

# COVID-19 INFORMATION LANDSCAPE IN LEBANON

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*Initial Insights*



accelerator  
labs



**1 THE LEBANESE CONTEXT**

**2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

**3 MAJOR INSIGHTS**

**4 MOVING FORWARD**

**1**

**THE LEBANESE  
CONTEXT**

**In Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic is  
happening alongside many other crises.**



قارئة



**50% INTO  
POVERTY**

**50% INTO  
POVERTY**

**HYPER-  
INFLATION**

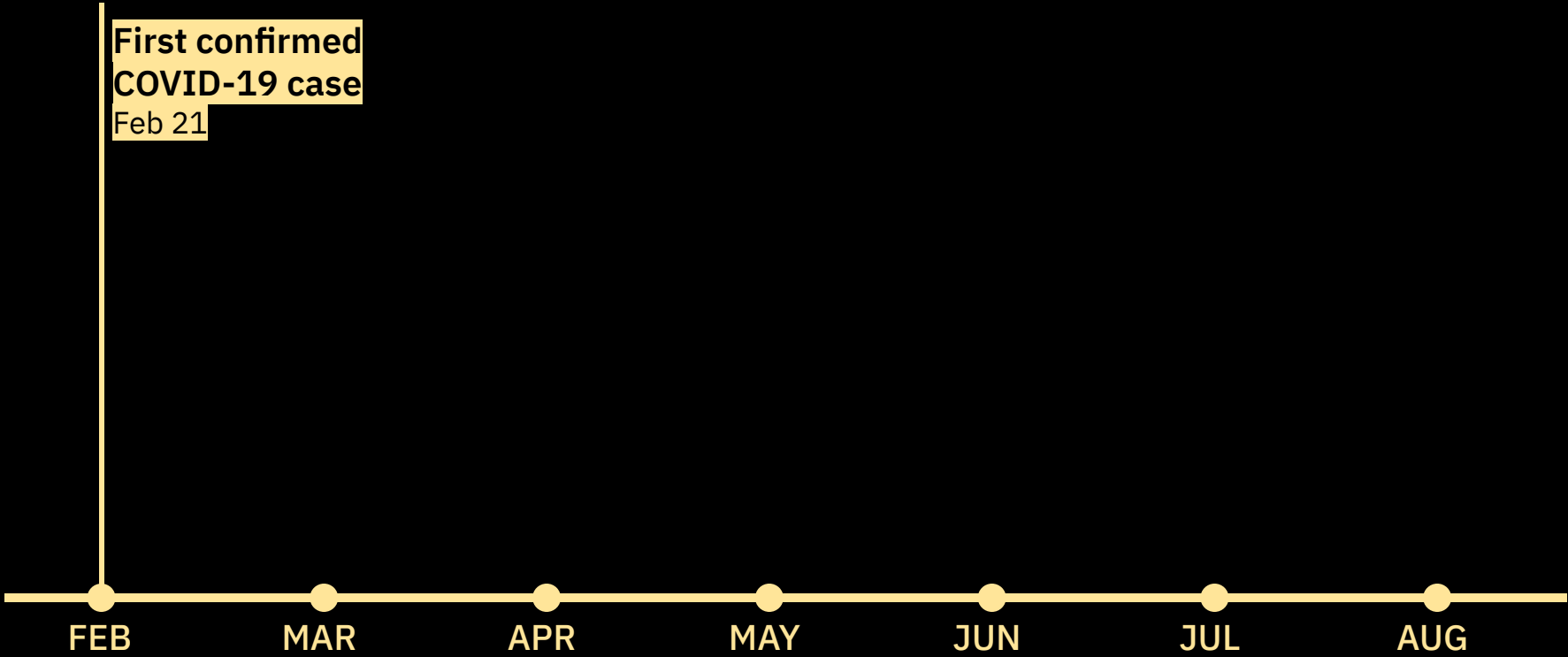


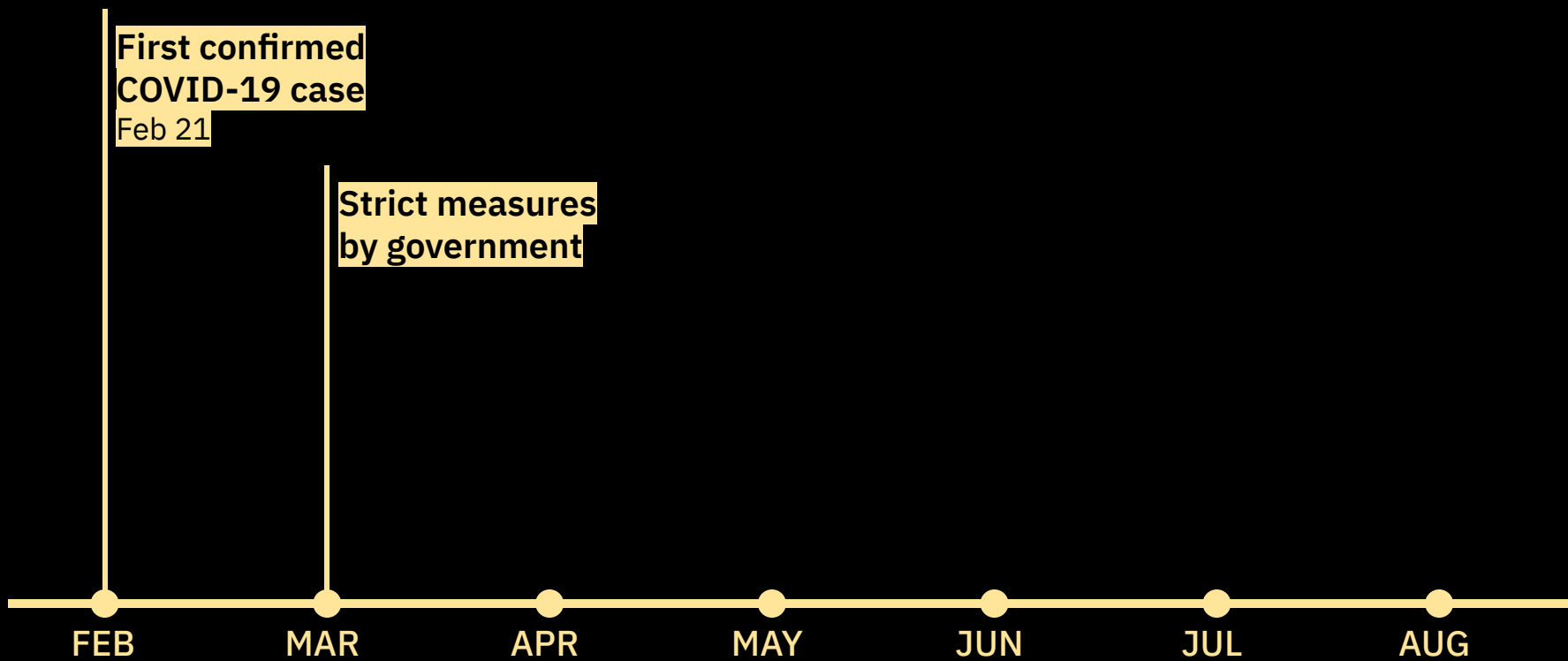
**50% INTO  
POVERTY**

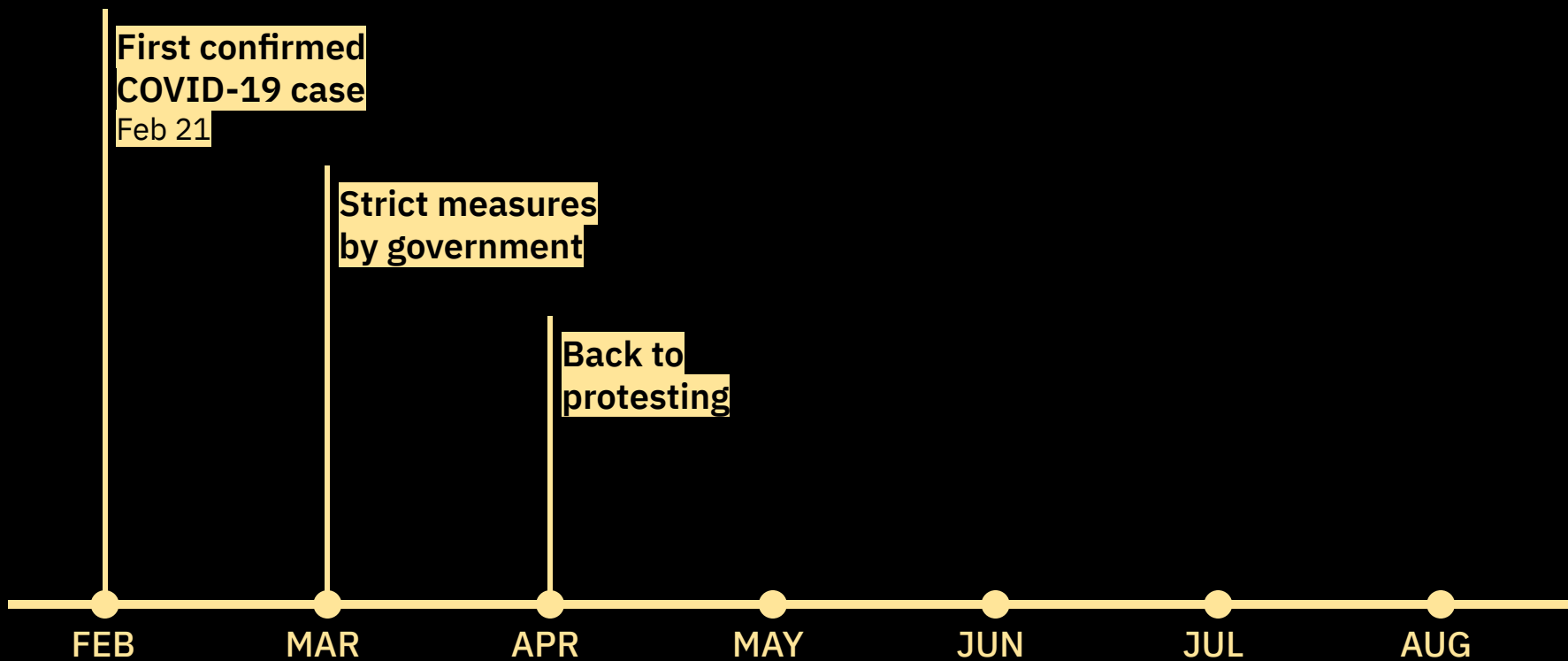
**HYPER-  
INFLATION**

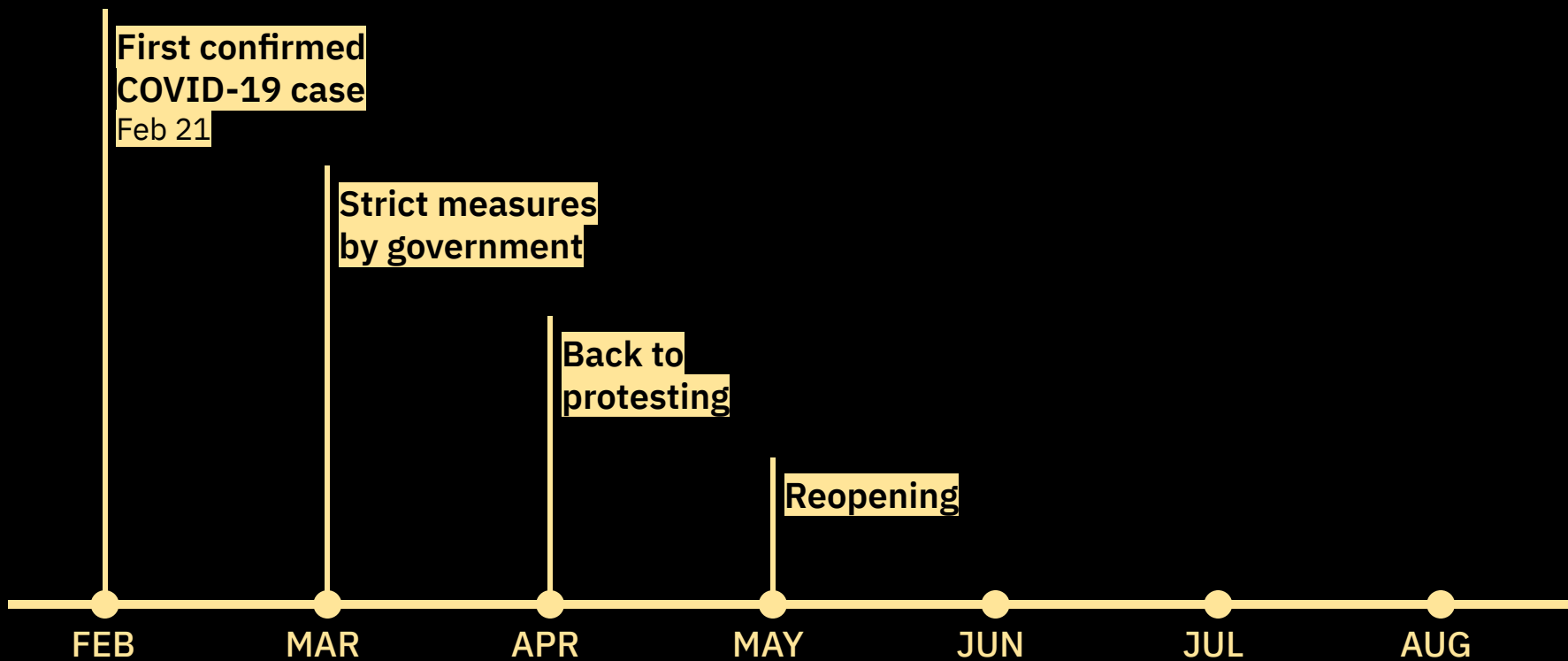
**CAPITAL  
CONTROL**

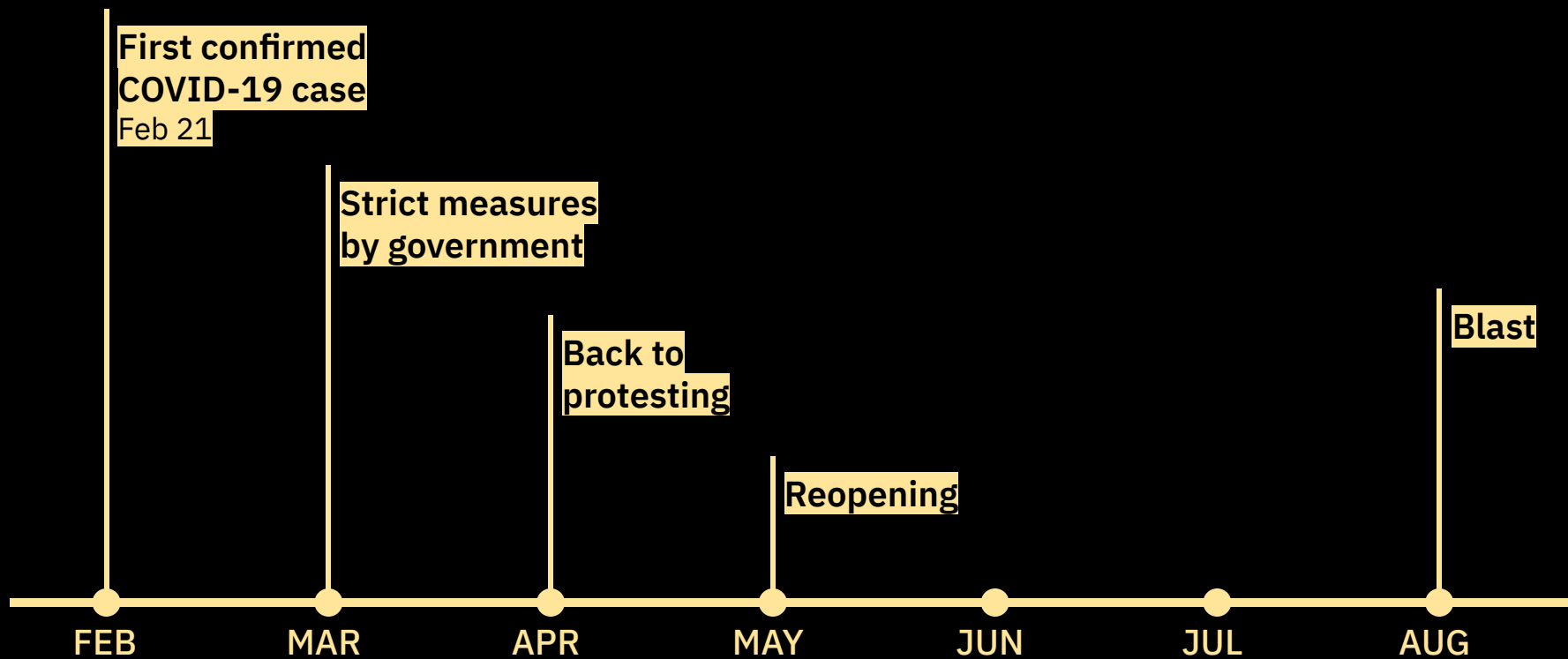












**First confirmed  
COVID-19 case**  
Feb 21

**Strict measures  
by government**

**Back to  
protesting**

**Reopening**

**Blast**

FEB

MAR

APR

MAY

JUN

