



POLL SHOWS BASES FOR UNITY IN LEBANON

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Despite deep differences, which continue to divide the so-called “opposition” and “loyalist” movements in Lebanon, there are some important areas of agreement that could form the basis for national unity and democratic reform in that country. This is one of the initial findings of a new Zogby International/Information International poll taken in Lebanon during the second week of April 2005.

The strongest points of consensus are on three issues that are currently at the top of Lebanon’s political agenda.

Overwhelming majorities of all Lebanese want: a national dialogue of all Lebanese parties to implement the Taef Accord; the “opposition” and “loyalists” to join in the formation of a national unity government; and national parliamentary elections to be held on time.

While there is not so clear a consensus on changing the 60 year old National Pact (that provides for Maronite and Sunni hegemony over the major posts of government), there is significant support among all sects for the principal of a “one man, one vote” direct election of the next Lebanese President.

If leaders of the opposition and loyalist camps were to focus their discussions on these issues, significant progress could be made in implementing a key provision of the Taef Accord, which calls the “abolishing of political sectarianism” a “fundamental political objective.”

One additional area of strong agreement across “opposition” and “loyalist” lines is outrage over the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri. When asked how important a number of issues were in leading to their participation in the massive rival demonstrations that rocked Beirut in March, nine out of ten in each camp said it was their demand to know who killed Hariri.

While some differences exist over the issue of an armed Hizballah presence in Lebanon, there is no agreement that the group should be forcibly disarmed. Eight out of ten Shi’a reject the disarming of Hizballah. Sunnis had a more nuanced view of this issue, with one-third rejecting disarming Hizballah, one-third supporting disarming only if Hizballah agrees to it, and another one-third saying that disarming the group should only occur in the context of regional peace. Even Maronites, 53% of whom say they support “more US pressure on Syria to disarm Hizballah,” also agree that this disarming should only occur if Hizballah agrees to it. Only 18% Maronites would force the issue on the group.

Here’s where the consensus ends.

While supporters of the “opposition” identify the demand that Syria leave Lebanon (8 out of 10) and the resignation of top Lebanese security officials (9 out of 10) as important concerns, nine out of ten “loyalists” declared that what motivated them was support for Hizballah, and three-fourths identified their rejection of US/French interference in Lebanese affairs. Two-thirds also claimed their support for the “loyalist” cause was due to their rejection of UN Security Council Resolution 1559.

Interestingly, both sides are equally dismissive of the other's demonstrations. Only 10% of the "opposition," for example, thought that the "loyalists'" demonstrations were important, while one-half said they were not. Conversely, only 7% of those who identified themselves as "loyalists" said that the "opposition's" efforts were significant. 54% said they were not important.

It is also useful to note that only one-fifth of those who identified themselves as "opposition" demonstrators claimed that US and French support was important to their cause, and only one in ten claimed to have been inspired by either the "Orange Revolution" in the Ukraine or the Iraqi elections.

A deep sectarian divide continues to shape attitudes toward a number of other issues. Maronites, for example, are strong supporters of the US and French roles in Lebanon. Sunni and Shi'a Muslims, on the other hand, are in even stronger opposition to the role played by these two countries.

Attitudes toward Syria, remain a source of division, with Maronites and Sunni Muslims strongly opposed, while Shi'a attitudes are more mixed (54% positive, 42% negative). Attitudes are also mixed as to whether Hizballah's role in Lebanon is positive. Almost nine in ten Sunnis and Shi'a Muslims say the group has played a positive role, while Maronites are divided (43% positive, 53% negative).

A political path for Lebanon emerges from a review of these numbers. If the country is to preserve its national unity, leaders of both the "opposition" and "loyalist" movements and leaders of Lebanon's political groupings need to focus their efforts on areas where consensus exists and can be strengthened: a national dialogue leading to direct elections and a change in the national pact. As a first step, both camps need to join in a national unity government and insure that the upcoming elections are held on time.

It appears, as well, that in the aftermath of the Syrian withdrawal, the more promising path for the Lebanese to pursue is the full implementation of the Taef Accord, and not the more controversial, less comprehensive, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559. It would also be best, at this point, for the US, France and Syria to keep a low profile in Lebanon. They are sources of division in the country today. And what Lebanon needs is national unity that can best be achieved through national dialogue free of all foreign divisive elements.

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Poll Results

1. Change in the “National Pact” (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Support	63	42	68	74
Oppose	29	52	20	20

2. One Man, One Vote (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Support	69	49	83	79
Oppose	25	42	12	16

3. Hizballah Should be Disarmed (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Disagree	41	8	31	79
Only if Hizballah Agrees	31	51	28	6
Agree	6	18	3	--
Agree, if peace exists	18	17	28	14

4. Roles of Countries or Organizations in Lebanon (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
	Support/Oppose	Support/Oppose	Support/Oppose	Support/Oppose
United States	30/69	67/31	20/80	7/93
Syria	37/61	15/84	34/65	54/42
Hizballah	74/23	43/53	85/15	92/6
France	45/54	69/30	36/63	35/64
United Nations	53/45	76/22	53/46	31/67

5. Opposition Joining National Unity Government (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Support	76	70	77	79
Oppose	12	17	12	12

6. Election On Time (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Support	81	87	77	73
Oppose	5	1	6	9

7. National Dialogue on Taef Accords (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Support	85	89	84	83
Oppose	6	2	5	10

8. More US Pressure on Syria to Disarm Hizballah (%)

	All	Maronite	Sunni	Shi'a
Support	26	53	14	9
Oppose	61	29	70	82

9. Principal Motivation for "Opposition" Demonstrators

	(%)
Who killed Rafic Hariri	94
Syria out	81
Resignation of Lebanese Security Officials	69
Lahoud should resign	40
Inspired by US/French support	19
Inspired by events in Ukraine	11
Iraq	9
Importance of loyalist demonstrations	Yes 10/No 48

10. Principal Motivation for "Loyalist" Demonstrations

	(%)
Who killed Rafic Hariri	89
Support for Hizballah	90
No to US/France	75
Appreciate Syria	48
Reject UN Res. 1559	64
Importance of opposition demonstrations	Yes 7/No 54

11. Composition of "Opposition" Supporters (%)

Maronite	31
Other Christians	21
Sunni Muslim	25
Druze	14
Shi'a Muslim	3

12. Composition of "Loyalist" Supporters (%)

Shi'a Muslim	75
Sunni Muslim	9
All Christians	7
Druze	4

