

SECURITY THREAT PERCEPTIONS IN LEBANON

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SUMMARY

Human security needs and the security concerns of the public are considered a cornerstone for meaningful human-centred security sector reform (SSR). With this in mind, and in an attempt to foster a debate around SSR in Lebanon, International Alert and the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies conducted a nationwide survey about the perceptions of security threats and the institutions providing security. The survey revealed that a majority of Lebanese feel less safe now than three years ago, that most security threats are considered very serious on the national level but less serious on the local level, and that the threat posed by Syrian refugees is consistently identified as serious across the country. Crime threats and security challenges were nuanced across regional, sectarian, urban/rural and gender divides.

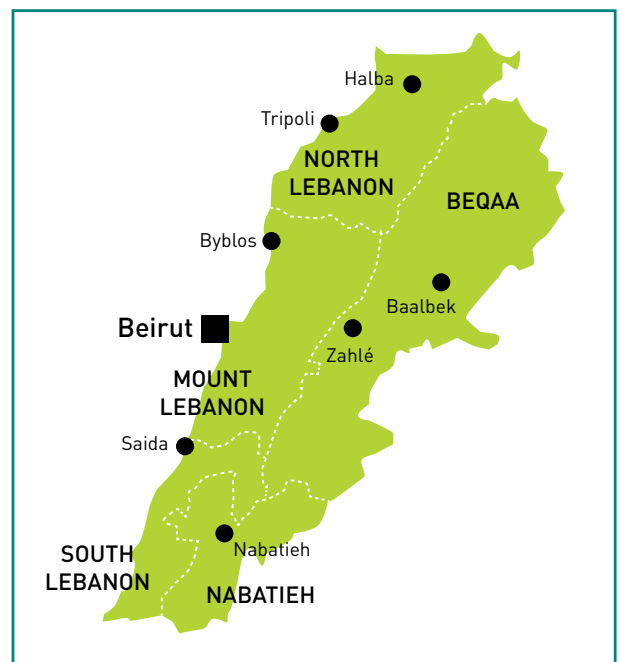
INTRODUCTION

Instability and conflict have prevailed in Lebanese modern history. Deep internal disagreements, divergent loyalties and external destabilising factors have all contributed to an environment prone to conflict and disputes. In these circumstances, security provision was always going to be a huge challenge, as has proven to be the case. Nevertheless, due to the highly politicised and sensitive nature of the topic, the security issue has been confined to a handful of researchers and political circles, making an informed debate and transparent research difficult.

SSR has risen to the top of the global development agenda for the last two decades. It has been increasingly recognised that insecurity is a huge obstacle to development.

The 2003 *Human security now* report of the Human Security Commission introduced a new paradigm to security, which moves away from the traditional state-sector security to “one that concentrates on the security of the individuals, their protection and empowerment”.¹

To achieve these broader goals, SSR therefore needs to be informed about people’s perceptions of security, threats and risks. This is particularly important in a country such as Lebanon, where these perceptions differ across sect, location and political affiliation. In-depth information and analysis of people’s perceptions, concerns and expectations can prepare the ground for an informed political dialogue that, in the longer term, could foster a nationally owned reform process designed to address the diverse security challenges facing the state and its population.



¹ Commission on Human Security [2003]. *Human security now*. New York. Available at <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/91BAEEDBA50C6907C1256D19006A9353-chs-security-may03.pdf>

SECURITY DEFINITIONS

“‘Security system reform’ is another term used to describe the transformation of the ‘security system’ – which includes all the actors, their roles, responsibilities and actions – working together to manage and operate the system in a manner that is more consistent with democratic norms and sound principles of good governance, and thus contributes to a well-functioning security framework.”

OECD (2001). *DAC guidelines: Helping prevent violent conflict*. p.38.

“In the final analysis, human security is a child who did not die, a disease that did not spread, a job that was not cut, an ethnic tension that did not explode in violence, a dissident who was not silenced. Human security is not a concern with weapons – it is a concern with human life and dignity.”

UNDP (1994). *Human development report*. p.22.

“Human security can be said to have two main aspects. It means, first, safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease and repression. And second, it means protections from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities.”

UNDP (1994). *Human development report*. p.23.

Study overview and methodology

Alert and the LCPS attempted, through this 30-month project, to produce valuable data informing the debate around security and security provision in Lebanon. After a process of standardisation and systematisation, a huge part of the data gathered will be made public in a series of papers designed to highlight several key themes in relation to security and SSR in Lebanon.

