

L7 CVE Lab

Drivers of Instability, Conflict and Radicalization

A snapshot from Akkar

(01/2015)



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1.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The influence of terrorist groups operating on the Lebanese-Syrian border, Hezbollah's involvement in Syria, and the increasing sense of humiliation and powerlessness amongst Sunnis since Hezbollah's takeover of west Beirut in 2008 is breeding concern about the radicalization of Lebanon's Sunni community.

The purpose of this case study is to identify drivers of radicalization of Sunnis in Akkar, particularly in Halba and its surrounding areas, and to examine any motivations to contest the Lebanese state. Through this case study, Levant7 aims to i) determine trends in the radicalization of Sunnis in Lebanon; ii) contribute to the understanding of the main challenges and best practices of conducting research on this issue; and iii) inform the preliminary design of stabilization, community resilience, and countering violent extremism (CVE) programs in the country.

Between November 19 and December 5, 2014, Levant7 led a quantitative survey of 400 respondents and carried out ten key informant interviews in Halba and its surrounding areas. Results suggest that the perceived illegitimacy of the government and its inability to provide security and services has led to a widespread feeling of disenfranchisement and distrust. This has been compounded by political infighting and the weakening of social ties amongst the Lebanese and between Lebanese and Syrian refugees.

These factors, along with the involvement of Hezbollah in the war in Syria, are motivating some Sunnis to sympathize with Islamist groups. These sympathies are exacerbated by the inability of the government and moderate Sunni leadership to address the consequences of the refugee crisis. Results show that 14% of respondents are neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra, while 1.5% is neutral towards the Islamic State. It is important to note that the likelihood of people openly supporting these groups is very small, therefore the expression of neutrality may actually suggest a certain degree of sympathy.

A significant relationship was found between being neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra and not relying on anyone. In addition, there is a negative correlation between neutrality towards the Al Qaeda affiliate and trust for the Lebanese Security Forces, which shows that those who are neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra tend to distrust the army and internal police. Results also indicate a division in the moderate Sunni constituency: while many supporters of the Future Movement are neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra, others are against it. Results show no relationship between poverty and sympathy for terrorist groups, but there is a significant positive correlation between having neutral views of Jabhat al-Nusra and being underemployed¹. Several key informants suggested that both the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra are distributing money to recruit Sunni youth, while supporting religious leaders with extremist views.

¹ Throughout this report statistical significance is determined at a $p < 0.1$ level unless stated otherwise

Based on these results, Levant7 recommends implementing stabilization, community resilience, and CVE programs to:

- Improve the level of social cohesion
- Improve the municipal government outreach and service delivery to refugees and host communities
- Increase employment opportunities and access to finance
- Improve the level of trust in the Lebanese Security Forces
- Develop or strengthen the Lebanese political leadership at the local level
- Delegitimize Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State and strengthen alternative influential figures

2. INTRODUCTION

Saad Hariri, the leader of the Future Movement, briefly visited the country in 2014 after years in exile. During that visit he called for moderation and to step up assistance to disenfranchised Sunnis. But Hariri's prolonged absence had already created a leadership vacuum among the Sunni community, allowing more radical voices to gain prominence at the local level.

The Future Movement supported the Lebanese Armed Forces' (LAF) crackdown on Tripoli's Sunni militants, leaving many Sunnis resentful. Concurrently, the scandals that marred Dar el-Fatwa, the official Sunni religious institution, have hurt the reputation of more moderate religious leaders. Several Lebanese Sunnis – including Army soldiers – are now following preachers with extremist views, and are not only joining terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq, but also assisting terrorist operations inside Lebanon.

The Akkar Governorate is the poorest area of Lebanon and has long been neglected by the government. The recent influx of refugees, the near collapse of the state, and exacerbated economic hardship caused by the closing of the border have all compounded the region's vulnerability to radicalization, particularly among the Sunni majority. Additionally, Hezbollah's growing influence over the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), contributions from some Islamist charities, and the growing sway of groups like Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, have all served to increase both the influence and legitimacy of extremist Islamist views among Akkar's Sunni population. Akkar has also experienced sporadic attacks against the LAF, the arrests of dozens of Syrians, and a few Lebanese soldiers from the region have defected and joined terrorist groups, such as the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra².

In this context, both the Government of Lebanon and international governments and organizations are realizing the need to develop countering violent extremism (CVE) programs to help prevent, control, or revert the radicalization of Sunnis on both sides of the Lebanese-Syrian border and increase communities' resilience to the influence of extremist groups. To design and implement such programs successfully, however, there is an urgent need to develop a better understanding of what motivates Sunnis to sympathize with, support, and eventually join extremist groups.

This understanding must draw from evidence-based baseline studies specific to the context in which each stabilization, community resilience, or CVE program is being implemented to ensure that the initiatives respond to the drivers, needs, and interests of each community in each particular time and place. In addition, the complexity of the situation calls for periodic atmospheric studies that can provide nuanced information of the behavioral and attitudinal changes in each target community to guide the implementation of programs and ensure that they continuously adapt to the changing realities on the ground. This report attempts to make a positive and actionable contribution to the burgeoning field of CVE based research at both the macro and micro levels.

² See Annex > Citations

3.

OBJECTIVES

The objective of this case study is to identify drivers of radicalization among the Sunni population in Akkar, particularly in Halba and its surrounding areas, and to examine any motivations to contest the Lebanese state. Through this case study, Levant7 aims to i) determine trends in the radicalization of Sunnis in Lebanon in the context of the Syrian crisis; ii) contribute to the understanding of the main challenges and best practices of conducting research in this context; and iii) inform the preliminary design of stabilization, community resilience, and CVE programs in the country.

The Halba region in Akkar is home to approximately 9,000 Lebanese residents. The majority of the population is Sunni, but there are also Greek Orthodox and Maronite Christians. Over 11,000 registered refugees from Syria are living in this area, the overwhelming majority of who are Sunni. The current dynamics between these groups at the local level, as well as their political allegiances, largely reflect those of the broader population of Akkar, and so make this case study informative on a number of levels.

Given the limited scope inherent to this case study, its purpose is not to determine what radicalization means in the general Lebanese context or to provide an index of the level of radicalization in Akkar or Lebanon as a whole. Rather, by focusing on the specific case of Halba, Levant7 seeks to deepen understandings of how political, economic, and social dynamics at the local level relate to processes of radicalization. This methodology will also allow Levant7 to identify the challenges and best practices related to this type of research in order to guide the initial stages of future CVE program design in the country.

4.

METHODOLOGY

Levant7 selected the city of Halba and its surrounding areas to conduct this case study for its relatively accessible location, stable security situation, and for being fairly representative of Akkar's demographics. In order to ensure comprehensive results, the methodology included both a quantitative and a qualitative component. First, a quantitative survey was conducted to gather perceptions of the residents of Halba and its surrounding areas. In addition, in-depth interviews with key informants were conducted to gain a more nuanced understanding of the quantitative data gathered through the survey.

Levant7 partnered with Information International, a Lebanese market research consultancy firm based in Beirut, to conduct the survey and key informant interviews. Levant 7 designed and translated both the survey and the key informant interview questionnaires and Information International supported Levant7 to administer the questionnaires in the field.

4.1.

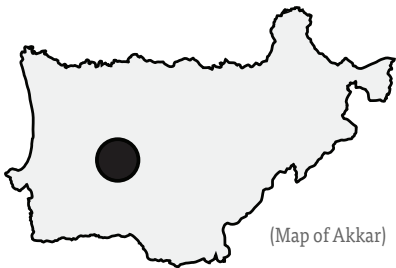
Quantitative Survey

Levant7 designed a questionnaire of 32 questions³. The survey aimed to gather respondents' perceptions of the national and municipal governments, the general socio-economic situation in the area, the degree of social cohesion in the community, and the level of support for diverse political groups and figures.

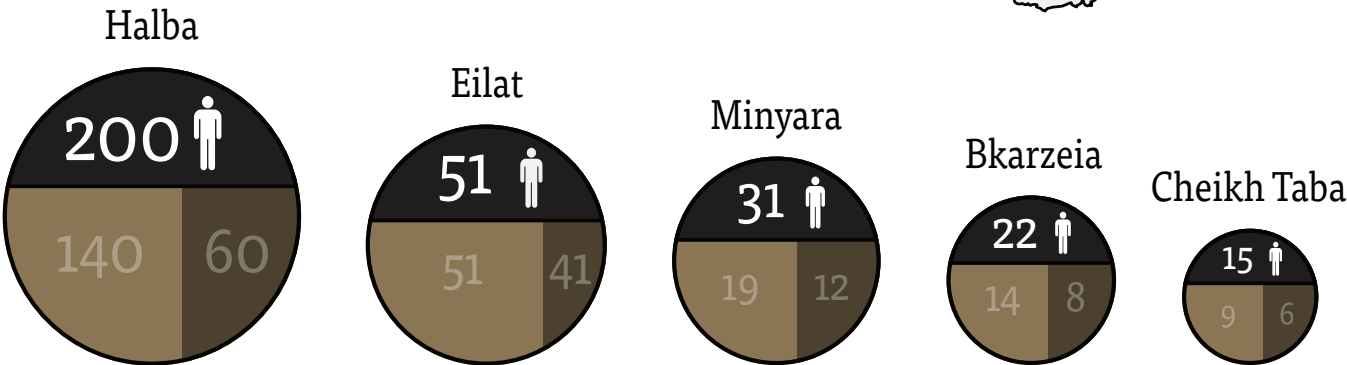
The survey sample included 280 Lebanese residents and 120 Syrian Refugees aged 18 years and over in Halba and the surrounding towns of Eilat, Minyara, Bkarzela, Cheikh, and Taba. The sample was designed to reflect the confessional landscape of the Halba region. Therefore, of the Lebanese surveyed, 70% were Sunni, 20% Greek Orthodox, and 10% Maronite. All Syrian refugees surveyed were Sunni. The gender distribution of respondents was 50% female and 50% male.

Levant7 adopted a multi-stage probability sampling to ensure a random, representative sample for identifying households and main respondents. A pre-test of the questionnaire was conducted to assess its reception on November 13. The survey was conducted between November 19 and November 25, 2014.

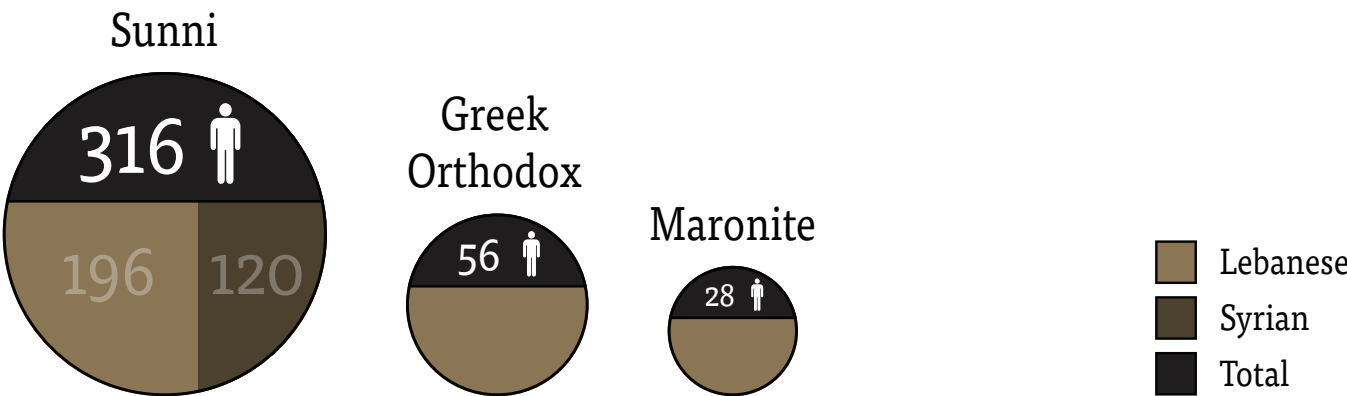
³ See research instruments in Annex



4.1.1. Geographic distribution of sample of Akkar residents



4.1.2. Distribution of sample by sectarian affiliation



4.2.
Key-informant interviews

Levant7 conducted ten key informant interviews between 27 November and 5 December 2014. Those interviewed include the Vice President of the Municipality of Halba and the Mukhtar of the City of Halba; three religious leaders: a Maronite priest, a Greek Orthodox priest, and a Sunni Sheikh; the coordinator of the Future Movement and the coordinator of the Lebanese Forces in Halba; the head of an Islamic charity; and two Syrian refugee camp leaders.

