

# Instructors' and Learners' Perceptions of October 17 million-plus Turning Phenomenon and Participation in 2022 Parliamentary Elections

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## Abstract

This study set to elicit instructors' and learners' perceptions of Lebanon's October 17 mobilization and consequences that started on October 17, 2019, and rendered on October 29 the toppling of Lebanon's government headed by Saad Hariri. In particular, the purpose of the study was to investigate the effects of October 17 on participants' willingness to participate in the 2022 parliamentary elections, the role of social media in shaping their perceptions, and participants' perceptions of the responsiveness of Lebanon's political system to their cry. This study aimed to identify the perceptions of 111 participants who represented almost all categories of instructors and learners of an American university located in Lebanon. The researcher utilized the survey adapted from Zestanaki (2019). Data were collected using a Google form sent via WhatsApp to address the study question. Data yielded findings that showed the significant effect of social media on shaping the participants' perceptions of the October 17 mobilization. In addition, the findings showed that around half the participants confirmed that they would participate in the 2022 elections. However, most of the participants who showed a willingness to vote indicated voting for new candidates and not the old ones, which determined their willingness to vote for a new parliament in 2022. The findings also shed light on conflicting perceptions of the consequences of the 2019 protests. Recommendations and implications were given and discussed.

**Keywords**— Corruption, mass mobilization, protests, revolution, reform, sectarian elites

## Introduction

Lebanon has broken into a consociation system in Lebanon's 2018 parliamentary elections [1], power-sharing after the Arab Spring [2], the massive influx of Syrian refugees [3]-[4], and Consociation in Postwar Lebanon [5]-[7]. Lebanon has been affected by the perspective of Yemen's violent contradictions [8]-[9] and the United States foreign and security policy in Lebanon since 1980[10]. North Yemen War impacted the cold war equilibrium of force in the Middle East, shaped alliances, and affected foreign policy relations among countries in the Arab world [11]-[12]. In addition, Lebanon

witnessed civil war and political change [13]. Media discriminating revelation and responsibility during major events provided resources and communication needs [14]-[15] and shaped the youth's beliefs [16], especially during pandemics [17], protests [18], and decision-making [19]-[20]. Women had strategic performance in war reporting [21], gender equality in Lebanon [22]-[23], and in Yemen [24]. However, sectarianism has been agonizing Lebanon even in the postwar era [25] and political confessions and contestations dominated in postwar Lebanon [26]. Taif's accord ended the civil war [27] but did not end sectarianism.

The million-plus protests started in 2019 because many protesters suffered inequalities, poverty, and corruption [28]-[29]. October 17, 2019, protests "grew out to be the largest and most durable uprising in the country's history" (p.1) [30]. Lebanon suffers from corruption which drastically influences the public healthcare system and ruins the very fabric of the economy, society, and politics during the period extending from 1990 to 2019(p.3) [28]. Many protesters cried for citizenship and sectarianism abolition. Recent research conducted by [31] has revealed that most teachers of 21 public schools in Lebanon have shown that corruption is the main barrier for teaching and learning citizenship values needed for environmental sustainability.

Lebanon is a republic that underwent civil war starting 1975 until 1989 due to sectarianism and ethnic conflicts. Lebanon, a confessionally different country, includes 18 publicly established religious groups.

Muslims, Christians, and Druze constitute 54%, 40.5%, and 5.6%. Lebanon has also been struggling with massive economic inequality, and around 0.3% of the population controls 50% of the nation's wealth. System justification processes may help explain Lebanon's sectarian political system's persistence (p.138) [32]. Taif Accord ended the Lebanese civil war and formed the first constitutional amendment since Lebanon's independence in 1943. Rafic Hariri, the late prime minister, was the first after the Taif accord. The Taif accord stipulates that the republic's president should be a Maronite, the prime minister should be a Sunni, and the parliament speaker should be a Shi'a. The parliament constitutes 128 seats representing the 18 sects in Lebanon [33]. Over the last three decades, the sectarian elites representing the ruling class have had tremendous control over media outlets, institutions, and economic facilities, which gives them the means to weaken and discredit the non-sectarian actors [34]. Since

the assassination of Rafic Hariri in 2005, turmoil and instability dominated on the social, economic, and political levels, followed by the Lebanon-Israel July war in 2006. Since 2005, the Lebanese started undergoing political, economic, and social instability.

