

Lebanese Elections 2009

Contributed by Agencies
Friday, 05 June 2009
Last Updated Friday, 10 July 2009

Q&A on Lebanon's parliamentary elections, Facts and figures on Lebanon and the Elections

Q&A on Lebanon's parliamentary elections

BEIRUT - Lebanese head to the polls Sunday in crucial parliamentary elections that could determine the country's future for the next four years. Here's what to look for as voting begins:

Q: Who are the major players?

A: On one side, a coalition of pro-U.S. and pro-Western factions. On the other, the pro-Iranian and pro-Syrian Hezbollah and its ally, Christian leader Michel Aoun. Sunni Muslims overwhelmingly support the former, Shiites the latter - and Christians are divided between them. That makes Christians the swing vote. Independent Christian candidates may also win enough seats to deny either side an absolute majority.

Q: What does a victory by the Hezbollah alliance mean?

A: An election win for Hezbollah and its allies would propel the Shiite militant group, which the United States considers a terrorist organization, to a position where it would have a major say in the formation of Lebanon's next government. This in turn could present a setback for the Obama administration as it tries to start up dialogue and resume peace talks in the Middle East. Israel is also alarmed, having fought the heavily armed Hezbollah but failing to defeat it in a 2006 war.

Q: What happens if the current ruling coalition retains its majority?

A: The majority may try to form a government excluding Hezbollah, which would leave the influential group in the opposition. But it will likely be unable to do that and will have to form another unity government, including Hezbollah. Hezbollah and its allies have had veto power over major Cabinet decisions since July 2008.

Q: What are the major issues?

- Hezbollah's weapons: The pro-Western coalition opposes Hezbollah keeping its arms, but Hezbollah and its allies maintain those weapons are necessary to defend against Israeli attacks.

- Relations with Syria: Syria, which controlled Lebanon for almost three decades before it pulled out its troops in 2005, has established diplomatic relations with Lebanon. But officials in the pro-Western coalition accuse Syria of continuing to meddle in Lebanon and of smuggling weapons to Hezbollah. The pro-Western coalition says a win by Hezbollah would increase Syrian and Iranian influence in Lebanon.

- The U.N. tribunal set up to try the killers of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri: His supporters blamed the murder on Syria, although Damascus denied involvement.

Q: What is likely to be the international reaction in case of a Hezbollah victory?

A: Washington has warned it could reconsider its aid to Lebanon, and neighboring Israel called a possible win by Hezbollah a danger to the stability of the Middle East and the world. But some analysts say the international community is likely to deal with any future Lebanese government regardless of the election winners. -AP

Facts and figures on Lebanon

A look at Lebanon, which holds parliamentary elections Sunday:

THE LAND — Lebanon lies in the eastern Mediterranean and covers about 4,030 square miles (10,450 square kilometers) — smaller than the U.S. state of Connecticut. From a narrow coastal strip, the land rises steeply to the Mount Lebanon range whose highest peak reaches 3,090 meters (10,130 feet), then descends into the fertile Bekaa

Valley before hitting a mountain range that separates Lebanon from Syria to the east.

THE PEOPLE – Muslims make up at least 60 percent of the estimated 4 million population. The rest are Christians. There are 18 religious sects. Christians, Sunni Muslims and Shiite Muslims make up roughly a third of the population each. About 400,000 Palestinian refugees also live in Lebanon.

THE HISTORY – Some Lebanese claim descent from the ancient Phoenicians. But Assyrians, Persians, Romans, Byzantines, Crusaders, Mamelukes, Arabs and Ottoman Turks all ruled what is now Lebanon. Lebanon gained independence from French rule in 1943. Christians dominated, but Muslim demands for reform helped trigger the 1975-90 civil war that killed 150,000. A 1989 agreement ended the war and the two sides shared power. Israel withdrew in 2000. Syrian troops pulled out in 2005. A truce has been in place since a 2006 war between Hezbollah and Israel.

