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Generation What? Arabic Countries
LEBANON

National Report

“Out with the old, in with the new”?

A portrait of a torn generation in the making.

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1. Introduction

Lebanon was one of the first countries in the region to complete its demographic transition, with continuously decreasing fertility rates (approximately 1.5%) and a predominantly young country[1], with youth constituting 27% of the population in 2012[2]. In spite of this, the Ministry of Youth and Sports was only established in the year 2000, as youth issues were previously nested under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. In 2009, the Ministry of Youth and Sports launched a special department to deal with youth-related matters and in 2012, Lebanon's national youth policy finally saw the light (Youth Policy, 2014). Endorsed by the Council of Ministers in April 2012 and developed with the financial and technical support of the international community[3], the policy has however stumbled in the implementation phase, and remains until the time of writing this paper pure rhetoric and wishful thinking.

Youths in Lebanon have generally been studied through the lens of emigration and unemployment. While this literature offers interesting insights, it fails to capture this segment of the population through a broad sociological perspective, comprising the complex economic, social, political, and legal dynamics youths face in a rather constraining environment. Basing itself on a nationwide online consultation, this paper therefore offers to explore youths' representations in Lebanon today, their – often complex – relations with social, cultural, economic, and political realms, thus questioning their potential transformative role in society. Noting the somewhat elusiveness of the concept of "youth" (*ash-shabāb*), as well as the lack of a universal definition, a common approach is

[1] Eric Verdeil, Ghaleb Faour, Sébastien Velut, *Atlas du Liban. Territoires et société*,Beyrouth, IFPO & CNRS, 2007.
[2] Youth Advocacy Process and Youth Forum for National Youth Policies, "The Youth Policy in Lebanon Case Study," 2012, available online: http://www.youthpolicy.org/library/wp-content/uploads/library/2012_Case_Study_Youth_Policy_Lebanon_Eng.pdf [last accessed on 20 November 2018]
[3] Tamirace Fakhroury, "Youth Politics in Lebanon. A call for citizen empowerment", Sahwa Policy Paper 11, 2016.

to generally adopt age ranges as benchmarks. Hence, considering youth as a cohort whose age is comprised between 15-29 facilitates, notably, quantitative comparisons[4]. Lebanon has officially adopted this age bracket to define "youth"[5]. However, looking at the sociological category of "youth" as mere members of a particular age group fails to grasp the depth of this socially constructed category of individuals, its uses, representations, as well as the different social realities these individuals navigate through. Other approaches define youth as the "transition" phase between childhood and adulthood (Dhillon et al. 2009, Dhillon and Yousef 2009). Nevertheless, this transition period is becoming increasingly longer, with prolonged duration of studies, delays in entering the job market, and marriages and families being started at a later age[6].

The online consultation undertaken by Generation What adopts a double perspective: on the one hand, a cohort based one, considering youth as individuals aged between 18 and 34, since one of the aims of the project is to draw on comparative insights on youth in different contexts; and on the other, beyond mere biological age and the concept of adults in the making, the self-depictions of youths, their representations of their contexts, their projections for the future, among others. Indeed, expressions, ideas, and experiences of being young vary across national and cultural contexts, and are structured according to interweaving social relations (class, confessional and/or gender identities among others) – or their euphemization. Contrary to other surveys, *Generation What?* refrained from adopting selection criteria, using digital tools to leave access to responding to the survey open, and targeting youth in Lebanon, regardless of nationality, religion, class, gender identity or orientation, etc.

[4] Age-based definitions of youth vary between countries and organizations. Many international organizations which used to define youth as persons aged 15-25, now define youth as persons aged 15-29 due to the prolongation of schooling (United Nations 1993, United Nations 2005, Council of Europe 2003, World Bank 2008).
[5] See the Youth Policy project website, available on: http://www.youthpolicy.org/factsheets/country/lebanon/ [last accessed on 20 November 2018].
[6] Myriam Catusse and Blandine Destremau, "Governing Youth, Managing Society: A Comparative Overview of Six Country Case Studies (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territo- ries, Tunisia and Turkey)," Working Paper / Power 2 Youth program, 2016.

In a context where literature on youth (in both the academic and practitioner field) is mainly focusing on their entry – or lack of – to the labour market, emigration rates, disenfranchisement and "radicalisation," and an official context of data scarcity and lack of reliable statistics[7], this paper endeavours to shed light on the various faces of this generation "in waiting"[8], generation Y, or what in contemporary Lebanon. It offers fragments of stories of a generation, that is often jaded and attempting to navigate everyday through the realities of the Lebanese context and system.

The Generation What online survey targeting people aged 18-34 living in Lebanon amassed 868 responses between March and October 2018. The sample of respondents is diverse in terms of age distribution: all ages are represented evenly, each falling between 4 and 8% of the total sample (see fig.1 below).

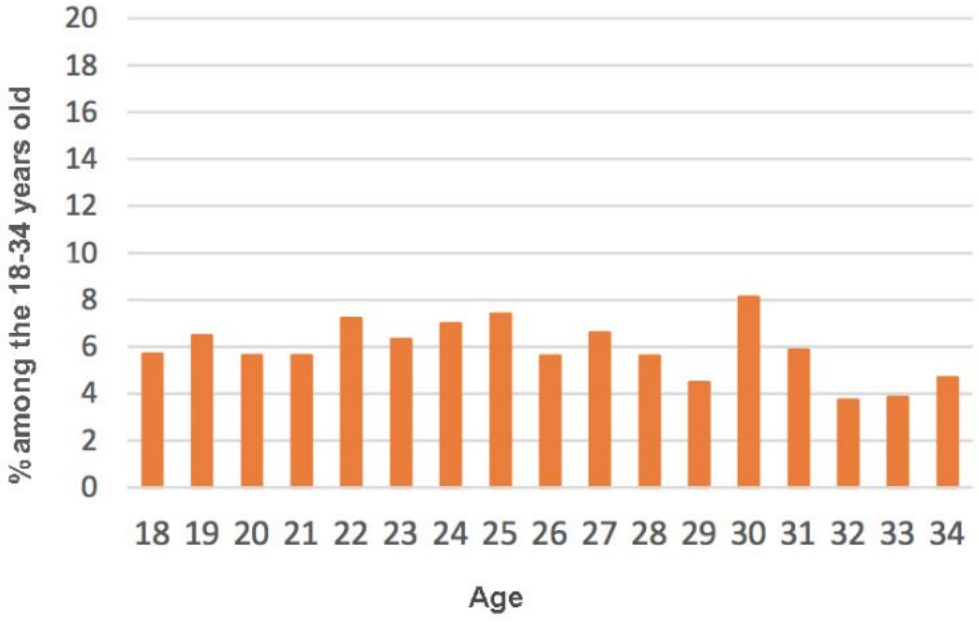


Fig.1: Age distribution of respondents to the Generation What? survey

[7] The last official population census in Lebanon was undertaken in 1932.
[8] Navtej Dhillon, Tarik Youssef (eds), *Generation in Waiting. The Unfulfilled Promise of Young People in the Middle East*, Brookings Institute, Washington, 2009.

The sample, composed of 52.3% of women and 47.7% of men, is representative of the gender distribution in the country[9]. With 72.7% of the respondents still living with their parents, the sample is also representative of housing habits and options in the country. Moreover, 75.6% of them have completed their high-school education and enrolled in higher education programmes, ranging from preparatory courses (44.1%) and bachelor degrees (24.9%) to masters degrees (3.4%) and doctoral programs (3.2%). While the majority of respondents (40.9%) are working under a permanent contract agreement, nearly a quarter of respondents are unemployed (23.9%).

With this, while the survey does not aim to be exhaustive (with a sample size of less than 1000), it does, however, succeed in capturing an overall image of youths in Lebanon, providing quantitative trends and a snapshot of this generation in the making.

[9] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2017). World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision. Available online: https://population.un.org/wpp/Graphs/DemographicProfiles/ [Last accessed on 20 November 2018].