The objective of the interviews was to provide context to the information gathered with the surveys and also to gain an in-depth understanding of topics that are difficult to address in questionnaires. Interviews were semi-structured and so provided the flexibility for key informants to communicate their first-hand expertise freely and in their own words. In particular, Levant7 focused on trying to determine the extent to which the feeling of marginalization amongst Sunnis and their disappointment with the moderate Sunni leadership and government institutions (municipal and national governments as well as security forces) may be encouraging some to support extremist groups or leaders.

5.

CHALLENGES

The main challenge when conducting the survey and key informant interviews was the reticence of most people to express their opinion on certain issues. In interviews it was almost impossible to gain any information directly related to community views on extremist political groups or about how the marginalization of some sectors of the population may be encouraging adherence to radical ideologies. Additionally, Syrian representatives of refugee camps refused to speak about political parties or to give their opinion about the attacks against the Lebanese Security Forces (LSF) for fear of reprisal.

In addition to being fearful, some respondents questioned the objective of the study. It was difficult to convince them that the purpose of the survey was solely to assess perceptions of both Lebanese and Syrian refugees and was not tied to relief efforts. It was also challenging to convince the head of each household that the person needed for the interview had to be the one with the most recent birthday. Surveyors had to explain the need to adopt the scientific methodology developed for the study and the need for a representative sample of both genders and different age groups.

Moreover, results indicate that respondents may have misinterpreted one of the multiple-choice questions. When asked about their views on four political groups – Hezbollah, Future Movement, Jabhat al-Nusra, and ISIS – respondents could choose between “Positive”, “Neutral”, or “Negative”. The choice “Neutral” was meant to reflect neither a positive nor negative view, and thus was intended to convey a certain degree of tolerance. However, results suggest that different respondents assigned different meanings to “being neutral”.

Findings suggest that some respondents associated neutrality with tolerance, while others associated it with indifference due to lack of information, and others with the simple disapproval of a group—in contrast to one they actively oppose. For example, some respondents who said they were “Neutral” to Jabhat al-Nusra also expressed neutrality towards Hezbollah but had a negative view of the Islamic State. Being neutral to both Hezbollah and Jabhat al-Nusra seems contradictory.

It is possible that these respondents chose to be neutral to both Jabhat al-Nusra and Hezbollah, even though they dislike both or possibly one more than the other, to establish that they are against the Islamic State more than any other political faction. It is also possible that respondents chose their answers randomly, as is suggested by the fact that many answered the question “Which political parties do you sympathize with?” by choosing competing groups. For example, some Sunni respondents said they sympathized with the Future Movement and Hezbollah at the same time. This may be because they were simply lying for fear of reprisal or not taking the survey seriously.

Attacks on the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and the arrest of Sunnis in the area has made people suspicious of the true identity and motivations of the surveyors and fearful of LAF or Hezbollah information gathering tactics. This has increased the difficulty of getting people to agree to participate in the survey and it may have affected the accuracy of the data collected. This is a widespread problem affecting all data collection efforts involving public polling in Lebanon. Levant7 is committed to mitigating this challenge by designing appropriately tailored questionnaires based on an understanding of the sensitivities of potential respondents, pre-testing questionnaires, and improving its field networks to increase their reach. Future research may also introduce endorsement questions or atmospheric techniques in order to account for the highly sensitive nature of these topics.

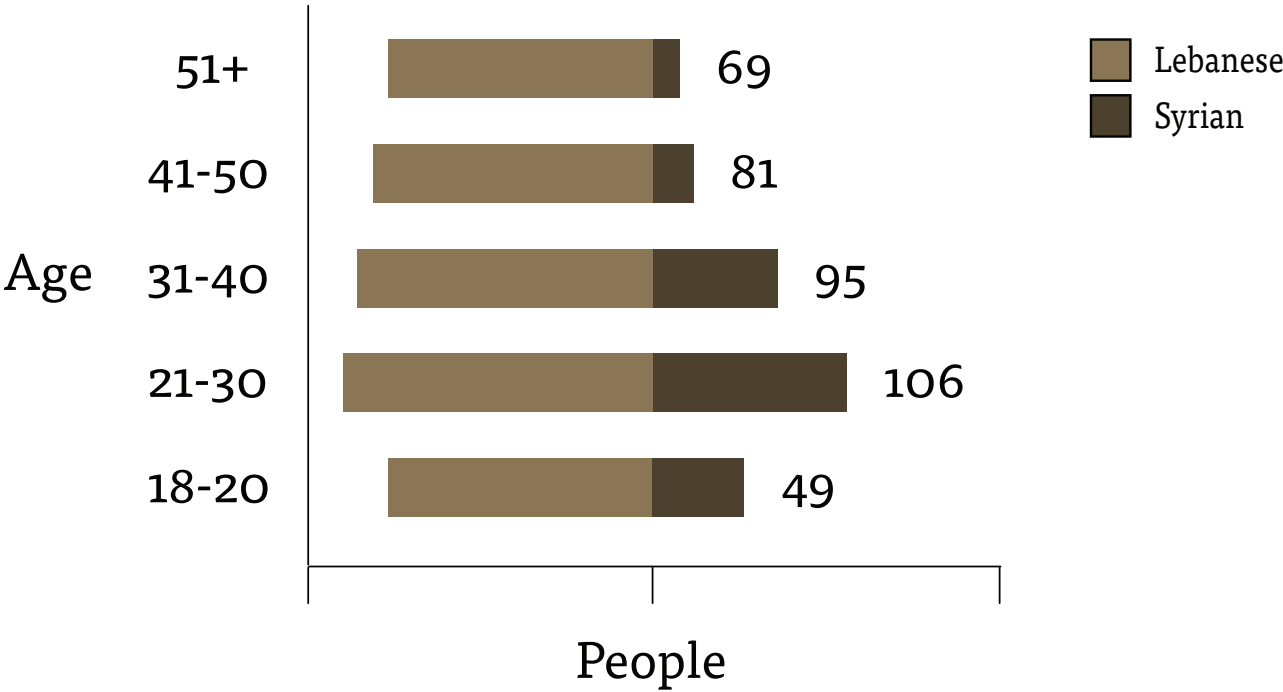
6. RESULTS

This section describes the results of the quantitative survey designed by Levant7 and conducted in Halba between 19 November and 25 November, 2014. The data provided by the survey was complemented with information gathered through ten key informant interviews conducted between 27 November and 5 December, 2014.

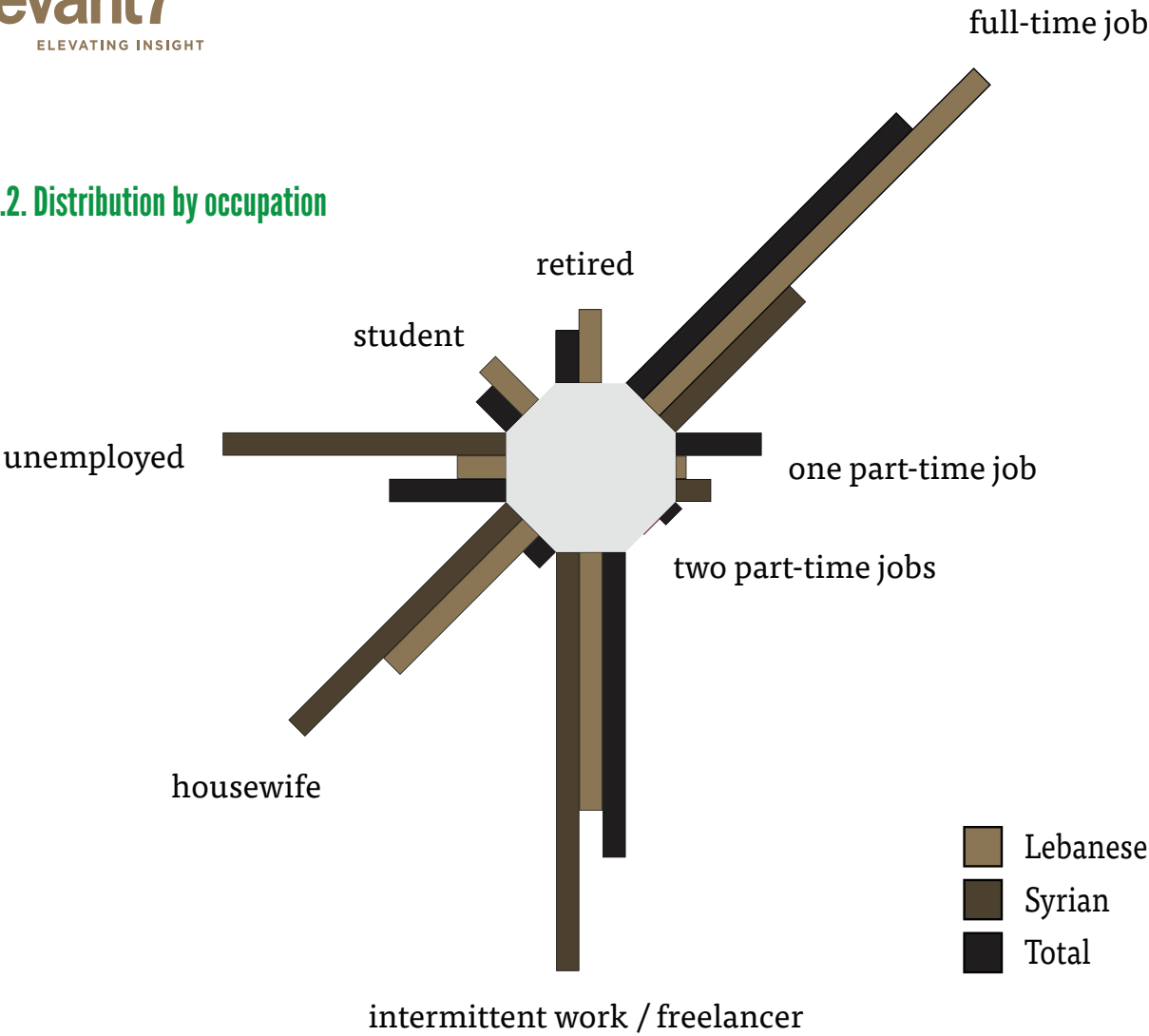
The first sub-section provides a detail of the sample population of the survey. The second sub-section analyzes the results to determine the extent to which respondents feel represented by the national and municipal governments, the relationship between the municipal government and its constituents, and the satisfaction of the latter with the government’s provision of services. The third sub-section focuses on the level of social cohesion in the area, both among Lebanese residents and between them and Syrian refugees. The fourth and fifth sub-sections identify the political affiliations of the respondents and their views of the Lebanese Security Forces. Finally, the sixth sub-section analyzes the profile of those respondents who pronounced themselves neutral towards Islamist groups.