Two papers will analyse the security threat and security providers’ perceptions of the Lebanese public. Another paper will focus on the phenomenon of Syrian refugees in Lebanon who are considered a security threat by survey respondents. Two other papers will focus on the gender perspective of security and security provision and the role of civil society organisations and SSR. Alternative policing schemes and their manifestations and potential in Lebanon, as well as the Lebanese security apparatus, will be the themes of two other papers. A final piece will synthesise all the information presented in the previous papers and offer a broader outlook.

The overarching rationale behind studying Lebanese citizens’ perceptions of the security challenges facing Lebanon and its people is to explore the actual origins of insecurity, to untie the real and illusory threat sources, and to present the security sector institutions with some of the information needed for more human-centred security sector policy formulation. Alert has adopted this approach as a tool for promoting people-centred SSR and, to a certain extent, for more transparent, responsive and effective security provision.

A nationwide opinion survey was conducted in May to June 2013. It was preceded by extensive desk research and focus groups in addition to a series of meetings with representatives of state security institutions in order to lay the ground for the survey. The survey was divided along two main axes: perceptions of security challenges and threats; and perceptions of the security providers. This background paper focuses on the first axis of the survey and attempts to provide a comprehensive overview of the data gathered as well as to explain some of its interesting and worthwhile features. The first section of the paper offers a background to the political and security situation in Lebanon since 2005. This short narrative is essential in order to situate the survey findings in the dynamic regional and national context to enable better understanding of the emerging patterns. The second section presents the findings of the perceptions survey, focusing on security threat perceptions, and attempts to explain their nature and causes.

BACKGROUND TO POLITICAL AND SECURITY SITUATION IN LEBANON

In multi-sectarian and multi-ethnic states, where the state’s uniting influence has been eroded, communities start to harbour suspicion and unease towards each other. Each community starts to believe that the other constitutes a threat to its existence and that it has to ‘guard’ itself against ‘the other’. Similar to the security dilemma theory in international relations, communities aspiring to protect their own security will increase the other communities’ distrust, leading to even higher levels of suspicion. Under these circumstances, where the weakness of central government and its security services is coupled with mutual distrust between the different communities, insecurity becomes a challenge.

The extreme manifestation of this distrust is civil war. However, in most instances, it creates an atmosphere of insecurity, doubt and misjudged concerns. This distrust between different communities has an impact on security concerns and the environment in which community members assess security threats and respond to them. The study of this phenomenon and people's perceived security threats is an important step in gaining a true insight into the perspective of the community, their perceived security threats and the levels of inconsistency between real and perceived threats. It also gives an insight into the reasons behind these perceptions and, importantly, the measures required to defuse such tensions and to provide security and safety.

Thus, understanding the perception of threats by the public is essential for reforming the security sector. In most cases, these perceptions will be somewhat different to the reality on the ground. Identifying and understanding the worries and experiences that underpin such perceptions are essential for addressing them. In situations similar to the one described above, anxiety and distrust between the communities will influence their members, sometimes leading to misperception or misevaluation of existing security threats. Any reform initiative aimed at better security provision will undoubtedly need to understand these realities and the right methods to address them; it cannot focus solely on developing, democratising or modernising the security providers.

The survey commissioned by Alert and the LCPS, and conducted by Statistics Lebanon, aimed to explore the perception of security threats among the Lebanese public. This paper identifies and analyses these perceptions based on the survey report and the preceding focus groups report.

THE CHANGING SECURITY LANDSCAPE OF LEBANON

The Lebanese civil war, which lasted 15 years, ended in 1990. Its potential had been evident since the late 1960s, with the increasing presence and activities of the Palestinian guerrillas in Lebanon and their clashes with specific sections of the Lebanese population. Although the civil war, which 'officially' started in 1975, was directly triggered by an incident between Palestinians and the Phalanges Party in Beirut, it quickly and continuously changed in nature. In addition to the Lebanese–Palestinian rivalry, the war rapidly evolved into a clash along sectarian identities, an offshoot of the Arab–Israeli conflict and, on a bigger scale, a Cold War-era rivalry between the two camps.

The Taef Agreement in 1989 ended the Lebanese civil war and established a 'reformed' state apparatus based on sectarian power sharing. This gave every major sect considerable influence and presence in the government system as well as veto power over major decisions. The huge Syrian military presence in Lebanon ensured relative stability of this system until 2005. However, the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri in February 2005 significantly altered this status quo. It resulted in the withdrawal of the Syrian military from Lebanon, throwing the country into a political deadlock and a security crisis that has prevailed ever since. Hariri was a key political player in Lebanon and in the region, as well as being one of the more prominent representatives of the Sunni community. His assassination signalled a major shift in regional politics. It led to accusations against the Syrian regime, headed by President Bashar al-Asad, a member of the Alawite sect, which is an offshoot of Shiite Islam; and against the major Shiite political and military party in Lebanon and the region – Hezbollah. This contributed to the heightening of sectarian tensions to unprecedented levels in Lebanon and the region.