THE POLITICS – Lebanon's political system is drawn from the country's sectarian makeup. The presidency goes to a Maronite Catholic, the prime minister must be a Sunni Muslim, and a Shiite Muslim must be parliament speaker. The Cabinet and the parliament's 128 seats are divided equally between Christians and Muslims. Parliament is elected by the people and the president appoints the prime minister and Cabinet in consultation with lawmakers. The president is elected by parliament for a six-year term.

THE ECONOMY – Lebanon has few natural resources so, for centuries, people have specialized in commerce. Before the civil war, Lebanon was the commercial center of the Middle East and its currency was one of the region's strongest. It was also a major tourist center. The war gutted the economy and destroyed much of the infrastructure. Postwar reconstruction rebuilt central Beirut but plunged the country into debt. -AP

Key facts about Lebanon's parliament

BEIRUT - Key facts about parliament, voting and the complex power-sharing system in Lebanon, which is holding a general election on Sunday.

PARLIAMENT:

- Lebanon has a 128-seat unicameral parliament, with seats equally divided between Christians and Muslims.
- MPs are elected by simple majority for a four-year term.
- Of the 64 seats allocated for Muslims, 27 go to Sunnis, 27 to Shias, eight to the Druze sect and two to the Alawite sect.
- Of the 64 seats for Christians, 34 go to the Maronites, 14 to the Greek Orthodox, eight to the Greek Catholics, five to the Armenian Orthodox, one to the Armenian Catholics, one to Evangelicals and one to minority sects.
- The speaker of parliament is always a Shia.

CANDIDATES:

- 587 candidates registered to stand for parliament.
- Candidates must be 25 or older.

ELECTORAL DISTRICTS:

- The country of around four million has 26 electoral districts.

VOTER ELIGIBILITY:

- 3.2 million Lebanese are eligible to vote.
- Voting age is 21.
- Serving members of the military not allowed to vote.

VOTING PROCEDURE:

- Voting starts at 7:00 am (0400 GMT) and closes at 7:00 pm (1600 GMT).
- There are 5,200 polling stations.

· After casting their ballot, voters must dip their thumbs in indelible ink as proof they voted and to avoid electoral fraud.

MPs:

· Members of parliament earn between 10-11 million pounds (7,000 dollars, 4,500 euros) a month.

Key players in the Lebanese elections

Key players in Sunday's parliamentary elections in Lebanon:

SAAD HARIRI: After former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri was assassinated on Feb. 14, 2005, his 39-year-old son inherited the family's political mantle. The billionaire businessman heads the largest bloc in parliament and is competing for a Sunni Muslim seat in Beirut. Hariri is leader of the pro-Western majority contesting against a coalition of the Shiite militant Hezbollah and Christian groups.

HEZBOLLAH: The Shiite Muslim guerrilla group, backed by Iran and Syria, fought a devastating war against Israel in 2006. It has veto power in the government and is looking to increase its political power along with its Shiite and Christian allies. Hezbollah had 11 candidates in the 2005 elections. It has 11 candidates running in different parts of the country.

MICHEL AOUN: A former army commander, Aoun, 74, leads the Free Patriotic Movement. He had the largest Christian bloc in parliament. Aoun is a major ally of Hezbollah against the Western-backed coalition. Aoun is running for a seat in the Maronite Catholic Christian mountain region of Keserwan, north of Beirut.

NABIH BERRI: The leader of the Shiite Amal group, Berri has been parliamentary speaker since 1992. An ally of Syria, Berri, 71, is running in an alliance with Hezbollah and Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement. He is running for a Shiite seat in the southern district of Zahrani.

WALID JUMBLATT: Political leader of the Druse sect, Jumblatt, 59, is running for a Druse seat in the central region of Chouf in Mount Lebanon. He is a leading member of the pro-Western coalition.

SAMIR GEAGEA: A former Christian warlord, Geagea, 56, was serving life in prison for political assassinations but was released after the 2005 parliamentary elections. His Lebanese Forces group is part of the anti-Syrian coalition and has seven candidates running in this year's elections. Geagea himself is not running but his wife, Setrida, is seeking re-election for a Maronite seat.

