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Ricardo Diab

Sociopolitical Drivers fostering a Hatred of Convenience: Assessing Lebanese Christians' Perceptions of Syrian Refugees.

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**SOCIOPOLITICAL DRIVERS FOSTERING A
HATRED OF CONVENIENCE:
ASSESSING LEBANESE CHRISTIANS'
PERCEPTIONS OF SYRIAN REFUGEES**

The Institute of Political Science at Saint Joseph University does not intend to give any approval or disapproval to the opinions expressed in this thesis. These opinions belong solely to their author.

Abstract

The trajectory of protracted refugee populations in Lebanon, notably Syrians, has and remains to be subject to a diverse range of potential outcomes. From the improbable potential of partial or full integration into Lebanese society to eventual repatriation to their homeland, these outcomes are significantly shaped by a complex interplay of socioeconomic stressors, political agendas, and media influence and can often have a huge impact on the lived experiences and access to essential human rights of these individuals. The politicization of migrant populations in Lebanon through external and internal political pressures hinging on international geopolitical strategies as well as local partisan interests respectively has complicated the context considerably. Adding to this, bearing in mind; shifts in state policies since 2011, calls for the obstruction of the principle of nonrefoulement, local sectarian power plays, and the potential for Syrian refugee populations to alter national demographics, perceptions towards these refugees have noticeably differed along sectarian and regional lines. Accounting for these factors, this thesis examines the evolving perceptions of Lebanese Christians in particular toward Syrian refugees, focusing on how socioeconomic crises, political narratives, and media discourses have intensified hostility and normalized hate crimes by this segment of society towards Syrian refugees. The study argues that these factors have cultivated a *hatred of convenience* (Levy, Goldstein , & Phyllis, 1939), where refugees are scapegoated to divert blame from state failure and to rile up support for Christian political parties. Using a mixed method approach; surveys of Christian Lebanese adults and interviews with experts as well as political and municipal figures, it investigates the correlation between worsening perceptions and discriminatory acts since 2019. By narrowing its scope to Christians in non-refugee-dense areas, this study addresses a neglected dimension of refugee-host dynamics, providing insights into how sectarian memory, economic collapse, and political incitement shape public attitudes and compromise refugee rights.

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List of Abbreviations

ALEF	Act for Human Rights (NGO)
ARK	Analysis Research and Knowledge
CPT	Community Perception Report
CSO	Civil Society Organization
EU	European Union
FPM	Free Patriotic Movement
GC	Geneva Convention
Gol	Government of Lebanon
HRW	Human Rights Watch
HTS	Hay'at Tahrir El Sham
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights
IFI-AUB	Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs at the American University of Beirut
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
ISF	Internal Security Forces
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
LBP	Lebanese Pounds (Currency of Lebanon)

LCRP	Lebanese Crisis Response Plan
LF	Lebanese Forces
MoIM	Ministry of Interior and Municipalities
MSF	Médecins Sans Frontières
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
UEC	University Ethics Center
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNSCOL	Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon
USJ	University of Saint Joseph
USJUEC	USJ University Ethics Committee
VP	Vice President
WB	World Bank
WE'AM	Working for Engagement, Acceptance, and Mediation
WFP	World Food Programme
WG	Working Group
WG PASC	Working Group for Persons Affected by the Syrian Crisis
YES	Young Epidemiology Scholars Program

Glossary

Term	Definition
PASC WG	The Working Group for Persons Affected by the Syrian Crisis in Lebanon (WG PASC) is a voluntary, inter-organizational, non-binding, and informal network of 31 local CSOs (PASC WG, 2021).
WE'AM	The project 'Working for Engagement, Acceptance, and Mediation (WE'AM) is a community-based Approach to Social Cohesion in Lebanon. The initiative targets vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees. The program was implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with Right to Play, SHiFT, and ALEF launched by the EU (INFOPRO, 2024).
REACH	REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT, UNOSAT, and the UNOCHA that was created in 2010. It is a leading humanitarian initiative providing granular data, timely information and in-depth analysis from contexts of crisis, disaster and displacement (UNOCHA, 2025).

Fafo	It is an independent Norwegian research foundation focused on social science and policy, originally established by the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions (LO) (Fafo, 2025).
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1. Introduction and Methodological Considerations

1.1 Introduction

This research offers a novel take on the dynamics of protracted displacement in the context of Lebanon, contributing to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities for Syrian refugee integration. By focusing particularly on the Christian Lebanese segment of the broader Lebanese community, which is often contextually divided along sectarian lines, it aims to see how this group's perception has compromised the human rights of Syrian refugees in their vicinity by exposing them to various forms of hate crimes and/or hate speech. The period from January 2019 to January 2025 was selected as the timeframe to be studied as this epoch saw a plethora of socioeconomic and political stresses, from the 2019 prote, to the 2020 Beirut port explosion, to the devaluation of the LBP, to remaining without a government or president for prolonged periods, and security threats continuously mounting, which this research is arguing has driven certain members of the government, as well as specific Christian political parties, and Christian traditional media news channels to use Syrian refugees within the country as a scapegoat (Timeline: Lebanon in dire straits since 2019, 2023; Lebanon: New World Bank Project to Restore Basic Fiscal Management Functions in Support of Public Service Delivery, 2024). The argument being made is thus that this disproportional blaming is taking place in order to exonerate politicians of the responsibility they bear in the broader failure of the Lebanese state and economic turmoil the nation has been facing and in turn this method of scapegoating is worsening perceptions and inciting hate crimes and hate speech. The thesis investigates the evolving perceptions of Lebanese Christian adults aged 21 and above towards Syrians in Lebanon, in the wake of what is being argued as a growing prevalence of hate crime and hate speech against the latter group perpetrated by the former since 2019, which peaked in 2024. The general public's discontent with Refugees is a major talking point in Lebanon, and specifically the stereotype that Christian Lebanese among them specially hold a negative perception for the group is a widely accepted trope among Christians themselves. This is due to the common sentiment that Christians are more opposed to intermingling with Syrian Refugees because they represent an intersectional identity which they

oppose on multiple levels (Abi Khalil, 2015, pp. 67-68). Thus, fueled by xenophobic media content, xenophobic sociopolitical narratives coming mostly from Christian political parties, as well as discriminatory government policies and municipal measures, hate crimes/ hate speech against Syrians are becoming increasingly normalized and citizens are becoming desensitized to seeing these acts as they have been continuously exposed to a rhetoric which dehumanizes and stigmatizes Syrian refugees. Christian Lebanese, who had already had their unique grievances towards Syrians, have notably become more hostile with Syrian Refugees in their vicinity and their overall perception has worsened. Broader studies have examined discontent in host regions like Beqaa and Akkar, wherein majority populations are Muslim, since they hold some of the largest concentrations of refugee camps in Lebanon due to their vicinity to Syria, having found trends of discontent with a perceived disproportional provision of aid to Syrians as opposed to local impoverished Lebanese whose economic situation is said to have declined as a result of refugees' arrival. Alternatively, this research narrows its focus to Christians residing in region that host only a few scattered Syrian families, communities, or business owners, rather than entire refugee populations as this remains to be understudied.

1.2 Research Design

1.2.1 Research question

This thesis attempts to answer the following research question: How has the use of Syrian refugees as a scapegoat in the wake of heightened socioeconomic and political stresses throughout the past six years led to Lebanese Christians' perceptions towards Syrians worsening, and hate speech as well as hate crimes perpetrated by the former against the latter increasing?

1.2.2 Hypothesis

Disproportionally blaming Syrian refugees for heightened socioeconomic and political stresses throughout the past 6 years has led to Lebanese Christians' perceptions towards said refugees worsening, as well as hate speech and hate crimes perpetrated by the former against the latter increasing in frequency.

1.2.3 Objective: The purpose of this research is to assess why cases of hate crimes against Syrians and instances of the use of hate speech, which have been taking place since well before even 2011 at the hands of all sects and communities in Lebanon, have heightened

especially as of the recent turmoil within Lebanon since 2019. The specific focus on Christian Lebanese communities is due to the particularly xenophobic rhetoric from Christian political parties and Media outlets during this time.

1.2.4 Methodology and Data Collection

In an attempt to uncover one of many reasons behind the unjust circumstances of Syrians residing in Lebanon, this research used a mixed-method approach. As, it presented qualitative primary data collection administered in the form of KIIs. These interviews with key informants were chosen because according to Kumar (1989) this method allows for direct access to valuable information, provides flexibility to explore the topic deeply without the limitations of predetermined answers, and is relatively efficient, especially with regard to time. However, it was used in parallel with the deployment of a survey in a mixed-method approach as alone it would have provided a very limited basis for quantification. Conversely, a survey alone would not allow for the expertise of KIs to enrich the study (Kumar, 1989, pp. 3-4).

KIIs took place with the following individuals: 2 experts in the field of Migration; Stephanie Abboud; Programme's Manager at the local NGO ALEF (Act for Human Rights) and Dr. Jasmin Lilian Diab; a highly published scholar in the field of migration and refugee studies that has been referenced for a number of her academic works in this thesis. In addition to a high-ranking official from each of the Lebanese Forces (LF) and Free Patriotic Movement; John Chamoun, Youth Leader of the LF in Keserwan, and Martine Kteily, Current Vice President of the FPM. Finally, 2 mayors of Christian villages were interviewed as key informants: Former Mayor Imad Lalous of Ain Ebel in the Nabatieh Governorate and the current mayor of the town of Mazraat El Sayed in Jbeil-Keserwen Governorate Serge Gharios. These Key informants were interviewed throughout the months of April and May. KI (Key Informant) interviews were semi-structured and took place either in person through consensual recording or through correspondence sending a list of questions which the KI filled out and sent back. Said interviews were transcribed through recording the live interviews and writing them thereafter, in addition to writing all responses during the interviews themselves so as to have a back-up of the contents of the interviews. The philosophical framework or epistemological research paradigm of this writing was the critical school as this research is seeking to challenge the social structures and residing power dynamics that have led to the marginalization of Syrian refugees and to them facing injustice and hate. According to the

Handbook of Research Methods in Health Social Sciences, this school aims to criticize and transform society as a whole by orienting itself in relation to its self-evident potential. By uncovering the hidden power structures, inequalities, and ideologies that prevent true freedom and justice, writings from this school seek to transform theory into concrete political vindications for science by acting as a mirror to the societies they interpret (Marinopoulou, 2018). On this basis it was correlational in its research design, seeking to interpret the correlation between socioeconomic turmoil and blame shifting on Syrians which this research seeks to establish simultaneously manifest in increased hate crimes and hate speech as well as worsening perceptions.

That said, as mentioned, the study was not solely qualitative, it also included a quantitative approach which took place following the KIIs as the second phase of the data collection. This phase entailed a small-scale survey of which the sample was 93 participants, whose age was at least 21 years old, of any Christian sect and from any region in Lebanon to gauge their perception as of now and answer what drives hate to increase and manifest itself in speech or crimes. This age was chosen as it reflects individuals who were at least 16 years old during the start of the worsening Lebanese situation in 2019; in turn meaning they should have a decent recollection of the entire crisis and how Syrians have been blamed throughout it, having been in the middle adolescence stage at the cutoff point of this research (Barrett, 1996, pp. 333-334). It was disseminated online from July 8 to July 22, and it was a cross-sectional survey. This type of survey is pertinent for multiple usages but relevant to this study it is being used for the purpose of extracting data through statistical analysis, According to the Young Epidemiology Scholars Program (YES), a “cross-sectional survey” refers to observational research that analyzes data from a population, or a representative subset, at a specific point in time (Olsen & St George , 2004). Questions were presented in both English and Arabic and preselected and tested in several stages in correspondence with the thesis advisor and the university’s ethical committee.

In terms of secondary sources, it includes incites from data collected in Summer 2024 as part of the PASC Group¹²'s CPT Town Hall which were attended as part of an internship conducted in fulfillment of a requirement for this master's program. The Town Halls centered around grievances experienced by citizens of several regions who host Syrian refugees. This secondary data was used as a Lebanon wide general starting point to understanding national concerns that transcend sectarian divisions to then delve deeper into Christian concerns in particular.

It also included archival research entailing the collection of a wide record of village curfews, and as many instances of hate crimes/speech as possible that are recorded or documented from 2019 onwards.

The duration assessed for secondary data and the timeline of related events was January 2019 to January 2025, while the period for primary data collection was from April to July 2025 (April and May for KIIs, June and July for the survey).

1.2.5 Ethical considerations

This research adheres to established ethical standards for studies involving human participants based on the procedures presented by the USJUEC (USJ University Ethics Center). Prior to conducting key informant interviews (KIIs), informed consent was obtained from all participants. Each respondent was presented with a clear and concise preface outlining their rights and the voluntary nature of participation. In addition, ethical clearance for the research was formally obtained from the University of Saint Joseph (USJ). All data handling and storage procedures have been designed to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and the protection of participant rights in accordance with institutional and academic ethical guidelines.

1.2.6 Survey Deployment Plan

Target Population & Sampling - How respondents were chosen.

¹ The Working Group for Persons Affected by the Syrian Crisis in Lebanon (WG PASC) is a voluntary, inter-organizational, non-binding, and informal network of 31 local CSOs, facilitated by ALEF - act for human rights. The Working Group is open to all local CSOs working with persons affected by the Syrian crisis. It works to enhance the capacity and space for CSOs in Lebanon to influence their government and international actors to adopt policies that more effectively meet the needs of vulnerable refugees and host communities and implement them effectively.

² PASC. 2021. *Empowering Civil Society in Lebanon Amid the Syrian Refugees Crisis*. Retrieved from <https://pascwg.com/>

The targeted population for this study is Christian Lebanese respondents over 21 years of age. Given the particularity of the studied group, the sampling method is non-probability sampling based on convenience and expert selection with anonymized responses. According to the Sage Handbook of Survey Methods, non-probability convenience sampling is sampling wherein the subjects are selected based on certain factors and as such certain probabilities are guaranteed to be zero, in this case they were selected based on their location in close proximity to the survey deployment and to their personal connection with the survey's deployer. Furthermore, since subjects were also selected based on their religion, as this is a case study of Christian Lebanese citizens' perception, it may also be considered an 'expert selection' case study (Vehovar, , Toepoel, & Steinmetz, 2016, p. 329). In terms of what anonymization is, according to the British Sociological Association, it is a method wherein no personal information that could be traced back to respondents is required within the survey so as to prevent participants from being revealed for their personal identity (Li, 2004). It was used in this case as no personal information would be necessary or relevant to this study apart from political affiliation, religion, and nationality as the perception of the Christian Lebanese community as a whole, and not particular individuals, was being assessed. With that, no personally identifying information, which would've been irrelevant to this thesis's research objectives such as names, email addresses, IP addresses, employee IDs, was requested. The sample size of the survey was 93 participants, and the platform of the survey was Google Forms. The channels by which it was disseminated where, first, in person, by requesting individuals known by the surveyor, who are Christian, to take the survey. Second, Via WhatsApp, sending the link of the survey to individuals whom the surveyor is sure are Christian and requesting that individuals only send the survey to coworkers, friends, or other family members whom they know are Christian. The individuals who were sent the survey link from someone within the surveyor's inner circle were not requested to share or circulate the survey further as it would become difficult to guarantee only relevant participants to the study take part. Third, via private Instagram story online posts using a limited access broadcasting method wherein the story is only accessible to a pre-selected list of individuals from the surveyor's total followers list. This allowed for only the individuals from the list of Instagram followers of the personal account of the surveyor which are certain to be Christian and residing in Lebanon to view said story and thus access the link to the survey.

Table 1: Data Collection Timeline

Phase	Duration	Actions
Pilot Testing	June 1-July 7	Survey refinement based on feedback and ethical approval from USJ's Ethical Committee as well as through running a pilot test with my advisor.
Full Deployment	From July 8 - 22	Individual requests were made to individuals who are known to already be Christian to participate in the survey by sending them the survey through its direct link.

- **Follow-Ups:**

In person follow-ups Respondents who are often seen in-person, as they were individuals that live within surveyor's area and go to the same local sites.

Following up via WhatsApp and direct messages on Instagram: 2 days after sending out links individuals who received them were sent a message asking the respondents about their feedback (to gauge if they have completed the survey or not) and requested they take the time to participate if they have not already.

Final day private story post: On the 22nd the survey link was reposted to the same group of preselected followers on my private Instagram story that meets the sample requirements and asked that they kindly participate if they have not already.

Analysis Plan: Quantitative Data:

Due to the descriptive nature of this study, Google Forms and as well as basic formulas were sufficient to process the data and provide the adequate visualization capabilities necessary for the data processing and quality control of the quantitative element of this study's mixed method

approach. For cross-tabulation and basic statistics, exported data was analyzed using Excel's pivot table feature. Excel was also the software with which the filtering and cleaning of the data as well as the analysis process thereafter took place.

1.3 Research Limitations

- Some may criticize this research as potential incitement of tension between sects or refugee and host communities, however even if this somehow was the case, it would still pale in comparison to the incitement directly coming from the various actors mentioned within this study. More importantly, it would be a gross misinterpretation of the core aim of this research; to uncover why there is a lack of respect for Syrian Refugees' human rights in Lebanon as a whole, focusing in this case on uncovering the reasons relevant to Christian communities.
- It could also be said that many will not recall the past 5 years well enough to discuss them properly, but key factors are defined in the survey leaving participants with only the task of choosing among them.
- Moreover, the choice to administer the survey based on convenience sampling may be seen as a potential limitation, since it can sometimes be at a high risk of bias. But in this case this concern may be less worrying as; within the Christian community that became the sample group, factors such as political affiliation, age, and level of education (all asked at the beginning of the survey) could completely alter the perspective and preconceptions that may impact how each individual responds to the survey, irrespective of their proximity to the data collector.
- Another issue may be that most surveyed participants may fall within the middle to upper middle class financial categories, but this is purely coincidental, and the financial standings of participants were not asked about as part of the survey as it is irrelevant personal information surplus to requirements.
- Additionally, the sample size of the survey, which comprised of 93 participants, as this may impact the generalizability of the study but the limitations pertaining to the required timeline of submission prevented further surveying.
- Furthermore, the ability to collect as many individual instances of hate crimes and hate speech perpetrated against Syrians as possible, since there is a large amount and it is difficult to find a database that has categorically kept track of said offenses.

- Also, KIIs were conducted through correspondence with the 2 village mayors as they lived in their respective villages which were geographically quite far from the data collector and as such it may have prevented extensive probing, but phone calls and several back-and-forth clarifications mitigated this setback.
 - Finally, conflict of interest as the producer of this thesis is a part of the group being analysed. But, given the sensitivity of the subject, it was felt that rather than hampering the research, endogenously addressing this matter as part of this community would allow for complete transparency while not seeming like it was an outsider's attempt at attacking or slandering Lebanese Christians with a hidden agenda. In turn providing the study's producer with a unique opportunity as well as somewhat of a sense of responsibility to hold fellow community members accountable in instances where they blatantly display xenophobic tendencies.
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2 Literature Review

The following literature review tries to answer questions concerning why Christian Lebanese have particularly negative perceptions of Syrians compared to other Lebanese before presenting the sort of grievance that nonetheless emerge with all host communities more generally irrespective of their sects. It then seeks to address why the blame is concurrently shifted on Syrian refugees in the Lebanese context, why hate crimes and hate speech could be manifestations of negative perception, how media can promote using Syrians as a scapegoat, and how remaining in Lebanon is not always a voluntary choice for these refugees (de Haas, 2021, p. 16; Carling, 2002) since, as seen with the capabilities-aspirations theory, the intersection between the financial means and legal status of refugees alters their aspirations to either remain or leave Lebanon (Larkin & Gutkowski, 2021, p. 1061). After addressing these matters the literature review seeks to present context on the region. Such as, describing the Syrian situation, the wars which have impacted both nations and led to reciprocal refuge, and Lebanon's legal obligations towards Syrian refugees as a host nation based on international law and *opinio juris*. The Literature review is concluded with a counter argument section that challenges the narrative being built as a precursor to the research findings as well as a section identifying potential research gaps of this study.

2.1 Christian Perceptions Standing out within National Survey

Narrowing down to Christians in this manner has been done before, but not as an exclusive report. Take for example the 2013 research conducted by Christophersen, Jing, Thorleifsson, and Tiltnes on *Lebanese attitudes towards Syrian refugees and the Syrian crisis Results from a national opinion poll implemented between 15–21 May* which uncovers a trend that Christian sects in Lebanon tend to have more negative perceptions than remaining sects. It uncovered this reality without probing further or isolating the phenomenon. Furthermore, the findings of this research have become outdated, comparing sects rather than focusing on one, and it does not present elements of the factors driving negative perceptions or the culmination of these negative perceptions, which is argued as being increased hate crimes/ hate speech in this research.

2.2 Varying levels of Cohesion based on a Regions' Predominant Sect

In the same research of Christophersen, Tiltnes, and Thorleifsson it is also argued that cohesion and integration for Syrians in Muslim majority regions may be more likely than Christian ones (pp. 47-50, 54-57, 64). That said, according to ARK and UNDP's 2023 survey 46.1% of Lebanese and Syrians rated the quality of Lebanese-Syrian inter-communal relations as "negative" or "very negative", and this was not disaggregated based on sect, which makes the previous study's observation somewhat outdated, leading to the question being probed within this research's survey to uncover the latest reality on the matter (ARK & UNDP, 2023).

2.3 Host Community Resource-Based Scarcity Mindset

That said, it is widely regarded that nationwide grievances with Syrian refugees in Lebanon are economically driven; often motivated by a dissatisfaction with the so-called disproportional support refugees receive compared to host communities rooted in a resource-based scarcity mindset. Citizens perceive Syrian refugees to be attaining support while they are left to fend for themselves (ALEF, Right to Play, Oxfam, & Shift, 2023, p. 16; Larkin & Gutkowski, 2021, pp. 1061-1062).

2.4 Politically orchestrated Immigrant Blaming

This brings us to immigrant blaming, which, as introduced by Rubenstein, is a process wherein, based on preexisting social tensions similar to those mentioned above, politicians single out a migrant group within their nation and shift the blame for most nationwide problems on said group by fabricating or exaggerating statistics, often during campaign runs, so as to then claim they are

the most suitable leader, or potential candidate, to address the issue, all in a self-serving effort to consolidate power (Rubenstein, 2018). Jones, Gunaratnam, Bhattacharyya, Davies, Dhaliwal, Jackson, & Saltus (2017) also discuss this when describing how undeserving migrants face dehumanization when they are made to seem like a national burden or the cause for a nation's problems (Jones, et al., 2017). 'Immigrant blame' narratives are consistently fabricated and remain to be often overly exaggerated narratives manufactured by politicians and pundits often either out of complete fabrication or unremarkable or highly individual statistics. Studies of Trump's anti-immigrant narrative and how it unequivocally displayed the blatant instrumentalization of migrant communities can be used to interpret the case in Lebanon (Rubenstein, 2018, pp. 125-126). The way in which it is exclusively used in periods where it is self-serving, most often during elections as is the case of Trump, and during times of crises, without following through with anti-migrant policies as stringently as had been promised, shows the intentions behind its use. But this lack of sincerity does not undo the damage of the rhetoric itself contributing to dehumanization. And it is precisely this which thinkers such as Jones et al, assess in *Un/Deserving Migrants and Resisting Dehumanization*. The depiction of Syrians as a burden, lazy, non-tax paying, freeriding, and crime committing is a narrative adopted in order to benefit the political class in Lebanon thus the case being discussed in this research essentially marries the concept of *immigrant blaming* mentioned by Rubenstein and the parallels that can be drawn from the assessment of the dehumanization of illegal migrants in the UK conducted by Jones et al. (Jones, et al., 2017, pp. 124-125; Rubenstein, 2018, p. 125). The prevalent rhetoric has led some scholars such as Abi Khalil to believe that the perils of the present time are being taken out on the Syrian refugees and that they are being used as a scapegoat in a manner which is not organic, but rather orchestrated by political will (Abi Khalil, 2015, pp. 59-61). That said, it should be noted, the blaming in question is not exclusive to the Christian community or Christian political parties. For, tensions being played upon by various actors for their own self-serving agendas has become a national phenomenon. That said, what is exceptional to the former is the way in which it was self-proclaimed by both the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces, the two most popular Christian political parties, to have been championed by them as their primary political talking point, and this was validated in KI interviews with the representatives of each.

2.5 The Correlation Between Hate Speech/Crimes and Negative Perception

The communities' perception of an individual among them committing a hate crime against another group tends to be an interesting means to gauge said community's (of which the perpetrator belongs) overall attitude about the targeted victim's group (Craig & Waldo , 1996, p. 114). The prevalence of hate crimes/ hate speech masqueraded by a desire to maintain safety or improve the economy which are unnecessarily harsh and often involve public shaming as a form of justice seeking are the most potent manifestation of a negative communal perception among a community's member towards another group. For, just as Shirlow and Taylor made the pertinent observations in their research on Northern Ireland that the fluctuation of hate crimes' frequency can be used as a metric to gauge populations' satisfaction with the police's work. In the case of Christian Lebanese, periods wherein hate crimes, hate speech, and municipal policies which restrict the agency of Syrians are more prevalent in predominantly Christian communities can be seen as the manifestation of a worsening perception of Syrians in that community (Shirlow & Taylor, 2013, p. 237). This sort of correlational logic is also represented within the works of Craig and Waldo, as they discuss how perception and hate crimes are intertwined not because individuals with a negative perception are unequivocally more likely to commit them, rather because the communities' perception of an individual within it committing a hate crime against another group tends to be an interesting means to gauge their overall attitude about the victim's group (Craig & Waldo , 1996, p. 114). As such, in the case of Christian Lebanese, the increase of hate speech and hate crimes perpetrated by members of the community against Syrians is a sign of negative perception not only because the act itself represents the negative perception of the perpetrator, but also more so due to the fact that these acts tend to be normalized, encouraged, commended, or overlooked by the rest of their community. Contentment, approval, or a lack of opposition to these acts undeniably correlates to negative perception of the group being subjected to these crimes.

2.6 Media and Scapegoating

The impact of media framing on scapegoating has been researched as a phenomenon in several contexts. For Damion Waymer in his writing "Politics and Media Scapegoating in Public Relations", which takes from the research of Christine Viertman, scapegoating in media is seen as a crisis management strategy (Viertman , 2018; Waymer, 2018). Using qualitative analysis and archival research of newspapers, interviews, articles, and campaigns, it uncovers how media can be instrumentalized for grand narratives of scapegoating as their research presented a strong

connection between the ritual and rhetoric of scapegoating and postmodern ideas of marginalization, just as this research has established that media scapegoating in Lebanon, driven by political agendas, marginalizes Syrian refugees. Scholar Christy Bridgman also conducted similar comparative work on an expansive scale as part of her doctoral dissertation in History at the University of Southampton. In her work titled “Is there a dynamic pattern of the public using refugees as scapegoats in times of crisis?” Bridgman analyzes scapegoating in media from the 1890s to the early 2000s in the UK using archival research and Mass-observation directives to gauge the influence of media and social media on the general public’s perceptions with the assistance of scholars such as Greg Smart and Tony Kushner from the same university. Her work adds relevance to the correlation between media as a key instrument and indicator for refugee scapegoating particularly since individuals, organizations, and political parties often use these platforms to frame refugees as a scapegoat for broader issues (Bridgman , 2016).

2.7 Involuntary Immobility

But scapegoating cannot exist in a vacuum and must emerge from preexisting grievances. That said, among the primary reasons for hatred in the context of this study is seen to be the fact that Syrians are in Lebanon indefinitely. Yet, it can be argued that Syrians are not here by choice and rather that they are in a state of “involuntary immobility”, coined by Jørgen Carling in his 2002 seminal paper exploring the role of aspirations and ‘abilities’ in migration processes and referred to by de Haas in his work on the same theory. This phenomenon specifies a state wherein a refugee population is showing discontent, facing discrimination, and/or living below poverty in their current place of refuge; however they do not possess the means or the opportunities to seek a better life elsewhere (de Haas, 2021, p. 16; Carling , 2002).