JUL

AUG



**Beirut Blast**  
**August 4, 2020**





**Beirut Blast**  
**August 4, 2020**



**Beirut Blast**  
**August 4, 2020**















**1500-2000**  
**COVID-19 cases/day**

**1500-2000**  
**COVID-19 cases/day**

Population: 6.8 million



**FAITH IN  
GOVERNMENT  
DECLINING**

**FAITH IN  
GOVERNMENT  
DECLINING**

**FATIGUE  
RISING**

**FAITH IN  
GOVERNMENT  
DECLINING**

**FATIGUE  
RISING**

**ANXIETIES  
GROWING**

**How are people accessing and making sense of information related to COVID?**

**The media landscape in Lebanon is muddied with **misinformation**, **misleading information**, and the **willful lack of information**.**



# **Traditional Media Outlets**

**Traditional  
Media Outlets**



**Political  
Parties**

**Social media also contribute to an ecosystem of information pollution.**

**What does the information  
landscape look like and how does  
it inform people's behaviors?**

**2**

**RESEARCH  
METHODOLOGY**

- 1 How Lebanese citizens access information about COVID-19**
- 2 Perceptions and behaviors of Lebanese citizens towards COVID-19**

**DESK  
REVIEW**

**385**  
**PHONE  
SURVEYS**

**20**  
**INTERVIEWS**

**ONLINE  
SURVEY**  
(ongoing)

**3**

**INSIGHTS**

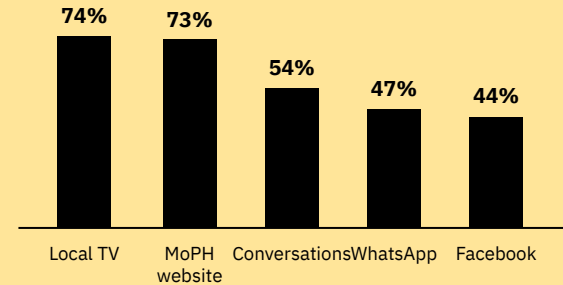


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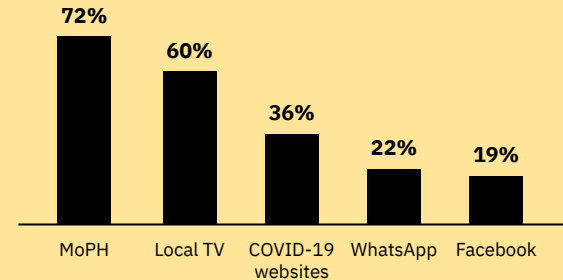
**There is a significant reliance on TV and social media to get information.**

- The use of an information channel is not a reflection of trust in the information.
- There is a general acknowledgement that much of the information shared by social media groups can be categorized as misinformation and fake news.

**TOP 5 SOURCES USED TO RECEIVE INFORMATION ABOUT COVID-19**



**TOP 5 SOURCES CITED AS TRUSTWORTHY**



## 2

### **Conspiracy, incomplete information, false information, and no fact-checking.**

→ More than half of survey participants see COVID-19 as “just another flu” and a hoax.

“ [...] People have been living in a conspiracy mindset for a very long time and **have mixed the political issues with economic and health issues**. They (people) accuse the Government of increasing numbers so that they isolate the villages and stop the people from participating in the demonstrations. They (people) have also been saying that the Government is giving money to each reported positive case. ”

“ The awareness that we are talking about is not related to information. The information now is known from A to Z, but people are not convinced. They think this is a **conspiracy**, an imperialist Zionist conspiracy. ”

### 3

**Trust in information sources is built based on personal judgment; not fact-checking.**

- If a source of information confirms people's bias, then they trust it.
- Most respondents rely on their "common sense" or their self-constructed reality.

