



Lebanon's 2009 Parliamentary Elections

The Lebanese Electoral System

Lebanon holds parliamentary elections on Sunday 7 June 2009. This IFES Lebanon briefing paper provides background material on the electoral districts and the electoral system that will be used, as well as outlining some of the key issues relating to the electoral process, including the issues of electoral lists and ballot papers.

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The Lebanese Parliament: confessional seats

The Lebanese Parliament is a unicameral body consisting of 128 directly elected Deputies. In accordance with the Constitution, all parliamentary seats are divided equally between Christians and Muslims.

The seats are further sub-divided into eleven confessional branches (four within Islam and seven within Christianity). The distribution of the 128 seats among the eleven confessions listed here is formalised under the 2008 Election Law

	seats
Muslims	64
Sunni	27
Shi'ite	27
Druze	8
Alawaite	2
Christians	64
Maronite	34
Greek Orthodox	14
Greek Catholic	8
Armenian Orthodox	5
Armenian Catholic	1
Evangelical	1
Minorities	1

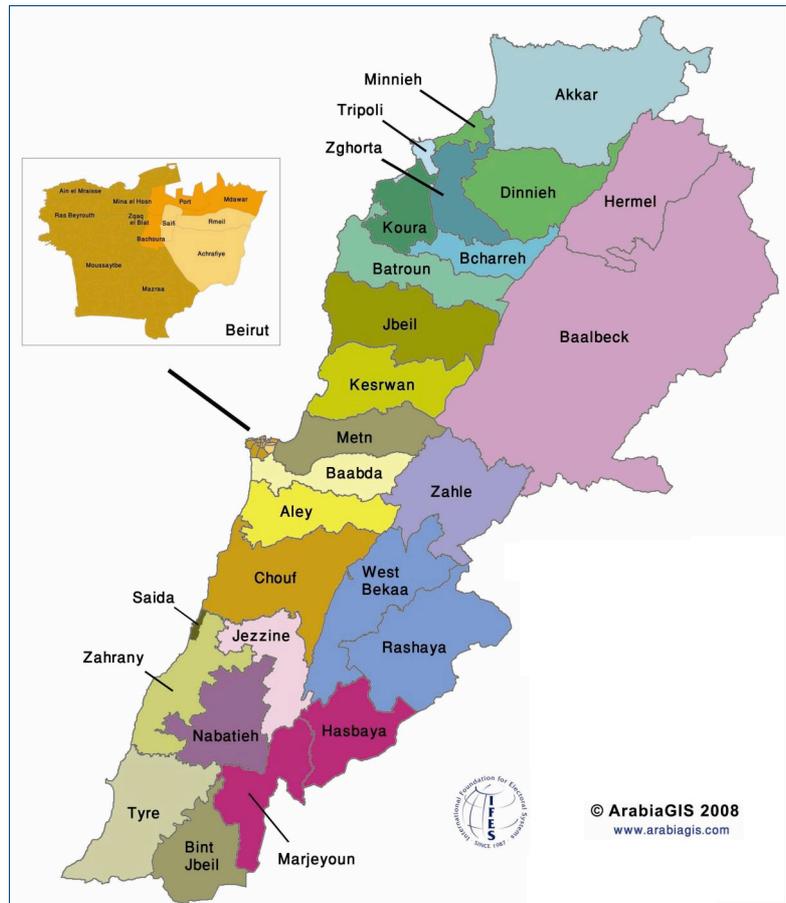
The single seat for Christian Minorities is intended to provide parliamentary representation for six recognised confessional groups. Lebanese citizens of any other religion, including two that are formally recognised by the State, are unable to be elected to Parliament.

Lebanon's Electoral Districts

The 2008 Election Law allocates 128 parliamentary seats among the 26 election districts shown on the map opposite. Political consensus on these districts was a core part of the Doha Agreement in May 2008.

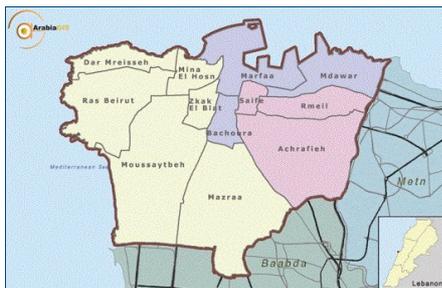
The current 26 electoral districts are based on the administrative boundaries of the *qada* but with some exceptions: in three cases, two *qada* are merged into one district (e.g. Marjeyoun-Hasbaya) and in one case, a single *qada* is divided into two districts (Saida and Zahrary). The use of individual *qada* as the basis for electoral districts was last used in Lebanon as part of an Election Law adopted in 1960; for this reason the current boundaries are often referred to as the '1960 districts'.

