

The Lebanese Parliamentary Elections 2022: A reading of the background and results

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Ливанските парламентарни избори през 2022 г.: Един прочит на предисторията и резултатите

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***Abstract:** On May 15, 2022, Lebanon witnessed its first parliamentary elections after the protests of October 2019 and the explosion of the Port of Beirut in August 2020. Although the camp that includes Hezbollah and its allies lost the majority it enjoyed in the previous parliament, the results were not result in a clear majority for either party; This may delay the formation of the government, and the election of a new president to replace the current president, Michel Aoun, whose term ends in October 2022, and plunges the country into a state of political paralysis. The article presents a reading of the background and results of this election and drawing up future scenarios, and in the absence of a parliamentary majority for any particular group or alliance, internal developments depend largely on the regional situation. The resulting parliament open the door to delays and delays with the aim of obtaining political gains in government shares or in the presidential elections, or waiting for a regional deal in the next stage. The previous failure to agree on governments, and the lengthening of their formation for months, was to reopen the debate about the nature of the Lebanese system and the need for serious constitutional amendments towards expanded decentralization or a new electoral law. It is expected that this discussion will return to the fore in the event of the failure to form a government and the intensification of the living crisis as a result of the collapse of the local currency; as there has become a political and popular conviction that there is a structural defect that transcends political divisions and tensions, and requires research into Hezbollah's weapons and role in the coming period, as well as the nature of the system and the electoral law.*

***Keywords:** Election, Lebanon, Government, Presidential Elections, Lebanese System.*

***Резюме:** На 15 май 2022 г. Ливан стана свидетел на първите си парламентарни избори след протестите от октомври 2019 г. и експлозията на пристанището на Бейрут през август 2020 г. Въпреки че лагерът, който включва Хизбула и нейните съюзници, загуби мнозинството, от което се ползваше в предишния парламент, резултатите не доведоха до ясно мнозинство за нито една от страните. Това може да забави формирането на правителството и избора на нов президент, който да замени настоящия президент Мишел Аун, чийто мандат изтича през октомври 2022 г., и да потопи страната в състояние на политическа парализа. Статията представя прочит на предисторията и резултатите от тези избори и прогноза за бъдещи сценарии на развитие на политическата ситуация в страната.*

***Ключови думи:** избори, Ливан, правителство, президентски избори, ливанска система.*

On May 15, 2022, Lebanon witnessed its first parliamentary elections after the protests of October 2019 and the explosion of the Port of Beirut in August 2020. Although the camp

that includes Hezbollah and its allies lost the majority it enjoyed in the previous parliament, the results were not result in a clear majority for either party; This may delay the formation of the government, and the election of a new president to replace the current president, Michel Aoun, whose term ends in October 2022, and plunges the country into a state of political paralysis.

The parliamentary elections in Lebanon took place in the light of important changes that took place in recent years, including the October 2019 uprising (the October 17 uprising) against corruption and the sectarian system, bearing responsibility for the financial and economic collapse and its social repercussions, and the explosion of the port of Beirut for those who were named With the "political class". In addition to all this, Lebanon has been affected by the negative repercussions on energy and food security that resulted from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These elections were the first elections to be held in Lebanon without the participation of the Hariri movement, which emerged in the early nineties of the last century with former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri, and without the "Future" movement, which was founded in 2007 under the leadership of his son Saad Hariri. The decision to suspend political action taken by Saad Hariri in January 2022 had important repercussions, as the electoral calculations changed accordingly, and candidates raced to fill the void left by the Future Movement, which had a representative majority among Lebanon's Sunnis. These elections also came at the end of President Aoun's term, whose policies reflected negatively on the popularity of the "Free Patriotic Movement," which he founded in 2005 and is currently led by his son-in-law Gebran Bassil. All these factors, such as the economic collapse, the lack of participation of the Future Movement, the decline in the popularity of the Free Patriotic Movement, and the entry of "uprising" candidates into the competition line, imposed new dynamics on these elections. These elections represented a first test of the political forces and personalities that emerged after the "October 17 uprising" and their ability to make breakthroughs in the wall of the "political class" that holds the joints of the Lebanese political system.

