

## Changing of the guard?

### Wrapping up Lebanon's municipal elections, all eyes are now on 2005

Lebanon's municipal elections have wrapped up in 1,404 cities and villages, with the selection of 2,389 mukhtars and 905 municipal councils. The municipal and mayoral councils have 17,098 members, divided among 905 municipalities and 1,404 villages, as shown in [Table 1](#) on the opposite page.

#### Mount Lebanon

The first round of elections, which took place on 2 May 2004 in the mohafaza of Mount Lebanon, saw some of the following results:

- The emergence of Christian political powers, especially in the Chouf region, where those parties won a number of municipalities and mayoral councils in the Higher Chouf area (Kfarqatra, Bira, Wadi Sitt). In this region, there was significant Christian participation when compared with the 1998 municipal elections and the 2000 parliamentary elections. However, Jumblatt dominated in most Druze strongholds, especially Choueifat.
- The continuing dominance of Al Jama'a al Islamiya in the municipality of Barja, despite a union between the Communist Party and the Socialist Progressive Party (PSP). The party also dominated in most municipalities in the Iqlim area, especially KetarMeya.
- Jumblatt's opposition won in the municipality of Damour, considered vital to the Druze leader, as it represents the coastal front of Mount Lebanon. This also means the municipality will likely undertake touristic projects that Jumblatt had resisted.
- The division of the Christian opposition (especially the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces) in the Metn and Keserwan. The opposition only acquired three municipalities in the Metn and a limited number of seats in other municipalities.

#### Beirut and the Bekaa

The second round of voting took place on 9 May 2004 in the mohafazas of Beirut and the Bekaa. In the Bekaa, voter turnout was around 70%. The following ballot results can be noted:

- The dominance of Al Jama'a al Islamiya in a number of municipalities in the Bekaa.
- The dominance of Hizbullah in the municipality of Baalbeck and 35 other municipalities, except for Britel, which is still under the influence of Sheikh Sobhi Tufeili.
- Lost ground for the Amal movement in Shemstar and Baalbeck, the defeat of Elie Ferzli and Sami Khatib's coalition in Jib Jennin and the win by Minister Elie Skaff in Zahle.

Despite Prime Minister Hariri's success in the Beirut municipality, low voter turnout was a great setback. While 419,000 voters were registered and 210,000 had election cards, only 90,000 constituents participated, or 21.4%. This is compared with the 1998 elections, when voter turnout reached 133,000, or 33%. Although the difference between the winning and losing lists was significant (33,000 votes), the question posed by analysts is how greater voter participation would have affected the outcome.

#### South Lebanon and Nabatieh

Three important dynamics emerged in the mohafazas of the South and Nabatieh on 23 May. Those involved the ballots in Saida, Jezzine and the rivalry between Hizbullah and Amal in the southern Shiia villages.

Contrary to expectations in Saida, the opposition list won a 20-seat majority, while Hariri's list scored only one. The loss was underscored by Adnan Zibawi's (head of Hariri's list) 13,479 votes compared with Abdel Rahman Bizri (head of Saad-Bizri's list) 15,166 votes.

In Jezzine, Deputy Samir Azar's list was successful, despite a coalition between the opposition (the Lebanese Forces and the Free Patriotic Movement) and Jezzine families. As for the Shiia villages, conflicting results were initially reported by Amal and Hizbullah. Out of the 248 municipalities in the South, there are 171 Shiia municipalities. Hizbullah won 75, Amal took 67 and the remaining 29 municipalities were a Hizbullah-Amal-families coalition.

In addition, Hizbullah was victorious in some large municipalities like Khiyam (the hometown of Amal's Minister of Agriculture, Ali Hasan Khalil), Bint Jbeil (hometown of Deputy Ali Bazzi) and Nabatieh. However, in Mays Al-Jabal, the prior dominance of Hizbullah was lost to Amal. Also, Amal maintained control in Tyre, fending off opposition from Hizbullah, the Lebanese Forces, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Khalil family and Nabih Berri. The winning ballot succeeded by 5,000 votes.