6.1. Profile of survey respondents

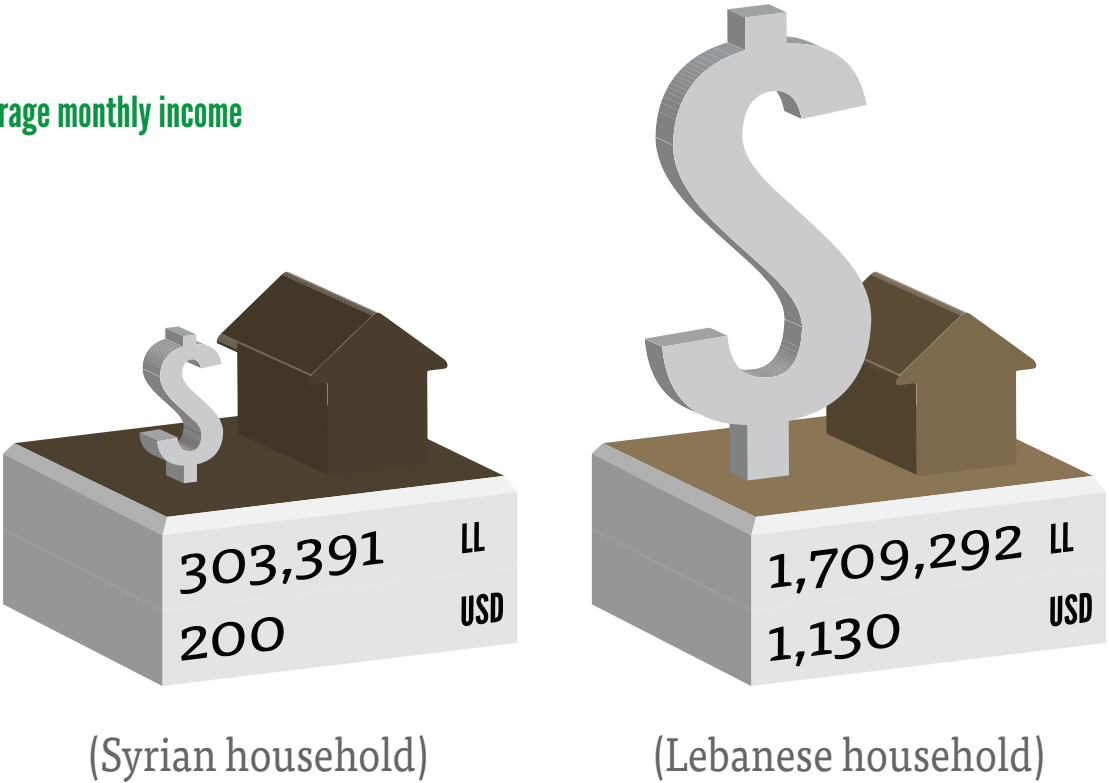
6.1.1. Age distribution



6.1.2. Distribution by occupation



6.1.3. Average monthly income



6.2. Governance

Results suggest that there are a low level of trust in the government and a generalized feeling of disenfranchisement in Halba and its surrounding areas. Lebanese respondents who felt underrepresented by the national government tended to think that their sectarian group is not well represented at the national level either. A higher feeling of accountability and representation in the municipal government is significantly correlated with higher levels level of engagement with the local government among Lebanese respondents.

6.2.1. National level

Respondents of both nationalities expressed a low level of trust in the Lebanese national government: 48% of all respondents did not trust the Lebanese government and 36% stated that they only somewhat trusted the national government. When asked who they rely on if they need assistance, only 1.5% of respondents stated they would rely on the national government in case of the need for assistance. The level of distrust was relatively similar among all sectarian groups, although Greek Orthodox expressed the greatest discontent. Among Sunnis, 62% did not trust the Lebanese national government, 65% did not feel represented by it, and 55% think thought sect is not properly portrayed by it.

Those who feel unrepresented by the national government tended to think that their sect was not well represented at the national level. In particular, 71% of Sunni respondents who do not feel represented by the national government think that their sect is not properly represented either, as well as 88% of Greek Orthodox. The Greek Orthodox priest interviewed for this study explained that members of the Greek Orthodox community feel that there is barely any representation of their sect at the national level and that that their interests are therefore rarely met. According to a Sunni sheik, although Sunnis are technically represented at the national level by the Prime Minister, many Sunnis in Akkar feel that their views are not in line with the government's policy regarding Syrian refugees and question the government's neglect of the Lebanese host communities.

6.2.2. Municipal level

Both Syrian and Lebanese expressed general dissatisfaction with the municipal government, though this sentiment was particularly evident among Lebanese Greek Orthodox. Approximately 42% of Lebanese respondents did not feel represented by the municipal government and 29% only somewhat. Only 8% would rely on the municipality in case of the need for assistance. However, Sunnis felt more represented at the municipal level (34%) than Maronites (25%) or Greek Orthodox (20%). This can be expected because most municipal officials are Sunni, like the majority of Halba’s population.



The feeling of disenfranchisement was higher among those Lebanese who never engage with the government than among those who do. Almost 90% of those who stated that they never engage with the government felt underrepresented, as opposed to 35% of those who are in regular contact with municipal officials. A majority of respondents (66%), however, do not engage with the government on a regular basis, through any means of assembly, voting, by presenting complaints, or by helping organize or attend events.

However, key informants offered mixed accounts regarding opportunities for civic engagement. The Vice President of the Municipality and the Mukhtar of Halba both said there are a variety of public activities – such as meetings, educational and cultural workshops, and cleaning campaigns – and that many Lebanese community members actively participate in them. All the other key-informants, however, said there are no public activities for the community. The possibilities of engaging with the municipality seem to be limited to administrative matters. A member of an Islamic Charity said that the old municipal council did not engage with the community, but that he hopes the new administration will make more efforts to reach out to the people of Halba.

For now, any form of interaction is limited to filing complaints: interviewees described how those who have complaints usually present them directly to the municipal council. The lack of government outreach may be due to the small number of employees and the scope of the municipality's work, which currently consists of developing the sewage system and improving the electricity network. The Vice President of the Municipality explained that there are only seven permanent members of staff – four police officers, two administrators, and one librarian – and 22 people in the cleaning and maintenance department.

According to a religious leader, Syrians have never been invited to participate in municipal affairs or consultation meetings. One interviewee said that the municipality offered them housing or living stipends and some aid when they started arriving, but that it is not assisting Syrian refugees anymore. The head of the Islamic charity said that Syrians are interested in engaging with municipal officials to ensure the reception of aid and that leaders of informal tented settlements like to arrange meetings with the municipality to coordinate their work with that of the government. However, both Syrian camp leaders said that they have never participated in any meetings with municipal officials and that they were only in contact with the municipality when they were requested to clean camps and the surrounding roads.

Several interviewees indicated that there is a high degree of nepotism and lack of transparency in how the municipality works. For example, the level of participation among Lebanese residents largely depends on family or tribal ties to municipal officials. In addition, municipal officials were said to routinely assign the implementation of development projects to people they have ties to, always benefiting the same closed circle of people. However, a Greek Orthodox priest and a political party coordinator pointed out that the municipality's jurisdiction over its territories and the political situation is limited: political parties have control over their constituents in informally defined areas and can easily contest the authority of the government if they want to.

Those who expressed discontent with the government's provision of services also felt more underrepresented than those who thought the government is fulfilling its duties properly. Nearly all key informants, including the Vice President of the Municipality of Halba, agreed that the government provision of services is poor and progressively worsening since the advent of the refugee crisis. Most refugees are living among the local population, increasing the demand for already strained public services and competing with host communities for shelter and employment.

At the same time, the decrease in economic activity has resulted in lower revenue collection rates, and the government is struggling to respond to the increasing demand in public services and infrastructure. Schools are overwhelmed with students and the quality of education has dropped to the point where teachers in public schools are sending their children to private institutions. Health facilities are struggling to keep up with the demand, there are greater water and power cuts, and roads are in disrepair. The influx of refugees has worsened the situation and bred discontent among Lebanese, who are now competing with similarly qualified Syrian refugees for jobs.

There are several NGOs working in the area, but interviewees suggested that aid is not distributed efficiently, is sometimes stolen, and in other cases, is sold by the recipients. This prevents many refugees from receiving the assistance they need and creates discontent among poor Lebanese residents who either do not receive anything or see how the resources are wasted. Several key informants complained about Syrians being entitled and expecting too much help from the Lebanese government and requested that host communities receive assistance as well.

6.3.

Social Cohesion

There is certain degree of social cohesion within members of the community of Halba, but many believe that trust has gradually deteriorated in the past years. The causes of this deterioration seem to be the battle for influence between political leaders and the economic and social impact of the refugee crisis. Among Syrians – the majority of whom are Sunni – the less they trusted other members of their community, the less prone they were to rely on anyone for support.

Fifty-three percent of respondents stated that they trusted members of other sects in their community, 34% somewhat trusted other members of their community, and 13% did not trust others at all. Sunnis, who are the majority in Halba, were more prone to trust their community members than those who belong to one of the minority groups. Only 6% of Lebanese Sunnis – the largest group in Halba – did not trust their community members, as opposed to 28% of Greek Orthodox and 18% of Maronites.

The relative level of trust among residents of Halba, however, did not translate to a willingness to rely on each other. Almost 13% of all respondents said they would rely on their neighbors in case of need, and 6% on their families or their political party. However, only 2% of Lebanese respondents would rely on Lebanese community representatives, while only 1.5% of refugees would rely on the Syrian counterparts. Less than 2% of respondents would rely on civil society organizations, NGOs, or Islamic Charities, while only 3% of Lebanese and no Syrians would rely on religious leaders. Finally, 6% said they would not rely on anyone. These figures indicate a dearth of civil society presence in the Halba area.

More than half (55%) of Lebanese believed the level of trust has remained unchanged, but 32% thought it had deteriorated in the past two years. This feeling of deterioration was more prominent among Greek