In July 2006, Israel initiated a 34-day war on Lebanon. After Hezbollah fighters had ambushed and abducted two Israeli officers, the Israeli government decided to destroy Hezbollah's capabilities and force it to disarm. Following massive air and land strikes on Lebanon, as well as sea and air blockades, the United Nations Security Council approved Resolution 1701. The Lebanese and Israeli governments accepted the UN resolution. Although the war caused enormous damage to Lebanese infrastructure, it failed to destroy or disarm Hezbollah.

In May 2007, after a security incident involving the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) and army officers/members of the Fatah al-Islam Sunni Islamist militia in northern Lebanon, the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) was tasked with capturing and destroying the militiamen who were hiding in the densely populated Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp. The army's assault on the camp, which lasted over three months, succeeded in dismantling Fatah al-Islam, resulting in the killing or arrest of hundreds of its members. However, it also led to civilian casualties, more than 150 army deaths and huge material destruction to the Nahr al-Bared camp.

Against a backdrop of these clashes and the political deadlock within government, direct clashes between the main forces – the March 8 and March 14 alliances – brought the country to the verge of civil war in May 2008. The Lebanese government's decision to remove the airport security chief in Beirut and to destroy Hezbollah's military communications system sparked the clashes. The next day, Hezbollah fighters stormed several areas of Beirut and Mount Lebanon, taking control of several state-owned buildings. The opposition militants also seized several pro-government party headquarters and media outlets. However, the fighting eventually stopped and things returned to normal after an internationally sponsored and regionally administered agreement was signed in Doha between the Lebanese government and opposition forces on 21 May 2008.

POLITICAL LANDSCAPE OF LEBANON

The Lebanese political scene is roughly divided into two main blocs – the March 8 and March 14 alliances. The March 8 alliance refers to a coalition of political parties sympathetic to the current Syrian government, such as Hezbollah, Amal, Free Patriotic Movement and Marada. The name dates back to 8 March 2005, when several political parties called for a mass protest in downtown Beirut to thank Syria for helping Lebanon. The March 14 alliance is named after the date of the Cedar Revolution, which was triggered by the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri. The alliance calls for the withdrawal of Syrian troops from Lebanon and more independent leadership away from Syrian interests. It includes the Future Movement, Lebanese Forces and Kataeb.

Armed clashes have been ongoing since 2008, sometimes with deadly consequences in Tripoli, Lebanon's second largest city in the north of the country.* The impact of the Syrian crisis on Lebanon has triggered even more tensions across the country – for example, in relation to the Hezbollah critic Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir in June 2013. Assir had called for sit-in protests to object to what he called Hezbollah's control of the Lebanese state, its 'violations' against the Sunni community and its fighting in Syria alongside the Syrian regime. Assir also claimed that the national LAF was following Hezbollah orders and carrying out the party's plans. These tensions eventually led to bloody clashes between Assir's supporters and the army, leading to the death of army soldiers, the capture or killing of Assir supporters and the fleeing of Assir himself.

In addition, the Syrian crisis has further fuelled the Sunni-Shiite divide in the region as a whole and mainly in Lebanon. With Hezbollah fighting in Syria alongside the regime forces and the Syrian army bombing border villages and mountains to target rebel groups, a series of suicide bombings and explosions commenced in July 2013, targeting Beirut and Baalbek neighbourhoods, which are seen as Hezbollah strongholds.

* For more on this topic, see: R. Lefèvre (2014). *The roots of crisis in Northern Lebanon*. Beirut: Carnegie Middle East Center. Available at <http://carnegie-mec.org/2014/04/15/roots-of-crisis-in-northern-lebanon/h86r>

MAIN FINDINGS ON PERCEIVED SECURITY THREATS

Against this political and security landscape, Alert and the LCPS sought to assess the security threats perceived by the Lebanese public. The key question investigated was: what do the Lebanese perceive as threats to their security? Several other questions were asked to examine the different types of security challenges and crime threats, sense of security and the perceived reasons behind insecurity and crime. The following are the main findings obtained from the research.

People feel that the security situation is worse now than it was three years ago

The security spill-over from the Syrian conflict drew closer to the capital as radical Islamists set off car bombs in several neighbourhoods in Beirut from July 2013 until January 2014, killing innocent people and injuring hundreds. The survey was conducted right before this wave of suicide bombings in the southern suburbs of Beirut, but in a context where Lebanese society had seen little stability and peace in the past decade, as well as facing the additional humanitarian crisis with over a million Syrian refugees fleeing the conflict in their homeland and finding refuge in Lebanon.