2.8 Capabilities-aspirations theory and demography: The Origins of Christian Perception: Collective Memory, Demographic fears, and Islamophobia

The capabilities-aspiration theory proposed by Larkin and Gutkowski discusses a similar concept, how financial capabilities and legal status alter how refugees are perceived, which in turn alters their aspirations to remain. For, sometimes due to the circumstances they are under or due to the fact that they are undocumented or illegal, refugees might become involuntarily immobile due to their limited capabilities, and this may alter their aspirations to leave as they are forced to remain in their current situation. At the same time, if they are financially stable or wealthy, they may be

accepted irrespective of other identity-based metrics, which may also impact their aspirations to remain in Lebanon, as they do not feel discriminated against and thus may seek to remain voluntarily. Christians in Lebanon also tend to hold the stereotype that Christian Syrians may be more financially comfortable or more likely to belong to the middle-class, adding to their esteem, which may result in Christian Syrians willingly remaining in Lebanon and this will be explored more deeply in the findings section discussing the KII with FPM VP Martine Kteily (Larkin & Gutkowski, 2021, p. 1061). This reality validates two concepts discussed by De Haas as part of his aspirations-capabilities theory, first, the undeniable vital role of difficult-to-quantify structural factors such as inequality and economic ability. Second, the identity-based reasoning behind discrimination present in this case, proves de Haas's point that "*the portrayal of migrants as more or less passive victims of capitalist forces*" is antiquated and reductive as their aspirations and agency invariably play a role (de Haas, 2021, p. 3). The first reason for discrimination in cases of involuntary immobility from the perspective of Christians is based on the religious demographics of Syrians, i.e; the majority of Syrian refugees being Muslim, as this renders their presence a source of fear. Since, they may be seen as a potentially demography altering community which may weaken the standing of Christians in the country if naturalized while also infiltrating predominantly Christian regions and slowly ridding them of their Christian majority if welcomed into certain towns and villages without constraints (Boustani, Carpi, Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, p. 5; Abi Khalil, 2015, p. 21; ALEF, 2024a, p. 65). This prevalent correlation has concurrently been used as a means to justify or excuse normalizing hate crimes against Syrians. For, as commented on by former PM Mikati, Christians within Lebanon are a dwindling minority that currently holds 50% of government positions as of the Taif agreement as well as several key roles in the government, most notable the seats of the Presidency and the Head of the Army (L'Orient Today, 2023). In spite of the fact that in the aftermath of the Taif, as of 2022, Christians only constitute roughly 30% of the population according to the US Department of State figures, meaning they hold a disproportional amount of power (US Department of State, 2022). For this reason, as they continuously lose out on more of the demographic % due to higher rates of migration and lower birth rates among the sect compared to the national figures, the worst possible scenario for Christians would be to permanently incorporate current Muslim majority Palestinian and Syrian communities as full citizens (Thomas, 2024). Since, this would exponentially lower the % held by Christian groups further highlighting the unrepresentative and nonreflective nature of the 50% of

government positions being reserved to them at the present moment (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 17). Second, due to their nationality, as Syria has a long gruesome history of occupation and political interference in the nation and citizens, specially Christians as they were particularly marginalized during this period, tend to unfairly associate Syrian refugees with the regime that occupied Lebanon and its militants (Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, p. 5; Abi Khalil, 2015, p. 21; ALEF, 2024a, p. 65). This correlation describes how the bitter memory of the atrocities committed the Syrian Regime during the Lebanese Civil war including occupation from 1976-2005, the forcible disappearance of 17,000, as well as a plethora of accompanying human rights violations, have become associated with Syrians present in Lebanon thereafter. This association is interesting to note as Syrians entering Lebanon were fleeing the oppression of the same dynastic regime endured by Lebanese and as such if anything this mutual loathing of the Assad Dynasty should be a unifying commonality rather than a source of xenophobia (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 14; ALEF, 2024b, p. 65; Gambill, 2005). The turbulent history of the two nations is quite multidimensional, aside from a history of occupation, there also exists deep lying historical grievances between the regions' highly diverse religious communities which have inhabited the Levant for centuries and these grievances transcend borders. Evident in the research of thinkers Larkin and Gutkowski, Christian communities in Lebanon are more likely to allow the complete assimilation of Syrian refugees into their community if they also belong to some sort of Christian denomination, as opposed to Muslim individuals. That said, the 2015 research of Abi Khalil and research conducted by Selsky for the purpose of seeing if referencing religious scripture can be used to allow people that are both religious and xenophobic to become more tolerant, both discuss how irrespective of the worsening of the Christian perception, Christians even before 2019 tended to be more apprehensive to intermingling with Syrian Refugees because they represent an intersectional identity which they oppose on multiple levels (Abi Khalil, 2015, pp. 67-68). Furthermore, it should be noted that Christians' increasingly negative perception has long been as such, unlike the Shia community in Lebanon for example which was initially more closely tied in its perception of Syrian refugees to the broader Muslim community, presenting a stance of tolerance or indifference to the presence of Syrians, switching thereafter due to multiple reasons of which Selsky highlights Hezbollah's involvement in the Syrian civil war in support of the Alawite Former Dictator Bashar Al Assad against revolutionaries and militias widely regarded as being predominantly of the Sunni Majority (Christophersen, Jing , Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013;

Selsky, 2024, pp. 1168-1169). This sort of rhetoric was echoed years prior by Christophersen, Jing, Thorleifsson and Titnes in their study introduced above which, though antiquated and not reflective of the post 2019 state of Lebanon, is still relevant in that it acts as a foundational study claiming Christians have likely maintained a more negative perception than other sects since shortly after the arrival of Syrian refugees in 2011. For, it found that Maronites and “Other Christians” saw the 1st and 2nd % of agreement to the statement “you have to watch out for Syrians” with 53% and 46% respectively compared to the remaining sects in Lebanon as well as the 1st and 2nd lowest when it came to agreeing with the statement “some Syrians can be trusted but not all”, with 26% and 33% (Christophersen, Jing , Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013, p. 47). Their findings also show that the lowest % of individuals agreeing to the statement “I would be comfortable sharing a meal with Syrians” came from the two Christian sects as well, with Maronites at 18% and “Other Christians” at 27% (p. 50). Regarding matters such as being comfortable to work with Syrians and being comfortable with Syrians attending the same school as one's own children, the Christian groups also saw the lowest % percentage of agreement (pp. 51, 54). Even in questions where the national average was quite high such as the question pertaining to disagreement with the statement “all Syrians should be able to enter Lebanon freely”, with a national average of 90%, the Christian average remained to be higher at 96% (Christophersen, Jing , Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013, p. 64). That said, for Nammour and Al Sharabati in their 2015 study published by USJ, the worsening of the Christian perception that took place, thereafter, was a result of the general public’s perception worsening, further worsening already more negative Christian perceptions in the country. Thus, perhaps the fact that the perception of Christians were initially lower is why the worsening of the general public’s perception led to particularly xenophobic and hate related outcomes from this specific segment of Lebanese society (Survey on perceptions of Syrian refugees in Lebanon., 2015, p. 23).

2.9 Contextual Background

2.9.1 Syria Situation (Failed State)

Prior to moving any further, it is relevant to describe the state of Syria in the immediate wake of the 2011 war and thereafter. The nation of Syria has experienced a gruesome history of colonization, occupation, internal conflict, authoritarian regimes, as well as the enduring rule of a plethora of corrupt leaders. The environment that this reality has created has proven unsuitable for

the emergence of a strong state in the nation as of yet. Following the last presidential elections in 2021, Syria, which once again witnessed a landslide victory for authoritarian dictator President Bashar Al Assad, had been predominantly reclaimed by Al Assad's government forces on the ground militarily as well (BBC news, 2021; Tan & Perudin , 2019, p. 1). As of 2024 However, the complete sovereignty over the war-torn nation was not claimed by the regime with several pockets of the state falling under other militant groups control such as the Hayaat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) led regions in northwest Syria and the Kurdish controlled regions of the Northeast. In fact, another example of a recent incident wherein the very territory of the nation came under threat was with the Turkish led Northern Syria Buffer Zone which Türkiye deployed as a defense from ISIL and Kurdish Forces (Hakan, Yavuz , & Gunter , 2020, pp. 86-101). Additionally, the internal and external sovereignty of the nation had been neglected by foreign militia groups as well as foreign nations' militaries which had run rampant in the nation with air strikes and on the ground operations, such as the US Army, Israeli Army, Russian Armed Forces, Hezbollah Militia, HTS, and the Kurdish People's defense unit, just to name a few, and they had been doing so since the start of the war in 2011 (Tan & Perudin , 2019, p. 2). The war within the nation first started with the formation of the Free Syrian Army which acted as a foreign backed revolutionary force and intended to oust Dictator Al Assad from power but was not successful and later lost most of its fighters to various extremist militia groups on the ground such as Al Qaeda, ISIS, and Jabhat Al Nusrah (Tan & Perudin , 2019, p. 3). Adding to this, as of late 2024 the government's legitimacy had been under extreme scrutiny with most western nations condemning the Assad regime for its inhumane treatment of its people and its dictatorial nature resulting in the nation becoming a pariah state and being heavily sanctioned while the regime's legitimacy was rejected by several states (Dixon , 2019, p. 820; Tan & Perudin , 2019, p. 10). Then, when it was least expected, one of the opposition groups dominating the region of Idlib under Turkish safeguarding mentioned above, HTS, managed to overthrow the entire regime in a matter of days, ushering in a new era in Syrian politics whose outcomes remain to be unforeseen (Gebeily & Azhari , 2024). On the 11th of March 2025, the Kurdish controlled areas in the Northeast region of Syria formally run by the Kurdish led armed group known as the Syrian Democratic Council formally agreed to joining the military apparatus of the state (Holleis , 2025). Simultaneously, Israel has remained steadfast in its intent to remain within southern regions of the country, occupying regions in the vicinity of the Golan heights under the pretext that it is defending its territory from the prospect of extremists on its

borders and to maintain the safety of Druze minorities in the area (Sabbour , 2025). Since the beginning of the conflict, which was initially inspired by the broader Arab Spring, 7.2 million Syrians are said to be internally displaced while 6.2 million having fled the country as per UNHCR data from 2021, heading mostly to neighboring countries like Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. That said, many have attempted to illegally cross into Europe with many also having been granted legal asylum, while in totality Syrian refugees have been registered to have arrived in more than 125 countries around the world since 2011 (Al-Terkawi, 2023; UNHCR, 2023a; UNHCR, 2024a). In 2023 alone, 100,000 Syrian Refugees crossed into Europe illegally through the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) from either Lebanon or Syria's coast as per Frontex and the EU Agency for Asylum. This remains to be among the only viable options for Syrians seeking to leave the region, evident in that only 14% of asylum requests to Europe were being considered in 2024 (FRONTEX, 2024; EUAA, 2024). Syrians residing in Lebanon particularly have been risking their lives travelling in extremely unsafe conditions and paying smugglers to escape the poverty and discrimination they face in the host nation as well as its recent economic and political turmoil (HRW, 2024b; Tello , 2024; UNHCR, 2024b; Santos , 2024). Adding to this, the Hezbollah-Israel conflict that began on the 8th of October 2023 and has spilled over into 2025 as well as the reemergence of conflicts in some regions of Syria under its new regime mean that Syrians may continue to be forced to make the choice between discrimination in Lebanon and uncertainty in Syria or a life threatening trip across the Mediterranean (Harb , 2024; Qibtawi , 2024; PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 20).

2.9.2 Impact of the Syrian War on Lebanon and Reciprocal Refuge

According to the World Bank (WB), Lebanon holds the highest refugee population per capita worldwide with the nation hosting 1.5 million Syrians alone, aside from other refugee communities, in spite of the WB vehemently proclaiming the country is extremely ill equipped to take on the task and that it has not signed the 1951 Refugee Convention (The World Bank , 2023; Diab, 2025, p. 140). That said upon considering the “reciprocal refuge” between Syria and Lebanon throughout the years this displacement seems to follow a cross-border pattern. For, both the 1975 Lebanese Civil war and the 2006 Hezbollah-Israel war displaced thousands of Lebanese to Syria, with the latter displacing roughly 180,000 (Diab, 2025, p. 40). Host communities face a variety of contextual struggles that are exacerbated by the widely diverse perceptions existing

amongst them. This is primarily due to the government's ineptitude since 2011 and the self-serving role international stakeholders play in Lebanon to keep refugees in the country and not sailing the Eastern Mediterranean Route to Europe (Al-Terkawi, 2023). Though Lebanon has ratified the ICESCR in 1972 and the ICERD in 1971 meaning it has acknowledged its obligations to implement customary international law as well as its duty towards refugees and migrants within its jurisdiction, the fact that it has failed to adopt both the 1951 Geneva Convention (GC) and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees and has consistently fallen short as a result of governmental corruption, inactivity, or lack of resources has rendered the nation's incumbent refugee crisis one it cannot handle without external support (Norwegian Council, 2016, p. 1; OHCHR Database, n.d.). On that note, this created a dynamic of shared cooperation between the EU and Lebanon which saw both benefitting from the subsequent arrangement. As mentioned above, Europe is attempting to curb its illegal migrant entrees while Lebanon is in a state of economic turmoil and thus an arrangement of convenience seeing Lebanon as yet another immigrant rentier state on the Mediterranean has slowly taken shape. The EU provided 16.7 million euros between 2020 and 2023 before agreeing a 1.032 billion euro financial aid package in 2024 to be administered through to 2027 of which 1/5 was designated for the Lebanese Armed Forces as a means to strengthen their border control and security forces to mitigate smuggling through the EMR (Amnesty International, 2024, p. 1; HRW, 2024a; European Commission, 2024; Davis, 2024a). These efforts are considered by some to have prolonged the presence of Syrians in Lebanon and with that they have impacted the overall perception of Lebanese and especially Christian Lebanese as continued Syrian presence, as has been made clear throughout this thesis, is considered a negative outcome for this community.

2.9.3 Lebanon's Legal Obligations Towards its Syrian Refugee Populations

Discrimination against Syrians has long been commonplace in Lebanon ever since the end of the Syrian occupation of the country in 2005. The worsening socioeconomic situation thereafter only intensified this prejudice as Lebanese attribute it to the large amounts of Refugees entering the country in the last 15 years. Moreover, the European Union and several UN agencies such as UNHCR and UNICEF have had to bolster the state's initiatives at aiding refugee communities as well as promoting integration, social cohesion, and respect for the rights of refugees since the state proved incapable of adequately servicing its refugee communities as per the terms of the UDHR

as well as the ICERD and ICESCR which it ratified in 1971 and 1972 respectively adding more fuel to the narrative that foreign powers are seeking to keep refugees in Lebanon. (Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, pp. 5, 11, 12, 14). Still, though the nation's economic turmoil may lend it some sympathy it does not negate the reality that the nation has not adopted the Geneva convention or its 1967 optional protocol and has seemed at times more concerned with becoming an 'emigrant rentier state' exploiting international stakeholders, most notably the EU as presented above, than a true asylum for Syrians in need.

The most telling sign of this is the Lebanese Crisis Response Plan (LCRP) which was adopted in 2015 as the first strategy by the government addressing its Syrian Refugee population. It served as a roadmap for coordination between INGOs and local actors such as municipalities and local NGOs allowing international actors to circumvent some of the red-tapism and corruption synonymous with dealing with the government, specially as this narrative of government inefficiency was then further reinforced in the Syria & the Region Conference held in London in February 2016 (Diab , 2023; Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, pp. 5, 8, 14; Issam Fares Institute , 2020; Mourad , 2021, p. 1390). For, as per Article 2(1) the 1966 ICESCR, irrespective of state officials' legal ineptitude, Lebanon still bears a responsibility to either house refugees adequately or seek the assistance of other international actors that are capable of supplementing its lackluster efforts and yet it was not cooperative enough between 2011-2014 (UN Treaty Body Database; Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, pp. 7, 13; UNSCOL, 2018). As per KI Diab, the LCRP was well overdue as international actors had been struggling with the Lebanese government's stance on refusal to implement formal camps, the politicization of the refugee crisis, and the overall failure of the government to uphold any timeframes it sets for reform implementation since 2011, being essentially disengaged from the management of the entry (Diab , 2023). The Response Plan which included international organizations, UN agencies, as well as local NGOs was a collective efforts of nearly 95 partners seeking to improve the living standards of Syrian Refugees in the country, including but not limited to MSF, UNICEF, ICRC, UNHCR, EU, WFP, IOM, as well as INGOs such as Save the Children, and Relief International, (Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, p. 14; Diab , 2023; MSF Lebanon , 2022; UNHCR, 2023b; Seeberg , 2018; Truppa, Leresche, & Fuller, 2019). But the aspect of locals' perception and how it may impact the lives of these refugees with this plan was more focused on host community-refugee cohesion than it was on the general publics' perception. Thus rendering these initiatives unable to

anticipate or address the worsening of these views thereafter which led to the lived experiences of Syrian refugees still being compromised even after all their efforts (Diab , 2023; Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, pp. 5, 8, 14; Issam Fares Institute , 2020).

Having mentioned that Lebanon has not ratified the GC, this does not negate certain obligations the state still has as it pertains to the protection of refugees under the convention. For, some refugee rights are absolute rather than contingent, falling under the *opinio juris* category meaning they must be generally upheld (Norwegian Council, 2016, pp. 1, 4, 7): Based on article 16 of the GC, Lebanon still has an obligation to provide access to courts and legal assistance to Syrian refugees. The GC's article 22 paragraph 1 discusses the need to provide access to education, article 4 designated religious freedoms, article 14 is on the protection of intellectual property, article 23 on the right to social security, while articles 25-28 discuss the inherent rights of refugees to administrative assistance and legal documents for travel and identification (Norwegian Council, 2016, pp. 4, 5). Most importantly, Lebanon is bound by article 32-33 of the GC on the illegality of expelling refugees and the concept of nonrefoulement, a matter which its own ruling class came to oppose at various junctions, notably in 2014 when the government stated its intent to return Syrian refugees, efforts which yielded little results and only brought international condemnation and scrutiny to the state (Diab , 2023; Norwegian Council, 2016, pp. 4, 7). Furthermore, since Lebanon as previously mentioned has ratified the ICESCR, it is relevant to note some of its articles that must be upheld by the state. Under Article 6 Syrians must maintain the right to work in Lebanon and as stipulated in Article 7 this employment must have favorable workplace conditions for said refugees as the article was clarified to encompass the group in its 2016 General Comment No.23. While under Articles 13 and 14 of the treaty it attests once again to the unequivocal right of refugees to education (Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, pp. 7-13). Lebanon has ultimately done much less than it is obligated to do, but still when viewed in light of the economic and political turmoil it has faced and the longstanding periods it endured without a government for several segments of the last 15 years, it may conversely also be reasonably argued that it has actually done more than what could've realistically been expected of it.

2.10 Counter Argument and Research Gap

2.10.1 Counter Argument

This thesis is not being mentioned to reflect the Christian faith or its institutions in Lebanon in any way. In fact, many Christian groups within the country are not only in support of Syrian refugees morally but also through financial aid and charity work. This can be seen in the writing by Larkin and Gutkowski which took place in Autumn 2018 and was centered around the philanthropic initiatives taken by Christian religious groups and faith-based NGOs working with Syrian refugees and host communities (Larkin & Gutkowski, 2021, pp. 1058, 1063-1064). It can also be seen in the 2015 thesis report by Abi Khalil wherein coping mechanisms that have kept tensions between Syrian refugees and Christian Lebanese groups at bay were presented as having existed since the very beginning of the 2011 Syrian refugee arrival. For, Abi Khalil claimed that these tensions have been exacerbated by overly used stereotypes on both sides that worsen the situation and though it may seem impossible to overcome these narratives, social cohesion has proven possible between these two groups in the last 15 years when driven by community based initiatives to maintain peace and tranquility (Abi Khalil, 2015, pp. VII, 26, 62, 64, 67-68). Furthermore, as reiterated within this study, Lebanese non-Christian communities do themselves hold resentment towards Syrians and the general perception of all Lebanese is negative. As such, this study ought not be conflated with the idea that Christians alone harbor resentment, rather that Christians tend to have even more negative perceptions than the broader Lebanese communities' perceptions more generally and that in their case their negative views have manifested in hate crimes and hate speech in a particularly alarming manner in recent times which was worth probing into further. This can be seen in the literature produced such as the national poll conducted in 2013 by Christophersen to gauge Lebanese attitudes towards the refugee influx, unsurprisingly found 61 per cent of Lebanese were not comfortable with Syrians living as close neighbors but this rose to 78 per cent amongst Maronite respondents (Christophersen, Jing , Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013, pp. 7, 49).

2.10.2 Research Gap

The research conducted on Lebanese citizens' perception on Syrians, though not excluding Christians specifically, has not been centrally focused on the group in a manner which can explicitly deliberate upon their fluctuating perceptions which tend to consistently be more negative than the already negative general public's perception, thus remaining to be a noteworthy distinction that has not been sufficiently explored (Christophersen, Jing , Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013). Furthermore, the correlational likelihood of a rise in hate crimes and hate speech to coincide with

the worsening of perceptions which thinkers Shirlow and Taylor discussed to have existed in Northern Ireland has not yet been exported to assess the cases of Christians' negative perception of Syrian refugees manifesting in verbal or physical hatred (Shirlow & Taylor, 2013, p. 237). Adding to this, the ability to identify the normalization of hate crimes against a certain group in a specific society as an indicator of worsening perception which Craig and Waldo discussed have also not been used as logical framework to assess these acts (Craig & Waldo, 1996, p. 114). Another important element which seems to be underdeveloped by scholars in the field is the perception of populations outside of direct host communities that reside in close proximity to refugee camps, such as individuals in villages or towns that house small Syrian communities. This remains to be relevant because individuals with negative perceptions may be more emboldened to escalate discriminatory policies and/or violent behavior as a means to maintain the sanctity of their regions. This is evident in another statistic from Christophersen's national poll which highlights how Maronites and "other Christians" maintained the lowest % of agreement among sects when it came to comfortability with Syrians living in their same village, with the clear distinction of the sects becoming even more evident as it pertained to comfortability with Syrians as nearby neighbors. For, both Christian groups assessed in the survey averaged an agreement of 23% compared to the national average of 36% and the Muslim average of 44.7% (Christophersen, Jing, Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013, pp. 48-49). These figures show glimpses of a looming escalation in the event of more Syrians moving into Christian majority areas, and thus foreshadowed the broader idea tackled in this thesis which is, colloquially, that; influenced by media and politicians as well as in light of subjugation to a reaffirming echo chamber of approval for discrimination, Christian communities' negative perceptions which have long existed have worsened and began to take shape as hate crimes or discriminatory policies, especially in the last 5 years due to the growing prevalence of Syrians in their regions. Thus, existing literature has not provided recent enough data or even been exclusively Christian-focused enough as it pertains to perceptions on the presence of Syrians in Lebanon, specially not as a means to uncover the cause of noticeable Christian-Lebanese hate crimes/speech towards Syrians since 2019. That said, to sum up; prior literature has uncovered key reasons behind the hatred experienced, proof there is a correlation between hatred and negative perception, proof it is nationwide and not specific to Christians, yet also proof it tends to be more widespread or prevalent amongst Christian groups, as well as insight on specific incidents and events that may have shaped key narratives determining perspectives and

inciting hate crimes. Still, the literature remains incomplete in that it has not been updated expansively, is not homed in on Christians as a primary group of interest exclusively, and does not answer what factors drive hate to increase and manifest itself in speech or crimes in the Christian context, all elements this research seeks to address correlatively.

3 Preliminary Findings

In this section, what will be tackled is, first, which government policies were discriminatory as well as how government ineptitude contributed to worsening perceptions, second, how they've impacted the day to day lives of Syrians, third, how discrimination and government policy have forced Syrians into illegal labor schemes and crime as a last resort which further tarnished their reputation locally leading to a vicious cycle, and fourth, how systemic forms of discrimination reinforce this cycle. Section 3 also includes a fifth segment on why this has led to concerns from host communities arising as it pertains to security and the saturation of the labor market, as well as how the former led to the emergence of civil-based security measures and how their overarching perception as of late has been that Syrians are no longer in Lebanon out of necessity raising questions as to why INGOs continue to support them.