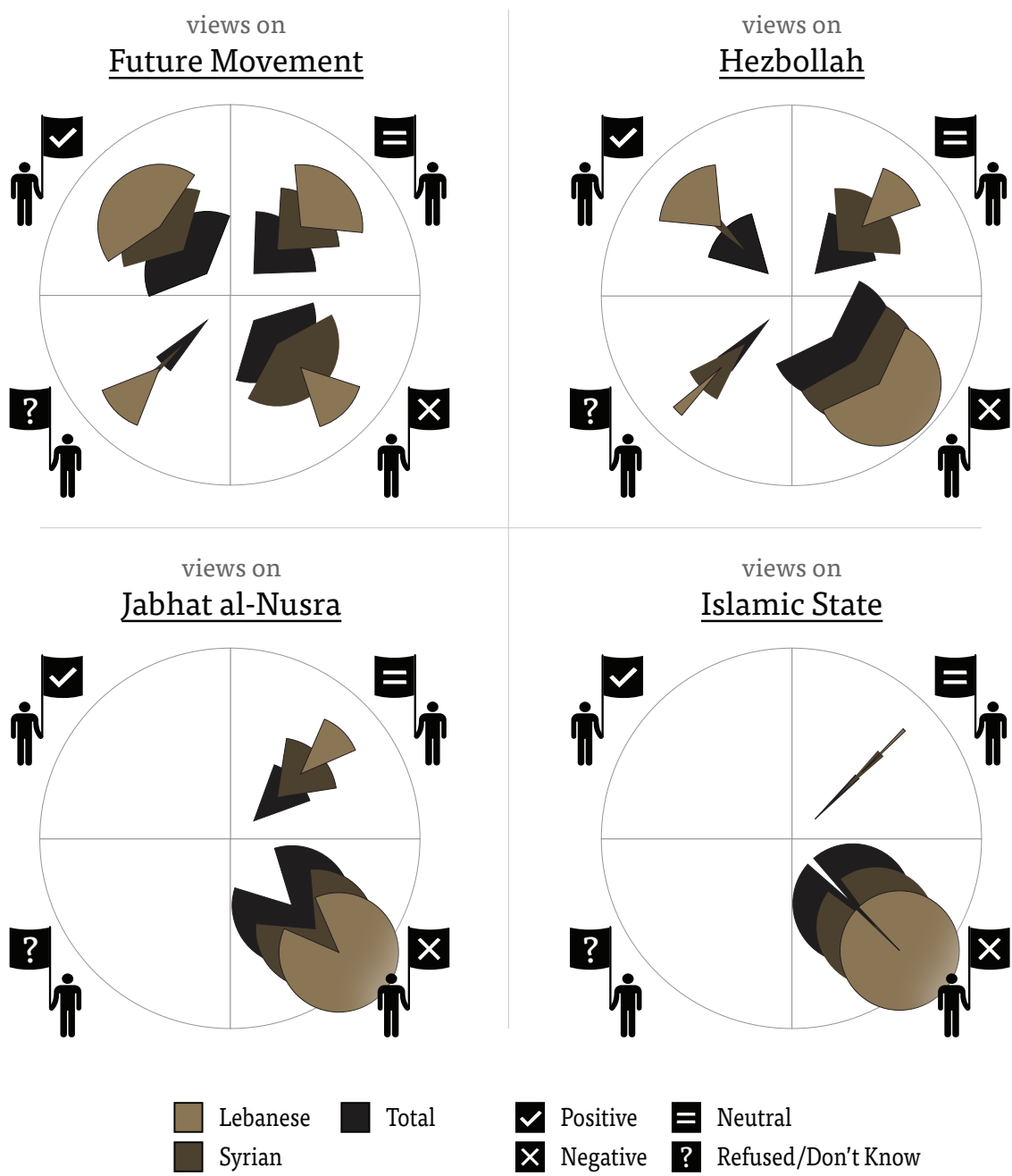
Orthodox (55%) and Sunnis (28%), while almost non-existent among Maronites (only 7%). The Future Movement coordinator in Halba believed that relationships among Lebanese of different sectarian backgrounds has become more open recently, as shown in the rising number of mixed marriages and lack of violent incidents among them, but that the influx of refugees has fuelled tensions, particularly among locals and refugees.

The religious leaders interviewed believed that trust has worsened as a result of power struggles among sectarian leaders and the massive influx of refugees, which has brought insecurity, prostitution, a decrease in the provision of services, and worsening economic hardship. A Maronite priest and a Sunni sheik complained about the increase in theft and the worsening social corruption, particularly because of prostitution. An informant said that many Lebanese couples are also divorcing because Lebanese men want to remarry young Syrian girls.

Competition for an already limited job market has left many Lebanese unemployed and increased tensions between locals and refugees. Several key informants mentioned violent encounters between Lebanese and Syrians, but others could not recall any. The Syrian camp leaders interviewed for this study explained that most refugees are aware of the burden they impose on the Lebanese and that they try to avoid problems by limiting their contact with Lebanese residents to a minimum, leading to further segregation. If there are ever any verbal or violent incidents, they try to take control and remove the Syrians involved to avoid a reprisal from LSF.

6.4. Political Affiliations

The Future Movement enjoys the highest level of popularity in Halba and surrounding areas: 37% of respondents had a positive opinion of the party (34% of Lebanese and 44% of Syrians). There was considerable support for Hezbollah (16.5%) – particularly among Christians whose first preference was a March 8 coalition member. There was also support for Hezbollah among Lebanese Sunnis: 14% of them reported a positive view of the group, while another 15% reported a neutral view. While there was no express support for Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State, there was some degree of neutrality among Sunnis.



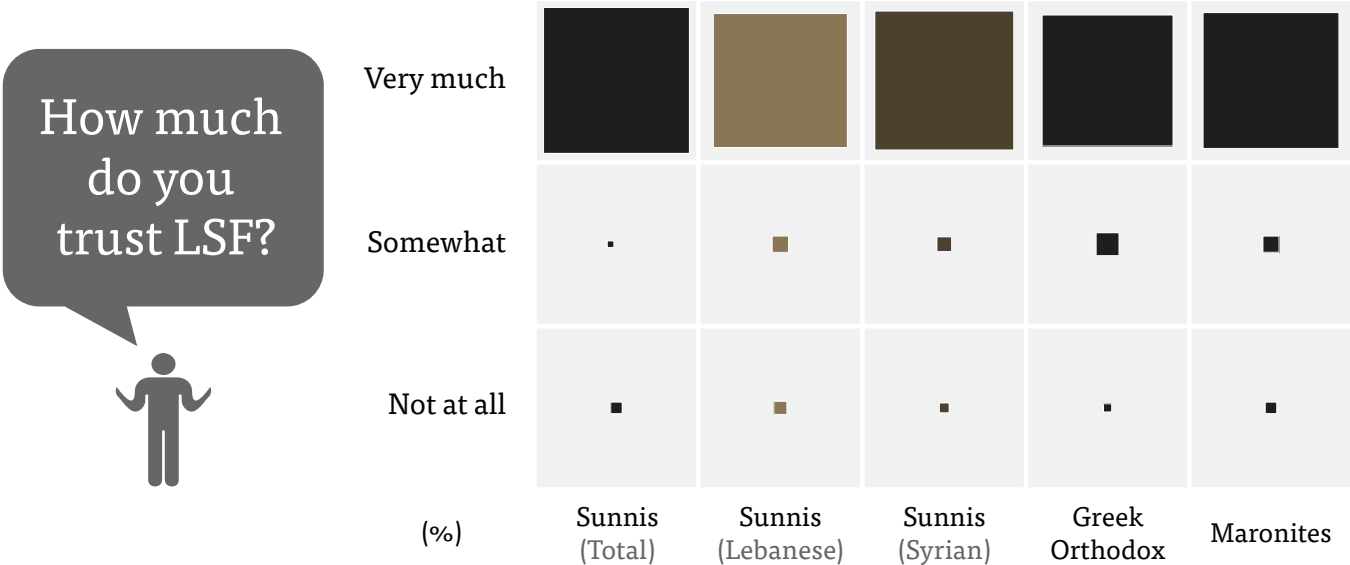
Saad Hariri's party is the most popular party among Sunnis. Still, survey findings indicate a lower level of support than was suggested in key informant interviews. While 39% supported Hariri's party, 26% were neutral towards it, and 29% held negative views. At the same time, the interviewees agreed that the Future Movement's rival, Hezbollah, is rather unpopular in the area. However, 14% of Lebanese Sunni respondents and 4% of Syrians – all Sunnis – had a positive opinion of Hezbollah. These Sunnis could be either supporters of the fight against Israel or sympathizers of the Assad regime. According to a Lebanese political coordinator there are some refugees in Halba who take orders from the Syrian government.

Among Christians, perceptions were divided mostly between those who sympathize with the Future Movement (26%) due to their support for its March 14 coalition allies, the Lebanese Forces and Al Kitaeb, and those who sympathize with Hezbollah (40%), particularly followers of Al Marada, the Free Patriotic Movement, or the Syrian Social Nationalist Party (SSNP). The Future Movement was perceived positively among 33% of Maronites and 30% of Greek Orthodox respondents, while 39% of Maronites and 41% of Greek Orthodox had a positive opinion of Hezbollah.

Results indicate that there is no express support in Halba and surrounding areas for extremist Sunni groups, but there is a level of neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. None of the respondents expressed support for Jabhat al-Nusra, but 14% expressed having a neutral view of the Al Qaeda affiliated group. Of these, 57% were Lebanese (31 Sunni and 1 Greek Orthodox) and 43% were Syrian Sunni. This indicates that 12% of Lebanese Sunni respondents are neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra, as well as 20% of Syrian respondents. Those neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra were roughly 57% male and 43% female and were distributed among all age ranges and income distribution groups. Only 1.5% of all respondents expressed neutrality towards Islamic State and none expressed support. The six respondents who said they were neutral towards Islamic State were also neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra. All six were Sunni: half Syrian, half Lebanese.

6.5. Trust in the Lebanese Security Forces

Support for the Lebanese security forces (both Lebanese Armed Forces and Internal Security Forces) remained widespread among all sectarian groups. Likewise, 99% of respondents described the attacks against the Lebanese Security Forces (LSF) as terroristic and all key informants stated that the attacks had neither justification nor support among the local population.



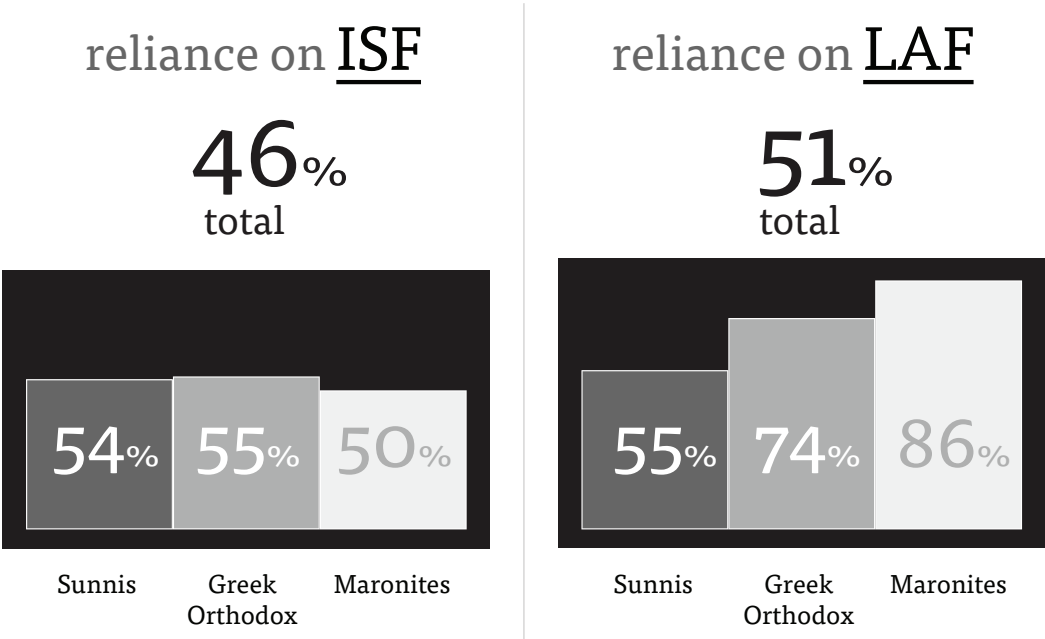
Support for the Lebanese security forces seems to be stronger among Lebanese and Syrians who sympathized with Saad Hariri’s Future Movement: there was a strongly significant positive correlation between greater support for the Future Movement and greater trust for the LSF⁴, indicating that greater support for one is related to greater support for the other. Contrary to this correlation, there was a significant negative relationship between Nusra neutrality and trust in security forces. In other words, those who feel neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra are less likely to trust the LSF.

According to key informants, Akkar’s residents have historical ties with the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) as most families in Akkar had at least one member in the Army. None of the interviewees mentioned the political ties of the LAF’s leadership with Hezbollah, but on the contrary, stressed the institution’s multi-sectarian nature and the efforts it has made to pull the country together.

While support for the LAF seems to be unconditional, the Internal Security Forces (ISF) are viewed as somewhat corrupt and politically biased, particularly its lower level members. Several key informants suggested that the ISF responds to biased political interests more often than the LAF. The ISF is largely controlled by the Future Movement (both its former and current chiefs are Sunnis affiliated to the party), but that does not seem to affect the on-the-ground perceptions of the ISF in the area, not even among Sunnis.

⁴ With a p-value < 0.000

The Lebanese security forces are the institutions on which respondents are most likely to rely on in case of need. Still, according to survey results, only 55% of Sunnis would rely on the LAF, while 54% would rely on the ISF. Reliance on the LAF is most prominent among Maronites and Greek Orthodox.



