



PRELIMINARY STATEMENT

Vote-buying practices affected the voters' free choice and resulted in a lack of level-playing field

Beirut, 17 May 2022

This preliminary statement of the EU election observation mission (EU EOM) is delivered before the completion of the entire electoral process. Critical stages remain, including tabulation of results and electoral complaints. The EU EOM is now only in a position to comment on observation undertaken to date and will later publish a final report, including full analysis and recommendations for electoral reform. The EU EOM may also make additional statements on election-related matters as and when it considers it appropriate.

Summary

Although preparations were affected by limited financial and human resources, the election authorities delivered the 15 May parliamentary elections. They were overshadowed by widespread practices of vote buying and clientelism, which distorted the level playing field and seriously affected the voters' choice. The campaign was vibrant but marred by various instances of intimidation, including on social media, and instances of campaign obstruction. The online space was also distorted by prevalent information manipulation. In addition, for certain categories of citizens, the right to vote is still severely restricted. The legal framework for campaign finance suffers from serious shortcomings concerning transparency and accountability. While the freedom of speech was generally respected, the media failed to provide equal visibility and balanced coverage. Longstanding deficiencies in the legal framework remain unaddressed, as well as previous EU election recommendations, and would require urgent reforms.

- The period after the 2018 parliamentary elections has been characterised by political instability and drastic deterioration of socio-economic conditions. The nationwide demonstrations of October 2019 against Lebanon's economic woes and government corruption and mismanagement resulted in the fall of the government led by Prime Minister Saad Hariri. A long period of political uncertainty ensued as the economy continued to shrink, the currency lost eventually 90 per cent of its value and unemployment and poverty rates soared. The COVID-19 pandemic and the tragic explosion at Beirut harbour on 4 August 2020 compounded the already dire situation.
- On election day, the EU EOM deployed 167 observers to all 26 minor districts of the country. Overall, the EU EOM visited 798 polling stations. Numerous localised tensions were reported. The lack of training of polling staff became clearly visible on election day, who showed a weak performance. Candidate agents were present in high numbers, controlling voter attendance and often displaying intrusive behaviour. The secrecy of the vote was not always guaranteed.

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- The legal framework constitutes an overall adequate basis for holding democratic elections, although important reforms are needed to address enduring and serious legislative gaps in various fields which fall short of the relevant international commitments to which Lebanon adheres. These include campaign finance regulations, principle of equality between men and women, equal suffrage, the right of certain categories of citizens to vote, the right to stand, the powers and functioning of the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE), certain media legal provisions. None of the 25 recommendations of the EU EOM Lebanon 2018 was implemented.
 - The district magnitude leads to significant differences in the ratio between voters and seats, which is inconsistent with the principle of equality of the vote. Also, the election law does not set out the criteria for allocating a certain number of seats to each district, which falls short of international good practice.
 - The Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM) and the local election administration were operating with severely reduced means due to the economic crisis. Due to the lack of financial and human resources, election preparations started very late, with the budget allocated less than a month before the elections. They were, however mostly on time, notably due to the support of the international community to the electoral management bodies. EU EOM observers reported varying performances by the local election administration, which often lacked basic information on deadlines and procedures. The SCE, in charge of monitoring compliance with campaign finance and media regulations, is not a full independent monitoring body; it lacked funds, qualified human resources, basic equipment, as well an adequate mandate and sanctioning power.
 - Both the MoIM and the SCE displayed a certain lack of transparency and provided little information about election preparations. In addition, activities dedicated by the authorities to voter and civic education were insufficient to adequately inform citizens about the elections and voting procedures.
 - The right to vote is severely restricted for certain categories of citizens, despite Lebanon's international obligations. The voter register enjoyed general confidence among EU EOM interlocutors. However, the fact that voters cannot change their place of registration leads to many of them having to travel to another electoral district on election day. In the context of the economic crisis, this rigid provision did not facilitate voter participation.
 - While, in general, campaign was vibrant, it was also marred by instances of intimidation of candidates, and some cases of campaign obstruction.
 - The legal provisions for campaign finance generally do not guarantee transparency and accountability. The inadequate legal framework and poor oversight, including the lack of sanctioning mechanisms, allowed for the proliferation of vote-buying practices, affecting the level playing field and undermining the integrity of the voters' choice.
 - Freedom of expression was mostly respected during the campaign period, although there were cases of intimidation and a number of incidents. In contradiction with the law, the media failed to provide equal visibility to all candidates and candidate lists. This was amplified by the unequal paid-for electoral content on the three major private television channels and by the unbalanced coverage of the politically affiliated media.