2. A constantly adapting generation: iterations between conforming or individual exits.

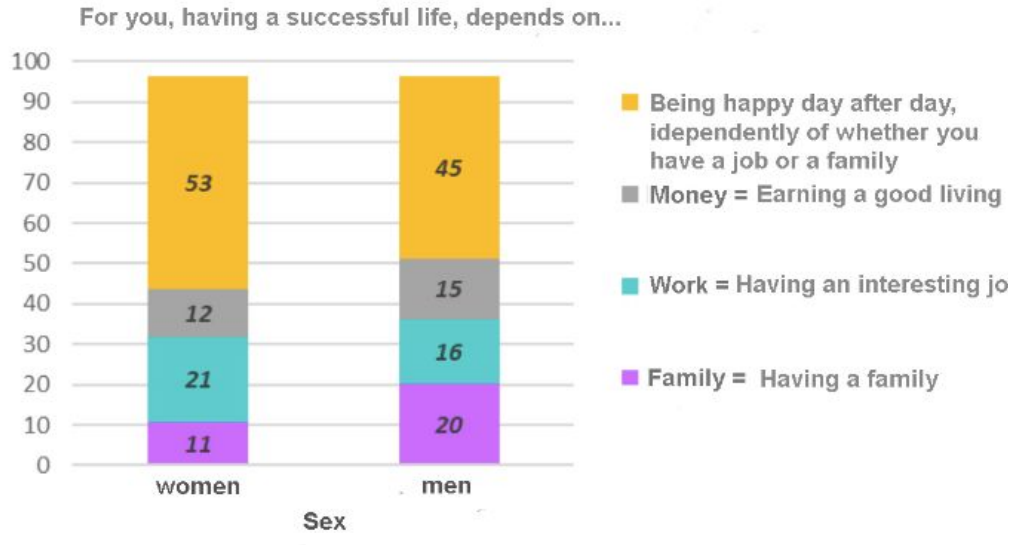
For most of the youth surveyed, adulthood is linked to broad moral values. Being an "adult" for the majority of respondents (63.5%) consists of "being mature and responsible"; and many (15.2%) seem to link it to being financially independent and no longer relying on their parents. This corroborates the idea of transition from a state of childhood to a concept of "adulthood," linked to a rather abstract idea of growth and reliability, and, to a lesser extent, to financial autonomy.

Hence, being autonomous, "leaving home" (27%), and accessing the labour market (39.1%) are voiced as the main elements that pave the way to adulthood in Lebanon. These aspirations show a desire to evade their lived realities, and show a disconnect with the context in Lebanon: estimates of unemployment rates vary from 25%[10] to 30% as per unofficial reports, and housing remains consistently inaccessible[11], which is further exacerbated in winter 2018 with the discontinuing of subsidised housing loans. While, in other contexts, unemployment is considered as an important factor hindering the autonomy of youths (Muxel, *Generation What? France*, 2017), in Lebanon however, economic challenges are not the only constraint that impede the youth from moving out of their parent's nest: prevailing social customs tend to consider living with one's parents as the norm until marriage, and young people living on their own or in shared apartments remain a minority[12]. Yet, the majority of respondents (over 50%) do feel and consider themselves as adults, which illustrates an ambivalence in youths' self-representations.

[10] LBCI, Report: alarming figures on unemployment in lebanon, 6 May 2017, available online: https://www.lbcgroup.tv/news/d/news-bulletin-reports/314820/report-alarming-figures-on-unemployment-in-lebanon/en [last accessed on 18 Novmeber 2018].
[11] Bruno Marot, "Pegged urbanization and the (in)stability of Lebanese capitalism", Executive Magazine, 4 Octobre 2018.
[12] Barbara Drieskens, *Changing Perceptions of Marriage in Contemporary Beirut* In :*Les métamorphoses du mariage au Moyen-Orient* [en ligne]. Beyrouth, Presses de l'Ifpo, 2008.

In a context of an entrenched economic crisis[13], over a quarter (30.9%) of the *Generation What?* respondents in Lebanon believe that it will affect their future. In spite of this, the majority expresses a sense of agency and a feeling of being in control of their lives (34% agreeing or completely agreeing that they are in control of their destiny).

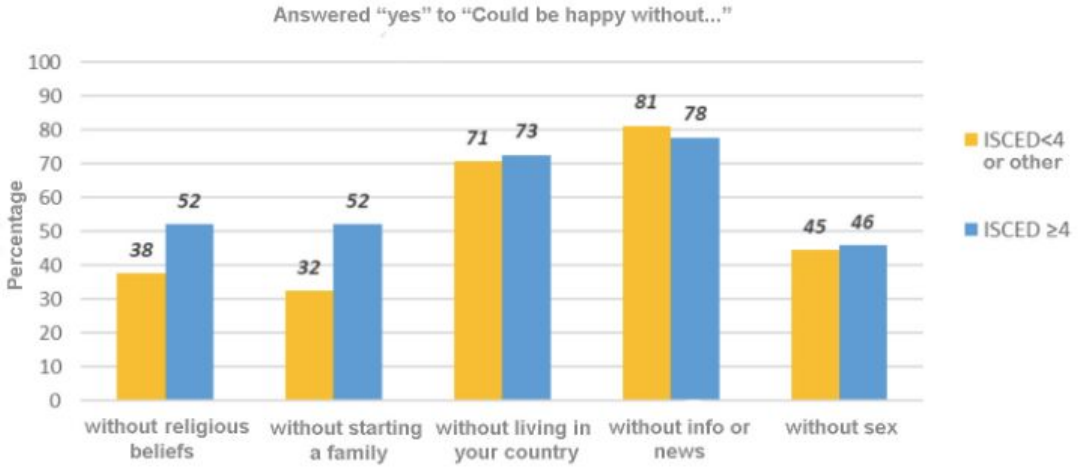
While a majority (57%) see themselves in the future as married with children, in line with their own parents' way of life, almost half of respondents (49.3%) link having a successful life to being happy day after day, independently of a job or family. As the graph below shows, female and male youths have similar answers as to their conception of success in life, except for two main areas: work and family. In contrast with general gendered preconceptions, more female than male respondents value work and consider having an interesting job key to a successful life, and considerably less women (9% less) than men link having a family to life success.



When asked about their thoughts on happiness, 41.9% of the respondents voiced that they would be happy without Internet while 57.2% would not. This denotes a

[13] See: https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2018/08/30/lebanons-economy-has-long-been-sluggish-now-a-crisis-looms

certain disillusion with online mediums, in spite of a high rate of using social and online media[14], and is in contrast with global approaches to the internet as full of potential in democratising access to information, and breaking down barriers between people. This does not, however, imply that youths in Lebanon are isolating and not prioritising living in groups, or not using digital tools to build social and solidarity bonds between each other. In fact, 76.3 % of respondents claim that they would not be happy without friends, "the long wait before acquiring adulthood status [having] intensified friendly and relational activities specific to youth."[15] The relatively high rate of respondents who would forego access to Internet, and see their happiness unaffected, can be linked to news consumption however. In a context of constant political upheavals and cyclical crises, youths in Lebanon do express a disconnect from politics in general and a desire to "not [focus] on politics but on [them]selves"[16], and 78.1% of respondents claim they would be happy without having access to news and info.

