

LEBANESE COLLECTIVE IDENTITY

How Conflicting Identity
Perceptions
Disengage Youth from Politics

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Studio Madane is a youth-led organization established in 2019, dedicated to engaging youth in Lebanon to design and implement multidisciplinary projects that contribute to the country's regeneration across political, urban, and social dimensions. This academic research is a part of a larger project entitled Collective Identity Project (CIP). CIP is designed and executed by Studio Madane's Youth Politicians Working Group, one out of seven groups, which has focused on identity politics and sociopolitical discourse as critical pathways for addressing the deep divisions within Lebanese society. This group's goal is to unite the people in the mission to establish a more just, inclusive, and effective ruling class.

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Abstract

This paper is a pilot study to examine the recent phenomenon of youth's political disengagement by establishing a correlation between the absence of a collective Lebanese national identity and political disengagement among Lebanese youth. Furthermore, this research investigates the impacts of Lebanese youth's perception and identification with their national identity on their political behavior and civic engagement. Lastly, the study opens up the considerations to other researchers to study how strengthening a national Lebanese identity can enhance youth's political engagement, therefore, Lebanon's positive development. This research investigates the recent political disengagement among Lebanese youth by exploring the relationship between the absence of a collective national identity and their disengagement. It further examines how perceptions and identifications with national identity influence their political behavior and civic engagement. The study encourages future research into how fostering a stronger Lebanese identity might enhance political participation, contributing to Lebanon's overall development. Employing a mixed-methodology approach, the research integrates qualitative narratives with quantitative data, underpinned by the Social Identity Theory, Political Psychology, and Political Efficacy frameworks. The findings reveal that Lebanese youth tend to prioritize micro-identities over a collective national identity, contributing to significant political disengagement and widespread frustration regarding Lebanon's social and political future. Moreover, the youth's definition of Lebanese identity, primarily through a cultural lens, underscores the complexity of building a unified national identity in a politically fragmented society. These results highlight the urgent need to strengthen a collective Lebanese identity, which could lead to increased political engagement among the youth. Thus, the research paper suggests key recommendations in the aim of strengthening Lebanese youth's sense of belonging as a factor to enhance their political engagement. Focusing on educational curriculum enhancement, youth's incorporation in governance processes, and collaborations for strengthening youth's political engagement with the objective of a better Lebanon.

Keywords

National Collective Identity: Refers to the shared sense of belonging and unity among individuals belonging to the same nation. It is characterized by the interplay between shared historical narratives, shared cultural values and practices, social norms and civic responsibility of citizens, such as, but not limited to, voting, community service, and participation in public life which play a critical role in national cohesion.

Political Engagement: Refers to both traditional and nontraditional forms of political participation. This includes, but not limited to, voting and running in the elections, enrolling in parties, advocating for political causes on social media platforms, engaging in political discussions with family and friends, trust in the political system, and having interest in participating in political activities.

Youth: Individuals who are aged between 15 and 24 (UNESCO, n.d). Youth are often regarded as individuals navigating education systems, entering the workforce, and starting to engage in civic and political life.

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Introduction

Prior to October 17, 2019, Lebanese citizens, particularly the youth, accumulated dissatisfaction with the political apparatus, distrust toward institutions, and a gloomy economic outlook, prompting considerations of emigration (Arab Barometer, 2019; Arab Youth Survey, 2022) in percentages that are higher than in war-torn countries like Libya, Iraq, and Yemen (UNDP, 2022). Meanwhile, despite being constitutionally defined as a "democratic parliamentary republic," Lebanon's decision-making is dominated by leaders who derive their authority not from democratic processes but from their positions within the sectarian system. Which creates a system where democracy is hindered by sectarianism and inefficiencies (Bertelsmann Stiftung Transformation Index, 2024). Thus, the discontent, fueled by political and economic turbulence, propelled the unprecedented unity of the October 17th protests in 2019—often called *Thawra*¹— which ignited a developing hope for transformation. This passionate movement sparked aspirations for political, social, and economic evolution in Lebanon. Notably, the youth emerged as dynamic agents of change, orchestrating, executing, and disseminating their message with remarkable efficacy. Their prominence was evident in the streets, and their activism transcended mere demonstrations, fostering grassroots initiatives aimed at confronting governmental corruption (e.g., Meddeb, 2019; Fawaz, 2020; Khoury, 2021; Nasrallah, 2021; Masri, 2022).

However, despite the initial surge of hope in a better Lebanon, recent trends reveal a troubling decline in political engagement among Lebanese youth, paralleled with a growing sense of frustration and fragmentation of national identity, making October 17th protests a short-lived enthusiasm (Harb, 2021; British Council, 2021; Doueihy, 2022). Now, years following the revolution, a pervasive despair lingers among the Lebanese, especially youth. Their faith in political institutions fades, their hope diminishes, and their outlook remains pessimistic (Arab Barometer, 2022). Furthermore, recent UNICEF data reveals a troubling 36.4% drop in national belonging among Lebanese youth between March and September 2022, highlighting challenges in forging a unified identity amidst sectarian and political fragmentation. The quest for reconciliation among these sub-identities complicates their sense of unity and national coherence (Ghamloush, 2019; Diab & SkulteOuaiss, 2024).

Recognizing that many researchers have highlighted various reasons for political disengagement among individuals across different nations. These reasons vary from distrust in political systems, the fragmentation of identity (Al Hariri, 2018), the preference for alternative forms of expression (BrayCollins, 2023), and a focus on micro-identities (Harb, 2018). To the best of our knowledge, no studies have examined political disengagement through the lens of fragmented micro-identities amongst Lebanese youth. Accordingly, this study will test the hypothesis that the lack of a unified shared Lebanese identity and the presence of fragmented micro-identities are contributing factors to the political disengagement of Lebanese youth. As such, this study is informed by the overarching research questions

1. Does the fragmentation of national identity impede the political engagement of Lebanese youth?
2. To what extent do fragment micro-identities and the absence of a unified Lebanese identity contribute to the political disengagement of Lebanese youth?
3. Can a more cohesive sense of identity facilitate their involvement in political reform?

By examining these dynamics, this research aims to illuminate the complex relationship between collective identity and political participation among Lebanese youth, exploring the effects of the absence of a unified prioritization of Lebanese identity on youth's political engagement. In the hopes of offering insights into potential pathways for enhancing their engagement and contribution to Lebanon's future.

¹ Arabic word for revolution

Theoretical Framework

This study aims to examine the complex relationship between the absence of a cohesive Lebanese collective identity and the political engagement of Lebanese youth, employing Social Identity Theory, Political Efficacy Theory, and concepts from Political Psychology to provide a comprehensive analysis of this issue. To frame this investigation, it is crucial to explore the foundational concepts introduced by Gestalt psychologists, specifically the differentiation between psychological and sociological groups. Psychological groups are characterized by an internal sense of unity and belonging, where members perceive themselves as part of a cohesive whole, often described as a "we." This internal sense of unity is contrasted with sociological groups, which are categorized based on external characteristics and may lack this intrinsic emotional connection. These initial distinctions have evolved into central components of Social Identity Theory, which focuses on how group memberships shape individual self concept, interpersonal dynamics, and broader social interactions. For Lebanese youth, the absence of a strong, unified national identity may critically affect their political engagement and perceptions of civic responsibility. Without a cohesive national identity that is translated in a sense of belonging to a nation wide, young individuals might experience difficulties in connecting with national causes, national political narratives, and political institutions, potentially leading to reduced political participation and a weakened sense of accountability towards broader civic duties.

Expanding on this theoretical framework, Social Identity Theory, as developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979, provides valuable insights into the relationship between group identity and political behavior. This theory asserts that individuals derive a significant portion of their identity from the social groups to which they belong. It emphasizes that a strong sense of ingroup identity can enhance political solidarity and engagement. When individuals perceive themselves as part of a cohesive group, they are more likely to engage in collective actions and support group related causes. In the context of Lebanese youth, a fragmented or weak collective identity might lead them to identify more with sectarian or religious groups rather than a broader national community. This shift can undermine their connection to and understanding of national political issues, resulting in lower levels of political involvement and civic engagement. That said, Social Identity Theory explains that a comprehensive and strong collective identity fosters a sense of shared purpose and mutual responsibility, which is critical for mobilizing political action and achieving social and political prosperity. Conversely, when national identity is fragmented or weak, individuals may prioritize their local affiliations, such as sectarian, religious, and regional identities, potentially leading to disengagement from broader national political matters.

In addition to Social Identity Theory, Political Efficacy Theory, as articulated by Miller in 1974, offers a crucial perspective on how perceptions of political efficacy influence political behavior. Political efficacy encompasses two key dimensions: internal efficacy and external efficacy. Internal efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their own competence to understand and influence political processes, while external efficacy relates to the belief that political institutions are responsive to individual actions. The absence of a cohesive national identity in Lebanon could significantly impact youth's perceptions of both internal and external efficacy. If Lebanese youth feel disconnected from a unified national identity, they may experience diminished confidence in their ability to drive political change and may view political institutions as unresponsive to their concerns and unable to carry serious change for the Lebanese community. This erosion of internal efficacy can result in reduced political participation, as youth may feel that their political knowledge and capabilities are inadequate and will not help in participating actively in domestic political activity. Similarly, weakened external efficacy can lead to skepticism about the responsiveness of political institutions, further discouraging engagement in political activities.

Moreover, Political Psychology provides a broader understanding of how psychological factors, such as identity, beliefs, and perceptions, influence political behavior and attitudes. This perspective explores how the absence of a unifying national identity can affect political attitudes and behaviors, offering insights into the psychological dynamics at play. The lack of a strong, cohesive, and shared national identity may lead to fractured political beliefs and reduced emotional investment in national political matters. For Lebanese youth, not seeing themselves as part of a unified national community might result in decreased motivation to participate in political activities, as they may perceive such participation as less relevant and impactful. Political Psychology emphasizes the importance of psychological motivation in shaping political engagement. When young individuals lack a strong national identity, their psychological drive to engage in political activities may be weakened, leading to lower levels of civic involvement. Understanding these psychological dynamics is essential for analyzing how Lebanese youth navigate their political environment and interact with political processes. Thus, this study applies Social Identity Theory, Political Efficacy Theory, and Political Psychology to explore how a fragmented collective identity in Lebanon affects the political engagement of its youth. By incorporating these theoretical approaches, the research aims to provide an in-depth understanding of how the lack of a unified national identity impacts young people's political attitudes and actions.

Literature Review

Scholarly research has consistently demonstrated that an individual's identification with a particular group exerts a significant influence on their proactive involvement in shaping and influencing their communities (e.g., Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Bigler & Liben, 2007; Campbell & Leaper, 2011; Mael & Ashforth, 1992; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). Evidence suggests that a robust sense of national identity can correlate with heightened political engagement (Sekerdej & Roccas, 2016), though some studies reveal a negative association, particularly regarding forms of national identity that emphasize glorification (Richey, 2011). Despite the acknowledgment of national identification's multifaceted nature, there is a notable scarcity of research examining its impact within the context of fragmented societies. Few studies have addressed the interplay of national identity's various dimensions and their effects on political and civic engagement comprehensively (e.g., Huddy & Khatib, 2007; Schatz et al., 1999).

