

A stylized map of the Middle East region, composed of a grid of dots. The dots are mostly grey, with several red dots highlighting specific countries or areas, including Lebanon, Syria, and parts of the Gulf region.

Lebanon: The Predecessor of the Arab Spring?

The Youth is Sceptical but not Desperate

FES MENA Youth Study: Country Analysis Lebanon

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- Lebanon experienced its own »Arab Spring« in March 2005, when the then government was overthrown by mass protests. The country continues to suffer from the ensuing political polarization and the blockade of state institutions. In particular, the youth is disappointed by their politicians and disillusioned with regard to the overthrow of the regime. This may explain their great scepticism about the upheavals of the »Arab Spring« of 2011 and its varied consequences, including the civil war in Syria.
- In other ways too, Lebanon plays a pioneering role in the region. Economic self-initiative and family cohesion have always played a crucial role in individual life planning – factors that have only become more relevant in the other Arab countries since the crisis of the neo-patrimonial supply states.
- The FES MENA youth study shows that, despite disappointment in parliamentary practice, democracy enjoys a high approval rate among Lebanese youths. Despite their frustrations over their politicians, Lebanon's young people are very interested in politics.



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1. Introduction

Starting in December 2010, young people flooded the streets of Tunisia, Egypt, Bahrain, Morocco, Libya, Syria, and other Arab countries to protest the authoritarian regimes in power and to demand more freedom. At the same time, the Lebanese people suffered from the collapse of many state institutions and a political standstill. There was no elected prime minister at the time, only a caretaker government and a parliament in agony. While protesters in the region chorused, »the people demand the fall of the regime« (*al-sha'b yurid isqat al-nizam*), it was commonplace to hear Lebanese complain the lack of any political authority and order (*ma fi nizam*). Lebanon too witnessed major demonstrations starting in February 2011, driven especially by young people and intellectuals. The campaign to »abolish the confessional system« (*isqat al-nizam al-ta'ifi*) made use of similar forms of protest and symbols as the public movements in Tunisia and Egypt. But different than in the other countries, protesters did not call for the overthrow of an autocratic ruler, and other than in all other countries, the security forces did not shoot at them.

In many respects Lebanon has been, and still is, exceptional in the Middle East. Lebanon's laissez-faire state never had established a welfare state in which services were granted in exchange for political acquiescence, as in other Arab states. Therefore, the Lebanese were not hit by the structural crisis of neopatrimonialism in the region. The high degree of cultural and organizational autonomy of the 18 officially recognized religious communities guarantees a unique social and political pluralism and a high degree of political freedom. The confessional power sharing arrangement, which grants shares of power proportional to the size of the communities for communal elites saved the country from the fate of autocratic rule, as it is common in the region. The downside of this politicization of religious identities is the resulting strong sectarianism, a holistic mentality that connects political attitudes, party affiliation, education, marriage, and personal life of every single Lebanese to his or her denomination. Therefore, Lebanon has been regarded as the pitiful outlier of the Middle East because of the way the society is deeply divided along religious identities. Government services and social opportunities are awarded according to religious affiliation and patronage networks. »Lebanonization« has long been the synonym for a strife-ridden, if not violent power struggle

between elites fought along ethnic-sectarian fault lines. In the country, this culminated in the Lebanese Civil War of 1975, which lasted until 1990.

Lebanon has continued to have a very high degree of political violence after the end of the civil war; guerrilla warfare from Hezbollah against the Israeli occupation of South Lebanese territory continued until the year 2000; the year of the Israeli retreat from Lebanon; the three wars with Israel in the years 1993, 1996, and 2006; about 100 political assassinations; several civil war-like instances of fighting; and spill-over from the civil war in Syria including bomb attacks and regular fighting between pro- and anti-Assad militias on Lebanese territory all prevent peace among the populace. Lebanese young men fight on both sides of the Syrian War; Sunnite Salafist and jihadist fighters joined the violent uprising against Bashar al-Assad in 2011, whereas a significant number of the Shiite Hezbollah militia intervened in the year 2013 to defend the regime.

The assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri on February 14, 2005, became a watershed for the further political development. It led to a deep division into two camps of pro- and anti-Syrian forces that paralyzed Lebanon's politics for a decade. The March 8-Alliance, which held its biggest demonstration on March 8, 2005, suspected an »international conspiracy« behind Hariri's assassination. Their claim is that he was assassinated in order to weaken Lebanon by alienating it from its »natural ally«, Syria. Several Lebanese parties and intellectuals organized a huge demonstration against the Syrian occupation forces, which it held responsible for Hariri's assassination, on March 14. This became its name-giving date as the »March 14-Alliance«. A few days later, the pro-Syrian government under Omar Karami resigned, and Syria announced the withdrawal of its troops from Lebanon.

The uprising, which its protagonists called the »Independence Intifada«, played a big role in the regional and geopolitical ideological framing of the time. The US government under George W. Bush interpreted the »Cedar Revolution« of 2005 — as it was often called in the Western media — as evidence of the success of its strategy to promote democracy in the »New Middle East« and indirectly as a post-factual legitimation of the controversial Iraq War of 2003 and the toppling of Saddam Hussein. Fouad Ajami, an American university professor of Lebanese descent, coined the term »Arab Democratic Spring« for events in Lebanon, for which he thanked George W. Bush (2005).

In the following months and years, however, Lebanon became an arena for regional and international contestations of a »New Arab Cold War« (Valbjørn and Bank 2012). Iran and Saudi Arabia fought for regional supremacy on the Lebanese stage by supporting their local allies: Iran and the Shiite Hezbollah of March 8, Saudi Arabia and the Sunni Future Movement of March 14. This reflects the growing politicization of the Sunna-Shia divide that had spread in the region since the Iraq War of 2003. The Christian parties were split between the two camps as well; the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) led by Michel Aoun joined the March 8 Alliance, while the Lebanese Forces and other Christian parties aligned with March 14.

Many Lebanese became frustrated with their »revolution betrayed«. Sectarianism, favouritism, and corruption remained unchanged after Syrian security forces withdrew in April 2005. The polarization between the two inimical political camps, which was accompanied and reinforced by the strong involvement of regional and global players, paralyzed Lebanese politics for a decade. Twice, from 2007–2008 and 2014–2016, the parliament was unable to agree on a new president for months. On several occasions, a few parliamentarians withdrew their confidence from the prime minister by switching sides between the two alliances. Since 2013, the parliament has delegitimized itself by twice postponing elections. The political elite has refused to approach the structural problems caused by its outdated power-sharing arrangement. All this has led to a deep frustration among the Lebanese, and especially among the Lebanese youth, about their politicians. These negative experiences may explain the general scepticism of the Lebanese youth about the outcomes of the Arab Spring of 2011 and about Lebanese politicians, as they express in the youth study at hand. It seems they see their own disenchanting experience repeated in the failed Arab Spring.

2. The Sample

In the framework of its regional MENA Youth Study, researchers with the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation¹ interviewed from May to June 2016 a representative sam-

1. This survey was part of a regional study covering eight countries in the MENA region. The results of the FES MENA Youth Study are published as: *Coping with Uncertainty: Youth in the Middle East and North Africa*. London: Sagi Books, 2018. The regional and country-specific data is available at: <http://www.fes.de/lnk/youth-study>.

ple of young people from Lebanon between 16 and 30 years of age. For this purpose, 1,000 young people were consulted in a standardised survey. Furthermore, 13 young people were surveyed in in-depth interviews. Born after the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990), this generation is still dealing with their parents' war memories, and, as described above, they have suffered a high level of continuous political violence. The data of this survey has to be interpreted against this historic background, which strongly influences the collective memory and the political culture of Lebanon and the opinions of the interviewed young people. In many regards, Lebanon's youth does not or does only slightly differ in its answers from those of the youth of other Arab countries. Yet, in some answers they show specific patterns which can be explicated by these experiences. The following analysis will focus more on these specific characteristics of Lebanon than the general trends of the region, which have been analysed in the general MENA Youth study.