- Freedom of speech online was curtailed by the law and by recurring intimidation practices. The election law did not reflect the increased use and specificity of social media and the SCE did not have an explicit mandate over violations on social media. Candidates largely used social media to campaign, including through boosted content. The online space was distorted by a widespread negative campaign by contestants, derogatory comments by social media users, several severe instances of intimidation against candidates, and manipulative attempts to impose narratives shared by pages and accounts affiliated to parties.
- There were 118 women candidates (16.4 per cent) on the lists, a two per cent increase compared to previous elections. The parliament did not include in the legal framework positive measures to encourage equality between men and women and women's representation in the decision-making bodies, in line with Lebanon's international commitments.

The European Union Election Observation Mission (EU EOM) has been present in Lebanon since 27 March following an invitation from the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities. The mission is led by Chief Observer, György Hölvényi, Member of the European Parliament (Hungary). In total, the EU EOM deployed 167 observers from 27 EU Member States, Canada, Norway, and Switzerland, across the country to assess the whole electoral process against international obligations and commitments for democratic elections as well as the laws of Lebanon. A delegation of the European Parliament, headed by Brando Benifei, MEP, also joined the mission and fully endorses this Statement. On Election day, observers visited polling stations in all 26 minor districts, 73 during the opening, 658 during voting, and 67 during the closing and counting.

This preliminary statement is delivered prior to the completion of the election process. The final assessment of the elections will depend, in part, on the conduct of the remaining stages of the election process, in particular, the tabulation of results, and the handling of possible post-election day complaints and appeals. The EU EOM remains in the country to observe post-election developments and will publish a final report containing detailed recommendations within two months of the conclusion of the electoral process.

The EU EOM is independent in its findings and conclusions and adheres to the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation endorsed at the United Nations in October 2005.

Preliminary Findings

Background

Following the previous parliamentary elections of 6 May 2018, the Future Movement's leader Saad Hariri formed a national unity government in January 2019, comprised of a wide spectrum of the Lebanese political forces (Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, Progressive Socialist Party, Hezbollah, Amal, Free Patriotic Movement).

A distinct dividing line in the Lebanese political discourse, exacerbated in election times, is the major political actors' allegiance to competing regional powers. During the campaign, the candidates from the Sunni camp, the Lebanese Forces, the Party of Socialist Progress, and Kataeb advocated for the country's sovereignty and neutrality, appealing to Hezbollah's disarmament and accusing the Hezbollah-Amal Movement tandem for following the Iranian-Syrian agenda. In turn, Hezbollah insisted on the armed resistance to Israel, considering those political forces that demand its disarmament as acting in favour of Lebanon's enemies.

In 2022 political forces representing the Sunni community had difficulties organising themselves following the withdrawal by the Future Movement (FM) leader, former Prime Minister Saad Hariri. Former FM members and other Sunni leaders nevertheless entered the electoral race. Their electoral performance, despite the absence of unity, was crucial in preserving the fragile balance between the Sunni and Shia parties.

Although the events of October 2019 were short-lived, they gave rise to new civil society-stemming political forces who aspired to form a parliamentary representation. The elections' outcome has clearly demonstrated that these forces are able to have a say in Lebanese politics.

Legal Framework

The legal framework is overall adequate for holding democratic elections, but important reforms are needed to address enduring and serious legislative gaps in various fields.

The legal framework constitutes an adequate basis for holding democratic elections, although it continues to fall short of relevant international commitments to which Lebanon adheres in areas such as campaign finance regulations, equality of suffrage, the principle of equality between men and women, the right of certain categories of citizens to vote, the right to stand as candidates, the powers and functioning of the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE), media legal provisions. In addition, fundamental parts of the legal framework have not been implemented.

The 2022 electoral legal framework remains almost unchanged from that of the previous elections. The EU EOM Lebanon 2018 presented a list of 25 recommendations, many of which required the adoption of legislative amendments. None was implemented.