Inequalities, dearth, instability, unemployment, and debts control Lebanese society's current circumstances [28]and [29]. In addition, public healthcare in Lebanon is harshly affected. Lebanon reported the high-ranking concentrations of "cancer in the MENA region in 2017, with an incidence of 242.8 per 100 000 inhabitants" (p.7) [28]. The present decline is due to civil uncertainty, frequent fierce tension, and political upheaval, along with the "spillover from the Syrian Civil War and the related refugee crisis" (p.4) [28]. In addition to exploitation and the outcomes of the COVID-19 crisis, Lebanon ranked Lebanon 129th of 141 on inequality. Lebanon's financial and economic downfall resulted from "30 years of social, economic, financial, and fiscal mismanagement, amplified by the Covid-19 pandemic and further exacerbated by the Beirut port explosion" (p.1) [29]. Joblessness has increased further as around 40% of young people are unemployed. Inflation, along with the COVID-19 pandemic, has also severely escalated Lebanon's social, financial, and economic situations [28].

Lebanon's economy can grow again if it becomes established in an "open-economy model and driven by low tariffs, a flexible exchange rate regime, and a dynamic export sector built on competitive and comparative advantages" (p.1, 2021) [29]. This plan partly relies on suggestions and recommendations given by preceding economic policies.

The massive protests erupted on October 17, 2019, making Beirut, Lebanon's capital, exemplary. The protesters also condemned the latest taxes and the dishonesty of Lebanon's

"political class, which had presided over a failing economy and failed public services—from electricity to water" (p.456) [35]. As of October 17, 2019, protests signify a new-found "case of non-sectarian mobilization" (p.95) [36]; this study intends to make two main contributions to the existing literature on non-sectarian mobilizations. This study draws on the new slogan, "All of Them Means All of Them," used for the first time in the history of Lebanon on October 17, 2019, to identify the protesters' perceptions and motifs and accordingly to determine whether reforms or riots were the targets. The 2019 protests were defined as exceptional in their "number, geographical scope, and tactics" (Rønn,2020, p.95). A series of tragic incidents, including the fire forest attacks and the inability of the government to provide the basics of living, triggered October 17 protests. The Lebanese, mainly civilians, were able to suppress the forest blazes when the firefighters failed due to the dysfunctional helicopters[35].

In September 2019, banks in Lebanon started putting restrictions on getting access to dollars and the Lebanese lira, which rendered anxiety among Lebanese who started facing inflation and low living standards. The disasters persisted, and governments could not stop the deterioration of the currency. By August 2020, the currency had dropped about "80 percent of its value since October 2019. COVID-19 struck, and while a lockdown" stopped a devastating spread of viruses, it more discouraging commercial movement (p.456) [35]. On August 4, the collapse peaked with an immense explosion at Beirut port which led to the death of 180 people and to injuring 6000 people[35].

### **The Current Study**

This study is significant since it is the first study that sheds light on the instructors' and learners' perceptions of 2019 million-plus protests. This study contributes to the existing knowledge

pertinent to politics, non-sectarian mobilizations, and reforms in Lebanon, a fragmented country in the middle east. We focused on Lebanon's October mass mobilization, which started aggressively on October 17, 2019. In this study, we focused on how the non-sectarian activists from all over Lebanon overcame the above challenges when developing frames of October 17, 2019, mass mobilization. "All of Them Means All of Them" was the slogan that made the non-sectarian mobilization an opposition power to the whole political class "without exceptions" (p.90)[36].

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2019, the grievances of the Lebanese escalated following the wildfires that invaded Lebanon and showed the impotence of Lebanon's government to contain the crisis and extinguish the fires without receiving tremendous help from the civilians. The cries turned into a mass mobilization on October 17 after the government declared the WhatsApp Call tax proposal following fires. The series of imposed taxes on the Lebanese, including the newly agreed taxes and the last tax on the WhatsApp calls, has been the natural sparkle of the boiling rage inside us. It is time to explore the anger repressed inside all of us. It is ridiculous to believe that the sparkle of Lebanon's October peaceful revolution was merely the long series of taxes whose victims are all the Lebanese, excluding the ruling and illicitly wealthy class. The Lebanese uprising did not result from the long series of taxes, explicitly ending with the WhatsApp tax. Lebanon's October revolution started because the Lebanese could not take the present ruling class's inconsideration, neglect, and corruption. The Lebanese majority was starving and got fed up.

### **Research Questions**

The present study intended to address the following question:

What were the instructors' and learners' perceptions of the consequence of Lebanon's October 2019 protests? Will they vote in the 2022 parliamentary elections? Do they believe that Lebanon's political system is responding to their cry?

