

June 1, 2009

With the support of USAID, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is conducting an international observation mission for the Lebanese parliamentary elections scheduled to take place on June 7, 2009. Below is the sixth in a series of election updates that will be published on a weekly basis until the election.

Cabinet Approves Constitutional Council Appointees



Pictured above, members of the previous Constitutional Council

Last Tuesday, with less than two weeks left before election day, the Cabinet of Ministers approved the final five appointments required to form the Constitutional Council. The formation of the Council, which is responsible for adjudicating electoral complaints and ensuring the constitutionality and legality of laws in Lebanon, was long blocked by political deadlock. This impasse was overcome in enough time to guarantee that the body will be ready to validate the elections, but many analysts and politicians have voiced concern over how it will perform given that its members have never deliberated over a decision together and were appointed by politicians of opposing political blocs. The ten member council is balanced confessionally, comprised of five Christians and five Muslims. It will be headed by Issam Suleiman, a professor of law.

The Constitutional Council's role comes into play once the Ministry of the Interior has announced the official election results, at which point candidates can begin submitting challenges. The results of an election in a district can only be challenged by a losing candidate from that district, and the challenge must be submitted to the Constitutional Council within 30 days of the announcement of the official results. The MP being challenged has the right to be provided with full details of the claim and may respond to the challenge or provide counter-evidence within 15 days. The deadline for filing complaints to the Constitutional Council is July 7.

International Observation

NDI Long Term Observers Deployed in the Field for Ten Weeks

NDI's Long Term Observers (LTOs) are entering their tenth week on the ground in Lebanon. See below for a snapshot of some of their activities:



South Team Observes Door to Door with MP Osama Saad

In Saïda, the South LTO team observed candidate MP Osama Saad, head of the Popular Nasserite Movement (opposition), in his door to door campaigning. NDI's LTOs walked up and down the streets with Saad as he stopped by shops shaking hands and laughing with the employees and also greeted people standing on their balconies. A member of Saad's campaign team noted that he regularly conducts these visits outside of campaign periods.

Osama Saad is a local powerhouse in Saïda, and his father Maarouf, who founded the Popular Nasserite Movement in Lebanon, also served in Parliament until he was assassinated while participating in a protest by fishermen in 1975. Osama Saad has been an MP for Saïda since 2002 when he was elected by acclamation after his brother, MP Mustafa Saad died. He was re-elected in 2005, when he ran uncontested. The 2009 polls mark the first time that Saad faces a competitive race, and his competitors are two high ranking members of the March 14 coalition: Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, who controversially entered the race at the last minute, and Bahia Hariri, who has been an MP for the district since 1992 and is the sister of the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri.



Bekaa Team Attends "Zahlé in Our Heart" Rally



On May 23, the Bekaa observer team attended a rally for "Zahlé-7", the March 14 list for the district. The rally, which took place in the largely Sunni village of Majdel Anjar, took on the spirit of the familiar local saying, "Zahlé bil Aleb" or "Zahlé is in our heart." All seven March 14 candidates gave speeches during the rally as the hundreds of village inhabitants who attended continuously repeated the slogan "zaye ma hiye" or "as it is," a slogan coined by former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri to mean vote for the entire list "as it is." The village, which witnessed widespread electoral fraud in the 2005 polls was enthusiastic about the upcoming election and the Zahlé-7 list. The Bekaa Team noted that the Zahlé-7 list is highly unified and does all of its campaigning together, from visits to villages to festivals and large rallies.

Beirut Team Meets with Sheikh Fadlallah

In their seventh week in the field, NDI's Beirut observer team interviewed Sheikh Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah, a leading Shi'a cleric in Lebanon. Their conversation focused on legal issues related to the upcoming parliamentary election, the Ministry of the Interior's impartiality in conducting the June polls, and the course that the election can take. Specifically, NDI's LTOs posed questions regarding Fadlallah's vision of the future of the country if the opposition wins, and whether he believes that the opposition will accept the official results published by the Minister of the Interior.



NDI's Beirut Team with Sheikh Fadlallah

Sheikh Fadlallah outlined the issues he feels are challenging Lebanon, which he divided between domestic tensions caused by confessionality and the external pressure caused by the influence of outside powers. He noted what he considers the hypocrisy of Western countries— countries that only back democracy where it matches their interests. "[W]e believe that the human being should be free in his choices, not subjected to security, financial or political pressure, and to be able to exercise his right to vote according to his own convictions, in order to give his vote for those who he thinks will serve best the country and the nation's interest," said Fadlallah.

North Team Observes Poll Worker Training

The North LTO team spent much of last weekend observing the third tier of poll worker trainings conducted by trainers who were trained by the Ministry of the Interior. In Batroun, for example, the Team attended a training held at the public high school for polling station head and clerks. The trainer led the group through every aspect of election day from opening to counting procedures and took several questions from participants regarding new procedures introduced in this year's electoral law.