This research aims to contribute to the scholarship on political engagement among Lebanese youth, situated within the broader framework of democratic systems. The ensuing literature review will offer a comprehensive analysis of the existing body of work on the complex fragmentation of Lebanese identity. Then, it will explore how this fragmentation manifests in the political engagement of Lebanese youth, particularly in the absence of a cohesive national identity. By delineating the specific gaps in current understanding, this study seeks to explore how the lack of a collective Lebanese identity influences political participation among the younger demographic. Thus, this review will establish a foundation for a detailed investigation to address the research questions of this study.

1 Fragmented Lebanese Identity

1.1 Sectarian Identities and Coexistence Facade

Lebanon's governance system is often cited as a classic example of sectarian consociationalism with contemporary elements aimed at fostering consensus and mitigating deep divisions (Makdisi&ElKhalil,2017). Alternatively, some scholars view Lebanon's model of power sharing from the lens of sectarian governance and suggest a need for a process of "sectarianization". Critics contend that Lebanon's long standing commitment to the sectarian power sharing arrangement has deepened societal divisions and consolidated political authority among postwar elites with sectarian ties. This situation has impeded the development of a more inclusive and secular political framework, adversely affecting both governance and social unity(Roen,2022,p.18). However, the success of power sharing hinges on the commitment to its implementation and a collective desire to coexist as a unified nation(Stojanović,2008,p.5).

Discussing the governmental system, scholars underscore how sectarianism has been institutionalized as a result of different agreements that Lebanon have signed, including the National Pact of 1943 that have entrenched sectarian divisions by allocating power along religious lines (Haddad, 2002; Hashemi & Postel, 2017). Thus, the ruling system in action is the confessional model—a definition of the Lebanese political system. Additionally, it is a contributor to the lack of development of a collective identity (Hashemi & Postel, 2017, p. 5). This obstacle can obstruct progress towards national unity, social cohesion, and comprehensive development as a cohesive nation state. Moreover, proponents argue that the confessional model fosters political deadlock and inefficiency, with decision making often becoming protracted and contentious as various religious factions negotiate to protect their respective interests (Harb, 2006). The sectarian model, a cornerstone of Lebanon's political system, further impedes the cultivation of a collective identity (Hashemi & Postel, 2017, p. 5). It is reported that incorporating sectarianism into governance and politics impedes the creation of a unified national identity that rises above religious divides (Henley, 2016). Thus, and for many factors, the Lebanese institutional and governmental system prioritizes sectarian identities over a unified Lebanese identity, hindering its development. Moreover, Lebanon's political agreements have established sectarian quotas that have influenced not just governmental institutions but also societal structures, affecting dynamics outside the political realm. This enduring issue carries important consequences for Lebanon's persistent struggles with governance, social cohesion, and intercommunal relations (Roan,2022, p.16). Thus, the processes of social interaction and identity formation are also impediments to the creation of a collective identity. It is a belief that sectarian identities are reinforced and solidified through historical events and social interaction (Peleikis, 2001, p. 401). Also, it is described as being a practice that ties sects to actions and intentions which in turn strengthen fragmentation (Shaery-Yazdi, 2020, p. 332).

To add to the contributors of a facade of coexistence, it is inevitable to review the educational sector which plays a significant role in perpetuating sectarian divisions. Research by Helen Tannous and Konstantin Ash highlights that despite efforts to move past sectarian identities, schools continue to reinforce sectarian narratives and norms. Indeed the educational sector is shown to be a core player in revitalizing sectarian divides. They add, despite any efforts to move past a sectarian identity, schools remain a hotbed for reproducing sectarian narratives and talking points (Tannous, 1997, p. 23; Ash, 2019, p. 27). It is noted that each sectarian group has schools under their auspices that reinforce certain narratives, norms, and talking points (Tannous, 1997, p.23). Nonetheless, the absence of a cohesive collective identity in Lebanon is primarily attributed to the pervasive influence of sectarianism, fueled by the competing interests of numerous religious groups. This dynamic manifests in a facade of coexistence among Lebanon's various confessional communities. Similarly, the impact of the civil war has further exacerbated the absence and fragmentation of a collective Lebanese identity, a point further tackled in the surveyed literature, creating prominent waves of migrations that have also had straining effects on the absence of the Lebanese identity.

Now, one might deduce that sectarianism is an inseparable factor shaping Lebanese society, ultimately leading to the absence of a collective Lebanese identity. Under the guidance of sectarianism and coexistence facade, sectarianism becomes a site where governance systems, educational systems, and historical events perpetuate sectarian narratives of division, which in turn leads to identity fragmentation and its absence. Regardless, a historical synopsis of the events that have shaped Lebanon can prove to be a compelling source to further understand the roots behind this phenomenon.

1.2 Absence of a Shared Memory

The practice of assigning political roles in Lebanon according to sectarian quotas has deep historical roots, originating in the Ottoman Era and being formalized by the 1943 National Pact. This pact allocated key positions: the Presidency to Maronite

Christians, the Prime Ministership to Sunnis, and the Speakership of Parliament to Shiites. This primarily manifests in the expansive history of political intrusions from foreign powers in the practice of politics in Lebanon. Duba and Köprülü (2017) posit that the consociational model—an evolution of the Ottoman millet system – made sectarian identities a priority over a collective identity (Duba & Köprülü, 2017, p. 113). Following the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the 1989 Ta'if Accord sought to overhaul the political framework by mandating an equal distribution of parliamentary seats between Christians and Muslims to better represent Lebanon's demographic balance. Although the Accord was intended as a temporary arrangement, its sectarian power sharing provisions have remained in place. It was specified that these quotas would stay until a new, nonsectarian election law could be introduced, but this transition has not yet taken place (Roën, 2022, p.20). The literature appears to be consistent in giving a historical basis for the fragmentation of collective identity in Lebanon. Tamara Chalabi names sectarian historiography—or the unique historical narratives reiterated by sects about their legitimacy in the state and identity—as disrupting a unified identity (Chalabi, 2006, p.154). This division is most evident in the selective utilization of history for the service of different communities, such as the Maronites asserting a Phoenician identity to escape confusion with the Arab Muslim Identity (Chalabi, 2006, p. 157). Moreover, scholars Tamara Chalabi and Robert G. Rabil offer their historical perspectives regarding the sheer extent of influence that colonialism and historiography have had on the development of any sort of identity (Chalabi, 2006, p. 154; Rabil, 2011, p. 12). In that vein, Robert G. Rabil posits that the French initiative to create Greater Lebanon aimed to strengthen Maronite political dominance, thus marginalizing the Lebanese Muslims and hindering the formation of a collective identity (Rabil, 2011, p. 12). Also, Salibi supplies a complex and nuanced elucidation about why the sectarian structure reinforces the disruption of a collective identity. He describes the progression of Lebanese identity starting from the Shihab reign to the Mutasarrifate, emphasizing the contradiction between Phoenicianism and PanArabism and its challenges in creating a national identity (Salibi, 1971, p. 83).

Nina Maadad and Minerva NasserEddine argue in their article "Decolonising Lebanon's PostConflict Sense of National Identity via Curriculum Change" that Lebanon's post independence national identity has been unsuccessful due to conflicting notions of identity and external as well as internal political cultural influences, despite a new wave of nationalism among Lebanese citizens united by their dissatisfaction with corruption and lack of basic services, as reflected in the 2019 protests (Maadad & NasserEddine, 2021, p. 141). This highlights a nascent collective identity that challenges the deeply entrenched sectarian divisions. This has led to a crisis of legitimacy and ongoing instability in Lebanon. To add, Zeina Abdallah enriches this debate by investigating the absence of a unified national memory as a hurdle in forming a collective identity. She zeroes in, particularly on contradictory historical accounts and the incapability of producing a unified history book as evidence of Lebanon's identity crisis on an educational level (Abdallah, 2014, p. 7). This division of collective memory has stood in the way of achieving a unified national identity. The importance of history education is highlighted in constructing a cohesive national identity. Arguing that the failure to create a unified national history has perpetuated divisions and hindered reconciliation and nation building efforts (Maadad & NasserEddine, 2021, p. 143), placing further emphasis on the role of education as another tool that attempted to unify and form a collective identity, but instead did the opposite. In a similar vein to the works of Abdallah and Tannous, the impact of Lebanon's contested history is reflected in history education within educational institutions.

The sheer fragmented nature of Lebanese National identity is equally reflected in the methodologies used by the authors in pursuing their findings. Various qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to tackle the multifaceted and homogeneous nature of the absence of a collective Lebanese Identity. For instance, Chalabi employs historical analysis, which includes comparative analyses, case studies and a textual examination of political texts tackling how narratives are constructed within sectarian communities. On a similar level, Rabil adopts the historical analytical method and uses comparative and chronological analysis to examine the progression of Lebanese identity and to what extent sectarianism has been institutionalized. The methodology adopted by Salibi is one that adds chronological and comparative analyses alongside critical analysis to tackle both the historical and ideological front in understanding identity. Kliot uses historical analysis and comparative analysis with quantitative data while Abdallah uses the qualitative approach (literature, historical analyses, comparative focus group) to offer empirical evidence about narratives and their effect on creating a national identity. The variety of these methodologies tackling this issue underlines the vast influence the historical factor plays in the absence of a collective identity, which we believe promotes and encourages to further study this topic, which is what this research aims to do.

1.3 Political Rapture

Political dynamics often represent significant barriers to forming a unified collective identity. Expanding on the additional layer that complicates any attempt to reconcile a unified national identity is the international and regional interventions in internal Lebanese politics (Mohsen, 2021, p. 41). External influences do play an inflammatory role in sectarian divisions. The connections maintained between sectarian groups, and foreign entities complicate the formation of a collective Lebanese identity. This position is in Nour Mohsen's work, she points to how external players have worsened sectarian conflicts, leading to further fragmentation in identity (Mohsen, 2021, p. 41). It is further posited by Nurit Kliot that the combination of the sectarian political system and foreign influences has resulted in the fracturing of national identity (Kliot, 1987, p. 5457). Additionally, Lebanon's sectarian system transcends mere distribution of political roles. It has been analyzed as a hegemonic ideology (Saouli, 2019) and a biopolitical apparatus of state authority that regulates the lives of its populace (Mabon, 2020).

