

Lebanese Emigrants' Confidence in the Voting Behavior of Resident Lebanese In the 2022 Parliamentary Elections

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past half-century, an increasing number of countries have granted their citizens residing abroad the right to participate in homeland domestic elections through Out-of-Country Voting (OCV).

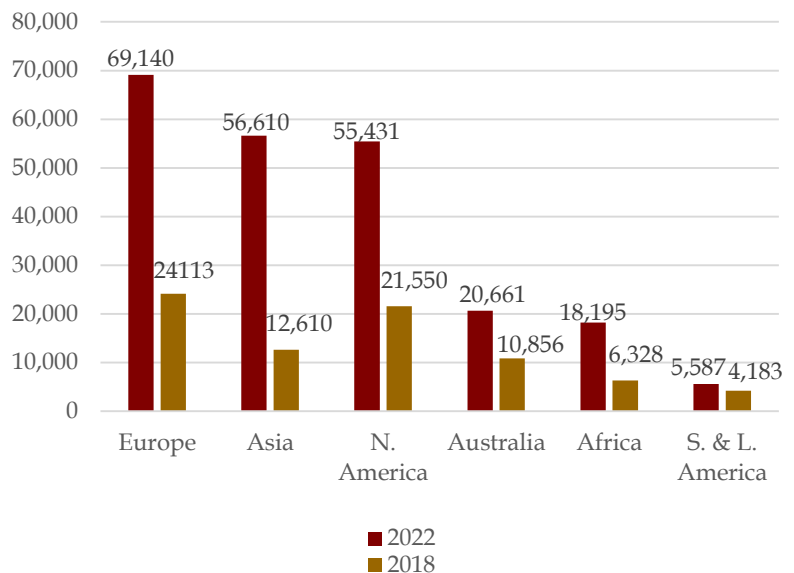
Lebanon is one of these countries. It had its first OCV parliamentary elections in 2018 and has just completed its second OCV in 2022.

There is a lot at stake in these elections after three years of socio-political, financial, and security turmoil. Both resident and non-resident Lebanese are hoping for a significant change in the outcome of these elections that would lead to much-needed serious reforms.

Political parties and civil societies in the country and abroad believe that non-resident Lebanese, i.e., emigrants, are "as potent voters as their homeland compatriots"² and count on them to make a difference in certain competitive districts.³

Lebanese emigrants who cast their absentee ballots on May 6 and 8, 2022 see these elections as "their only chance to voice disapproval of the ruling establishment which has destroyed their homeland."⁴ However, emigrants alone, whose number is estimated at 1,864,900 in 2019 (27% of the total population), of whom 225,624 registered and ended up

Emigrant Voting Registration by Number and Continent for 2018 and 2022 Elections



on the voters' list for the 2022 elections, cannot achieve democratic governance, especially in a country that suffers from a democratic deficit like Lebanon does at this stage. Lebanese residents have a considerable responsibility, along with the organizations and movements with which they engage, to attain this goal.

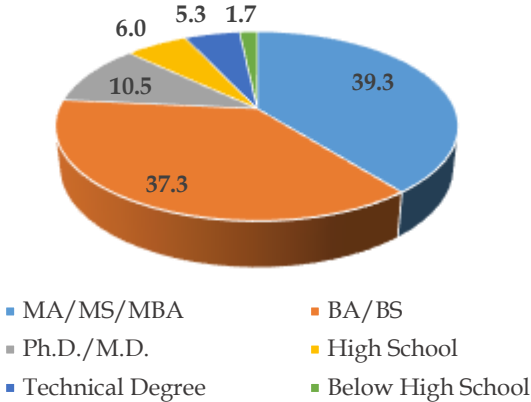
It has long been recognized that the challenge of building a responsive and accountable state lies not only in the institutions of the state themselves, but also in the role that their citizens play,⁵ in acting responsibly. Citizens should be change agents, in articulating their concerns, mobilizing their ranks, pressuring their government for transformation, monitoring government performance, holding elected politicians and government officials accountable, and, above all, electing their representatives responsibly.

To test the perception of the Lebanese emigrants' confidence in Lebanon's residents voting in the parliamentary elections of 2022, we conducted a self-administered questionnaire following the Port of Beirut blast and the calls for a major shift in Lebanon's international relations policies. The survey ran from September to October 2020,⁶ collecting 1,004 responses. In this brief, we share some demographic information on the respondents, but more importantly, their perceptions of their home country at the time of the survey.

RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

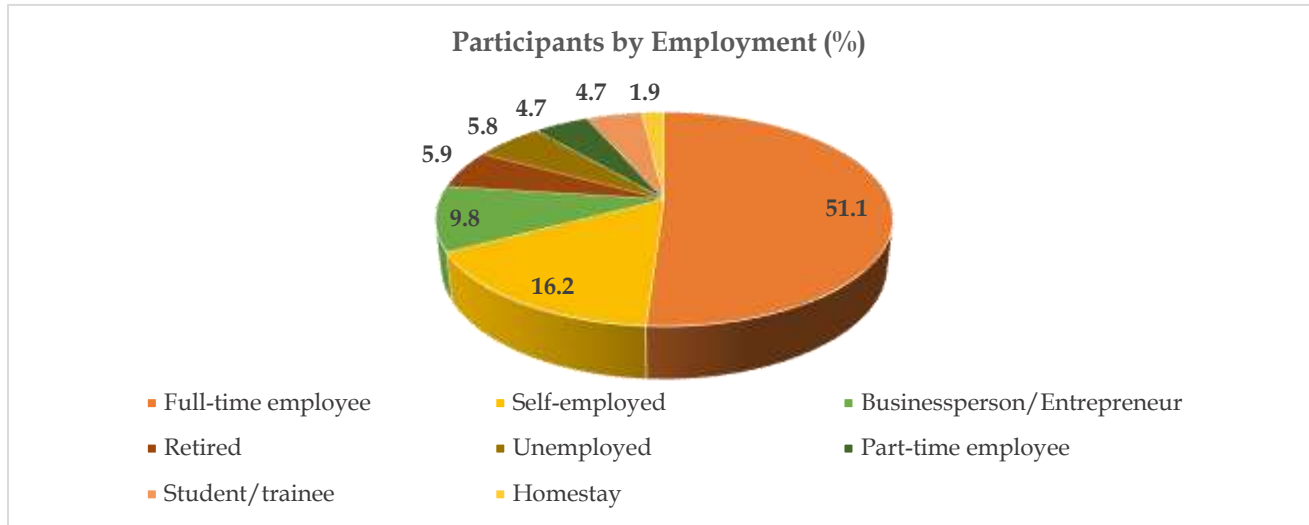
Of the 1,004 respondents, the majority were males (69%), compared with 31% females. The highest segment of participants were aged between 30-39 (26%), 40-49 (20%), and 50-59 (23%). The lowest ratios of participants were aged between 18 and 24 (3%), 25 and 29 (9%), and 60 and above (16%).

Survey Participants by Education (%)



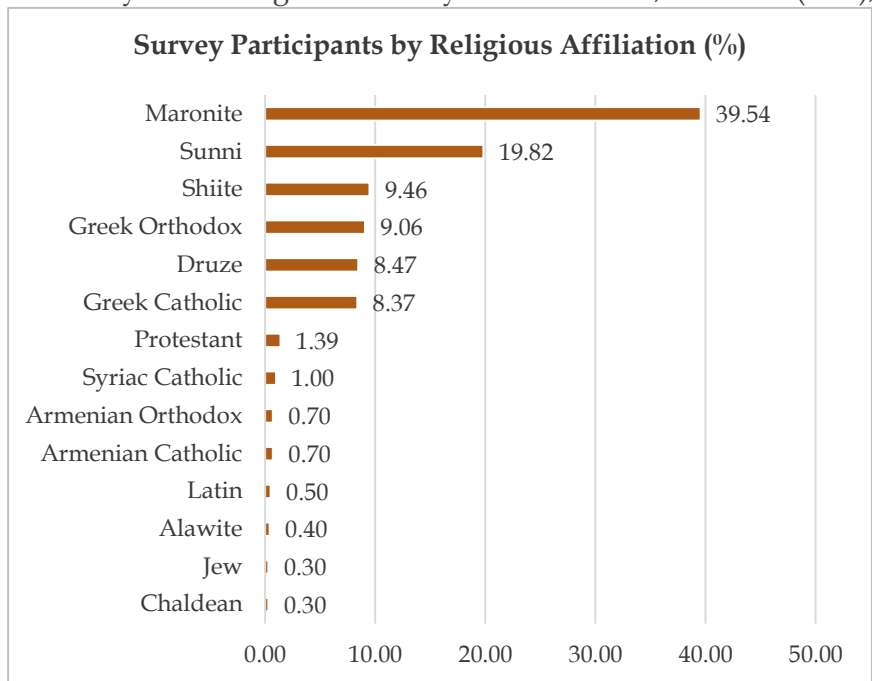
As for the participants' educational level, 39% had an MA or equivalent degree, 37% had a BA or equivalent degree, 10% had a Ph.D. or equivalent degree, 6% had a high school, 5% a technical certificate, and only 2% had less than high school education.

