**What the Lebanese people really want**

[**Dr. James J. Zogby**](https://nation.com.pk/Reporter/5749)

November 24, 2021

Most policymakers and pundits are confounded by what to do about Lebanon. They ask: “What do the Lebanese people want? How strong is the hold of the sectarian elites and Hezbollah over the population? And is change even possible in Lebanon?”

In an effort to answer these questions, the American Task Force on Lebanon (ATFL) and Zogby Research Services (ZRS) conducted a nationwide poll from September 20–29, 2021, of 859 Lebanese citizens asking them to assess their current situation and to identify their political priorities and their hopes for the future.

The findings are both instructive and fascinating. For example, in the results we find multiple areas where a consensus on critical issues exists among Lebanese citizens from every demographic and religious sub-group. We are also able to conclude that despite the extreme hardships they are enduring, for a strong majority of Lebanese, next year’s elections present a make it or break it moment for the future of their country.

[PTI decides to not move SC over rejection of nomination papers](https://nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2021/pti-decides-to-not-move-sc-over-rejection-of-nomination-papers)

What comes through quite clearly from the findings is the profound impact the economic collapse is having on Lebanese across the country. Nine in 10 respondents tell us that they are worse off now than they had been just five years earlier. More than eight in 10 tell us they have experienced shortages in fuel, electricity, and drinking water. One third of respondents say that there are occasions when they have been forced to go without food. Among the poorest Lebanese, one in five say that they “very often go without meals.” And almost two thirds of Lebanese respondents report that they do not have enough income to make ends meet. As a result, a disturbing two thirds report that, if given the opportunity, they would emigrate to another country.

Despite these hardships, Lebanese retain confidence in some of their country’s institutions — with the Lebanese Armed Forces, civil society, the religious leadership, judiciary, and the October 17th Thawra movement scoring quite high among all religious sects and demographic sub-groups. Attitudes toward Hezbollah are divided, leaning negative, and confidence in the Parliament and in the traditional parties are quite low. On the issue of Hezbollah, it is striking that two thirds of all Lebanese, including a majority of respondents from every religious sect, express the belief that their “weapons and forces” should not be allowed to operate independent of the state and instead should be under the control of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

[Citizens suffer as petroleum dealers go on indefinite strike](https://nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2021/citizens-suffer-as-petroleum-dealers-go-on-indefinite-strike)

It is important to note that despite their desperate situation, the Lebanese are looking forward to next year’s elections. Three in five respondents tell us that they believe that the “elections will bring the political change Lebanon needs,” with two thirds expressing their intention to vote for the “new alternative parties.” On the other hand, only one in five say that they would vote for the traditional parties.

What the Lebanese want from their government also comes through quite clearly in the survey results. When asked to identify the number one issue facing the country, far and away, “ending corruption” is the top-rated priority followed by education, health care, and employment. A substantial majority also want to see an end to the Taif formula of sectarian governance. And when asked to provide their primary source of personal identity, eight in 10 respondents say “Lebanese,” while fewer than one in 10 say their “sect” provides their primary identification. And, most significantly, 97 percent of Lebanese respondents say that it is important that there be “a full investigation of and accountability for the explosion in the Port of Beirut.”

[Police arrest blind pseudo PM’s secretary in Attock](https://nation.com.pk/25-Nov-2021/police-arrest-blind-pseudo-pm-s-secretary-in-attockt)

These are only a few of the topline results from the ATFL/ZRS poll—which the remainder of the findings serve to accentuate. In summation, the Lebanese people: are hurting from the economic collapse; are fed up with an ossified and broken sectarian political system that they want to see changed; want an end to government corruption; want Hezbollah reined in and brought under the control of the state; want accountability for the government’s failings—in particular the devastating explosion in the port; and have their hopes pinned on the belief that next year’s elections will bring needed change. It is vital when speaking about Lebanon that these areas of consensus be factored into any discussion about the future of the country. For years now, we have been saying that Lebanon is at the breaking point. What I conclude from this ATFL/ZRS poll is that if next year’s elections do not happen because the sectarian elites or Hizbollah sense that they pose a risk to their control, if the elections are not free and fair, or if Lebanon’s sectarian electoral system brings the same old traditional elites back into power, then the hopes of the Lebanese people will be shattered. The country will go from the breaking point to being broken.