

Lebanese Elections in Brief

Election News From NDI

May 18, 2009

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

Districts to Watch: Metn, Beirut I, and Zahlé

Metn, Beirut I, and Zahlé: these three hotly contested districts have a majority of Christian voters whose vote will have a considerable impact in determining the balance of power in Lebanon's next government. In each district, powerhouse political parties and candidates from both the March 14 and March 8 coalitions have formed competing lists, making the results of the election highly unpredictable. Together, these 3 districts have 20 seats: 4 Maronite, 2 Greek Orthodox, 1 Greek Catholic and 1 Armenian Orthodox seats in Metn; 1 Maronite, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Greek Catholic, 1 Armenian Orthodox and 1 Armenian Catholic seats in Beirut I; 2 Greek Catholic, 1 Maronite, 1 Greek Orthodox, 1 Armenian Orthodox, and 1 Shiite and 1 Sunni seat in Zahlé.

Metn

In Metn, voters and analysts have learned to expect the unexpected. Independent MP Michel Murr, a former ally of Michel Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (March 8), switched alliances and joined the ticket of the Kataeb Party (March 14). The battle for Metn took another interesting twist when Minister Nassib Lahoud, a prominent local figure and head of Democratic Renewal Movement (March 14), bowed out of the race. The FPM list enjoys wide support in Metn but with the loss of Murr supporters, the party will rely heavily on Armenian support. Armenians enjoyed considerable electoral clout in the 2007 Metn by-elections, when their vote tipped the scales in favor of Aoun's candidate, who beat the Kataeb candidate by only 400 votes. There is already one winner in the Metn race, MP Hagop Pakradounian (Tashnag Party- March 8), who won the Armenian Orthodox seat uncontested.



Beirut I

The June elections mark the first time Christians in Beirut will choose their representatives since before the civil war. With the majority of Beirut's Christians registered in Beirut I, this race is at the frontline of determining who represents the Christian community. In 1992 and 1996, the Christian neighborhoods of Achrafieh, Rmeil, and Saifi were part of the larger Muslim district that encompassed all of Beirut, and the 2000 electoral law districted Beirut so that Christians were a minority in each of its three districts. The new electoral law makes Beirut I a majority Christian district with five seats up for grabs.



The Beirut I race pits fresh faces against veteran politicians. The March 14 list will include two young candidates often referred to as "political heirs": Nadim Gemayel (son of late President Bashir Gemayel) and Nayla Tuéni (daughter of late MP Gebran Tuéni). The March 8 list will be led by Deputy Prime Minister Issam Abou Jamra (FPM) and includes Massoud Ashkar, an independent who is allied with FPM in the race. During the civil war, Ashkar fought alongside Bashir Gemayel.

Zahlé

The election in Zahlé, a predominantly Christian district in the Bekaa valley, is extremely competitive, with the second highest number of candidates running out of any district. The outcome of the race is unpredictable, in part because of the late formation of lists; the March 8 list is still unknown, while March 14 only announced its list yesterday. Politics in Zahlé have long been dominated by political families with deep roots. For example, the Skaffs have been well-known political leaders in Zahlé for more than 90 years, and Elie Skaff (opposition) has won a seat in Zahlé in every election since 1992.



But Zahlé is also considered a heartland of the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb, and the murder in April 2008 of two Kataeb supporters, one of which was the brother of Minister Elie Marouni, by a Skaff supporter may influence voters as they head to the polls. In fact, tensions remain high between the two factions, with dozens of partisans involved in a recent street scuffle in a village near Zahlé.

Independent candidates come from prominent political families as well. The district's sole female candidate, Magda Braidy-Rizk, hails from a well-established political family in Zahlé. Failing to make it on either bloc's list, Braidy-Rizk is running as an independent and recently held her own rally at which she presented her political platform and demanded a quota for female representation in parliament.