As well, Gulay Umaner Duba, Nur Köprülü and Raná Gharzeddine have investigated the ongoings of how a political system alongside external intrusions can obstruct the cultivation of a collective identity (Duba & Köprülü, 2017, p. 113; Gharzeddine & Hernandez, 2023, p. 140). In fact, scholars have examined how foreign interference with local identities obscures the development of a comprehensive national identity. The consociational system, originally intended to foster inclusivity, paradoxically institutionalized sectarian divisions and facilitated foreign intervention. Kisirwani further argues that such interferences have effectively transformed Lebanon into a battleground for international interests (Kisirwani, 1980, pp. 680687). Arguably, reliance on sectarian power distribution leads to political deadlock, increased foreign dependence, and ineffective governance, further deepening divisions within Lebanese identity (Fakhoury, 2019, pp. 1011). Halawi (2023) also touches on the topic of absence of a Lebanese collective identity, further discussing how Lebanese individuals tend to align with sectarian identities due to the sectarian nature of domestic politics. The long history of consociational politics in Lebanon has led to the birth of a sectarian based political atmosphere which controls all aspects of political and social life, including the formulation of identities in Lebanon. This systemic emphasis on sectarian agendas over national unity results in persistent political conflicts and inconsistent policy directions. Following comparable threads, Gharzeddine and Hernandez also clarify on the pernicious part that foreign interventions play on sectarian divisions and subsequently collective identity. For instance, the assassination of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq AlHariri, as discussed by Bosco (2009, p. 13), exemplifies how global powers influence domestic political dynamics, further complicating the establishment of a cohesive collective identity (Duba and Köprülü, 2017). On the other hand, the political inexperience of the local population is taken advantage of and reinforced to sustain discord. This intrusion has stood as a hurdle in the way of cultivating a unified national identity (Gharzeddine & Hernandez, 2023, p.140142). Political dynamics that are directed by foreign interventions and the current political structure are proven to have a dramatic effect on the absence of a unified Lebanese whole. To expand upon this discourse, the political dynamics established throughout the civil war did not end when the war did; rather these divisions have been solidified and institutionalized through the postwar power distribution accords (Delatolla, 2019, p. 12). The persistence of institutionalized sectarianism has created large fissures between different confessional groups instead of creating a cohesive identity (Delatolla, 2019, p. 4).

With the massive sectarian division in Lebanon, and with the absence of a unified Lebanese collective identity, each sect within the Lebanese society pledges loyalty to a foreign country to guarantee its interests and power, as Christian Maronites still have a good relationship with France, and with Muslim Shias relying on Iran, and Muslim Sunnis relying on KSA (Ghamloush, 2019). Historically, even before the initiation of the state of Greater Lebanon in 1920, especially during the Ottoman rule, the people that form the Lebanese society did not have a unified collective identity, instead, they identified themselves according to the geographical area which they originate from. The Lebanese people still do that today, due to the absence of the Lebanese collective identity. To add a very important aspect of the Lebanese identity crisis topic, mentioning that historically, the identity conflict was similar to a competition between two larger identities, either supporting France or Arab identity, either AntiSyrian rule or ProSyrian rule, either proWestern alliance or proEastern alliance, but it was never a radical unified Lebanese identity (Akiki, 2021). Exploring more, Lebanon's political framework integrates the representation of various religious groups, granting their leaders considerable authority over matters such as personal status courts, religious endowments, places of worship, educational institutions, and clerical appointments. Rather than inciting sectarian tensions, these religious leaders manage their respective religious duties (Henley, 2018). Unlike other Middle Eastern countries, Lebanon has uniquely maintained a sect based political system since its inception. The Lebanese state officially acknowledges eighteen distinct sects, each endowed with certain powers due to their formal recognition. This includes five Islamic sects (Sunni, Shia, Druze, Alawite, and Ismaili), the Maronites, eleven additional Christian sects, and the Jewish community. Within their communities, religious leaders oversee religious practices, administer hierarchical clerical networks, and manage places of worship, schools, and courts dealing with personal matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Additionally, they act as representatives in dealings with public authorities. While not engaging in politics directly, their recognized roles often entangle them in the complex interplay of local, national, and regional political interests (Henley, 2018).

The vast history of political interventions from external and regional powers in Lebanon, in addition to the consociational system which hyper fixated on sectarian identity, has challenged the ability to cultivate a collective identity. These intrusions, having been solidified by the political inexperience of the local populace, continues a cycle of sectarian strife and doesn't allow for the creation of an all encompassing identity. This further manifests in national fragmentation and the reinforcement of the sectarian political structure, a factor that heavily sways the diaspora's identification with their place of origin, which will be further reviewed in this paper.

1.4 Disconnected Diaspora

The degree of connection that the Lebanese diaspora maintains with their country of origin is profoundly influenced by transnational engagements, diasporic affiliations, and notably, the fractured nature of national identity (Pearlman, 2014, p. 34). Scholars contend that diasporic and transnational practices alone do not fully encapsulate the Lebanese experience abroad. They advocate for the concept of a "diasporic field" to offer a more nuanced understanding of the Lebanese diaspora, which actively interacts with their homeland in ways that either reinforce or interrogate national identity. These

interactions often materialize as remittances or political involvement through sectarian parties, mirroring the internal fragmentation of collective identity.

Moreover, the younger generation within the diaspora inherits this fragmented national identity from their forebears, further complicating their political engagement with Lebanon (Tabar, 2019, p. 8; Leichtman, 2005, p.5). The erosion of Lebanese collective identity is exacerbated by exclusionary emigration policies, which alienate diaspora members from the homeland's political processes. Casanovas and Kerras suggest that the diaspora's mobilization during the 2019 Revolution reflects a profound dissatisfaction with the stagnant sectarian system and a desire to move beyond confessional divisions (Casanovas & Kerras, 2020, p. 176).

According to Pearlman, the weak state model facilitates a fragmented relationship between the homeland and the diaspora, mirroring pre-existing internal dynamics. In this context, it is often non-state or private actors who engage the diaspora in specific spheres. For instance, Christian nonstate actors who mobilize the Christian diaspora for issues such as demography, voting, and banking further exacerbate the fragmentation of diaspora identity from a collective national unity to a sectarian one (Pearlman, 2014, p. 3738).

The dual identities and complex loyalties of diaspora members present significant challenges to the notion of a unified collective identity. For example, Leichtman (2005) focuses on Lebanese communities in Dakar, Senegal, particularly second generation and subsequent members who retain transnational values despite their assimilation into Senegalese society. This illustrates that the connections within these communities are predominantly cultural and ideological, rather than economic or political, which may account for the harmonious coexistence among individuals of diverse faiths within the same community. Similarly, Humphreys explores the Lebanese diaspora in countries such as Argentina, Australia, and Côte d'Ivoire, emphasizing that the diaspora does not conform to a singular form. Rather, these individuals adapt to their host countries, demonstrating that the concept of a unified "diaspora" is problematic due to the diverse nature of their individual experiences (Humphrey, 2004, p. 3234).

The complexities of Lebanese diaspora identity and political engagement underscore the challenges faced by Lebanese youth in navigating their own political involvement. The fragmented nature of the diaspora's connection to Lebanon, shaped by sectarian divisions and exclusionary policies, mirrors the political landscape that Lebanese youth encounter. While diaspora members often engage with Lebanon through remittances and sectarian parties, their fragmented national identity complicates their role in addressing Lebanon's systemic issues. In contrast, younger Lebanese within Lebanon are increasingly motivated to challenge the status quo, as evidenced by their activism during the 2019 Revolution and ongoing political efforts. Yet, 2019 Revolution showcased a generational shift that highlights a desire to overcome sectarian divisions and build a more cohesive national identity (Khedrlarian, 2022). The disparity between the diasporic experience and the youthful drive for reform reflects a broader struggle within Lebanese society: reconciling fragmented identities with the pursuit of a unified national vision. Thus, while the diaspora's engagement with Lebanon often reinforces existing divisions, Lebanese youth's local political engagement remains understudied.

2

Lebanese Youth Political Engagement

Young people between the ages of 15 to 29 constitute 27.4% of the Lebanese population (Lebanese Ministry of Sports and Youth, 2022). As young people develop their individual identities, they often seek connection with larger groups that share similar beliefs and values, leading to the formation of a social identity. Tajfel&Turner (1979) explain that when individuals with shared social identities and beliefs unite, they create a collective identity. This collective identity, if aligned with political ideologies or goals, can drive political enthusiasm and participation. However, political knowledge alone or residing in politically active communities is not enough to mobilize youth effectively. Young people need both ethical and emotional incentives to engage politically. Many find traditional politics as useless, boring, or irrelevant (Barrett & Pachi, 2019), which discourages their involvement. Barret & March further note that youth who actively seek political information, such as understanding their country's political systems and current policies, are more likely to engage in political activities.

A study by Crocetti, Jahromi, & Meeus (2012) proved that youth with a clear identity status were more involved in civic engagement and political efficacy compared to those with a diffused identity status. Thus, a strong collective identity is crucial for fostering political engagement. The lack of such an identity can significantly impede youth involvement in politics. Strong ethnic identities, particularly among minority or immigrant groups, often enhance political participation by fostering a sense of importance and community engagement. Similarly, a national collective identity can motivate youth to participate in politics as a means of achieving social change and protecting national interests. With the same idea, Ghamloush (2019) highlights that Lebanon's sectarian divisions, 18 distinct sects, complicate the development of a unified national identity, as sects are often ethnocentric and distrustful of others, reinforcing sub-identities within the society (Diab & SkulteOuais, 2024).

By now, it has been established that sectarianism is regarded as a key factor contributing to divisions within Lebanese society. Lebanese youth tend to identify with the sect which they belong to, and look down on other sects, which amplifies the sectarian identity and strengthens the absence of a Lebanese collective identity (Tavitian, 2019). These findings align with a growing body of evidence spanning the past decade or more, indicating a transition in youth political engagement from conventional to unconventional and civic forms. Therefore, labeling younger generations as apathetic toward politics may not be accurate, because while they may not engage conventionally, such as through voting, they actively participate in politics through alternative avenues (Cormak & Doran, 2014).

2.1 Youth's Political Engagement

Public policies in Lebanon are not elaborated in a suitable way to include youth actively in domestic politics and in decision making processes regarding the issues that concern them and their lives. The youth interested in political action and activism are also the ones interested and willing to migrate to a foreign country (Harb, 2021). In addition, youth are viewed as a non-political group in Lebanese society, and they are viewed as a subversive group that should be policed and monitored, thus amplifying the youth's political disengagement. Furthermore, there are many socio-economic restrictions and inequalities governing the Lebanese youth's life such as high unemployment rates and limited access to education, and these socioeconomic obstacles discourage youth from engaging actively in Lebanese politics, hence increasing the rates of youth political disengagement. To better understand the youth political disengagement in Lebanon, Harb (2021) presents the results of a questionnaire distributed for 1000 Lebanese youth from different backgrounds, and the results showed that only 29% of these youth are interested in politics and political activism, and only 40% of them sympathize with the popular protests that took place during that time. Such findings show clearly how disengaged in politics Lebanese youth are. However, Harb, 2021 relied mainly on clustering youth into strictly five categories based on a quantitative research of youth and focused on linking youth mobilization to already existing political organizations such as political parties, NGOs, and progressive political organizations, which might not give a clear image of the youth political disengagement in Lebanon, especially with minimal focus on collective identity beliefs.

To better detect the youth political engagement in Lebanon and other Arab countries, Arab Barometer (2016) show that the rate of Arab youth enrolling in political parties as members has decreased from 10% in 2013 to 4% in 2016, the rate of youth electoral turnout in Arab countries including Lebanon decreased from 44% in 2013 to 30% in 2016, in addition to the rate of Arab youth participating in political activism forms such as protests, sit ins, and marches decreased from 23% in 2013 to 16% in 2016. Furthermore, only 20% of Arab youth report being internet users and engaging in politics online. Notably, young people played a crucial role in the 2019 protests, they were highly visible in demonstrations and engaged in activism beyond the streets, forming grassroots groups to address issues like environmental concerns and corruption (e.g. Meddeb,2019; Fawaz,2020; Houry,2021; Nasrallah, 2021; Masri, 2022). Using social media to organize and spread their message effectively. Still, recent data from UNICEF indicate a troubling decline in Lebanese youth's sense of national belonging, with a 36.4% drop between March and September 2022. This decline underscores difficulties in building a unified national identity

amid sectarian and political fragmentation. The challenge for Lebanese youth lies in reconciling various sub-identities related to sectarian, religious, regional, and political affiliations, which complicates their sense of cohesion and national identity (Ghamloush, 2019; Diab & SkulteQuaiss, 2024). Research done by Khoury (2017) points out that if youth have no interest in engaging in politics and do not engage in making their voice heard, then there are no chances of any meaningful political and social reforms to take place. He continues to discuss that in Lebanon, domestic politics until now is dominated by older generations in which the decision making processes are shaped in a way that reflect their narrow interests, and this absence of inclusion of youth decreases their interest in engaging in Politics (Khoury, 2017).