3.1 Discrimination as the Nexus between Policy and Culture

The first government policy that catalyzed discrimination was the labor laws the state issued. Under the pretext of protecting the workplace interests of its citizens, the Lebanese government implemented tough labor laws and work permits for Syrians and other foreign nationals while also designating Lebanese-only jobs as seen with Decision No. 29/1, issued by the Minister of Labor on 15 February 2018, Decision No.1/41 from January 2017, and Decision No.218/1 issued in December 2015 (Badri and Salim El Meouchi Law Firm , 2023, p. 8; UN Inter-Agency Coordination , 2017, p. 1). It defended this act under Article 2, paragraph 3 of the Global Compact on designating economic liberties of Refugees. This reality coupled with the Lebanese economic crisis, rapid currency inflation (1 USD equated to 1500 LBP in 2020 and 89000 LBP in 2023), 2020 August 4 Beirut port explosion, and growing social disapproval for snubbing Lebanese laborers in favor of cheaper Syrian ones, collectively created an environment wherein Syrians' have very limited opportunities, an outcome which has only further been exacerbated by discriminatory

government policies and the already prevalent normalization of Syrian societal marginalization (Diab , 2023; Norwegian Council, 2016, p. 10; ALEF, 2024a, p. 16; ALEF, 2024b, p. 68; PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 8). That said, the societal response has ranged from complete support of their presence under pretexts of Arab unity and brotherhood to absolute rejection of their presence and a call for unlawful deportation. Lebanese citizens' views on this matter vary quite considerably and it remains to be highly polarizing and deeply entrenched within local politics. Stances tend to take shape along the lines of identity centered biases such as financial standing, residency status, nationality, political party, and/or sect (Chatty , 2017a; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, 2020, p. 402). Speaking of Christians in particular, events such the 2024 assassination of Lebanese Forces member Pascale Sleiman which was widely believed to have been committed by Syrians as well as many other petty crimes and thefts being attributed to Syrians during that time added to the communities' particular grievances towards them; in turn legitimizing the government's decisions to enact harsh policies on one hand while simultaneous exposing its ineptitude on the other (Hall & Todman, 2024; Haid , 2024; PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 20; Maucourant Atallah, 2024). KI John Chamoun, a regional youth leader in the Lebanese Forces, described Pascale as the coordinator of Jbeil for the LF born and raised in the town, cordial with all its residence. On the sensitive matters relating to the events of the assassination Chamoun remarked that Pascale Sleiman was abducted on April 7, 2024, on a Sunday. The next day on Monday a video circulated of his body, hours after he was killed according to the KI. Chamoun claims the culprits were a Syrian gang, he himself claimed to have been basing this accusation on the investigation of the Lebanese Army not any speculations. Chamoun stressed that irrespective of the background of the event, causality of the assassination, or even the eventual outcome following the continuation of the trial, as two individuals in the case are still evading prosecution having fled to Syria, the LF has used this incident to stress to the Lebanese government that this is unacceptable and any person can get abducted in broad day light in Lebanon. Thus, even government inaction rather than specific policies can sometimes also catalyze negative perceptions as seen with the ineffectiveness of labor policies and indirectly in the case of Pascale Sleiman as lax border regulations facilitated the crime itself as per KI John Chamoun. However, the biggest testament to government ineptitude, which will be the 2nd government driven catalyst to be discussed, remains to be undocumented Syrians being allowed to roam freely without proper governmental oversight purely due to negligence and mismanagement. For, this has made many amongst the general public wearier of their presence

within local communities, thus undoubtedly tainting the overall reputation of Syrians in the country and sabotaging the potential for their assimilation (PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 10). Third, the lack of integration of these refugees and the intentional adoption of a ‘securitization approach’ with a large percentage of Syrian refugees, i.e. keeping them in confined camps as has long been the case with Palestinians, is said to have rendered Syrian refugees more susceptible to politicization and scapegoating according to findings of the PASC Working Group as marginalizing the group in this manner facilitates unjustly blaming them for broader crises within the socioeconomic sphere (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 19). The fourth government initiative adding to the overall worsening of Syrians’ daily lives and reputations, subsequently fostering a culture of discrimination, are the raids often conducted by Lebanese security agencies, done mostly in a sporadic fashion over the last 5 years. So much so, that they have led some to believe their purpose remains purely for intimidation and villainization in an attempt to encourage voluntary returns as no widespread coordinated response was implemented as part of the crackdowns (PASC Working Group, 2024, pp. 13-14). Evidence of the acts seeking to encourage returns (by intimidating Syrians residing in Lebanon) can be seen in that the Directorate General of General Security conducted raids in unison with the facilitation of return movements it organized in 2019. Furthermore, reinforcement of the notion that this has tarnished the local public’s perception of Syrians further can be seen in that vocal demands for the return of Syrians made by government officials tend to increase societal debates, normalize the inhumane and illegal breaching of the principle of nonrefoulement taking place, and frame returns as a means forward for Lebanon and an initiative serving the public good (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 14). It is worth noting, a decision to formally violate nonrefoulement came in 2019 when Lebanon’s Higher Defense Council decided to deport all refugees who had illegally entered the country after the 24th of April (ALEF, 2024b, p. 57). Some of the policy’s outcomes were, according to the UNHCR, 8359 Syrians repatriated in 2019, 6,224 in 2021, 9,814 in 2022, and 10,130 in 2023 (ALEF, 2024b, p. 87; UNHCR, 2025). Between April 1st and May 16th 2023 alone for example, 22 raids took place wherein 808 Syrians were detained, of which 336 were eventually deported (PASC Working Group, 2023, pp. 10, 16; ACHR, 2023). Human Rights Watch claims that during the same year between May 13 and August 28th 2,731 refugees were deported, even though a genuine risk of execution or abuse upon arrival was there (ALEF, 2024b, pp. 81-82; Access Center For Human Rights, 2024). This not only means the narrative that the human dignity of illegal immigrants

should not be respected is becoming common place, because it has been driven by a narrative perpetuated by the state itself, it also means citizens have begun associating a lack of respect for Syrian refugee's rights with the government's official stance. The Lebanese government even doubled down on its policy in the May 2023 Conference on Syria which took place in Brussels stating it was aiming to return 2 million Syrians (ALEF, 2024b, p. 83). Adding to this, synonymizing Syrians with crime seems to be an intentional trope propagated by public officials and politicians alike. Politicians have made the inaccurate claim that 80% of crimes have been committed by Syrians since 2019 while in 2023 the Minister of Interior and Municipalities claimed that 30% of crimes are perpetrated by Syrians (L'Orient Today, 2023b; PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 11). Yet, this seems to be politicized propaganda since figures from Lebanese prisons show constitutently that the % of Syrians in Lebanese prisons between 2021 and 2024 remained between 20-30% (2000/ 8500-9300 in total) with rates fluctuating insignificantly due to uncertainty concerning prisoner populations and conflicting data (SNHR , 2025; Assaf, 2024; World Prison Brief data, 2023; ALEF, 2024a, p. 54; Lebanese Ministry of Justice Directorate of Prisons, 2024; PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 20). But adopting this rhetoric was not made in a vacuum, a survey conducted by Fafu and the Issam Fares Institute of Public Policy and International Affairs at AUB revealed that in 2013 three out of four participating Lebanese believed that Syrian refugees pose a threat to national security, while seven in ten believed that the UN should establish refugee camps for Syrian refugees to organize their presence within cities and towns. This adds to the notion that the basis of these fears was always speculative and merely expanded as a function of being capitalized upon by politicians and party leaders across Lebanon's sects to further villainize Syrian refugees and present themselves as the saviors or righteous opposition to the injustice of the unbridled and dangerous behavior of these refugees. The embodiment of this role was seen in key informant interviews with both the VP of the FPM and the youth representative of the LF. Moreover, the stereotype gained further traction as the level of safety in the country worsened starting 2019 alongside the economic crisis as eluded to earlier; a correlational phenomenon journalist Ethel Bonet aptly points out and one which she attributes to the ineptitude and bankruptcy of the government leading to widespread layoffs and huge salary cuts in all security branches of the state (Bonet , 2023). Finally, on the topic of detained Syrians, government corruption and lack of oversight has resulted in extremely harsh conditions for prisoners in general, and specifically Syrians among them as cases of torture, sleep and food

deprivation, sexual abuse, and beatings continue to surface, the most notable of which being the 2021 Amnesty International Report claiming 26 Syrians who were charged with terrorism faced all the above-mentioned acts (ALEF, 2024b, p. 52; Al Jazeera , 2021).

3.2 Syrians' Lived Experienced and Struggles

PASC's 31 CSOs have collectively made the claim that the political polarization caused by the Syrian refugee situation today is significantly deeper than it was in previous years (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 13). Irrespective of their legal status or entry date, Syrians face symbolic sociocultural forms of discrimination, as well as systemic forms of discrimination orchestrated through government policy and measures taken at the more localized regional levels of government. In a WE'AM³⁴ led survey using Oxfam's Community Perception Tracker (CPT) in 2024, 33 Syrian refugees expressed significant concerns related to their safety siting particularly recent widespread hate speech and threats of deportation as the root causes of their fear (ALEF, Right to Play , Oxfam, & Shift, Community Perceptions Report 01 March - 31 May 2024, 2024, p. 18). Adding to this, economic factors have, though not exclusive to the Syrian lived experience in Lebanon, only exacerbated this current reality in that they have forced more Syrians to take on low paying informal labor. An arrangement where no legally enforceable agreement is safeguarding their rights, while leaving many more deprived of healthcare and social protections due to the government's bankruptcy (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 13). It is also worth noting that this humanitarian case, as a result of being heavily reliant on foreign aid, has become even more dire in the wake of the situation in Gaza and Ukraine forcing International Aid agencies to extend resources more broadly or even in severe cases reallocate aid meant for Syrians in Lebanon temporarily to these more urgent humanitarian crises. This shift of focus was corroborated in KIIs with the FPM VP Martine Kteily and with the Programme's Manager at ALEF Stephanie Abboud who both pointed out this reallocation taking place. One instance where this is most evident is in the case of the UNHCR lowering its overall percentage of Syrians receiving aid from 90% to around 60% of registered refugees, with the organization siting higher levels of vulnerability in other territories as necessitating this change (Inter-agency Coordination Lebanon, 2023). Not to

³ The project 'Working for Engagement, Acceptance, and Mediation (WE'AM) is a community-based Approach to Social Cohesion in Lebanon. The initiative targets vulnerable Lebanese and Syrian refugees. The program was implemented by Oxfam in collaboration with Right to Play, SHiFT, and ALEF launched by the EU.

⁴ INFOPRO. (August 19, 2024). OXFAM – EU: WE'AM Conflict Mapping. Retrieved from <https://research.infopro.com.lb/oxfam-eu-weam-conflict-mapping/>

mention the fact that the Hezbollah-Israel war, which started on the 8th of October 2023 and slowly fizzled down following a late November 2024 ceasefire, but had not completely ended as of January 2025, further altered the distribution of aid within Lebanon itself, as hundreds of thousands of IDPs were in a more urgent situation than Syrian Refugees out of the line of fire (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 15; Qibtawi, 2024). Regional Wars in addition to the remaining factors impacting the economy left the average Syrian family of 5 receiving a maximum of 8 million LBP up until May 23 2023 from the UNHCR when a family of that size needed roughly 19 million LBP to survive based on the PASC groups' assessment of average spending costs in the month of March 2023 (PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 9).

3.3 Symbolic Sociocultural Forms of Discrimination: Vicious Cycle

Crimes continuously rose between 2017 and 2023 in Lebanon and Syrians are often disproportionately blamed for this increase (Abou Aljoud, 2024). This is evident in that, in perceptions and aspirations research, on Syrians in Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, Chatty discusses how Syrians in Lebanon feel as though there was a rising level of discrimination against them when asked in 2017 which they attributed to a growing association between rising crime rates and their presence in communities (Chatty, 2017a, p. 28). Reaching their peak in 2023, rates eventually began to fall back at the end of 2023 and in 2024 as per an interview with Mohammad Chamseddine, a policy research specialist at a Beirut-based research firm known as Information International, conducted by L'Orient Today. With Chamseddine noting specifically that the surge between 2019 to 2021, which saw a 289.94% percent increase, was a period which coincided with the aftermath of the Beirut port Explosion and the beginning of the economic crisis (Abou Al Joud, 2024). This is being mentioned to say that if in 2017 the sentiment amongst the general public that Syrians are associated with crime was being felt by Syrians themselves, it comes as no surprise that, in light of the rise in crime since then, the way in which Syrians are perceived has worsened on a national scale in the wake of this surge. Furthermore, knowing what the 2013 research of Christophersen, Jing, Thorleifsson, and Tiltnes affirms that Christians have considerably higher overall negative views on Syrians compared to other religious communities in Lebanon, and that this has likely continued to be the case to the present moment, it is evident that the overall increase in the intensity and frequency of societal discrimination and municipal restrictions by Christian Lebanese towards Syrians which have been witnessed could have been expected and even

prevented if deteriorating socioeconomic factors and government inaction were seen as precursors to worsening security and in turn as catalysts of xenophobia (Christophersen, Jing , Thorleifsson, & Tiltnes, 2013). This exact point was echoed by scholars at USJ Al Sharabati and Nammour in their description of a vicious cycle that sees Syrians take on illegal employment or partake in crimes in light of wage caps enforced against them in certain regions, not being registered, and the economic crisis, leading to a reputation of being associated with crime and insecurity, which in turn reduces their opportunities, marginalizes them further, and justifies discriminatory government policies; leaving Syrian refugees in a position of even more desperation thus driving them towards illegal acts for survival even more, and the cycle repeats itself (Nammour & Alsharabati, 2015, p. 23).

3.4 Systemic Forms of Discrimination and the Syrian Perspective

That said, a sense of safety amongst Syrians themselves is not exactly completely there either with Alsharabati & Nammour's research in 2015 finding that 26% of Syrians claim to not feel safe (Nammour & Alsharabati, 2015, p. 23). Furthermore, in the same report, only two years after the Christophersen et al. report , 64.77% of Syrians, among 1200 surveyed, claimed they did not have a Lebanese friend while 24% said they had been assaulted in Lebanon (pp. 12, 15). This adds even more evidence to the broader theme that the increase in crime which has taken place has led to an increase in discrimination against Syrians in recent years. Al Sharabati and Nammour's research also found that 43% of surveyed Syrian refugees reported incidents of harassment, insults, beating, extortion, raids, detention, and/or searches, from either civilians or authorities and in some instances both. Most interesting from this statistic and in what ushers in the section on institutional discrimination aptly, 70% of victims among this 43% did not report incidents to the authorities as roughly 70% of Syrians at the time in 2015, remained undocumented, meaning they would be de facto handing themselves in by filing any case (ALEF, 2024b, pp. 83-84; Nammour & Alsharabati, 2015, p. 15). Nammour and Al Sharabati also asked Syrians if they felt welcome in all areas to which more than 50% said no and when probed as to whether or not they felt the situation was getting better or worse, 45% chose the latter (Nammour & Alsharabati, 2015, p. 18). Their research also included surveying Lebanese, and it is interesting to note that 42% said they had some level of hatred towards Syrians and 33% said they feared Syrians (Nammour & Alsharabati, 2015, p. 20). Moreover, as mentioned above, 80% of Syrian refugees aged 15 or older were not registered,

facing severe protection risks and the figure has ranged between 78-84% from 2019 to 2022 reaching its peak in 2021 (ALEF, 2024b, pp. 83-84). These protection risks are further heightened in cases of detention as refugees face extended pretrial detention, routine interrogation at checkpoints, raids of informal settlements, and custody after completion of a sentence (Chatty , 2017a, p. 29; PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 12; UNHCR, 2022; ALEF, 2024a, p. 56). That said the majority of the institutional hurdles Syrians face are related to governmental action or lack thereof which has been discussed earlier.

3.5 Host Community Concerns in General

Having attended several Townhall focus groups during my internship at ALEF⁵, which took place in Akkar, Deir El Ahmar, Barja, Beirut, and Tripoli, and were organized in association with ALEF's regional partners and local municipalities to present the community perceptions collected through the WE'AM project's community perception report using Oxfam's Community Perception Tracker (CPT) approach to capture, analyze, and understand the perceptions of host communities, and essentially entailed a series of focus groups, some grievances on host communities in general which are relevant to all sects emerged as Q&A discussions took place after the presentations (ALEF, Right to Play , Oxfam, & Shift, Community Perceptions Report 01 March - 31 May 2024, 2024, p. 9). Upon further analysis, the perspective and newly gained insight the qualitative findings produced from the transcripts of the Townhalls brought up produced several key findings that seemed useful enough to be analyzed further and used as a precursor to the Christian focused analysis that will follow as they fittingly act as a background on the broader grievances of all Lebanese and these findings were incorporated with past literature and KI interviews conducted. Comparing regions presented a congruency of ineptitude and a culture of self-sabotage among all bureaucratic initiatives, local and governmental, which lacked a sincere intent at achieving longevity, often saw a haphazard implementation of community building initiatives, and applied disorganized approaches to public policy in general. Throughout all regions visited a lack of support for both municipal and NGO led initiatives from the state was masqueraded with the spread of anti-refugee and anti-NGO rhetoric to shift the blame from the government's woes. This deflection tactic meant primarily to evade responsibility and reduce criticism has been displayed

⁵ ALEF Act for Human Rights is a Lebanese non-profit, non-partisan human rights watchdog organization that works on documenting, and promoting human rights.
- <https://alefliban.org/about-alef/>

through the spread of conspiratorial ideas that NGOs discriminate against Lebanese, instead favoring Syrians, and through fearmongering the general public into believing Syrians are to blame for the lack of security and scarcity of economic opportunities in Lebanon. Here are some of the main talking points established as it pertains to known perceptions of Syrians in Lebanon held by all sectarian communities.

3.5.1 Lack of Security Adding to Syrian Stereotyping

The most prominent symptom of the ascribed dysfunction is undoubtedly the state of the nation's economy. That said, this reality brings with it further difficulties. In Akkar citizens described how the economy and lack of safety have created an inescapable quagmire. For, what began with the economic situation worsening, has transformed into a vicious cycle wherein crime and theft are resorted to for survival as mentioned section 3.3, in turn disincentivizing investors to spend in the region, which leads to even less opportunities, and leaves citizens with even less options to resort to besides crime and theft. Yet, the narrative that Syrians are committing crimes without Lebanese affiliates persists. This environment stems from the minimal security presence of government agencies and the proliferation of illegal arms and unauthorized weapons. Moreover, Individual events like the murder of Pascale Sleiman on April 9, Lebanese Forces coordinator in the city of Jbeil discussed in section 3.1, which was said to have been taken out by 2 Syrians, exacerbated the calls for refugees' return and further normalized Syrian hate (NaharNet, 2024; Maucourant Atallah, 2024). These campaigns mentioned above, which the security forces conducted to address illegal residents of Syrian origin as far back as 2019, saw the detainment of Syrians through arbitrary raids in regions such as Zahle and Beqaa as part of a decision issued by the Supreme Defense Council that year, undoubtedly having a negative impact on the perception of these areas' citizens towards Syrians (PASC Working Group, 2023, p. 11). This showcases how government policy, which itself is blatantly discriminatory, is among the primary drivers for normalizing the sort of xenophobic rhetoric that may fester into hate.

3.5.2 Narrative that Syrians Saturate the Labor Market

According to the 2013 policy brief by IFI-AUB and Fafo mentioned above, *“the initial Lebanese hospitality towards Syrian refugees has become strained due to the increased competition for scarce employment, particularly in the unskilled sector”*, with youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds being the most harmed (IFI-AUB & Fafo, 2013). The tight budgets of business

owners who have been able to continue operating in Akkar, against all odds, has meant that employing foreign workers, especially Syrian nationals who accept lower wages, is not only a more lucrative option, but in some cases, it is the only viable options to stay afloat. This phenomenon of employing Syrians illegally to lower overhead is not unique to Akkar as thinkers such as Dawn Chatty have attested to its occurrence in the Beqaa region as well (Chatty , 2017a, p. 29). Attempts at mitigating its consequences have been made at the national level through the state enacting strict labor laws and permits on Syrians attempting to seek work within the country. Framed as a means to safeguard the opportunities of working-class nationals, Lebanon defends these discriminatory policies through article 2 parag. 3 of the Geneva Convention on freedom of a host nation to designate the economic liberties of refugees within its territory so long as the social and cultural rights of these refugees are not neglected (Norwegian Council, 2016, p. 10). Likewise, even the social pressures put on business owners from their communities to not ‘takes a job from the hands of a fellow Lebanese’ have abated this concern (Diab , 2023; Norwegian Council, 2016; ALEF, Right to Play , Oxfam, & Shift, Community Perceptions Report 01 March - 31 May 2024, 2024, p. 15). This narrative is validated with 2 of the findings discussed in the Nammour and Alsharabati brief on the survey they conducted in 2015. The first being that when asked if they are willing to hire Syrian workers 45% of Lebanese said they will not, 18% said maybe, 9% said they would if it helps save money, and 28% claimed that they certainly would. While another question on the reasoning as to why they would not hire Syrians, saw 69% agree with the notion that it is to prevent Syrians taking jobs from Lebanese (Nammour & Alsharabati, 2015, p. 21). FPM VP, Martine Kteily also corroborated this by saying that the primary concern for the lack of regulations, and as such the main reason why the FPM worked with municipalities, was to provide them with the training and logistical support necessary to register Syrians and make sure all Syrian business owners had the legal status to reside within Lebanon. She also claimed the FPM worked with municipalities to assure that Syrians had to attain the proper licensing just as a Lebanese citizen would, to open up a business, and to make sure no Syrians had not organized an arrangement with a Lebanese local to cooperate as partners to circumvent regulations placed on Syrians to open certain businesses or to open any business for that matter in villages preventing it. The matter of labor regulations is so particularly important to Christians specifically because, according to VP of the FPM, regulating Syrians’ job opportunities is ultimately tied to the demographic theme so central to the root causes of xenophobia towards Syrians that Christian Lebanese experience. For,

adequate job opportunities are seen as a reason for refugees to remain indefinitely. On this matter Kteily remarked, if Syrians are not able to find secure paying jobs in Lebanon and no longer see Lebanon as an environment conducive for haphazardly and unlawfully opening businesses at will, i.e.: the legal gaps are sutured, Syrians that entered Lebanon following the start of the Syrian Civil War will be less likely choose to stay in Lebanon open-endedly. Meaning, as per her logic, that the demographic fears of Christian Lebanese pertaining to the permanent presence of these refugees will subside.

3.5.3 Civilian-based Security Measures targeting Syrians

Attaching Syrians' presence to economic woes and security risks is noteworthy because it is not only compromising the human rights and dignity of Syrian refugees by risking their reputations, but also creating a more unstable and unsafe country for all Lebanese as it invites what can be referred to as citizen led justice seeking or civilian-based security measures. These measures are often solicited by municipalities as a form of night watch to secure the borders of a town in the evening, however they continuously have been used as a precursor for the justification of hate crimes. According to scholar Grabowsky, in his writing *Law Enforcement and the Citizen: Non-governmental Participants in Crime Prevention and Control*, since they are not controlled by authorities, these measures are viewed as unfavorable beyond a certain point and begin to turn counterproductive when left unchecked. For, in on citizen led crime prevention and control, the scholar explicitly argues as part of his central thesis that one of the possible outcomes of irregular citizen led crime prevention is posing a serious threat to the rights of minorities, and this concept undoubtedly fits the described situation in Lebanon (Grabosky, 1992, p. 249). In Deir El Ahmar for instance, a Christian town, civilians did arm themselves for protection, but this was met with mixed opinions. Some viewed it as a source of insecurity that was destabilizing the social fabric, holding a common perspective with the residents of Tripoli, as per the Town Hall meetings proceedings and echoing Grabowski's sentiment, while others saw it as a means to protect oneself given how lawlessness, government inactivity, and rampant corruption have left their regions unsafe. Proponents of civilians carrying arms were not objecting to the idea that safety and security should be the sole responsibility of the state and local authorities, but rather, merely adopting a pragmatic approach to guaranteeing their own safety given the circumstances. In Barja, a Sunni majority town, rather than adopting an 'every man for themselves' approach to maintaining safety,

the community decided to create a local taskforce to patrol the area replacing the security apparatus of the state. However, even the citizens of these towns themselves could see the potential pitfalls of such an arrangement, with some locals citing how organized taskforces were more likely to engage in confrontations with gangs, or Syrian communities, that could escalate into brutal exchanges or be seen as racially motivated and unwarranted acts of intimidation given the lack of professionalism in, and clearly set hierarchical structure of, these taskforces.

3.5.4 Perception that Syrians are no longer in Lebanon out of necessity and Have Become a Security Liability

Historians can attest to the fact that there are usually one or more minority groups within a society that are marginalized and unfairly deemed liable for the perils the general public faces. Syrians, since 2011, undoubtedly fit this description in the Lebanese context. But what is often left unsaid is that even prior to 2011, many of the issues faced by the local communities mentioned, which they perceive to be exacerbated or even created by the presence of asylum seekers, were in fact present long before, and if anything, are worsening due to other factors such as the economic and bureaucratic crises the nation continues to endure. In Deir El Ahmar, citizens conflate the lack of police presence with the increase in Syrians as the cause of higher crime rates, with some from the community even going as far as suggesting limiting the number of children Syrians are allowed to have during their time in Lebanon as a safety precaution. Others feel as though the dynamic is a competition for resources between host communities and refugees that must be addressed before it becomes a larger issue as the Syrian presence continues to grow. Residents of the town also felt that it was unfair how host communities, often as impoverished as incumbent refugees, have to pay taxes and bills for amenities while Syrians are free from these expenses and receive monthly stipends as well as food relief. Some even questioned the severity of the situation in Syria from 2021-2024 prior to the fall of the Assad regime, as clashes had become much less intense, a common anti-Syrian trope shaping public opinion during that time. Residents of the town mention this to show how the dire need for asylum seeking had waned and now, most individuals refusing to return to Syria were fleeing conscription and prosecution (prior to the HTS takeover) rather than danger according to them. Another more wide-ranging matter brought up in all regions was the lack of proper consensus on Syrians present. Residents believe this lack of organization to be the leading cause of what they attest is a higher propensity for Syrians to commit crimes. As, based on their logic, since they are unregistered, Syrians feel as though they can evade prosecution more

easily. The more likely explanation, however, is that this fugitivity is owing mostly to the reoccurring theme of this writing, a lack of government control, as no figures allude to Syrians committing more crimes than Lebanese, but rather an increase in crimes more generally as per the same interview with Mohammad Chamseddine conducted by L'Orient Today mentioned above (Abou Al Joud, 2024). Moreover, even the citizens themselves that are making these complaints admit in most instances that Syrian criminals have Lebanese accomplices helping coordinate heists. In terms of providing an incident wherein a government official unfairly generalized Syrians and attached this stereotype to them, this can be seen in 2023 when the Minister of Social Affairs Hector Hajjar claimed on the matter of Syrians committing crimes:

"The theft of electrical cables, manhole covers, the iron doors of churches, mosques, and even cemeteries, anyone who defends these criminals is a criminal themselves (Syria TV, 2023d)."

Hajjar had previously stated the since debunked statistics in 2022 that:

"85% of crimes were committed by 'displaced persons' and 40 percent of those detained by the various security services are Syrians. (L'Orient Today , 2022)."

3.5.5 NGO support for Syrians

Finally, the most prevalent source of resentment felt towards Syrians by their host communities in all regions of Lebanon where this dynamic exists, has been driven by a belief that NGOs and CSOs disproportionately support Syrians and neglect Lebanese. The latter in this context not only feel as though this support is leading to the purchasing power of Syrians surpassing their own, but also that the existing arrangement established by these organizations is excessively comfortable and thus is disincentivizing Syrians from returning to their own countries. Host communities, though grateful for NGO assistance, still feel that Syrians receive disproportional support, and that the situation is visibly unjust, and this can be seen through the WE'AM Project's Community Perception Tracker in 2023, which attested that 25% of the Lebanese interviewed believed that there was a Syrian favoring bias in aid distribution (ALEF, Right to Play, Oxfam, & Shift, 2023, p. 16). That said, the disparity between support for citizens and refugees is not as grave as one may assume. The WFP for example, which supports 900,000 Syrians within Lebanon, also supports 700,000 Lebanese (WFP, 2024). Furthermore, some citizens fail to acknowledge the mandate and scope of certain organizations. If an organization is primarily focused on supporting refugee

communities rather than impoverished communities more generally, they cannot be reprimanded for their efforts. Of course, assisting host communities in these cases should remain a priority, but having refugees be their focal point does not warrant the outrage it has garnered (HRW, 2024a; UNHCR, 2023b; Diab, 2024).

4 Survey Findings

Having discussed the more general grievances as a precursor to the survey's findings specific to this study adequately, a brief description of the respondents' profiles followed by the retrievable takeaways of the data collection process will be laid out in what follows.

4.1 Describing Respondents Profiles

The Sample being studied comprised of 93 Christian Lebanese participants of whom the majority (60.2%) were between the ages of 21-30, with 22.5% comprising individuals between the ages of 30-60 displaying a roughly equal percentages of each 10 year age group, while the remaining 17.3% of respondents were 60+ years of age. 61.3% of respondents were male with the remaining % all identifying as females. The vast majority of respondents were from Mount Lebanon with 82.8% while the remaining amount were from South Lebanon (12.9%) or Beirut (4.3%). In terms of level of education, all respondents had at least attained an undergraduate degree apart from 9.7% of respondents who had at least a high school degree. Moreover, 31.2% had a graduate degree while 8.6% had a post graduate degree.

On social media use, 75.3% of surveyed individuals claimed to be using social media multiple times a day while the remaining minorities represented 7.5% using social media multiple times a week but not daily, 9.7% only once a day, and 7.5% claiming to use social media rarely.

4.2 Uncovering Preliminary Findings of the Survey

4.2.1 Key Findings

4.2.1.1 Perceptions of Syrian Refugees' Impact on Lebanon

Beginning with thoughts on positive contributions, 32.3% agreed Syrians contribute positively to Lebanese society, while 45% disagreed. 23% of respondents were neutral on this matter, suggesting ambivalence, possibly tied to economic or sectarian biases. Pertaining to security concerns, 58.1% agreed Syrians pose a threat to Lebanon's internal security, with 19.4% strongly

agreeing. While 81.7% linked Syrian refugees to increased crime rates. This reflects prevalent securitization narratives. As to whether or not these Syrians should face stricter punishments for this perceived association with increased crime, margins were close; 46.2% agreed they should and 44.1% agreed they should not. Moving on to perceptions since 2019, the majority of respondents believed their perception of Syrian refugees had worsened since then (55.9%), while only 11.8% disagree or strongly disagree. This adds relevance to the thesis's selected timeframe which was chosen in light of the rapid decline in the sociopolitical, security, and economic state of the nation as a whole from that year onwards.

4.2.1.2 Socio-Economic Pressures

In terms of whether or not Syrians are viewed as an economic burden, 84% agreed or strongly agreed Syrians strain public services and the economy, among whom 48.4% strongly agreeing. This proves that Syrians are associated with the economic crisis worsening, and what further validated this view was the responses to the question "The main socioeconomic factors that negatively impacted my perception of Syrians since 2019" extracted from the survey and displayed in figure 1, which allowed citizens to have multiple responses. As in this question the main cited factors were: "rise in crimes/theft" (76.3%), "economic crisis" (58.1%), and "currency devaluation" (24.7%).