SULEIMAN FRANJIEH: One of Syria's strongest Christian allies in Lebanon, Franjeh, 43, is a former interior minister. He lost his seat in 2005 and is currently running for a Maronite seat in the northern district of Zgharta. He is allied with Hezbollah and Aoun.

PHALANGE PARTY: The right-wing Christian group of former President Amin Gemayel. It has seven Christian candidates running in different parts of Lebanon. They are part of the pro-Western, anti-Hezbollah coalition. Among Phalangists running is Gemayel's younger son Sami and nephew Nadim.

Lebanon Elections 2009 Districts and Seats

Beirut: 19 Deputies

Beirut I: Achrafieh, Rmeil and Saifi. 5 Deputies: Maronite (1), Greek Catholic(1), Greek Orthodox (1), Armenian Orthodox (1), Aemenian Catholic (1).

Beirut II: Bashoura, Mdawwr, Marfaa. 4 Deputies: Sunnite (1), Shiite (1), Armenian Orthodox (2).

Beirut III: Mina el-Hosn, Ain el-Mraisi, Mseitbi, Mazraa, Ras Beirut, Zokak el-Blat. 10 Deputies: Sunnite (5), Shiite (1), Druze (1), Greek Orthodox (1), Evangelical (1), Minorities (1)

Mount Lebanon: 35 Deputies

Aley: 5 Deputies: Maronite (2), Druze (2), Greek Orthodox (1).

Baabda: 6 Deputies: Maronite (3), Shiite (2), Druze (1).

Chouf: 8 Deputies: Maronite (3), Sunnite (2), Druze (2), Greek Catholic (1).

Jbeil: 3 Deputies: Maronite (2), Shiite (1)

Keserwan: 5 Deputies: Maronite (5).

Metn: 8 Deputies: Maronite (4), Greek Orthodox (2), Greek Catholic (1), Armenian Orthodox (1)

North Lebanon: 28 Deputies

Akkar: 7 Deputies: Sunnites (3), Greek Orthodox (2), Maronites (1), Alawites (1)
 Batroun: 2 Deputies: Maronites (2).
 Bcherri: 2 Deputies: Maronites (2).
 Koura: 3 Deputies: Greek Orthodox (3).
 Miniyeh-Dinniyeh: 3 Deputies: Sunnites (3).
 Tripoli: 8 Deputies: Sunnite (5), Maronite (1), Greek Orthodox (1), Alawite (1).
 Zgharta: 3 Deputies: Maronites (3).
 South Lebanon: 23 Deputies

Bint Jbeil: 3 Deputies: Shiite (3).
 Jezzine: 3 Deputies: Maronite (2), Greek Catholic (1).
 Marjeyoun Hasbaya: 5 Deputies: Shiite (2), Sunnite (1), Greek Orthodox (1), Druze (1).
 Nabatieh: 3 Deputies: Shiite (3).
 Sidon: 2 Deputies: Sunnite (2).
 Tyre: 4 Deputies: Shiite (2).
 Zahrani: 3 Deputies: Shiites (2), Greek Catholic (1).
 Biqaa: 23 Deputies

Baalbeck Hermel: 10 Deputies: Shiites (6), Sunnite: 2, Maronite: 1, Greek Catholic:1
 West Biqaa and Rachaya: 6 Deputies: Sunnite (2), Maronite (1), Shiite (1), Greek Orthodox (1), Druze (1)
 Zahle: 7 Deputies: Greek Catholic (2), Maronite (1), Sunite (1), Shiite (1), Greek Orthodox (1), Armenian Orthodox (1).
 Sectarian Distribution

Christians

Maronites 34
 Greek Orthodox 14
 Greek Catholic 8
 Armenian Orthodox: 5
 Armenian Catholic 1
 Evangelicals 1
 Minorities 1

Total

64

Moslems

Shiites 27
 Sunnites 27
 Druze 8
 Alawites 2

Total

64

Grand total 128