Given these realities, it was not surprising that 74% of respondents indicated that Lebanon was less safe than it was three years ago, with specifically higher rates in Mount Lebanon and the North and with a higher proportion of Sunni respondents compared with other communities.² The survey conducted by Northern Ireland Co-Operation Overseas (NI-CO) a couple of months after the Alert-LCPS survey further reinforced this perception: 62% of respondents said that they did not feel safe at all in Lebanon, while 22% answered 'rather not'.³ The higher tendency of threat perception within the Sunni community can be easily attributed to the heightened sense of persecution being experienced by this group since the assassination of Rafik Hariri and the rise of Hezbollah's military strength as well as its fighting in Syria. Moreover, 66% of respondents who perceived Lebanon as being less safe today than it was three years ago belonged to socio-economic groups earning less than US\$2,500 a month.⁴

2 K. El Mufti (2014). *Additional insight to survey analysis*, Report commissioned by International Alert. p.6.

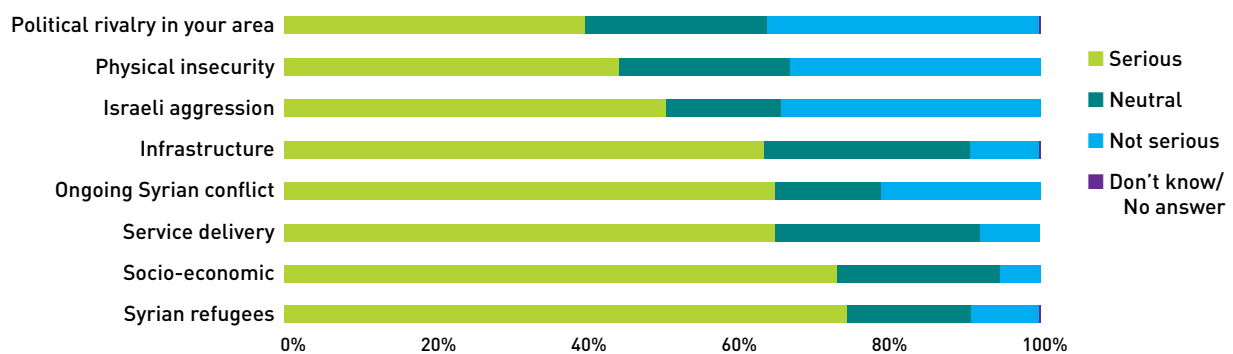
3 NI-CO (2013). *Report on ISF trust*. p.13.

4 K. El Mufti (2014). *Op. cit.* p.6.

Political instability, physical insecurity and the war in Syria are seen as the three main national security challenges

When asked to state the security challenges at national level, 95% of respondents identified political instability as a source of insecurity for the country. Other major concerns for insecurity related to physical insecurity (96%), the war in Syria (95%), the threat of Syrian refugees (91%) and Israel (88%). Lack of security, terrorist acts, basic living needs, unemployment and risk of civil wars were also identified in the NI-CO survey as challenges to safety and security.⁵ However, these rates dropped considerably when the survey sample was asked the same question but this time at the level of their locality. In fact, only 40% of respondents considered political instability a source of insecurity, while the perceived threat of physical insecurity dropped to 44% of respondents, Israel to 50% and the war in Syria to 65% (see Figure 1). Concerns over the Syrian refugees maintained a high rate, although lower at 75%. This suggests that a large majority of the Lebanese population are feeling the impact of the presence of Syrian refugees.⁶

Figure 1: Perceived seriousness of security challenges facing respondents' localities (%)



Source: E. Gordon (2014). *Perceptions of security and insecurity in Lebanon*. Beirut: International Alert Lebanon. p.16.

In general, similar challenges were perceived to constitute similar levels of threat across Lebanon for most respondents. Unsurprisingly, however, there were differences between the groups in the perceived seriousness of challenges faced by respondents in the area where they live. Syrian refugees posed the most serious challenge for people living in Beirut and Mount Lebanon, while Israeli aggression constituted the most serious challenge for those living in Beqaa and South Lebanon. In North Lebanon, socio-economic threats were considered the most serious challenges being faced, while in El Nabatieh the Syrian conflict was viewed as the most threatening factor. Many of these threats are also more likely to be considered serious in urban areas, among women and previous victims of crime, particularly if there are armed groups present in the vicinity.⁷ These perception differences are understandable to a certain extent. Proximity to Israel and the direct and indirect burden of Syrian refugees can be singled out as reasons for the prominence of threats regarding Syrian refugees and Israeli aggression. In addition, the sectarian identity of the majority population in some areas and the association of certain sects with specific warring parties in Syria on the one hand, along with the fact that North Lebanon and Akkar are considered to be some of the least developed areas in Lebanon on the other hand, can explain the remainder of the dominant threats.