3. Residency, Family and Education

Lebanon's regions, such as the city of Beirut, are mostly segregated due to sectarian affiliation. Muslim inhabitants dominate the western quarters of the capital while Christians predominantly inhabit its Eastern parts. The city of Beirut has more than half a million residents, the Greater Beirut area comprises about two million inhabitants and forms about half of Lebanon's total population. Beirut's suburbs have developed out of villages and still count as independent cities, although they are economically, culturally and socially integrated in the Beirut agglomeration. Most Beirutis originate from rural areas, and as it is difficult to change residency, the electoral law prescribes them to return to their hometowns to vote. In spite of this anomaly and although Lebanese still maintain strong bonds to their villages and small towns of origin, in reality they constitute a predominantly metropolitan society.²

2. The empirical study shows two inaccuracies regarding population distribution and residency. First, a huge majority of the sample is categorized as living in rural centres (48%) and small cities (41%). The remaining population supposedly lives in medium sized cities of 100,001 up to 500,000 inhabitants, and yet nobody lives in a large city of more than 500,000 inhabitants. However, the city of Beirut comprises more than half a million inhabitants. Second, Christians barely register in the sample's category that includes Beirut, which supposedly only comprises of 98 percent Muslims.

Compared to the other seven Arab countries that participated in the MENA survey, Lebanese youth are not significant outliers. Their percentage of self-estimation as youth (88 %) and adults (12 %) is slightly below average of the whole sample (92 % and 8 % respectively). They vary slightly from other Arab countries in marital status: 76 percent are still single (four percent are engaged, 19 percent married, and one percent divorced). This is above the average in other Arab countries in which only 66 percent are still single. Other coefficients confirm this tendency of a later marriage age: 78 percent of Lebanon's youth still live with their parents, while the average in all surveyed countries is 69 percent. Only 19 percent of Lebanese aged 16 to 30 live with their partners (the MENA average is 24 percent). Lebanese survey response indicated an average household size of 4.7 people, falling short of the regional average of 5.6 people.

Lebanon has a long tradition of laissez-faire statehood with a low level of social services compared to other Arab states. Families and religious communities provide community support. Therefore, the country was not hit as hard by the neo-liberal transformations through radical market opening and massive state austerity measures that swept the MENA region after the late 1980s. Lebanon's upper and middle classes have compensated this gap by private initiatives and family support, a tendency which is now repeated in the other Arab states. Lebanon's adolescents feel outstandingly confident about their family's economic situation of today; 77 percent assess it as very or rather good, only 23 percent as very or rather bad, which is above the MENA average of 71 percent and 29 percent respectively. Their own economic outlook is much more pessimistic. It is very common and socially acceptable for parents to pay for the education and the start of the professional and family life of their kids. On the flipside, the poor who don't have this family background hardly get any chance to escape their inherited social position; as Houssam, 26 and single, knows from his own experience:

»I dropped out of school because of my parent's financial situation, which is an obstacle to youth opportunities.«

As a country with few natural resources and a tradition of labour emigration, the relatively high percentage (46 %) of students among the Lebanese youth is not surprising, only surpassed by Morocco with 50 percent and

Bahrain with 57 percent. With 59 percent of the interviewed youths already holding a high degree of education, Lebanon outperforms all other countries surveyed in the FES MENA Youth Study.

4. Gender and Economy

Interestingly, 32 percent of the interviewees' mothers in Lebanon hold a high educational degree and 31 percent a medium degree. This tendency of female educational supremacy even increases in the younger generation. While 62 percent of female interviewees have a higher education, only 57 percent of the male have the same degree. This reflects a general trend in the MENA region in which female students nowadays make the majority of university graduates. Nevertheless, this educational lead of women does not yet translate into a higher presence in societal and political power. Even for family income and personal freedom, the traditional role model of the husband feeding the family seems to be resilient, which is verified by the statistics and by the interviews of male and female adolescents from Lebanon. Despite their good education, 82 percent of the interviewees' mothers are »jobless/work without income«; i.e. they are housewives. From a male perspective, Ghassan states:

»When a man wants to get married, he must be stable. If he failed to bring some sort of stability in his life or did not get any help from his father regarding the house, he won't be able to secure the basic requirement for a decent life. (...) Work is more important than marriage, because work is what makes a happy marriage, which demands to buy furniture, a house and a car.«

Dima, a 19-year-old female university student who plans to become a bank director, nevertheless has a traditional role model of partnership:

»There is supposed to be mutual respect in a couple. (...) The important thing is for the man to be responsible.«

Supply security for most men means having a good job, while many women believe a good marriage will provide them supply security. For 61 percent of young men and 34 percent of young women, a good job is the priority,

while for 44 percent of the young women and just 20 percent of young men a good marriage is the priority.