2.2 Identity Conflict and Political Disengagement

Research conducted by British Council in 2020 with 1591 Lebanese youth between 15 and 29 from various sectarian and regional backgrounds indicates that when participants were asked to define their identity, around 35% identified themselves through their religious and sectarian affiliations, while 68% answered "Lebanese". This dual perspective underscores the complicated interplay between national and religious or sectarian identities within the Lebanese population. Also, results point out that Lebanese youth do engage in community social activities which include social and religious events, but not in decision making or community development. When Lebanese youth were asked to define their community, only 8.1% answered that their political group is their community, while 70.6% of the youth answered "Family and Friends". Moreover, when participants were asked why they are not supporting a political party, 48.6% answered saying that none of the present political parties represent them, and 34.8% answered saying that they do not believe that political engagement in Lebanon leads to an effective development. Additionally, Lebanese youth who were legally able to vote and chose not to vote in the 2018 parliamentary elections in Lebanon were asked about the reason behind their decision. Results reported that 50.8% answered that they believe their vote will not change anything in the current political atmosphere, and 22.4% answered that they do not believe politics is important. Furthermore, when Lebanese youth were asked about how often they discuss politics with their friends after the October 17th uprising, 34.1% answered by "Not Often", 25.1% answered by "Very Often", and 22.8% answered by "Never". This clearly shows how politically disengaged Lebanese youth are. In addition, youth individuals believe that the communities which they belong to are not aware of their needs or abilities and they do not feel supported by the larger community. This is mainly due to many factors which include the presence of a rigid political system that does not hear youth's voices and does not prioritize their needs.

Expanding more on the sectarian identity prioritization rather than a national identity. Harb (2010) in a psychology based research found that among the Lebanese youth, which enjoys a fair level of education, there is a conflict of identity. Explaining that Lebanese youth have a high level of sectarian bias; being biased towards one's own sect and viewing other sects as inferior with average to minimal acceptance of individuals from other sects. The research states that sectarian identity plays an important role in the formulation of the main identity of Lebanese youth. This surely plays a role in impacting the political disengagement of the Lebanese youth, since the presence of cases of hostile prejudice and sectarian bias, for the effective participation in politics necessitates the presence of a nationalist collective identity, which is not the case when studying the case of Lebanese youth. El Homssi, Ali, and Kurdi, 2023 touch upon the issue of political disengagement in Lebanon, saying that there is a decline in the political participation levels in Lebanon. The Lebanese people, which include the Lebanese youth, are frustrated by the existing political parties and political system for it has failed in effectively addressing their concerns and the problems associated with the current living situations, which has led to Lebanese citizens becoming less interested and less enthusiastic to participate in political activity.

2.3 Lebanese Youth and the Current Political System: Absence of Trust

Recent general elections saw around 654,000 young Lebanese casting their votes for the first time. Despite this, voter turnout has declined compared to previous elections. Polls reveal that many young people who abstain from voting cite distrust in the political system and view elections as ineffective. Beyond participating in protests, a significant portion of Lebanese youth remains disengaged from formal political processes. Notably, the legal voting age is 21, which restricts younger individuals from influencing political decisions directly. This disengagement extends to national and municipal decision making processes. Many municipalities fail to engage with young people adequately, lacking mechanisms for communication about decisions, needs assessments, or meaningful inclusion in decision making. The Lebanese National Action Plan (2022) underscores this issue, noting that 49% of surveyed youth did not vote in the 2016 municipal elections. Furthermore, most government ministries neither assess the needs of young people nor develop targeted programs for them (National Action Plan, 2022). This pattern reflects a broader trend where youth might reject traditional political practices that fail to address their needs and potential (Harris, Wyn, & Younes, 2010).

The influence of sectarianism exacerbates this disengagement. Lebanese politics is heavily shaped by sectarian affiliations, with most political parties aligning themselves with specific sects rather than addressing national concerns comprehensively (Adyan Foundation, 2020). As a result, the connection between Lebanese citizens and the state is often mediated through religious communities, rather than through a national perspective (Collins, 2023). This sectarian dynamic further diminishes trust in the political system, discouraging youth from engaging with a system they perceive as inherently flawed. Moreover, regional factors contribute to the broader context of disengagement. Research highlights that after the 2011 Arab Spring

uprisings, Arab youth, including those in Lebanon, were increasingly involved in public opinion formation but continued to face marginalization in political and economic spheres. Persistent issues such as high youth unemployment and limited access to housing have led to what is termed "precarious adolescence," where economic and social hardships reduce interest in political activism. In some cases, these conditions have contributed to radicalization and participation in extremist movements (Rosney, 2018; Dhillion&Youssef, 2009; Salamey, 2015).

Adding, the 2019 uprising in Lebanon did see a resurgence in youth political activism, particularly through university based student organizations and elections. Despite this increased activism, young people face significant obstacles. Traditional political parties often threaten or harass politically active youth, while university administrations impose restrictions that stifle political expression (Chehayeb & Majzoub, 2021). Following the October 17th uprising, many Lebanese youth experienced a decline in trust in the national political system, further diminishing their political engagement (Nassar, 2022). In countries plagued by corruption, inefficiency, and lack of transparency, youth often exhibit low levels of trust in government institutions and withdraw from political participation. This pattern is supported by Barret & Pachi (2019), who argue that in nations with poor government efficiency, youth who are politically inclined tend to distrust existing institutions, leading to lower political engagement.

Gap

Observing existing research on political engagement and national identity's influence on civic participation showcases important gaps that persist in the literature trying to understand the impact of fragmented micro-identities on political disengagement among Lebanese youth. Although many studies have investigated the effects of sectarianism, political efficacy, and collective identity on political behavior, few have focused specifically on these dynamics on the youth demographic within the Lebanese context. Additionally, research directly examining the connection between fragmented micro-identities and political disengagement among Lebanese youth remains limited.

Firstly, there is a lack of focus on fragmented micro-identities, numerous studies have investigated the influence of sectarian identities in Lebanon. However, there has been limited exploration of how fragmented micro-identities affect political disengagement among youth. This gap is significant given Lebanon's sensitive social structure, where micro-identities significantly impact individual and collective behaviors. Secondly, there exists a limited exploration of youth perspectives, while there is a substantial body of work on political engagement in Lebanon, much of it focuses on the general population or specific adult demographics. The unique perspectives of Lebanese youth, especially regarding their disengagement from the political process, remain underexplored. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on youth as a distinct demographic group with specific experiences and challenges. Thirdly, there exists an insufficient integration of psychological and sociological theories, where it is apparent that research has often explored political disinterest and identity fragmentation as two separate phenomena, yet, this research studies the relationship between both phenomena. In addition, the literature excluded Social Identity Theory, Political Efficacy Theory, and Political Psychology, to fully understand the complexities of youth political disengagement in Lebanon, as a result, this study seeks to bridge this gap by employing a multidisciplinary framework to analyze the issue.

Research Design and Methodology

This study utilizes an embedded design where qualitative and quantitative approaches are employed to provide a nuanced understanding of the research question. The qualitative component is based on a phenomenological approach, involving individual virtual and in-person semi-structured interviews of Lebanese youth residing in Lebanon. To enhance participants' deep expression, follow-up questions were prompted to capture rich and detailed narratives regarding their collective identity and its impact on their political behavior. By capturing focused narratives, the qualitative analysis aims to reveal how the lack of a collective identity affects various forms of political engagement, including voting, political activism, and overall civic involvement. To complement the qualitative insights and further validate the thematic analysis to generalize deduced patterns, a quantitative survey is administered to a larger sample of Lebanese youth. This survey was designed to draw a correlation between the presence thereof absence of collective Lebanese identity and the youth's political engagement. The survey also aimed to measure participants' political engagement and attitudes towards collective identity through semi-structured questions, mostly, using a Likert scale for answers. The quantitative data is used to test hypotheses derived from the qualitative findings and to determine the extent to which patterns observed in qualitative research are generalizable across the broader youth population. To be more specific, the integration of these two data sets is achieved through methodological triangulation, where qualitative themes are cross-referenced with quantitative trends to validate and enrich the findings' analysis. This approach strengthens the understanding of how the absence of a collective identity shapes political engagement among Lebanese youth. Additionally, the study incorporates a negative case analysis to refine and contextualize the results. This analysis focuses on cases that do not align with the predominant patterns observed in the data, reflecting a correlation between youth's identification with a lack of a shared Lebanese identity and an absent political engagement. Providing insights into divergent experiences those who identify with an absent collective identity, however, are politically engaged. Aiming to highlight the complexities of the relationship between collective identity and political engagement.

A total of 30 youth were interviewed virtually and 62 youth were purposely surveyed voluntarily and anonymously and the age span was between 15 and 24, within this age group, efforts were made to include individuals at different stages of education in both private and public universities. Furthermore, criterion sampling was adopted to purposely choose the participating sample for both quantitative and qualitative tools. Regional, religious, sectarian, and socio-economic diversities were ensured. The participants filled out a primary survey to ensure diversity, and those who checked the selection criteria were reached out to with the survey link. To ensure a diverse representation across various dimensions, including socio-economic status; including low-income, middle-income, and high-income groups, to capture the influence of economic factors on identity and political engagement. In addition to geographic location covering the nine Lebanese districts, religious affiliation, sectarian identity, and political perspectives ensure a representation of varying political affiliations and levels of political engagement to explore the relationship between collective identity and political behavior across the political spectrum. This approach aimed to capture a broad range of experiences and viewpoints, reflecting the complexity and diversity of the population. This study sought to create a balanced and inclusive sample that would provide comprehensive insights into the research topic.

The recruitment and engagement of participants for the study's qualitative and quantitative components were meticulously organized:

1. **Initial Outreach and Pre-Screening:** The recruitment process began with an extensive outreach campaign across various platforms, including social media, educational institutions, and universities, to attract a diverse range of potential participants. Interested individuals were asked to complete a brief pre-screening survey, which collected essential demographic and socio-economic information, as well as initial data on their political engagement and sense of collective identity.
2. **Purposeful Sampling and Participant Selection:** After the pre-screening, participants were selected through purposeful sampling to ensure they met the study's diversity criteria. This method allowed for the strategic selection of individuals who could provide valuable and varied perspectives, rather than relying on random sampling.
3. **Qualitative Interviews:** For the qualitative portion of the study, 30 participants were selected for in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Participants were contacted via phone to explain the study's objectives and secure informed consent through email. The interviews were conducted either virtually or in person, depending on the participants' preferences and availability. Follow-up questions were employed to delve deeper into participants' narratives, enabling them to fully express their experiences and views.
4. **Quantitative Survey Administration:** A pilot survey was initially conducted with 15 participants to refine the survey questions, ensuring clarity and relevance. Following necessary revisions, the final survey was administered to 62 participants who met the diversity criteria. The survey was conducted anonymously through a secure online platform to protect participants' privacy.
5. **Key concepts** such as "collective Lebanese identity" and "political engagement" were clearly defined and operationalized for both the qualitative and quantitative components of the study:

6. Collective Lebanese identity refers to the shared sense of belonging to the Lebanese nation, transcending individual sectarian, religious, or regional identities.
7. Political engagement refers to the involvement of youth in both traditional and nontraditional forms of political participation. This includes but is not limited to, voting and running in the elections, enrolling in parties, advocating for political causes on social media platforms, engaging in political discussions with family and friends, trusting in the political system, and having an interest in participating in political activities.
8. Also, ethical considerations were carefully addressed, with informed consent obtained from all participants and measures taken to ensure confidentiality and participant well-being.