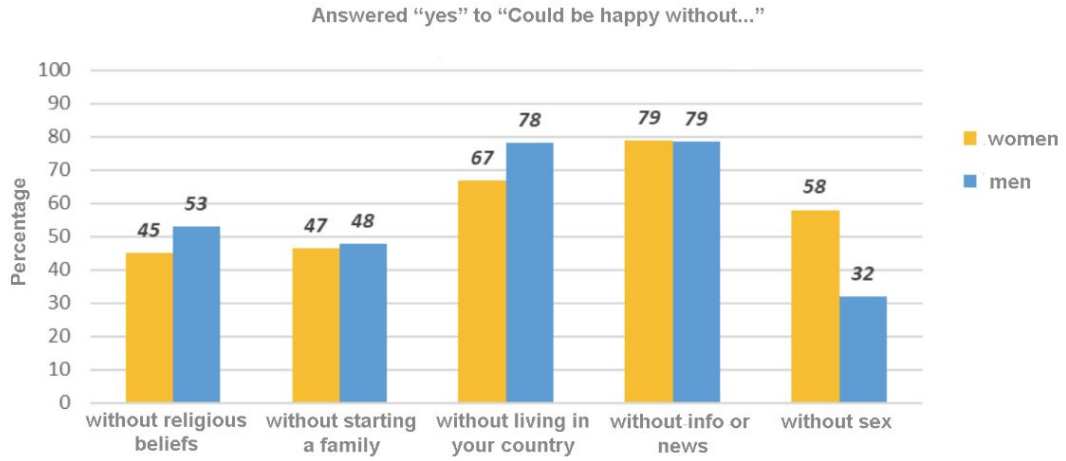


Another interesting result of the consultation is that 48.9% of the youth surveyed stated they would be happy without religious beliefs. These results are distributed rather equally across sex and age, however with some discrepancy

[14] See: http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Beirut/pdf/Survey_Presentation_En.pdf
[15] Monique Dagnaud, *Génération Y. Les jeunes et les réseaux sociaux, de la dérision à la subversion,* Paris, Presses de La Fondation Nationale Des Sciences Politiques, 2013, p.150.
[16] Generation What video interviews, "04 Generation What - En crise - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/LijyfyDXpcE.

when it comes to the educational level as shown in the graph above. This can suggest that higher educational achievements amongst our respondents draw them to slightly more distanced stances towards religion and family. This is to be read in a context where the political system institutionalises the representation of various religious sects (in confessions) and grants their leaders a broad influence over social and political affairs. This pervasiveness of religion in all aspects of everyday life in Lebanon (from the private realm to the public space) may explain this distanciation of a portion of the youth.

Does the rather gloomy picture above contribute to 72.1% of respondents stating that they would be happy if they did not live in Lebanon? Without drawing hasty correlations, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this paints a picture of the youth riddled with contradictions, and conflicting feelings as to their conception of growth, their future, and their own self-representation. A generation that operates mainly on a survival mode and that is in a constant search of individual exit strategies.



This could be linked to the fact that the cohort of 18 to 34 years old were either born during Lebanon's civil war (that spanned officially from 1975 to 1990), or in its

lasting aftermath and a context of cold civil peace[17], and of state-sponsored amnesia and an inability to deal with the past on a national policy level[18]. Indeed, this generation has lived recurrent, routinized, and episodic violence breaking across the country, as well as the prolonged reign of former militias and warlords as elected politicians. It is no wonder, then, that 68.5% of respondents believe that previous generations are responsible for the difficulties the youth face in Lebanon today, ignoring aforementioned socio-economic factors, but also eluding all responsibility.

In spite of it all, the youth are hopeful and optimistic as to their future, with 59.6% believing that their future will be better than their parents' lives, with respondents falling in the 18-24 age range considerably more optimistic than their 25-34 years old counterparts since 70% of them (18% more than 25-34 years olds) maintain this.

[17] Waddah Charara, *Al-Silm al-Ahli al-Barid: Lubnan, al-Mujtama' wa al-Dawla, 1964–1967 (The Cold Civil War: Lebanese Society and State),* Beirut, Beirut: Ma'had al-Inma' al-'Arabi, 1980.
[18] Mia Bou Khaled, "Contested history, conflicting narratives, and a multitude of initiatives: An analysis of the Mapping of Initiatives addressing Past Conflicts in Lebanon", *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, Lebanon Support, 2018.

3. Disconnect between the educational system and the job market

Youth in Lebanon is relatively well educated, with a literacy rate of 99%, a level of education of 80%, and a gross enrolment university rate of 38% in 2017[19]. Yet, in assessing whether the educational system prepares them adequately for the job market, 73.9% of respondents do not really agree or totally disagree with that assertion. This is echoed by a quarter of employed respondents who find that their current job is completely not in line with their qualifications. As interviewees of *Generation What?* maintain:

"There are only 3 schools in Lebanon that run orientation sessions for students since childhood for them to know what profession to strive for. They do not prepare us in the proper way to be able to succeed. Most people are selecting the same careers, either a doctor, an engineer, or a lawyer. Not all people love to do this." [20]

In Lebanon, the highly privatised educational system contributes to magnifying inequalities and marginalisation, and reduces youth unemployment to an issue of skills. "The private sector emphasises entrepreneurship, business and competitiveness. Unemployment is a major policy issue and the youth are the main targets of sectarian political parties. They tend to find employment in areas that increase their visibility in public spaces such as the army, militias, security firms and the police, as substitutes for other jobs."[21] Studies analysing the linkages between the educational system and the job market are quite rare and those that exist seem to converge in highlighting a rather absent regulatory role of the state that leaves education to the private sector (the majority of schools

[19] See: http://uis.unesco.org/country/LB
[20] Generation What video interviews, "11 Generation What - Bac ou crève - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/OmTwBjJwIAY
[21] Myriam Catusse and Blandine Destremau, "Governing Youth, Managing Society: A Comparative Overview of Six Country Case Studies (Egypt, Lebanon, Morocco, Occupied Palestinian Territo- ries, Tunisia and Turkey)," Working Paper / Power 2 Youth program, 2016.

and universities in Lebanon are private and many are run by religious institutions), which contributes to widen the disconnect between young graduates and the job market's actual needs[22]. A majority of *Generation What?'s* respondents (77.6%), hence, think that the state should play a more proactive role and fund higher education and work placements. In this context, emigration[23] often appears as the sole viable solution for young graduates, as shown by the seminal work of C. Kasparian in the early 2000s[24].

This rather contrasted landscape is more challenging as far as non-Lebanese youths are concerned. Indeed, while Palestinian youth has historically been characterised by high educational achievements, over 70 years in exile and life in dire encampment conditions in Lebanon have been enough to contribute to the dramatic decrease of enrolment levels[25]. In fact, for them, pursuing an education, maybe even more than their Lebanese counterparts, does not equate to accessing the job market. Indeed, more than twenty professions are prohibited to Palestinians refugees in Lebanon. Syrian refugees face similar challenges since 2011, and the start of the Syrian conflict; the overwhelming majority of children do not have access to formal education, and their elders are confined since 2016 to 3 labour sectors: agriculture, construction, environment (with the latter referring to occupations linked to cleaning and maintenance)[26]. Thus, when it comes to job seeking in Lebanon, prospects seem bleak for, both, vulnerable Lebanese and non-Lebanese youth alike.

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[22] See: Boutros Labaki (dir.). *Enseignement supérieur et marché du travail dans le monde arabe.* Nouvelle édition [en ligne]. Beyrouth : Presses de l'Ifpo, 2009 (généré le 22 novembre 2018). Disponible sur Internet : <http://books.openedition.org/ifpo/754>

[23] Ghassan Dibeh, Ali Fakih, and Walid Marrouch," Decision to Emigrate Amongst the Youth in Lebanon", IZA Institute of Labour Economics, Discussion Paper series, 2017.

[24] Choghig Kasparian, *L'entrée des jeunes dans la vie active et l'émigration*, USJ, Beyrouth, 2001. Choghig Kasparian, *Le devenir des diplômés de l'Université Saint-Joseph 2000-2004*, USJ, Beyrouth, 2006.

[25] Laurie Blome Jacobsen (ed), "Findings Means. UNrwa's Financial CRisis and refugee living conditions", vol. 1, Fafo, 2003.

[26] Lebanon Support, "Syrian Refugees' Livelihoods. The Impact of Progressively Constrained Legislations and Increased Informality on Syrians' Daily Lives.", *Civil Society Knowledge Centre,* Beirut, Lebanon Support, 2016.

With this, 61.5% of the youth who responded to the *Generation What?* survey feel uncertain that Lebanon's education system provides equal chances to all, and a majority (63.9%) of them believe that this system does not reward the deserving. It remains that the striking majority of respondents (87.7%) feels that Lebanese society does not give them the chance to live up to their full potential and capacities.