The current electoral districts vary widely in the size of their electorates: the largest district, Baalbeck-Hermel has over 250,000 voters while the smallest district, Bcharreh, has just under 45,000 voters.



Beirut's 2009 Electoral Districts

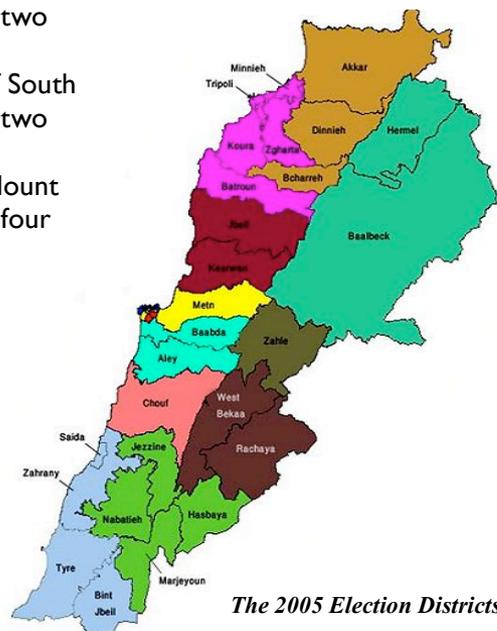
The capital's twelve administrative precincts are allocated to three different electoral districts.



Beirut District One	Saife Achrafieh Rmeil
Beirut District Two	Bachoura Marfaa Mdawar
Beirut District Three	Ras Beirut Ain El Mreisseh Mina El Housn Zoukak El Blat Moussaytbeh Mazraa

For the 2000 and 2005 elections, Lebanon was divided into 14 electoral districts that seemed based on no formal criteria:

- the eight *qada* of North Lebanon formed two districts;
- the eight *qada* of South Lebanon formed two districts;
- the six *qada* in Mount Lebanon formed four districts.



The 2005 Election Districts

Distribution of Parliamentary Seats among the 26 Electoral Districts

Under the current law, the number of seats allocated to districts ranges from between two to ten. There are no formal criteria that outline the basis for the distribution of seats to different districts or between different confessions present in the district. The current distribution of seats (shown in the table opposite) is done in the same manner as seats were distributed in the 2000 and 2005 elections; despite having different electoral districts, seats were still allocated to specific *qada*.

	Sunni	Shi'ite	Druze	Alawite	Maronite	Greek Orthodox	Greek Catholic	Armenian Orthodox	Armenian Catholic	Evangelical	Minorities	Total Seats per District
Akkar	3			1	1	2						7
Minieh-Dinnieh	3											3
Becharre					2							2
Tripoli	5			1	1	1						8
Zgharta					3							3
Batroun					2							2
Koura						3						3
Jbeil		1			2							3
Kesrwan					5							5
Metn					4	2	1	1				8
Baabda		2	1		3							6
Aley			2		2	1						5
Chouf	2		2		3		1					8
Saida	2											2
Zahrani		2					1					3
Jezzine					2		1					3
Nabatieh		3										3
Tyr		4										4
Bint Jbeil		3										3
Marjeyoun-Hasbaya	1	2	1			1						5
Baalbek-Hermel	2	6			1		1					10
Zahleh	1	1			1	1	2	1				7
W.Bekaa-Rachaya	2	1	1		1	1						6
Beirut 1					1	1	1	1	1			5
Beirut 2	1	1						2				4
Beirut 3	5	1	1			1				1	1	10
Total Seats By Confession	27	27	8	2	34	14	8	5	1	1	1	128

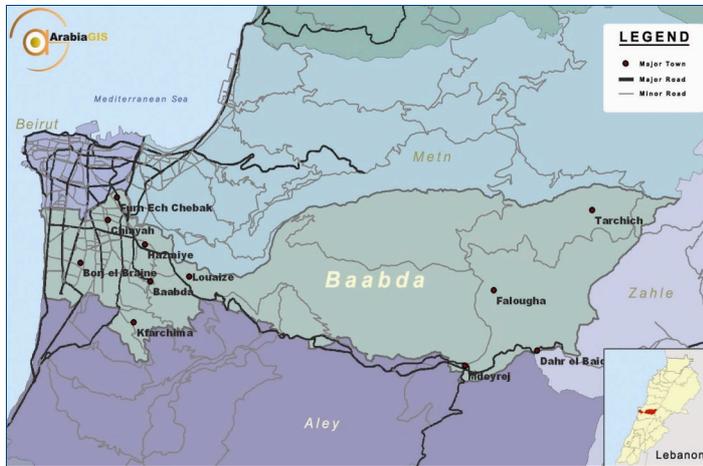
The Electoral System

Lebanon's electoral system has five basic elements:

- *The right to stand is confessional* Seats can only be contested by candidates who are from the confession it is allocated to (although there is no requirement for a candidate to prove their confessional status).
- *The right to vote is non-confessional* Voters can vote for all available confessional seats, regardless of the voter's own confessional group.
- *Voters have more than one vote* Lebanon uses multi-member electoral districts. Voters are able to vote for as many candidates as there are seats available. (This is known as the *block vote* system.)
- *Voters vote with a single ballot paper* On a single ballot paper, a voter chooses the names of candidates they wish to vote for. A voter may choose to use only some of the votes they are entitled to.
- *It is a plurality/majority system* Where there is only one seat for a confession, the seat is won by whichever candidate from that confession has the most votes (in effect, a *first-past-the-post* system). Where there is more than one seat for a confession, the seats are won by as many candidates from that confession who have received the most votes.

The Electoral System in Practice: the example of Baabda

In Baabda, there are six seats: 3 Maronite, 2 Shia and 1 Druze. A Sunni candidate could not stand for election. All voters can vote for up to six candidates, so long as they vote for no more than 3 Maronite candidates, 2 Shia candidates and 1 Druze candidate. The six Deputies elected to Parliament will be:



- the three Maronite candidates who win the highest number of all votes cast for Maronite candidates;
- the two Shia candidates who win the highest number of all votes cast for Shia candidates; and
- the Druze candidate who wins the highest number of all votes cast for Druze candidates.

The Druze candidate who has the second-highest number of votes would not be elected even if, for example, s/he had received more votes than any of the Maronite or Shia candidates who were elected.

Ballot Papers and Electoral Lists: how 'winners take all' under the Lebanese block vote system¹

In most elections held under a *block vote* system, a voter is presented with a ballot paper that contains the names of all candidates; the voter would then choose which candidates they wish to vote for and mark the ballot accordingly. However, a peculiarity of the Lebanese electoral process is that voters are not provided with an official ballot paper listing all candidates; instead, the 2008 Election Law (like its predecessors) gives voters two options on how they can cast their ballot:

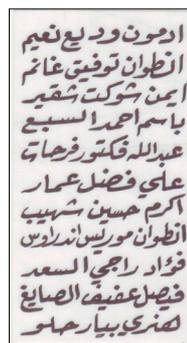
- Either the voter can write the names of the choice of their candidates on a blank piece of paper provided at the polling station;
- Or the voter can bring with them in to the polling station a piece of paper (known as a 'prepared ballot') that already contains the names of the candidates they have chosen.

In order to take best advantage of this practice, a candidate will try to ensure that s/he is on the same prepared ballot as other popular candidates. A candidate who is part of a group standing on the same prepared ballot – referred to as the 'electoral list' – benefits from the fact that the supporters of one candidate will also be voting for all others on the ballot, maximising the group's collective chance of winning seats under the *block vote* system.

Candidates on an electoral list will often be political allies from a political party or a coalition between parties and/or independent candidates. But, in multi-confessional districts, the choice on who will be on the same electoral list is often made more to enhance the candidates' cross-confessional vote-winning possibilities than as a reflection of any shared political opinion. A candidate who runs independently or is unable to join an electoral list has little chance of winning a seat.

Prepared Ballots

Prepared ballots are usually distributed through families and community leaders in advance of election day, or by activists outside polling stations on the day itself. The practice of using prepared ballots is widely criticised in Lebanon for undermining the secrecy of the ballot: they can be traced back to the voter which can also encourage vote-buying.



This is a prepared ballot for the 2005 election in the Baabda-Aley district. It was issued by an electoral list consisting of candidates from parties that are usually rivals (Future Movement, Progressive Socialist Party, Kateab and Hezbollah) as well as some independents. Winning just over 51 per cent of the vote, all 11 candidates on the list were elected.

Voters in Lebanon have the right to choose candidates from across different electoral lists, either by writing their own ballot or by 'crossing-off' candidates from a prepared ballot and writing in the name of their alternative choice of candidates.

¹ A detailed assessment of the 2008 Election Law has recently been published by Democracy Reporting International and the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections. See <http://www.democracy-reporting.org/>