By employing these methodological approaches, the study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the absence of a collective Lebanese identity influences youth political engagement, offering important insights into the broader implications for political participation and civic life in Lebanon by exploring these research questions:

- a. Does the fragmentation of national identity impede the political engagement of Lebanese youth?
- b. To what extent do fragment micro-identities and the absence of a unified Lebanese identity contribute to the political disengagement of Lebanese youth?
- c. Can a more cohesive sense of identity facilitate their involvement in political reform?

Findings

Qualitative Findings

The qualitative data reveal that many participants show a weak connection to a unified Lebanese identity, prioritizing sectarian or regional affiliations instead. This fragmented sense of identity is linked to lower political engagement, reduced interest in national politics, and skepticism towards the political system. These findings highlight how the lack of a cohesive national identity can negatively impact political involvement among Lebanese youth as a prominent factor amongst many.

1.1 Absent prioritization of Lebanese Identity

One of the first questions participants were asked about was their association with a shared Lebanese identity. Results were 22 participants out of 30 (73% of total participants) exhibited a weak identification with a collective Lebanese identity. Then, their narratives were further explored to understand their lack of identification with a shared identity. Participants have expressed that they would identify as Lebanese according to the geographic borders if asked by foreigners, but don't feel that there is a unified national identity. Thus, when asked about what identity dominates their Lebanese description, participants expressed a strong identification with the religious, sectarian, or regional identity.

"Look at the elections, every party speaks in the name of religion, and people follow hatred speech and vote out of fear that the other party will come and take over, not because there is a national agenda to prioritize.." P.22

"When you ask me about a shared identity, I can sing for you nostalgic memories about Lebanon, but that is false reality created to frame Lebanon in a false co-existing image, maybe for tourism reasons. The truth is, even those who say we have a shared identity, deep down they can not put Lebanon first, it is either their religion, sect or region..." P.23

"For sure we have common cultural characteristics that make us Lebanese, but is that enough to define a collective national identity.. My answer is No." P.24

"I wish there was a shared identity, when we travel abroad we say we are Lebanese, but inside the country it seems difficult to agree that we talk about the same Lebanon. Look at the recent events, people are dying in South Lebanon and mourning, while all of Lebanon is dancing and hosting grand events..I am not saying to stop life, but at least, tone down the grand festivities on the days of mourning...From this lens only you have an answer to your question." P.25

Highlighting the eight interviewees who identified with a shared national Lebanese identity, based on their personal experiences and perceptions they brought forward the rich culture of Lebanon, posing it as the primary identification of what they collectively identify with.

"It is the live love Beirut, the shared nights out, Mar Mikhael², good vibes and best summers. Lebanon has a long history of being the cosmopolitan hubspot, we are inherently hospitable and party lovers. Those who tell you we don't have a shared identity search for fragmentation and hold onto. We have things in common that we can identify with, why go to the negatives?" P.21

"We as Lebanese share a rich culture of hospitality, long lived laughter even with the political unrest, partying, laughing and living like there is no tomorrow.." P.27

"When I say I am Lebanese, people immediately know what I am talking about, the fun true vibes and welcoming spirit, I am proud about that.." P.30

"The definition of a Lebanese has no sense inside Lebanon, thus we can only agree on hummus and Firuz, however, there should be more to it, to its meaning. A shared Lebanese identity ...Now I am asking myself, I do not have an answer." P.29

Participants were further asked to describe what a Lebanese identity might be, regardless of their belief in its uniformity or fragmentation. Outcomes were 75% of the participants associated their answers with the Lebanese culture and its values.

² Mar Mikhael is an area in Beirut known for its pubs and vibrant nightlife.

Mainly the cultural heritage which includes traditional clothing, cultural cuisine, dialect, and other cultural practices. Participants mostly used words like “Cedar, fun nights, hospitable, Firuz in the morning, hummus..” to describe what a shared identity means. Noteworthy, there was a total absence of mentioning a shared history, civic and legal responsibilities towards the country, or a collective prioritization of Lebanon's benefit.

Thus, a follow-up was conducted with the interviewees, and 27 out of 30 equating to 90% of the participants were not aware of the legal and civic responsibilities they carry as Lebanese.

“We never learned about civic responsibilities, maybe when we were kids in school. I remember there was a civics’ class, but I never associated the lessons with realistic implementation in everyday life. We just memorized, and I was an A student by the way.” P.21

“When were we supposed to know all this? I remember the last time I learnt about Lebanon was during short history courses in highschool .” P.30

“What legal and civic responsibility are you talking about? We live in a corrupt government with an absent body of governance..” P:22

“I know that I am not supposed to cross a red light, and at 20 or 21 I can vote, I am not sure what you mean by civic responsibilities..” P.27

1.2 Impact of the Absence of Shared Identity

1.2.1 Absence of interest in traditional domestic politics

23 participants out of 30 (76% of total participants) have expressed very minimal interest in knowing about and participating in domestic Lebanese politics. Participants with no identification with a collective Lebanese identity have conveyed a low interest in knowing more about Lebanese politics and political activities. Participants displayed no interest in looking for news about Lebanese politics and expressed their disinterest in engaging in politics. Expressions such as:

“I have no motive to participate in Lebanese politics. I have little information about it and I think it is none of my business, who cares about a better Lebanon. It is a country tailored for private agendas, starting with the governmental system.” P.26

“I find that my participation will have no effect in the current political situation.” P.25

1.2.2 Distrust in the current political system

Participants demonstrated a mistrust of the current political system and the political elite. Descriptive terms such as “corrupt”, “sectarian”, and “failing” were frequently utilized by participants to demonstrate their views of the current political establishment. Additionally, recurring sentiments expressed during interviews included concerns that the system fails to provide essential public services, with statements such as “This system is not providing us with the basic public services” and “It is a failed system” being repeatedly mentioned. Notably, 26 out of 30 participants—86% of participants—reported a prevailing sense of distrust towards the existing political framework.

“The current political system is rooted in sectarianism. It has a well known history of corruption and bad governance. I strongly oppose this system and believe everyone should” P.17

“The current governmental structure is not effective at all. After all, we have been in the same financial crisis since 2019, what has the government done? Nothing. Why would I support it?” P.03

“It is a very incompetent system. Individuals get to reach high positions in government because of the large corruption levels. The government is not providing me as a citizen with anything of my rights.” P.06

“The Lebanese government is supposedly confessional, it succeeded at being pluralistic, but failed at homogenizing Lebanon above all pluralistic goals. There is no Lebanon, no us, only we versus them. How can you feel connected to a fragmented country like that?” P.2

1.2.3 University Level Politics

Among the 25 participants from the Lebanese University (LU), American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese American University (LAU), University of Saint Joseph (USJ), and University of Balamand (UOB), 20 participants out of 25, indicated that they view university-level political activities as detrimental to student welfare. One participant, who is an elected member

of a student council at the Lebanese American University (LAU), has noted that "the campus environment is heavily influenced by sectarian affiliations and dominated by traditional political parties, which exploit student political activities to enhance their visibility and gain popularity.

1.2.4 Frustration Towards Change

Participants have expressed pessimism about Lebanon's future, indicating a lack of confidence in the possibility of political change under the current conditions. They generally do not foresee any forthcoming improvements or growth, given the prevailing political and economic crises. Notably, 19 out of 30 (63% of participants) participants have explicitly conveyed their concerns about Lebanon's political future.

"With the current political and economic crisis alongside what is happening in the South as in the war, I do not see that positive change in Lebanon is feasible." P.08

"Lebanese society is not showing any signs of improvement when it comes to political understanding. Additionally, we're still a heavily sectarian society, and this will surely prevent any future change from occurring." P.12

1.2.5 Political Discussions

Participants expressed reluctance to engage in political discussions with family and friends. Out of the 30 participants, 22 reported either abstaining from political conversations entirely or only participating in superficial discussions. Participants indicated that in communities marked by significant political tensions, engaging in political discussions could jeopardize their relationships with family members or friends. Consequently, they expressed a reluctance to pursue such discussions, valuing the preservation of their relationships over engaging in political discourse.

"I rarely have political discussions with my friends. I do not see that such discussions are important." P.02

"My community does not endorse political discussions. It may cause conflicts between me and my community." P.04

"Political discussions frequently result in conflicts and complications. Personally, I feel that there are numerous other important activities that take precedence over engaging in political discussions." P.14

"Our political language is emotional, hatred speech works effectively, and chanting victim scenarios based on sectarian minorities works as effectively. Thus, political conversations are heated with emotions and anger, and it is uncivilized. Why would I get into a political discussion when it leads to nowhere?" P.22

"Politics is emotional in Lebanon with a superficial understanding of what it is about. We have no national agenda, we have private agendas implemented through the government, thus political discussions seem pointless." P.23

"It is pointless to discuss politics, they will end up criticizing the system and cursing politicians with an exception for their political parties" P.25

1.3 University Level Politics and Extension of the Sectarian Model

There was a follow up on university-level politics as it reflected a great deal of frustration. Indeed 20 out of 25 university-level participants perceived university-level political activities, including student council elections and political demonstrations along with other political events on campus, as neither beneficial nor significant. Participants expressed concerns that such activities often exacerbate existing sectarian and political tensions among students. Overall, the majority of respondents concurred that student political engagement does not yield positive effects on the campus community.

"There is no student political activity. This is the sad truth. These activities are nothing but a way for traditional parties to gain more exposure and further strengthen sectarian and political divisions within students" P.13

"I do not see political events on university levels as something useful. I have been in university for four years, and each year, during the student board elections, the same sectarian tensions appear strongly on campus. It is just a useless student activity used by the university administration to gain larger funding" P.11

"I would never participate in student council elections or any other political event at my university. There is absolutely nothing I would gain if I participate" P.04

Furthermore, participants have demonstrated a significant disinterest in and undervaluation of university-level political activities in Lebanon. Many youth perceive these activities as "useless" and "unrealistic." A former Student Council member at the Lebanese American University reported that student political activities lack substantive impact on the student body and are often exploited by political parties to enhance their campus presence. To further understand how Lebanese youth perceive university-level political activity, participants were asked to describe their experience in university-level political activities such as Student Council board elections, political discussions and webinars, and on-campus demonstrations.