The main socioeconomic factor that negatively impacted my perception of Syrians since 2019. (selecting more than one answer is allowed) is: - (يُسمح باختيار أكثر من إجابة) : العامل...الظرتي للسوريين منذ عام 2019. 93 responses

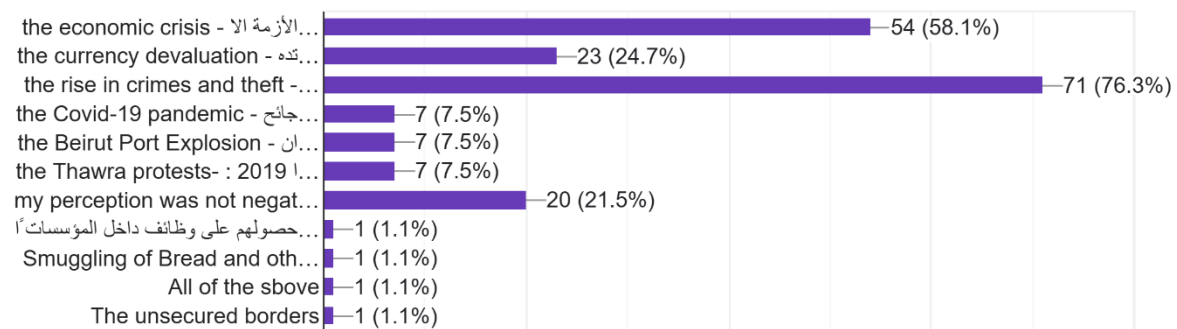


Figure 1 The main socioeconomic factor that negatively impacted respondents' perception of Syrians since 2019

Even when the question was slightly restructured, as seen in figure 2, to be more general and not timeframe specific, crime rates and their lack of registration, which are two factors often seen as being in a causal link, were the leading factors participants voted on.

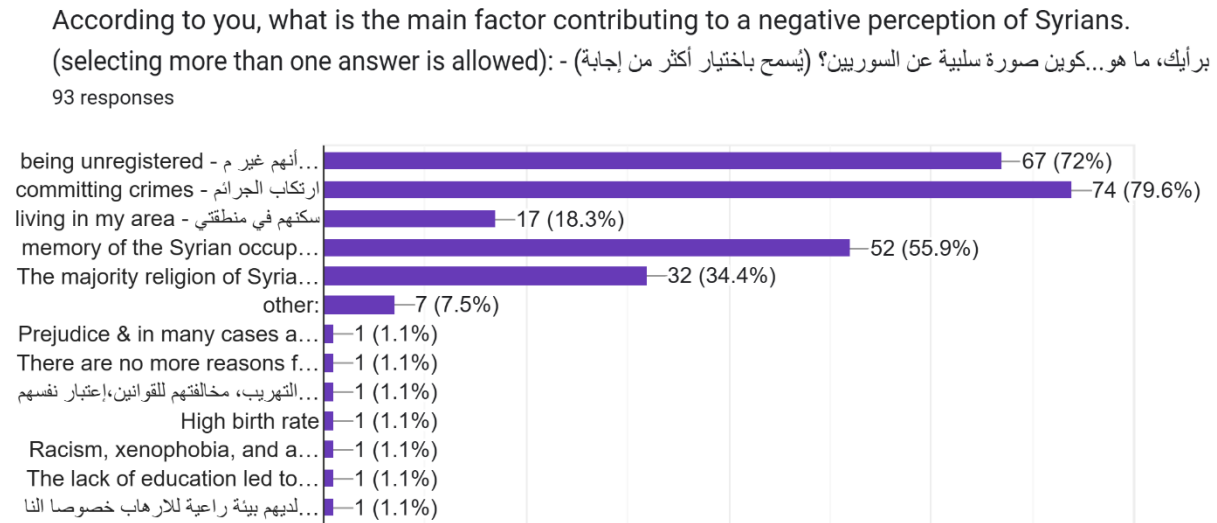


Figure 2 Main factors contributing to a negative perception of Syrians.

Still it should be made clear, among participants only 23.7% agreed to the notion that Syrian refugees are to blame for all the crises we have faced since 2019, with many more (45.2%) owing these issues to the various governments that have taken charge of the nation in this period, meaning participants view the Syrian presence as one of the central issues which has exacerbated the economic collapse and political turmoil the nation has plunged into since 2019, but not its main catalyst.

4.2.1.3 Historical and Sectarian Tensions

Interestingly, in response to the question mentioned above “According to you what is the main factor contributing to a negative perception of Syrians” the third and fourth most voted for factors were the memory of the Syrian occupation and the majority religion of Syrian refugees being Muslim with (55.9%) and (34.4%) respectively. This showcases that aside from economic strain, broader themes of a lack of transitional justice and healing from the trauma of the Syrian occupation as well as the demographic fears that Christians may continue to have which have been

highlighted throughout this research, remain high on the list of reasons for Christian xenophobia towards Syrians. In light of this, the fact that 84% supported repatriation, with a slight majority (51.6%) strongly agreeing, only further underscores the extent to which Christian fatigue with Syrian refugee presence has reached. But as to whether or not surveyed Christians felt that the largescale desire for Syrians to leave felt by all Lebanese may be impacting how Syrians have been treated as of late, participants seemed divided.

4.2.1.4 How Syrians are Treated

32.4% agreed or strongly agreed that they are treated unfairly, while a slightly larger minority of 40.8% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing with this opinion and the remaining amount being neutral. This divide shifted when the question became whether or not Syrians should be treated equally to Lebanese. Since, in this case, a minority of citizens believed they should be treated equally to Lebanese citizens (23.7%) while the majority (55.9%) believed they should not, the rest remained neutral as well. This underlines the prevailing misinformation and lack of human rights education in Lebanese society, especially among those surveyed, as they believe human rights are not inalienable and equality is conditional upon holding citizenship within a state or being ‘welcomed’ by a majority of its citizens.

4.2.1.5 Media Influence

The findings of this research will show various propaganda campaigns reinforced through media sources; from traditional media outlets openly endorsing anti-Syrian campaigns to social media widely circulating videos showing acts of violence against Syrians in the section immediately following this one, but before, here are perceptions relating to media from the survey (Ghadir , 2024; Megaphone News, 2025). A large minority of participants (43.5%) claimed to refer to traditional media outlets for their news with most citing MTV and LBC as their preferred channels. However, only 26.9% of participants said their viewing of these channels impacted how they perceived Syrian refugees. Yet, when asked if they agree as to whether or not these outlets tend to frame Syrian refugees in a negative light, see figure 3 below, and whether or not traditional media outlets normalize hate crimes and/or hate speech against Syrians by framing incidents of vigilantism in Christian villages (attacking Syrians for alleged security reasons) as positive, see figure 4 below; results were inconclusive with roughly equal segments either agreeing, disagreeing, or remaining neutral for the two questions on this matter.

Some people consider that traditional media tends to frame Syrian refugees in a negative light. To what extent do you agree or disagree? - يرى بعض الناس أن...للسوريين بصورة سلبية. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعارض هذا الرأي؟ -

93 responses

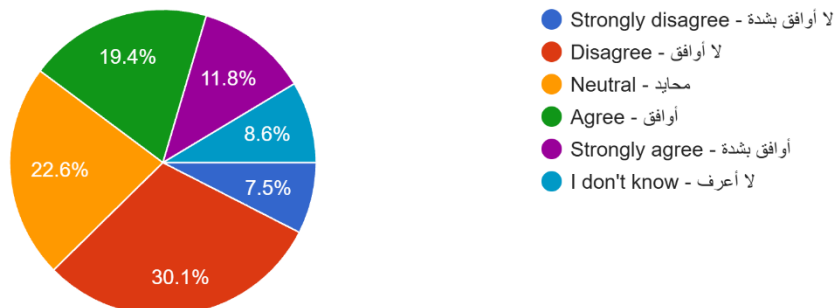


Figure 3 Perception of traditional media's negative framing of Syrian refugees.

Some people consider that traditional media outlets normalize hate crimes and/or hate speech against Syrians by framing incidents of vigilantism in C...نها تصرفات مشروعة. إلى أي درجة توافق أو تعارض هذا الرأي؟ -

93 responses

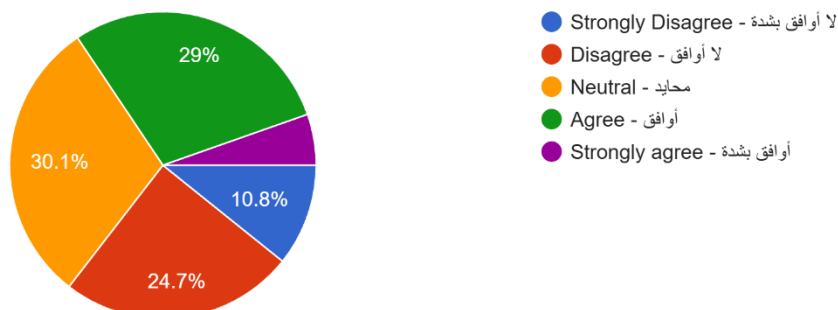


Figure 4 Perception on traditional media's normalization of hate against Syrians.

However, when it came to social media, a slight majority of participants (51.6%) agreed that its use through its various platforms does in fact contribute to the spread or normalization of violence and hate speech against Syrian refugees by sharing and amplifying related content. This is evident in that a slight majority of participants 51.2% claimed to have seen at least one video showing a Syrian individual being mistreated by a civilian, allegedly in response to a crime, with 21.5% even claiming to have seen multiple videos of this sort.

4.2.1.6 Government and Political Blame

Though a majority (57%) agreed that government policy on returning Syrians is just and rightful, only a small minority (17.2%) agreed that government crackdowns (raids, arbitrary arrests, and forced pretrial detention) against Syrian refugees have been effective. This shows a broader agreement with repatriation conceptually but a dissatisfaction with how the Syrian refugee situation has been handled by the state. On the matter of scapegoating, a slight majority of 50.6% agreed the government uses Syrians as scapegoats to deflect accountability for crises since 2019. In terms of political influence external to the government, i.e. Christian political parties, the largest minority of participants; 47.3% agreed Christian parties' statements influenced Christians' perceptions, with the exact same percentage (47.3%) noting these statements encouraged vigilante justice and 43% considering these parties' rhetoric to be considered a form of scapegoating attempting to deflect from their own actions which may cause social backlash.

That said given the fact that 75.3% of respondents were politically unaffiliated while only 24.7% held some sort of political affiliation with the group divided equally between Free Patriotic Movement, Lebanese Forces, and politically affiliated but not disclosing a specific party (all at 7.5%) while the remaining 2.2% identified as followers of the Kataeb Party, there is reason to believe the assumption that Christian Lebanese citizens have lost trust in their political parties and have become disenfranchised by their anti-Syrian rhetoric and lack of effective contributions to Lebanese politics leaving them to prefer a stance of non-political affiliation. It is also key to mention that this lack of political affiliation must be considered alongside the fact that the sample size of this survey is mostly young adults between the age of 21-30 (60.2%) who happened to be highly educated (90.3%) and this may have skewed the results in a way that is slightly unrepresentative of the totality of Christian Lebanese.

4.2.2 Discussion of Themes

4.2.2.1 Securitization and Crime:

The strong association of Syrians with crime, among 81.7% of participants, aligns with past surveys conducted on Lebanese perceptions of Syrians references in earlier sections of this research as well as global refugee securitization trends where host communities perceive refugees as threats due to economic instability. This association was discussed before also in particular reference to Syrian refugees by scholars Vallejo-Martín, Canto, San Martín García, & Perles

Novas in their 2020 work on Syrians which gauged the prejudice of a Spanish sample group towards the refugees in Spain (Prejudice and Feeling of Threat Towards Syrian Refugees: The Moderating Effects of Precarious Employment And Perceived Low Outgroup Morality, 2020)

4.2.2.2 Media's Role in Polarization:

A sizable minority's perception of media's negative framing corroborates theories of media-driven moral panics as discussed by Scholars such as Arnold Hunt in his 1997 article and Charles Krinsky in his 2016 article (Moral panic'and moral language in the media, 1997; Introduction: The moral panic concept, 2016). These perceptions also validate the assertion that social media plays a role in normalizing violence, a concept which was echoed in KI Dr. Jasmin Lilian Diab's discussion on the role of media in spreading hate speech and normalizing hate crimes and has been discussed in depth in studies on digital platforms amplifying xenophobia such as that of Scholar Daniel Tevera (Xenophobia in the Media: Critical Global Perspectives., 2025).

4.2.2.3 Historical Grievances:

The prominence of the memory of the "Syrian occupation" (55.9%) as the third leading cause for negative perceptions of Syrian refugees as mentioned above reflects how historical conflicts perpetuate distrust. This phenomenon was discussed by KI Stephanie Abboud in the interview conducted with her and also by scholars Markova and Gillespie in their 2011 article wherein they noted that persisting distrust is common in post-conflict contexts that have not properly conducted transitional justice (Markova & Gillespie, 2011).

4.2.2.4 Political Exploitation:

The data suggests Lebanese politicians instrumentalize anti-Syrian sentiment, consistent with theories of diversionary blame in fragile states, and particular to this study, the notion of 'immigrant blaming' referenced from Rubenstein's 2018 work (Immigration Blame, 2018, p. 125).

5 Scapegoating Syrians for Political Gain

5.1 Media and Political Party Influence:

It comes as no surprise that media (traditional and social media) plays a key role alongside government statements in influencing the general public's perception. Moderate views held by traditional media channels pertaining to the presence of Syrians have shifted to more polarizing

and divisive rhetorics. Within the Lebanese landscape, Christian TV channels, such as MTV, have been guilty of not presenting the entire narrative by disregarding the Syrian perspective, discussing the importance of prioritizing struggling Lebanese over Syrians, spreading discriminatory rhetoric about Syrians, and providing a platform for Christian politicians and their political parties' agendas to call for breaches of nonrefoulement rendering Christian media and political parties' efforts to instrumentalize the presence of Syrians indivisible. An example of this can be seen in the 2017 statement released by MTV made by Head of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea, wherein he called for the dignified return of Syrians to take place immediately (Geagea: It is time for the Syrian refugees to return to their country with dignity because Syrian areas are now safer than Lebanon, 2017). Geagea's political party hold that the humanitarian approach to Syrian refugees in Lebanon should be based on resettling refugees from the country before anything else, that unregistered refugees are causing security threats, and that the UNHCR is prolonging the return of Syrians on purpose to pressure Lebanon. As corroborated by KI John Chamoun, the LF have been vocal opponents of the UNHCR since 2017 on social media, an act which was considered a taboo at the time according to Chamoun because of its status as a reputable international organization (PASC Working Group, 2024, p. 17; MTV, 2017). According to Chamoun, the UNHCR was refusing to provide complete data on registered refugees to Lebanese authorities, and it failed to maintain the 2003 memorandum⁶⁷ as it states that Lebanon is a transit country not a host country and it mandates a one-year limit for refugees and yet this was not respected. Chamoun also stated 2 key points on the matter. First that the UNHCR overstepped its authority by issuing registration cards for Syrians between 2011-2015 and that this infringed upon Lebanon's sovereignty. Second, that the LF were so adamant and steadfast about addressing the long standing situation that they highlighted the issue by drafting a formal letter sent in June 2024 to the government and the UN after a highly publicized meeting between Samir Geagea, the UN special coordinator for Lebanon, Ghazi El Hajj, Nijar Koukounjian a minister with the LF, and Nijar Koumounjian a minister with the LF In Meerab, the town holding the LF headquarters. Another pertinent and timely instance showcasing the role MTV plays as a Christian-led anti-Syrian establishment can be seen with the recent billboard campaign called "Undo the Damage" in reference to the UN(HCR) that ran in

⁶ In 2003, the Lebanese government signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with the UNHCR, in which Lebanon declared that it was not a country of asylum, but merely a country of transit for those seeking asylum in third countries (Kheshen , 2022).

⁷ The Memorandum: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/3fd9c6a14.pdf>

March 2024, seen in figure 5 below. The campaign was, according to journalists from Megaphone News, produced by a production house called Phenomena and organized as well as funded in association with MTV, NGO World House of Lebanon, and The Chamber Of Commerce Industry And Agriculture Of Beirut And Mount Lebanon (Megaphone News, 2025b). The billboard read *“Lebanon’s population is split into two halves: The first half is made up of Syrian refugees, and the second half is of Lebanese wanting to migrate,”* and *“undo the damage, the Syrian displaced issue needs immediate action before it is too late”* (Ghadir , 2024). Thinkers such as Fiddian-Qasmieh have discussed at great lengths the importance of language and how it is used to humanize or dehumanize certain groups, i.e. play up or play down how ‘deserving’ a community may be of aid or how entitled they may be to human dignity. For example, referring to Syrians’ presence as “damage” is dehumanizing and Syrians as ‘displaced’ rather than ‘refugees’ reduces the notion of responsibility felt towards them. While the use of the word “issue” is straightforward in its derogatory function (Fiddian-Qasmieh, Representations of Displacement Series, 2017). Aside from being platformed themselves, LF members have also put up their own banners with one campaign stating, *“The day will come when we tell the Syrians: gather your things and everything you stole, and leave”* seen in figure 6. The 2018 banner caused widespread debates when a picture of it was posted on twitter featuring a photo of late party founder Bashir Al Gemayel alongside the text who held similar views and made similar statements in the past concerning Palestinians and Syrians. Though this was in the context of the Civil war and the armed groups made up of these nationalities which had infiltrated Lebanon’s borders and not in the context of civilian refugees (Fiddian-Qasmieh, 2018).



Figure 5 UNDO the damage banner: billboard seen in Zouk in the Jbeil governorate on Feb. 28, 2024. (Credit: PHB/L'Orient Today)



Figure 6 Anti-Syrian banner: it reads *“The day will come when we tell the Syrians: gather your things and everything you stole, and leave.”* The image has been widely shared (and debated) on Twitter since 26 April 2018. [Source: Twitter]

The Free Patriotic Movement (Tayyar) has also had their fair share of incitement tactics, with head of the movement Gebran Bassil also regularly inciting anti-Syrian policies and rejecting the principle of nonrefoulement. Such as in May 2024 when the movement’s leader claimed “*we do not want to be racists, we want to be nationalists*” in reference to municipal policies by Batroun to rid the town of all Syrians residing or working within it (L'Orient Today , 2024). But interestingly their latest electoral campaign which was announced by their Head Gebran Bassil in late April 2025 has to be their most flagrantly xenophobic. The campaign in figure 7 directly translates into “*Occupiers masquerading as*

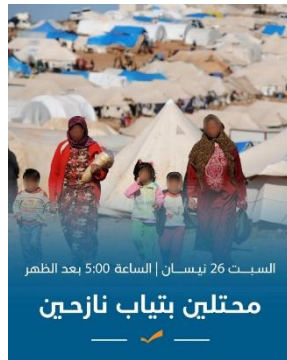


Figure 7: Occupiers masquerading as refugees: all images sourced from Mahmoud Ghazayel, April 28, 2025 Facebook

Refugees” and was released on the 20th anniversary of the exit of the Syrian army from Lebanon marking the end of their decade’s long occupation. Christian voters clearly still prioritize the Syrian Refugee situation in Lebanon as Bassil has decided to adopt the slogan as his main campaign initiative. Evidence of the matters’ popularity among FPM partisans can be seen in that members of the FPM have consistently protested against the continued presence of Syrian refugees. Take for example when FPM members protested on the 19th of April 2023 in front of the European Union delegation headquarters in Beirut on not being able to absorb such a large amount of refugees or almost exactly a year later on the 17th of April 2024 when FPM members protested in front of two public schools; the Jbeil Second Public School and the Amchit Mixed Intermediate Public School siting Syrian refugees’ presence as a driving force for security concerns and rising crimes and requesting they no longer be given a free education. In the former of the two mentioned protests they also mentioned the killing of Pascale Sleiman whose death, though a member of the rival LF Party himself, was seen by FPM members as extremely relevant to their cause as it was the most blatant incident in recent times showcasing a rise in criminality and a lack of security directly attributable to Syrians’ presence (Akhbar Al Saha , 2024c; Syria TV, 2023a).

The “*Occupiers masquerading as Refugees*” campaign was accompanied by an event on the 26th of April in which key officials had speeches. Loosely translating their quotes from Arabic (NNA, 2025; The New Arab , 2025):

- Elie Al Aswad senior party official who was formerly a parliamentarian for the Lebanese Forces claimed: “*towns are festering with the smells and garbage of refugees that do not hold the same values and way of life as we do.*” – “*1/3 of criminals are Syrians* (Megaphone News, 2025a).”
- Naji Hayek, the deputy head of Foreign Affairs in the party claimed: “*there is an occupation on the economic, security, and demographic levels, and if we do not address it, we will regret it as Lebanon’s population will be replaced by another nation’s* (Megaphone News, 2025a).”
- Walid Abi Nader: “*the influx of Syrian refugees is a conspiracy against the Lebanese people meant to weaken and destabilize the nation and sabotage the presidency of Michel Aoun* (Megaphone News, 2025a).”



Figures 8-14: *Occupiers masquerading as refugees: all images sourced from Mahmoud Ghazayel, April 28, 2025, Facebook.*



The remaining photos of the campaign shown above in figures 8-14 represent more examples of how Syrians are occupiers disguised as “refugees”. Commenting on the campaign, FPM VP and KII Martine Kteily tried to justify the party’s actions, discussing how it is clear that perhaps “*some people concerned with human rights and in the field of academia*” might see this campaign and raise certain human rights concerns, or concerns of hate speech or incitement, but at the same time, she claimed, this campaign resonates with the party’s followers who hold the same concerns as its members. That being, Lebanon cannot afford to subsidize these refugees and has openly stated it does not want to continue to have to bear this disproportional responsibility, yet it is forced to continue to do so. This is where the harsh comparison being drawn in the campaign between a refugee and a Syrian occupying military force come from according to her; the fact that in both cases Lebanon was not voluntarily accepting the reality imposed upon it. She states:

“The idea of ‘occupiers in the clothes of refugees’ given the anniversary was to portray a parallelism between the international conspiracy that led to the military Syrian occupation which ended in 2005 and the international conspiracy of the present which can be framed as the demographic Syrian occupation. The idea was to push a strong message, to get people’s attention, and to let our supporters know [that] keeping refugees here and integrating them within Lebanon is a form of occupation and a conspiracy against our country (Martine Kteily, VP FPM, Key Informant Interview in this study).”

That said, for context it should also be noted Kteily and her party considered Syria to be safe as so of 2020 when the state was still under the rule of Dictator Bashar Al Assad, since fighting had ceased in major population centers. Ultimately on the matter Kteily remarked:

“At the advocacy level. I know we could’ve used different wording. we could have maybe not focused on the refugees themselves but on the bigger problem, but in terms of creative work this is the best way they found it possible to convey this message (Martine Kteily, VP FPM, Key Informant Interview in this study).”

All in all, there is undoubtedly evidence that Christian political parties and media outlets have disproportionately pushed anti-Syrian narratives, and this reality has been corroborated through the KII which took place with expert in Migration and Gender Dr. Jasmin Lilian Diab. On Bassil, Diab remarked, *he consistently links Syrians to the labor market collapse, criminality, and infrastructure strain*. She also mentioned that Bassil’s famous 2019 statement that “*we don’t want*

to naturalize them; we want to send them back” reflects a long-standing discourse of repatriation over rights that sums up the Free Patriotic Movement’s stance. That said, on the use of social media and traditional media to spread anti-Syrian sentiment, Diab was quick to note that there is an important distinction that must be made between intent vs. impact: While some of these narratives are explicitly inciteful, others may be framed as “security” or “economic” concerns but contribute indirectly to public hostility and hate speech—particularly on social media platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp. This indirect incitement is particularly the case with the FPM movement’s campaigns, and this is why they were trying to exonerate themselves from responsibility for their actions in inciting hatred as seen in the comments made over by KI FPM VP Martine Kteily. They continue to project their intentions which are noble in their eyes, and neglect to see the xenophobia it fosters. According to Kteily, the FPM’s stance is driven by the fact that on the ground this influx of refugees has been quite politicized. According to her, this politicization has taken place due to the bad management by the government, and the political pressures; both internal and external, from the international community and from internal political players who may want to instrumentalize refugees’ presence to use it as a pressure card on, for example; the Assad regime itself, before it fell, or inside Lebanon against the Shiite community because Syrian refugees in Lebanon are of a Sunni majority (these are the speculations and political analysis of FPM VP Martine Kteily).

➤ FPM and LF: a Shared Paradox of anti-Refugee Rhetoric:

When asked if the campaign shown in figure 7 above was done to rally support and gain popularity as this is a major talking point for Christian voters, FPM VP Martine Kteily exhibits an intriguing paradox in the party’s rhetoric that entails simultaneously claiming that the FPM has not adopted this issue due to popular demand and only for the best interest of Lebanon, yet they are steadfast in their conviction that they were the first and most active political party nationwide working on addressing the situation. Kteily even denied the notion that Christians have particular animosity towards Syrians in comparison to other groups, stating if anything Christians benefit more than other sects from their presence, but did say that Christian political parties have been the most vocal on the matter. This is similar to the instrumentalization described by Rubenstein when discussing the notion of immigrant blaming mentioned in section 2.4, as leaders who use this technique tend to frame it as a national favor rather than what it truly is, a self-serving fear mongering tactic. The

LF have also been seen doing so, but interestingly when asked about the situation, similarly to the KI representing the FPM, LF KI John Chamoun gave the same contradictory statements in succession; first that his party does not do it for votes and second that the LF is proudly the main political party that addressed the Syrian Refugee situation with campaigns since 2011. If instrumentalization was not taking place and it was not a competition between Christian parties to gain popularity by focusing on sensitive subjects that rally the general public like the Syrian crisis as both parties claim, why would they both be so adamant that their own is the political party that has spearheaded the fight against the perceived conspiracy and injustice that is the Syrian refugee presence in their eyes? Why deny the importance of championing the cause in gaining popular support from Christian voters only to continuously claim to be the main political party advocating for it? This logic was corroborated by one of this study's KIs: ALEF Programmes Manager Stephanie Abboud, who claimed that the 2022 elections were a prime example of this instrumentalization during campaigning periods as both parties campaigned under the promise that they would enact mass deportations. It is undeniable that it is an advantageous stance to take and that these two parties remain so steadfast in stressing that they've played the biggest role in criticizing Syrian refugees' presence as a means to gains to popularity. Adding to this logic, even less relevant Christian political parties such as the Marada Party have opposed the Syrian presence with the latter's leader Sleiman Franjeh who prided himself in his families' long standing relationship with the dynastic dictatorial Assad regime, telling Al Jadeed in 2023 that he told Bashar el-Assad Syrian refugees cannot remain in Lebanon (Syria TV, 2023e). This paradox from the KIs from Christian political parties interviewed thus highlighted that what was essentially being created was a cycle of reciprocal radicalization in Christian political party rhetoric. In what can be described as a feedback loop of antagonistic mobilization; political elites strategically deploy xenophobic or anti-immigrant rhetoric to galvanize an already receptive electorate. In turn, the normalization of such discourse reinforces in-group biases among supporters and creates an echo chamber, with this environment then subsequently necessitating even more extreme positioning from said parties. Thus, in what is a cyclical process of escalating rhetoric, parties intensify xenophobic stances to maintain loyalty, while voters, conditioned by this rhetoric, grow more hostile toward Syrian refugees, further incentivizing elites to adopt harder stances. A similar concept to this was discussed by scholars Rabushka & Shepsle in their 1972 work wherein they

termed this process as *ethnic outbidding* (Politics in plural societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability, 1972, p. 139).

5.2 Political Affiliation and Harsher Perceptions:

Based on this logic, it became evident that comparing politically affiliated participants (24.7% collectively) that took part in the survey with non-politically affiliated participants (75.3% majority) would be interesting to test out this theory. In doing so, some key findings became apparent concerning the former holding more hardliner and harsher perceptions than the latter group just as it had been expected.