The participants' employment status was as follows, 51% were full-time employees, compared to 16% who were self-employed, and 10% who were businessmen/entrepreneurs. Retired participants made up 6%, the unemployed 5.8%, the part-timers 5%, the students/trainees 5%, and the homestay 2%.

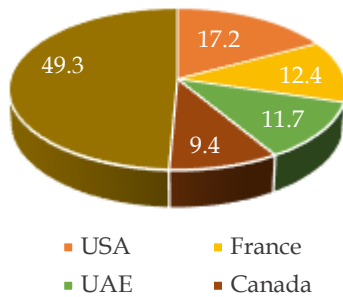


The highest proportion of the respondents were Maronites (39%), followed by Sunnis (19%), Shiites (9%), Greek Orthodox (9%), Druze (8%), and Greek Catholic (8%). The lowest ratio among the respondents is equally among the Chaldeans (0.3%) and the Jews (0.3%).

Around 50% of the participants in the survey were emigrants to only four countries; the USA (17%), France (12%), the UAE (11%), and Canada (9%). The other 49.3% of the emigrants were distributed among 59 other countries. The countries with a significant percentage of respondents other than the aforementioned countries were Australia, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UK, with percentages that range between 3% and 6%.



Respondents' Country of Immigration (%)



The highest percentage of the surveyed (47%) were citizens of the country of immigration with dual citizenship. The other relatively high percentage (36%) were those with permanent residency (Green Card or Carte de Séjour), while the lowest percentage refers to asylum seekers (0.8%) and illegal migrants (0.3%), respectively.

RESPONDENTS' CONFIDENCE IN RESIDENTS VOTING IN THE 2022 ELECTIONS

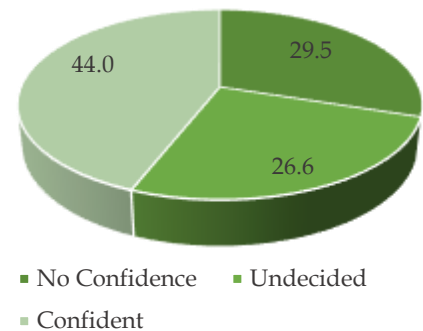
The majority of the respondents (44.0%) had confidence in Lebanon's residents' ability to cast informed votes in the 2022 elections, while 29% had no confidence, and 27% were uncertain of their position.

To many, the 2022 parliamentary elections are perceived "as an opportunity that might bring an end to the ongoing economic and financial crises, ease the political deadlock, and bring new faces to Parliament."⁷

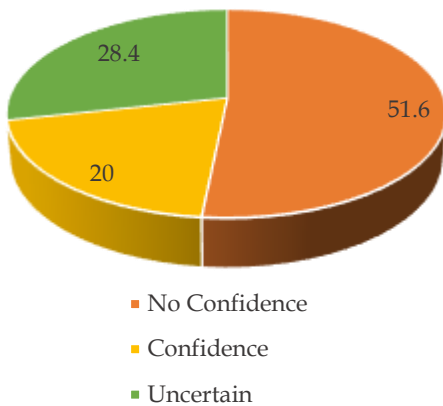
But this opportunity may be lost if Lebanese resident turnout is low. An Oxfam report of April 26, 2022 which sampled 4,670 Lebanese residents, stated only 54% of respondents said that they are planning to vote in the 2022 elections.⁸

Fifty-two percent (51.6%) of the respondents believed that Lebanon's residents will vote along their party line, versus 20% who were confident that they will not, and 28% who are unsure.