*“ 90% of people **do not fact-check**. For example, if someone did a test in a public hospital and it turns out to be positive, they **don't believe it**. Then they will do a test in a private hospital and it turns out to be negative. They don't ask why this happened. They **directly say** that the results from the public hospital are wrong and they start with the **conspiracy theory**. ”*

*“ I don't always fact check. I use my **common sense** to see whether this information is true or not. For example, if the information is posted by **someone I know and trust** and think highly of, then the information should be true. So **who sends the information** makes a difference to me. ”*

# 4

## Factors for a self-constructed reality

Lack of fact-checking capacity and tools

Need for a sense of control

Ambiguity of COVID-19

Inconsistency and low-quality of COVID-19 information\*

Inconsistency of the decisions of the Lebanese Government

Need to find solutions for day-to-day problems

“ People want to live. They **create their own reality** based on the level of information they have and based on what makes sense to them. **This is why science is not really the most important thing to the people.** They will not get the science, they need something that makes them feel that they can understand and something that they based their **day-to-day functions on.** ”

\* Only 17% of participants described the information as of high quality, and 20% described it as highly consistent.

5

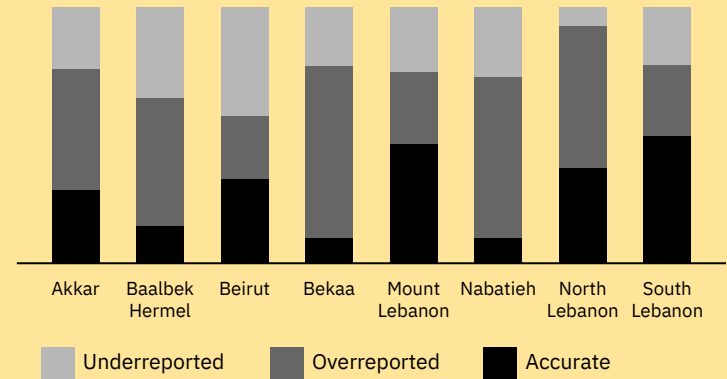
**The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.**

***Lack of trust in the severity of the COVID-19 situation in Lebanon***

- Only 38% of participants believe that statistics reported by the MoPH are accurate, while most believe they are either over- or underreported with major geographic difference.
- In Beirut, 42% perceive the statistics to be underreported, while participants in Bekaa, Nabatieh, and North Lebanon state that it is overreported (68%, 64%, 55%).

*“ Counts reported by the Ministry on TV do not make sense to me. I don't believe that we have over a thousand cases every day. I don't know anyone who has COVID. People around me don't know anyone. ”*

**PERCEPTION OF ACCURACY OF COVID-19 STATISTICS REPORTED BY THE GoL**



## 5

**The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.**

***Lack of trust in the severity of the COVID-19 situation in Lebanon***

- Participants believe that government actions are meant to hinder people from mobilizing and demonstrating against the other economic and political priorities.

“ A lot of people **don't take this seriously**. They say this is a made-up game so that people **don't demonstrate and go to the streets**. They say they don't know anyone who got sick.

”

“ [...] The government is **bombarding people with restrictions and messages of what they need to do without explaining what is behind these measures**. This is happening at a time when the people already have low trust in the Government. In this situation, people will turn to their **natural state of doubt** and go to the easy option of not adhering and not listening.

”

5

**The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.**

***Lack of trust in the crisis management decisions and implementation***

- Only 28% of survey respondents understand the strategy of the Government, with participants in Akkar (23-29 y-o) showing the lowest level of understanding.
- Only 9% of survey respondents state that they trust the politicians to handle COVID-19.
- Only 52% state that they fully agree that medical practitioners understand COVID-19.

“ *The two-week shutdown that was imposed after the explosion was very different for me. **I did not trust the need for this measure and I did not abide by it**, I thought it was not necessary and it was not well studied before being imposed. We were already in a very bad situation after the explosion. The evidence is that the cases didn't decrease after the two-week shut down. What I know is that **the explosion made a huge difference in my decisions and my behavior.*** ”

“ *[...] the decisions of the Government were not clear. Moreover, the changes in the decisions, and lack of enforcement of the measures made people question the ability to exercise their authority. **We as citizens, we like to defy authority. Based on this people stopped complying with the measures.*** ”

5

**The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.**

***Lack of trust in the enforcement measures***

- Participants believe that the Government's enforcement approaches are inadequate.
- Factors related to favoritism, political agenda, or lack of accountability are reported as main reasons of mistrust.
- Respondents report inconsistency in the treatment of individuals and communities in Lebanon, and the perception of unfairness appears to impact the behavior of people.