4. A discerning diagnosis on contemporary society in Lebanon

This comes in a context of heightened socio-economic inequality that youths are not blind to. An overwhelming majority of respondents (94.7%) find the gap between the rich and the poor increasingly widening in Lebanon. An even bigger majority of 95.3% believe that money is too prominent and given too much importance in society, and 95.5% consider there is too much injustice in the country.

"Injustice means living in an air conditioned place [...] Having the power suddenly cut forcing you to turn the hot water tank and the fridge off because your main is 10 amperes and can't handle it."[27]

Lebanon's "merchant republic"[28] is characterised by a very liberal economy and scarce redistribution. The absence of a welfare state contributes to nurturing confessional solidarities; indeed, families and communities are the main safety net for all residents in the country, especially for the most vulnerable and disenfranchised[29]: it is thus not surprising that 86.2% of youths who responded to the survey find solidarity essential to everyday life, and 70.2% among them regret an increasingly individualistic society.

In contrast, 60% of the *Generation What?* respondents note that there are too many idlers, leading to question the deep-rootedness of individualism in their mentalities. Against this background, individuals are left with no other choice

[27] Generation What video interviews, "04 Generation What - En crise - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/LijyfyDXpcE
[28] Caroline Gates, *The Merchant Republic of Lebanon: the Rise of an Open Economy*, London, IB Tauris, 1998.
[29] Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, "Social Protection in Lebanon, between charity and politics", (Arabic), Social watch, ANND, available at https://civilsociety-centre.org/node/52858 [last accessed on 25 Novembre 2018].

than finding individual coping mechanisms, cornerstones of the so-called Lebanese resilience.

The myth of the phoenix forever rising of its ashes, in a highly neoliberal system, illustrates the daily struggle to keep afloat in this society, in the absence of rights and protection. It also underlines the seemingly superficial contradictions that structure today's youth, but also, to a great extent, Lebanon's social fabric and socio-political system.

"There doesn't exist a women quota which is the most important matter and which is in control of everything. Therefore, there's no gender equality"[30]

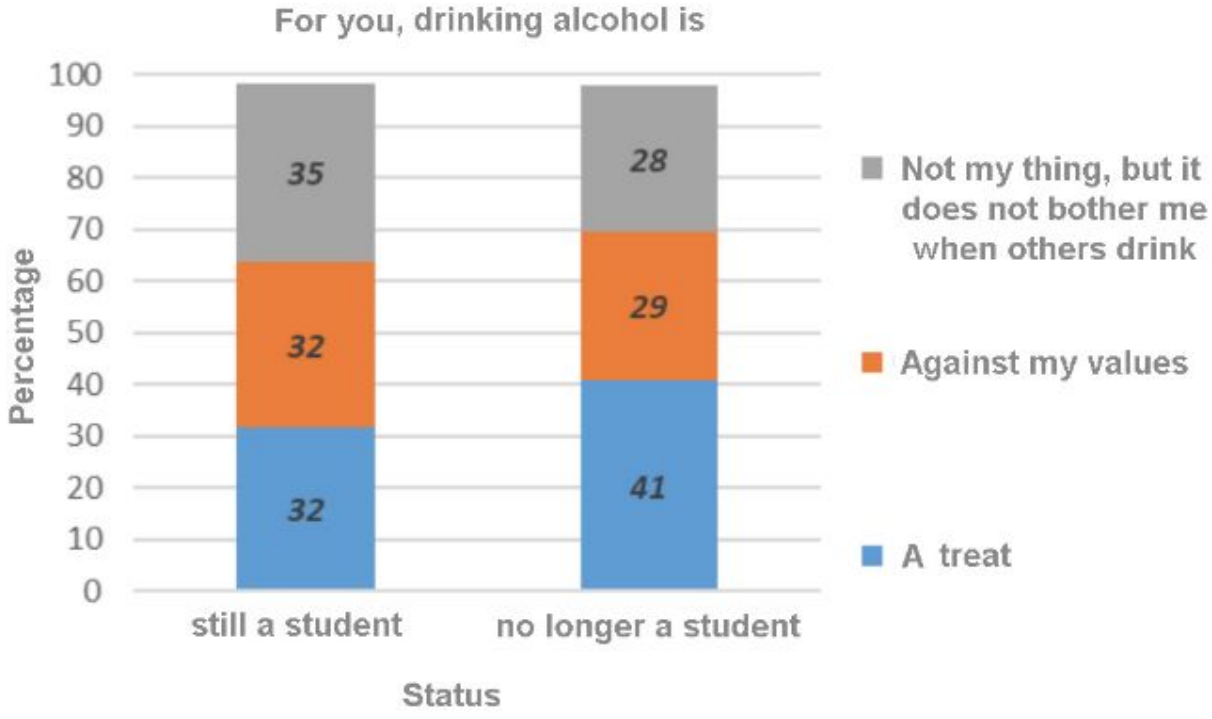
On another note, youths' perception of society seems to also encompass other facets of inequality, notably regarding gender. Given the importance of gender parity in the social and economic development of any given country, and the fact that Lebanon ranked 137 in the World Economic Forum's 2017 Gender Gap Report[31], figures like 63.6% of respondents finding that Lebanon is still far from achieving gender equality reveal an awareness of the prevalence of gender discrimination in the country. With reports of 1 out of 4 women experiencing sexual harassment[32], 91% of respondents decrying street calling and harassment shows a high level of perceptiveness regarding this issue.

Lastly, a majority of the *Generation What?* respondents (79.2%) find there are too many drugs in Lebanon; this, again, tends to depict quite a contrasting portrait of youths in Lebanon, that can tend to reproduce prevailing "morals", as shown in the next section.

[30] *Generation What* video interviews, "04 *Generation What* - Feminism - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/LpzKFMPHPIc
[31] See: http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2017/?doing_wp_cron=1542904669.0082669258117675781250
[32] See: https://bit.ly/2hpNOrq

5. Conservatism 2.0: The youth perpetuating conservative customs.

Orientalist clichés on Lebanon tend to depict it as a liberal oasis in a conservative region. However, the *Generation What?* consultation illustrates the ubiquity of social customs and a rather conservative young generation. 78.6% of respondents consider that drugs are against their values, and only 12.2% do not partake in drug consumption but respect others' choice to take drugs, revealing a rather strong stance against drug users and drug use in general. In contrast, only 29.9% of them find drinking alcohol against their values, and 31% do not drink alcohol but do not mind others who do.



This hostile position against drugs, as opposed to alcohol, can be linked to the enduring practices of religious institutions and religiously affiliated organisations,

in campaigning against drug use, with rehabilitation programmes built around finding faith. Indeed, a simple Google search of the keywords "rehab" and "Lebanon" yields results of organisations with names bearing clear religious – mainly, Christian – connotations. Despite Lebanon's characterisation as a liberal country, moral panics still abound, with the media playing a role in magnifying rumours and preconceived notions, contributing to creating episode of "witch hunts," notably towards people expressing alternative sexualities[33], or even, towards people listening to heavy metal, a music deemed as Satanic[34].

"Even for those who don't have a problem with it [taking drugs], when considering its effects and damages they must refuse or quit using it. It doesn't have to do with values.