Electoral System

The district magnitude as determined by the law leads to inequalities in voting power.

The 128 members of parliament are elected for a four-year term through a system of proportional representation. The electoral system is based on a confessional distribution of seats, half of the seats being reserved for Muslims and the other half for Christians. While voters can vote for any candidate in their district, candidates can only run for a seat corresponding to their confession.

The 2017 election law created 15 major districts, subdivided into 26 minor districts, and fixed the number of seats to be contested in each of them. The legally determined district magnitude (i.e. the number of seats assigned to each district) leads to significant differences in the ratio between voters and seats,¹ which is inconsistent with the principle of equality of the vote. Also, while the electoral district boundaries largely correspond to the administrative division of the country (exceptions: Beirut, Baalbek-Hermel, and Saida-Saida villages), the law does not explain the criteria for allocating a certain number of seats to each district. This lack of legally established and objective criteria falls short of international good practice.

¹ At the national level, the average voter-per-seat ratio is 30,996 (3,967,507 voters elect 128 seats), but this ratio ranges from 16,853 in Beirut 1 to 46,866 in South Lebanon 2, which means that the weight of a vote in Beirut 1 is three times higher than one in South Lebanon 2.

Electoral Administration

Despite a severe lack of resources, election preparations were mostly on time, but the election administration showed varying degrees of transparency and performance.

The administration of elections is the responsibility of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities (MoIM), as well as governors and district commissioners on the local level. In addition, committees of judges are appointed for each electoral process, primarily to conduct the results tabulation. The MoIM and the local administration were operating with reduced means due to the economic crisis, with most of the staff working only a few days per week due to high transportation cost. Internal differences and an opaque management within the MoIM coincided with a general lack of transparency and public information on election preparations, including towards the EU EOM.²

The budget for these elections amounted to LBP 320 billion (EUR 14.8 million), less than a third of the 2018 elections budget. While the budget law was approved by parliament on 29 March and signed by the President on 7 April, no transfers were made to the election authorities until the first week of May. The MoIM did not establish a detailed election calendar, and governors, as well as district commissioners, lacked basic information on deadlines and procedures. The main challenge of the election preparations was to ensure electricity supply for polling and tabulation centres. As the offer from the state electricity company exceeded the entire election budget, the MoIM decided to rely on local generator providers and shifted the responsibility to the local administration, who had not received any funds for this until 8 May. EU EOM observers reported varying performances by the local election administration, with some showing a high level of commitment despite the difficult situation. Eventually, the basic election preparations were carried out, albeit at the last minute, due to the lack of resources. Most EU EOM interlocutors lacked trust in the MoIM, as in state institutions in general.

The Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE) oversees compliance with campaign finance as well as media regulations. In the run-up to these elections, the SCE published over 40 decisions and announcements, mainly to clarify campaign rules for candidates and the media. While the election law qualifies the SCE as independent, it simultaneously sets the commission's dependence on the MoIM for financial and administrative resources. In practice, the SCE lacked funds, qualified human resources, and basic equipment. The SCE showed a restrained attitude towards stakeholders, including the EU EOM, which resulted in a difficult access to information, although some members, in their individual capacity, shared with the mission important updates on the electoral process.

Overall, the voter information about the elections and procedures was broadly insufficient. The SCE's legal mandate includes voter education. Starting on 20 April, the SCE released 24 posts on Facebook containing video or visual voter education material, including on out-of-country voting and on the rights of voters with disabilities. Also, the election law requires the media to allocate at least three hours per week for official voter education programmes. The public broadcaster *Tele Liban* did not air any voter education spot. Commercial channels broadcasted voter education content produced by themselves or by civil society organisations. MTV was the only television channel to broadcast official voter education spots produced by the MoIM

² The MoIM often published important decisions several days after they were taken. For example, the change of a polling centre for the out-of-country voting was published only after election day. Governors and sub-governors lacked essential information, like a timeline for preparations or the final voter lists.

and the SCE, starting only on 22 April, far from the minimum requirement of three hours per television channel and per week during the campaign. The EU EOM observed hardly any voter education initiatives at the local level.