### Theoretical Framework of the Study

The repression theories [37] frame this study. The study addresses Lebanon's mass mobilization on the backbones behind October 17, 2019. Lebanon's protestors under discussion were urged by solid demands for political change, especially since most citizens in Lebanon have got fed up with the neglect and corruption of their governments that failed to combine repression with concessions.

#### *Lebanon's Diverse International Relations*

Lebanon hosts 18 sects [38] which might have shaped politics as ethnic [39], caused trauma in consociational systems [40], yet yielded Democracy and Rhetoric in the country [41]. This study sampled the faculty of an American university because Faculty views on developing and accessing things might be deep [42]-[43]. Lebanon encompasses Muslims and Christians [44]-[46]. Powerful countries had hegemony over Lebanon [47] and over many Arab countries [48], which had shaped the economic policy in postwar Lebanon [49]. France had a collaboration with the US on Lebanon [50]: Syria's role in Lebanon has been strong as well [51]-[52]. Lebanon's overseas business dealings in the Postwar period called for integration [53]-[54]. Muslim's Perspectives on International Relations were generally supportive [55] and supported the integration of Syrian refugees into the society [56]. The Lebanese universities focused on English Medium Instruction showed more freedom to express beliefs and thoughts [57], but the Lebanese authorities generally showed respect to the international role France played in Lebanon [58].

Lebanon perceived the effect of sharing economy and perceived economic benefits on sustainable consumption through the sharing economy [59] and the significance of openness to the Arab world [60]. Furthermore, the European Union has been engaged in mitigating the dispute practices and struggle consequences [61]-[62]. The study population was selected from an American university encouraging freedom of expression [63].

Social media play a role in shaping people's perceptions [64], but Lebanese leaders need to create a political change [65] and, differently, shape Lebanese militias [66]. The politics of adaptation might help to reach agreements [67]. In addition, the interplay of economy, politics, and culture are decisive in creating either war or peace in the Arab world [68]—digital media influence people's thoughts [69].

Reintegration for peace and avoiding *civil wars* is crucial in Lebanon [70]-[71]. Lebanon's economy has been deteriorating [72]. The Iranian foreign policy in Lebanon made a Shia revival in Lebanon [73] which led to the downfall of Middle Eastern tyranny: and broke the barriers of fear and power [74]. Hezbollah began to have an Islamist population in Lebanon and the MENA region [75]. Thus, consociational democratic state and urban sustainability have changed the confessional divides in Beirut [76]. However, the decline of nation-states after the Arab spring led to the rise of communitocracy [77] and the balance of powers in the Middle East [78]. Economic policy impacts improving the country's situation [79]. Power-sharing shaped Lebanon's political situation and Nationalism and Ethnic Politics [80]. Geopolitical risk mitigates inbound tourism and deteriorates the economic situation [81]. Access to social protection makes immigrants, emigrants, and resident nationals hesitant to return to Lebanon [82]-[84]. Furthermore, access to information communication technology (ICT) devices in

higher education make instructors and learners aware of current events [85]. To work for peace and civil society makes reintegration possible and civil wars not possible [86]-[89].

#### *Political Constellation after the Beirut Port Explosion*

The Beirut port explosion triggered many civic initiatives and several protests. The economic situation deteriorated, and many properties near the port got demolished. Three hundred thousand 'people had been made homeless and put the cost of reconstruction at US\$15 billion (p.460) [35].

#### *Weak Democratization or/and Weak Economy for the Inept States*

Increased regime violence might yield more determination as the mobilization obligated Prime Minister Saad Hariri to stand down in October 2019. Then Hassan Diab took it over without political weight and showed an inability to support banks and decrease their losses. Diab's failure to bring about a "united front to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) led to a breakdown of negotiations for a rescue package. Successive governments since the early 2000s had first negotiated neoliberal reform"(p.459) [35].

### **Methodology**

The study context is an American university located in Lebanon. This university is deemed a moderate-sized institution with minor to no common ground between "faculty specialties according to their Ph.D. theses (p.1)" [90]. The overall purpose of this study is to explore the different instructors 'and learners' perceptions of October 17 events and consequences.

#### *Participants*

One-hundred eleven participants filled out the survey sent as a Google form. All the participants

were either instructors, staff, or students at an American university located in Beirut. The age of the participants ranged from 25 to 65. The age of 42.7% ranged between 25 and 35.20.9% were between 25 and 35.10% were between 35 and 45, and 10% were between 45 and 55.16.4% were older than 65.60.6% were females, and 39.4% were males.40.5% were undergraduate, 23.4% were postgraduate, 24.3% were graduates.12% were holders of Ph.D.48.6% were residents in Beirut. 13.1% lived in rural areas.16.8% were outside Lebanon at the Protests.