"Student political activities are ineffective and merely reflect the divisions within Lebanese society." P.17

"I am unwilling to engage in university political activities due to their strong association with sectarian politics." P.09

"Such activities do not educate students about political life; instead, they provide an opportunity for political parties to increase their visibility and popularity among the youth." P.11

2

Quantitative Findings

The quantitative data further supports the qualitative findings, showing low scores on both collective identity and political engagement scales. Furthermore, the data suggests a strong correlation between weak collective identity and low political engagement. Additionally, it explores the impacts of such a phenomenon.

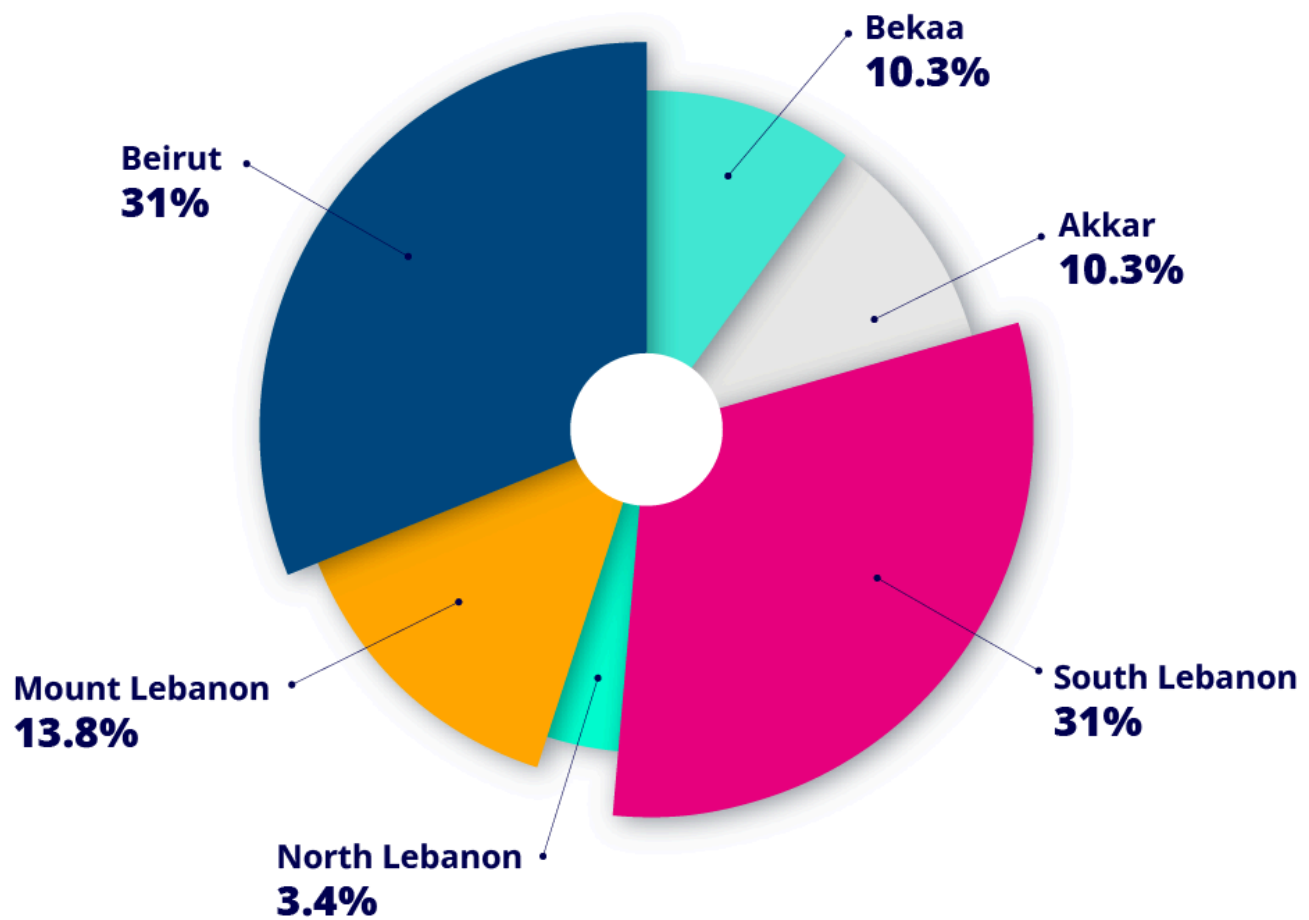


Fig 1: Regional distribution of survey participants

2.1 Collective Lebanese Identity Index

Respondents were asked to rate their sense of Lebanese collective identity on a scale from 1 (no sense of identity) to 10 (strong sense of identity). The average score was 1.06, with a standard deviation of 0.25. Since the average is close to 1, it indicates that most participants rated their sense of identity near the lowest end of the scale. In other words, the outcome was 93.5% who answered weakly to no sense of shared identity and 6.5% reported a strong sense of belonging to a shared Lebanese identity.

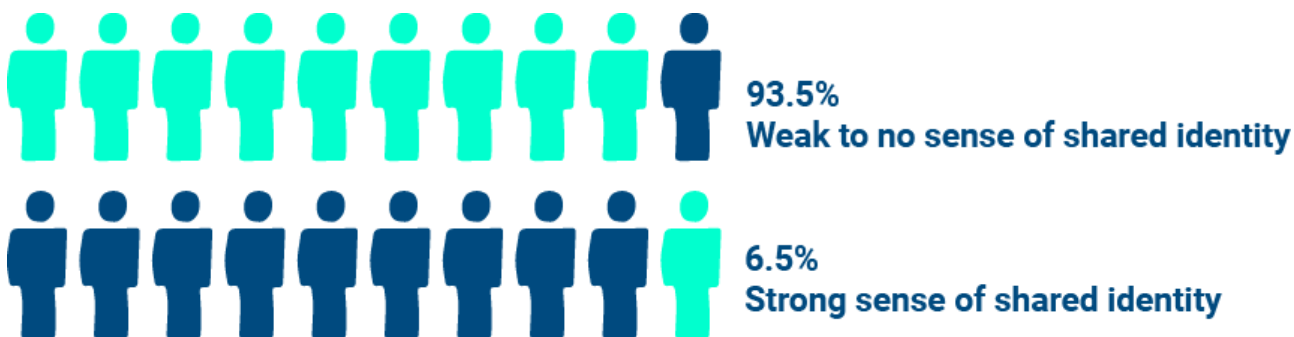


Figure 2: Participants identification with Collective Identity

2.2 Lebanese Youth’s Limited Interest in Lebanese Politics

Participants were asked about their political engagement, and responses scored an average of 2.0 on a scale from 1 (never engaged) to 5 (very frequently engaged), with a standard deviation of 0.5. This suggests that political engagement among participants is generally low, with most participants scoring between 1.5 and 2.5. Yet, political engagement was further measured by the frequency of participation in traditional and non-traditional political activities such as voting, party memberships, attending town hall meetings, partaking in protests, signing petitions, participating in political discussions, expressing political views on social media, trust in government, grassroots movements, and hope towards positive change through political engagement.

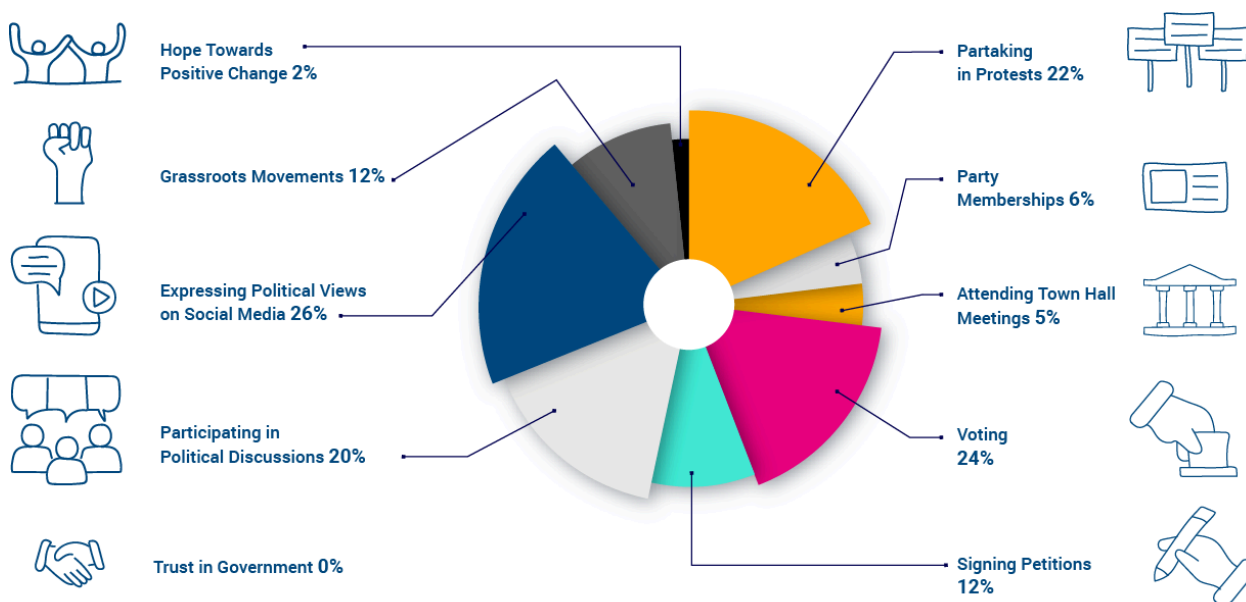


Figure 3: Participants’ political engagement indicators

Overall, these numbers indicate a pronounced tendency among Lebanese youth to disengage from political discourse, as evidenced by their low affiliation with political parties, minimal engagement on social media, and lack of interest in political issues metrics.

2.3 The Correlation Between Shared Identity Ambiguity and Political Engagement

A Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between the sense of collective Lebanese identity and political engagement. The correlation coefficient was found to be $r = 0.85$, indicating a very strong relationship.