However, attitudes in Lebanon on this subject are not homogeneous, and it does not mean young women will accept this status quo for the future. The young generation seems to be in search for new role models:

»Traditions that used to say that a woman is not supposed to work and that her place is at home has changed and do not exist anymore. Today, the woman is an effective element in society.«

Ghassan

24-year old Lara complains:

»My ambition is to work before getting married because my husband might prevent me from working in the future. I don't want to be supported by anyone.«

The present political and economic crises led to changing role models and economic necessity for shared responsibility may further adjust gender roles.

5. Middle Class

91 percent of the Lebanese youth describe themselves as part of the lower and upper middle class, three percent as »wealthy« and six percent as »poor«. This self-assessed designation of »middle class« is only surpassed in the sample by Bahrainis at 93 percent and Tunisians at 96 percent. This self-assessment is reflected in a high standard of living: 84 percent of Lebanon's youth live in their own room, more than 97 percent of the interviewed enjoy tap water, electricity, WC, a separate kitchen, a stove, and TV. Three quarters of respondents have their own computer and internet access. There is hardly any variance in these percentages due to gender, marital status, budget, or milieu of residency. Excluded from having these possessions are young people with a low education level, who are much less likely to own a computer (40 %) than medium (70 %) and highly educated respondents (85 %).

Qualified self-employment occupations are frequent in the parents' generation; more than half of the fathers are self-employed and only eleven percent are state em-

ployees. This experience of individual responsibility and self-determination of the parents' generation may explain the high level of confidence to realize one's own job wishes. Lebanese youths are totally (30 %) or rather confident (45 %) that they will realize their job wishes. This high level of confidence (75 %) is only approached by Tunisian and Bahraini youths (74 % and 72 % respectively). In Lebanon, the private sector displays substantial dynamism, and the youth is less hit by the loss of employment security, expanding precarity, and a failed promise of education compared to the youth in other Arab countries.

6. Insecurity, Economic Deprivation, and Violence

The Lebanese youths' optimistic professional outlook stands slightly in contrast to their assessment of the current economic situation. With 70 percent of Lebanese youths describing their situation as »very/rather good« and 30 percent describing it as »rather/very bad«, their results place them inbetween the group of war-torn societies in which fewer youths answered »very/rather good« (Palestine 62 %, Yemen 34 %, and Syrian refugees 10 %) and the non-war countries in which more young people answered positively such as in Jordan (71 %), Egypt (73 %), Morocco (82 %), and Bahrain where an astonishing 91 percent of the surveyed youth described their economic situation as »very good« and »rather good«. Not surprisingly, Lebanese youths with low education are even less content with their economic situation – only 45 percent describe it as very or rather good.

Considering its turbulent surroundings, young Lebanese show a lower general sense of security about their personal situation, with a value of 5.6 on a scale between 1 and 10, than most interviewees from the other Arab countries, whose average was 6.2. This negative value is only undercut by the war-experienced Yemenis with 5.0 and Syrian refugees in Lebanon with 4.5. With a relatively low value of 4.9, the probability of armed conflict triggers much stronger feelings of insecurity than in most other countries. This is mainly caused by a fear of spill over of the Syrian civil war, which reminds many Lebanese of their own history of civil war, the spread of jihadist violence, as well as the constant threat of an iterated war with Israel, which had destroyed important parts of Lebanon's infrastructure in its last war of 2006.

Table 1: »I feel secure / insecure in the following fields« (on a scale from 1 »not at all secure« to 10 »totally secure«)

	Total	Education			Marital status		Own budget	
		low	middle	high	single	married	with	without
My economic situation	5,4	4,4	5,6	5,4	5,5	4,6	5,4	5,2
My health status	7,7	7,1	7,8	7,8	7,9	7,1	7,9	7,4
My exposure to violence	7,1	6,5	7,2	7,2	7,2	6,8	7,3	6,7
My access to food	7,8	6,8	7,8	8,0	7,9	7,3	8,0	7,3
The future of my family	6,7	5,6	6,9	6,8	6,9	5,8	6,8	6,4
The probability of armed conflict	4,9	4,2	4,9	5,0	5,0	4,4	4,9	5,0
My future professional career	5,9	4,8	6,0	6,0	6,1	5,1	6,1	5,4

Further sources of fear include economic insecurity and fear for their future professional career. In general, those with less education and without their own budget show less optimism than those with middle and higher education and a budget.