#### North Lebanon

The final ballots were in the mohafazas of Akkar and North Lebanon on 30 May, where voter turnout was approximately 45%. Preliminary results indicated that Health Minister Suleiman Franjeh was victorious in most villages across Zghorta and Ehden, while the Lebanese Forces prevailed in Bcharri. The big surprise, however, was Omar Karami's measured loss (9 out of 24 seats) in Tripoli against Ministers Samir Jisr and Najib Mikati.

#### Uncontested elections

Despite the tensions that accompanied the municipal elections, 121 municipalities and 400 mayors won uncontestedly, owing to prearranged alliances and unwanted conflict in some villages. Those included 27 municipalities and 73 mayoral councils in the mohafazas of South Lebanon and Nabatieh; 45 mayoral councils in the Bekaa; and 25 municipalities and 30 mayoral councils in Mount Lebanon.

While municipal and mayoral councils were established to meet an essential need for local administration and to promote local development, critics charge that the real objectives behind the elections have been distorted, leaving constituents wary of the Lebanon's skewed politics. ■

**DISTRIBUTION OF VOTERS AND COUNCIL MEMBERS BY MOHAFAZA AND CAZA (2004)****Table 1**

Mohafaza/caza	No. of voters	No. of municipalities	Municipal Council members	No. of villages	No. of mukhtars	Mayoral Council members
<b>Mount Lebanon</b>						
Chouf	164,967	72	828	97	144	282
Aley	108,551	55	606	72	103	210
Baabda	139,568	45	537	62	107	168
Keserwan	85,719	48	507	67	83	198
Metn	160,585	48	576	96	164	279
Jbeil	69,828	35	369	83	100	240
<b>Total</b>	<b>729,218</b>	<b>303</b>	<b>3,432</b>	<b>477</b>	<b>701</b>	<b>1,377</b>
<b>North Lebanon</b>						
Tripoli	172,957	3	60	3	65	1,134
Batroun	55,013	22	237	68	76	204
Bsharri	43,841	11	141	21	34	60
Zghorta	66,257	31	330	50	67	147
Akkar	199,755	86	987	148	210	441
El Mennieh- El Dennieh	85,002	25	312	48	90	144
Koura	55,247	34	351	45	54	135
<b>Total</b>	<b>678,072</b>	<b>212</b>	<b>2,418</b>	<b>383</b>	<b>596</b>	<b>1,134</b>
<b>Bekaa</b>						
Baalbeck	195,759	53	681	103	199	267
Hermel	36,386	5	69	33	44	93
Zahle	138,147	29	372	39	81	105
West Bekaa	72,408	28	348	35	56	102
Rachaya	38,340	26	282	26	35	75
<b>Total</b>	<b>481,040</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>1,752</b>	<b>236</b>	<b>415</b>	<b>642</b>
<b>South Lebanon and Nabatieh</b>						
Saida-Al Zahrani	113,000	42	501	53	103	156
Sour	127,036	56	684	69	121	204
Jezzine	51,000	35	360	56	69	168
Nabatieh	104,370	38	513	42	87	123
Marjayoun	107,948	26	339	32	69	87
Hasbaya	27,000	15	177	19	37	51
Bint Jbeil	105,879	36	477	36	83	99
<b>Total</b>	<b>636,233</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>3,051</b>	<b>307</b>	<b>569</b>	<b>888</b>
Beirut	419,361	1	24	12	108	--
<b>Sum total</b>	<b>2,943,924</b>	<b>905</b>	<b>10,668</b>	<b>1,404</b>	<b>2,389</b>	<b>4,041</b>

\*The new administrative breakdown of Lebanon's mohafazas was not adopted in this table..

\*\* The following municipalities were excluded from the elections under the pretext of non-return of the displaced and non-reconciliation: Kfarmatta,Alghaboun,Abey and Ain Darafel in Aley. Breeh in the Chouf was excluded owing to public safety concerns, while Chtaura and Mashan were excluded to safeguard national interests.

Source: Compiled by Ii from the Official Gazette and the Ministry of Interior