Interestingly, members of the Sunni community appeared to be more likely to view challenges seriously, as did people from Beqaa. In addition, those who support political parties (partisans) were more likely to consider the challenges of the Syrian conflict as serious, showing less concern about service delivery and infrastructural challenges (such as transport, electricity, telephone and internet).⁸ The latter may suggest that those who are partisan are less likely to be disadvantaged in terms of accessing services or may simply be more focused on politico-security challenges. Gender, age, education and being from an urban or rural area did not appear to have a significant impact on the seriousness of challenges perceived to be facing the areas where people live.

⁵ NI-CO (2013). *Op. cit.* p.13.

⁶ K. El Mufti (2014). *Op. cit.* pp.10–11.

⁷ E. Gordon (2014). *Op. cit.* pp.16–17.

⁸ *Ibid.* p.18.

The fact that there is a marked difference in the perception of security challenges between the national and local levels points to an interesting tendency among the Lebanese public. The perception of threat levels for the whole country is clearly not based on the assessment of one's own environment. Respondents have expressed medium levels of security threats in relation to challenges facing their own localities, but much higher levels in terms of threats at the national level.

Another indicator pointing to this trend of heightened concern at the national level is the fact that most Lebanese feel that other areas are far less safe than the area in which they live. For instance, only 13% of respondents said they would feel safe travelling long distances within the country compared with 64% of the respondents who felt otherwise. At the same time, 21% of respondents said they were concerned when commuting to work, while 81% of respondents stated that their region was safe or relatively safe,⁹ showing that a majority of the population hold an exaggerated perception that other areas are less safe than where they live.

Although there is no conclusive reason for this phenomenon, the heightened perception of insecurity at national level could be partly attributed to sources of information and available communication tools. It is understandable that various media outlets will focus on security incidents and violent clashes as newsworthy items. Hence, the average citizen may develop an unbalanced perception of security challenges as a result of security-focused news reporting. With 82% of respondents citing local TV channels as their source of information and 44% using the internet for browsing news, the population has developed a sense of insecurity that is largely inconsistent with actual numbers of crime incidents and with the 13% of respondents who said they were victims of crime.¹⁰ It is also inconsistent with the 14% who have visited an ISF station and with the percentages who have actually experienced violent incidents, as shown in Table 1.¹¹

Table 1: Direct experience of violence by respondents and close relatives between 2005 and 2012

Type of violence	None at all (%)	To a 'large' or 'very large' extent (%)
Verbal threats and harassment	78.5	4.9
Street disturbances	61.7	18.3
Unofficial checkpoints	86.8	3.2
Kidnapping	89.7	3.3
Bombings	84.6	8.5
Armed clashes	71.8	8.9

Source: K. El Mufti (2014). Op. cit. p.13.

The exaggerated perception of security threats generally, compared with 'actual' levels of threats, is a phenomenon that needs to be studied in depth and which has important implications for both SSR initiatives and security policies. The outlook of security institutions towards security provision and the image they portray to the public could warrant review. At the same time, greater focus could be placed on the role of the media and their security threat narratives in light of some of the above accounts.

All crimes are perceived to be serious at the national level but less so at the local level

Concerning types of crimes, most people identified the different types of crimes (property-related, violent, political, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) crimes) as serious concerns for Lebanon and, to a lesser extent, for the areas in which they live.¹²

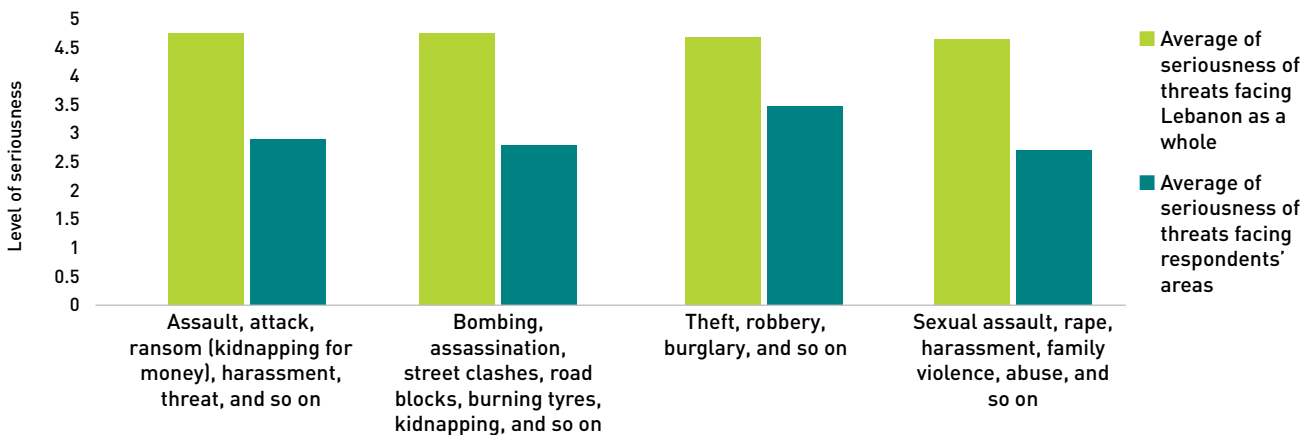
There were obvious differences between respondents in the various areas regarding the perceived seriousness of the different types of crimes. Respondents in the North – an area that had been entangled in violent clashes between militants of Bab el-Tebbeh and Jabal Mohsen for months at the time of the survey – did not appear to consider the property-related crimes of theft and burglary to be the most serious. All the other *mouhafazas* (provinces) rated them as the most serious type of crime. Most of the respondents in the North rated political crimes, such as assassinations and bombings, as the most serious type of crime.