Collective Lebanese Identity

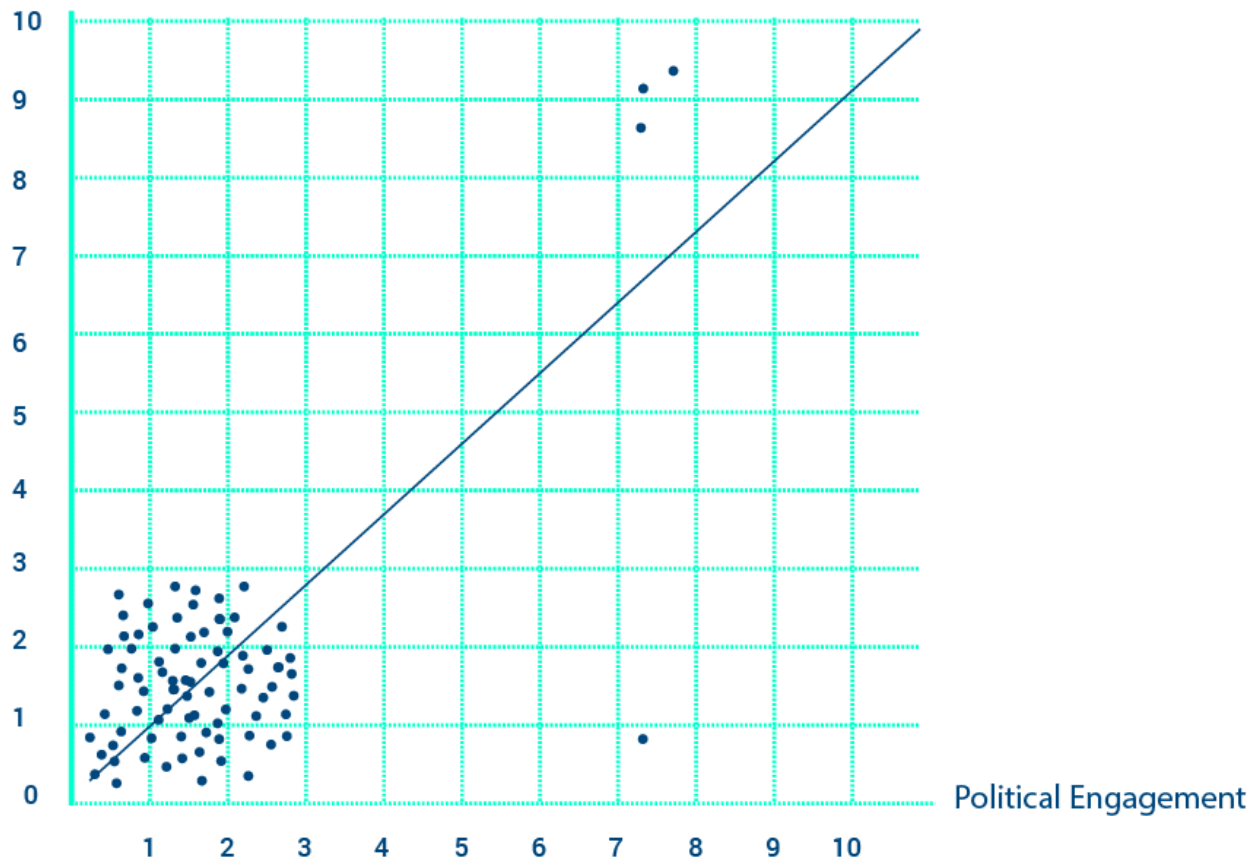


Figure 4: The direct proportionality between the absence of collective Lebanese identity and political disengagement

2.4 Lebanese Youth Associate Lebanese Identity to Lebanese Culture

When asked about how they perceive the Lebanese Identity, Lebanese youth expressed their sense of belonging to the Lebanese Identity through the lens of Lebanese culture. Lebanese youth have closely associated the Lebanese identity with prominent cultural practices and values.

1. Cultural Association: A significant 61.5% of participants view Lebanese identity as closely linked to Lebanese culture.
2. Key Cultural Values: Participants emphasize key cultural values that shape their national identity, with the prominent three key values:
 - Sense of Freedom: A strong commitment to freedom.
 - Desire for Education: A strong desirability for higher education and knowledge.
 - Love for Diversity: An appreciation for cultural diversity.

These findings highlight how Lebanese youth strongly associate their national identity with core cultural values, underscoring the importance of these values in shaping their perceptions of the shared Lebanese identity.

2.5 Impact of Low Collective Identity on Political Engagement

Respondents with a collective identity score between 1 and 3 had an average political engagement score of 1.0, while those with a score above had an average engagement score of 4.1. This suggests that individuals with a stronger sense of collective identity are more likely to be politically engaged.

2.6 Lebanese Youth's Sense of Distrust in Lebanese Governmental Institutions

Participants' trust and belief in the current governmental political institutions and their ability to drive political change within the current situation was assessed, in which participants revealed substantial levels of distrust and pessimism regarding governmental institutions and potential political changes in the country.

1. Trust in Government: A significant majority, 100% of participants, expressed a complete lack of trust in Lebanese governmental institutions.
2. Optimism for Change: A notable 65.5% of participants reported a lack of optimism about future political change in Lebanon.
3. Effectiveness of Political Participation: Additionally, 44.8% of participants believe that their involvement in political activities will not result in meaningful change.
4. Overall, these numbers highlight a pronounced skepticism among Lebanese youth towards political institutions and the efficacy of their participation in making political change possible.

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2. Key Cultural Values: Participants emphasize key cultural values that shape their national identity, including:
 - Sense of Freedom: A strong commitment to freedom.
 - Desire for Education: A pronounced thirst for education and knowledge.
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These findings highlight how Lebanese youth strongly associate their national identity with core cultural values, underscoring the importance of these values in shaping their perceptions of the shared Lebanese identity

2.8 Prioritizing Lebanese Identity

Answers showed that 75% of participants chose a strengthened sense of shared identity amongst a strengthened economy, increased civic education and awareness, political rest, and enhanced social norms as an accelerator and motivator for them to engage in politics.

3

Negative Case Analysis

The findings indicate a positive correlation between weak identification with the Lebanese collective identity and youth's political disengagement, which further allowed for the examination of how the absence of a shared collective identity shaped the Lebanese youth's political interest and engagement. However, there were outliers to the hypothesis who are worth noting, they have correlated with low sense of belonging, yet, they held an active political engagement status. Thus, participant number 20 presents a notable exception to the research hypothesis, which examines how the absence of a shared Lebanese identity influences political disengagement among Lebanese youth. Although this participant does not fully embrace the concept of a shared Lebanese identity, they prioritize religious identity over a shared Lebanese identity. They exhibit an active political engagement in efforts to attain a shared collective identity. Including active involvement in a reformist Lebanese political party, publishing articles on political and economic issues, leading a student branch of the political party at a Lebanese university, and engaging in daily political discussions.

Participant number 20 attributed their political activism to a deep intellectual curiosity and a commitment to achieving social and political change. They joined a reformist party to advocate against the current political system and view their political engagement as a moral duty. They state, "According to my religion, I find myself obliged to advocate for all the oppressed in the world. There is a humane duty that I have to react to." Participant number 20 makes it clear that their religious and moral belief is one of the main drivers for their political activity. However, participant number 20 has chosen not to join any traditional political parties justifying that these parties resemble a long history of corruption and political inefficiency in addition to them feeding the sectarian divisions within the Lebanese people instead of building a collective Lebanese identity. Moreover, participant number 20 states that they do not believe that having both religious and nationalist motives for political activity is wrong, but interconnected. To further elaborate, participant number 20 mentions that it is normal for individuals to belong to a national shared identity and a religious identity simultaneously as they complement each other. Furthermore, participant number 20 states "I support the project of a civil state that respects all sects, does not strengthen sectarian divisions within the Lebanese, and unites the Lebanese based on a shared and clear national identity, narrative, and agenda."

This case deviates from the research hypothesis, which anticipated a correlation between weak shared Lebanese identity and political disengagement. Instead, Participant number 20's strong political knowledge and active participation highlight a different dynamic. Their profound understanding of politics and strong religious identity seem to compensate for their relatively weak sense of shared Lebanese identity. The participant's commitment to political action and advocacy, driven by their moral and religious convictions, underscores that a lack of shared identity can be offset by deep political knowledge and a strong sense of moral obligation and identification with the religious affiliation. Thus, this case illustrates that political engagement can be influenced by a variety of factors beyond mere identification with a collective national identity. Participant 20's example highlights how personal convictions, moral beliefs, and alternative visions for societal reform can drive political activity. Their experience suggests that while a shared collective identity may generally enhance political participation, individuals with strong personal motivations and alternative sources of identity can also engage actively in political processes.

Although the lack of a unified Lebanese identity may play a role in political disengagement, this analysis indicates that the relationship is not entirely straightforward. Sectarian affiliations, regional ties, and other external influences also shape political involvement in Lebanon. Therefore, it is crucial to account for these complexities when exploring the connection between identity and political participation in the country. The case further proves the complexity of political engagement of Lebanon and highlights that political engagement may not solely depend on a collective national identity. Instead, factors such as individual responsibility also play crucial roles. Participant number 20's strong political activism despite a relatively weak sense of shared Lebanese identity suggests that the hypothesis might need additional variables like religious conviction and personal motivation. This paper only focuses on the shared sense of belonging of Lebanese youth as a main factor in engaging Lebanese youth in politics. A broader perspective could offer a more nuanced understanding of political engagement among Lebanese youth, which is stated in the limitations of the research in the hopes of consideration by future research.

Discussion

This study has confirmed that the fragmentation of national identity does discourage Lebanese youth from engaging in domestic politics. As supported by the findings, a strong positive correlation does exist between the absence of a collective national identity and Lebanese youth political disengagement, which suggests that as Lebanese youth adopt a weaker identification with the Lebanese national identity. They become more inclined to withdraw from political activity and further disengage from politics which is an alarming phenomenon that should be addressed for a positive societal steering and the future of a better governance.

Significantly, the qualitative findings highlight that Lebanese youth often feel disconnected from the broader national narrative because they identified primarily with pluralistic micro-identities, alternating with their religion, sect or region over the nation. Stating that 73% of participants showcased a weak identification of a shared Lebanese identity which was confirmed by the collective identity index with a 93.5% of participants who expressed a weak to no sense of national identity with a dominance of identification with their sectarian affiliation. Thus, this finding supports British Council (2020), Harb (2021) and Doueihy (2022) who noted a growing frustration and fragmentation of national identity among Lebanese youth. However, this study focuses on further examining the phenomenon of the absence of a shared identity amongst Lebanese youth to explore its impact on their political engagement.

"The truth is, even those who say we have a shared identity, deep down they can not put Lebanon first, it is either their religion, sect or region" P.23

Notably, participants who reported a lack of a shared national identity have exposed a significant discouragement from partaking in domestic Lebanese politics. Actually, 76% of participants in the qualitative study have expressed disinterest in Lebanese politics, supported by figure 3 in quantitative results, participants have reflected a daunting minimal political engagement. Further exploring, both qualitative and quantitative findings align with Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), demonstrating that the majority of participants do not view themselves as part of a unified group and immensely related their political disengagement to the lack of a sense of belonging to Lebanon and a limited prioritization of a Lebanese agenda by the government and its citizens.

"There is no Lebanon, no us, only we versus them. How can you feel connected to a fragmented country like that?" P.25

"I have no motive to participate in Lebanese politics. I have little information about it and I think it is none of my business, who cares about a better Lebanon. It is a country tailored for private agendas, starting with the governmental system." P.26

It is evident that the lack of a cohesive group identity amongst participants highlights the negative impact of fragmented micro-identities, which stifles their involvement in collective political actions and support for group related causes that participants perceive as irrelevant or non-existent. Importantly, participants critiqued the political system's sectarian nature and pointed at the entrenched sectarianism in the governmental institutions, emphasizing a marked frustration over unmet civic rights and torn apart governance. Such negative perceptions of the political system seemingly contribute to political disengagement, because participants expressed how sectarianism undermines a cohesive national identity and fosters disappointment, discouraging them from participating in such political discourse. Incorporating Political Psychology research, it is worth highlighting the importance of psychological motivation in shaping political engagement, the study reflects that young individuals' psychological drive to engage in political activities appears to be weakened, leading to lower levels of civic involvement which has been tied to the lack of a strong national identity. Also, Political psychology indicates that a strengthened national identity is a key factor to predicting political engagement. It is expected that this sense of belonging can enhance the perceived value of civic engagement among young people, resulting in increased participation in political debates and actions. In other words, individuals with a strong national identity are more inclined to see political engagement as crucial for active citizenship, potentially positioning them as leaders in political participation. Interpreting this study, results reflected that Lebanese youth do have a limited civic responsibility towards Lebanon, startlingly, qualitative findings reported an absence of civic and legal responsibilities as citizens amongst youth.

