

Polling Lebanon

Li takes a look back at some of the most significant results in Lebanese public opinion over the last year

The international arena

On the war in Iraq: 81% say it will bring more terrorism to the United States ▶▶▶▶

The year began with the country bracing for a nearby war in Iraq, which was the subject of a February poll conducted by *Information International* and Zogby International. Perceptions and attitudes of 400 respondents in the Greater Beirut area toward the United States were gauged, and pessimism was high in terms of the consequences of the war on Iraq. While 81% expected more terrorism toward the U.S., only 9% believed the conflict would result in less terrorist actions, while 6.5% said it would not affect the occurrence of such acts.

A rise in democracy was not expected as a result of the war either. Instead, **72.5% predicted there would be less democracy after the war**, and only 7.3% countered that claim. The outlook on peace was equally dire, with close to **79% of those polled forecasting less peace in the Middle East region**, as opposed to 8.7% who believed the conflict in Iraq would bring about more peace.

Prospects toward a settlement of the Arab-Israeli issue would also worsen, according to 82.2% of those polled. Less than 5% expected them to improve in light of the Iraqi conflict, while 8.5% said it would not change the course of a settlement and 4.5% reported uncertainty.

In terms of the interests shaping American policy toward Iraq, the responses ranked as follows (percentages add up to more than 100% because respondents could give more than one answer):

- Oil: 91%
- Support for Israel: 68.8%
- Imperialism: 38.8%
- Peace and stability in the Middle East: 17.2%
- Economic development: 10.2%
- Democracy: 9.5%

Finally, the poll indicated that the shaping of attitudes was largely based on U.S. policy (according to 58%) rather than the personal or cultural values of the respondent (28.5%), while 13.5% were unsure.

Domestic issues

On the public debt: 53.8% say eliminating waste and corruption is the best way to reduce Lebanon's public debt ▶▶▶▶

In a poll of 600 Greater Beirut residents in September 2003, 53.8% put eliminating waste and corruption ahead of privatization (18.8%) in dealing with the debt. Administrative reform ranked

third with 14%, followed by more efficient tax collection (8%) and an increase in indirect taxes (3.5%).

However, approximately one quarter of those polled felt that privatization would deprive the country of income in the long run, while 27.7% thought it would improve services and 12.3% said it would save money in the long-run. Another 12.7% believed it would increase corruption, while 6.7% thought it would reduce it and 9.2% felt privatization would have no effect.

On the economy, the budget, taxes and reform: 55.2% say the government's top budget priority should be healthcare said 55.2% ▶▶▶▶

Education was the second priority according to 15.5% of those polled, followed by cutting taxes (14.2%), reducing the public debt (8.8%) and roads and transport infrastructure (2.3%).

Criticism of the political class was widespread, with **47% of those polled blaming politicians for the country's economic woes**, while 25.5% said regional instability was the main culprit. The Prime Minister was held solely responsible by 12% of respondents and 11% felt that he, more than others, was to blame.

The public's view of an increase in the VAT from 10% to 16% was largely critical, with 88% of respondents against the move and 6% in favor of it.

Real reform should take place through the application of the Illicit Wealth Law, according to 20.6%. Another 20.2% suggested eliminating the confessional system of politics, while 17.9% believed that adopting a merit-based approach when appointing officials was the best solution. The dismissal of corrupt employees was proposed by 16.7%, restructuring the public sector was suggested by 12% and putting an end to political interference in the different administrations was recommended by 11.4%.

On the cellular issue: 81.1% of those polled felt that special interests were behind the result of the first tender, while a mere 5.7% disagreed.

On the shopping festival: 41.4% of merchants polled stated that commercial activity was worse ▶▶▶▶

Another 40% said it was the same and 17.2% felt it was better. Approximately 77% of the merchants polled said they participated in the shopping festival, compared with 81.4% the previous year.

The number of visitors who chose to stay in a hotel fell 11% from last year to 40%, while 28.9% stayed with family, com-

pared with 13.4% last year, and 15.6% resided in a furnished apartment, compared with 2.2% in 2003. Another 13.3% stayed with friends and 2.2% had their own residence.

