



LEBANON ON THE BRINK OF ELECTIONS: KEY PUBLIC OPINION FINDINGS

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OVERVIEW

As the Lebanese approach a crucial election on June 7th that could alter not only internal Lebanese politics but also Lebanon's relations with the world, much of the focus has been on predicting the outcome or the likely coalitions that could emerge. Equally important, however, are the expressed opinions of the Lebanese public, many of whom will be going to the ballot box. In many ways, the attitudes of the public on core foreign and domestic issues will be critical to the type of government that could emerge. During the campaign, some important issues of concern to the United States were discussed in the course of the political debate. For example, the current Hizballah-led opposition sought to assure the public that Lebanon would not become an Iran-like theocracy. The United States, for its part, made its intentions clear, through visits by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Vice-President Joe Biden, both of whom registered their support for the current ruling coalition.

Whether or not these steps will make a difference remains to be seen, but some things are clear: On many issues, majorities of the Lebanese public remain very much at odds with American foreign policy, even as they express somewhat positive views of President Obama. What's also clear is that on many issues, all the major communities in Lebanon (Shi'ah, Sunni, Christian, and Druze) are united. A critical reason for this is that, quite strikingly, large majorities of each group see themselves as Lebanese above all else. In this way, expressed Lebanese views are more "statist" than the other countries polled in the Arab world (Egypt, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the United Arab Emirates). One issue on which the Lebanese public largely agrees is that of Iran's

nuclear program; a majority opposes international pressure on Tehran to stop its nuclear project.

At the same time, however, the Lebanese public disagrees on several important issues. Some differences are predictable: Few Shi'ah identify Iran as one of the two biggest threats they face, whereas 45 percent of Druze, 29 percent of Sunnis, and 23 percent of Christians do. Other differences are somewhat surprising: While 11 percent of the Shi'ah polled express support for al-Qa'ida's methods, 20 percent of Christian Lebanese express similar approval.

Not surprisingly, the Arab-Israeli issue is seen as the central issue through which most Lebanese evaluate American foreign policy. But what is striking is that the second most important issue is economic aid, which is significantly different from what publics in other Arab countries state. Whether or not an assessment of the likely economic consequences of the elections will be a factor on voters' minds remains to be seen, but it is clearly an important issue to them (one that Vice President Biden may have tried to play on when he spoke in Beirut about the unlikelihood of continuing aid if the Hizballah-led coalition wins a majority).

KEY FINDINGS

The following are key findings from the 2009 Arab Public Opinion Poll conducted in Lebanon from March to May 2009. The survey had a sample size of 583 and has a margin of error of +/- 4.1 percent.

Responses are broken down along the lines of religious groupings. A presentation of the data may be found in the appendix to this memo and more detailed results of the poll can be accessed [here](#).

- ❖ **Identity:** Strong majorities of every Lebanese community polled (Christian, Sunni, Shi'ah, Druze) identify themselves as Lebanese first. All factions also identify themselves as Arab second.
- ❖ **Media:** Hizballah's Al-Manar TV is identified by 36 percent of Lebanese (and the overwhelming majority of Shi'ah) as the first choice for international news. Al-Jazeera comes second with 25 percent.
- ❖ **Role of religion in politics:** Forty-two percent of Lebanese (50 percent of Shi'ah, 40 percent of Sunnis, 41 percent of Druze, and 35 percent of Christians) state that religious clergy should play a bigger role in politics.
- ❖ **President Obama and his administration:** Majorities of every faction except for Shi'ah express positive views of President Obama. Among Shi'ah, 31 percent hold positive views of the president, whereas 48 percent hold negative views (21 percent are neutral). Similarly, majorities of every faction except for Shi'ah are hopeful about the administration's policy toward the Middle East. Among the Shi'ah, 34 percent are hopeful, whereas 44 percent are discouraged (22 percent are neutral).
- ❖ **The United States:** Majorities of Christians and Druze have favorable views of the United States, whereas majorities of Sunnis and Shi'ah have negative views. In identifying the two factors that would most improve their views of the United States, 59 percent of Lebanese choose resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict and 44 percent choose providing more economic aid to the region. A majority of Lebanese identify controlling oil and protecting Israel as the two primary aims of American policy in the Middle East. Majorities of every faction except the Druze (46 percent) identify the United States as one of the two biggest threats they face.
- ❖ **Iran's nuclear program:** Sixty-three percent of Lebanese polled say that Iran's nuclear program is merely peaceful and 71 percent (majorities of every faction except for the Druze) express the view that international pressure on Iran over its nuclear program should stop.
- ❖ **Arab-Israeli Issue:** Seventy percent of Lebanese (majorities of every group) say they would accept peace with Israel based on the 1967 borders, but 52 percent say it will never happen.
- ❖ **Palestinian politics:** A majority of Lebanese (and a majority of every group) prefer to see a Palestinian unity government, whereas 36 percent prefer a Hamas-led government and 14 percent prefer a Fatah-led government. Overall, 42 percent of Lebanese sympathize with Hamas, 16 percent sympathize with Fatah, and 32 percent sympathize with both to some extent. Among every faction, including Christians, more people sympathize with Hamas than with Fatah.