“ If people see that the **municipal police** is allowing a shop to open but not the others, how will they trust the Government? People have lost trust in the Government, and it is very hard to regain trust. They also have low trust in Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), because each CSO is related to someone in the government. ”

“ There were many situations when we notified the security forces about weddings that are happening. They, however, **often do nothing.** ”

“ I (Head of Union of Municipalities) have authority. I can punish people who are organizing wedding and such things, I can issue a “Mahdar” with a 6 million L.L fee and 6 months in jail, but I **don't do this.** The maximum I can do it to issue a **warning.** You know our region. ”

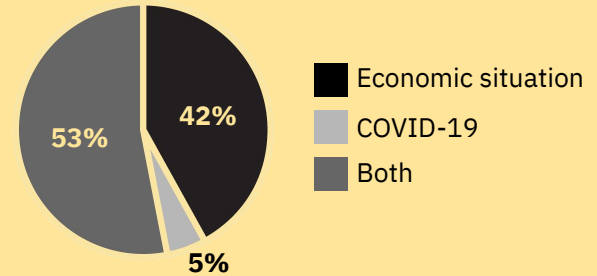


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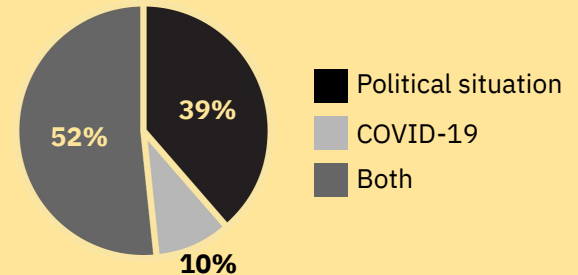
## The economic situation in the country is the top priority.

- High levels of unemployment, hyperinflation, and depreciation of the Lebanese Pound significantly shape perceptions and behaviors towards COVID-19.
- Respondents report that they are having to choose between protecting themselves from COVID-19 and generate income for their families.

**LEVEL OF CONCERN:  
COVID-19 AND ECONOMIC SITUATION**



**LEVEL OF CONCERN:  
COVID-19 AND POLITICAL SITUATION**



*“ I prefer to die from COVID-19 and not let my family die from hunger. ”*

7

**Perceptions and behaviors of individuals are influenced by several factors at the individual, environmental, and policy levels.**



**The perceptions and practices of respondents towards COVID-19 and its information landscape are not influenced only by health considerations.**

**COVID-19 seems to be strongly linked to political and economic considerations that respondents believe have a direct impact on their daily life.**

**The perceptions and practices of respondents towards COVID-19 and its information landscape are not influenced only by health considerations.**

**COVID-19 seems to be strongly linked to political and economic considerations that respondents believe have a direct impact on their daily life.**