⁹ K. El Mufti (2014). Op. cit. p.12.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.13.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² E. Gordon (2014). Op. cit. p.23.

Figure 2: Extent of seriousness of threats facing Lebanon as a whole versus respondents' own areas

Source: E. Gordon (2014). Op. cit. p.24.

Perceptions of the different sectarian communities also diverged, with members of the Sunni community being much more likely to give a higher rating for the seriousness of threats such as bombings, assassinations, street clashes, roadblocks, burning tyres, kidnappings, as well as the threat of assaults and attacks, than members of other sectarian communities. For example, 57% of Sunnis considered bombings and assassinations to be serious threats and 46% viewed assaults and attacks as serious threats, compared with 35% and 22% of Shiites, respectively.¹³ This points to the discourse and sense of victimhood that has developed in the Sunni community as mentioned earlier.¹⁴

Interesting differences also emerged between the perceptions of those who are members of political parties and those who are not. Partisans were much more likely to consider the threat of theft, robbery and other property-related crimes to be serious in their areas. However, all other threats were considered to be of slightly more concern by those who were not members of a political party, compared with the partisan respondents.¹⁵ This might indicate that members of political parties would be less inclined to rate attacks, sexual violence and political threats as serious due to their advantageous situation, in terms of being better informed about crime levels and the political and security situation. If accurate, it may also suggest that better and more balanced access to news and information could result in a less exaggerated perception of crime threats.

Respondents rate security threats less seriously if a permanent ISF station is present nearby

In another important finding for the purposes of SSR and citizens' security needs, the survey revealed that people were much less likely to give a high rating for the seriousness of these threats if a permanent ISF station was present in the area. For example, 65% of respondents with no ISF station nearby considered assaults and political violence to be serious, compared with 34% of those who lived near an ISF station. Moreover, people were much more likely to view the threat of sexual violence in their area as serious if there was no ISF station nearby (at 70% of respondents with no ISF station compared with 30% of those living near an ISF station).¹⁶ The matter of ISF stations' presence must be studied further and from different outlooks. This study can only present the respondents' perceptions; it does not cover the actual distribution of ISF's presence in Lebanon or the institutional challenges and possible scarcities facing the ISF.

More people in urban areas than in rural areas consider theft and other property-related crime threats to be serious

Differences in perceived crime threats were also noticeable between rural and urban residents. The threat of theft and other property-related crimes was more likely to be considered serious in the area by those living in an urban location. In contrast, all other threats (assaults, political violence and sexual violence) were more likely to be viewed as serious in the area among those living in rural locations. For example, while 50% of urban residents considered the threat of property-related crime to be serious in the area, only 42% of people from rural

¹³ Ibid. p.25.

¹⁴ For more on this topic, see: International Crisis Group (2010). *Lebanon's politics: The Sunni community and Hariri's future current*, Middle East Report No. 96. Available at <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/Middle%20East%20North%20Africa/Iraq%20Syria%20Lebanon/Lebanon/96%20Lebanon%20Politics%20-%20The%20Sunni%20Community%20and%20Hariri's%20Future%20Current.ashx>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ E. Gordon (2014). Op. cit. p.26.

areas agreed. However, 42% of people living in rural areas viewed sexual violence as a serious problem in their area compared with 29% of people in urban areas.¹⁷ These percentages correlate with the general belief that,

42% of people living in rural areas viewed sexual violence as a serious problem in their area compared with 29% of people in urban areas.

in tighter-knit communities such as rural communities in villages, people rarely worry about ‘softer’ crimes such as theft and burglary because ‘they all know each other’, while in urban areas, due to population density and larger spaces, these crimes are supposed to be more widespread. It is possible that more people in rural areas perceive sexual crimes to be serious because these

types of crimes are slightly more likely to be exposed and prosecuted in urban areas. In cities, the existence of organisations and stakeholders fighting sexual crimes and gender-based violence may have contributed to the fact that more people in rural areas consider these threats to be serious.