Voter Registration

The voter register enjoyed general confidence, but certain restrictions on the right to vote fall short of international standards, and rigid registration provisions did not facilitate voter participation.

The voting age is set to 21 years (whereas the age of majority is 18), which excludes certain young citizens and is contrary to international common practice. For certain categories of citizens, the right to vote is still severely restricted. This falls short of Lebanon's international obligations. The law disenfranchises serving military personnel of all ranks and divisions, whereas naturalised citizens can only vote or run for office ten years after their naturalisation. No measures are in place for the exercise of the right to vote of pre-trial detainees.

Voter registration in Lebanon is passive; the permanent voter register is updated once a year. Voter lists are drawn up by the MoIM based on civil status records. For these elections, the preliminary voter register included 3,970,073 voters. After the public inspection period from 15 December 2021 to 1 January 2022, the final number of 3,967,507 voters was announced, including 50.97 per cent women.

Voters are registered to vote in their paternal ancestral village. To change the place of registration is possible but requires a lengthy procedure and is rarely undertaken. Many voters do not live where they are registered and have to travel to their electoral district on election day, which was even more difficult this year in the context of the economic crisis and higher transport costs. 'Mega centres' were to be set up for these elections, which would have allowed voters to cast their vote for their electoral district at a central location. These plans were discarded, allegedly due to logistical and financial constraints.

Registration of Candidates

An uncontroversial process, although limitations on the right to stand, fall short of international standards.

The candidate registration closed on 15 March with 1,043 registered candidates, 77 more than in 2018. Candidates must specify the confessional seat and the district where they intend to run and must be of the same confession as the seat they contest. These provisions fall short of international standards related to the right to stand. The registration process went smoothly, with only two rejected candidates, as they had previously removed their confession from their civil registry record. By 4 April, the candidates had to organise themselves into lists complying with the seat allocation in each electoral district, as well as with the confessional distribution of those seats. A total of 718 candidates were running on 103 lists.

Campaign Environment

Generally a vibrant campaign, but vote-buying and clientelist practices seriously undermined the voters' choice.

The campaign period took place between 10 January and 13 May. Candidates resorted to a diversity of means (public rallies, door-to-door meetings, billboards and other visibility materials, *iftar* invitations, phone calls, etc.) in accordance with their spending capabilities, as well as family and public networks. While, in general, the campaign activities may be characterised as vibrant, in some regions in the south, for instance, in South Lebanon 2 and 3, where the tandem Hezbollah-Amal Movement prevails, their intensity was considerably lower than in the rest of the country.

Campaign messages concentrated on the socio-economic crisis and the ways of its resolution, as well as fighting corruption. Candidates opposing Hezbollah advocated for an independent and sovereign Lebanon against regional interference, while Hezbollah pointed to the necessity of continuing the struggle against “external enemies.”

The EU EOM assessed that the campaign was marred by the lack of a level playing field and the negative impact of the overall crisis on the size and diversity of candidates' campaign activities. Numerous cases of vote buying and clientelist practices have been reported. Distributing ‘bread bags’ and medical supplies, as well as generators, solar powers and fuel, were among the tactics used by certain political parties and candidates, often in their offices, to unduly influence voters.

Instances of intimidation, including of female candidates, destruction of campaign materials, and the obstruction of campaign activities, have also been observed and reported. However, these violations remained localised and cannot be considered as having an impact on the election results.

Most contestants had a well-established presence online. Financial challenges, unequal access to traditional media, and the need to renew parties' messaging to attract the youth partially moved the campaign online. The EU EOM social media monitoring shows that representatives of the camp in alliance with Hezbollah were the most active, forming 52 per cent of the campaign postings, against 32 per cent for the non-Hezbollah allies. Social media platforms allowed visibility to independent and opposition candidates, including through paid-for content. However, the level playing field was heavily tilted in favour of wealthier candidates who had more resources to create and boost content. A significant part of the online messages posted by political stakeholders was considered negative campaigning (16.5 per cent), namely messaging opposing Hezbollah, Amal, and the government primarily, and to a lesser extent, the Lebanese Forces. The EOM observed that some candidates continued campaigning on Facebook and Twitter until election day.