Take for example the following indicators wherein politically affiliated participants, of the Free Patriotic Movement (7.5%), Kataeb Party (2.2%), Lebanese Forces (7.5%), and those who hold a political affiliation but chose not to specify which party they adhere to (7.5%), were grouped into one collective and compared to non-politically affiliated participants as it pertained to; worsening perceptions of Syrians, whether they deserve equal rights or stricter punishments for crimes compared to Lebanese, if participants mind living in the same region as Syrians, if civilians have the right to enforce the law on Syrians, and finally if they were the main cause for all the turmoil the nation has face since 2019.

➤ **1- On the Matter of Whether or Not Perceptions have Worsened Since 2019**

Table 2: Agreement to the statement: “my perception towards Syrian refugees has worsened since 2019”	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Politically affiliated (23/93)	48% (11)	26% (6)	21.7% (5)	4.3% (1)	0% (0)
Non-politically affiliated (70/93)	13% (9)	37% (26)	36% (25)	10% (7)	4% (3)

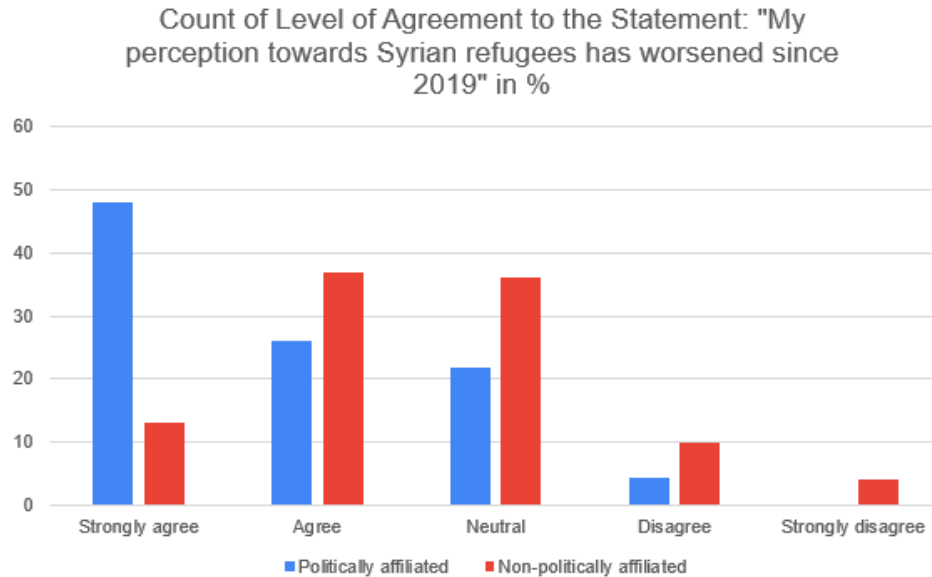


Figure 15: perception bar graph 1

Though as mentioned above, the majority of all participants sampled (55.9%) attested to the fact that their perception of Syrian refugees had worsened since 2019; which may add relevance to a broader nationwide discourse, or present a reality that prevailing rhetoric among Christian Lebanese particularly, has created a growing anti-Syrian rhetoric, those who participated in this survey among them who are politically affiliated have agreed to their perceptions worsening at much higher rates. This is evident in that 74% either agreed or strongly agreed, and among them 48% chose ‘strongly agree’, thus showcasing a much higher propensity to agree with this statement when compared to those who were non-politically affiliated of which though half either agreed or strongly agreed (exactly 50%), a much lower percentage chose to strongly agree (13%). In turn, this adds reason to the idea that the rhetoric of Christian political parties is adding to the intensity of negative perceptions held by Christians who support and prescribe to their rhetoric and that the intentional effort among these parties presented above to conduct campaigns or make statements condemning/ dehumanizing Syrians and calling for their return irrespective of the principle of nonrefoulement have in fact shaped the opinions of their followers leading them to possess harsher and more hardliner perceptions of Syrian refugees.

➤ **2- On the Matter of Whether or not Syrians Deserve Equal Rights to Lebanese in Lebanon:**

Table 3: Agreement to the statement: “some people consider Syrians deserve equal rights in Lebanon as Lebanese”	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Politically affiliated (23/93)	0% (0)	4.4% (1)	8.7% (2)	30.4% (7)	56.5% (13)
Non-politically affiliated (70/93)	8.6% (6)	21.4% (15)	24.3% (17)	31.4% (22)	14.3% (10)

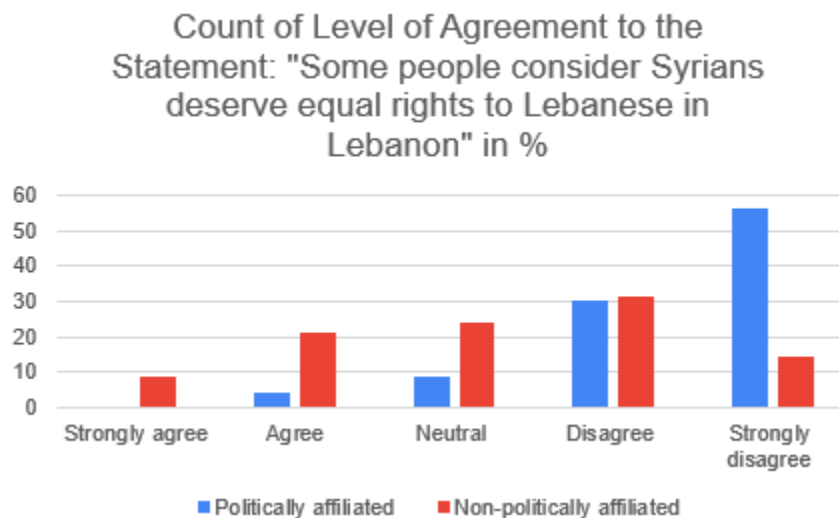


Figure 16: Perception bar graph 2

Figures from this question showcase a clear tendency among politically affiliated individuals to strongly disagree with this notion when compared to non-politically affiliated individuals as a majority of the former (56.5%) did so while only a small segment of the latter (14.3%) felt as strongly about the idea that Syrians should not have equal rights. Another noteworthy finding from this comparison is that 30% of non-politically affiliated individuals strongly agreed or agreed to this notion while only 4.4% (1 participant out of 23) among politically affiliated participants responded in agreement to the idea. That said it is still important to note that this question showed a majority of the entire sample of the survey (55.9%) disagree or strongly disagree. Still, this highlights a harsher perception among politically affiliated individuals towards the concept of Syrians deserving equal rights and a higher likelihood for them to view human rights as conditional.

➤ **3- On the Matter of Whether or not Syrian Nationals, Who Commit Crimes in Lebanon Should Face Stricter Punishment than Lebanese Citizens**

Table 4: Agreement to the statement: “non-nationals, particularly Syrian nationals, who commit crimes in Lebanon, should face stricter punishment than Lebanese citizens”	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Politically affiliated (23/93)	43.47% (10)	30.43% (7)	8.7% (2)	17.4% (4)	0% (0)
Non-politically affiliated (70/93)	14.3% (10)	22.9% (16)	10% (7)	42.8% (30)	10% (7)

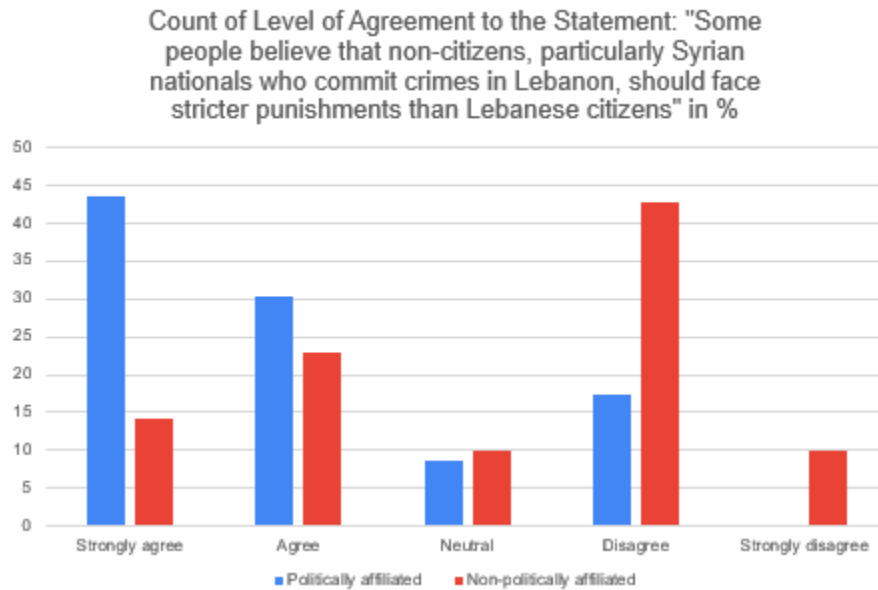


Figure 17: perception bar graph 3

Figures from this question showcase a clear propensity among politically affiliated individuals to strongly agree or agree with this notion when compared to non-politically affiliated individuals as a majority of politically affiliated individuals (73.9%) did so while only a minority of non-politically affiliated individuals (37.2%) followed suit. This highlights a desire among politically affiliated individuals to see Syrians punished more strictly than citizens just for the mere fact that they are Syrian, which adds reason to the broader theme correlating Christian Political Parties’ rhetoric and the villainization of Syrian Refugees.

➤ **4- On The Matter of Whether or Not a Syrians’ Religion or Sect is a Deciding Factor in Christian Lebanese’s Preferences on them living within their Areas of Residence**

Table 5: Agreement to the statement: “I prefer that only Syrian refugees adhering to my own religion or sect reside within the areas I live in”	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Politically affiliated (23/93)	22% (5)	26% (6)	13% (3)	13% (3)	26% (6)
Non-politically affiliated (70/93)	9% (6)	13% (9)	34% (24)	31% (22)	13% (9)

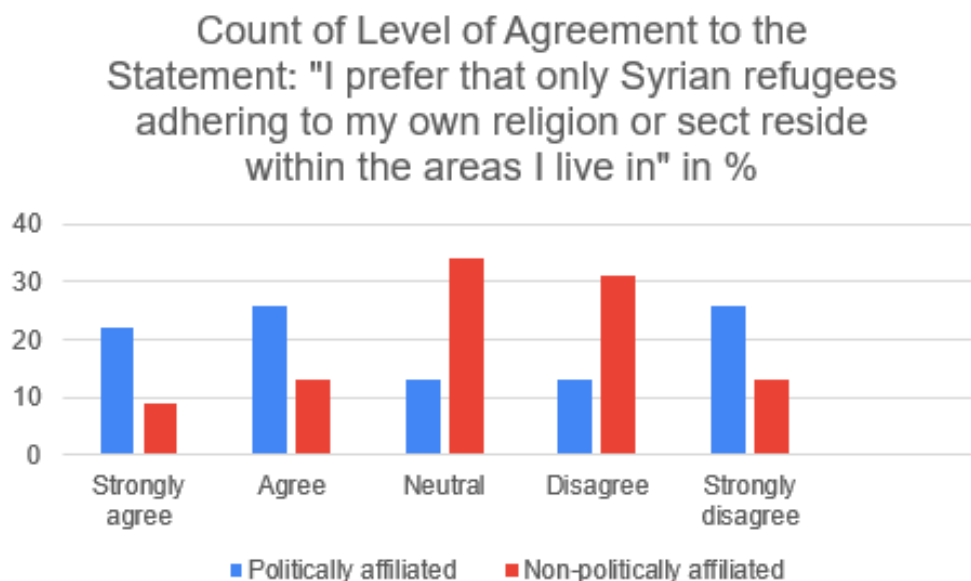


Figure 18: Perception bar graph 4

Figures from this question showcase a much higher likelihood among politically affiliated participants to agree or strongly agree with this statement (48%) as compared to non-politically affiliated participants (22%) of which the largest minority chose to remain neutral (34%). While also showcasing a higher propensity for the latter to disagree or strongly disagree with the statement (39%) as compared to the former (36%). This in turn highlights the fact that politically affiliated participants yet again hold a comparatively more xenophobic perception of Syrians than non-politically affiliated participants, among the sample being studied in this research, given the fact that they would be apprehensive to even allow Syrians of their same religious adherence to live in their regions. This shows that the strong xenophobic perception of politically affiliated individuals divided the sample as to many among them merely the fact that a resident could be Syrian, irrespective of their religion, remains to be an issue. It is also worth noting here that this adds to the notion that political parties stoking fears of demographic replacement among their

followers by warning of the demographic shift or ‘replacement’ that would take place in Lebanon’s societal fabric if Syrians were to become naturalized citizens may be adding to the overall fear of both groups being compared with regards to Syrians residing in their towns and villages. Furthermore, this exact sentiment was corroborated by Key Informant Former Ain Ebel Mayor Imad Lalous and in referenced reports presented throughout this research. Interestingly, the fact that the highest percentage of non-politically affiliated participants chose to be neutral (36%) shows how this question can be seen as either harboring Islamophobic tendencies, if agreeing, or harboring racist tendencies, if disagreeing, which left most of them to chose not to engage in any of the two definitive stances.

➤ **5- On the Matter of Whether or Not Citizens Should Be Allowed to Intervene Until the Authorities Arrive When a Crime is Committed, Particularly in Cases Involving Syrians**

Table 6: Agreement to the statement: “citizens should be able to intervene until the authorities arrive, particularly in cases involving Syrians”	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Politically affiliated (23/93)	21.7% (5)	43.5% (10)	13% (3)	17.5% (4)	4.3% (1)
Non-politically affiliated (70/93)	3% (2)	22.8% (16)	24.3% (17)	31.4% (22)	18.5% (13)

Count of Level of Agreement to the Statement: "Citizens should be able to intervene until the authorities arrive, particularly in cases involving Syrians" in %

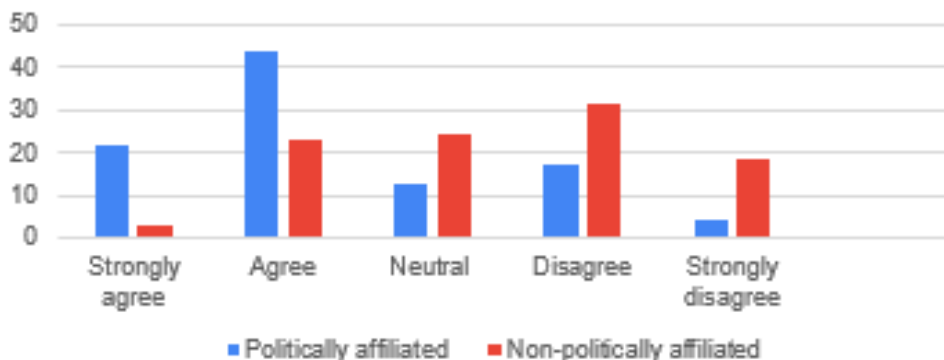


Figure 19: perception bar graph 5

Figures from this question present a much higher likelihood among politically affiliated individuals (65.2% either agreed or strongly agreed) to feel that such acts are permissible, unlike non-politically affiliated individuals who only marginally agreed to this prospect (25.8% either agreed or strongly agreed with only 3% choosing the latter). This is the most blatant distinction among the two groups. As, it shows a higher likelihood for politically affiliated individuals to physically engage with Syrians they perceive to be committing a crime. Politically affiliated individuals viewing this involvement outside the premise of the law to be permissible adds relevance to the claim that, as discussed in section 3.5.3, the plausibility of them committing a hate crime subsequently increases in likelihood (Grabosky, 1992, p. 249). For, the more often this sort of involvement takes place, the more likely it becomes for errors that may be classified as hate crimes to increase. Since, given their lack of experience and the unregulated nature of their involvement, the odds of civilian-based justice seekers to be mistaken about what they may have initially perceived to be a Syrian caught in the act as well as the odds of their actions being unnecessarily aggressive, thus classifying them as hate crimes, naturally increases. This will be showcased in examples of instances of a similar nature taking place in section 5.3 below.

➤ **6- On the Matter of Whether or Not Syrians are to Blame for All the Crises we have Faced Since 2019**

Table 7: Agreement to the statement: “Syrian Refugees are to blame for all the crises we have faced since 2019”	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Politically affiliated (23/93)	4.3% (1)	48% (11)	21.7% (5)	21.7% (5)	4.3% (1)
Non-politically affiliated (70/93)	1.4% (1)	12.9% (9)	24.3% (17)	41.4% (29)	20% (14)

Count of Agreement to the Statement: "Syrians refugees are to blame for all the crises we have faced since 2019" in %

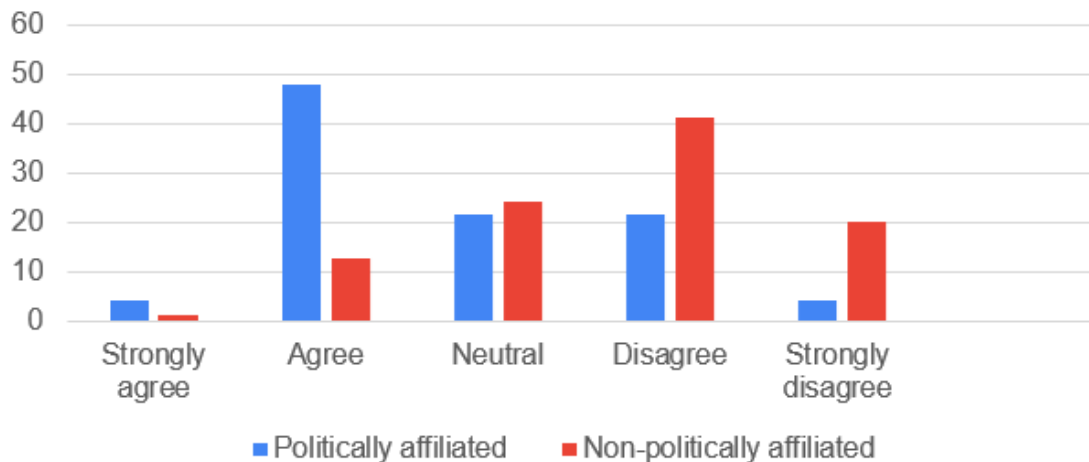


Figure 20: perception bar graph 6

Figures from this question highlight the fact that the majority of politically affiliated participants surveyed in this study (52.3%) agree with the extremely fringe and baseless opinion that Syrian refugees are to blame for all the crises we have experienced since 2019 while only a small minority of 14.3% among non-politically affiliated agreed to this same statement. This once again highlights the now quite clearly evident takeaway from this comparison that those who are influenced by the rhetoric of Christian political parties tend to disproportionately blame Syrian refugees’ presence within the country for the declining state of Lebanon’s economy and internal security.

➤ **Concluding Thoughts on Survey Findings:**

These figures indicate that individuals that follow Christian political parties are more likely to be accepting of harsher practices to be committed against Syrians, in addition to having a more xenophobic approach to perceiving their presence within the country in general. However, as earlier figures have also shown, young educated Lebanese Christians are less likely to follow Christian political parties to begin with and this in itself presents the idea that even if we are witnessing a situation where we have confirmed essentially that Christian political parties are causing their base to become more anti-Syrian which is in turn increasing their likelihood to commit, or find the perpetration of, hate speech and hate crime against Syrians to be normalized, this group remains to be a minority among the general Christian Lebanese public; specially among those between the ages of 21-30 and those who have attained at least an undergraduate degree as these two groups form the majority of the sample surveyed. This signals that though it remains to be a dangerous and discriminatory fringe group that has worsened the overall state of Syrians human rights in Lebanon, hardliners among those who are politically affiliated are themselves a fringe group among politically affiliated Christians, whom furthermore are themselves a minority among Christian Lebanese as a collective. Owing perhaps to the fact that Christian Lebanese have lost faith in their political parties and are not as impacted by their rhetoric. That said, the matter of trust in political parties among Christian Lebanese is not within the scope of this research.

5.3 Individual Instances of Discrimination against Syrians:

Certain instances since the year 2019 which highlight blatant cases of discrimination will be mentioned in chronological order in what follows in order to highlight the growing xenophobic tendencies of citizens, municipalities, and political parties which predominantly belong to the Christian community within Lebanon so as to display the observed escalation in hate crimes and hate speech's intensity and frequency throughout the period being assessed in this study. Some municipality related measures will be mentioned here, before moving into the section particularly about municipalities, as they are seen to be seminal examples that either began trends of municipal measures on a national scale or due to them being particularly noteworthy instances of discrimination.

Beginning in 2019, according to Key Informant of this study Stephanie Abboud, disclosed how Miziara, a Christian village, enforced a curfew, organized a neighborhood watch, and prevented

the entry of Syrians into the village after a certain time starting that year. Many municipalities started taking these measures shortly after the start of the 2011 Syrian Civil war, but this will be discussed with more clarity in the section dedicated to municipalities that follows. Two years later, In May 2021 the first major clash between politically affiliated Christians and Syrians took place. In light of the Syrian presidential elections of 2021, Syrians in buses heading towards the Syrian Embassy were stopped and harassed by groups of Lebanese Forces men. Screenshots from videos that have circulated online via WhatsApp show that one of the videos was even captioned “do not rile up Lebanese Forces, end of story” (translated from Arabic).



Figure 21: this image represents two screenshots taken from videos widely circulated online via WhatsApp from 2021 of which the author is unknown.



Figure 22: Members of Christian Right-Wing Group attack a car holding Syrian voters heading to the Syrian Embassy in Zouk Mosbeh (AP Photo/Hassan Ammar)” (Tawil , 2021).

The reason for the attack, displayed in figures 21 and 22 was said to be LF supporters’ discontent with what they perceived to be a widespread paradox, that these Syrians fled their nation to be freed of the oppressive regime of Bashar Al Assad and yet they were holding pictures of him and playing pro-Assad music loudly while passing through the predominantly Christian town of Zouk Mosbeh. Lebanese Christians who supported the LF party in the area found this to be provocative. The hate crime included the beating of the Syrians through the busses’ windows and chasing those who managed to flee the highway before it was eventually closed by the Internal Security Forces (ISF) due to the extent of the violence. The Security Forces later reopened and deescalated the situation only hours after it had sprung up. LF supporters also inflicted heavy damages on many

vehicles belonging to the minority group in the short window of the altercation (*Reuters, 2021; Tawil, 2021*).

Returning to municipal measures, in 2021, the municipality of Ferzol in the Beqaa, historically known to be inhabited by Catholics, was among the first to reignite the wave of municipal measures that single out Syrians, enforcing curfews on their movements and wage limits on their daily rates. The municipality of Zgharta-Ehden in the north, which is Maronite majority followed suit in June 2021.

While Ras-Baalbeck, a catholic majority town in the Baalbeck-Hermel, and Dekwaneh, a Christian majority town with several denominations, enforced similar measures in November 2021 and August 2023 respectively (ALEF, 2024a, p. 28). On the 10th of November 2021, Ras Baalbek also enforced labor regulations on Syrians, issued in a municipal decree, displayed in figure 23, stating the following:

- The wage of Syrian workers is 40,000 LBP from 8 to 3 pm.
- 10,000 LBP as an hourly rate for Syrian domestic workers.
- No visitors allowed at Syrians' residences within the village at night that are from outside the village.
- Syrians have a 7pm curfew (Syria TV, 2021).



Figure 23: The statement of the circulated Document from Ras Baalbek Municipality retrieved from Syria TV.

On the 20th of May 2022, Christian village Deir El Ahmar's municipality, issued a circular against Syrian workers in the town, seen in figure 24 below, similar to Ras Baalbek's, specifying the wages

they should receive and that they cannot live in Deir El Ahmar and work outside of it or else they will be deported from the village.

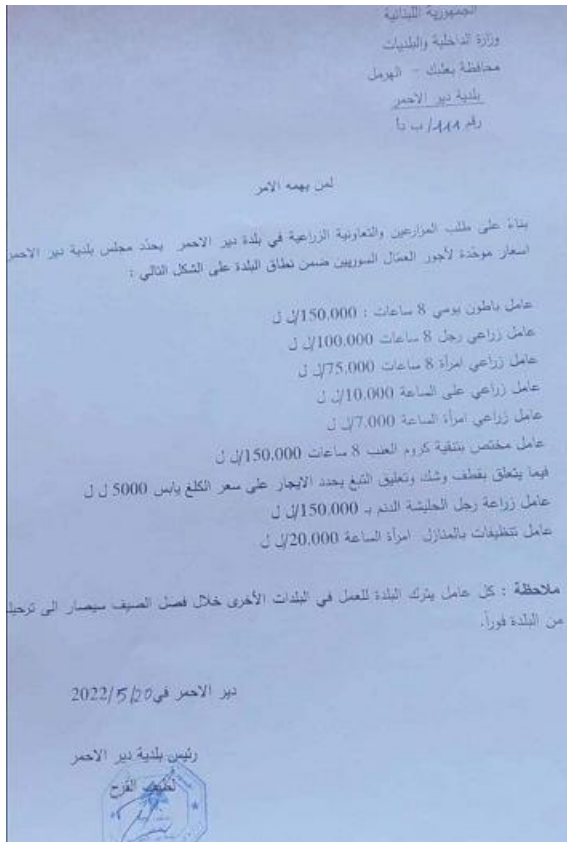


Figure 24: The statement of the circulated Document from Deir El Ahmar Municipality retrieved from Syria TV

Translated to English it says:

- Daily concrete worker 8 hours: 150,000 LBP.
 - Male agricultural worker 8 hours: 100,000 LBP.
 - Female agricultural worker 8 hours: 75 thousand LBP.
 - Male agricultural worker per hour: 10,000 LBP.
 - Female agricultural worker per hour: 7 thousand LBP.
 - Grapevine cleaning worker 8 hours: 150,000 LBP.
 - price per kilogram of dry tobacco: 5,000 LBP.
 - A farmer earns 150,000 LBP per dunum.
 - Female house cleaner, 20,000 LBP per hour
- (Syria TV, 2022).

Returning to more brazenly violent instances, on the 24th September 2023, in a predominantly Christian village, Jal El Dib, 2 municipal police were caught in the act by Carmen Lebbos, a Lebanese actress who filmed the incident and posted it on X, assaulting an underage Syrian male who was rummaging through garbage searching for food or valuables to sell in broad day light (Syria TV, 2023c)⁸. While On the 1st of October 2023, 3 young males identified to be Christian residents of Achrafieh took it upon themselves to brutally attack and beat two Syrian men walking

⁸ Jal El Dib, September 24, 2023, retrieved from X, published by Carmen Lebbos: <https://twitter.com/i/status/1704870004636692734> (By the name of the Jdeideh municipality, dammit!, 2023).

at night, presumably believing them to be in violation of the curfews set by municipalities and thus seeing it fit to take matters into their hands. This incident cannot but be described as a hate crime. According to news outlets the brutal attack did not end even with most neighbors waking up to the sounds of screaming Syrians at 4:30 AM as most just stood by idly watching, until one woman thought to call the police⁹ (Syria TV, 2023b). This example perfectly illustrates Craig and Waldo's description of how sometimes individuals from a community overlooking a hate crime they witness being perpetrated against a certain group is in itself an indicator of how negatively they perceive, or for that matter how little dignity they attach to, the victims of the crime and the group they belong to (Craig & Waldo, 1996). Another altercation took place in Dora on the 6th of October 2023. Starting after demonstrations against the presence of Syrians, from all sects and regions all over Beirut, in support of the narrative that Syrians needed to be deported as soon as possible, went down to the streets in unison in suburbs such as Al Nabaa, Jdeideh, El Sad, Bouchrieh, Bourj Hammoud and Sin El Fil (Syria TV, 2023a; L'Orient Today, 2023a). This event was further corroborated by FPM VP, and KI to this study, Martine Kteily, who claimed the October 7 Attacks of Gaza prevented the situation from escalating further as it completely diverted focus from the incident¹⁰. That same year, Greek Catholic municipal security guard Daniel Shahda brutally attacked and beat a 15-year-old Syrian named Ghayath al-Bacha after falsely accusing him of stealing from his child. Shahda also kidnapped the child to a remote location and extracted a forced video confession for him, displaying an instance where hardliner Christians see it fit to traverse the law and seek justice themselves cases where the perceived perpetrator of a crime is a Syrian (ALEF, 2024b, p. 40; Akhbar Al Saha, 2023b). In 2024 the North governor's announcement that he was starting a campaign to remove 'illegal' Syrian presence, led to the Tayyar movement holding a conference for municipalities in several districts in the first quarter of 2024, with more than 200 municipalities participating predominantly from Koura, Jbeil, and Batroun, for the purpose of equipping them with the necessary support and recommendations to reduce Syrian populations in their towns (L'Orient Today, 2024). The domino effect of this announcement saw

⁹ Achrafieh on the 1st of October 2023, footage retrieved from X, posted by Akhbar Al Saha: <https://x.com/i/status/1708864936430928097> (On Sunday dawn, the first of October, three young men from the #Achrafieh area decided they could roam the area and assault people, 2023a).