**Our research showed major differences in the results across different Governorates and age groups.**

**A one-size-fits-all approach will not work for any behavioral interventions in Lebanon.**

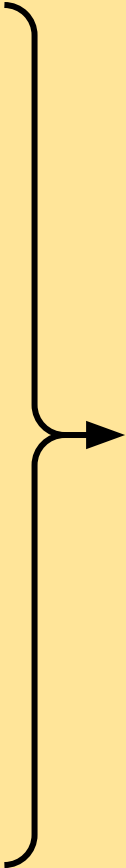
**ECONOMIC  
SITUATION**

**+**

**REGION/  
SPECIFIC  
CONTEXT**

**+**

**PERCEPTION +  
TRUST IN THE  
GOVERNMENT**



**THE  
INFORMATION  
LANDSCAPE**



**PERCEPTIONS  
OF COVID-19**



**BEHAVIORS  
AROUND  
COVID-19**

**4**

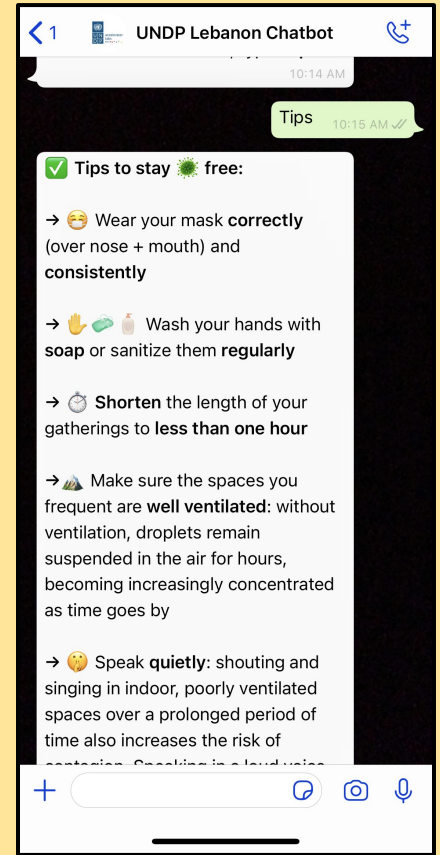
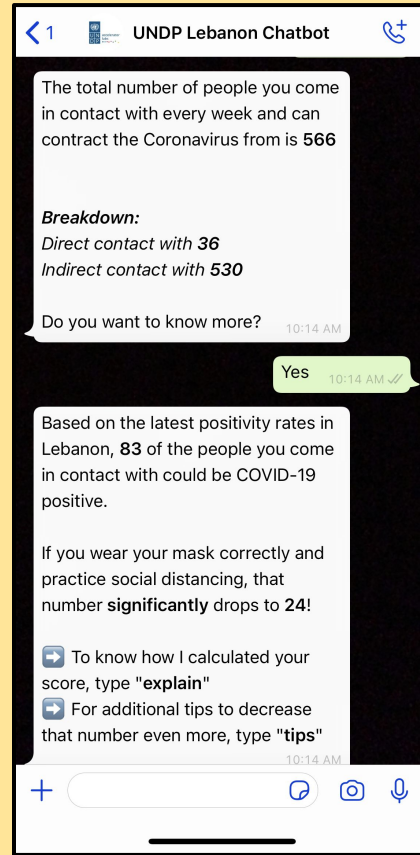
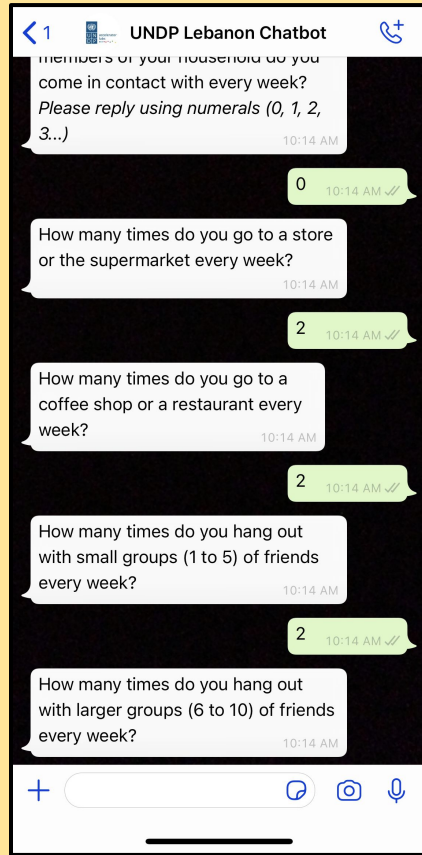
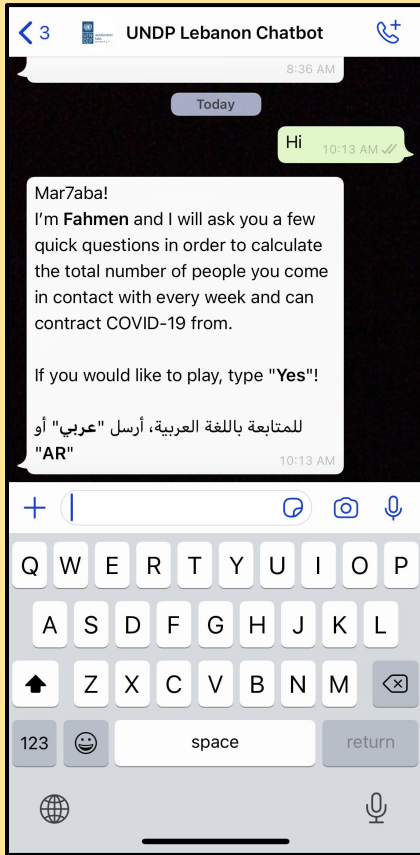
**MOVING FORWARD**

**Open up survey  
to larger public  
to validate and  
have a better  
understanding**



**Open up survey  
to larger public  
to validate and  
have a better  
understanding**

**Experiment with a  
chatbot as source  
of information**



**Open up survey  
to larger public  
to validate and  
have a better  
understanding**

**Experiment with a  
chatbot as source  
of information**

**Make results  
accessible**

# COVID-19 in Lebanon: Perceptions and Behaviors

The perceptions and practices of the respondents towards Covid-19 are not influenced only by health considerations. Covid-19 seems to be strongly linked to political and economic considerations that respondents believe have a direct impact on their daily life. Research findings showed major differences in Covid-19 perceptions and behaviors across different governorates and age groups.

## What do people think about COVID-19?

**81%**

of people believe COVID-19 is a serious disease.

“ At the beginning, I used to check WHO. I look for evidence, because I am a scientific person. Once I got info on Covid I got to know what it is. Now, I am not checking anymore.

“ Before, when I used to hear the word Corona, I felt a lot of fear and concern. Now it is becoming more of a style of living, and it is becoming normal. When it first started, I used to disinfect my hands, the money, and the door handle everytime I used the van (mini-bus). Now, it is normal, I just wear a mask, and when I leave the van, I put on a sanitizer.

**74%**

of people believe COVID-19 will not influence their daily activities.

**55%**

of people believe COVID-19 is just another type of cold or flu.

“ I know that COVID-19 is here and I know it will always stay. Maybe I got used to the fact that it exists or maybe my priorities are different.

**57%**

of people believe

COVID-19 is just another type of cold or flu.

“ I know that COVID-19 is here and I know it will always stay. Maybe I got used to the fact that it exists or maybe my priorities are different. Now the fear that used to prevent me from seeing my parents is no longer there. So, now I am going out, I am working from the office, and I am going to see my parents.

**57%**  
of people believe COVID-19 is a hoax or conspiracy intended to control people.

**59%**

of people believe they are likely to be infected with COVID-19 in the next 3 months.

“ People have been living in a conspiracy mindset for a very long time and have mixed the political issues with economic and health issues.