2009 Lebanon Arab Public Opinion Poll

A Survey of the Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development, University of Maryland (with Zogby International). Professor Shibley Telhami, Principle Investigator

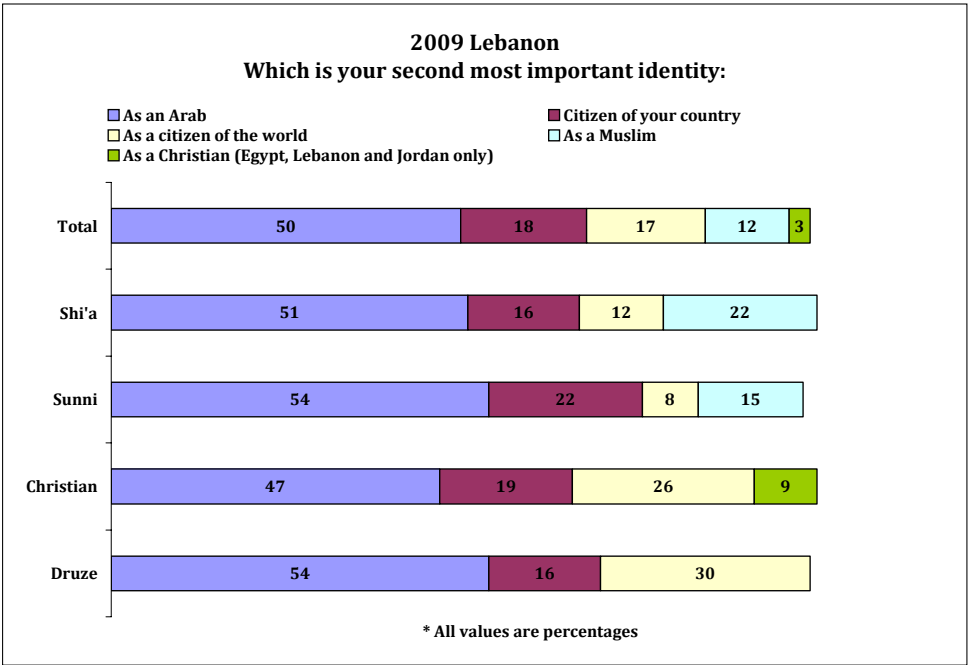
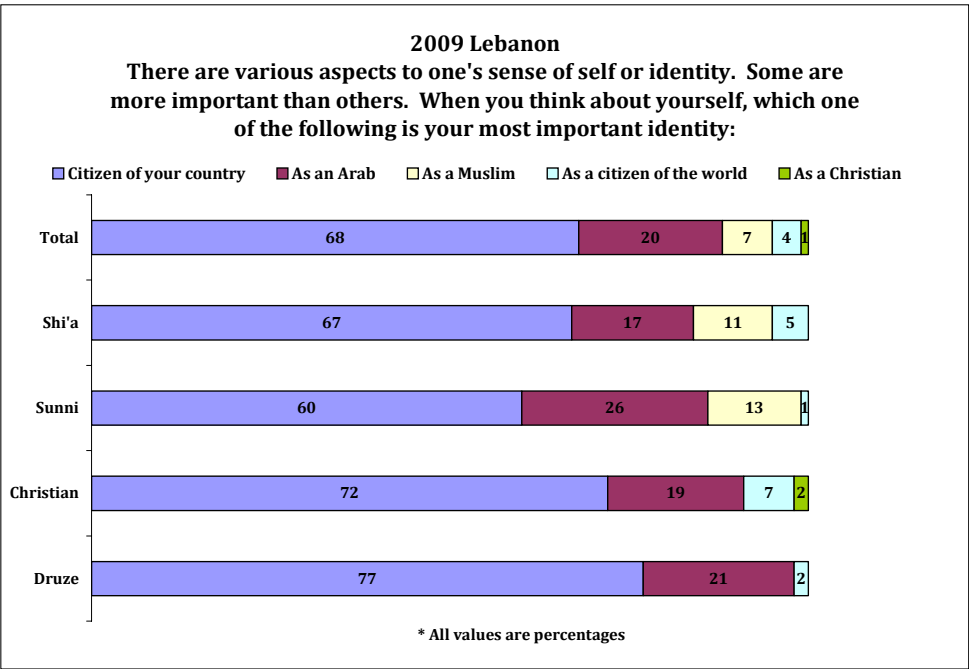
Survey conducted March-May 2009