Survey Participants' Level of Confidence in Lebanon's Residents Casting Informed Votes (%)

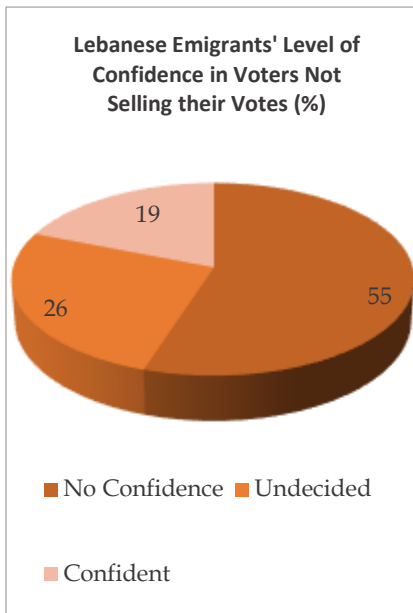


Lebanese Emigrants' Level of Confidence in Lebanon's Residents' Voting against their Party-line (%)



Oxfam's survey revealed that 53% of participants said they will vote for traditional parties, and 41% will vote for independents.⁹

Fifty-five percent (55%) of the respondents declared that they had no confidence in residents' resisting vote selling, versus 26% who had confidence that residents would resist, and 19% who were undecided on the matter.



Oxfam’s survey indicated that voters for both political parties and independent candidates, reported “bribes being distributed in their neighborhoods, which shows that clientelism and vote-buying methods are still predominant.”¹⁰

FINAL NOTE

Despite the fact that there are voices that discredit the elections because they are unlikely to bring about political change in the Chamber of Deputies, Lebanese are called to exercise this political and patriotic duty to vote. The outcomes of these elections lie in the voters’ political maturity to cast ballots for sovereignty, pluralism, and freedom by rising above their hatred and personal vindictiveness, and by shedding their clannism, clientelism, nepotism, and confessionalism.

Lebanese emigrants’ lack of confidence in Lebanon’s residents’ voting behavior may be realistic or pessimistic, but emigrants are accurate in considering that resident voters are the spearhead for liberating Lebanon from corrupt, uncaring, and incompetent representatives and officials. It is believed that as the Lebanese people mature politically, they will "realize that democracy is not a simple matter of casting a vote every four years, but rather a sustained effort to stand up to tyrants who usurp power in the name of an imagined tribe or community. This notwithstanding, the road to change is a long and arduous one and the liberation of Lebanon... cannot be achieved remotely, nor through proxies, but will require the Lebanese [residents] to continue to denounce corruption and call for change."¹¹ Only then will the votes and engagement of Lebanese emigrants and the Lebanese diaspora have a long-term impact.

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² Goldberg, A. C., & Lanz, S. (2019). Living abroad, voting as if at home? Electoral motivations of expatriates. *Migration Studies*, 9(2), 279–310. <https://doi.org/10.1093/migration/mnz018>.

³ For detailed analysis on the Lebanese diaspora and the upcoming election, see Dagher, G. (2022). “The Lebanese Diaspora and the Upcoming Elections: Lessons from the 2018 Voting. The Arab Reform Initiative. <https://www.arab-reform.net/publication/the-lebanese-diaspora-and-the-upcoming-elections-what-lessons-from-the-2018-voting/>.

⁴ Rabah, M. (2021). “Lebanese diaspora vote will not be enough to force change on a corrupt establishment.” *AlArabia News*. <https://english.alarabiya.net/views/news/middle-east/2021/10/13/Lebanese-diaspora-vote-will-not-be-enough-to-force-change-on-a-corrupt-establishment>.

⁵ Gaventa, J. & McGee, R. (2010). “Introduction: making change happen – citizen action and national policy reform.” London: Zed Books. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08b25e5274a27b20009af/1052734655-gaventa_etal.2010-making.pdf.

⁶ The results of this survey were presented on April 2, 2022, by J. Abouarab and G. Hourani in a paper entitled "Connectivity and Collectivity in Times of Crisis: Lebanese Emigrant Women's Perception of Homeland Politics" at the International Studies Association's 2022 Annual Convention in Nashville, Tennessee, USA; and virtually on November 7, 2020, by G. Hourani at the V Congreso Internacional de Escritores por el Líbano of the Centro Argentino de Investigación sobre la Inmigración Libanesa (CAIIL) in Rosario, Argentina.

⁷ Abed, D., Sawaya, R., & Tabbal, N. (2022). "Analyzing Voter Turnout and Behavior in Lebanon." Oxfam. <https://oxfamilibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621366/rr-lebanon-analyzing-voter-turnout-260422-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>, p. 4.

⁸ Ibid., p. 4.

⁹ Ibid, p. 29.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. 29.

¹¹ Rabah, 2021.

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