Candidates for the parliamentary elections competed for 15 electoral districts distributed over five governorates: Beirut, Mount Lebanon, Bekaa, North and South, to occupy 128 seats in the House of Representatives. There were 103 electoral lists and 718 candidates, compared to 77 lists and 597 candidates in the 2018 elections. The map of the candidates was generally distributed between the traditional forces that are part of the sectarian quota system, whether they are with or against Hezbollah, and the forces of change that represent the uprising, with differences within both camps. One of the new factors that

played a role in these elections is that the votes of expatriate voters outside Lebanon were counted for the first time, especially since a large percentage of them fall outside the framework of traditional line-ups, and the political class does not have the ability to directly influence its choices. The number of voters abroad reached 142,000 out of 225,000 registered, according to the final figures of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants; That is, their voter turnout was 63 percent, which reflects their electoral enthusiasm for change, especially since these votes helped the uprising's candidates to win an additional seat in major districts such as Beirut I and II, Chouf - Aley, and the third district of the South. As for the voter turnout at home, it declined in all Lebanon's governorates, reaching about 41 percent of registered voters, compared to 49.7 percent in 2018. This decline was recorded especially in Sunni-majority districts such as Sidon, Dinnieh and Minieh.

The results of the elections need to be scrutinized in detail so that their impact can be assessed, whether in the camp of Hezbollah and its political influence inside Lebanon, or in the camp of the opposition. Given the multiplicity of lists and blocs, the winners were divided according to political affiliation and position on Hezbollah's weapons:

The pro-Hezbollah camp:

The pro-Hezbollah camp won 61 seats, distributed as follows: the Hezbollah bloc, which includes 15 deputies, the Amal Movement 15 deputies, the Free Patriotic Movement, which includes 17 deputies, the Tashnaq Party (Armenian party), 3 deputies. In addition, Direct and indirect allies, numbering 11 deputies, including two deputies from the "Marada" movement, Tony Franjeh and Melhem Touq, in addition to representatives Farid al-Khazen, Hassan Murad, Adnan Traboulsi, Muhammad Yahya, Jihad al-Samad, Taha Naji, and Firas. Al-Salloum, Jamil Al-Sayed, and Michel El-Murr. During their electoral campaign, these people declared positions in support of Hezbollah's weapons, or that they are committed to a position that supports them to win the elections.

The anti-Hezbollah camp:

The anti-Hezbollah camp includes 51 deputies, distributed as follows: the "Lebanese Forces" party, which includes 18 deputies, "Progressive Socialist Party" 9 deputies, Kataeb Party, which includes 5 deputies and elected independent and party figures announced positions against Hezbollah's weapons, and the 12 deputies

The Sunni Bloc: As a result of the Future Movement's boycott of the elections, a Sunni bloc emerged from 7 representatives distributed as follows: Supporters of the Future Movement (5 deputies). It appears that there was tacit support for their candidacy from Saad Hariri. In addition there were two deputies for the "Islamic Group".

The Revolution (Intifada) Bloc and its Allies:

The Intifada bloc includes 16 deputies, distributed as follows:

The uprising's 13 deputies and possible allies of the al Intifada bloc, and its 3 deputies are: Osama Saad (the Nasserite Popular Organization), Abd al-Rahman al-Bizri, and Charbel Massad.