The fears regarding personal economic insecurity and of armed conflict are similar in distribution and frequency; these two topics are strongly interconnected in Lebanon. The war in neighbouring Syria has nearly annihilated one of Lebanon's most important markets and has cut the only overland trade line into the Gulf region. Furthermore, the influx of Syrian refugees has strained the already weak public utility infrastructure and stretched the budget of a state already running deep in the red. All this caused a decline in economic growth from eight to ten percent prior to 2011 to below two per cent since the outbreak of the Syrian uprising (Nemeh 2017).

Ghassan, a 27-year-old lawyer, clearly relates economic and political causes of insecurity:

»The economic and security situation are both affecting my view for the future, which is a little bit pessimistic. In Lebanon I feel the existence of »sleeping cells«, you do not know when they will start moving, especially with the ISIS phenomenon, which will lead to explosions and war.«

One million officially registered and half a million non-registered Syrian refugees, a huge number compared to Lebanon's small population of about four million, pose a strong challenge to the security and economy of the country, especially for the lower strata of society (Salloukh 2017).

Bob, a 22 year with a High School diploma, complains about the Syrian refugees:

»The wars that are occurring around us are affecting us negatively. The Syrian refugees, for example, are dominating the job market, resulting in a decrease of income and an increase in rent, in addition to traffic congestion due to overpopulation.«

7. Values

With an average score of 6.6 on a scale from 1 to 10, Lebanese youths are the second lowest after Tunisians (6.0) in their self-perceived religiosity. 89 percent of the interviewed Lebanese consider religion a private matter; although this contradicts the statement from 36 percent of the interviewees, who want Islam to play a larger role in daily life. This is the lowest rate among the countries under investigation; it is relevant that 38 percent of the Lebanese sample are Christian and only 58 percent Muslims.

Table 2: »If you look around the world, what kind of political system would you prefer?«
(values in percentages)

	Total	Gender		Education		
		male	female	low	middle	high
A strong man who governs the country	14	16	11	22	15	12
A strong woman who governs the country	4	1	6	4	5	3
A religious state based on sharia	3	3	3	7	3	2
A socialist system	1	2	1	1	1	2
A combined socialist and Islamic system	0	0	0	1	0	0
A democratic system	69	68	70	49	68	73
A combined democratic and Islamic system	4	4	4	7	4	3

Table 3: »Which institutions do you trust?« (values in percentages)

	Total	Education			Own budget		Milieu of residence		
		low	middle	high	with	without	large city	city	rural
Public health system	19	17	21	18	19	17	16	16	28
Educational system	40	30	41	41	39	40	35	37	49
Media	15	12	20	13	15	16	8	15	17
Family	85	82	84	85	87	79	81	84	86
Police	33	36	37	30	33	33	9	34	36
Government	9	13	10	7	8	11	4	9	10
Trade Unions	12	15	16	9	11	13	5	11	18
Parliament	9	10	8	9	8	11	1	8	14
Zawiya	2	1	4	2	3	2	1	3	1
Neighbourhood associations	2	1	3	2	2	3	1	3	1
Tribe	11	15	12	10	11	11	12	11	10
Parties	9	5	10	9	6	15	7	7	16
Religious organisations	16	21	18	14	14	20	17	14	23
Legal system and courts	18	21	18	17	16	21	14	17	22
Military	81	72	83	82	82	81	60	82	87
Militias (armed groups)	3	2	3	4	4	1	–	3	5