¹⁰ Dora October 6th 2023; footage retrieved from X, posted by Lebanon Pulse: <https://x.com/i/status/1710045415788122157> (Motorcycles are roaming the streets in the area and the surrounding neighborhoods, and tension grips, 2023).

several events unfold in a clear pattern. First, the predominantly Christian Al Koura region conducted forced evictions of more than 1500 Syrians as part of a collective campaign which even saw the dismantling of group shelters, most notably a camp in Al Waha complex (Elnashra News , 2024b; Elnashra News, 2024a). Second, Byblos and Kfifan, as well as other Christian majority towns, demanded all unregistered Syrians to leave the area. Third, Towns outside the North governorate started following suit such as Sin El Fil and Bourj Hammoud, wherein Syrians were forced to evacuate their homes and shops within a specific period, and many were violently beaten (Arabic RT, 2024). That said, though most towns enforcing the curfew were Christian-run municipalities, since the initiative was governorate wide, some Muslim towns and cities also partook, notably Minieh (Nourhan, 2023). Fourth, Syrian owned stores from shops to barbers were closed in the Christian town of Anfeh (Nourhan, 2023). Fifth, in Zahle, the General Directorate of Public Security shut down dozens of ‘illegal’ Syrian institutions under orders from the Public Prosecution of Appeal (Nourhan, 2023). Aside from municipality driven discrimination, on April 10th in Bourj Hammoud a group of young Christian men with loose ties to Jnoud El Rab (Soldiers of God), at least as speculated by the Syrians they attacked, rode their bikes in a convoy throughout the streets of the suburb while using loud speakers to project the message that Syrians had only 48 hours to abandon their rental homes or business establishments in the area or else they would face grave consequences (Davis, 2024b). That said this group has also partaken in its own patrolling and night watches of Syrians as well as various acts of harassment and violence against the group. Though the group’s inception story is widely disputed; Jnoud El Rab’s acts began springing up more frequently as of 2020 and they have continuously targeted Syrians as part of their defense of Christian areas from what they describe to be the ‘Islamist peril’ and ‘outsiders’ (El Kari , 2024a; 2024b). That said, April 2024 was the peak of the harassment and widespread abuse faced by Syrians since 2019, triggered by the killing Lebanese Forces High Ranking official Pascale Sleiman mentioned throughout this study, Syrians had to go into complete hiding for almost 2 weeks as they were continuously targeted by Christian Lebanese followers of the LF as well as other hardliner Christians, with some having to flee Christian majority areas during that time (Edwards, 2024; Maucourant Atallah, 2024). In a video posted on X¹¹, an incident from that intense period is shown. The video displays LF members are brutally beating a Syrian, breaking his phone,

¹¹ Sawt Kel Lebnen. 2024. [video]. Supporters of the #Lebanese_Forces party attack Syrian pedestrians. Retrieved from <https://x.com/sawtkellebnen/status/1777424206680014998>

and seemingly taking him away, for an unclear reason as posted on April 8, 2024 by Sawt Kel Lebneen (Supporters of the #Lebanese_Forces party attack Syrian pedestrians, 2024).

Following the event, Syrians in Bourj Hamoud were under intense threats. Christians in the suburb had mobilized and circulars, seen in figure 25, reading (as translated from its original Arabic): "*The incomplete Resolution 1559 cost us lives, but it increased our faith and steadfastness until its full implementation. We began by expelling the Syrian army, and we will continue the resistance until its lackeys, remaining under the guise of 'displacement', are expelled and until the last cartridge is removed from the hands of the Wilayat al-Faqih militia*" were disseminated (Syria TV, 2024). Men from the town were even driving around the areas streets with loudspeakers and a microphone warning all Syrians to leave within 48 hours during the month of April 2024 (Syria TV, 2024). This can be seen in this April 10, 2024, video

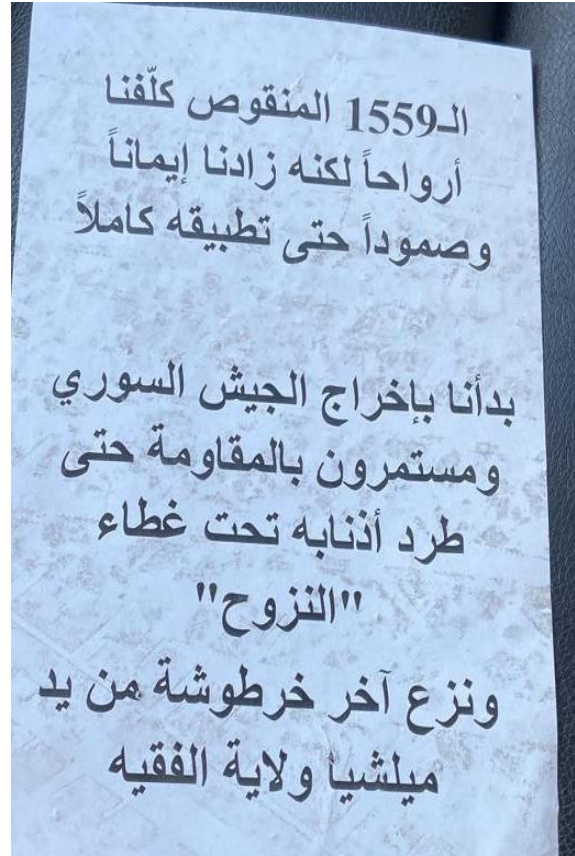


Figure 25: This picture was circulated online and retrieved from Syria TV's website (Syria TV).

retrieved from X¹², posted by Qatiba Yassine (Lebanese give Syrian refugees 48 hours to evacuate homes and commercial establishments in the Bourj Hammoud area of Lebanon., 2024) Jnoud El Rab also struck again on the 16th of that month. As, they attacked Syrian students in Sed El-Bouchrieh in front of a public school, according to Akhbar Al Saha who took note of the incident following one student's father, named Nabil Habibi, who witnessed them and discussed what he saw on Facebook (Akhbar Al Saha, 2024b). Syrians also faced discrimination as it pertained to their access to education. In the predominantly Christian town of Al Qaa for example, Syrian students were not allowed to enroll in the town's private and public schools if they were not

¹² Yassine. 2024. [video]. Lebanese give Syrian refugees 48 hours to evacuate homes and commercial establishments in the Bourj Hammoud area of Lebanon. Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/i/status/1778108382043357450>

registered as refugees and holding a legal status as per a municipal decree issued on the 22nd of July 2024. 3 days later Sin El Fil issues a similar decree, and many more Christian and non-Christian towns followed suit unfairly ridding many Syrian refugees of their indisputable right to education (Akhbar Al Saha, 2023b). These instances collectively display the concept mentioned in section 2.5 of the literature review on *The Correlation Between Hate Speech/Crimes and Negative Perception* as it provides evidence of the argument made by Craig and Waldo in their 1996 work which this thesis applied to the context of Christian Lebanese perceptions of hate crimes and xenophobic displays committed by members of their communities against Syrians (Craig & Waldo, 1996). I.e. that the increase of hate speech and hate crimes perpetrated by members of the community against Syrians is a sign of negative perception not because the act itself represents the negative perception of the perpetrator's group, rather due mostly to the fact that these acts tend to be normalized, encouraged, commended, or overlooked by the rest of their community.

5.4 Municipalities

Having alluded to municipal measures in the above section, in what follows this matter will be the central focus. Since the beginning of the civil war in Syria in 2011, border town Municipalities have had to take responsibility in securing their own borders while municipalities more generally have had to address mounting security risks faced within their communities due to the unregulated arrival of Syrian refugees. Some of the methods used by municipalities have been reported as violating the human rights of Syrians, negatively impacting perceptions nationwide due to the normalization of dehumanizing practices against said refugees. However though Christian towns, as argued below, may be more likely to enact harsher measures, on whether or not they've specifically shaped Christian perceptions to be more negative than other sects in Lebanon, it seems as though they did play any particular role in worsening views, as seen in data from the survey conducted which is mentioned below, mostly due to them being nationwide in application. The reasons for municipalities taking it upon themselves to enforce harsh measures have mainly been due to the government failing to both enact timely national policies in response to the arrival of Syrian refugees and to it being unable to secure the border in order to regulate crossings. Said failures forced a reality upon municipalities wherein they had to take more autonomous action regarding measures to keep tabs on the Syrians residing within their jurisdiction, and this was only reinforced when international actors slowly shifted their focus towards directly working with these

municipalities to circumvent the red-tapism and corruption of the government, a narrative reinforced in the 2015 LCRP¹³ and in the 2016 Syria & the Region Conference in London (Diab , 2023; Boustani, Carpi , Gebara, & Mourad, 2016, pp. 5, 8, 14; Issam Fares Institute , 2020; Mourad , 2021, pp. 1388, 1390). This narrative was corroborated by KI John Chamoun of the Lebanese Forces as he remarked, it was *simply too easy* for Syrians to take the remains of the late Mr. Pascale Sleiman across the border in 2023 when the incident first occurred following his killing. And even thereafter, they faced an extremely informal and lax border control, as it pertained to returning his remains through Quseir, a Lebanese border town. For him this was a sign of a long lasting and much greater issue; informal border crossings in various border towns were a dangerous lawless problem the nation had faced throughout the entire period of the Syrian civil war and even as late as the events of the assassination. Chamoun viewed this as a root cause of what he described to be the ‘*crisis*’ of the Syrian refugee presence in Lebanon. KI Chamoun also corroborated that the LF organized several campaigns and worked with the general security, municipalities, and the Lebanese army to improve security in all municipalities, not only those politically affiliated with the LF. Chamoun claimed that following the Pascale Sleiman Assassination, the LF warned municipalities about the dangers of unregistered refugees and worked with the head of the army and the Minister of Interior and Municipalities, in an initiative which was headed by Strida Geagea herself, former parliamentarian and wife of party head Samir Geagea. According to his insight, the LF’s most successful work in association with municipalities came with the LF initiative with the Bsharre municipalities Union as they were able to start working on checking the status of refugees in its region. While KI Martine Kteily, VP of the FPM, confirmed the FPM had been doing much of the same. She mentioned how the conference, mentioned above, on organizing the influx of Syrian refugees wherein data and literature collected on the status of Syrian refugees was disseminated and governors from all over Lebanon were present had played a similar role. According to her, at the event which took place in December, 2023, they presented success stories and learned lessons about what they had done to address the refugee crisis while also setting recommendations based on the proceedings of the conference regarding what to do as the next step (FPM Official Website , 2023). But aside from municipal measures adopted due to Christian political party interference, municipalities also took independent measures based on safety precautions which catalyzed a nationwide trend. According to academics like Mourad, the first

¹³ 2015 Lebanon Crisis Response Plan: <https://data.unhcr.org/en/documents/details/42701>

municipalities to enforce anti-Syrian municipal measures were in Mount Lebanon, springing shortly after the start of the Syrian war in 2011, though Mourad does claim the spread of these measures nationwide came soon thereafter in 2013. Measures like curfews, restrictions of movement, specifying geographical boundaries and permitted localities, as well as banners warning Syrians of these measures, and the necessity to abide by them, sprung up across Lebanon in the decade that followed. It is interesting to note, in 2013, before governorates like the north and Nabatiyeh began running governorate wide cooperative measures to control the presence of Syrians in all their villages which had government foresight, figures such as Minister of Interior and Municipalities Marwan Charbel referred to the measures as illegal (Mourad , 2021, p. 1390). Of the many measures adopted, a study conducted by REACH/UNOCHA in collaboration with UNICEF among 252 communities, found that curfews were the most common municipal guideline. They usually lasted from between 7-8 pm to 6 am and if Syrians wanted to leave during this time, they had to contact police or municipal workers to request permission (Mourad , 2021, p. 1390). By 2016, 135 municipal curfews had been adopted according to that same report, while figures from a January 2020 report conducted by the UNHCR titled “Measures Impacting Refugees in Lebanon: Curfews January 2020” found that number to have risen to 328 municipalities (Mourad , 2021, p. 1390). The UNHCR report also identified that, at the time of their study, 551,757 refugees were affected by these measures (UNHCR, 2020). And that, interestingly, those enforcing curfews were municipal police 36% of the time, a task which may supersede the jurisdiction of their job depending on their methods of implementation as it may become the duty of the Lebanese Armed Forces or other security branches in certain cases. For, the ISF have jurisdiction nationwide and are mandated to assist local municipal police as per the law. Local taskforces are only responsible and permitted to be established for the purpose of ensuring security in their respective jurisdictions (Government of Lebanon, Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 1977). However, the law does not adequately delineate the respective roles of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) and that of municipalities, adding confusion as to where this assistance should take place and where local officials can rightfully handle a situation. For this reason, the Minister of Interior and Municipalities in 2013 confirmed that municipalities cannot conduct security measures related to Syrian refugees without first coordinating with the MoIM, and its ISF. Failing to do so is in fact illegal, yet as discussed in section 5.3 unregulated municipal discriminatory measures continue to be the norm and remain

largely unaccounted for. This existence outside of the jurisdiction of the law in principle has perhaps led to harsher practices and methods of dealing with Syrians due to the fact that no accountability needs to be taken and no supervision or foresight is taking place on a consistent basis. Fleming-Farell agrees with this notion stating that there is a direct correlation between the prevalence of “*threats of forced evictions, prolonged or arbitrary detention, lack of due process, cruel inhuman or degrading treatment, and discriminatory practices*” and the lack of consequences for municipalities cracking down on Syrians while compromising their human rights (Fleming-Farell, 2013). In terms of why these measures have been taken, the UNHCR report’s surveying of Mayors in their 2020 report found that security related considerations topped the list of concerns of municipal officials with 27%, while *discrimination based on nationality or religion* and *tensions with host community* tied in 2nd place at 13% (UNHCR, 2020). The same UNHCR report from 2020 also uncovered that political groups and ‘unknown’ came in at 16 and 15% respectively. This adds to the narrative that these measures are not regulated, and thus more susceptible to breaches of human rights, and it also presents the idea that political groups instrumentalize the refugee situation as a means to gain influence and power at the local municipal level as well (UNHCR Measures Impacting Refugees in Lebanon Curfews). According to Human Rights Watch, the most concerning practice is the curfew on Syrian nationals imposed by a number of municipalities across the country. Confiscation of IDs from refugees by municipalities is also a highly concerning practice. It has been reported that municipalities confiscate IDs of Syrians that do not comply with curfews for a few days in some areas, and the creation of local vigilante groups to enforce curfews, as mentioned throughout, only exacerbates concerns about abuses (HRW, 2014). These measures were even enforced in regions as far south as Ain Ebel, a remote Christian village with less than 3000 annual inhabitants on the southern border which never really had a Syrian refugee issue or too large of a Syrian presence; only 2-3 families at their peak in 2022 whom all left within weeks of the Hezb-Israel war starting, according to KI Former Mayor of Ain Ebel Imad Lalous who left office in May 2025. For, as corroborated by Lalous, even he felt the need to enforce the measure that Syrians remain in houses after 8 in the evening and this was since the year 2016, but this was the only measure enforced and it was not enforced based on a specific perceived threat, rather as a general safety precaution following suit with other municipalities. When asked about perception of Syrians among his town’s villagers, Lalous also mentioned how some in the village were scared of **religious demographic threats** as it pertained to Syrians’

residence within the village, due to them not being Christian. *“They were all well treated in Ain Ebel, but of course since this is a Christian village there were some people objecting the presence of non-Christians in the village”* Lalous claimed. This corroborates the demographic fears felt by Christians regarding Syrians potential permanent residency in Lebanon which is among the major causes found in the survey and in the literature review, proving it is persistent even in more far-out Christian towns in Lebanon that are not within the Christian-concentrated Mount Lebanon Region. A report conducted by ALEF in March 2015 analyzing the villages of Jezzine and Roum, claimed that the villagers in Jezzine had the same fears. It claimed that residents of the town did not want Syrians to be comfortable and settled enough in their village out of fears that their settlements will become permanent and ultimately alter the demographics of the town leading to a desire for participation in its decision making process; as Syrians numbered at around 1000 (ALEF, 2015). That said, there is always outliers, Mazraat El Sayed, a Maronite-Shia village in the stronghold of Christian influence, Keserwen-Jbeil Governorate, for example has not experienced any Syrian tensions, only has a few Syrian families, and the only measures they placed were during the Covid-119 pandemic, i.e. curfews and regulations not exclusive to Syrians. Even though they are within a region where the wide majority of villages were enforcing curfews as evident in the UNHCR’s 2020 report (UNHCR Measures Impacting Refugees in Lebanon Curfews). This is because, according to current Mayor Serge Gharios who was briefly interviewed as a KI for this research and worked at the municipality during the previous term so was witness to all matters pertaining to Syrian measures, *“there was never a necessity to address any threats relating to Syrian refugees, the matter of demography never became anything of a serious discussion, and no crimes, physical altercations, thefts, or notable incidents took place wherein Syrians were the culprits.”* It is interesting to note that the mayor mentioned how the demographics of the town, being 900 Shiite families and 970 Maronite families, led villagers to make the decision to not involve political partisanship in the village so as to not add more confusion and tension, focusing instead on local fiefdoms and heads of dynastic political families such as Mustafa Al Hussein among Shias and Fares Sead among Maronites. As such, even though the usual political parties are supported among each sect, they have not been able to infiltrate the municipality and with that their agendas have not been enforced, and as a result, Syrians have not been instrumentalized in the villages’ political scene. The mayor said it is clear that Syrians are dehumanized by political parties of all sects and specially Christians and that he agrees with the theory that there is potential reason to believe non-

partisanship municipally is, alongside the fact that they have a very insignificant Syrian presence, most likely the reason why the situation in Mazraat El Sayed has been handled so well. When asked about the potential of common demographic fears felt by both Shia and Christians in Lebanon given the majority sect of Syrians in Lebanon being Sunni, and how that could hypothetically rile up the village behind a common demographic fear catalyzing unified racism towards Syrians, Gharios said this may be the case outside of Mazraat El Sayed but political parties that could capitalize on this narrative within the village do not do this due to the lack of importance the Syrian matter is given by the town's residence. That said, as a general observation, KI Dr. Jasmin Lilian Diab, highlights that there is reason to believe municipal-level restrictions tend to be harsher in Christian areas as field observations and reporting suggest. According to her, Christian municipalities have often been among the first to adopt harsh restrictions on Syrians and curfews are more frequently imposed and strictly enforced in Christian villages (e.g., areas in Mount Lebanon, Zahle, Jezzine) where municipal councils are politically aligned with parties like the LF or FPM. Furthermore, she attests to the fact that labor restrictions and rental bans are more common in these areas. She mentions Keserwan and Zahle as examples, as within them, Syrian men are often not allowed to rent homes independently, work outside of agriculture or construction, or circulate at night. She even stated that compared to Shia-majority areas (e.g., Nabatieh, Baalbek), where Syrians may be integrated into Hezbollah's support network, Christian areas show lower tolerance and less informal protection. But comparing sects' perception and treatment of Syrians is not the objective of this research, though it may be an intriguing topic to address in the future. Returning to the topic, Diab establishes the idea that Christian members of municipal councils tend to enforce harsher municipal measures against Syrians the more said officials are associated with the LF and/or FPM corroborating the findings that the more these two parties have a say in a municipal council's internal decision making the more restrictive measures are likely to get. Integrating the survey findings on Municipalities from this study presents how, in terms of how the surveyed sample viewed municipalities' anti-Syrian measures, a 55.9% majority agreed with the belief that local municipalities enforcing wage limits on Syrians and closing down Syrian owned businesses is justified. While regarding measures such a curfew as a way to maintain safety, a 57% majority agreed that they were justified, though this figure dropped to 45.2% when the question concerned whether this measure was effective. This showcases a strong fear among Lebanese Christians that Syrians causing a safety risk may require more than just a curfew while

also presenting a potential indicator of a lack of trust in their local officials' ability to keep tabs on their Syrian refugee populations. Adding to this narrative of a lack of complete trust in the effectiveness of local officials; a large majority of surveyed Christians (64.5%) were in favor of the formation of civilian patrolling task forces, i.e. civilian neighborhood watch or night watch that can supplement local municipal police forces, to guarantee safety, viewing it as an effective measure.

With all the above said, the tendency for harsher measures enforced in Christian Lebanese towns have proven to be more of an indicator of the increased xenophobia among Christian communities in Lebanon towards Syrians within their vicinities, rather than a catalyst for their increasingly hostile perception. Whereas, when it comes to nationwide perceptions, it may be argued that anti-Syrian municipal measures, viewed more generally, which have been enacted in villages across the country are, rather than being an indicator of perceptions, a catalyst for worsening perception. As, they normalize the mistreatment and villainization of Syrians by unfairly insinuating that any Syrians' presence in any given town is a threat to regional security, given how the discourse behind these measures frame Syrians under the pretext of a faulty generalization.

5.5 The Remaining Emergent Factors Impacting Christian Lebanese Perceptions of Syrians:

This research has established that Christians, though quite clearly living in a nation where perceptions of Syrians is negative on a national level amongst all citizens, have a particularly noteworthy negative perception on the matter among the nation's different religious groups that is worth looking into more deeply as an isolated phenomenon. KI Dr. Diab corroborates this broader ethos, as she confirms that, while anti-Syrian sentiment is pervasive across Lebanese society, secondary sources suggest that Christian communities, predominantly Maronites and other conservative Christian enclaves, harbor distinctively sharper perceptions of a threat from these refugees' prolonged presence.

5.5.1 Past Discourses that have Remained to be Relevant:

Before describing the new factors uncovered, a final rundown of the persisting factors that have been substantiated by this study will be enumerated as corroborated by the KI interviews with Dr. Diab, KI Stephanie Abboud, and as concluded from presented findings. Firstly, the already

mentioned historical memory of the Syrian occupation (1990–2005): Christians often associate this period with repression, assassinations (e.g., Gebran Tueni, Samir Kassir), and the erosion of their political agency. On this KI Abboud, noted that the lack of a proper transitional justice process consisting of reparations for the crimes committed by the occupation and finding of the missing and disappeared, led to the association between Syrian refugees in the present and the occupying Syrian Army from the past to fester and stand the test of time, reemerging as an associative trigger as seen through the FPM’s campaign associating Syrian refugees today with ‘occupiers’ mentioned in section 5.1. She notes that military service being mandatory for all Syrians at the time of the occupation has led many Lebanese to consider it likely that a refugee today was himself a militant in that same regime or could have been the son of those militants of the Assad Regime or a relative of them; which leaves a negative memory in the minds of all Lebanese and reduces their remorse for incumbent refugees. Second, the widely regarded factor of Demographic anxieties: to close the topic; Christians perceive themselves as a shrinking minority. The arrival of a largely Sunni Syrian population is seen not only as an existential threat, but also as a total disruption of Lebanon’s delicate sectarian balance. That said, in terms of the reasoning behind these fears, they have been exacerbated throughout the years by the economic crisis leading to Christian migration and the slow decline in Christian population growth relative to other sects according to KI Dr. Diab. Third, the scapegoating of refugees by Christian leaders: According to KI Dr. Diab, Christian leaders’ channel national discontent toward refugees to deflect attention from elite failure; specially as it pertains to the economic mismanagement and corruption. Bringing us to the fourth causation, the worsening economy ushering in an unemployment crisis: For KI Diab, Lebanese widely believe that economic competition in skilled labor sectors (not just construction) is increasing unemployment and that it is driven by Syrians accepting lower average wages than their Lebanese competition. A large segments of Christians also associate this with the Christian brain-drain taking place, as they believe this phenomenon to have been exacerbated by the entry of Syrian Refugees. Fifth, government inaction leading to animosity towards Syrians: KI Abboud corroborates that the government’s belated and lackluster response to the entry of Syrian refugees into Lebanon led to the Lebanese people developing concerns that are valid and without addressing these concerns the government only aggravated people’s xenophobic tendencies, i.e. making Lebanese people more frustrated about the situation may have evolved into a direct hatred of Syrians. KI Abboud discusses a cycle that can be observed. This cycle begins with inaction and a lack of policy making

creating a vacuum of information which is then fed by misinformation on Syrians. As, this vacuum is then observed by politicians to be an environment conducive to foster their electoral ambitions since it allows them to appeal to a desperate voter base. So, they chose to reinforce the emergent misinformation with their rhetoric. This advantageous environment then plays a role in eventually reinstating them in office where they proceed to do nothing on the issue yet again and the cycle continues. The sixth persisting factor is propaganda and false information. As seen in section 5.1. on Media and Political Parties; anti-Syrian rhetoric has been spreading on both traditional and social media platforms. While the final factor may be considered the widely discussed Municipal measures. These factors are as important as the novel discourses to be discussed in what follows in terms of their impact, with the only difference being that they are more widely recognized and acknowledged among the general public.