The position on the formation of the government and the presidential elections

The position on Hezbollah and its weapons constitutes the aforementioned alignments, but these alignments change regarding other controversial issues, such as the election of the president of the republic or the formation of the government, where the "Amal" movement, for example, will be closer to the Progressive Socialist Party than to the Free Patriotic Movement. As for the Lebanese Forces, they have indicated that they do not want to join a "national unity" government with Hezbollah. Likewise, the Kataeb Party believes that staying out of power is better than entering it at this stage and the "Intifada" representatives will not bear the consequences of their joining a government. It is led by one of the pillars of the political class. In this case, Hezbollah and its allies do not have a sufficient majority to form a government, and they must give the Progressive Socialist Party a weighty share to join the government, especially after the fall of its traditional rivals from the Druze in the recent elections, led by Talal Arslan, who lost his seat in the Mount Lebanon constituency. In fact, the two major camps are completely engrossed in their internal divisions, do not converge on a unified agenda and have contradictory interests. However, Hezbollah seems better able to control the pace of its camp, unlike the coalition against it, which lost the Future Movement, while the "Lebanese Forces" are not accepted to play the national role in leading this opposition and face accusations from all political parties that are trying to destroy its image in front of public opinion.

There are several indicators that must be read in the outcome of this election, namely:

First, Hezbollah still has parliamentary representation in all governorates, and it has allies in all sects (except for the Druze sect), in addition to the fact that its candidates received many votes in their constituencies, and was able to influence the election results in almost all governorates, especially outside areas His influence in Beirut, Akkar and Jbeil. Although the results consolidated Hezbollah's influence in the Shiite community, they made it more in need of its opponents to form a government, implement policies and pass bills in the parliament.

Second, most of the candidates loyal to the Syrian regime (Faisal Karami, Talal Arslan, Wiam Wahhab, Asaad Hardan, and the Syrian Social Nationalist Party) lost in these

elections, as well as symbols in the Lebanese banking system such as Marwan Khair al-Din and Elie Ferzli.

Third, the elections arithmetically blocked any possibility of Gebran Bassil assuming the presidency, especially since the Christian mood became divided equally between the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces, especially after the former lost a great loss in major strongholds such as Jezzine, Ashrafieh and Zahle.

Fourth, the call to boycott the elections received a response among the Sunni community in general, despite the victory of some deputies. The Sunni seats that were emptied as a result of Saad Hariri's non-candidacy were distributed as follows: Supporters of the Future Movement (8), Hezbollah (5), Intifada (5), and Siniora (3). The Sunni voter, loyal to the Future Movement, was torn between satisfying Saad Hariri's wishes and the priority of voting against Hezbollah.

Fifth, Walid Jumblatt emerged as the most prominent winner, because the Progressive Socialist Party he leads won six of the eight Druze seats (compared to two for the uprising), while his traditional opponents lost in Mount Lebanon, and obtained a parliamentary bloc of nine representatives that may make his role decisive in the scene politics in the coming years.

Finally, the representatives of the uprising won a number of seats that exceeded pessimistic expectations, indicating that the path to change in Lebanon is not blocked. It can be imagined what the results would have been if the election method had changed. These new representatives represent a different political culture, and it is important that they preserve it and not slip into the quota system. People do not expect favors from these people, but in return they should offer an alternative political and social, and a professional parliamentary performance. The representatives of the uprising have lost some seats as a result of their divisions during the formation of the electoral lists, and they may lose more if there is no serious bloc or alliance that brings them together in the next stage.

The results of the elections can be characterized between the circumstantial vote associated with the fact that independent candidates affiliated with the "October 17 Intifada" obtained a relatively high percentage of the vote, as a result of the punitive vote of the power parties, and the permanent and continuous transformation taking place in Lebanese society and its political representation, on the other hand.

This group's ability to influence may be limited, but it is able, if united and performed well, to present the opposite image of the irresponsible image of the ruling class.

Punitive voting: Independent candidates obtained high percentage of votes in various constituencies, 12 of them were elected for the first time, although some of them had

previously run in the elections and were unsuccessful. What is remarkable about these nominations is that they are not only for new MPs, most of whom are young people, but also that they do not belong to active parties in the political scene, but rather to emerging and small groups that were participating in the uprising.

This vote for independents does not necessarily mean its continuation in the future or the continuation of this political trend, unless they establish organizations capable of forming an electoral lever in the upcoming elections. This result came as a result of a retaliatory vote by the voters to punish the political parties for four years that witnessed financial and economic collapse, wholesale corruption scandals, and an explosion in the port of Beirut that left destruction and dozens of victims and wounded without any transparent investigation that ends with punishing any political, security and military official for his negligence.