The campaign in the media significantly stepped up in the final run-up to the polls. Most of the private media, including local news websites and radio stations, charged fees for covering candidates, with prices raising noticeably for the major private television channels. Broadcasters said they also offered free access to less wealthy candidates, including *Thawra* ones, on a case-by-case approach. Politically affiliated television channels provided both free access and paid coverage, depending on the candidates' political party.

Campaign Finance

An inadequate legal framework coupled with the acute socio-economic crisis allowed for the proliferation of vote-buying practices, affecting the level playing field.

The legal framework for campaign finance generally falls short of certain international commitments and best practices concerning transparency and accountability. Despite the 2018 EU EOM's recommendations, the SCE continued to have a limited mandate and lacked human and financial resources, as well as sanctioning power and even a legal personality.

The deep socio-economic and financial crisis, near dysfunctionality of the banking system, as well as the lack of effective control and sanctioning mechanism to ensure accountability have affected the level playing field.

The monitoring of campaign finance is limited to the electoral campaign bank account that the candidates and lists have to open when registering, with total bank secrecy on other personal accounts of the candidates or of their close relatives. Although, according to the law, all transactions above LBP 1,000,000 (EUR 36) should be done by cheque, in practice the electoral expenses were largely paid in cash, posing further challenges to tracing funds and verifying compliance with spending limits. The SCE acknowledged to the EU EOM that it does not have the capacity to monitor these cash transactions.

Even if the law imposes campaign-spending limits to candidates and lists, variable according to the size of the districts, the SCE had no resources to assess the reliability of the financial information provided by candidates and the respect of these ceilings.

The EU EOM observed a high monetisation of the campaign, where a culture of in-kind and financial handouts for electoral purposes by institutions owned or managed by candidates or parties, prevailed. These practices are due to a legal provision according to which the distribution of services and payments during the campaign period are not subject to the spending ceilings and do not fall under the control of SCE if the same have been provided for three years prior to the elections. This enables the bypassing of campaign finance prohibitions by wealthy parties and candidates, who can influence the voters' choice in exchange for basic necessities, particularly in the current economic crisis.

Opacity governs the financing of political parties. While the law forbids foreign contributions or donations for candidates and lists, there is no such prohibition related to the financing of political parties, and the SCE does not have access to their bank accounts.

While financial reports have not been submitted by all candidates and sanctions have never been applied in previous elections, only a limited number of candidates and lists submitted the mandatory monthly financial reports. There are currently no requirements in the electoral law for the public disclosure of financial reports or of the candidates and lists who did not comply with the campaign finance reporting requirements. In practice, the lack of sanctions allows candidates to ignore the already scarce legal provisions concerning campaign finance.

On 22 March, Meta rolled out its Ad Library for Lebanon, providing more transparency on spending on Facebook. Online spending was, however, limited compared to the overall spending.

Media

The politically affiliated and sectarian media scene proved unable to provide a level playing field for candidates, it was further exacerbated by the dependence on financial resources in accessing major television channels.

The media scene, even though diverse and dynamic, remained fractured along sectarian and political lines, preventing inclusive and independent media coverage. Media ownership involving political parties, business interests and wealthy families influenced media content. Private television channels provided the bulk of political content, together with online and local media.

Freedom of the media was generally respected during the campaign period. However, several cases of intimidation of journalists occurred, and extensive self-censorship was reported, as well as limited violent incidents against the media.

The campaign in the media was overall dense and lively, although with scarce television debates between candidates. The state-run *Tele Liban* had only one election programme that offered free access to candidates with very few of them participating, partly due to the low audience ratings of the public broadcaster. *Tele Liban* mainly covered the activities of the president, the government, the speaker of parliament, as well as of the ruling political parties in its news programmes.

In contradiction with the law, the media failed to provide equal visibility to all candidates and candidate lists. This was amplified by the selective flow of paid-for electoral content, mainly on the three major private television channels, *Al Jadeed*, LBCI and MTV. Also, politically affiliated media mainly favoured their own lists and candidates, contributing to unbalanced electoral media coverage in favour of established political parties.

Most television broadcasters did not abide by their obligation to display onscreen the specific ‘sponsored programme’ logo when their electoral coverage was paid for, including live campaign events. Major media confirmed to the EU EOM that the official rates they sent to the SCE were “fake” and underestimated, infringing the law, with transactions taking place in cash.