Sample Size: 583

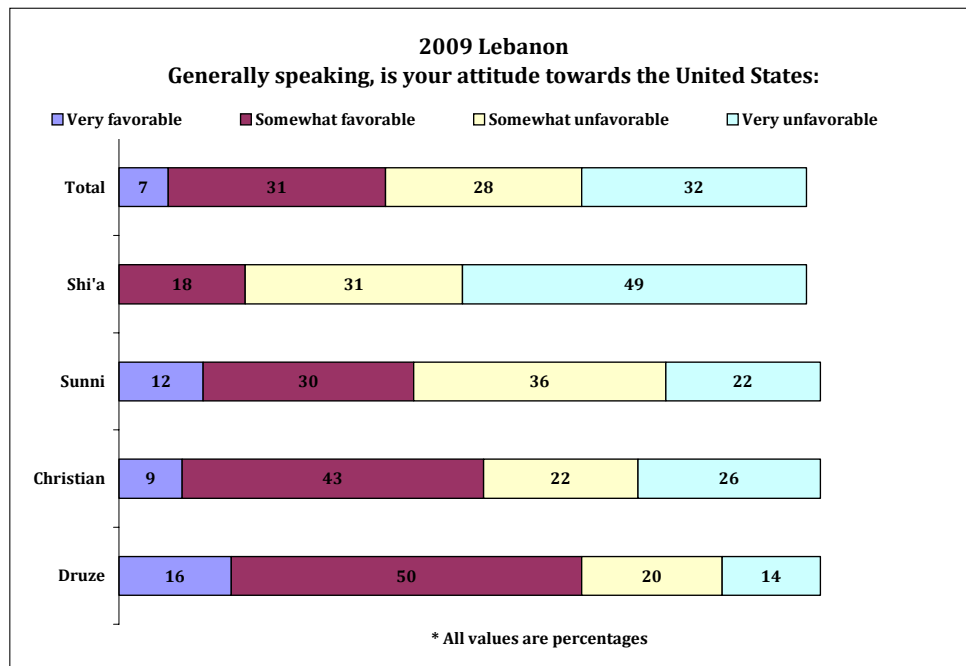
MOE+/- 4.1%

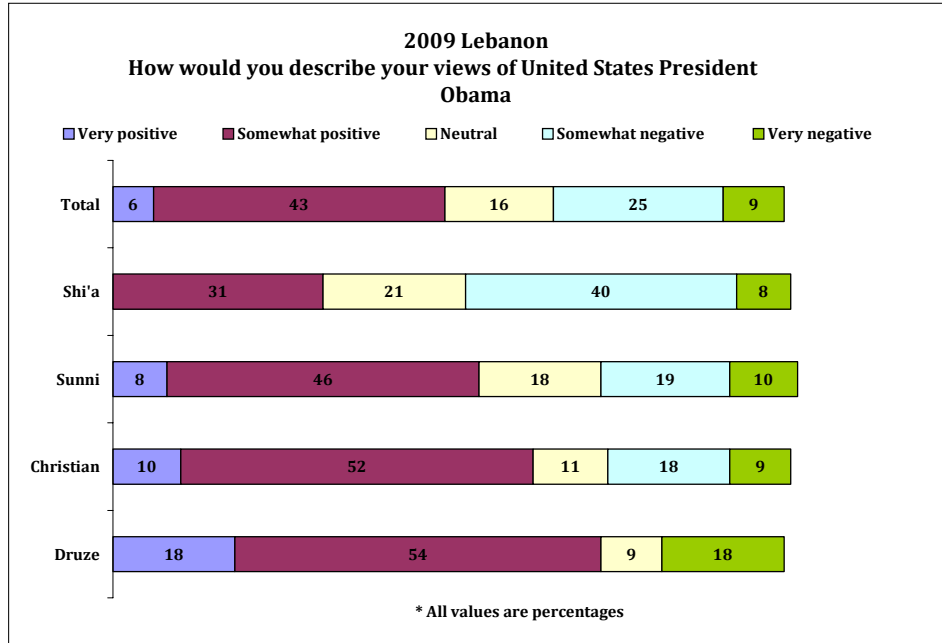
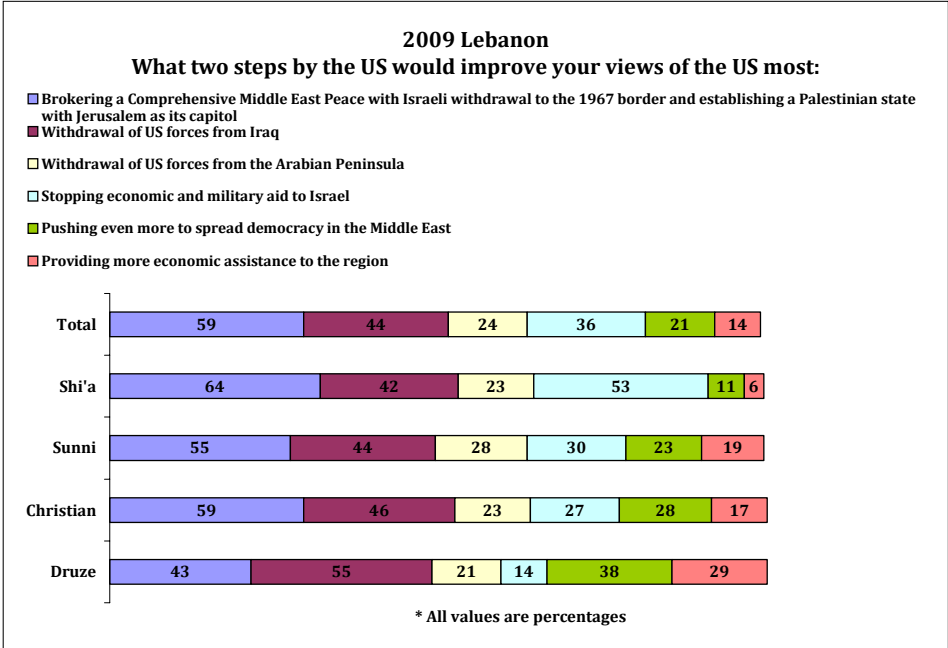