We weren't raised to such principles. It isn't something to be proud of and continue using it. It's even harmful in terms of health. And as they say, it's illegal everywhere"[35]

In this vein, millennials in Lebanon appear to be rather conservative on sexuality related issues. In a country that still considers homosexuality as being "against nature" (art.534 of the Penal Code), and undertakes intrusive so-called "homosexuality tests" in order to further control and discipline bodies, many grassroots and civil society organisations have been organising and campaigning since the late 1990s for bodily and sexual rights, as well as on LGBTIQ rights[36]. Many of these interventions have mainly targeted the youth in their awareness campaigns; hence 52% of respondents who find homosexuality shocking appear as a limited impact of such interventions. While landmark ruling

[33] Several LGBT clubs have been closed down in Lebanon, for example, see: https://english.al-akhbar.com/node/15610

[34] See for example: https://www.popmatters.com/158667-the-heavy-metal-witch-hunt-lives-on-2495851143.html

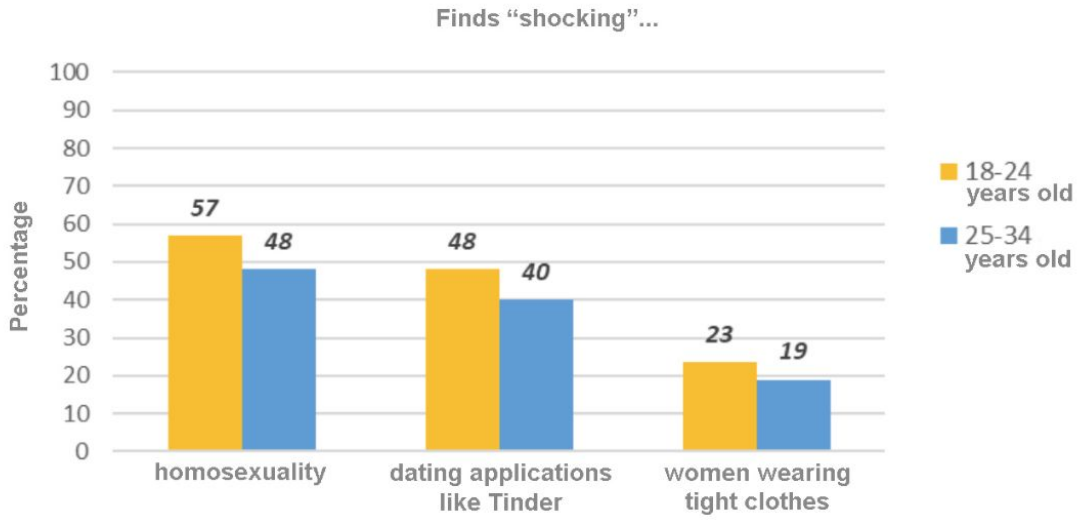
[35] *Generation What?* video interviews, "20 *Generation What?* - My values - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/qd1IlzvDzfA

[36] Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi, *L'altermondialisme au Liban : un militantisme de passage. Logiques d'engagement et reconfiguration de l'espace militant (de gauche) au Liban*, Université de Paris1-La Sorbonne, doctorat de science politique, 2013.

by judges have redefined homosexuality as not being a crime[37], such prevalent conceptions against homosexuality still put at risk the youth who identify as LGBTIQ, with vulnerable and marginalised young people being at risk of double discrimination.

"Any person can take this decision despite that I oppose to this matter from a religious perspective because God created us man and woman. If that wasn't his will, he would have created us in the opposite way"[38].

Youth conservatism also appears in respondents' mixed feelings towards dating applications (with 52% finding Tinder shocking), sex before marriage (51% are against it), and a rather judgmental outlook on pornography, with 31.8% describing it as a form of perversion. In opposition to this, a majority (68.3%) considers that talking about sex should not be taboo. It is interesting to note that these stances are mostly adopted by the youngest cohort in our sample, who seem to have a higher propensity to feel "shocked".



[37] See for example: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2018/Jul-16/456690-court-upholds-landmark-ruling-for-lgbtq-community.ashx

[38] Generation What video interviews, "17 Generation What - Tolérance - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/42-yOeoDCTs

This rather conservative perspective on sexuality appears to be tainted with a naive outlook on relationships: 89.1% find that people should be free and their privacy respected if it is founded on consent and respect; 42% believe that their families should not get involved in their choice of partner, while 40.6% feel they can talk about their parents choosing who they marry, but in the end will prioritise love. Moreover, 63.9% feel they will never be in a relationship without love. Millennials can also be quite pragmatic in managing their love relationships with 71.4% maintaining that divorce is oftentimes necessary.

Lastly, it is important to note that 84.7% of Lebanon's youths consider that the minimum age of marriage should be 18. Recent years have witnessed heavy campaigning by civil society actors, notably women's rights organisations, on raising the legal age of marriage to 18, so this figure can show the impact of such initiatives, but also raises questions as to the necessity and usefulness of continuing such programming.

6. Religion between the private and the public sphere

Lebanese society is structured in different religious communities, each with its own specific set of personal status laws. Lebanon does not have a civil code regulating personal status matters. Instead, there are 15 separate personal status laws for the country's recognised religious communities including twelve Christian, four Muslim, the Druze, and Jewish confessions, which are administered by separate religious courts. Religious authorities often promoted this judicial pluralism as being essential to protecting Lebanon's religious diversity. In reality, the multiplicity of laws means that Lebanese citizens are treated differently when it comes to key aspects of their lives, including marriage, divorce, and custody of children.

"Political confessionalism" (*ta'ifiyya siyassiyya)* refers to the political institutionalisation of the communitarian divides in the constitutional system. It was reinforced in the early nineties, after the end of the civil war.[39] The very functioning of the state, its government, political affairs, civil services, are ruled by the delicate sectarian balance, legitimized by the Ta`ef Agreement ratified in 1989. The confessional element therefore appears as the main explanatory variable of politics, as well as the main driver of political mobilisation.[40] Identity politics are, more than ever in post war Lebanon, recognised, accepted, and practiced, without any taboo.

The *Generation What?* youth appears quite secular, in contrast with Lebanon's social and political system that is characterised by the pervasiveness of religion in the private, social, as well as the political realms. Indeed, 74.3% among them believe that religion holds too much emphasis in society. What is more, their secularism appears to encompass the private sphere (with for example 83.6%

[39] Elisabeth Picard, « Les habits neufs du communautarisme libanais », *Cultures & Conflits* [En ligne], 15-16 | automne-hiver 1994, available on: http://journals.openedition.org/conflits/515 [last accessed on 24 November 2018].
[40] Idem.

stating that they consider the hijab as a personal choice) and is also translated in a political stance: a majority (80.6%) refuses the intervention of religious leaders in politics.

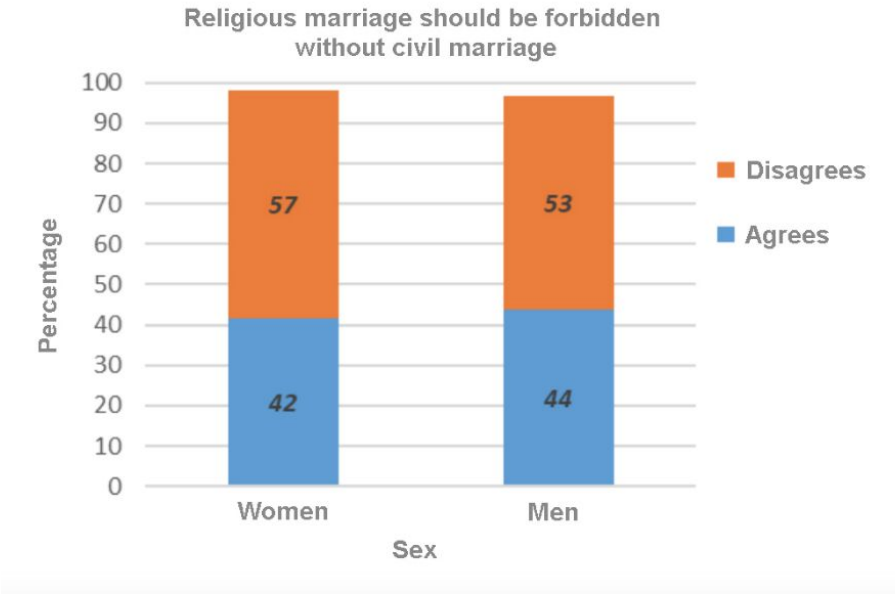
This separation of religion and politics is to be read, however, with some nuance.