The Syrian camp leaders interviewed for this study refused to express their opinion about the LSF or provide details about any encounters they have had with them. They assured the interviewers that refugees try their best to avoid any type of conflict with LAF. Still, they explained that registered refugees who have the required paperwork do not have problems, but those who have entered illegally usually face scrutiny at checkpoints. One camp leader observed that ISF is usually “rougher” than LAF. Arrests of Syrians by LAF and ISF in the past months have instilled great fear among refugees, which explains their refusal to speak openly about this issue.

6.6. Support for violent Islamist Sunni groups

It is important to consider that social desirability likely diminished the number of respondents expressing explicit support for Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State. Therefore, given the political climate, therefore, expressions of neutrality might have in fact have reflected slight inclinations towards those groups. The six respondents who showed neutrality towards Islamic State may be rare isolated cases. The degree of tolerance toward Jabhat al-Nusra, however, should not be understated. Being neutral today indicates that the respondents is much more likely of being in favor in the future. The influence of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Halba and surrounding areas is still weak, but key informants suggested an increase in the activity in surrounding areas. Key informants stated that both groups are distributing monetary compensation to recruit followers and secure the loyalty of local religious leaders.

Neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra was significantly correlated with a feeling of political underrepresentation and distrust for the LSF. Those Syrians neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra tended to believe that the government's provision of services is lacking and most Lebanese and Syrians who are neutral to the Al Qaeda affiliate do not sympathize nor support any of the official political parties in Lebanon. Some of those neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra did support Saad Hariri's Future Movement, but others were against it, suggesting a division in the until-recently rather homogenous Sunni community.

In addition, results showed that those who were neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra tended to distrust the LSF, while those who felt that the LSF are trustworthy tended to be against the Al Qaeda affiliated group. No correlation was found between neutral disposition towards Jabhat al-Nusra and a feeling of distrust in the community or the national and municipal governments. Like those Sunnis who expressed being against Jabhat al-Nusra, those neutral to the Al Qaeda affiliate expressed distrust for government institutions, civil society actors, and community leaders.

Several key-informants suggested that poverty, unemployment, and lack of a proper education motivate people to support extremist groups. There is a significant correlation between neutrality to Jabhat al-Nusra and being underemployed. However, survey results suggest that there is no correlation between economic hardship and neutrality towards these groups: while most Syrians neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra were in the lowest income group, the Lebanese who shared their opinion belonged to a variety of economic backgrounds.

The average monthly household income of Lebanese respondents (1,709,292 LL) was much higher than that of Syrians (303,391 LL). This may indicate that the level of income can be a driver of radicalization under a certain threshold.

6.6.1. Lack of political representation

There is a positive significant relationship between being neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra and not feeling represented by any official political party. More than half (61%) of those who held a neutral view of Jabhat al-Nusra chose "Nobody" when asked "Which political parties do you support or sympathize with?", as opposed to 49% of those against the Al Qaeda affiliate.

In addition, among Syrian refugees there was a significant negative correlation between neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra and satisfaction with services provided. This indicates that the more disappointed Syrians are with the provision of services, the more likely they are to be neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra. Although a significant correlation was not found in the case of Lebanese Sunnis, 84% of those Lebanese Sunnis neutral towards the Al Qaeda affiliate believed that the capacity of the government to provide services (water and power, sewage collection, education, and health care) has worsened considerably in the past two years.

At the same time, results suggest a feeling of disenfranchisement among Sunnis neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra. Those who expressed neutrality towards the Al Qaeda affiliate tended to distrust the government and

not feel neither represented by nor engaged with the municipal government. No correlation was found between neutrality towards the group and distrust for the government, but more than half (52%) of those neutral towards the Jabhat al-Nusra said they did not feel at all represented by the municipal government, as opposed to 35% of those who were against the group. Of those who did not feel represented in the municipality, 82% had never engaged with it through any type of activity or communication channel. Those neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra did not seem to distrust the national government more than those who are against the group. However, 74% of those neutral to the Al Qaeda affiliate who did not feel represented by the national government thought that the Sunni sect is not properly represented.

Fourteen percent of supporters of the Future Movement expressed neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra. In addition, 30% of those neutral to the Al Qaeda affiliate had positive opinions of the Future Movement and 23% chose Saad Hariri as the political figure they identified with the most. Others identified with Khaled Daher, a Future Movement Member of Parliament from Akkar known for encouraging extremist views and criticizing LAF, or with Najib Mikati, a former Prime Minister who used to be affiliated with Hariri's party. All six respondents who had a neutral stance towards Islamic State also had positive opinions of the Future Movement. These similarities suggest that Islamist groups are gaining the sympathy of more or less moderate factions of the Sunni community.

Still, 11% of the detractors of the Future Movement also expressed neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra, which suggests that the Sunni base might be dividing in favor of more extremist beliefs. There are some outliers, since Ashraf Rifi, the former head of ISF in Tripoli and Future Movement figure accused by some of supporting Jabhat al-Nusra, has the support of respondents who are against the Al Qaeda affiliate.

6.6.2. Relationship with the Lebanese Security Forces

There was a negative correlation between neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra and trust in the Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces. This suggests that the greater the distrust of the LSF, the higher the chance that someone will support Jabhat al-Nusra. Still, results indicate that 56% of Lebanese respondents who are neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra would rely on the LAF, while 40% of Lebanese respondents neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra would rely on the ISF.

Results suggesting reliance on the LAF by people neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra were unexpected, given that Hezbollah has considerable influence over the LAF leadership and soldiers from Akkar have defected the Army to join extremist ranks. These results might be explained by the fact that LAF continues to have strong support in Halba due to the large number of Akkar residents in the Army and the enduring perception of the Army as a non-sectarian organization. Support for the ISF may stem from the support of the Future Movement, since the head of the ISF is traditionally linked to the party. Although many members of the community viewed the ISF as corrupt and inefficient, they may choose to support it due to its political ties.

It is also possible, however, that the number of Sunni arrests conducted by the LSF during the months preceding fieldwork deterred people from responding truthfully to survey questions, or that the attacks against LAF bolstered support for the Army regardless of the alleged political bias of its leadership against Sunnis.

6.6.3. Perceptions of Social Cohesion

There is a highly significant correlation between holding a neutral view of Jabhat al-Nusra and not relying on anyone for support. In fact, 16% of those neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra would never rely on anyone in case of need, as opposed to 4% of those who are against the Al Qaeda affiliate. Like most other respondents, 6% would rely on their municipal government, while none would rely on the national government or Lebanese community representatives. Only one Sunni respondent neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra said he would rely on a religious leader.

Results indicate no significant correlation between the level of communal trust and the degree of neutrality to Jabhat al-Nusra. Still, it is valid to note that most respondents who were neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra were rather skeptical about the degree of social cohesion in their community: 39% of Sunnis who were neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra believed trust among sects in their community deteriorated in the past two years, as opposed to 24% of Sunnis who were against the Al Qaeda affiliate.

In addition, half of the Lebanese Sunnis who were neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra had a negative opinion of the Syrian refugee community. This suggests that support for the Al Qaeda affiliated group fighting the Assad regime does not necessarily translate in an endorsement of the refugees' cause.

6.6.4. Other considerations

Several key informants suggested that Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS cells operating in border areas of Akkar have limited influence in Halba, but that their popularity is increasing. Although survey results indicated that there was no correlation between income and support for extremist groups, key informants agreed that monetary compensation in poor areas is the main means of recruitment, followed by word-of-mouth and religious preaching.

The head of the Islamic charity interviewed for this study explained that many support Jabhat al-Nusra because it is contesting Hezbollah and defending the Sunni doctrine. However, he pointed out that many oppose the Al Qaeda affiliate because it is fighting in Lebanese territory and that if the group did not engage in a fight in Lebanon it would have even greater support among the Lebanese. Several informants said that ISIS has little support because many do not agree with their radical view of Islam, but that their influence in Halba has grown recently due to their presence in border areas of Akkar.

A Sunni Sheikh said that communal efforts are being made to raise awareness among youth to prevent them from being recruited. However, he mentioned that it is difficult to compete with the amount of money these terrorist groups are spending in recruitment. The head of the Islamic charity agreed that

both Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS are distributing large amounts of money to encourage the recruitment of young men and added that they are backing and in some cases financing Sunni religious leaders with extremist views to preach in mosques.

While many are willing to contest the growing influence of these extremist groups, there are also fears of reprisal: one key informant, for example, reported receiving threats from ISIS for denouncing their activities. In addition, the Syrian leaders of informal settlements refused to express opinions about these groups out of fear. The refusal of Syrian leaders to speak up about Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State does not necessarily translate into support for these groups; it may just express an interest to remain “neutral” to all political factions in an effort to avoid any confrontation with Lebanese or alternative factions within the refugee community.

7.

CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that some of the factors that motivate support for extremist groups among Sunnis are long-term structural problems that have worsened as a result of the refugee crisis. Results suggest that the lack of government legitimacy and its inability to provide security and services, as well as competition for employment, the weakening of social ties, and the inaction of the traditional political leadership, has led to a widespread feeling of disenfranchisement and distrust in the community. These factors – as well as the involvement of Hezbollah in the war in Syria – are motivating some Sunnis to sympathize to a certain extent with Islamist groups.

The lack of decentralization of government institutions and the scarcity of financial resources – coupled with corruption, nepotism, political infighting, and lack of interaction between civilians and the municipal government – have resulted in the poor provision of services and a generalized discontent with the government. The inability of the government to respond to the increase in the demand of services and employment since Syrian refugees started settling in Akkar in 2012 has weakened its legitimacy even further. Almost 80% of Lebanese respondents were unsatisfied with the government's capacity to respond to the crisis and key informants suggested that a feeling of vulnerability and dissatisfaction with the government among host communities has increased in the past years.

Weak social cohesion is the result of historical sectarian and political divisions throughout Lebanon, but has deteriorated due to the increasing sense of vulnerability as a consequence of the economic and social impact of the refugee crisis. Most respondents were reticent to rely on anyone for support. Results show that the absence of a strong support base is correlated with neutrality towards extremist groups. There is actually a very strong correlation between being neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra and not relying on anyone in case of need, neither on the government, security forces, civil society organizations, other members of the community, or religious leaders. Although both LAF and ISF still enjoy more support in Halba than any other institution and are generally perceived as inclusive, results indicate that only half of the population is willing to rely on them and that there is a correlation between holding neutral views of Jabhat al-Nusra and not trusting the security forces.

Results show no significant relationship between poverty and sympathy for terrorist groups, but there is a significant correlation between being neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra and being underemployed. Although poverty is not a driver of radicalization according to survey results, key informants believe both poverty and unemployment are a breeding ground for radicalism. Both the Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra are taking advantage of the vulnerability of both Syrians and Lebanese by distributing money to recruit Sunni youth while supporting religious leaders with similar extremist views.

The feeling of distrust in formal and informal institutions is coupled with a feeling of disenfranchisement and disappointment with the traditional political leadership. Half of the respondents do not support nor sympathize with any Lebanese political party or movement. In addition, results indicate a division in the moderate Sunni constituency. Many of the supporters of the Future Movement have neutral views of Jabhat al-Nusra, while others are against it. This division seems to be fostered by the inability of the Sunni leadership to address the consequences of the refugee crisis and because of its inaction towards Hezbollah.

In conclusion, the lack of confidence in the government and the political leadership, weakening social ties, and a growing sense of vulnerability and disenfranchisement – both among Syrian refugees and host communities– have left a vacuum likely to be filled by extremist groups that present themselves as an alternative source of authority capable of solving people's immediate concerns.