Over half of visitors (57.4%) heard about the shopping festival on satellite TV. Others heard about it through friends (37%), through family (3.7%) or from the print media (1.9%).

Most of the people polled (67.7%) approved of this year's campaign theme, "Lebanon: Time and Place", while 24.9% did not like it.

General behavior and attitudes

On sex: 61% of university students approve of sex before marriage ▶▶▶▶

An opinion poll conducted by *Information International* for the American University of Beirut Medical Center in November 2003 explored university students' perceptions on issues of sexuality. The students in the study were distributed equally by gender and by university over the following five institutions: American University of Beirut, Université St. Joseph, Beirut Arab University, Lebanese University Campus 1 and Lebanese University Campus 2.

While the majority of males approved of premarital sex, a much lower 27.3% of female students said they approved of the practice. In terms of religion, 44.2% of Christian females and 76.4% of Christian males approved of sex before marriage, compared with 13% of Muslim females and 48.8% of Muslim males.

In general, anal sex was considered an acceptable alternative by 20.7% of the women polled, compared with 36.3% of the men polled.

On virginity and marriage: more than half of men polled (57.3%) said they would marry a non-virgin ▶▶▶▶

A breakdown by religion showed that 72.4% of Christian men had no problem with such an arrangement, compared with 45.8% of Muslim men.

On capital punishment: 40.7% of respondents were categorically opposed to capital punishment ▶▶▶▶

Another 15.3% supported it in principle, 43.5% said it depended on the crime and less than 1% did not specify a response. In terms of religion, Muslim respondents were more likely to approve of the death penalty (41.3%), followed by Christians (29.2%) and Druze (18.2%).

On reading: 36.7% of the respondents said they read nothing ▶▶▶▶

This poll was conducted with 600 respondents in the Greater Beirut area. It gathered basic information on understanding the public interest in cultural activities relating to music, theater, cinema, television and radio, as well as reading habits and visits to exhibitions, archeological sites and the National Museum.

Newspapers constitute the preferred literary medium, according to 35.5% of those who read, followed by magazines at 34% and books at 30.7%. The poll showed that 62.1% of newspaper readers only read one paper and that over 60% are not daily readers. The majority of those who read books only do so from time to time (41.4%), as opposed to 35.3% who read on a daily basis and 20% who said they read weekly. One quarter of those who read magazines read one magazine per month, while 29.7% read two and 45.3% read three or more.

On TV and radio, 99% of respondents have a TV in their home, 92.5% have a radio and 79% have a satellite connection ▶▶▶▶

Almost 88% of respondents acknowledging regular TV viewing habits. Moreover, 81.3% of the respondents who had stated that they do not read owing to a lack of time were found to be watching an average of 1.7 hours of TV per day.

Movies were rated as the number one TV attraction by 68% of respondents. The number two viewership category was the news, according to 65% of those polled, followed by regular series such as soap operas, with a 39.9% viewership.

77% of those polled were radio listeners, with 70.8% tuning into the radio from their homes, 53.7% from their cars and 20.8% from the workplace (multiple answers shown). Top listener preference was music (82.3%), followed by news (43.9%), religious broadcasts (12.8%), political shows (12.3%) and sports broadcasts (7.6%).

On cinema, only 30% of those polled go to the movies, and the 18–24 age bracket accounts for the lion's share of total attendance (57%). Also, 91% of cinema-goers attend foreign films, compared with 56% who prefer Arabic movies.

On theater and exhibitions, 89.2% never attend the theater and 76.3% never attend exhibitions.

On the National Museum, only 31.5% of respondents have made a visit, while 4.5% said they made an attempt but it was closed at the time.

On archeological sites, 10.2% of respondents have not visited any, while 17.1% claim to have visited them all. Another 12.9% visited Jeita, 15.9% visited Aanjar and 17.1% visited Baalbeck.

Finally, almost 70% of respondents do not believe that the Lebanese government supports cultural activities.

Out of those who do not believe there is enough government support, 77% were respondents who do not attend exhibitions and 66% had never been to the National Museum.

Please note that some responses do not add up to 100% since only the most significant replies were noted in this review. ■