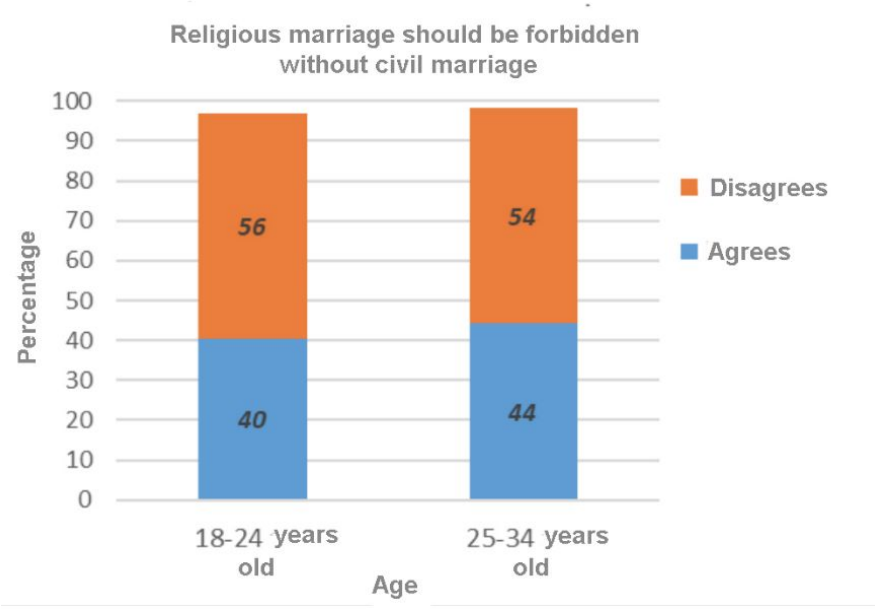
"Personally, a religious leader is considered a father and the father is welcome to interfere in his child's matters.
Politics is considered to be a part of these matters. But to what extent and why? That is the question[41]*."*

Indeed, in the realm of the power of religion over personal lives with personal status laws, defining what is considered a private issue and what is considered a civic state issue becomes problematic. For example, citizens of the same country see aspects of their lives governed differently: divorce is incumbent on different conditions based on your sect, women might lose custody of their children and see their offspring taken away by the state to implement religious courts' decisions, and civil marriages, while recognised, are still not performed in Lebanon.

Thus, while youths' apparent secularism may seem progressive in Lebanon, it is still reserved with rather mixed opinions. More than half of the respondents (55.1%) do not think that civil marriages are necessary along with religious marriages, raising questions as to what their positions regarding civic laws would be, and nearly half of the respondents (48%) state that they could be happy without religious beliefs.

[41] *Generation What?* video interviews, "10 Generation What - Tous pourris - Liban," available online: https://youtu.be/IrNcvopc83k


Religious marriage should be forbidden without civil marriage
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percentage
57
42
53
44
Women
Men
Sex
Disagrees
Agrees


Religious marriage should be forbidden without civil marriage
100
90
80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0
Percentage
56
40
54
44
18-24 years old
25-34 years old
Age
Disagrees
Agrees

7. Mixed identities: conceptualising one's self, country, the Arab World, and the world.

For decades, Arab intellectuals and populations have been questioning the meaning/s of being Arab[42] beyond the monolithic or essentialist representations on the one hand, and beyond the "considerations of Arab despair"[43] that appear to condemn them to helplessness, colonialism, occupation, conflict, ethic and confessional tensions, that for some are inscribed in the very geography of the Arab world, on the other.

Besides conceptions linking to religious belonging (the *umma*), being Arab is rather a pragmatic and operational identity. The Arab world is defined today as comprising the states that are members of the Arab League, encompassing countries that extend from the Atlantic Ocean to the Persian Gulf, passing by Mediterranean shores. It refers to plural realities; diverging histories, diverse socio-economic system (from rentier states, liberal economies, to more redistributive systems), political systems, social fabrics, religions (with Christian, and Jewish minorities), dialects and languages, ethnicities (from the Amazigh, to the Kurds, and the Yazidis), and local customs. Being Arab should therefore be considered in its plural form.[44] Attempts to formalise a supranational body, the Arab League, as well as attempts to merge countries (such as the short lived United Arab Republic, merging Syria and Egypt between the 1958 et 1971) have not materialized a feeling of belonging to any form of unified Arabness. Difficulties to reach mere joint political positions by Arab states are an illustration of the disjointment of such attempts.

It thus does not come as a surprise that a majority of the *Generation What?* youth (63.8%) do not trust the Arab world at all and only 0.9% trust it totally, revealing

[42] Farouk Mardam-Bey, Elias Sanbar, *Être Arabe*, Paris, Actes Sud Sindbad, 2005.
[43] Samir Kassir, *Considérations sur le malheur arabe*, Paris, Actes Sud Sindbad, 2004.
[44] Laurent Bonnefoy and Myriam Catusse, *Jeunesse arabes. Du Maroc au Yémen:loisirs, cultures et politiques*, Paris, La Découverte, 2013.

feelings of scepticism towards the so called Arab identity and belonging. Indeed, 59.4% of youths who responded to the survey think of Arab unity as a historical illusion, and 17.8% as a necessary construction. Yet, a considerable majority (78.8%) wish to see an economic and political union in the Arab world, showing a realistic perspective regarding geo-politics.

With tempered attitudes towards a common Arab identity – 52.5% of respondents feel Arab – the majority of youth respondents (38.4%) are detached from feeling Arab and believe they are their own person, while almost equal proportions relate it to living in an Arab country and sharing common ground (18.2% and 18% respectively), 12.9% link it to being part of a community that transcends national borders, 7% to carrying the banner of the proudest people in the world, and a minority of only 3.3% link it to sharing a common identity.

Indeed, 43.1% of youths feel they are part of the world at large, and 31.2% feel they are more part of Lebanon, while 21% link their belonging to the more local city or region. Yet, only 2.6% feel they are part of the Arab World.

However, when asked about the priority for Lebanon as a state, only 10.8% of respondents mentioned the necessity of having bonds with other Arab countries, 11.7% saw it was necessary to have bonds with Mediterranean country, and 17.8% with the European Union. The majority (52.3%) stressed the importance of the country remaining sovereign and independent. This resonates with the history of the country that has been marked, even before achieving independence (from the Ottoman empire to the French mandate), and until today, with constant struggles regarding its sovereignty. This also reveals different conceptions of defining a national identity, plural by definition, but that has also been linked to confessional and/ or regional allegiances that oftentimes can seem to supersede “national interest”.

On another note – and maybe for some, as a symptom of this ever-recurring “Arab despair” – the region has witnessed the rise of extreme beliefs and practices, with the emergence of transnational nebulas of violent extremism, such as IS, for

example. When asked about the rise of extreme beliefs in the Arab world, the majority of youths surveyed (67.9%) sees it as a negative evolution. Nevertheless, a considerable portion of more than a quarter (27.5%) does not recognise that extremism is growing in the region.

In contrast with increasing discourses globally and in the region, linking radicalisation with immigration, *Generation What?* youths appear to be quite progressive on that front, and consider that immigration is culturally enriching for a majority of them (70.7%). This does not however translate to beliefs in open-border attitudes as only 28.9% think borders should be open to everyone, while 21.2% specify that frontiers should be open to refugees from war zones, and another 21.2% think that this privilege should be reserved to well-educated people. It remains that 12.7% of respondents believe that borders should be completely closed. Given that the Lebanese passport ranks 89th out of 97 on the Global Passport Power Rank,[45] with 153 countries requiring individuals holding the Lebanese passport to go through convoluted and long visa procedures to secure entry, these answers can be perplexing. It could, however, be linked to the recent context in light of the Syrian refugee crisis that has engendered since 2011 an important influx of refugees of over 1.5 million refugees to a host population of 4 millions. The refugee influx, amidst an endemic economic crisis, has led to a rise of tensions based on identities among populations, in addition to further burdening already disenfranchised populations in peripheral Lebanese regions.

This has led the Lebanese state to take a series of restrictive measures limiting access to residency (among others) to Syrians in Lebanon. In the same restrictive approach, local authorities have imposed curfews on refugees in many regions; all of this has extremely affected the liberty of movement of Syrians, in and out of Lebanon.

Similar restrictions on mobility affect the Palestinian youth in Lebanon, that are often confined to their camps, and that, in absence of a Palestinian passport, see traveling even more restricted to them.