7.1. Program recommendations

Based on this study's findings, Levant7 suggests developing stabilization and CVE programs in order to:

- Improve the level of communal trust
- Improve the municipal government outreach and service delivery for refugees and host communities
- Increase employment opportunities and access to finance
- Increase trust in the Lebanese Security Forces
- Develop or strengthen the Lebanese political leadership at the local level
- Delegitimize Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS and strengthen alternative influential figures

7.1.1. Improve social cohesion

Results suggest that almost half the population of Halba and its surrounding areas do not trust other members of their community. In addition, there is a significant correlation between having neutral views of Jabhat al-Nusra and not relying on anyone for support. Lack of cohesion in the community can exacerbate feelings of marginalization, making some groups more likely to engage in violence or to support religious or political figures that hold extremist views. A disjointed community is also less likely to work together to achieve a common goal – such as developing the local economy, strengthening civil society, or engaging youth – than a cohesive one. Therefore, weak social ties can also diminish the success or sustainability of development programs that require community-wide participation.

Improving social trust among Lebanese and between Lebanese and the refugee community will be a challenging task, given the historic tensions among sectarian groups and the resentment fueled by decades of Syrian political and economic intervention in Lebanon. However, strengthening social ties must be the

foundation of any stabilization and resilience program implemented in Akkar or anywhere in the country. No community can become resilient to the influence of extremist groups without a relative degree of internal trust.

Social cohesion can be improved through targeted, strategic communication programs. These types of programs engage with influential figures and institutions, circulate strategic messages through both traditional and unconventional media (such as word of mouth or cultural activities like music concerts or theatrical representations), and support activities that encourage the participation of different sectarian and national groups. Such outreach activities and community development projects are ideally organized by the municipal government in order to garner civic participation and increase the government's perceived legitimacy.

The success of this kind of programming depends on an accurate and nuanced understanding of the local information ecology. This means that successful programming must identify several key factors, including: the most locally influential individuals or institutions; the most popular means of communication (both formal and informal); the outreach activities most likely to bring together the largest number of people; and which type of development projects are likely to secure the voluntary participation and engagement of the community. These topics will be developed further in the following sub sections.

7.1.1.1. Improve the municipal government's outreach and service delivery for refugees and host communities

The strength and perception of local governments and institutions play a central role in conflict mitigation and in limiting the influence of anti-government entities. People who trust their municipal governments to provide security and protect livelihoods will be less likely to support anti-government entities and more likely to engage in conflict-mediation mechanisms than those who do not.

Government inefficiency, poor service delivery, and lack of communication between the municipality and the community were complaints mentioned by all key informants and most survey respondents. Other common concerns included the lack of government accountability as well as accusations of nepotism at the municipal level. To increase the perceived legitimacy of the government, so as to limit the influence of anti-government entities, it is imperative to develop municipal capacity. This will ensure that local governments can respond to the needs of their constituents and can limit practices that can harm their credibility.

Many of the obstacles to developing municipal capacity are long-term, structural problems that precede the refugee crisis. These problems affect both the national government and most municipalities throughout the country, and include political deadlock, ineffective government decentralization, limited funding, and under-developed coordination strategies. Allowing direct election of municipal officials, increasing and expediting the distribution of the Independent Municipal Fund, and providing municipal governments with the authority and access to financial resources and information needed to make decisions without consultation with the Ministry of Interior would substantially improve the legitimacy of

the government and its efficiency in the long term. Unfortunately, such reforms would likely take many years to materialize. Still, there are alternative programs that can help improve the capacity and response of local governments given the present circumstances.

Stabilization and resilience programs that aim to improve the municipal government's image should provide financial or in-kind resources to improve the provision of services and develop the capacity of the municipal staff. Service delivery should attend to the needs of both host communities and refugees and should be based on comprehensive baseline assessments. Beneficiaries – including Syrian refugees – should be encouraged to participate in the design and implementation of programs through consultation assemblies.

In addition, stabilization programs should address the municipalities' capacity to communicate and reach out to the population to improve its image and support. A good option would be to train a spokesperson and event organizer whose purpose is to engage with the community, enquire about its needs and interests, bring them to the attention of relevant municipal employees, and guide these employees on best ways to address each issue. In addition, the spokesperson's duty would be to improve the image of the government at the municipal level by publicly sharing information about the municipality's projects and challenges while working to increase the amount and quality of community outreach activities, such as communal assemblies and sports and cultural events.

So far, the inter-agency response to the refugee crisis has not shown enough interest in engaging with municipal governments to develop resilience mechanisms that allow them to deal with the long-term consequences of the influx of refugees. In the future, all programs should be implemented through the municipality, ensuring that officials participate in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of the projects and that they receive the appropriate training in order to be able to execute development programs without further assistance. In addition, programs should continue to shift attention towards the needs of host communities, and not just refugees, in order to prevent resentment against Syrians.

7.1.2. Increase employment opportunities and access to finance

Results show a significant correlation between underemployment and neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra and several key informants mentioned that monetary compensation to youth is one of the main recruiting tactics used by these extremist groups in poverty stricken areas of Halba. Akkar was already the poorest governorate in Lebanon before the refugee crisis and the influx of refugees has worsened its economic hardship. Competition for employment has become one of the main sources of tension between Lebanese and Syrians, and host communities are finding it increasingly harder to secure their livelihoods.

In this context, programs to increase employment opportunities and access micro credit should be a priority. If youth have alternative sources of income and a meaningful job, there will be less incentive to exchange loyalty for money. To ensure that these programs are successful – i.e., that the beneficiaries find

a job or gain profit from their investments – they must be designed based on a comprehensive study of the labor market at both the national and local levels. This will help avoid the all-too-common scenario in which the beneficiaries of vocational and job creating programs cannot find jobs relevant to their new skill sets.

7.1.3. Improve trust in Lebanese Security Forces

The Lebanese security forces are the most relied on institution in Halba and surrounding areas, but still half of the respondents suggested that they would not rely neither on the LAF or ISF in case of need. Those who are neutral towards Jabhat al-Nusra tend to distrust the LAF and ISF and refugee leaders interviewed said that they actively avoid any encounter with LSF to prevent conflict. The increasing vulnerability of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, coupled with the correlation between discontent with the state's security apparatus and sympathy for extremist groups, calls for urgent measures to improve the image of the Lebanese Security Forces in Akkar and elsewhere.

One key informant mentioned that support for Jabhat al-Nusra seems to be largely motivated by Hezbollah's involvement in the war in Syria. Public knowledge of Hezbollah's ties with LAF's leadership – coupled with the arrests by LAF of Syrian refugees in the North and the Bekaa and its crackdown on Sunni militants in Tripoli – is debilitating the last remaining non-sectarian organization in Lebanon. Losing this inclusivity, which has historically earned LAF most of its Lebanese support, would damage its reputation. Results also show a positive correlation between supporting the Future Movement and trusting the LSF. However, despite the fact that the ISF remains under the control of the Future Movement, several informants explained that their reputation has been damaged by its political bias at the local level and because its members are corrupt and can be quite aggressive.

Limiting Hezbollah's involvement in Syria and its ties with LAF will not be accomplished in the foreseeable future. Still, it is possible to improve the image and capabilities of the LSF by increasing the oversight and transparency of its operations, both of its leadership and on the ground. Security councils could be organized at the local level between residents and members of the ISF assigned in the area to share views, interests, and complaints, and foster a better understanding between them. In addition, a strategic communication campaign at the local level should complement the existing national campaign to support and legitimize LAF. The campaign should include the participation of Akkari soldiers in order to ensure the campaign's reach in every household. Messages should emphasize the non-sectarian character of LAF, its historical ties with Akkar residents, and its fight against extremist groups, while encouraging both Lebanese and Syrians to rely on LAF when in need of assistance.

7.1.4. Develop or strengthen the Lebanese political leadership at the local level

Results show that than half of those who are neutral to Jabhat al-Nusra do not sympathize with any political party in Lebanon. While 30% support the Future Movement, 11% are against it and the rest are neutral. This suggests a relative disenchantment with the traditional Sunni leadership and civil society

and a potential trend towards supporting more radical views.

The distrust of LSF among those who support Jabhat al-Nusra may be related to this discontent with the Future Movement, since Saad Hariri supported the LAF's crackdown on Sunni Islamist militants in Tripoli, leaving many Sunnis displeased with the party. The division of the Sunni constituency provides more room for extremist groups to gain influence. In addition, discontent with the poor provision of services is correlated with neutrality towards Jabhat al-Nusra, which suggests that questioning the efficiency and accountability of the government can lead Sunnis to sympathize with anti-government entities. Therefore, stabilization and CVE programs should focus on strengthening the moderate political leadership at the local level.

These programs can include capacity building courses for political leaders of all sectarian backgrounds and outreach activities that communicate the importance of active citizenship and broaden the interest in political participation at the local level. At the same time, the municipality should be encouraged to hold assemblies with political leaders and public consultations with members of the community who are interested in participating. It is important that all the activities with political parties are conducted within the framework of the municipal government to avoid contesting its authority and to encourage the idea of officials, political parties, and community members as dependable actors in a democratic process.

7.1.5. Delegitimize Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State and strengthen alternative influential figures

While strengthening institutions is fundamental to contain and reduce the influence of anti-government entities, such programs must go hand-in-hand with campaigns that aim directly at delegitimizing radical groups and limiting their capacity of recruitment.

Strategic communications programs should include public campaigns in traditional and informal media – such as radio, television, word of mouth, music concerts, theatrical representations, or graffiti – and direct engagement with influential figures. The public campaign should feature messages delivered by popular figures in the realms of politics, religion, and culture both at the national and local level. At the same time, a targeted strategic communications campaign should aim to shape the way these popular and influential figures think. By influencing the influencers, the campaign will gain more strength and the results will most likely be greater and more sustainable.

Identifying the “influencers” will be the first task and in some cases a hard one. Survey results suggest that reliance on community members, religious figures, LSF, and government institutions in Halba and its surrounding areas is relatively low. A new survey and atmospheric research should be conducted, therefore, to specifically identify the most popular and relied-on figures in each community and to determine the best ways to engage them in program activities.

In general, religious figures tend to have considerable influence on public opinion in rural areas like Akkar, where other institutions are dormant. Engaging with moderate religious figures and strengthening moderate religious institutions – such as Dar El Fatwa and the more conservative League of Muslim

Scholars – is an example of how “influencing the influencers” can widen support for moderate leadership and prevent clerics from being recruited by the Islamic State or Jabhat al-Nusra.

The content of the strategic communications messages, on the other hand, could be drawn based on the findings of this study, but should also be based on further and continuous qualitative research on the community’s perceptions of extremist groups and related events that shape understandings of the political situation. The content of the messages should of course vary and adapt to the different types of audiences.

For example, key informants stated that most Sunnis in Halba and surrounding areas do not support either Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State because they promote distorted ideas of Islam. Messages focused on the idea that these groups support a distorted conception of Islam may appeal to moderate Sunnis and those who do not sympathize with the group yet. However, these messages are unlikely to have any effect of Islamists who already sympathize with the group. In that case, it will be more useful to focus on a different topic. For example, condemning Jabhat al-Nusra for fighting on Lebanese soil – a source of discontent among many Sunnis in Akkar, according to a key informant – is likely to be a more successful way to change the mind of those who already sympathize with the Al Qaeda affiliate.

The aforementioned key informant also stated that many support Jabhat al-Nusra just because it is fighting Hezbollah. Unlike the Islamic State, Jabhat al-Nusra is still focused on its original objective, the overthrow of the Assad regime, and its loyalty to that cause seems to have gained the group considerable respect among Sunnis. Downgrading the threat posed by Hezbollah to the Sunni community or encouraging moderate Sunni leaders to publicly condemn the Shia organization and the Syrian regime may be the best way to change the mind of those who support Nusra and encourage them to side with moderate anti-Hezbollah political factions instead. Downplaying the influence of Hezbollah can also help prevent an unintended consequence of delegitimizing Jabhat al-Nusra: creating a leadership void that allows Hezbollah to strengthen its grip on Sunnis who support the Shia resistance against Israel.