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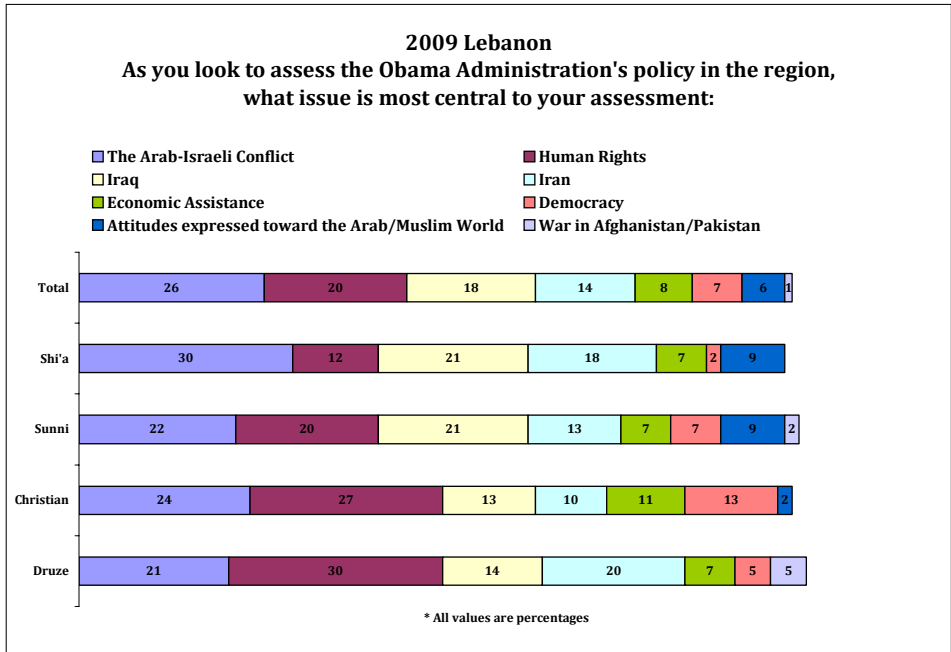
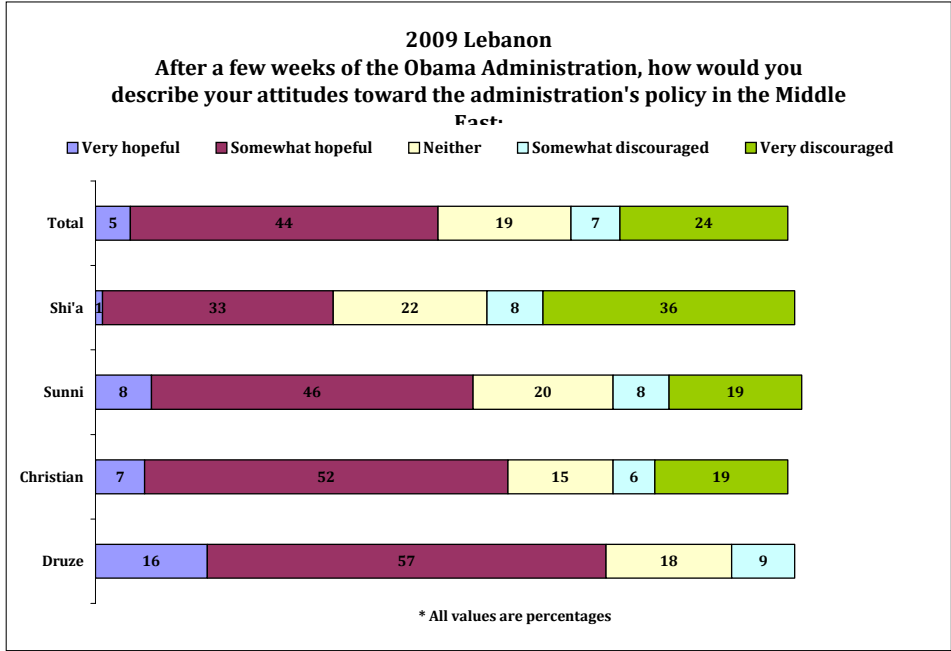
Identity Politics