[45] See: https://www.passportindex.org/byRank.php

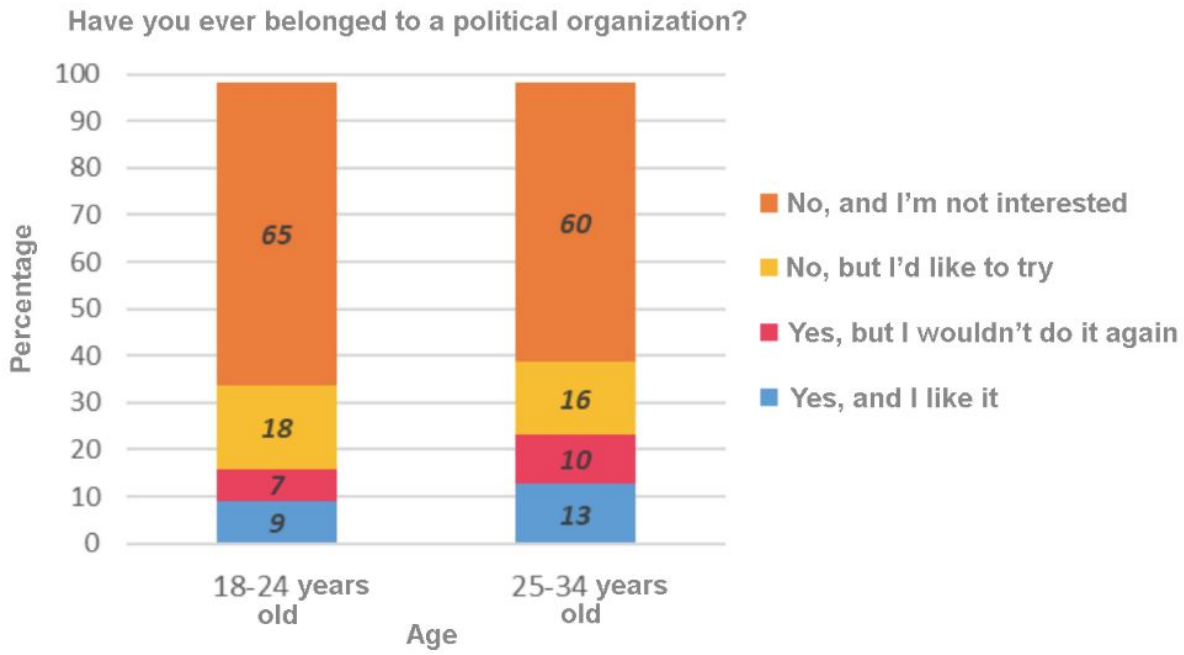
8. In search of (alternative) ways to political participation?

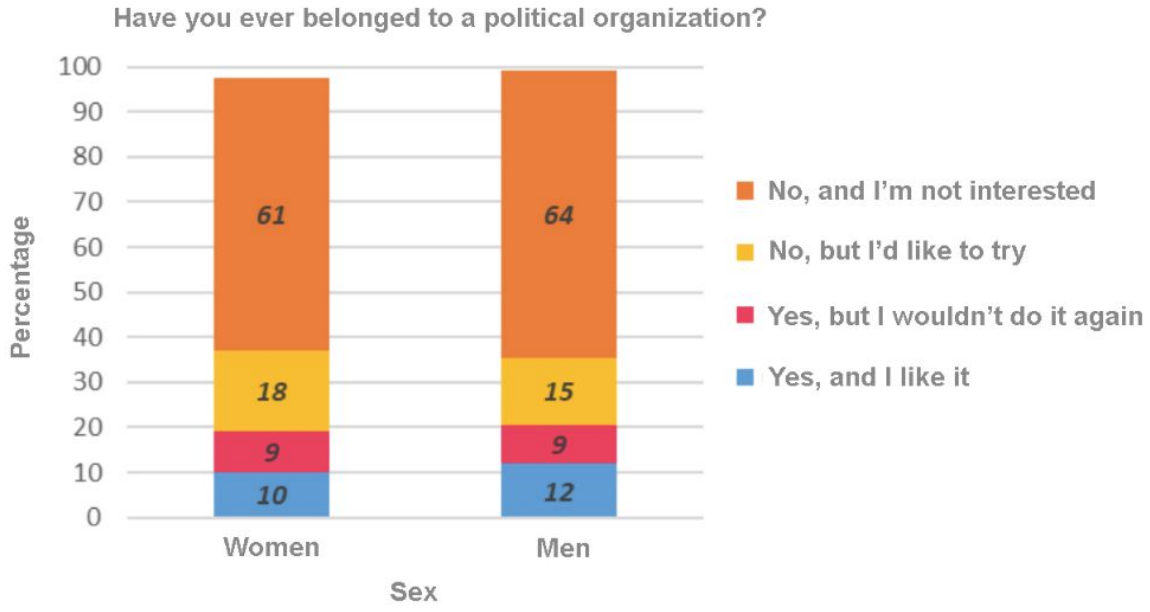
The youth portrayed in *Generation What?* voice defiance towards representative democracy, or rather to the manner it is implemented in Lebanon.

The Lebanese "consociational" political system[46] has institutionalised confessional and religious divisions, and embedded them in the system, along with political familism.[47] All this has contributed to restrain the effective participation and emergence of new actors, notably youth, thus limiting political turnover. Young people's political socialisation, and hence political participation, is oftentimes channelled through sectarian political groups.

"The main sectarian groups that constitute the state (or the political system) are in agreement that youth matters are better taken care of within their own structures: their political parties, their foundations and their NGOs. Thus, all the major sectarian political groups in Lebanon have their own "youth wings," which are organisations targeting youth, socialising them through sports, leisure and cultural events, and ultimately mobilising them into their partisan structure."[48]

[46] Arend Lijphart, "Consociational Democracy", *World Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1969, Vol. 21, No. 2.
[47] Suad Joseph,"Political Familism in Lebanon", *Patrimonial Power in the Modern World,* The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 636, 2011.
[48] Mona Harb, "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action," Working Paper / Power 2 Youth program, 2016, p.6.





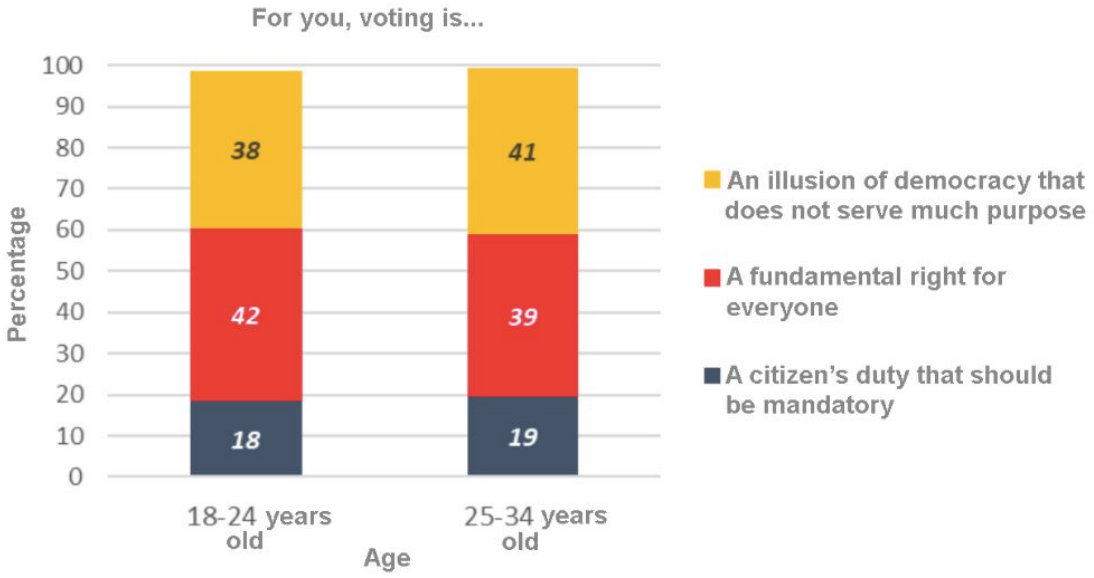
With this, one would think that Lebanon's youths would be interested in enrolling in political organisations, but our figures show that a majority (62%) have never belonged to a political party and are not even interested in doing so, while only 10.9% have been part of such an organisation and enjoyed it. These are shared

across our sample, irrelevant of sex or age range. Reading this in parallel with 49.3% not trusting politics at all, and only 1.6% trusting it totally, the disconnect between the political class – politics overall – and the youth in Lebanon seems quite apparent. Indeed, with a majority of respondents feeling that politicians still hold a lot of power (73.4%) and that almost all political figures are corrupt (71.1%), this chasm is not surprising.