7.2. Research recommendations

Levant7 suggests conducting research in the near future on the recruitment techniques of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State and their influence on religious leaders, as well as on likelihood of the militarization of the Lebanese Sunni community. Levant7 also recommends conducting atmospheric research to complement specific research initiatives and to track perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors in targeted areas where programs will be or are being implemented.

7.2.1. Specific research initiatives

Several key informants mentioned that the distribution of monetary compensation is a popular recruit-

ing method of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Akkar. Identifying the population targeted by extremist groups, as well as the source of the money and how it is being distributed can help understand the interests, appeal, and support of these organizations, how they interact with the community, and who is funding them.

Given the increasing influence of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State, the discontent with the traditional political leadership, and the looming war in Syria, research efforts should also focus on the likelihood of the militarization of Sunnis in Lebanon. Lebanese Sunnis are traditionally merchants who rarely engage in armed conflict. During the civil war, most Sunnis in the battlefield were Palestinian – sometimes allied with the Lebanese Sunni leadership, sometimes not. It remains to be seen whether the influence of Jabhat al-Nusra and the Islamic State in Lebanon will lead to the militarization of the Lebanese Sunni community or if, once again, those who take arms continue to be the refugees – this time both Palestinian and Syrian. How the Sunni community in Lebanon organizes itself and engages military against Hezbollah and in favor or against Sunni extremist groups will largely determine the course Lebanon will take in the years to come.

7.2.2. Atmospheric reporting

Levant7 recommends conducting atmospherics research to provide accurate and timely information about target communities so as to guide the design and implementation of programs and ensure that they adapt to the changing circumstances on the ground. Atmospheric reports are qualitative in nature and based on information gathered informally by local reporters during a selected period of time. The constant monitoring of the pulse of each place allows the identification and tracking of the perceptions and behavioral and attitudinal changes of the target population towards issues of relevance to the program that is being implemented. The type of information that is collected through atmospheric research will depend on the target area and the objectives of each program, but can include the monitoring of perceptions of and attitudes towards the government, extremist groups, public figures, and civil society organizations, as well as people's opinion and behavior towards events, government activities, and development programs implemented in the region.

Atmospheric research can also complement other research initiatives, particularly in cases where the sensitivity of the issues addressed or the fear of the targeted population to respond truthfully affect the accuracy of data collected through open surveys and interviews. Atmospheric reporters are originally from each target area, come from diverse cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and live and work within their respective communities. This allows them to gather information while informally talking to community members in key information nodes, such as religious temples, bazaars, camps, teahouses, restaurants and food stands, or wherever else relevant information can be obtained. Being part of the community gives atmospheric reporters much greater reach than that allowed to conventional researchers. In addition, the diverse background of the reporters ensures access to information that can only be gained through contacts from across the social spectrum. This provides a variety of perspectives on local affairs, which can be widely divergent.

Annex

Citations

footnote 2, page 5:

Alex Rowell, Lebanon's Akkar, Lebanon's Anbar? Now Lebanon, 16 October, 2014

Another Soldier Reportedly Defects to Nusra after One Says Joined Jihadists, Nahar Net, 10 October, 2014

Lebanese Soldier Defects, Calls on Fellows to Follow Lead, MTV, 23 July, 2014

AKKAR Survey Questionnaire

0

استبيان رقم

جزء 1 - المجيبين على الاستبيان

1

الجنسية:

أ. لبنان

ب. سوريا

2

الجنس:

أ. ذكر

ب. أنثى

3

السن:

أ. 15-20

ب. 20-30

ج. 30-40

د. 40-50

هـ. 50+

4

الطائفة:

أ. مسلم سني

ب. مسلم شيعي

ج. روم أرثوذكس

د. روم كاثوليك

هـ. ماروني

و. علوي

ز. أخرى

5

نوع الملجأ:

أ. منزل للعائلة/ شقة

ب. منزل مشترك للعائلة أو شقة

ج. ملجأ عمومي

د. خيمة في معسكر غير رسمي

6

نوع الوظيفة:

أ. دوام كلي

ب. وظيفة بدوام جزئي

ج. وظائف بدوام جزئي

د. عمل متقطع

هـ. ربة منزل

و. عاطل

7

متوسط الدخل الشهري للفرد

ليرة

8

متوسط الدخل الشهري للعائلة

ليرة

جزء 2.أ. - للبنانيين فقط

9

هل أنت راض عن قدرة الحكومة على توفير الخدمات (المياه والطاقة وإدارة المخلفات والتعليم والرعاية الصحية)؟

أ. راضي جداً

ب. راضي إلى حد ما

ج. غير راضي إلى حد ما

د. غير راضي مطلقاً

10

هل أنت راض عن تعامل الحكومة مع أزمة اللاجئين؟

أ. راضي جداً

ب. راضي إلى حد ما

ج. غير راضي إلى حد ما

د. غير راضي مطلقاً

11

هل تعتقد بتغير قدرة الحكومة على تقديم الخدمات على مدار العامين المنصرمين؟

أ. تحسنت كثيراً

ب. تحسنت قليلاً

ج. لم تتغير

د. أصبحت أسوأ قليلاً

هـ. أصبحت أسوأ كثيراً

12

هل تعتقد بن هذا التغيير يرجع إلى تنفق أعداد اللاجئين؟

أ. نعم

ب. إلى حد ما

ج. لا

13

ما رأيك في اللاجئين؟

أ. إيجابي

ب. محايد

ج. سلبي

14

هل تشعر أن الحكومة الوطنية تمثلك؟

أ. جداً

ب. إلى حد ما

ج. لا

15

هل تشعر أن طائفتك ممثلة جيداً في الحكومة الوطنية؟

أ. جداً

ب. إلى حد ما

ج. لا

لماذا؟

16

هل تشعر بأن الحكومة البلدية تمثلك؟

أ. جداً

ب. إلى حد ما

ج. لا

17

هل تعتقد أن الحكومة البلدية عند اتخاذ القرارات تراعي احتياجات ومصالح المجتمع؟

أ. على الدوام

ب. غالباً

ج. أحياناً

د. نادراً

هـ. أبداً

18

هل أنت مشارك في الحكومة البلدية؟

أ. على الدوام

ب. غالباً

ج. أحياناً

د. نادراً

هـ. أبداً

18.ii

إنما كانت الإجابة 23- كيف؟ (اختر الإجابة المطابقة)

AKKAR Survey Questionnaire

أ.	حضور الاجتماعات	ب.	التصويت في الانتخابات البلدية	ج.	تقديم الشكاوى	د.	المساعدة في تنظيم الفعاليات	هـ.	حضور الفعاليات العامة	و.	أخرى
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جزء 2.ب. - لغير اللبنانيين فقط

19 هل أنت راضٍ عن قدرة الحكومة على توفير الخدمات؟

20 هل أنت راضٍ عن تعامل الحكومة مع أزمة اللاجئين؟

21 هل تتعامل مع الحكومة البلدية؟

21.ii كيف؟ (اختر الإجابة المطابقة)

أ. حضور الاجتماعات ب. تقديم الشكاوى ج. بصورة غير مباشرة، عبر الممثل المجتمعي د. حضور الفعاليات العامة هـ. أخرى

22 هل تشعر أن الحكومة اللبنانية مسؤولة عن شعورك بالرفاهية؟

جزء 3 - المجيبون عن الاستبيان

23 هل تثق بالحكومة الوطنية اللبنانية؟

23.ii لماذا؟ (اختر الإجابة المطابقة)

أ. يتحكم بها حزب واحد ب. محايدة ج. فاسدة د. غير كفء هـ. توحّد اللبنانيين و. أخرى

24 هل تثق بالحكومة البلدية

24.ii لماذا؟ (اختر الإجابة المطابقة)

أ. متحيزة ب. محايدة ج. فاسدة د. غير كفء هـ. توفّر إلى الموارد البشرية و. توفّر إلى الموارد المالية

25 هل تثق بالمنتخبين إلى الطوائف الأخرى في مجتمعك؟

26 هل تغير مستوى الثقة بين الطوائف في مجتمعك على مدار العامين المنصرمين؟

أ. تحسنت كثيراً ب. تحسنت قليلاً ج. لم تتغير د. أصبحت أسوأ قليلاً هـ. أصبحت أسوأ كثيراً

27 على من ستعتمد حين تواجه مشكلة تستلزم الحل؟ (اختر الإجابة المطابقة حسب مدى تكرارها)

أ. الحكومة الوطنية ب. الحكومة البلدية ج. ممثلي المجتمع اللبناني د. ممثلي المجتمع السوري

هـ. منظمات المجتمع المدني و. الجيش اللبناني ز. قوى الأمن الداخلي ح. الشرطة المحلية ط. أحد الأحزاب السياسية اللبنانية ي. الزعماء الدينيين ك. المنظمات الدولية الأهلية ل. المنظمات اللبنانية الأهلية م. المنظمات السورية الأهلية ن. الجمعيات الخيرية الإسلامية س. الجيران ع. أخرى

28 أي الأحزاب السياسية التي تدعمها أو تتعاطف معها؟ (اختر ثلاث إجابات صحيحة على الأكثر حسب درجة أهميتها)

أ. المردة ب. الكتائب ج. القوات اللبنانية د. التيار الوطني الحر هـ. المستقبل و. الجماعة الإسلامية ز. الحزب السوري القومي الاجتماعي ح. جبهة النصرة ط. الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام ي. حزب الله ك. حركة أمل ل. الحزب العربي الديمقراطي م. أخرى ن. لا يوجد

29 هل تثق بالجيش اللبناني

لماذا؟ (اختر الإجابة المطابقة)

أ. قطعاً ب. إلى حد ما ج. لا

AKKAR Survey Questionnaire

<div><div><div>ي. فاسد</div><div>ك. نزيه</div><div>ل. أخرى</div></div><div><div>ز. جدير بالثقة</div><div>ح. كفاء</div><div>ط. غير كفاء</div></div></div> <div><div><div>د. متحيز للحكومة السورية</div><div>هـ. منظومة غير طائفية</div><div>و. محايد</div></div><div><div>أ. متحيز للسنة</div><div>ب. متحيز للمسيحيين</div><div>ج. متحيز للشيعة</div></div></div>
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هل تثق بقوة الأمن الداخلي؟

أ. قطعاً

ب. إلى حد ما

ج. لا

30 لماذا؟ اختر الإجابة المطابقة

<div><div><div>ي. فاسد</div><div>ك. أخرى</div></div><div><div>ز. غير كفاء</div><div>ح. كفاء</div><div>ط. نزيه</div></div></div> <div><div><div>د. متحيز للحكومة السورية</div><div>هـ. منظومة غير طائفية</div><div>و. محايد</div></div><div><div>أ. متحيز للسنة</div><div>ب. متحيز للمسيحيين</div><div>ج. متحيز للشيعة</div></div></div>

31 بمن تثق أكثر؟

أ. الجيش اللبناني

ب. قوى الأمن الداخلي

32 هل تعتقد أن الهجمات الموجهة ضد الجيش اللبناني مبررة؟

أ. نعم

ب. ربما

ج. لا

33 من الشخصية السياسية التي تمثلك؟

34 ما رأيك في الجماعات التالية؟

أ. حزب الله

ب. محاييد

ج. سلبي

أ. إيجابي

ب. جبهة النصرة

أ. إيجابي

ب. محاييد

ج. سلبي

أ. المستقل

ب. إيجابي

أ. إيجابي

ب. محاييد

ج. سلبي

أ. الدولة الإ.أ.