Generally, more women than men consider these crime threats to be serious

In terms of gendered differences in crime perceptions, in most places in Lebanon women seemed to view all these violent threats as being slightly more serious than men did. However, this difference was only significant in a few places, such as Koura where 77% of women compared with 57% of men considered the threat of assault and similar violent crimes to be serious in their area. In contrast, in a few areas, men considered violent threat to be more serious than their female counterparts did. For instance, in Tripoli almost twice as many men (41%) as women (24%) perceived the threat of property-related violence, such as theft, to be serious. In general, where the perceived seriousness of the violent threats was highest – in places such as West Beqaa, Akkar, Miniyeh-Danniyeh and Saida – more women than men expressed concern. With respect to sexual assault, rape and other SGBV crimes, unsurprisingly more women than men rated the seriousness of such threats in their areas as high.¹⁸ While it is understandable that women may feel more threatened than men because of the various physical, social and cultural barriers hindering their access to protection and security, in certain areas women’s heightened sense of anxiety should be studied more to uncover potentially significant features unique to those areas. It would also be worthwhile exploring the regions where men expressed higher security threat perceptions than women. While this may be the result of men being more familiar with the realities of their neighbourhood, it may also be due to the fact that men perceive certain crime threats, such as violence, fights and explosions, as being more targeted at men than women.

Overall, only 13% of respondents admit to being actual victims of crimes

Another factor pointing to the complexities of perceived crime threats is the fact that, although people generally viewed the various property-related, violent, political and SGBV crimes as a threat to their areas, only 13% of respondents admitted to actually having experienced such crimes. The most common crime experienced was property-related crime. More men than women said they had been a victim of violent crime (20% compared with 9%), while more women than men said they had been a victim of SGBV and related crimes (9% compared with 4%).¹⁹

There were considerable variations between the *mouhafazas* in the proportion of respondents who said they had been a victim of these crimes. Overall, 21% of respondents from Beirut said that they had been a victim of crime, compared with 2% of respondents from Beqaa and 4% of respondents from El Nabatieh. This suggests that fear of crime does not appear to correlate with the crime rate, given that 50%–60% of people in Beqaa viewed the various crimes as a particularly serious problem in the area in which they live. In North Lebanon, Mount Lebanon and South Lebanon, around a sixth of the respondents said they had been a victim of crime.²⁰ While the overall figure of 13% is not necessarily a ‘small’ proportion, the percentages found in the *mouhafazas* suggest that the crime threats perceived by the population are based on information gathered through sources other than official concrete statistics and appear to be overstated.

Most Lebanese live in areas where their community is the majority

The impact of the Lebanese civil war continues to affect perceptions of insecurity and threat levels. Although a full 23 years have passed since the war ended, Lebanon’s social fabric is still affected by the civil war’s remnants. The survey results showed that 89% of the respondents now live in an area where their community constitutes a majority. At the same time, a level of distrust has persisted among the different segments of Lebanese society, to which the harsh security conditions may have also contributed. Despite the fact that a large proportion of respondents expressed trust

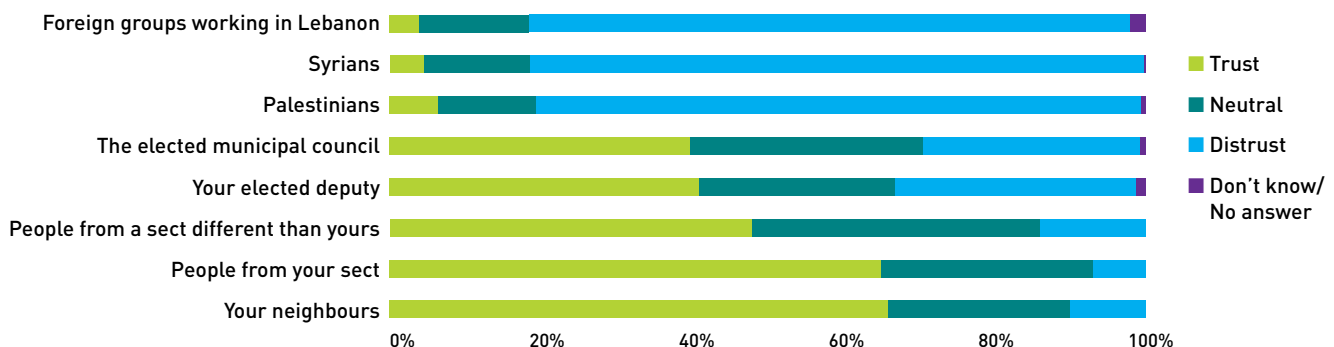
¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid. p.27.

