

Poll Finds Overwhelming Majorities in Lebanon Support Hezbollah, Distrust U.S.

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Most Lebanese—including majorities across all major religious groups—support Hezbollah in its conflict with Israel and distrust the United States as a mediator, according to a recent Lebanese poll.

Palestinians also overwhelmingly support both Hezbollah and the Hamas militants who captured an Israeli soldier last month, provoking Israeli attacks on Gaza. Israelis, meanwhile, believe their military should press its attacks against Hezbollah until the militia is either destroyed or pushed back from Lebanon's southern border.

Eighty-seven percent of the Lebanese back Hezbollah's response to "Israeli aggression," the [Beirut Center for Research and Information](#) found in survey taken July 24-26. That included strong majorities in Lebanon's four major religious groups: 96 percent of Shiites, 87 percent of Sunnis, 80 percent of Christians; and 80 percent of Druze.

The survey of 800 citizens was conducted by Lebanese pollster Abdo Saad. A press release on the center's website said the poll was conducted "according to confessional and regional distribution, including the opinion of the displaced" by the Israeli offensive. But it did not give a margin of error or discuss methodology.

Asked whether they believed the United States was playing the role of an "honest mediator" in the crisis, nine out of ten Lebanese (90%) said no. Again this response included majorities across all groups: Shiites (94%), Sunnis (92%), Druze (89%) and Christians (85%). An overwhelming majority of Lebanese (86%) also answered no to the question of whether the United States had adopted "a positive stand regarding Lebanon in this war." More than eight out of ten in all groups answered in the negative.

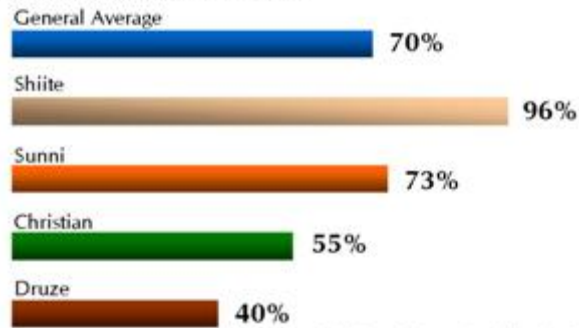
A majority of the Lebanese polled also said they supported Hezbollah's decision to capture two Israeli soldiers to demand an exchange for prisoners held by Israel. Lebanese Shiites (96%) were the most supportive of Hezbollah's actions followed by Sunnis (73%) and Christians (55%). Only among the Druze, a sect that broke with Islam centuries ago, did less than a majority (40%) say they supported Hezbollah's action.

Slightly more than half of Lebanon's population is Muslim, divided about equally between Sunnis and Shiites, according to figures cited in a [2005 U.S. State Department report](#) on religious freedom. About 40 percent are Christian and six percent are Druze.

The July 12 cross-border attack led to a massive Israeli counterattack that has left hundreds of Lebanese dead and forced thousands to flee their homes. But most Lebanese believe that Hezbollah, which has continued to fire shells at across the border, will survive the Israeli offensive. According to the Beirut Center's poll, 63 percent of all Lebanese said that Israel would be unable to defeat Hezbollah. Majorities of Lebanese

Lebanese on Hezbollah Incursion

Percentage who "support the resistance's move to capture two Israeli soldiers for a prisoners swap"



Beirut Center for Research and Information, 7/06

Sunnis (72 percent), Shiites (94%) and Druze (55%) agreed. Less than half of Lebanese Christians (38%), however, thought that the Israeli effort to break Hezbollah would fail.

Polls of Palestinians also show overwhelming support for the Palestinian militants who captured an Israeli soldier on June 25. Over the following month an Israeli offensive has killed some 160 Palestinians in the Gaza strip and cut off much of the territory's electricity. A survey conducted July 24 by [An-Najah University](#) in the West Bank town of Nablus found that 91 percent of Palestinians supported the militants' demands that the soldier only be released in exchange for prisoners held by Israel. Ninety-six percent of those polled—800 Palestinians on the West Bank and 500 in Gaza—also said they had a positive opinion of Hezbollah.

Israelis also overwhelmingly back their armed forces' conduct and a majority oppose any immediate halt in the offensive. According to a poll taken July 31 for the newspaper Maariv, eight in ten Israelis are satisfied or very satisfied with the performance of the Israeli military in Lebanon and seven in ten (74%) are pleased with their political leaders. Asked what the Israeli government should have done following the Qana bombing, 61 percent said "continue the war uninterrupted," according to a BBC translation of the questions. Twenty-nine percent favored a 48-hour halt to the aerial campaign and only nine percent thought Israel should stop fighting and enter negotiations.

A poll taken July 28 by the Dahuf Institute for the newspaper Yediot Aharont found that seven in ten (71%) supported using more military force in Lebanon. Asked what Israel's next step should be, 48 percent said fight until Hezbollah is destroyed and 30 percent said drive the militia away from the border. Only 21 percent wanted to stop fighting and negotiate.