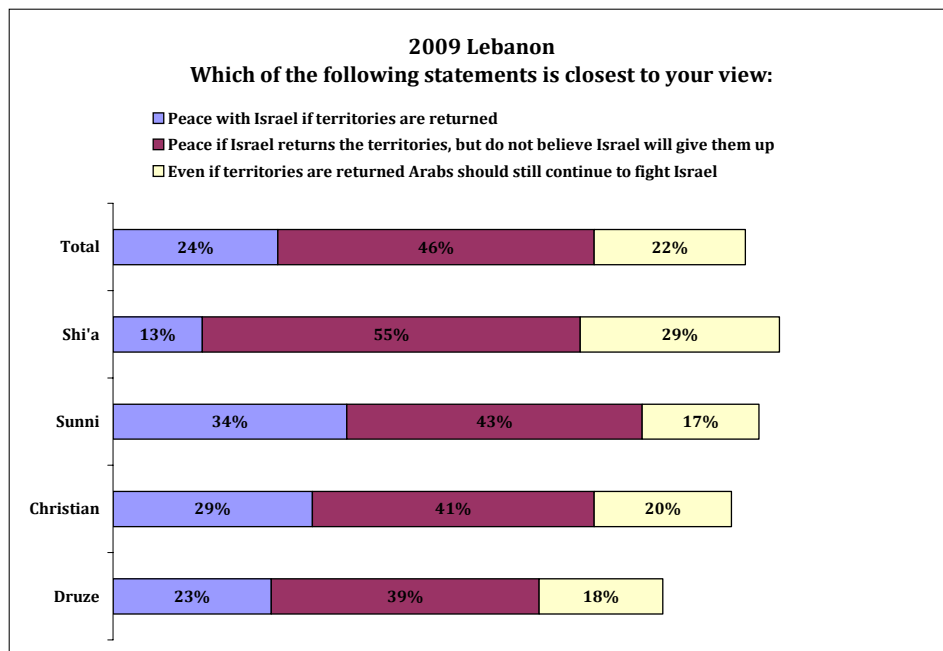
Views of the US

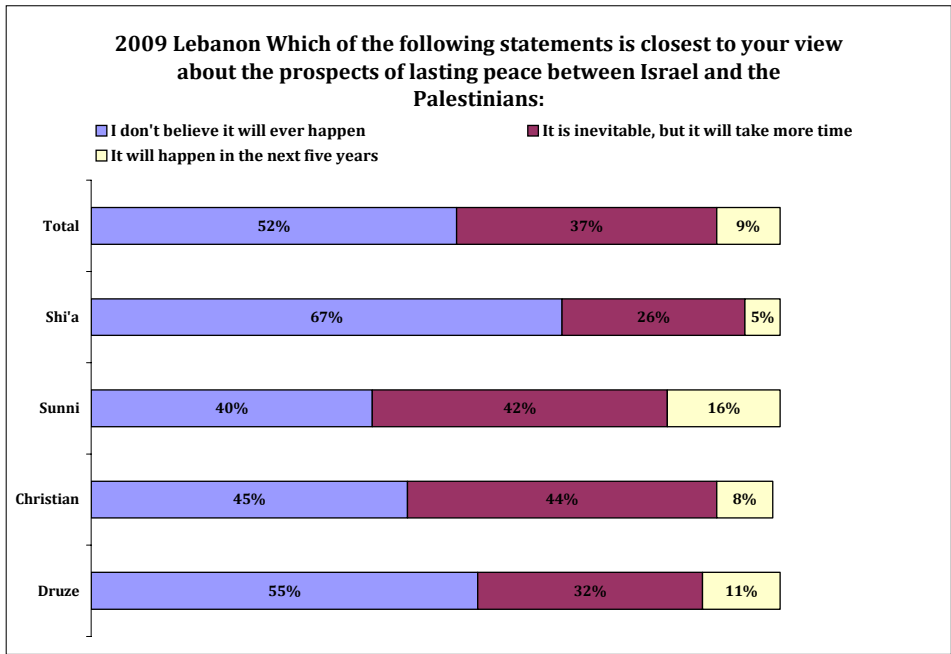




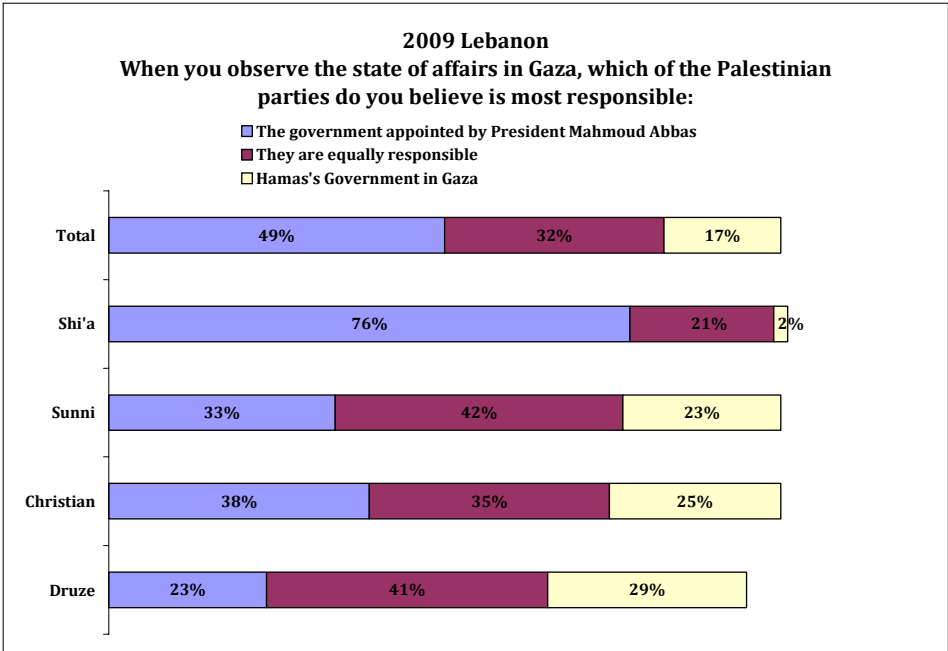
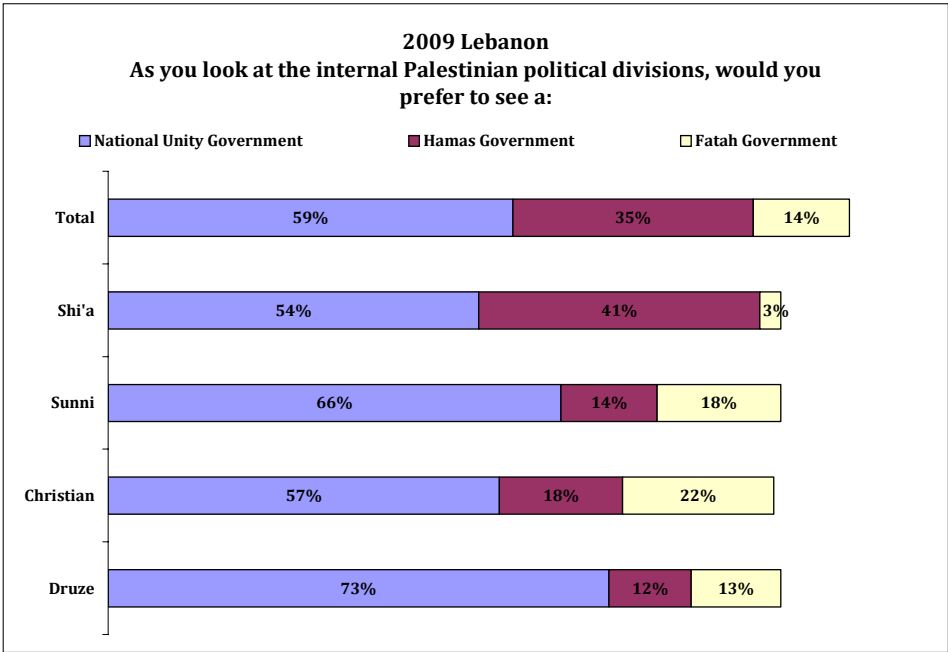