Perhaps the most significant departure from previous elections is the introduction of female poll workers for the first time in Lebanon. Forty-two of Batroun's 288 poll workers will be women. NDI's observers met with a high-ranking female official in the office of Batroun's *Qaimaqam* (district commissioner) who noted that the training of female poll workers is going well, but election day will determine how well male poll workers perceive their female counterparts. In total, about 11,500 poll workers will be trained by election day.

NDI Prepares for Short Term Observation Mission

As election day nears, NDI is finalizing its preparation for the arrival of its short term observation mission. With deployment routes, observation methodology, and election day forms nearly complete, NDI's Lebanon office is busy preparing election day materials, such as observer vests (see photos at right):



Domestic Observation: LADE Releases Third Pre-Election Report on Findings



On May 29, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) held a press conference to mark the release of its third pre-election report on its monitoring of the election administration, violations of the election law by candidates and campaigns, and media coverage of the elections. In this report LADE noted a cumulative figure of 225 breaches of the electoral law, 32 of which it validated since the release of its last report on May 8. Like in previous reports, all validated violations breached one of three articles of the electoral law: 59: illegal non-allocable expenses (service provisions and cash payments); 68: libel, slander, or defamation of a candidate in the media; 71: use of public space for campaigning. LADE named specific offenders, including high-profile politicians like Ahmed

Fatfat (Sunni candidate, Miniyeh-Diniyeh), Carlos Eddé (Maronite candidate, Kserwan), Michel Mouawad (Maronite candidate, Zgharta), Bahia Hariri (Sunni candidate, Saïda), and Omar Karami (Sunni candidate, Tripoli). LADE listed 16 of the 32 offenders by name, but released all names to the Ministry of the Interior with the details of each violation. The Association also released its first report on media monitoring, which covered 25 media outlets (print and electronic), publishing each outlet's coverage of 18 political parties or blocs.

Ad Watch

Amal Movement Runs a Populist Ad Campaign:

In contrast to Hezbollah's non-sectarian makeover and the verbal and visual sparring between the Free Patriotic Movement and the March 14 Christian parties, Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces, Amal opted for a populist ad campaign featuring children, elderly and family images. Additionally, images from Barack Obama's successful campaign can be seen in Amal's poster campaign: the word "ama" is Arabic for hope, and the icon of the party's leader Speaker of Parliament Nabih Berri (seen below) is reminiscent of Obama's iconic campaign paraphernalia.



Translation: Hope



Translation: Dignity



Translation: Hope (right) Democracy (left)



Translation: Solidarity (pictured behind the text is both a church and a mosque)

March 14 Responds to Free Patriotic Movement Ads:

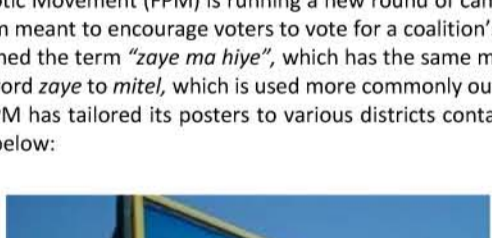
In response to the Free Patriotic Movement's controversial poster "Sois Belle et Vote" or "Be Beautiful and Vote", the March 14 coalition issued the poster below which translates into English as "Be Equal and Vote."



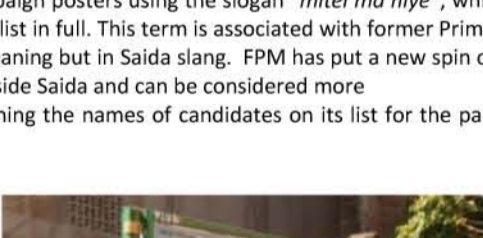
As part of the same advertising campaign, the March 14 alliance released the poster above, a play on the famous René Descartes saying "I think therefore I am"

The Free Patriotic Movement Borrows from Hariri:

The Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) is running a new round of campaign posters using the slogan "mitel ma hiye", which translates to "as it is," a term meant to encourage voters to vote for a coalition's list in full. This term is associated with former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, who coined the term "zaye ma hiye", which has the same meaning but in Saïda slang. FPM has put a new spin on the slogan by changing the word *zaye* to *mitel*, which is used more commonly outside Saïda and can be considered more "Lebanese." FPM has tailored its posters to various districts containing the names of candidates on its list for the particular district. See examples below:



Future Movement with the slogan "Zaye ma hiye."



Beirut I



Kesrwan



Chouf



Aley

Unusual Campaigns:



Resources

In the News:

- <http://www.reuters.com/article/middleeastCrisis/idUSLQ860661>
- http://www.economist.com/world/mideast-africa/displaystory.cfm?story_id=13743336
- <http://www.reuters.com/article/saudiArabia/idUSLQ940562>

Resources:

"Guide for National and International Observers and the Media" produced by the Ministry of the Interior

http://www.elections.gov.lb/Observers-Corner/الدليل-وطليات-الاعتماد/application_local_ar.aspx

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