It is noteworthy that the "punitive vote" took place at the level of all constituencies and reached for the first time the third southern constituency, with two penetrations in the Druze and Orthodox seats, after Hezbollah and its allies managed in the 2018 elections to raise the electoral quotient and prevent any penetration.

The "revenge" vote was not absent from the speeches of the winning candidates, whether in terms of electoral propaganda with scenes from the Beirut explosion, or to warn people against voting for the same politicians to avoid financial, economic and humanitarian disasters. This reality reflects the nature of independent nominations to Parliament, which are often individual media, cultural, and academic figures, and activists gathered on unified lists as a result of the current proportional law that combines lists and preferential votes for each of the candidates on one list. Since the winning independent forces did not fight the battle as a single bloc with a clear program at the level of the whole country, but rather decided to compete at the local level, they are of course dispersed and do not reflect a single case.

Political Shifts:

Some of the variables in these elections are related to and related to societal political transformations: First: The voter turnout continues to decline nationwide, albeit slightly this year; It reached 41% in the preliminary figures of the Ministry of Interior, although it rose later in other estimates, but below the percentage of the previous elections. The participation rate in the Lebanese elections was 49.20% in the 2018 elections, a decrease of 4.8% compared to the 2009 elections, when it registered 54%. This decrease is linked to several factors, the first of which are: The decline in the rate of participation in political life among young people at the level of the region in particular and the world in general for reasons including education, attention to pressing social affairs and loss of confidence in politicians, as well as

interest in service issues that did not receive much discussion and illumination in election campaigns that focused on revenge against the political class and on general political discourse.

The second striking feature in the parliamentary elections was the weakness of the ability to deliver services to followers and devotees at the same level that it was many years ago. The rentier system in its previous form, i.e. providing thousands of jobs and government services to followers in exchange for their loyalty and votes, collapsed as a result of the financial and economic collapse since 2019; as the government salary is barely enough for days, not to mention the high cost of transportation between regions. As a result of this development, vote buying was remarkable with the increase in the fortunes of businessmen of their financial ability, and amid a rise in the price of appearing on the Lebanese media.

The third feature is the high share of the Lebanese Forces in Christian representation, which has happened in every election in which it has participated since 2005, that is, in four elections in a row. In 2005, the Lebanese Forces won six seats, and eight in 2009, increasing their share with the change of the electoral law towards proportional in the 2018 elections to 14 deputies, and then to twenty in the last elections. Thus, we are faced with an increasing representation of this organization that arose during the Lebanese civil war (in which the strongest was a Christian), and for the first reasons was to present itself on the basis of the ability to protect Christians from the growing dangers, specifically "Hezbollah" in light of the latter's military capabilities. These capabilities reinforce fears in light of the numerical predominance of Muslims; it makes the parity system less permanent, and necessitates a transition to a kind of decentralization. In fact, decentralization was mentioned in the programs and discourses of the two main Christian forces, ie the Lebanese Forces and their rival, the Free Patriotic Movement, allied with Hezbollah. Consequently, decentralization has become a comprehensive Christian demand that addresses two sources of concern: the first: the need to protect Christian privacy from the ongoing and growing demographic shift, and the second: development by maintaining taxes in light of the prevailing belief that Christian regions are subject to levying more broadly than Muslim ones.

The growing Christian vote for this option and the consideration of decentralization as a necessary protectionist means has become more prominent in the recent election campaigns, and it must be reflected in the political discourse in the subsequent period with the increasing impact of the financial and economic crisis.

Scenarios:

In drawing up future scenarios, and in the absence of a parliamentary majority for any particular group or alliance, internal developments depend largely on the regional situation and the possibility of a Saudi-Iranian understanding that would allow cooperation between Hezbollah and its allies, on the one hand, and the Lebanese Forces, on the other. Such a scenario, if it occurs, will be accompanied by a dialogue table under international (possibly French) sponsorship to produce a parallel understanding. Even in the event of going in this direction, it is expected that negotiations between the various forces to form a government will take time, especially as it will be linked to a subsequent election, which is the presidential elections.

