another sect. However when asked about marrying a person from a different religion almost half of the respondent (49%) did not support the idea. There were high levels of agreement (68%) on the idea of separating religion from the state and religious practices from public life (social, political, etc.). Similarly the majority of the Lebanese youth strongly agreed (45%) and agreed (21%) that the clergy should not influence the government decisions. There were also equal levels of agreement among 72% of the respondents that no one has the right to excommunicate those belonging to other reli-

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rious denominations or sects or those who hold different views in the interpretation of religion. There was an average agreement (52%) on the idea that weapons outside the state's control should be removed. In addition to that 61% of the Lebanese youth supported the idea of holding politicians accountable for their actions for the period after 1990, however this percentage dropped to 48% for the period before 1990. On the other hand, results showed low levels of agreement (13%) that every non-religious person is definitely a bad person. Moreover, the majority of the Lebanese youth strongly disagreed (45%) and disagreed (21%) that it is better for Lebanon when religious figures assume higher public positions in the state. The main areas of interest among the youth are Sports (38%), Fashion (35%), and Art (32%).

### Conclusion

Lebanon will be voting for a "new" parliament for the first time since June 2009. First time voters showed a high willingness to vote in the forthcoming parliamentary elections. They believe that voting is a national right and a duty. As proof of their commitment to voting they have checked that their names are on the voter lists for 2018. In addition to that, they are aware of the new law's voting mechanism. Lebanese young voters have already determined their electoral choice based on loyalty mainly to parties and individual candidates. However the services provided by the candidates and their achievements impact these youthful voters' electoral choices. Choices of the youth are still relatively traditional being focused on; services provided and political affiliation to traditional parties/personalities. There is limited support for the civil society parties not affiliated with sects. Family remains a significant factor with a proportion not making independent choices. In addition to which the voting choice is highly dependent on the sect of the candidate.

In conclusion the current survey showed that the participation of the first-time voters might not yield a significant change in the political landscape since the new voting generations are still traditional and sectarian in their voting choices.