Lebanese youths show a high esteem for freedoms and rights. Freedom of opinion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of movement, and basic rights for minorities gained higher scores in this survey than in most other Arab countries. The awareness for all these rights rises with education. Interestingly, there is hardly any variation due to gender, marital status, budget, or milieu of residence. Yet, when asked which three of the listed rights were the most important to the respondent, absence of violence (88%), security of basic needs (75%) ranked significantly high. In third, came freedom of opinion and speech (63%). However, Lebanese youths are very sceptical that the state can provide these rights. Moreover, it is striking that an overwhelming majority of 69 percent of the Lebanese interviewed prefer a democratic system, which is by far the highest score among their generation. Results from other countries on this question include: Tunisia (52%), Syrian refugees (52%), Egypt (51%), Yemen (24%), Palestine (23%), and Morocco (23%). A strong man governing the country comes next, only 14 percent of Lebanese youth prefer this style of state system. This is more popular among less educated respondents: 22 percent of the low educated youth favouring this system. Other systems of government include: a religious state with sharia legislation (3%); a socialist state (1%); and a combined democratic and Islamic state (4%). Lebanon's youth seems to be aware that an Islamic state would not be an acceptable option given the large number of Christians in the country.

This high approval for a democratic system is all the more surprising given the failure of Lebanon's democratic system and institutions to gain the trust of the youth. Only nine percent trust the parliament and the government and parties respectively; 18 percent have trust in the legal system and courts; and 19 percent have trust in the public health system. The two institutions that gain the highest support among the youth are the military and the family. The Lebanese army is esteemed the only national institution that crosscuts sectarian fault lines; 81 percent of Lebanese respondents have trust in the military, a higher figure than in all other MENA countries in this study. In contrast, the institutions that could have been expected to be more important in a society with strong non-state community associations such as zawiya (2%), neighbourhood associations (2%), tribes (11%), religious organizations (16%), and militias (3%) do not enjoy broad support at all. Nevertheless, the family is highly trusted by Lebanese youth (85%).

8. Politics and the Role of the State

Whereas a huge majority (77%) in all countries under investigation call for a larger role of the state in daily life. This demand reaches a peak among Lebanon's youth at 92 percent. Strikingly, 65 percent of the Lebanese youths prioritize »surveillance« as most important role of the state, followed by social security at 51 percent. This reflects the current fear of a massive spill over of violence from the Syrian war into Lebanon. Frequent news in local media about the uncovering of jihadist terrorist cells feeds this fear.

Yet, the Lebanese interviewees criticise the state for neglecting its duty to provide an educational system and create job opportunities, especially for the youth. They demand the state provide caretaker functions and blame corruption for the current failure to do so. As the in-depth interviews show, young Lebanese deeply resent the existing system of favouritism as it limits their chances for upward mobility through education. The whole country would therefore suffer from brain drain of the well-educated, who seek their fortune by emigration instead. Furthermore, they reject the disunity of the politicians, which allows external powers to intervene and exploit the situation, as the 22-year-old student Dana articulates:

»What's happening today is that we don't have internal policy, because the external policy is controlling us. In Lebanon we have many parties, and each party is guided by an external state. Whatever foreign states want, is being done to us in the country.«

The high awareness of political processes and the very critical attitude towards existing structures sharply contrasts with the replies to the question »Are you interested in politics?«, which 63 percent of Lebanese youth negate and 21 percent answered with »a little interested«. It seems that this question has been misunderstood by many interviewees, who share a distrust in and frustration with their politicians and the existing political institutions, but are very aware of and interested in politics, as especially the qualitative interviews show. Dima declares:

»I have no reason to trust politics [politicians] because it is all about bad deeds. There are lots of problems in Lebanon that cannot be solved, for example the garbage crisis, electricity, the condition of the roads and the supply of water.«

20-year-old university student Sam sharply criticises:

»I do not trust political institutions due to corruption and greed. Politics is full of fraud and cheating. Politicians work for their own interests and not for the interests of the people.«

The frustration with politicians leads to a low interest in voting in parliamentary elections (35 percent would consider doing so), and even a lower actual voting rate in elections (21 %). After all, 15 percent of the respondents have attended a demonstration, ten percent a strike, and eight percent have joined a party. This surpasses their contemporaries in the other MENA countries. The low rate (21 %) of Lebanese youths actively informing themselves about politics may be understood in relation to their demonstrated mistrust in media which are very biased and sectarian – only 15 percent trust the media.