5.5.2 Novel Discourses on Christian perceptions unfolding from this Research:

These concepts were uncovered during this research and are less widely regarded as the previous section. First, the factor of geographic separation which, based on the logic of KI Diab, ascertains that unlike other sects, some Christian areas (especially in the North and Mount Lebanon) were relatively insulated from direct contact with large Syrian refugee populations prior to the crisis. Their rapid influx post-2011 thus created sharper feelings of "invasion" or "cultural intrusion". This sentiment was echoed by KI Abboud, as she viewed the geographical location of an individual as being more directly linked to whether or not abuses to Syrians is normalized to them. She describes how the extent to which citizens' perceptions are negative often aligns with the intensity of their local governorates' measures. Abboud illustrated this by saying the citizens of Sin El Fil for example, a municipality near Beirut, have witnessed strict measures against Syrians that may add to the overall threshold of what they deem as acceptable acts to be carried out against Syrian communities while impacting how much of a threat they perceive Syrians to be. Second, the observation that Christians are ideologically isolated. Also mentioned by KI Dr. Diab, for her, some Christian political movements, such as the LF and the FPM, have constructed narratives of Christian victimhood that draw from both the Civil War and Syrian occupation, making the Syrian presence in Lebanon resonate differently among them than among other sects with more pragmatic and less emotion-based perceptions made in an echo chamber, in turn exacerbating hatred. Third, the impact of the church's discourse, on this matter KI Dr. Diab corroborated that Christian clerics

echo replacement theory—adjacent rhetoric, invoking the need to "*protect our land and community.*" For example, Bshara El Rai, Lebanon's patriarch, has made anti-Syrian comments based in demographic fears and the '*draining of resources*' (Davies, 2023). The fourth novel concept concluded to be contributing to the normalization of anti-Syrian rhetoric is the application of the theory of a *hatred of convenience* to the context of Christian hatred of Syrians in Lebanon (Levy, Goldstein, & Phyllis, 1939). Colloquially speaking, this is applicable to the government by saying officials within it are applying the logic that; since Syrians are already an alienated group with various negative attributes associated to them previously amongst the general public, it is easier to build off of preexisting grievances and blame Syrians than it is to do anything else as a means of deflection. For KI Diab, political elites use Syrians as a strategic distraction. By rallying around refugee "threats," politicians deflect blame for corruption, economic collapse, and mismanagement. This validates the global phenomenon of "immigrant blaming mentioned by Rubenstein and discussed in section 2.4 (Rubenstein, 2018, p. 125). KI Abboud adds to this remarking that she considers politicians in Lebanon to be using Syrian refugees as a '*barrier to prevent politicians from being held accountable*' – she refers to it as a form of narrative manipulation that is convenient and centered around fear mongering and misinformation. However, KI Diab adds that this *hatred of convenience* is not purely instrumental (Levy, Goldstein, & Phyllis, 1939). She highlights how over time, it becomes emotionalized and racialized, producing long-term socio-political exclusion. What begins as a tactic of political deflection solidifies into a social norm—normalizing discrimination at the municipal, media, and interpersonal levels. When taken into account alongside the idea that Christians already had a plethora of possible causes to discriminate against Syrians before the national trend of scapegoating the refugee group began, it is clear that Christians may be more susceptible to villainizing Syrians in the wake of this politicized scapegoating and as such they are the most likely sectarian group within the nation to completely normalize a hatred against the group without any inhibitions. Yet, findings mentioned above from the survey show that Christian Lebanese surveyed within this study are aware of this instrumentalization with 43% considering Christian political parties' rhetoric to be considered a form of scapegoating attempting to deflect from their own actions which may cause social backlash, while a slight majority of 50.6% agreed the government uses Syrians as scapegoats to deflect accountability for crises since 2019. It is also worth noting that KI Diab also mentioned how this *hatred of convenience* (Levy, Goldstein, & Phyllis, 1939)

can also be interpreted as being convenient for the public as well in a way. This is because Syrians have become an accessible outlet for anger and despair in a country where political accountability is absent. Though upon assessing the correlation between being able to hold elected officials accountable and having harsher perceptions of Syrian refugees from cross-tabulating corresponding questions to this correlation from the survey, this association proved to be weak with no real evidence of the impact of not being able to hold said officials accountable and having more generally xenophobic perceptions as was the case with the factor of political affiliation. That said, as seen with the fifth novel take, the spread of misinformation has in fact proven to play a key role in radicalizing certain segments of the Christian population within Lebanon as it pertains to their xenophobia towards Syrians. KI Abboud discussed how a major reason for discrimination being normalized is that certain individuals, often from the older generations, who are less experienced in making sure of the credibility of the sources they are sharing, from reposting social media posts to circulating information through word of mouth that they read online, are more likely to partake in the spread of misinformation. Whether it is from bias traditional media or uncredible social media sources, many in Lebanon do not fact check, and though it is prevalent among older generations, it is an intergenerational issue. This lack of awareness is creating an environment that is the perfect breeding ground for discriminatory rhetoric. Politicians in Lebanon, most often of Christian political parties, seem to leverage misinformation and exaggerated figures related to Syrian refugees. KI Abboud corroborates this by noting that politicians are specially to blame for the spread of misinformation since they base their success on leveraging popular opinion and rallying their support groups, leading to them being less apprehensive to compromise the truth in pursuit of their end goals. That said, this was conceptually difficult to prove using the survey data due to the fact that politicians were not surveyed. Moving on to the sixth concept to be discussed, it was clear through the KI interviews with Christian political party representatives Martine Kteily and John Chamoun, that perception of Christians vis-à-vis Lebanon's role hosting Refugees has contributed to worsening perceptions of the group towards Syrian refugees. Many Christians do not see Lebanon as a host state but rather a transit state and maintaining this image has always been one of the central themes of Christian political parties in Lebanon, especially the LF. According to KI John Chamoun, of the LF, the Memorandum of understanding of 2003¹⁴ between the Lebanese Government and the UNHCR, mentioned above, is used by party head Samir Geagea

¹⁴ The Memorandum <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/legacy-pdf/4b05121f9.pdf>

as a foundational reference as it pertains to the grievances the party holds with Lebanon's role throughout the Syrian war hosting refugees and as such this discrepancy in understanding Lebanon's role has shaped the perception of the party's followers and thus altered how they view Syrian refugees' presence in general. This is because within it, Lebanon's role is designated as a transit state rather than a permanent host for Refugees given its economic and resource-based constraints and though this role may have evolved with time, LF members still reject any designations other than this one to this day. Lastly, the notion that wealth drives integration was addressed in the interview with KI Martine Kteily, VP of the FMP, and this provides an alternative perspective to the predominant discourse on the matter. According to KI Kteily of the FPM, if anything religious identity does not drive how Christians perceive Syrian Refugees in Lebanon, wealth does. She would not go as far as negating one in favor of the other, but she does bring up an interesting notion that seems to have some basis in it. According to her, historically Syrian Christians were usually wealthier and more educated per capita as they resided primarily in major population centers rather than rural areas. For this reason, she attests, Lebanese Christians may feel more inclined to accept their integration as opposed to Syrian refugees belonging to other religions for this reason. She added to this argument by saying wealthy families in Lebanon and Syria have long had ties irrespective of their religion and that wealth, status, and class based commonalities likely supersede religion in importance when it comes to how Christian Lebanese perceive Syrians. For her, wealthy Syrians following 2011 were welcomed very well by the wealthy social classes in Lebanon. While on the other hand, poorer Syrians having to integrate into poorer societies face trouble because they are naturally competing over the limited resources and jobs with locals in these regions and since they are seen as being of a lower social class.

All in all, the negative perceptions of Christian Lebanese citizens towards Syrians are just as driven by the reasons mentioned in this section as they are by the reasons mentioned in section 5.5.1 which preceded it, the only difference being these reasons may be less widely regarded and the research and data collection of this study allowed them to be exposed and addressed with more clarity.

6 Conclusion and Summary

In response to the initial research question of this thesis which was "how has the use of Syrian refugees as a scapegoat in the wake of heightened socioeconomic and political stresses throughout

the past six years led to Lebanese Christians' perceptions towards Syrians worsening, and hate speech as well as hate crimes perpetrated by the former against the latter increasing?" This thesis has proven that this has taken place by the instrumentalization of the Syrian refugee situation at the hands of Christian political parties who exacerbated preexisting fears among their Christian party members to maintain their relevance as the "sole protectors" of the interests of Christians in this nation which they claimed were under attack by the threat of demographic erasure due to the continued presence of Syrians. A continued presence they asserted was due to international state and nonstate actors conspiring to keep Syrian refugees in Lebanon so as to not have to host them within their own nations, especially Europe. Christian political parties, though only popular among a minority of Christians in Lebanon based on the surveyed participants selected in this study, built upon fears which stemmed from several key factors. First, the fact that the % Christians represent of the Lebanese population has in fact dwindled at an unprecedented rate. Second, the notion that the Syrian occupation, which ended in 2005, did leave unresolved trauma among Christian Lebanese citizens which negatively impacted their perspective of Syrians in general. And finally, the fact that government mismanagement pertaining to registering refugees, a growing widely debunked sentiment that rising crime rates between 2019 and 2022 were catalyzed by the presence of Syrians, and anti-Syrian measures by municipalities, all converged to create the widespread narrative that Syrians are a danger to the Lebanese society.

As, this led to two manifestations of hatred to emerge. First, hate crimes as seen with the multiple instances wherein the following groups: supporters of Christian political parties such as the LF, religious extremists such as Jnoud El Rab, and Christian municipality organized civilian vigilante groups/ night watch groups/ municipal police forces such as in Bourj Hammoud, have committed crimes against Syrians simply as a factor of their nationality. And second, hate speech, which grew in prevalence among Christians due to an environment within Christian communities wherein Christian media outlets like MTV and Christian political parties like the FPM used propaganda to frame the Syrian presence as a crisis and persistently normalized the villainization of Syrians by disproportionately blaming them for the economic and security related crises faced in Lebanon from 2019 to 2025.

All things considered, Lebanese Christians' perceptions of Syrians are predominantly negative, driven by security fears, economic stress, and historical grievances, exacerbated by orchestrated

propagandization at the hands of Christian political parties who seek to use the Syrian presence as a scapegoat by way of the media and through directly impacting their supporters. But where this becomes dangerous is that the excessive extent to which this dehumanizing rhetoric by Christian political parties has been used has resulted in negative perceptions to manifest as hostility (hate crimes and hate speech) which has negatively impacted the lives and overall safety of Syrians in Lebanon in turn completely disregarding their human rights. Now that we have figured out the roots of Christian xenophobia towards Syrians, it is clear that these findings are relevant since they contribute to uncovering the possible causes for the broader struggles of Syrian refugees in Lebanon by explaining one factor that may have negatively impacted their lived experiences in the country.

That said, these findings are also interesting since they provide one potential reason as to why the majority of Christian Lebanese citizens have become disenfranchised with the political parties which represent them, i.e. their continued desire to use the instrumentalization of social issues, rather than to create tangible improvements in the daily lives of citizens, to maintain relevancy and political dominance. In light of these core insights, it would be quite interesting to compare the Syrian rhetoric of the two major Christian political parties discussed in this study with related rhetoric produced by political parties of other sects considering how important the role of Christian political parties' rhetoric proved to be on segments of the Lebanese Christian subset of the broader society who harbor a mentality which has normalized hate crimes and hate speech against Syrians. As, producing this comparative analysis was not possible given the scope of this research.

All in all, this analysis underscores yet another illustration of the intersection between socio-political fragility and refugee-host dynamics in the Middle East, contributing to literature on how forced migration and sectarianism can lead to discrimination and the deterioration of a social groups' human rights.

Recommendations

Some recommendations to address this situation and help safeguard the human rights of Syrians and prevent future incidents of hate crimes and hate speech or their normalization any further among Christian Lebanese may include:

- NGO or INGO led media literacy programs to counter hate speech and misinformation by increasing awareness on the potential for the instrumentalization of xenophobic rhetoric. This effort would allow citizens, whom this survey already proved are somewhat aware, to become even more conscious of these tactics and as such less susceptible to manipulation by way of them.
- The Lebanese Government (Gol) should enact economic policies addressing host community grievances and job scarcity in order to diffuse tensions related to perceived oversaturation of the labor market.
- INGOs, NGOs, and the Gol should promote dialogue initiatives between Syrians and Lebanese to address current grievances starting with small-scale communal initiatives while also striving to seriously consider the enactment of a formal transitional justice process to address historical tensions, as it is never too late for such processes to take place.
- The Gol should develop a clear state-led plan for repatriation that abides by international law and includes concrete timelines that citizens can feel reassured by. Since, this would be in the best interest of the refugees themselves, who are experiencing hardships, and for Lebanon as a nation, as it has always unanimously been viewed by foreign and local actors alike as a state ill-equipped to feasibly host as large a refugee population as it has.

7 References

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8 Appendices

8.1 Key Informant Interviews

8.1.1 Municipalities

8.1.1.1. Ain Ebel Former Mayor Imad Lalous

1. Has Ain Ebel implemented any security measures targeting Syrians? If yes, when was the first time?

In Ain Ebel we never really had a Syrian refugee issue or two large of a Syrian presence. Only 2-3 families at a time and they all left within weeks of the Hezb-Israel war starting, and none have returned. The number of Syrians in Ain Ebel was always under control, they were all families and always abided by the rules. The first and only security measure was to remain in houses after 8 in the evening and this was since the year 2016.

2. Please describe all measures taken by Ain Ebel's municipality regarding Syrians since as early back as you can recall (2019 as a minimum starting point please).

We always stressed on the fact that no new Syrians should come to Ain Ebel but like I said 2016 was the only official measure we adopted, and we maintain it till today, in theory that is as no Syrians reside anymore.

3. During which periods of time during your time in office did these measures come into force? Are any measures targeting Syrians still in place today?

Since the early days of my term.

4. How do Christians in Ain Ebel perceive Syrians and why?

No more Syrians are living in Ain Ebel, they all left during the war and were not authorized to return.

5. To what extent do you think political discourse by Christian parties has influenced public opinion or tensions related to Syrian refugees in Ain Ebel?

They were all well treated in Ain Ebel, but of course since this is a Christian village there were some people objecting the presence of non-Christians in the village.

6. Have there been any notable incidents involving Syrian nationals in the municipality since 2011? If yes, how were they perceived or responded to by local actors?

No, thank God.

8.1.1.2 Mazraat El Sayed Current Mayor Serge Gharios

1. Have Christian political parties had any sort of direct influence on perceptions of Syrian in Mazraat El Sayed?

No because our village has 900 Shia families and 970 Maronite families, so we do not involve political partisanship in the village so as to not add more confusion and tension, focusing instead on local fiefdoms and dynastic political families such as Mustafa Al Husseini among Shias and Fares Sead among Maronites. Even though the usual political parties are supported among each sect, they have not been able to infiltrate the municipality and as such their agendas have not been enforced and Syrians have not been instrumentalized in our villages' political scene. I agree with you that Syrians are dehumanized by political parties of all sects and specially Christians and do see some validity in you saying that this non-partisanship municipally is, alongside the fact that we have a very insignificant Syrian presence, is most likely the situation has been handled so well.

2. Do you think common demographic fears may bring together the villages' two sects in their discontent with Syrians continued presence?

Yes, I do think that is probable and I see it being a point of agreement, but not in the case of our village. Maybe in Lebanon more generally but not in Mazraat El Sayed because we have no Syrian related issues to have the matter become a pressing concern of villagers.

3. Have there been any notable incidents involving Syrian nationals in the municipality since 2011? If yes, how were they perceived or responded to by local actors?

The first time these sorts of measures were imposed on Syrians in our village was during the covid pandemic. It was imposed on both Syrians and Lebanese. We did not consider them refugees, and we welcomed them because there were not many of them and they've been here since 2011. We did not have any security measures, but we did keep track of them, taking pictures of their documents and making sure they are legal. I am the new mayor, but I was part of the last

municipality, so I know what happened. We never had any acts committed against Syrians because it was never a problem for us. We notified the general security and internal security about the few Syrian families residing within our village and that was basically it. Christians in the village did not have any direct confrontation with Syrians that was linked to hate speech or hate crimes. Our security was never harmed by Syrians' presence. The only issue we had with them is the disposal of waste. We take the garbage waste weekly to a waste dump in Hbaline, Jbeil. Syrians did not want to cooperate with us at first, but we managed to clean up the situation and dispose of secondhand items they had acquired from residents that they did not want anymore and had disposed of improperly. Other than that, we had no issues.

8.1.2 Political Party Representatives

8.1.2.1 Youth LF Youth Representative John Chamoun

1- How has the Lebanese Forces' stance towards Syrians fluctuated since 2019? and what was their stance prior if you want to go further back? (Go as far as 2011 stating the chronology of their stance, if possible, be as brief or detailed as you prefer).

Okay man so before starting I think the most important element to mention is the 2003 memorandum of understanding. This is the basis of everything as it completely defines our stance on refugees. It stipulates that Lebanon must be a transit state not an asylum state given the fact that the country does not have the resources. Samir Geagea has been saying Lebanon is a transit state not equipped to take in refugees and the basis of this is the 2003 memorandum. Since 2011 our stance has been first, recognizing the humanitarian necessity to welcome refugees knowing well from the past how gruesome the Assad regime can be. But we said we must not be a permanent refugee settlement as this is to address a temporary humanitarian crisis. Thereafter, some crimes started taking place on the level of municipalities and certain tensions started arising, particularly with unregistered refugees, who constitute roughly half the approximately 1,800,000 total Syrians in the country. 880,000 are registered with the UNHCR and the rest are illegal. LF thinks the humanitarian approach to Syrian refugees in Lebanon should be based on resettling refugees from Lebanon.

Starting 2017, LF openly on media criticized the UNHCR, and this was a taboo at the time because this was an international org. Since then, we have been criticizing their work on social media.

In June 2024 it was highly publicized that Geagea met with the UN special coordinator for Lebanon in Meerab and Ghazi El Hajj and Nijar Koumounjian a minister with the LF.

At the time we had this stance because we are not only the largest block in parliament for Christians, but we are also currently the largest block in the parliament as a whole.

In the meeting we wrote a letter to UNSG Guterres describing the negligence of the UNHCR:

First it mentioned the high number of unregistered refugees and the need to either register them or for them to be deported by the general security of any other country.

The approach of the UNHCR is criticized because it is said that they seek to integrate the refugees rather than looking to resettle them to another country that is more equipped to handle their presence or to Syria and this exacerbates the crisis.

Back then, in June 2024, 90% of the Syrian land was deemed safe. Now its not clear.

The UNHCR was refusing to provide complete data on registered refugees to Lebanese authorities, and it failed to maintain the memorandum as it states that Lebanon is a transit country not a host country and it mandates a one-year limit for refugees and yet this was not respected. Moreover, the UNHCR overstepped its authority by issuing refugee cards and residency permits and this is illegal and infringed upon Lebanon's sovereignty. There were diplomatic protocol breaches that were noted, and this is something that the ministry of interior was informed on back then by the LF.

So, the demands of the letter, the main points, immediately cease the criticized practices of the UNHCR, allow them to comply the 2003 memorandum and fulfill its duty to provide regular information and data to the Lebanese authorities about refugees and if this not met it should result in the closure of the offices of the UNHCR in Lebanon. And this was quite controversial in Lebanon.

2- In April 2024 following Pascale Sleiman's assassination can you tell us about the goal of the LF when dealing with Syrians in its aftermath?

Pascale Sleiman was abducted on April 7, 2024, on a Sunday. The next day on Monday a video circulated of his body, and he was killed that day. The culprits were a Syrian gang, and this is based on the investigation of the Lebanese Army not a rumor.

Irrespective of the background of the event or causality of the assassination or the eventual outcome following the continuation of the trial as too individuals in the case are still evading prosecution in Syria.

Regardless, thereafter we have been telling the Lebanese authority that anyone can get kidnapped in Lebanon in front of their house. Pascale Sleiman was the coordinator of Jbeil for the LF, he is born and raised there and knows the whole areas residence and yet he was killed there. But the biggest problem was that the group that killed him were able to cross the border into Syria with him in their possession. This means there must be illegal entry ways that the government does not know about.

Anyway, Qusayr was the area Pascale's dead body was handed over in and interestingly enough, from a military standpoint, the village was at that time run by Hezbollah officials completely.

3- Has the LF worked with municipalities in any capacity as it pertains to dealing with Syrian refugees?

Other than us going to the and doing campaigns and working with the general security and municipalities the Lebanese army.

We reiterated the campaign about Syrian refugees, as these were the culprits of the attack. Strida went to the Ministry of Interior and there were many meetings with the head of the army and in many cases, we made efforts with LF municipalities that were functional as some municipalities were bankrupt and nonfunctional at the time. For example, Bsharri municipalities Union started working on checking the status of refugees in its region.

4- What do you think about those who believe that the LF might be exploiting the Syrian refugee crisis in order to rile up popular electoral support?

LF does not do it for votes, the people that support us are our people, we are not gaining extra support by doing this. If anything, the voters that are anti-Syrian are already part of our political party. The LF is the main political party that did this campaign since 2011, it makes the most sense given what we stand for, what we have been through historically under the Syrian occupation, and now with Pascale Sleiman's case. It is not because we want to reach a new audience, our audience are not only followers they are loyal.

But the main problem again is the lack of control on the border and the presence of illegal crossings. This is the cause of everything, first of all, their entry was caused by this, second of all, this caused the facilitation of Pascale's kidnapping. But this is a problem we need to address and ask who is opening these entry routes and why the Qusayr village was one of them.

We need to focus on who are the ministers of defense that have not controlled the border. We all know who controls out borders and who was smuggling drugs and everything else. There are cartels. (Insinuating they were run by Hezbollah).

But now with the new president we have a chance to control out borders as they are no longer controlled by the group that would smuggle often.

It's not only the UNHCR, it's only about the memorandum of understanding of 2003, it's not about what happened since 2011, it's not about the Israel war on Lebanon, as

It is important for you to know that between 23 September 2024 to 25 October 2024 350,000 illegal Syrian refugees left Lebanon to Syria and as soon as the cease fire was agreed between Hezbollah and Israel, 103,000 immediately reentered. So, we have refugees entering illegally at will and we do not have control over it.

The LF stance needs Lebanon to be a transit country not a host country and that refugees need to stay one year only and the UNHCR breached this, and this is why Samir Geagea send a letter. Pascale Sleiman's death caused a large backlash, but this was not in a vacuum, we have been asking for control since 2011, and the real problem is who is controlling the border, and which international organization are conspiring to keep refugees in Lebanon.

8.1.2.2 FPM Current VP Martine Kteily

1- What is the history of the FPM's stance on Syrians since 2011?

Following the accident with Pascale Sleiman or maybe not I'm not sure I'm not sure of the date so I do not want to be inaccurate. The idea is since 2011, when the war in Syria started there was a huge influx of Syrian refugees fleeing danger from their country. Of course, the weakness of our state, the lack of sovereignty, and the way they handled the whole issue made things worse over the years bringing the total number of refugees to be more than 50% of the Lebanese population (all nationalities). Without any organization in terms of registration, knowing who comes in and

who goes back whether they have legal status, that is a refugee status. So basically, this influx and the bad management and the political pressures both internal and external from the international community and from internal political players who wanted to take advantage of this situation to use it as a pressure to Assad regime in Syria or as a potential pressure inside Lebanon against the Shia because they are of a Sunni majority. All of this led to this increased problem let's say. The refugees themselves of course are victims to start with but also

They are taking advantage of a situation where the international community is financing their stay in Lebanon and encouraging them to stay by giving each member of the family a certain amount of cash which means the more family members you have the more income you will generate. So, this encouraged Syrian workers in Lebanon to call and bring their families from Syria regardless of if they are in dangerous zones or in areas where there is a threat to their lives. So it became more of a business money generating model where a Syrian workers who used to come and work in Lebanon - since a very long time, and our need in the market is 300-400,000 in various sectors whether it is in construction or otherwise- so add to this there big families and extended families because they register with UNHCR and ask for cash donations against the family members so this has encouraged them to stay in Lebanon. So, the political parties, the vast majority of them, except of course the fpm, they were encouraging this because they thought this was part of their agenda to criticize the Assad regime and say that people were fleeing death and danger.

Now what happened later on, in 2022-23, the war in Syria stopped basically and Syria became a safer place even before the Assad regime fell so during this time we were calling for the return of the Syrians. And since the international community started reconsidering the idea of integrating or naturalizing the Syrian refugees in Lebanon and they started to become open to the idea of the return.

Because people are kind of getting fed up, due to increased crimes by Syrian refugees, because of the loss of jobs for many Lebanese, and because of the unjust situation where they see money flowing into the hands of Syrians whereas the Lebanese are getting poorer and poorer because of the whole economic situation. So, after that in October 2023 the Lebanese forces and the Kataib started being more vocal about the issue of Syrian refugees and they provoked these incidents I was mentioning in Dawra and Bawchrieh where they kind of tortured a Syrian refugee and then almost killed another one and it could have erupted into a huge problem had it not been for the

October 7 attack. Then everyone became caught up with what was happening Gaza and later on in Lebanon, so this has contributed to easing down tensions but otherwise I think the intentions of those parties was to drag Syrian refugees and Lebanese into a conflict with Syrian refugees based on hate speech and hate crimes

But anyway, I do not think hate crimes or hate speech has increased much. There was a moment when they seemed to be some sort of hidden agenda.

But it did not go through because of the important events at the regional level.

Now we as fpm have worked with municipalities to organize the return of the families of the Syrian displaced within villages. And you know that our central administration for statistics states that 85% of refugees are economic refugees which means they are not refugees they immigrants seeking work just like any other nationality. Like Egyptians, Ethiopians, Filipino in Lebanon they come they have a legal status, and they seek work.

So, our problem was that they do not have legal status. So instead of doing what's right and getting the right documents and work permit and stick to the right sectors They are allowed to work in instead of replacing Lebanese in other sectors.

And we also advocated with the ministry of economy with the Ministry of Labor to organize this and with the general security so yes if you want to talk about it from a human rights perspective, basic human rights of any refugee be it shelter safe water food and decent livelihood until they return to their countries once the reason they fled no longer exist. And today with the fall of the Assad regime it is even more appropriate for the Syrian refugees to return back to their hometowns.

In Lebanon it's definitely more uncertain in Lebanon every day we have raids and Israeli attacks. Everything is relative. But those people who fled the Assad regime and they spent 20 years telling the international community the Assad regime is a criminal, and we cannot live there. Now there is a new regime that they love, and they think will protect them because of the religious affiliation that exists. Syrian refugees in Lebanon are mostly Sunni and the regime in place there now which is Sunni.

Maybe the current regime is not too kind to Alawites and Druze and Christians and Shiites but...Anyway, it's their home country and there is no war ongoing in their country. We have more

security incidents today in Lebanon then in Syria. Another problem with refugees is that you cannot go spend the weekend in Syria and come back here and be a refugee. If you are a political refugee, it means you cannot go back. So going back often and sending the money to build a house, this is not being a refugee. And still with that we are not asking to kick them out. We are not asking for anything opposed to human rights. We are only asking for their safe and dignified return. But not a voluntary return whether they like it or not whether they want to go back or not.

2- How did the FPM work with municipalities and what did they recommend regarding Syrians?

We held a Conference with data and literature; we had all the governors from the Beqaa and everywhere from the north the Beqaa and the Metn area. They presented success stories and lessons learned about what they learned from the refugee crisis. And we presented a set of recommendations based on this conference on what to do as the next step in order to solve this problem.

There is a plan ratified by the government in 2020 for the safe return of the refugees so if this was implemented, we would not have the problem today, so our idea was to start with the families. Because historically Syrian workers who come here do not bring their families. You know helpers that come and work in homes [as domestic workers] come alone, they do not bring their whole family. They go on vacation to their country and then come.

And Syrians do the same, they go back to Syria for two weeks every Adha or Ramadan so how can we label them as refugees If they are able to go back to their country.

If I am a Lebanese citizen and I want to open a shop in a certain area I have to get a permit from the municipality and I have to show that I have a legal status and I have all the licenses needed and register my establishment.

So, the Syrians should at least be forced to abide by these same laws. Municipalities' role is to prevent Syrians from haphazardly and chaotically open shops here and there like butchers and hairdressers without having the right paperwork.

This in itself will reduce by 80% the presence of Syrians in Lebanon and you will only have the workers that sponsored by a company who are needed in specific sectors not everywhere and anywhere.

Sometimes a Lebanese owns a shop and indirectly employs, or they register the shop in their name and get commission from the Syrian store owner to evade the law and cheat.

So just addressing these legal gaps could help solve more than 60,70,80% of the problem.

3- What role has the FPM played when compared to other Christian political parties and what is it seeking to solve?

The problem is the big number of refugees that the gov can no longer afford to host anymore because of the weakening infrastructure the lack of resources the loss of jobs in the job market so the problem is an international regional problem effecting both Lebanese and Syrians. The best-case scenario is that Syrians go back to their country. Let the international organizations that financed their stay here do it in their country because it is safe now.

In fact, during the Hezbollah Israel conflict several 100,000 Lebanese and Syrians fled to Syria because it was safer. Another problem is that they get access to subsidized necessities and get paid in US dollar which makes them have an upper hand on Lebanese citizens. Multiple issues, not just one.

Can you as a Lebanese go open a shop in Paris without having legal paperwork and the visa requirements and all of that. If the French police kick you out, would you think they are breaching human rights?

The weak state and the lack of sovereignty over our own borders and land is one main reason. But also, the conspiracy of international and regional players to transfer Syrians out of their land and to use them as bullying paper or pressure paper against the Assad regime against Russia sometimes against Hezbollah other times so this is why it was extremely political in that sense.

But to be fair, not one country in the world has managed to host so many refugees with a per capita number that is unprecedented without one crime as you mention, without an incident of tension.

So even the incidents I mention to you are almost insignificant compared to a 15-year crisis with 2 million and 200,000 refugees.