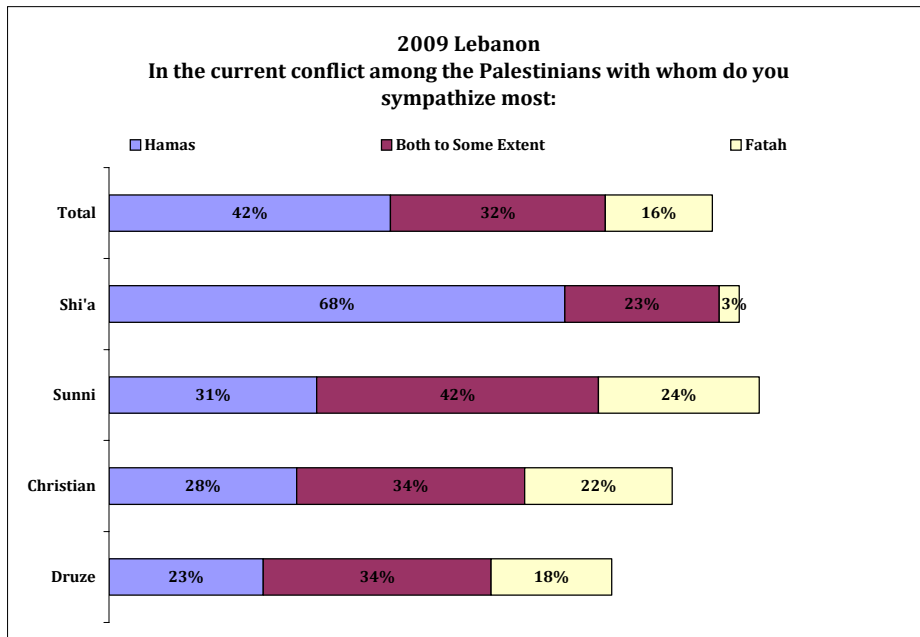
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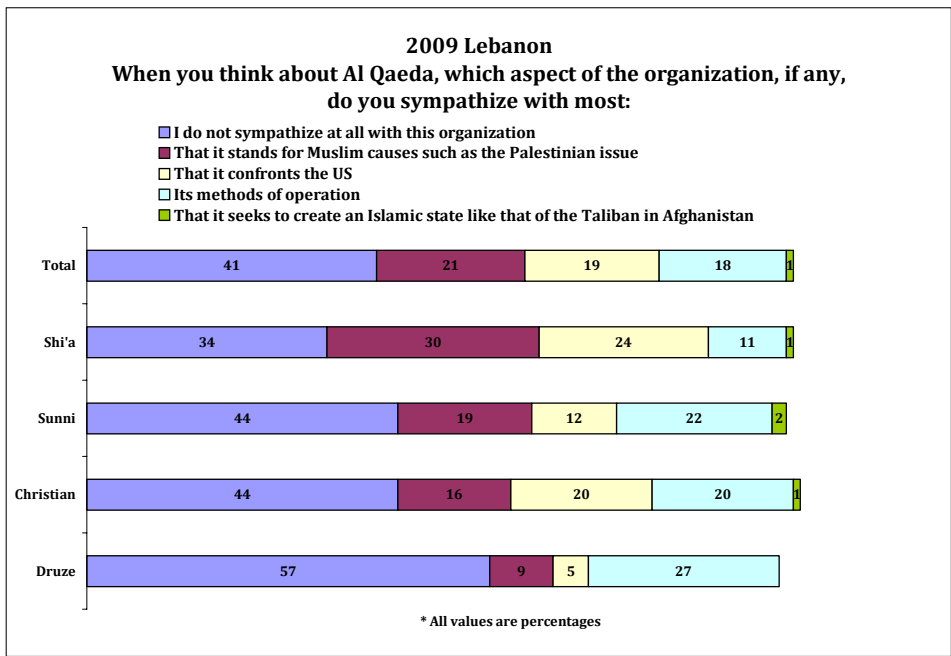