²⁰ Ibid. p.28.

Figure 3: Respondents' level of trust in different groups (%)



Source: E. Gordon (2014). Op. cit. p.23.

(at different levels) in individuals from other sects, additional indicators in the survey pointed to a fragmentation phenomenon in terms of actual relationships between people from different sects. When asked where they would buy property, 59% replied that they would favour areas where their own cultural group was predominant (13% chose not to answer). Only 29% said they would favour mixed areas.²¹

Respondents show very low levels of trust towards Palestinians, Syrians and foreign groups working in Lebanon

The sense of distrust between different communities in Lebanon has not been confined to Lebanese sectarian groups only. The survey revealed that large segments of Lebanese society show very low levels of trust towards Palestinians, Syrians and foreign groups working in Lebanon (see Figure 3). These sentiments were largely similar across the sectarian communities, except for a slightly higher level of distrust of Palestinians and Syrians by Christians.²²

The majority of respondents believe that poverty is the main reason for insecurity

Interesting results were uncovered when respondents were asked about the reasons for their perceptions of insecurity. The majority (66%) blamed poverty, while almost half (46%) thought unemployment was a factor. This highlights the link between socio-economic factors and crime, or at least people's perceptions of the links. It also underlines the overriding socio-economic challenges that people feel are facing Lebanon and the areas where they live. Other common explanations for the existence of widespread crime included inefficient state security institutions (22%), sectarian discrimination (21%), easy availability of drugs (21%), easy availability of small arms (20%) and political disputes (17%).²³

Possession of small arms is considered a reason for insecurity

Widespread availability and possession of small arms has always been a factor of instability in Lebanon. It has also posed a challenge to security and has limited the effectiveness of security sector institutions. Although the vast majority (78%) of survey respondents said that they did not possess a firearm, many experts distrust this finding, which contradicts the widely held belief that firearms are easily available among Lebanese citizens.

Only 17% of the respondents said they possessed arms. A further 21% said they had seen an armed presence in their areas 'sometimes' and 12% 'regularly', with 51% of those witnessing armed men regularly (other than security sector personnel) indicating that they were members of political parties.²⁴ While these percentages may seem modest and inaccurate, they undoubtedly illustrate a clear security threat in the form of available small arms among the public, as well as underlining the challenging circumstances under which the Lebanese security institutions are operating.

²¹ K. El Mufti (2014). Op. cit. p.10.

²² E. Gordon (2014). Op. cit. p.22.

²³ Ibid. p.29.

²⁴ K. El Mufti (2014). Op. cit. p.12.

CONCLUSIONS

This survey, and its related efforts, sought to gain an insight into the security concerns of the Lebanese population and to possibly offer entry points for reform to security sector institutions. Such entry points could be picked up by the institutions themselves or by a wider net of stakeholders, with the aim of strengthening the human-centredness of security provision in Lebanon. However, from the outset, the limitations of this method were obvious and were factored in throughout the data-gathering process and analysis. A key limitation that must be underlined is that perceptions are subjective in nature, usually influenced by longer-term grievances and last-minute events. Thus, in dynamic circumstances such as the security situation in Lebanon, they must be viewed in the context of time and place. This poses two challenges: first, the results of this survey must be largely attributed to a specific timeframe and cannot be deemed reliable for an indefinite period; and, second, its findings and statements must be considered cautiously as indications of certain trends and circumstances rather than an accurate representation of real conditions.

Nevertheless, the survey's outcome analysis highlights many causes and factors of insecurity that are useful to consider. For instance, the challenges posed by the presence of Syrian refugees, which have intensified since the time

The challenges posed by the presence of Syrian refugees, which have intensified since the time of the survey, constitute a significant and crosscutting issue all over Lebanon.

of the survey, constitute a significant and crosscutting issue all over Lebanon. The responses to this challenge and the solutions sought to date would benefit from a detailed mapping of its geography and diverse nature.

The geographical, sectarian and gender differences in the perception of various security challenges and threats offer an important insight, especially for formulating security policies and responding to threats. In addition,

the regional differences in the perceived seriousness of crime help to explain the factors contributing to the formation of these perceptions. The survey also revealed that the presence of a security post nearby generally lowers the perception of threat.

An important element in the analysis of perceived security challenges and threats is exploring the reasons leading to the formation of these perceptions. Past events, sectarian and political identities, the media, geography and other elements all contribute to people's perception of a given challenge to the security of their country and regions. The inconsistency between perceived security threats at the national and local levels further highlights the importance of accessing accurate and balanced information in order to obtain a realistic picture of the security challenges facing Lebanon.

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