The second scenario is that "Hezbollah" proceeds to form a government with independents, or perhaps the "Democratic Gathering" bloc, away from the "forces" and other blocs that reject the organization's weapons, but this is without obstacles.

The last scenario mixes the void in the upcoming constitutional elections, starting with the formation of a new government, and perhaps ending with the presidential elections, with security tension, pending the maturity of a regional settlement. In fact, the government vacuum and dependence on caretaker governments has become an inherent feature of the political process in Lebanon, where negotiations take months. This also happened with the elections of the President of the Republic after the end of the two terms of president, Emile Lahoud in 2007 and Michel Suleiman in 2014. After the elections in 2009 and 2018, the formations of the Saad Hariri's government took four and eight months, respectively, while the formation of the Tammam Salam's government, in 2014, took 11 months. Therefore, postponement has become an inherent feature of every political entitlement, regardless of the extent of the financial, economic and even security crisis.

In the absence of a settlement and escalation between the two parties, "Hezbollah" and its allies on the one hand, and the "Lebanese Forces" and its allies on the other hand, will argue accusations regarding responsibility for the disruption and the effects on the social and economic situation, with the possibility of tension moving to a security escalation resembling Saddam. Tayouneh" was sectarian in nature in October last year (2021). In fact, the refusal of large blocs, including the Free Patriotic Movement, an ally of Hezbollah, to elect Nabih Berri for a seventh term to head the parliament is evidence of the course of things during the coming period. As he may win the fewest number of votes since he was first chosen in Parliament in 1992, and this has repercussions on the path of forming the government and electing a new president as well.

But it is also clear that it is difficult to bring the views closer in light of the sharp divisions in the positions, whether regarding the necessity of discussing the weapons of "Hezbollah" or condemning the previous national unity governments as being responsible for the current crisis. Even the calls for calm, cooperation and partnership by Hezbollah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah in his speech after the parliamentary elections carried hidden messages. Nasrallah called for calm, cooperation and political partnership, Speaking of "the extent of the crises in the country: financial, monetary, economic and life" so that "a team alone cannot remedy them even if it obtains the majority." But in the context of his talk about "abandoning responsibility" and degrading "opposition and theorizing", he warned against "a betrayal of people's hopes, a betrayal of trust, and a failure to fulfill the promises made during the electoral campaigns." This speech classified the blocs between those concerned with "pacifying the country politically and in the media", and between "people who have no interest in pacifying the country and are receiving money for provocations".

However, these elections and the resulting parliament open the door to delays and delays with the aim of obtaining political gains in government shares or in the presidential elections, or waiting for a regional deal in the next stage. The previous failure to agree on governments, and the lengthening of their formation for months, was to reopen the debate about the nature of the Lebanese system and the need for serious constitutional amendments towards expanded decentralization or a new electoral law. It is expected that this discussion will return to the fore in the event of the failure to form a government and the intensification of the living crisis as a result of the collapse of the local currency; as there has become a political and popular conviction that there is a structural defect that transcends political divisions and tensions, and requires research into Hezbollah's weapons and role in the coming period, as well as the nature of the system and the electoral law.

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- Firas Al-Salloum, an elected representative from Tripoli, was counted by the uprising's candidates within their ranks, but since his election he has declared positions in support of Hezbollah's weapons.

- For example, this survey from the Pew Center that monitored a decline in interest in political affairs among young people: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/10/17/international-political-engagement/>

- Ihab Matar was counted among the uprising's candidates, but he frankly confirmed after his election that his victory was the result of the alliance with "Al Macharii el islamiah"

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- Official results as published on the websites of the Ministry of Interior and Foreign Affairs in Lebanon

- The Free Patriotic Movement counted the elected representative of Akkar, Muhammad Yahya, within its bloc, but this matter is not certain, because he is an independent deputy backed by Hezbollah, and there are no indications that he will join the Free Patriotic Movement bloc.