9. The »Arab Spring« from the Perspective of the Lebanese Youth

As has been shown above, the US-administration had framed Lebanon's »Cedar Revolution« of 2005 as proof of a positive outcome of the Arab Spring. It thereby tried to legitimize the Iraq invasion of 2003, claiming it was fostering democracy in the »New Middle East«. Lebanon's youth seems to project its disillusionment with this revolution across to Arab Spring events. Furthermore, they suffer from the violent outcomes of the Syrian uprising in their daily lives. This may explain why they evaluate the events since 2011 with a considerably more sceptical eye than those in other Arab countries. 33 percent of the interviewed youths classify the events in the region as »foreign intervention« and 42 percent as »anarchy« (*fawda*). Further negative associations include »riot« (18 %), »civil war« (10 %), and »coup d'état« (9 %). Only eight percent label the events as part of the »Arab Spring«. Another 17 percent classify these events as »revolutions«. A majority of them support the following negative statements: »The events are responsible for widespread violence« (66 %); »External actors instigated the events« (59 %); »International actors have worked long for the Arab regimes to fall« (54 %); and »The US wanted to stir up the whole region«. All in all, Lebanon's youth is more sceptical in its evaluation than the interviewees of all other countries.

10. Violence and Refugee Status

The questions on respondents' personal »experience of violence« led to very astonishing results. Just 16 percent of Lebanese youth declared that they have witnessed acts of violence. This is the lowest rate of the whole sample. Perhaps, the exposure to political violence since the end of the civil war (which is the life-span of the interviewees) – three wars with Israel, dozens of assassinations, civil-war-like fighting, and bomb attacks – has created a kind of collective amnesia of the violence. Lebanese continue to refer to the civil war as »the incidents« (*al-ahdath*). To sharpen the argument: Lebanese may have learned to deal with their real experiences of violence by suppressing their memories of it, while in other countries violence is still more recent and shocking. This kind of collective experience is also reflected in their (non-)self-description as »refugees«. Only two percent answered the question: »Would you consider yourself a refugee?« affirmatively, although millions of Lebanese have experienced flight and eviction, be it from the Lebanese Civil War or the occupation of South Lebanon by Israel (1978–2000). The proximity of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and up to 400,000 Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon for decades have coined a negative image of a »refugee« as somebody who has abandoned his/her homeland. Conversely, Lebanese who had fled their homes during the Israeli-Lebanese wars of 1993, 1996, and 2006 avoided being designated as refugees and returned as soon as possible to their homes, even though their houses may have been destroyed. Today, Lebanon's policymakers refuse to acknowledge the refugee status of Syrians because they fear their permanent settlement in Lebanon and a repetition of the negative experience with Palestinian refugees.

11. Migration

Nine percent of Lebanon's youth has lived abroad, with highly educated (11 %) clearly surpassing the lesser educated (2 %) in their experience abroad. 41 percent have relatives who lived abroad. These are very high values compared to the youth of the other countries. However, with 45 percent of the Lebanese adolescents playing with the idea of emigration, this shows that former experience or contacts abroad does not necessarily spread the desire to emigrate. This is a similar value

Table 4: »How would you judge the following statements concerning the events in the MENA region since the end of 2010/ beginning of 2011?«

	Total	Egypt	Jordan	Lebanon	Morocco	Palestine	Tunisia	Yemen	Syrian Refugees
With the events we are better off today	12	24	19	6	19	6	11	8	3
The events brought the Arab people closer to each other	20	26	26	13	25	12	24	15	16
The events are responsible for widespread violence	57	44	53	66	32	67	61	68	66
International actors have supported Arab regimes too long	31	24	29	40	23	34	29	29	38
External actors instigated the events	46	31	42	59	29	56	42	55	52
International actors have worked long for the Arab regimes to fall	44	32	41	54	28	57	42	53	44
The US wanted to stir up the whole region	50	38	47	60	35	66	43	58	51

to the average from the other MENA countries in the survey. Yet, former experience may direct the emigration: Germany, France, and Sweden are the preferred destinations in Europe for Lebanese youths, likely because family members have already emigrated to these countries.