Election Administration



Minister of Telecommunications Gebran Bassil (left), Minister of the Interior Ziyad Baroud (right)

On May 6, the Ministry of the Interior released a list of all polling stations and centers nationwide. There will be 5,187 polling stations in total, and with the list finalized, logistical efforts are underway to make sure that each polling station meets the standards set out in the electoral law. Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud also announced a comprehensive security plan that was adopted by the Central Security Council. During a joint news conference with Telecommunications Minister Gebran Bassil last Tuesday, Baroud said that alternative electricity sources (such as generators) were provided to 75 percent of polling centers, adding that the ministry was working in cooperation with Electricité du Liban to provide the remaining centers with alternative power sources before the elections. Bassil said that pressure on the cellular network was expected during election day, but noted that the landline network is able to contain the increased number of phone calls. Most areas of the country are without 24-hour electricity and in past elections power outages opened the door to electoral fraud during the counting process.

District in Focus: Saïda (Sidon)

Seat Distribution:

2 Sunni



Major Political Figures:

- **March 14:** Future Movement (FM) represented by Minister Bahia Hariri (sister of late Prime Minister Rafik Hariri) and Prime Minister Fouad Siniora
- **March 8:** Popular Nasserite Organization (PNO) led by MP Osama Saad, –Saïda Mayor Abdul-Rahman Bizri
- **Other Player:** Jamaa Islamiya

Saïda, a significantly Sunni Muslim city in South Lebanon, is frequently referred to as the "capital city of South Lebanon." For the first time since 1972 Saïda is its own electoral district. It is the only constituency in the South where an electoral battle is taking place among Sunnis only, as much of the South is composed of opposition-aligned Shia voters. Saïda is also the hometown of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, founder of the Future Movement (FM), and has been the center of a longtime rivalry between the Future Movement and other powerful local families over control of the municipal council. The 2005 parliamentary elections did not reveal the level of support rivaling parties enjoyed because MP Bahia Hariri (FM), sister of PM Hariri, and MP Osama Saad (Popular Nasserite Organization-opposition) ran on the same list and as the only candidates, winning their seats by acclamation.



Candidate Osama Saad, with Rafik Hariri in the background



Gone but not forgotten: Mustapha Saad, deceased brother of candidate Osama Saad (L) and Rafik Hariri, deceased brother of candidate Bahia Hariri

This year, competition is tight. Not only are Hariri and Saad running on competing lists, but Prime Minister Fouad Siniora, in a move that surprised many, registered to run just before the deadline and will be on the FM list. In addition, the Future Movement struck a deal with Jamaa Islamiya, (an independent Sunni party) which has one candidate in the race, called on their supporters to vote for Hariri and Siniora. Still, Saad has deep roots in Saïda (established by his father and brother, former MPs Maarouf and Mustapha Saad) and strong support among the local unions, so this is a race to watch.

Ad Watch: Hezbollah's Billboard Campaign



Translation:

Occupation
Aggression
Foreign Hegemony

Lebanon is a sovereign country capable with its people



Translation:

Confessionalism
Seat-Sharing*
Favoritism

Lebanon is a country of equality among its people

*This term refers to the political deals powerbrokers make to divide key influential positions



Translation:

Your Lebanon
Our Lebanon
Their Lebanon

Lebanon is a country for all its people

By the Numbers

- 5,187 Number of polling stations
- 2,325 Number of domestic observers recruited to date by LADE
- 293 Number of media violations reported by SCEC
- 133 Number of campaign violations reported by LADE in its second report
- 17 Number of campaign violations validated by LADE in its second report
- 19 Number of days left before election day

Resources

In the News:

Women candidates in the parliamentary elections:
<http://nowlebanon.com/NewsArticleDetails.aspx?ID=92875>

Christian parties in the parliamentary elections:
http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=1&categ_id=2&article_id=101802

Journalists as candidates in the parliamentary elections:
<http://www.menassat.com/?q=en/news-articles/6519-lebanese-journalists-eyeing-parliament-elections-virus-catches-media-four-candida>

Resources:

Human Rights Watch report, "Lebanon's 2009 Parliamentary Elections- A Human Rights Agenda"
<http://www.hrw.org/node/83040>

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