Lebanon's consociational system and "kin-based patriarchy,"[49] added to the gerrymandering that accompanies every electoral moment, limits young people's belief that being able to vote is a democratic right and tool. Indeed, the last parliamentary elections, held in May 2018 after a nine year long hiatus, saw the emergence of a plethora of "new" candidates, from the younger civil society scene as well as an unprecedented number of women candidates.[50] However, only one of these candidates was successful in reaching Parliament. In this light, the fact that 39.6% of youth surveyed consider that voting is an illusion of democracy that does not serve much purpose reflects the same feeling of distrust towards politics mentioned earlier.

With the age of voting in Lebanon being set at 21, it is telling that a considerable part of our sample still believes that voting is an illusion, even after being able to exercise the right to vote (as shown in the graph below). While this online consultation has taken place concomitantly with the 2018 parliamentary elections, and amidst partisan electoral mobilisation, this does not seem to have altered the opinions of our respondents towards voting. Still, youths majoritarily believe that voting is a fundamental right for everyone (40.5%), and 19% of them consider it a citizen's duty that should be mandatory.

[49] Suad Joseph, *op.cit*.
[50] See: Catherine Batruni and Marcus Hallinan, "Politics, Progress, and Parliament in 2018: Can Lebanese Women Make Headway?," *Civil Society Knowledge Centre,* Beirut, Lebanon Support, 2018. Zeina el Helou, "Lebanon's 2018 Elections: An Opportunity for "New" Political Actors?", *Civil Society Knowledge Centre*, Beirut, Lebanon Support, 2018.



That being said, youth's willingness to vote does not entail their endorsement of other forms of political participation: 27.5% consider the so-called Arab revolutions as a conspiracy aiming to destabilise the Arab world, 48.6% feel the uprisings that shook the region since 2011 have had a negative impact, while 38.8% feel they did not change anything. What's more, 61.4% of the respondents stated they would not actively participate in an Arab Spring-style uprising if it happened tomorrow. Thus, youths' desire to participate in political life via elections is tempered by this attitude towards collective mobilisations, compromising their willingness to participate in change processes and their understanding of being in control of their destiny. This also translates in their weariness towards other forms of collective action, such as trade unions and associations.

Collective action, on notably labour issues, appears to gather some interest among the youth. This can be linked to the country's weakness in providing social and economic rights, and the scarcity of social and labour protections. It doesn't come as a surprise, then, that a majority of youths (78%) think trade unions should be given more power. Yet, their trust in trade unions seems very shy, with 18.6% not trusting them at all, and only 3.6 % trusting them completely. Indeed,

the state has an interventionist policy as far as trade unions are concerned: promulgation of labour law in 1946 confers broad powers to the Ministry of Labour whose authorisation is required prior to the setting-up of a trade-union. Moreover, historically, successive governments and political parties have instrumentalised union mobilisation, distributing the leadership amongst their confessional clientele. Moreover, the adhesion to trade unions is quite limited, especially among the youth.

In this context of limited channels of formal political participation, civic engagement in community associations appears to be, to a certain extent, a preferred mode of action among young people in Lebanon. A third of respondents state that they have been involved in a local community association and have liked it, and 29.4% haven't but would like to try. They also expressed a certain level of trust towards such organisations (74% evaluating their trust as moderate), with a majority (82.3%) thinking that compulsory military service should encompass alternative civilian service options, such as engagement in humanitarian work.

Endorsement of universalist humanitarian principles appears to be accompanied by a high level of distrust towards some of the pillars of the Lebanese system: the banking system, the media (largely considered as propaganda tools for political leaders and parties), and religious institutions. Indeed, a vast majority of respondents (88.4%) believe that banks and money rule the world, and almost half of them have cautious attitudes towards the media (45.7% have moderate levels of trust towards it), with 36.2% not trusting media at all. The youth's crisis of trust in Lebanon also encompasses religious institutions, with 37.8% asserting they do not trust them at all, and only 4.8% who completely trust them.

Trust in the legal system is also divided among completely negative to moderate stances, with only 7.2% who absolutely trust it. Similarly, schools and the educational system do not rank very high in terms of trust, with 12.4% of the respondents claiming they trust education institutions completely.

Amidst this general distrust in formal and public institutions (for approximately 50% of the respondents), the one institution that stands out is the army, which manages to gather a considerably higher level of complete trust than others. In fact, 37.6% of young people who responded to the *Generation What?* survey estimate their levels of trust in the military as extremely high, and 34.7% as moderately high. Moreover, 54.7% of youths maintain that military service should be reinstated for both men and women – military service in Lebanon was compulsory only for men, and conscription was ended by decree in 2007.[51] This is contrasted by their attitude towards the police, with only 7.1% trusting it completely.

The Lebanese Armed Forces and the Internal Security Forces are both part of the country's formal security sector, and like other institutions, are governed by multiple authorities and linked to the sectarian system.[52] While people seem dissatisfied with these security institutions in general, the higher level of trust in the LAF reflected here should be read in the context of absence of national identity and of perceptions of corruption of the political class, whereby the army is portrayed in the popular vernacular as being the one institution safeguarding national interests. Indeed, a recent study showed that people overwhelmingly agree that "dealing with terrorism, fighting corruption, respecting citizens, arresting criminals, preserving civil peace and (to a slightly lesser extent) increasing patrols could enhance public trust."[53]

However, this highly securitised approach puts at risk vulnerable populations, including youths, such as refugees. Indeed, based on Lebanon Support's "Geo-located mapping of conflicts in Lebanon"[54], arrests and detentions are consistently among the most mapped categories. These operations routinely

[51] See: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/military-service
[52] International Alert, "Security Sector Overview: Final Report providing Overview of Lebanese Security Sector," Beirut, 2014.
[53] Carmen Geha, "Citizens' perceptions of security institutions in Lebanon," Beirut, International Alert, 2015, p.5, available on: https://www.international-alert.org/publications/citizens-perceptions-security-institutions-lebanon [last accessed on 24 November 2018]
[54] Available on: http://civilsociety-centre.org/cap/map

target Syrian refugees to detain those without official legal papers, in a context of heightened tensions and discourses scapegoating refugees.

9. Conclusion

Through the *Generation What?* consultation, youths in Lebanon have depicted their own image of themselves, perceptions of the world, their expectations, their potential futures, and their capacities to be agents of change, whether in their own private lives or in the political course of their country. The picture thus painted is one of a torn generation, caught between reproducing the traditional ways of its parents and grandparents, and departing from these conceptions in forging its own path. The multiple faces of this generation in the making reflect the multiple identities and issues of the Lebanese context.

The cohort that lived the Lebanese civil war was known as the “war generation”; children born during the conflict were referred to as the “post-war generation”. Millennials in Lebanon appear to still be living the enduring and structuring effects of the war and crisis, but condemn previous generations for their hardships, while refusing all liability and responsibility as to their role in perpetuating their status quos, including conflicts.

This translates notably in youths weariness towards political participation (through the ballots or through collective action). This symptom of a widening gap between the youth and the political class in Lebanon is telling of the crisis of the political system that tends to reproduce itself, and among the same “players”. It, however, raises questions for youths and future generations on their mere definition of citizenship and their expression of discontent with actual political choices, actions, and accountability.