Palestinian Domestic Politics

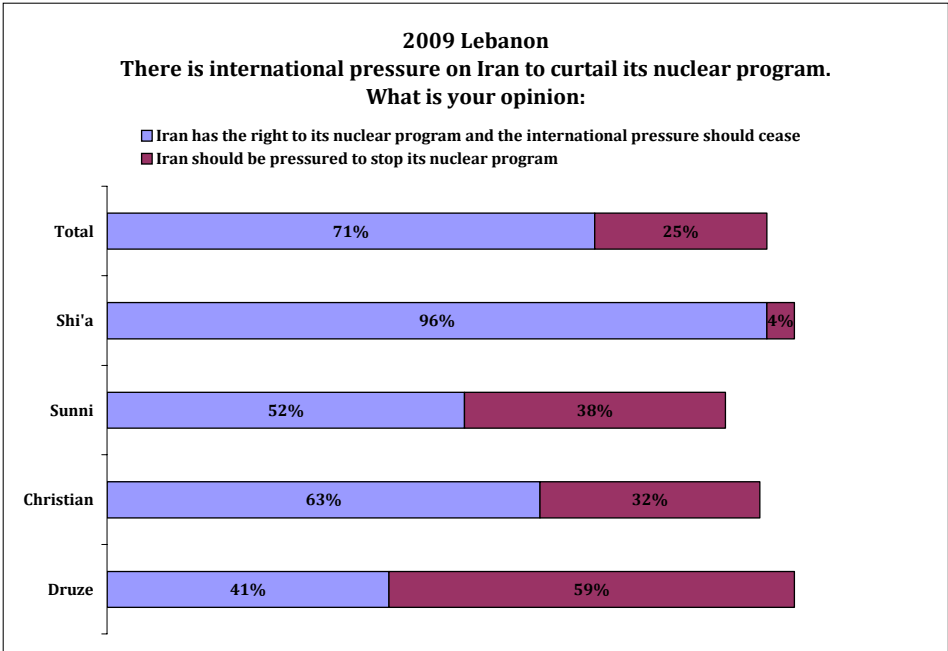
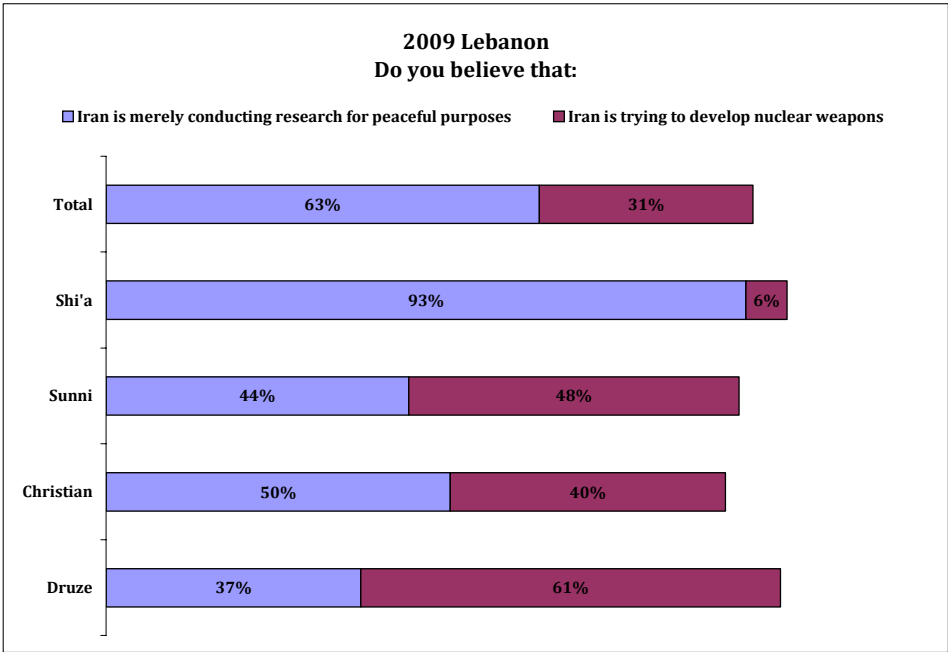