So, in terms of human rights I think Lebanon has done a great job preserving the dignity and decency of the refugees despite some of the gaps and the weaknesses here and there but for a people like the Lebanese they did actually a pretty good job at hosting people they do not know in their buildings and streets. We are not talking about people who are excluded in a tent like in most Arab countries. Syrian refugees live between us. They are not supposed to integrate they are supposed to stay in a limited time. The political problem is that it is forcing them to integrate whereas integrating them means changing the identity of the country, changing the demographics of the country, and weakening the country further in terms of infrastructure and resources. You cannot take 45-50% of your population as refugees. Germany took 1.5 million over 88 million and this made Angela Merkel lose the election. That's why we've had Economic commissions with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry among others and together with them we came up with solutions for how to tell with the Syrian crisis and address the economic burden of their presence and the minister of labor was there. We agreed on a set of recommendations to deal with this and then we followed up with the municipalities and eventually many did very well simply just by organizing the legality of the presence of their town's refugees.

4- What was the reasoning behind certain anti-Syrian campaigns, slogans, conferences, and social media campaigns by the FPM in recent years?

Other people are not our responsibility, they are from another party, and we invited him, and he did not get vetted and neither did his speech¹⁵. We were also offended by this. It is not our language.

The idea of “occupiers in the clothes of refugees” given the anniversary was to portray a parallelism between the international conspiracy that led to the military Syrian occupation which ended in 2005 and the international conspiracy of the present which can be framed as the demographic Syrian occupation. The idea was to push a strong message to get people's attention and to let our supporters know keeping refugees here and integrating them within Lebanon is a form of occupation and a conspiracy against our country.

It's not about gaining popular support from our voting base. It's about defending the cause we've adopted since 2011. I personally organized the conference I mentioned less than 2 years ago. So,

¹⁵ 2025 campaign: occupiers in the clothes of refugees. In the event of the 20th anniversary of the end of the Syrian occupation where the campaign was unveiled several officials went up and said extremely xenophobic statements about Syrians.

this is something we've been advocating for nonstop with the UN, the international community, league of Arab states, inside the government with the parliament. we presented laws. This is not something we just woke up and decided to do a nice campaign for the elections.

The issue of Syrian refugees is not a Christian problem, all communities including Sunnis and I've talked to opinion leaders and politicians in the north and in the Beqaa and they all have the same feelings and the same concerns because it has become too much to handle. The over crowdedness of the streets of the buildings, the chaos, the inability to control and the feeling of unsafety among Lebanese and the job security that effects all Lebanese. Job security issues effect non-Christian communities in Tripoli and west Bekaa, they suffer the most from this. If anything, Christian communities take advantage of Syrians to get cheap labor so it's really a Christian issue. It's a national problem.

I do not consider there to be more concern among Christians in Lebanon in comparison with other groups. Like Christians may be perceived as being more vocal because we were the political party pushing for this the most and we represent a Christian segment of the country.

While other parties were more aligned with the international community and they were busier fighting the Assad regime then caring for the Syrian refugees. We do not address instincts. If we wanted to cater to that we would curse Hezbollah because this sells among Christian communities as LF has done that.

And in a sense, some could have seen the Syrian refugee as advantageous politically.

We, however, at FPM do not, as it did not really sell as a cause, although we think it is very important.

In the 2018 and 2022 elections it was not the thing that attracted people to us. Even though it is one of our main talking points of it is not translating into votes.

It is not common to hear people say I voted for Tayyar because they are pro-Syrian return and solving the refugee problem.

I do not see there is a Christian Lebanese perception separate from the whole Lebanese perception like there was with regards to Palestinians in the country.

It's not the same because the Syrian refugees are in areas that are not a majority of Christians.

At the end of the day, it is a societal class thing. It's not a matter of religion. Rich Sunnis and Alawites from Syria are welcomed very well by the wealthy social classes in Lebanon.

At the same time, even when they attempt to integrate into poorer regions, they still face trouble because they are naturally competing over the limited resources and jobs with locals.

If there is a young mechanic from Tripoli who wants to find work, and a Syrian replaces him, this will create a grudge right?

We are not talking about CEOs at a company replacing each other. We are talking about the kind of jobs that usually Syrians would not be taking if it were not for this crisis.

The Assad regime fell and now the people using that as a reason for them to stay cannot anymore.

Concerning the 2025 campaign I can see why it is perceived like this, and I do not like this method. But this was meant to highlight the political parallelism present. It is a metaphor.

Some people concerned with human rights and in the field of academics did find it problematic as they know these sensitivities and understand how they can be offensive, but for others they face this issue on a daily basis because they cannot find a job etc.

Again, the only thing I do not like about the campaign is that it portrays the Syrian refugees themselves as the problem even though they are victims of this just as Lebanese are.

But the idea was to explain, in putting someone in half a military garment and half a worker's garment to show how the source of the conspiracy of both of these occupations is the same.

5- this could be seen as fear mongering, since the Lebanese population have trauma and perhaps even a collective PTSD from the unhealed wounds of the war and Tayyar among other parties may be trying to exploit that? Is not associating the current Syrian refugee population with military occupying forces fear mongering?

It is an existential fear. The logic behind this assessment could be correct in an isolated context. But in the context of FPM who has never used arms, who has never killed anybody, who has never hated anybody, who has always been bullied victimized and imprisoned for advocating for sovereignty and freedom, it's not worrying. You should be afraid if someone from the LF would

go and kill a Syrian guy because they are a militia and they have a history of using arms and terrorize others.

Coming from FPM this is where it starts and ends. At the advocacy level. I know we could've used different wording. We could have maybe not focused on the refugees themselves but on the bigger problem but in terms of creative work this is the best way they found to convey this message.

I can see where you are coming from and I had the same reaction, but I think this is because I am more sensitive to human rights issues than the average citizen.

How can you portray that best? You want people to think of it very similarly to the occupation.

Because it is an occupation, they are being forced to stay here. Not because they to, but because they are given incentives so long as they stay. If these same incentives were given to them in their hometowns in Syria, they would immediately head there. And this should happen, it's very simple.

We as FPM have long been accused of racism and discrimination before. When we start talking about the cause in general. Even without mentioning anything about the refugees themselves and without using slogans, president Aoun went to the UN GA and pulled out a map of the country portraying the progressive increase in Syrian population and they called him a racist just for showing how the problem was evolving. We are usually the victims of hate speech and bullying so do not worry that we could promote such speech. I know the 2025 campaign can come off as offensive, but I can assure you it will not lead to an increase in hate crimes.

Both the Kataeb and LF changed their stance very recently because they saw the shift that went on in the international community.

For them it also got to a point where they could not ignore the complaints of their communities regarding Syrians.

8.1.3 *Experts*

8.1.3.1 ALEF Programme's Manager Stephanie Abboud

1- Can you tell me about the PASC perception report you did?

Perception report of PASC is community report that is on a quarterly basis – it focuses on social tensions and communities specifically women and youth being involved – main findings is Syrian issue is a major driver for tension – alef PASC Syrian network – 30 members in PASC very wide

network – (all over regions of Lebanon) – leverage PASC community connections to gather data – 12 localities only not nationwide (Beirut, Akar, Tripoli, North, Bekaa, Barja) – we capacitated them using an adapted version of the Oxfam tool CPT (rolled out for the Ebola crisis in Africa)- adapted to the project because it is useful for perception report- they were reluctant for the vaccine in Africa so they used this method where they just listen to people then ask for their consent to use it (at all time all 30 member groups’ employees are collecting stuff) they have done 6 and they will now do 7 – the report is not about Syrian refugees but because there is not much about it and it’s a main grievance of people it became central.

2- How have political or media narratives in Christian communities portrayed Syrian refugees in recent years? Do you think that this is legitimate?

- It is fair to say that they have disproportionately blamed Syrians, but it is not specific for Lebanese Christians
- I would not say as an organization we have tried to apply this trend specifically to Syrians, but it is scapegoating that’s not based on religion of individuals but the religion of the region they live in.
- As an organization, ALEF sees the religious aspect as a geographical factor more of a religious factor of individuals.

3- How have Christian political parties’ stances impacted Christian Lebanese citizens’ perception of Syrians?

Yes, it reinforces a preexisting prejudice. Take for example the 2022 elections. It saw the same amount of incitement as we usually see from these political parties since it’s a campaign topic that’s popular). If you speak the narratives that people want to hear they will give you, their vote. In 2022, the FPM and LF both used deportation rhetoric to gain votes and the following year deportations increased, especially in April 2023.

Politicians were doing a balancing act saying Syrians have to go, calling for a Syrians return plan and their facilitated return via initiatives of the general security then claiming respect for the nonrefoulement principle at the Brussels Conference and posturing to beg for money.

Abdallah Bou Habib (minister of foreign affairs) for example is affiliated with the FPM so he kept mentioning Syrians leaving – the FPM tried to exert pressure on the international community by saying Syrians will go by boat to Europe if the EU do not pay Lebanon remittances.

In 2025 140,000 Syrians are estimated to return according to the UNHCR, this is an initiative not specifically organized by the government – but the government takes credit either way.

4- Is there a sufficient basis to claims stating that Syrians are driving the recent increase in crime rates in Lebanon?

No, the percentage of Syrians in prisons ranges between 20-30% - statistically this makes sense they are 2 million of a population of 7 million in total – a lot of arbitrary detentions as well inflate these figures.

5- Some analysts suggest anti-refugee sentiment may be a channel for broader frustrations. What do you think?

Politicians – use migration as a barrier to prevent citizens from holding them accountable – it is a misinformation of convenience and manipulation – it is easy in a failing state like Lebanon that is not willing to make changes – ALEF has since 2011 been telling them to deal with the Syrian crisis – and the government kept saying Bashar will not fall and it's going to stop soon.

Convenience for politicians not citizens – citizens are misled through misinformation and no one is countering the misinformation – people are not working hard enough for the general public to actually know the truth - what makes it easier for politicians is the lack of information countering them and the fact that politicians are somehow trusted more than random experts – sources that seem credible to people like (MTV) are not actually always reliable.

Older generations share information out of word of mouth from traditional media and social media that are not always correct, but they do not know how to fact check, this environment and lack of awareness creates the perfect breeding ground for discriminatory rumors to be spread like fake figures on the stipends of Syrians from UNHCR or how much they are paid.

Unwilling politicians seem like they do not have any true intentions to resolve this matter as it is a means of leveraging popular opinion and rallying their support groups.

6- What about the Syrian Occupation's (1976-2005) influence on Christian Lebanese's perceptions of Syrians residing in the country?

We did not have proper transitional justice, reparations, or finding of the missing. The older generation were not able to close the chapter, and they still feel fear.

The Syrian regime forces and regular people are not differentiated because a lot of people were forced into military conscription, which means Christians who have been wronged by the Syrian occupation may consider any Syrian to enter Lebanon now to have close ties with at least one soldier that partook in the occupation.

7- Has the government's return policy impacted Christian Lebanese perceptions of Syrians residing in Lebanon?

- Government policy is not the reason for inciting hate speech or altering perceptions.
- Government inaction is the real reason, not bad action – doing nothing messed up the entire social fabric of Lebanon – Lebanese people have concerns that are valid and without really addressing their concerns you will only aggravate people and make them angrier – making Lebanese people angrier about the situation not being regulated evolves into a direct hatred of Syrians – Syrians become the enemy.
- Inaction and no policy feeds misinformation; this misinformation increases our capital wins so you know what its better to move without policy, so then you increase social tensions again to gain votes and then they come into power and do more inaction (it's a loop).

8- What are some measures or possible mitigation strategies to reduce the overall discrimination Syrians face?

Two main things: efforts to combat misinformation and awareness campaigns no matter where they are and better security in Lebanon – rule of law and security – 8 December it was easy to think all Syrians can come back – 35000 came after that date and UNHCR does not want to register them – the situation is not done now that Bashar fell it's even more complicated, we need a policy now – what is temporary protection? If there is a student or a refugee or a (we need to classify them and quantify who is what).

9- How can we reduce hate crimes perpetrated by Christian Groups specifically?

It's the same recommendation – but Christians specifically have to advocate for the transitional justice and dealing with the past. Dealing with the legacy of political violence in Lebanon is the only way (people need to receive closure).

8.1.3.2 Migration Expert Dr. Jasmin Lilian Diab

1. How do perceptions of Syrian refugees vary across sectarian communities, based on your observations or available data?

While anti-Syrian sentiment is pervasive across Lebanese society, secondary sources suggest that Christian communities—particularly Maronite and other conservative Christian enclaves—harbor distinctively sharper perceptions of threat. Several intersecting reasons fuel this:

Historical memory of the Syrian occupation (1990–2005): Christians often associate this period with repression, assassinations (e.g., Gebran Tueni, Samir Kassir), and the erosion of their political agency.

Demographic anxieties: Christians perceive themselves as a shrinking minority. The arrival of a largely Sunni Syrian population is seen not only as a demographic threat, but as a disruption to Lebanon’s delicate sectarian balance.

Geographic separation: Unlike other sects, some Christian areas (especially in the North and Mount Lebanon) were relatively insulated from direct contact with large Syrian refugee populations prior to the crisis. The rapid influx post-2011 thus created sharper feelings of "invasion" or cultural intrusion.

Ideological isolation: Some Christian political movements (e.g., the Lebanese Forces, Free Patriotic Movement) have constructed narratives of Christian victimhood that draw from both the Civil War and Syrian occupation, making the Syrian presence in Lebanon resonate differently than among, say, Shia communities with more pragmatic alliances.

2. Have Lebanese Christian political/media narratives disproportionately blamed Syrians?

Figures like Gebran Bassil (FPM) consistently linking Syrians to labor market collapse, criminality, and infrastructure strain. Bassil’s famous 2019 statement that “*we don’t want to naturalize them; we want to send them back*” reflects a long-standing discourse of repatriation over rights.

Television stations like MTV Lebanon and LBCI have aired segments that subtly or overtly frame Syrians as burdens or threats, often without providing contextual data.

Municipal campaigns (e.g., posters or social media content) in some Christian areas have called for curfews or surveillance on Syrians, sometimes with militarized imagery (e.g., depictions of a Syrian man as a rapist or thief).

Intent vs. impact: While some of these narratives are explicitly inciteful, others may be framed as “security” or “economic” concerns but contribute indirectly to public hostility and hate speech—particularly on social media platforms like Facebook or WhatsApp.

9. Are municipal-level restrictions harsher in Christian areas?

Field observations and reporting suggest yes, Christian municipalities have often been among the first to adopt harsh restrictions on Syrians:

Curfews are more frequently imposed and strictly enforced in Christian villages (e.g., areas in Mount Lebanon, Zahle, Jezzine) where municipal councils are politically aligned with parties like the Lebanese Forces or FPM.

Labor restrictions and rental bans are more common in these areas. For example, in some parts of Keserwan or Zahle, Syrian men are not allowed to rent homes independently, work outside of agriculture or construction, or circulate at night.

Compared to Shia-majority areas (e.g., Nabatiyeh, Baalbek), where Syrians may be integrated into Hezbollah’s support network, Christian areas show lower tolerance and less informal protection.

10. Are those factors the primary drivers of Christian anti-Syrian sentiment?

Yes, your summary captures the main drivers well. I would say:

Scapegoating and political deflection are key. Christian leaders channel national discontent toward refugees to divert attention from elite failure. See Beirut blast rhetoric, economic crisis rhetoric, etc.

Demographic fears have been exacerbated by the economic crisis and the slow decline in Christian population relative to others.

Media narratives and disinformation (especially linking Syrians to ISIS or criminality) shape public perception and rationalize discrimination. See much of the Lebanese Army, "terrorist" discourse.

Civil War memory reactivates old trauma narratives, positioning Christians as perpetual “victims” of Syrian aggression.

Other things worth mentioning maybe:

Church discourse: Some Christian clerics echo replacement theory–adjacent rhetoric, invoking the need to "protect our land and community."

Economic competition in skilled labor sectors (not just construction) where Christians feel displaced or undercut by cheaper Syrian labor.

11. Based on your observations and available data do you think there is a basis in the notion that Christian anti-Syrian rhetoric is based on the refugee group being an easy target to channel unresolved frustration citizens have due to the economic and political turmoil the nation is facing?

Yes, and this could be referred to as a *hatred of convenience* which can be interpreted as being convenient for both the public and politicians. Both interpretations are valid and not mutually exclusive:

For the public: Syrians become an accessible outlet for anger and despair in a country where political accountability is absent. This mirrors classic scapegoating behavior in many post-crisis societies.

For political elites: Syrians are a strategic distraction. By rallying around refugee “threats,” politicians deflect blame for corruption, economic collapse, and mismanagement.

However, this *hatred of convenience* is not purely instrumental. Over time, it becomes emotionalized and racialized, producing long-term socio-political exclusion. What begins as a political deflection solidifies into a social norm—normalizing discrimination at the municipal, media, and interpersonal levels.

8.2 Survey Questions

Participant’s Background Information

[المعلومات الأولية عن المشارك]

1. **If you are Lebanese and Christian and agree to participate, click "I AGREE."**

Otherwise, click "I DO NOT AGREE."

إذا وافقت على المشاركة في الدراسة، يمكنك النقر على مربع "أوافق" أدناه للانتقال إلى الاستبيان. إذا كنت لا [ترغب في المشاركة، يمكنك النقر على "لا أوافق" وسيتم إعادتك إلى الصفحة الرئيسية]

- I AGREE / أوافق
- I DO NOT AGREE / لا أوافق

2. **Age Group:**

[اختر فئتك العمرية]

- 21-30
- 30-40
- 40-50
- 50-60
- 60-70
- 70+

3. **Gender:**

[هوية الجنس]

- Male / ذكر
- Female / أنثى

4. **Region of Residence:**

[منطقة الإقامة الحالية]

- Beirut / بيروت
- Mount Lebanon / جبل لبنان
- North Lebanon / الشمال
- Bekaa / البقاع
- Nabatiyeh / النبطية
- South Lebanon / الجنوب
- Akkar / عكار

5. **Highest Level of Education:**

[ما هو أعلى مستوى تعليمي حصلت عليه؟]

- High School / المدرسة الثانوية
- Undergraduate Degree / الليسانس
- Graduate Degree / ماجستير
- Post-Graduate Degree / دكتوراه
- Other / أخرى

6. Are you affiliated with any political party?

[هل أنت منتمي/منتمية إلى أي حزب سياسي؟]

- Lebanese Forces / القوات اللبنانية
- Kataeb Party / حزب الكتائب
- Marada Movement / تيار المردة
- National Liberal Party / حزب الوطنيين الأحرار
- Free Patriotic Movement / التيار الوطني الحر
- Other / أخرى
- No political affiliation / لست منتمياً/منتمية

7. How often do you use social media?

[كم مرة تستخدم وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؟]

- Once a day / مرة واحدة في اليوم
- Rarely / نادراً
- Multiple times a week / عدة مرات في الأسبوع
- Multiple times a day / عدة مرات في اليوم

Perception

[تصورك]

8. Some people consider Syrians contribute positively to Lebanese society. To what extent do you agree?

يعتبر بعض الناس أن السوريين يساهمون إيجابياً في المجتمع اللبناني. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا [الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

9. **Some consider Syrians a danger to Lebanon's internal security. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتبر بعض الناس أن السوريين يشكلون خطرًا على الأمن الداخلي للبنان. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على [هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

10. **Some believe it is time for Syrians to return to their country. To what extent do you agree?**

[يرى بعض الناس أن الوقت قد حان لعودة السوريين إلى بلدهم. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

11. **Some feel Syrian refugees pressure Lebanon's economy/public services. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتقد بعض الناس أن وجود اللاجئين السوريين يضع ضغطاً على اقتصاد البلاد والخدمات العامة. إلى أي مدى [توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد

- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

12. **Some associate Syrian refugees with increased crime rates. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتقد بعض الناس أن وجود اللاجئين السوريين مرتبط بزيادة معدلات الجرائم. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض [على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

13. **Some believe Syrians are treated unfairly in Lebanon. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتقد بعض الناس أن السوريين يُعاملون بشكل غير عادل في لبنان. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا [الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

14. **Some consider Syrians deserve equal rights in Lebanon. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتبر بعض الناس أن السوريين يستحقون حقوقًا متساوية في لبنان. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا [الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

15. Some believe non-citizens (especially Syrians) committing crimes should face stricter punishment. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن غير المواطنين (خاصة السوريين) الذين يرتكبون جرائم يجب أن يواجهوا عقوبات أقسى. [إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

16. Since 2019, my perception of Syrian refugees has worsened. To what extent do you agree?

[تغيرت نظرتي للاجئين السوريين نحو الأسوأ منذ عام 2019. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

17. What socioeconomic factors worsened your perception since 2019? (Select all that apply):

ما هي العوامل الاجتماعية والاقتصادية التي أثرت سلباً على نظرتك للسوريين منذ 2019؟ (يمكن اختيار أكثر من [إجابة])

- Economic crisis / الأزمة الاقتصادية
- Currency devaluation / تدهور قيمة العملة
- Rise in crime/theft / ارتفاع معدل الجرائم والسرقات
- COVID-19 pandemic / جائحة كوفيد-19
- Beirut Port explosion / انفجار مرفأ بيروت
- Thawra protests (2019) / احتجاجات الثورة (2019)
- My perception was not impacted / لم يتأثر تصوري سلباً
- Other / أخرى

18. Some prefer only Syrian refugees of their own religion/sect to reside near them. To what extent do you agree?

يفضل بعض الناس أن يقيم اللاجئين السوريون المنتمون إلى دينهم أو طائفتهم فقط في مناطقهم. إلى أي مدى [توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

19. Some believe civilians should intervene in crimes involving Syrians before authorities arrive. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أنه يجب السماح للمواطنين بالتدخل عند وقوع جريمة (خاصة مع سوريين) حتى وصول [السلطات. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

20. What is the main factor contributing to negative perceptions of Syrians? (Select all that apply):

إبرأيك، ما هو العامل الرئيسي الذي يساهم في تكوين صورة سلبية عن السوريين؟ (يمكن اختيار أكثر من إجابة)

- Being unregistered / أنهم غير مسجلين
- Committing crimes / ارتكاب الجرائم
- Living in my area / سكنهم في منطقتي
- Memory of Syrian occupation / ذكريات الاحتلال السوري
- Majority being Muslim / أن معظمهم مسلمون
- Other / أخرى

Media Influence

[تأثير الإعلام]

21. I refer to traditional media (e.g., news channels) for news.

[أنا أفضل وسائل الإعلام التقليدية مثل القنوات الإخبارية للحصول على أخباري]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

22. Your preferred news channel:

[القناة التي تفضل متابعة الأخبار من خلالها]

- LBC
- MTV
- OTV
- Al Manar
- Tele Liban
- Future TV
- NBN
- أخرى / Other
- I do not watch news channels / لا أشاهد قنوات الأخبار

23. Traditional media influences my opinion on Syrian refugees.

[وسائل الإعلام التقليدية تؤثر على رأيي حول اللاجئين السوريين]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

24. Some believe traditional media frames Syrians negatively. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن وسائل الإعلام التقليدية تميل إلى تصوير اللاجئين السوريين بصورة سلبية. إلى أي مدى [توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree
- لا أعرف / I do not know

25. Some believe traditional media normalizes hate crimes against Syrians (e.g., vigilante acts). To what extent do you agree?

يعتبر بعض الناس أن وسائل الإعلام التقليدية تُعزز خطاب الكراهية ضد السوريين عند تقديم أعمال "الحراسات [الأهلية" في القرى المسيحية على أنها مشروعة. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

26. Social media spreads/normalizes violence/hate speech against Syrians. To what extent do you agree?

تساهم وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي في انتشار أو تطبيع العنف وخطاب الكراهية ضد اللاجئين السوريين. إلى أي مدى [توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

27. Social media has normalized Syrian refugees' struggles. To what extent do you agree?

وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي جعلت معاناة اللاجئين السوريين تبدو أمرًا طبيعيًا في أعيننا. إلى أي مدى توافق أو [تعارض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

28. Have you seen videos of Syrians mistreated by civilians (allegedly for crimes)?

هل صادفت مقطع فيديو واحدًا على الأقل يُظهر تعرض مواطن سوري لإساءة من مدني ردًا على جريمة [مزعومة؟]

- Yes, at least one / نعم، واحد على الأقل
- Yes, multiple / نعم، أكثر من واحد
- No, never / كلا
- Not sure / لست متأكدًا

29. Some believe social media incites violence against Syrians. To what extent do you agree?

يعتبر البعض أن منصات التواصل الاجتماعي تحرض على العنف ضد السوريين من خلال نشر هذا النوع من [المحتوى]. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعارض على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

Government Policy / Municipal Measures / Political Rhetoric

[سياسة الحكومة / إجراءات البلديات / خطاب الأحزاب السياسية]

30. Some consider government policy on returning Syrians just and rightful. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن سياسة الحكومة بشأن عودة السوريين سياسة عادلة وحقّة. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض [على هذا الرأي؟

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

31. Some believe government crackdowns (raids, arrests) against Syrian refugees are effective. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن إجراءات الحكومة الصارمة (مثل التفتيشات والاعتقالات العشوائية) ضد اللاجئين [السوريين كانت فعالة. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

32. Some believe government policies frame Syrians negatively as a "burden." To what extent do you agree?

يعتبر بعض الناس أن سياسات الحكومة ساهمت في تصوير وجود السوريين المستمر كعبء. إلى أي مدى توافق [أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

33. Some consider the Lebanese state uses Syrians as scapegoats. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن الدولة اللبنانية تستخدم اللاجئين السوريين ككبش فداء لتحويل الانتباه عن أخطائها. إلى أي [مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

34. Some blame the government/politicians for all crises since 2019. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد البعض أن الحكومة والسياسيين هم المسؤولون عن كل الأزمات منذ 2019. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض [على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

35. Some blame Syrian refugees for all crises since 2019. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن السوريين هم المسؤولون عن كل الأزمات منذ 2019. إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على [هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

36. I feel I can hold elected officials accountable. To what extent do you agree?

أشعر أنه يمكنني محاسبة الحكومة ومسؤوليها عندما أعتقد أنهم أخطأوا في حقي كمواطن/ة. إلى أي مدى توافق [أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق

- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

37. Some believe Christian political parties shape Christian perceptions of Syrians. To what extent do you agree?

يُعتقد أن تصريحات الأحزاب السياسية المسيحية شكلت تصورات المسيحيين تجاه اللاجئين السوريين. إلى أي [مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

38. Some believe Christian parties encourage vigilante justice against Syrians. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد البعض أن تصريحات الأحزاب المسيحية شجعت العنف والعدالة الشعبية (مثل الاعتداء على سوريين [بدعوى حماية الأمن المحلي]). إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

39. Some believe Christian parties use Syrians as scapegoats. To what extent do you agree?

يعتقد بعض الناس أن الأحزاب المسيحية تستخدم اللاجئين السوريين ككبش فداء لتحويل الانتباه عن أخطائها. [إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
- Disagree / لا أوافق
- Neutral / محايد
- Agree / أوافق
- Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة

40. **Some believe municipal wage limits/closures of Syrian businesses are justified. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتبر البعض أن إجراءات البلديات (مثل فرض حد أدنى لأجور السوريين أو إغلاق مشاريعهم التجارية) مبررة. [إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

41. **Some consider municipal curfews for Syrians (as safety precautions) justified. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتبر البعض أن حظر التجول الذي تفرضه البلديات على السوريين كإجراء وقائي هو مبرر. [إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

42. **Some consider municipal curfews for Syrians effective. To what extent do you agree?**

يعتبر البعض أن حظر التجول المفروض على السوريين إجراء فعال. [إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟]

- لا أوافق بشدة / Strongly disagree
- لا أوافق / Disagree
- محايد / Neutral
- أوافق / Agree
- أوافق بشدة / Strongly agree

43. **Some believe civilian patrols (neighborhood watch) improve safety. To what extent do you agree?**

يرى البعض أن تشجيع البلديات لتشكيل "مجموعات مراقبة أهلية" (حراسات ليلية) لضمان الأمن إجراء فعال. [إلى أي مدى توافق أو تعترض على هذا الرأي؟

- Strongly disagree / لا أوافق بشدة
 - Disagree / لا أوافق
 - Neutral / محايد
 - Agree / أوافق
 - Strongly agree / أوافق بشدة
-