"I know that I am not supposed to cross a red light, and at 20 or 21 I can vote, I am not sure what you mean by civic responsibilities.." P.27

Not only that, also this study has strengthened the Political Efficacy theory (Miller, 1974), where the absence of a cohesive national identity in Lebanon significantly proved an impact on youth's perceptions of both internal and external efficacy. Observing that many participants refrain from engaging in political discussions because they find them 'useless', leading to disengagement from both national and university-level politics. Additionally, university-level political activities are viewed as extensions of the sectarian model, further alienating students from meaningful political participation. Missing out on what arguably is the first opportunity for youth to experience political participation and steer their values in politics. Interestingly,

63% of participants in the narrative findings explicitly conveyed their pessimistic view about Lebanon's political future, similarly, the numerical findings reflected a distrust in Lebanese governmental institutions with a shocking 100% of participants expressing a complete lack of trust in Lebanese governmental institutions. More to it, an intimidating 65.5% of participants responded with a frustration towards positive political change in Lebanon, as a result, Lebanese youth appeared to be disconnected from a unified national identity, their answers registered a diminished confidence in their ability to drive political change and may view political institutions as unresponsive to their concerns and unable to carry serious change for the Lebanese community.

Expanding on the analysis, the study outcomes registered an interesting identification of a minority of participants with a strong Lebanese identity, however, those participants, qualitatively, highlighted Lebanese cultural values as their identity, with no mention of historical or civic values. Recalling Tamara Chalabi's literature (2006), this finding confirms her claim that the absence of a unified historical narrative strengthens micro-identities or how she rather called it 'sectarian historiography'. Further analyzing, these results are validated quantitatively with a significant 61.5% rate of participants who strongly agreed that Lebanese identity is linked to culture rather than politics. Yet, this cultural connection does not seem to foster a stronger sense of civic duty or political engagement.

Observing the findings it is evident that fostering a stronger sense of national identity could enhance political engagement among Lebanese youth. As presented in both the qualitative and quantitative findings, fragmented divisions and widespread distrust in the political system obstruct youth's political engagement in Lebanon. Further analyzing the qualitative narratives which demonstrate a strong positive relationship between a shared national Lebanese identity and political engagement, individuals who strengthen their belief in a unified national identity are more likely to become involved in political activities. This analysis underscores the importance of collective identity in shaping political behavior and points to the need for further investigation into methods for strengthening national identity and boosting youth involvement in Lebanon's political arena. Worth noting are the various factors that affect political participation amongst Lebanese youth, such as economic crisis, and stressful political circumstances, lack of civic education and awareness. Remarkably, the majority of participants expressed during interviews that the lack of serving a unified Lebanese agenda as the main obstacle for their political engagement. Meanwhile, numerical results validated such findings and showed that 75% chose a strengthened shared identity that can encourage political engagement among strengthened economy, increased civic education and awareness, political rest and enhanced social norms as an accelerator and motivator for them to engage in politics. This fragmentation can also perpetuate a cycle of political apathy where youth view the political atmosphere as inherently divided and incapable of addressing their needs as a united population, consequently, discouraging their willingness to engage in politics. Stressing on the theories utilized by this study, the importance of identity in shaping political behavior is amplified by findings that explain how individuals having a stronger sense of a shared Lebanese national identity would be more inclined to engage in political activism. Recalling Social identity Theory, it is essential for Lebanese youth to strengthen their sense of shared identity, because when people experience a deep connection to a common identity, they are more inclined to engage in actions that support that group, such as participating in political activities (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Moreover, Political Psychology findings and Political Efficacy theories stress on the importance of a shared connection to instill in individuals a sense of purpose, unity, and shared strength, thus, motivating individuals to act in ways that advance the group's goals and such improvements' could be targeted through youth's political engagement. Also, low political efficacy keeps youth in a cycle of disengagement, making youth believe that they are incapable of influencing politics, as a result they do not engage, leading to even less political efficacy.

Having established that a strong, cohesive, national identity can serve as a unifying force among Lebanese citizens, promoting national unity over sectarian and political divisions. It is acceptable to believe that a shared identity can contribute to better political engagement among Lebanese youth, leading to positive societal change allowing them to perform a crucial role in advancing Lebanon's political growth and future prosperity. Also, youth expressed a serious frustration towards the government and described it as corrupt, which has been highlighted by previous studies as well which only stressed on the importance of enhancing youth's political engagement. Because accountability and responsibility increases among individuals when they are politically engaged, in fact, when politically engaged, youth are more likely to hold leaders accountable for their actions in the aim of reducing corruption and promoting transparency (Miller, 1994). Thus, it is confirmed that building a collective identity that surpasses sectarian boundaries might encourage greater political involvement, but achieving this would necessitate significant shifts in both political culture and the education system to emphasize civic duty and national cohesion.

However, the research findings do present a negative case analysis on an outlier to the correlation proven between sense of shared identity and political engagement among Lebanese youth. Although this participant identified a weak collective identity, strong religious or moral convictions can lead to active political engagement. This suggests that while a weak national identity is generally linked to political disengagement, other factors like personal beliefs can also drive political involvement.

Recommendations

Young people are citizens with rights and responsibilities, they are the future leaders and policymakers, thus, their political engagement is essential to address their interests and priorities that are influencing them in the long run. This section provides recommendations to strengthen a Lebanese shared identity with the ultimate goal of enhancing youth's political engagement. However, it is essential to mention that these suggestions aim for an inclusive vibrant political landscape, where youth take the lead in societal steering towards the betterment of Lebanon. Noting that a shared Lebanese agenda does not imply canceling diversities and micro-identities, rather, these recommendations aim at intensifying the sense of belonging of Lebanese citizens in the aim of re-organizing citizens' priorities to support a shared sense of responsibility towards the national benefit. Thus, an essential key for implementing the proposed recommendations is ensuring collective efforts between policymakers, civil society and the youth themselves.

As a first step to enhance youth's political engagement in a fragmented landscape, it is inevitable to implement comprehensive developments in the education sector. Firstly, youth must know their rights and responsibilities as citizens. Since this study has revealed the limited knowledge youth have about their shared civic responsibilities towards Lebanon, it is essential to build their civic education and awareness through the educational system, by strategizing their involvement in society through the schools and universities. Beyond that, the Lebanese system holds less regard towards social studies, including civic classes and history, which both seem to be disconnected from youth's identification of a shared identity. Expanding more on the importance of strengthening historical knowledge amongst Lebanese youth, the process of unifying a national identity relies heavily on the consolidation of a shared historical memory. Evidently, Lebanese history is built on victimhood, and it is taught differently according to different political and religious groups which, debatably, further strengthens fragmentations and prioritizes micro-identities (Chalabi, 2006; Roen, 2022). In this study, participants have expressed that their historical knowledge is superficial and only based on the historical classes given at school.

Additionally, civil society organizations in Lebanon should support youth initiatives on the long run rather than on short term projects. They shall aim to strengthen cohesion among youth and support projects that aim at bridging communities beyond micro-identities, in the aspiration of understanding that Lebanese people's needs are much more similar than they might think and prioritizing a national identity could be the answer for addressing those needs. Employing youth to be part of civil society organizations should facilitate youth's engagement in the society overcoming their enclosed communal and sectarian fragmentations.

On top of that, political institutions in Lebanon should steer their attention to incorporating youth in political activities. Be it decreasing the legal age to vote, creating channels to listen to their concerns and needs and incorporating their political engagement within their local communities through the municipalities, rather than political parties only. Strategizing youth's political inclusion in governance is an achievable aspiration which can motivate their engagement and contribution.

At last, youth's political disengagement in domestic Lebanese politics is worrying, because one can only wonder, what will happen when the future ruling generation is already frustrated and disconnected from their domestic politics? So, there is a pressing need to collaborate and enhance youth's sense of belonging to Lebanon in an effort to increase their political engagement for a better Lebanon, otherwise, the hopelessness becomes unstoppable.

Limitations

This study has showcased how youth political engagement is a complex issue, and this study focused on just one aspect: the relationship between the presence or absence of a collective Lebanese identity and political engagement among youth. Future research should consider expanding to include socio-economic conditions, education, media influence, and personal values as factors contributing to youth political engagement in Lebanon. Also, despite the small sample size, it plays a crucial role in the research's goal of fostering a sense of Lebanese national identity among youth, aiming to encourage societal change through their political engagement. The inclusion of expatriate youth was a challenge, and we recommend that future research on this topic address this aspect. Noting that the timeframe of the research further constrained the study's ability to explore complex interrelationships. Thus, the study's analysis of youth political disengagement focused on specific metrics, such as activity and interest in domestic politics, passion for university-level political activity, willingness to engage in political discussions, and social media political activity. However, it did not include factors like socio-economic conditions, diverse educational backgrounds, and media consumption, which might have provided a more comprehensive analysis. Additionally, the research took place during a period of significant political turbulence in Lebanon, which could have influenced participants' responses. Pointing the fact that all participants who conveyed interest came from an academic background, on one hand education rates in Lebanon is high and the illiterate would have had to be specifically targeted, and on another hand, the fact that they were all literate implied that they should be more politically aware, and allows for the study to propose a further speculation of the Lebanese educational system for failing at addressing a unified national identity among youth. Yet, this is an important inclusivity remark for future researchers to consider. Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the researchers are Lebanese youth living in Lebanon and they focused on having a high self-awareness for acknowledging potential biases and ensuring that interpretations are grounded in the data rather than shaped by the researchers' own experiences.

Conclusion

This study ultimately found that the political disengagement of Lebanese youth is a multifaceted phenomenon closely tied to a fractured national identity, a weakened sense of belonging, and the prioritization of micro-identities. By employing the frameworks of Social Identity Theory, Political Efficacy Theory, and Political Psychology, the study confirmed a positive correlation between the lack of a unified Lebanese identity and youth political disengagement. Thus, these theories collectively highlight the critical role of a cohesive national identity in fostering active political participation. Alarmingly, participants' outlook on Lebanon's future is marked by pessimism and frustration, with little hope that political engagement can drive change. By examining how youth perceive and identify with their national identity, the study reveals that a preference for micro-identities over a collective national identity significantly contributes to their political disengagement and widespread frustration with Lebanon's future. Knowing that, the findings suggest that the lack of a collective identity immensely impacts the motivation and commitment of Lebanese youth to engage in the domestic political sphere, whether traditionally or non-traditionally.

Therefore, it is crucial to enhance youth's political engagement in Lebanon by fostering a shared Lebanese identity beyond cultural values and empowering them to take responsibility for creating a better Lebanon. Additionally, the study results emphasize the complexity of fostering a cohesive national identity in a politically fragmented society, where Lebanese identity is often viewed through a cultural lens only. Worth noting, that the diversity in micro-identities is not the targeted topic in hand, it is rather the prioritization of those identities instead of a national identity. Eventually, the research advocates for key strategies to strengthen the sense of belonging to a Lebanese identity. Including enhancing the educational curriculum, incorporating youth in governance processes, and fostering collaborations aimed at strengthening youth political engagement. By prioritizing these efforts, the potential for a more politically active and optimistic Lebanese youth population could be realized, contributing positively to Lebanon's development.

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