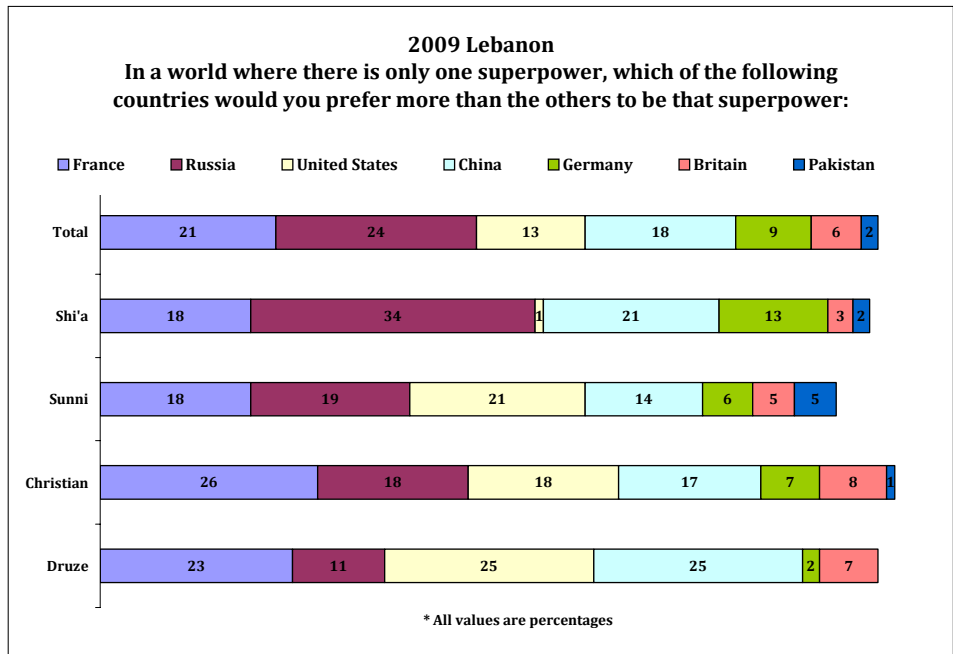
View of Al Qaeda

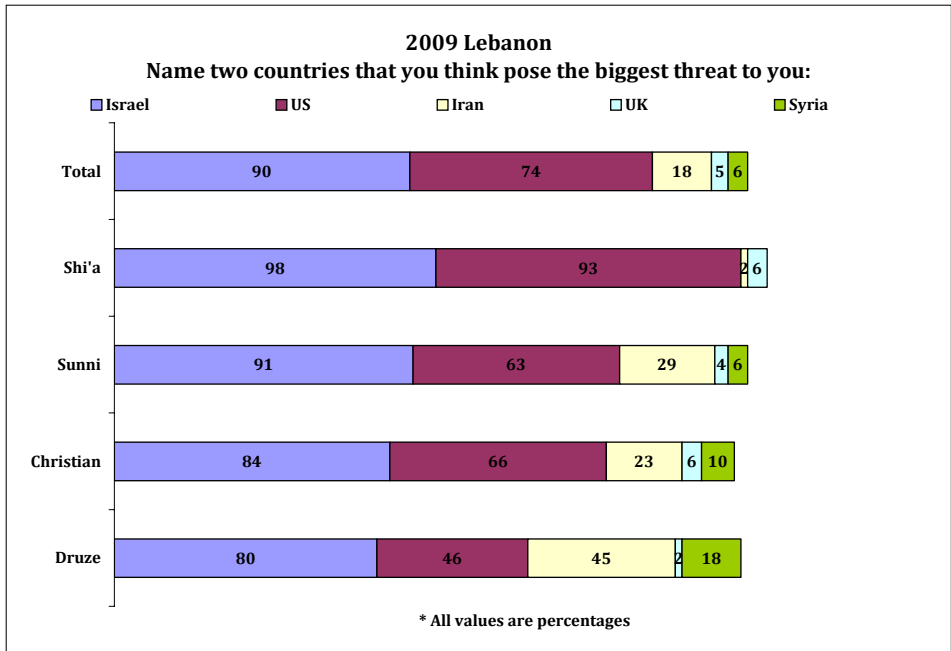
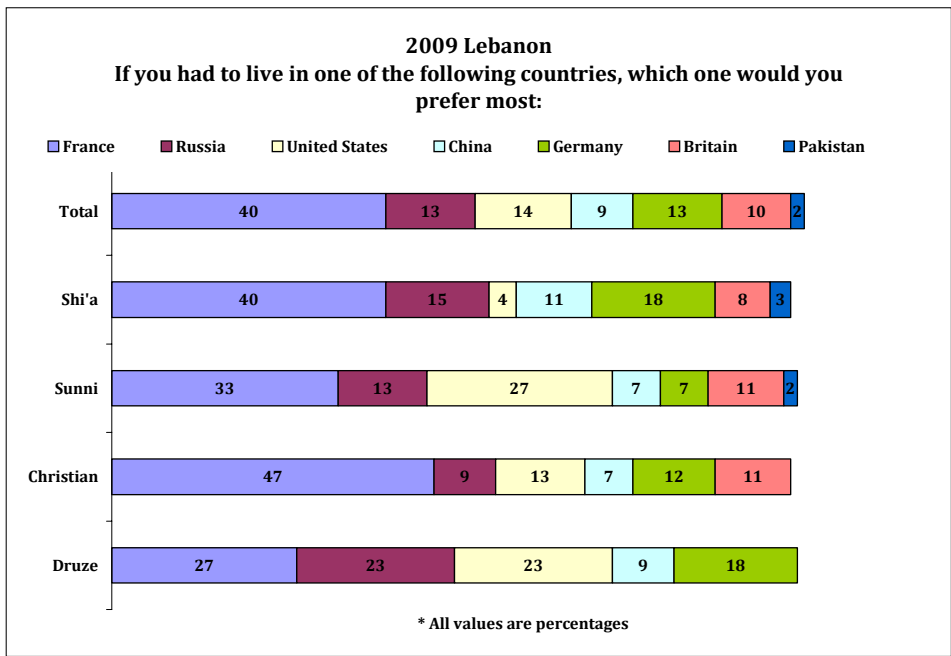


Iran's Nuclear Program

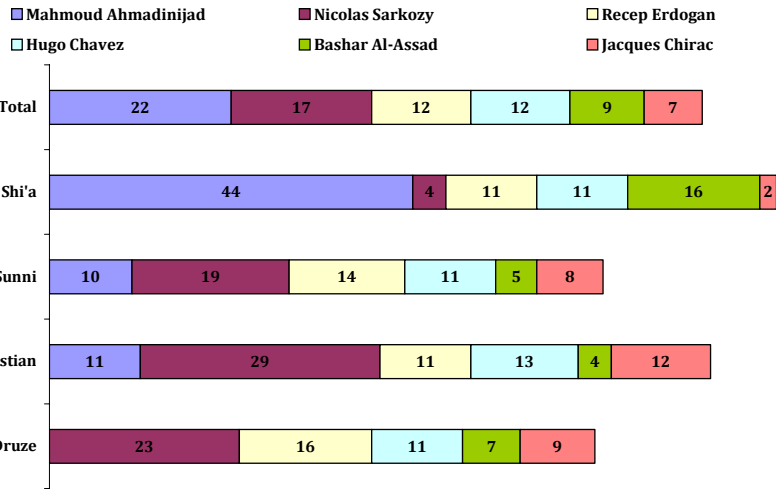


Views of Major Global Powers





2009 Lebanon
Please tell me which world leader (outside your own country) you admire most:



* All values are percentages * Other leaders mentioned include H. Mubarak, F. Castro, Putin and Obama