ب. محاييد

ج. سلبي

.....

AKKAR Survey Questionnaire

Levant 7 Survey Questionnaire - Halba, Akkar - November 2014

0	SURVEY #:																
PART 1 - All respondents																	
1	Nationality:	a.	Lebanese	b.	Syrian												
2	Gender:	a.	Male	b.	Female												
3	Age:	a.	15-20	b.	20-30	c.	30-40	d.	40-50	e.	50+						
4	Sectarian affiliation:	a.	Sunni Muslim	b.	Shia Muslim	c.	Greek Orthodox	d.	Greek Catholic	e.	Maronite	f.	Alawite	g.	Other:		
5	Type of shelter:	a.	Single family house or apartment			b.	Shared family house or apartment			c.	Common shelter		d.	Tent in informal camp			
6	What type of job do you have?	a.	Full-time job		b.	One part-time job		c.	Two part-time jobs		d.	Intermittent work		e.	Housewife	f.	Unemployed
7	What is your average individual income?	L.L.															
8	What is your average household income?	L.L.															
PART 2.A. - For Lebanese nationals only																	
9	Are you satisfied with the government's capacity to provide services (water, power, waste management, education, health care)?																
	a.	Very satisfied	b.	Somewhat satisfied	c.	Somewhat unsatisfied	d.	Very unsatisfied									
10	Are you satisfied with the government's response to the refugee crisis?																
	a.	Very satisfied	b.	Somewhat satisfied	c.	Somewhat unsatisfied	d.	Very unsatisfied									
11	Do you think the capacity of the government to provide services has changed in the past 2 years?																
	a.	Improved a lot	b.	Improved a little	c.	Did not change	d.	Worsened a little	e.	Worsened a lot							
12	Do you think this change was caused by the influx of refugees?																
	a.	Yes	b.	Somewhat	c.	Not at all											
13	What is your opinion of refugees?																
	a.	Positive	b.	Neutral	c.	Negative											
14	Do you feel represented by the national government?																
	a.	Very represented	b.	Somewhat represented	c.	Not at all											
15	Do you think your sect is properly represented in the national government?																
	a.	Very well represented	b.	Somewhat properly represented	c.	Not well represented											
	Why?																
16	Do you feel represented by the municipal government?																
	a.	Very represented	b.	Somewhat represented	c.	Not at all											
17	Do you think the municipal government makes decisions taking into account the needs and interests of the community?																
	a.	Always	b.	Very often	c.	Sometimes	d.	Rarely	e.	Never							
18	Do you engage with the municipal government?																
	a.	Always	b.	Very often	c.	Sometimes	d.	Rarely	e.	Never							
18.i	If 23 a., b., c., d. How? (Select all that apply)																
	a.	Attending assemblies	b.	Voting in municipal elections	c.	Presenting complaints	d.	Helping organize events	e.	Attending public events	f.	Other					
PART 2.B. - For NON-Lebanese nationals only																	
19	Are you satisfied with the government's capacity to provide services?																
	a.	Very satisfied	b.	Somewhat satisfied	c.	Somewhat unsatisfied	d.	Very unsatisfied									
20	Are you satisfied with the government's response to the refugee crisis?																
	a.	Very satisfied	b.	Somewhat satisfied	c.	Somewhat unsatisfied	d.	Very unsatisfied									
21	Do you interact with the municipal government?																
	a.	Always	b.	Very often	c.	Sometimes	d.	Rarely	e.	Never							
21.ii	If 23 a., b., c., d. How? (Select all that apply)																
	a.	Attending assemblies	b.	Presenting complaints	c.	Indirectly, through a community representative	d.	Attending public events	e.	Other							
22	Do you think the Lebanese government is accountable for your well being?																
	a.	Very much	b.	Somewhat	c.	Not at all											
PART 3 - All respondents																	
23	Do you trust the Lebanese national government?																
	a.	Very much	b.	Somewhat	c.	Not at all											
23.ii	Why? (Select all that apply)																
	a.	It is controlled by one party		c.	It is corrupt		a.	It is somewhat efficient		e.	It unifies all Lebanese						
	b.	It is neutral		d.	It is inefficient		b.	It is non-sectarian		f.	Other						

AKKAR Survey Questionnaire

24	Do you trust the municipal government?			a. Very much	b. Somewhat	c. Not at all
24.ii	Why? (Select all that apply)			a. It is biased	c. It is corrupt	e. It is somewhat efficient
				b. It is neutral	d. It is inefficient	f. It lacks financial resources
						g. It lacks human resources
						h. It unifies the community
						i. It is non-sectarian
						j. Other
25	Do you trust members of other sects in your community?			a. Very much	b. Somewhat	c. Not at all
26	Has the level of trust among sects in your community changed in the past 2 years?					
	a. Improved a lot b. Improved a little c. Did not change d. Worsened a little e. Worsened a lot					
27	Who do you rely on when you need to solve a problem? (Select all that apply numbering them according to the order of frequency)					
	a. National government		e. Civil society organizations		i. Lebanese political party	
	b. Municipal government		f. Lebanese Armed Forces		j. Religious leaders	
	c. Lebanese community representatives		g. Internal Security Forces		k. International NGO	
	d. Syrian community representatives		h. Local police		l. Lebanese NGO	
					m. Syrian NGO	
					n. Islamic charity	
					o. Neighbors	
					p. Other	
28	Which political parties do you support or sympathize with? (List them. Select up to 3 numbering them in order of importance)					
	a. Al Marada		d. Free Patriotic Movement		g. SSNP	
	b. Kitaeb		e. Al Mustakbal		h. Jabat Al-Nusra	
	c. Lebanese Forces		f. Jamiat Islamiya		i. ISIS	
					j. Hezbollah	
					k. Amal	
					l. Arab Democratic Party	
					m. Other	
					n. None	
29	Do you trust the Lebanese Armed Forces?			a. Very much	b. Somewhat	c. Not at all
	Why? (Select all that apply)					
	a. They are biased towards Sunnis			d. They are biased towards the Syrian government		
	b. They are biased towards Christians			e. It is a non-sectarian organization		
	c. They are biased towards Shias			f. They are neutral		
				g. They are trustworthy		
				h. They are efficient		
				i. They are not efficient		
				j. They are corrupt		
				k. They are not corrupt		
				l. Other		
30	Do you trust the Internal Security Forces?			a. Very much	b. Somewhat	c. Not at all
	Why? (Select all that apply)					
	a. They are biased towards Sunnis			d. They are biased towards the Syrian government		
	b. They are biased towards Christians			e. It is a non-sectarian organization		
	c. They are biased towards Shias			f. They are neutral		
				g. They are not efficient		
				h. They are efficient		
				i. They are not corrupt		
				j. They are corrupt		
				k. Other		
31	Who do you trust more?			a. Lebanese Armed Forces	b. Internal Security Forces	
32	Do you think attacks against the Lebanese Armed Forces can be justified?					
	a. Yes b. Maybe c. No					
33	Which political figure represents you most?					
34	What is your opinion of the following groups?					
	a. Hezbollah	a. Positive	b. Jabat Al-Nusra	a. Positive	b. Al Mustakbal	a. Positive
		b. Neutral		b. Neutral		b. Neutral
		c. Negative		c. Negative		c. Negative
					c. ISIS	a. Positive
						b. Neutral
						c. Negative

Key-Informant Interviews Guide

Levant7 Key-Informants Interviews Guide

Akkar, November 2014

Key-informants

- Two municipal officials and / or mukhtars
- About four religious leaders (two Sunnis, a Greek Orthodox, and a Maronite)
- About three Lebanese community leaders (one Greek Orthodox, two Sunni)
- One or two representative of the refugee community
- One or two Islamic charities

Topics of discussion

1. Satisfaction with the government's provision of services

- 1.a. Level of satisfaction among both Lebanese residents and refugees with the government's provision of services
- 1.b. Level of trust and reliance of both Lebanese and refugees on the government to solve their problems
- 1.c. Perception of change in Lebanese residents' capacity to secure livelihoods and access basic services since the influx of refugees
- 1.d. Refugees' perception of their capacity to secure livelihoods and access basic services
- 1.e. Level of satisfaction among both Lebanese residents and refugees with the government's response to the refugee crisis

2. Level of inclusion of municipal government institutions

- 2.a. Type and frequency of participatory venues for both Lebanese residents and refugees (such as assemblies, consultation meetings between the public and municipal officials, complaint channels, feedback,)
- 2.b. Extent to which different national and sectarian groups feel represented in the municipal decision making process (including the opinion of government officials)
- 2.c. Actual degree of representation of different sectarian groups in the municipal government (including the opinion of government officials)
- 2.d Political affiliation of government officials and mukhtars, religious leaders, and community representatives

3. Capacity of municipal government

- 3.a. Municipal government's sources and distribution of income, as well as working partners (Lebanese, Syrian, and international NGOs, political parties, private companies or donors, diaspora community and sectarian affiliation of group if relevant)
- 3.b. Government's number and type of employees, most active departments, recent development plans / objectives
- 3.c. Government's degree of control over its territory

4. Trust in government institutions

- 4.a. Perceptions and level of trust in municipal government and reasons why
- 4.b. Perceptions and level of trust in national government and reasons why

Key-Informant Interviews Guide

- 4.c. Perceptions and level of trust in LAF and reasons why
- 4.d. Perceptions and level of trust in ISF and reasons why
- 4.e. Incidents of violence against government actors and degree of support for the attacks

We are trying to determine:

- 1) The extent to which Hezbollah's influence on the LAF and the latter's bias in favor of certain groups is weakening the Sunni's support of the Army; *
- 2) Whether disillusionment with the LAF and / or the weakening of Al Mustakbal's support in favor of Islamist groups is affecting people's backing of the ISF; *
- 3) The extent to which sympathy or support for Jabat al-Nusra and ISIS affects perceptions of these government institutions;*
- 4) The level of satisfaction among the Lebanese Sunni community regarding the type of representation they have in the national government;
- 5) Any other reasons that may encourage or discourage support for these institutions, including the national government (such as the level of efficiency, transparency, and inclusiveness)

* We will not be able to ask questions 4.c., 4.d., or 4.e. as part of the survey because of LAF control on surveyors in the area, so we hope to get at least some information on this topic through KIIs.

5. Social cohesion

- 5.a. Trust among different sectarian groups and perceptions of change in recent years
- 5.b. General perception of refugees among Lebanese residents and vice-versa
- 5.c. Perceptions of change in the level of tension and / or violence and reasons why
- 5.d. Incidents of tension or violence between Lebanese and refugees
- 5.e. Number, type, and leverage of civil society organizations (such as neighborhood associations, community support groups, or shuras) that exist in the area

6. Support and reliance on non-government actors

- 6.a. Perceptions and support among different sectarian groups of political parties and organizations present in the area (Al-Mustakbal, Jamiaat Islamiya, Jabat al Nusra, ISIS, Hezbollah, Kitaeb, Lebanese Forces, Al Marada, and so on)
- 6.b. Perceptions among Sunnis of the moderate and non-moderate Sunni leadership at the national level (such as Al Mustakbal, Jamiat Islamiyaa, Akkar MP Khaled al-Daher, Jabat al-Nusra, ISIS)
- 6.c. Identify political and religious leaders operating in the area and / or popular among Sunni constituents. Assess their degree of "moderation" and reasons for their popularity.
- 6.d. Identify non-governments armed groups operating in the area, their level of support, and reasons for their popularity (including armed wings of political parties, informal militias, and check-points if any)
- 6.e. Degree of people's reliance on each of these groups and leaders; on what issues to they choose to turn to them and which not
- 6.f. The extent to which the presence of Syrian refugees and Sunni militarized groups is leading (or not) to the militarization of the Sunni community