#### *Instruments*

A survey adapted from Zestanaki (2019) was conducted and sent to one hundred thirty people teaching or learning at an American university located in Lebanon. The survey consisted of ten closed-ended items. (See Appendix A).

### 3.3 Data collection and data analysis

The survey was sent via WhatsApp as a Google form link to five Legal Studies courses and fourteen instructors. Google Drive and percentages directly recorded the responses that were yielded. The researcher analyzed data and reported data using APA-formatted tables.

### **Results**

49.1% participated in the protests. 38.4% did not participate, and 14.5% were unsure if their contributions to the October 17 events could be considered participation. 34.6% were observed through the media, and they supported.19.2% participated less than once a week. 12.5 % participated 2-3 times a week. 11.5% participated around once a week. 12.5 % participated every day in the gatherings. 56% will vote for new candidates in the 2009 elections. 13.8 % will vote for the same party you voted for, but 21.1% will not vote. (See Table 1).

Table 1: Participation in protest of October 17

Yes	49.1%
No	36.4%
Maybe	14.5%
Way of Participation	
Participating everyday	12.5%
Social Media	34.6%
Participating less than once a week	19.2%
Participating 2-3 times a week	5%
Participating once a week	11.5%
Future Voting for:	
New candidates in the 2022 elections	56%
The same party they voted for previously	13.8%
No one	21.1%
Previous voting:	
Yes	58.6%
No	36.9%
Maybe	5.5%

58.6% voted in the last parliamentary elections, whereas 36.9% did not, and 5.5% were unsure if they voted.

47.7% believed that the events taking place in Lebanon would affect the way they will vote in the 2022 elections, whereas 40.5% did not believe that. 11.7% were not sure. (see Table 2).

Table 2: Belief that events occurring in Lebanon now will impact participants' votes in the 2022 elections

Yes	47.7%
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No	40.5%
Maybe	11.7%

30.2% were impacted by the "October 17, 2019, through their participation they learned about political thoughts, actions, and ideologies they did not know very well until then.

20.8% participated and met people who convinced them of new political thoughts. 17.9% were involved through their participation and observing a different vibrant which promised a change of the political establishment, something they did not reason as conceivable before coming in touch with the other protesters. (See Table 3).

Table3: Ways participants' voting views are affected by Lebanon's events

Meeting people who made them change their political thoughts	20.8%
Observing dynamic groups of protesters	17.9%
Developing a different political perspective	20.8%
Other	30.2%

-13.8 % would vote the same as before for fear that the new wave they saw would defeat balances and bring turmoil.

In your opinion, what was the relationship between the October 17 demonstrations and social media?

49.1% confirmed that the relation between the October 17 demonstrations movement and the new/social media was essential. The movement would not have been the same without social media, and social media would not have been the same without the movement of October 2019. 9 % confirmed that the relation was responsive as one supports while the other develops.

15.5% asserted that the relation was of shared interest. 9.5% pinpointed that it was a lousy relation. One was being aggressive and repressive. 8.7% indicated that they did not see any relation between them. 2% asserted that it was a neutral relation. (See Table 4).

Table 4: Type of relationship between the October 17 movement and social media

structural	49.1%
Friendly and supporting each other	16.4%
Mutual interest	15.5%
Bad relation	9.5%
No relation	8.7%
Neutral relation	2%

- There was a relation between the “October 17” movement and the traditional media.

22.5% asserted that the relation between the "October 17" movement and the traditional media was friendly. 40.5 % indicated that the relationship was that of mutual interest. 23.4% confirmed that it was a weak relation. One was being aggressive and repressive. 13.6% claimed that there was no relation between them. (See Table 5).

Table 5: Type of relationship between October 17 and traditional media

Friendly	22.5%
Mutual	40.5%
Hostile/Bad	23.4%
No relation	13.6%

-Participants, in general, showed great interest in politics. 58.1 (28.2 % expressed much interest and 29.1% expressed average interest) whereas 23.6% showed impartiality, 12.7% did not show interest, and 6.20% did not show interest at all. (See Table 6).