12. Conclusions

Lebanon has and continues to experience a politicization of sectarian identities fuelled and exploited by a political elite. Intervention by regional and global actors, willingly or unwillingly, deepens these fragmentation lines. Both, internal and external actors combine to cause political violence that escalated into a civil war. Lebanon is not alone: political protests in Bahrain, Syria, Libya, Iraq, Yemen, and parts of Saudi Arabia have turned into violent conflicts with strong ethnic-sectarian and tribal inclinations, Lebanon has lost its uniqueness of sectarian fragmentation and warfare. The Lebanese Civil War may be seen as a predecessor of current conflicts in the area; like many other regional conflicts,

it began as a political power struggle for socio-economic reform and ended in sectarian warfare. Another parallel is the strong influence of external actors who turned Lebanon into a playground for proxy wars between regional and global actors. The Lebanese people experienced their »Arab Spring« during the Cedar Revolution of 2005, yet, they became disillusioned with politicians who claimed to respond to the population's progressive demands continued to mismanage government agencies. A strong political polarization between the March 8 and March 14 blocs led to a logjam, which paralyzed Lebanese politics for a decade. This negative experience and their mistrust in politicians explain the broad disinterest of the Lebanese youth interviewed for this study with politicians and the Arab Spring. Most Lebanese youth regard the Arab Spring as a product of external intervention. On the other side, Lebanon's transitory power-sharing arrangement Ta'if (1989) helped the nation move past a quagmire of sectarian violence, and – if properly implemented – it might have become a role model for solving the contemporary conflicts in the deeply divided societies of the region (Rosiny 2015).

This brings us to three general observations:

1. The Lebanese example offers an important lesson for statistical methodology. Lebanon proves that there are strong local specifics in the perception of threats and the description of challenges. The style of *perception* and *description* are the result of distinctive historical experiences. Such differences have to be taken into consideration when comparing attitudes of citizens in different societies. It would be interesting for future surveys to elaborate more on local cultures of memory and how they influence the results of comparative surveys. These subtle yet insightful variations may go unnoticed if quantitative statistical analysis is not crosschecked and modified with the qualitative analysis based on the knowledge of the historical and socio-political dynamics of societies.
2. The youth study in Lebanon shows great harmony in answers about the perception of threats, challenges, and hopes. These responses crosscut sectarian divides and political polarization between the March 8 and the March 14 camps. It reveals a broadscale fatigue among Lebanon's youth with the political struggle of the last decade between the March 8 and the March 14 camps. The youth seem to be fed up with politicians who only defend their own side and ignore the interests of the nation. Politicians hence have lost the confidence of a whole generation. Only few young Lebanese engage in politics, although their country offers the greatest freedom to do so in the whole region. Some are planning to leave the country, while most of the youth just turn away from politics.
3. The renewed Lebanese power-sharing arrangement of Taef (1989), with its guaranteed shares of power for representatives of all bigger ethnic-sectarian communities, once was crucial in ending the civil war between sectarian war-lords and militias. Nowadays it is obsolete and regarded as a burden because it keeps young people dependent on sectarian leaders. Therefore, the dynamic elements of the Taef Accord as a transitory power-sharing arrangement should be

resuscitated (Rosiny 2015). The guaranteed shares of power were once designed to restore the basis for a new coexistence after wartime, and then cooperation between representatives of different religious communities in order to overcome (and not to cement) sectarian divides. Taef and the reworked Lebanese constitution of 1990 demanded the abolition of political sectarianism, to be replaced with a secular state based on the rule of law. A decent suggestion of this survey's results may be that this first post-war generation is ready to abolish sectarian quotas and create instead a secular, pluralist political system of fair competition, instead of favoritism and sectarian privileges. This would thereby fulfil the promises of the Taef Accord. Or in Dana's words:

»Something called democracy should be applied, so all communities become one. Not that you're Sunni, you're Shiite, your opinion is different than mine, you're Christian, and I don't know what else. We should be united for the country's interest, we have to stop responding to what the foreign countries want, and refuse their pressure on us.«

As late as 2017, the Lebanese parliamentarians reformed the electoral law towards proportional representation in larger districts instead of a winner-takes-all contest in small electorates. This was a long overdue reform in order to strengthen actors with a national political program instead of sectarian clientelism networks and thereby a first step of overcoming political sectarianism. Sectarian politicians had to pull themselves out of the swamp of sectarianism by their own hair.

»Rather than expecting regional politics to change the status quo in Lebanon, as many factions have done for many years, local parties have decided to make their peace at the Lebanese negotiating table, even if next year's election could threaten their hold on the country's governance.«

Muhanna (2017)

Further fundamental reforms are required in order for Lebanese youth to begin to trust their politicians and their political system.



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