## What do people know about COVID-19?

### COVID-19 symptoms

72%	60%	54%	42%	27%	20%

### How COVID-19 spreads

73%	70%	58%	38%	34%	5%

### COVID-19 prevention methods

81%	75%	74%	39%	8%	2%

## Do people trust the Lebanese government to handle COVID-19?

### Trust in politicians to handle Covid-19



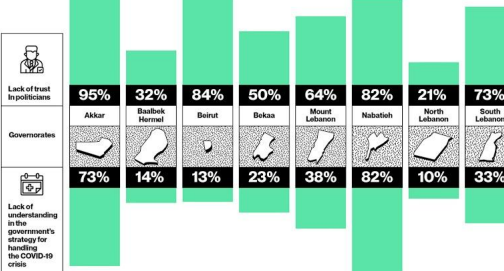
### Understanding of the government's response plan for Covid-19



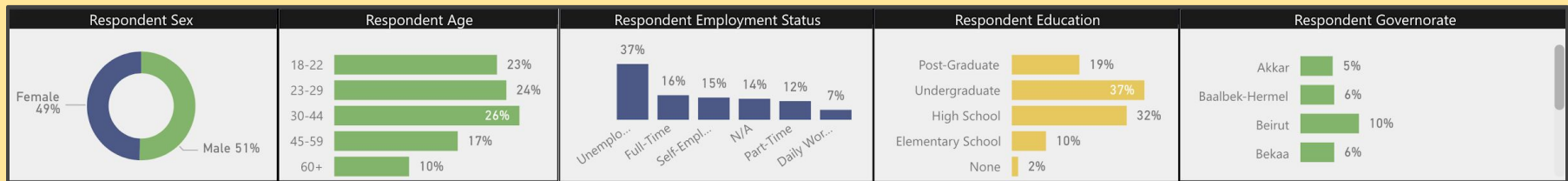
“ I don't think the situation in the country will get better. I actually think it will get worse, especially if people continue to act carelessly. I see a very troubling situation, especially that we don't understand what is happening; we don't trust the Government. There is no government anyway, and we don't know what will come next. I have a very dark image in my head.

“ The government is bombarding people with restrictions and messages of what they need to do without explaining the reasoning behind these measures. This is happening at a time when the people already have low trust in the Government. In this situation, people will turn to their natural state of doubt and go to the easy option of not adhering and not listening.

## Lack of trust in the government across Lebanese Governorates

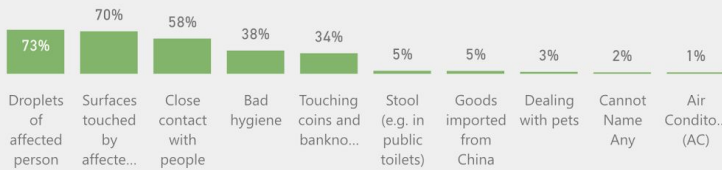


The data presented in this infographic is derived from a mixed-methods research conducted by the

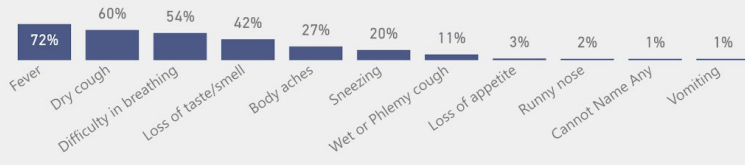


### What do people know about COVID-19?

#### Cited Ways in which COVID-19 Spreads



#### Cited COVID-19 Symptoms



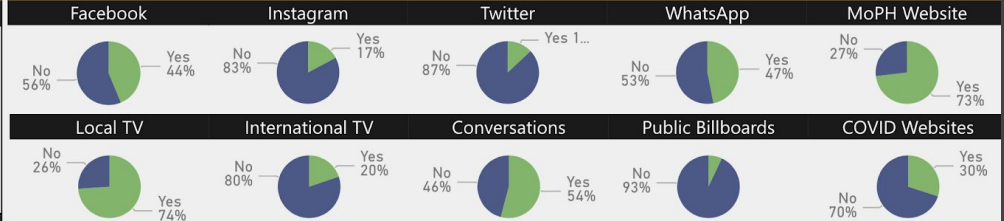
#### Cited COVID-19 Prevention Methods



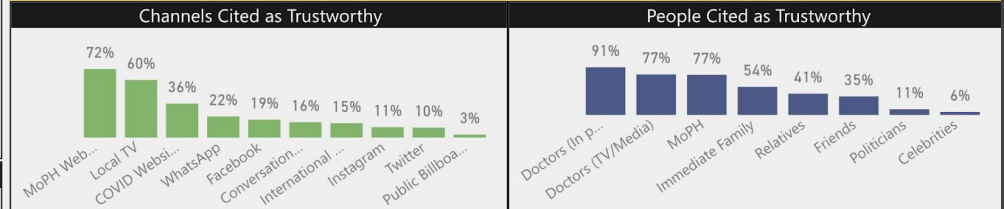
#### Are government COVID-19 infection statistics accurate?



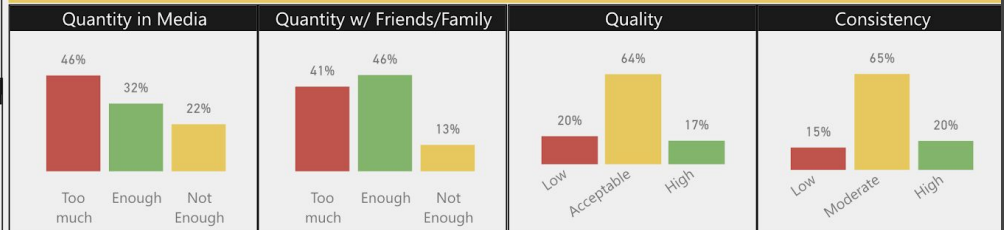
### What channels do people received their COVID-19 information from?



### What channels and sources do people trust for information on COVID-19



### What do people think of the quantity, quality, and consistency of COVID-19 information?



# THANK YOU!

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