Table 6: Degree of Interest in Politics

Much interest	28.2%
Interest	29.1%
Neutrality	23.6%
No interest	12.7%
No interest at all	6.2%

-Participants in general (82.9%) did not think that the Lebanese system is responding to the actions and expectations of the citizens. 9.9% thought it was responding, whereas 7.2% showed hesitation to either assert or disconfirm. (See Table 7).

Table 7: Degree of the response of the Lebanese system to the actions and expectations of the citizens

Not responding	82.9%
Responding	9.9%
Not sure if responding or not	7.2%



## Discussions

In the same vein as the findings of [36] and [37], the current study has revealed that October 2019 protests were unprecedented in their number, geographical scope, and tactics. The backbone behind October 17, 2019, Lebanon's mass mobilization, and those of 2011 and 2015 were that Lebanon's protestors were fed up with the neglect and corruption of their governments that failed to combine repression with concessions. Likewise, the protesters' perceptions revealed in the present study were framed by the Elite theory [91] because the perceptions showed that the ruling elites were corrupt and determined to fail Lebanon to serve their interests [91].

This study showed that democratic governance in Lebanon, being a republic, was not associated with solid-state capacity, which was supported by [92].

More importantly, in agreement with [36] and [37], the present study's findings asserted that although now in 2021, Lebanese protests dimmed, they should not be stopped before the Lebanese recuperate the glorious picture of green Lebanon. The Million-plus protesters in 2019 became tens yet still strive to enable children to stay in Lebanon, believe in Lebanon, and build Lebanon [35].

In addition, the study's findings are in the same vein as [93] that asserted that the 2011 and 2015 protests were repressed by the repression and counter-narratives implemented by the state of Lebanon failing its citizens. The findings of this study could suggest recommendations for the redemption needed for the failed state; the protesters had a critical message to send to the government irrespective of the uncertainties surrounding them and impede the mission that should serve the vision of glorious Lebanon.

### *Implications and Conclusions*

The Leadership reforms eradicate the incentives for the revolutionary movement and consequently inhibit revolutions (Huntington, 1968). Therefore, to not change protests into a revolution that might render bloodshed and human losses, protesters in Lebanon should make informed decisions whether they keep protesting or not, as their parents would like their children and own families to do. Accordingly, coalitions among the protesters from different backgrounds should be formed as per the above. On October 29, 2019, the protesters in Lebanon won the zero-sum game, which was to overthrow the seizing controlling government. The protestors ended up acknowledging that they needed to raise their voices now to get the remaining demands of all the Lebanese from this corrupt governing group; otherwise, to stay safe, educate themselves, and maintain the peaceful protests they had already started.

Now in 2021, Lebanese protests dimmed but are still there. The Million-plus protesters in 2019 became tens yet still strive to enable children to stay in Lebanon, believe in Lebanon, and build Lebanon. However, the question is how to get Lebanon to be on the track of Singapore, Sweden, Australia, Scotland, Belgium, and other countries that proved that the genuine power lies in the values, citizenship, and freedom attained only by the solidarity and the oneness of all the people living within the boundaries of any sovereign state. October 29, 2019, was critical in the history of Lebanon when for the first time, Lebanon's government resigned in compliance with the demands of the protesters.

More importantly, the state failing its citizens remains the case of Lebanon. The protests and the uprisings could suggest recommendations for the redemption needed for the state; the protesters have a critical message to send to the government irrespective of the uncertainties surrounding them and impede the mission that should serve the vision of glorious Lebanon. Creating synergies

across the different existent unions and orders in Lebanon could raise the Lebanese's awareness of the significance of the gains attained so far by Lebanon's protests. The organizations and synergies should aim to touch the different Arab cases to sustain and not suffocate October's breakthrough, uprisings, or revolutions.

## Conclusions

This study focused on investigating the instructors' and learners' beliefs of Lebanon's October 2019 protests that started on October 17 and led on October 29 to the toppling of the Lebanese government headed by Saad Hariri. This study aimed to identify the perceptions of the sampled population using the recurrent slogans repeated by almost all protesters during the 14 days.

Furthermore, calls were raised for democracy, development, and deployment of justice and fairness, denouncing corruption and the neoliberal policies that gave rise only to more and more poverty, joblessness, favoritism, sectarianism, and clientelism. However, uncertainty has been a central theme as some Lebanese accused the protesters of being agents for foreign embassies. What happened on October 17- 30 might make the case of Lebanon exemplary in laying the grounds for a genuinely solid democratization process. It is about time for the corrupt ruling class to realize that the stakes are incredibly high now, and all the people excluding their corrupt subordinates are fiercely furious and are no longer blindsiding their parties.

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