The SCE did not act in an impartial, independent, transparent, consistent manner to ensure compliance of the media with relevant regulations. In general, the SCE has not shared sufficient information on media related violations with the public or with the EU EOM. According to credible interlocutors, as of 28 April, 405 media violations were identified by the SCE, partly for alleged inflammatory speech, without indication that effective action took place. As of 10 May, no media-related cases had been referred to the Court of Publications by the SCE.

The silence period, preventing direct campaign in the media 24 hours before and during election days, was generally not respected, with multiple violations on most television channels. Also, the silence period involved a total of eight days between 5 May and 15 May, which affected the voters’ right to make an informed choice.

The EU EOM media monitoring focused during the campaign on all election-related content, including news, interviews, debates and paid-for programmes.³ On *Tele Liban* (State-run), the president, prime minister, government and speaker of parliament all together attracted 78 per cent of the coverage, mostly in an institutional and neutral way, while the lead trio in terms of airtime were Amal Movement (seven per cent), Hezbollah (four per cent), Lebanese Forces (two per cent), FPM and PSP (one per cent each), mostly in a neutral way. On *Al Jadeed*, the leading political actors in terms of airtime were independent pro-14 March and independent (21 per cent), civil society candidates (15 per cent), FPM (nine per cent), Kataeb (eight per cent) and PSP (seven per cent). On LBCI: independent pro-14 March and independent (20 per cent), FPM (14 per cent), Kataeb (12 per cent), civil society candidates (nine per cent) and PSP (seven per cent). On MTV: independent pro-14 March and independent (23 per cent), Kataeb (15 per cent), civil society candidates (14 per cent), Lebanese Forces (14 per cent) and FPM (nine per cent), National Dialogue party (five per cent) and PSP (four per cent).

Social Media and Digital Rights

Legal obstacles and intimidation limited freedom of speech online, while derogatory speech and information manipulation distorted the online space.

Social media posts are subject to a legal framework that unduly restricts freedom of expression online, conflicting with international standards. Selective lawsuits and summoning by security agencies have repeatedly been used against critical voices, leading to self-censorship. The law and its implementation by the authorities do not sufficiently protect privacy and user data nor establish an independent oversight body, resulting in the widespread circulation of personal voter data for campaign purposes. The election law does not reflect the increased use and specificity of social media, nor does it give the SCE an explicit mandate over violations it documents on social media.

Ninety-five per cent of the population over 13 years old have access to social media, despite rising infrastructure and economic challenges. With some 3.15 million users, Facebook was the preferred platform for information sharing, while Twitter was the most influential for shaping the political discourse. WhatsApp was extensively used to reach out to voters. The online space was distorted by a widespread negative campaign, derogatory comments, several severe instances of intimidation, and manipulative attempts to impose narratives.

Derogatory speech was pervasive both on Facebook and Twitter, polarising the online debate. The EU EOM analysed over 100 comments containing insults, accusations of corruption, murder, and treason, insults of contestants' families, and of sexual nature. In addition, some female candidates faced vicious attacks and hashtags over their kids' disability and sexual orientation, two characteristics protected against hate speech.

Several contestants, mainly independent Shia candidates, reported to the EU EOM serious coordinated threats and intimidation online, including rape and death threats. Threats and intimidation mirrored instances of offline violence and intimidation targeting Shia candidates

³ Quantitative media monitoring of four television channels daily from 18:00 to 24:00 (18 April to 13 May): *Tele Liban* (public); *Al Jadeed*, LBCI and MTV (private). Qualitative media monitoring: *Annahar* (news website); *Megaphone* (online news platform); the Facebook pages of two politically affiliated television channels (NBN, affiliated with Amal Movement; OTV, affiliated with FPM); the website of one politically affiliated television channel (*Al Manar*, Hezbollah).

that did not run on the Hezbollah or Amal lists. Intimidation silences dissenting voices, affecting the plurality of opinions online and voters' ability to make informed decisions.

The EU EOM identified several instances of coordination between pages or accounts, as well as manipulation and amplification of content across the board, distorting the online space and interfering with voters' formation of opinion. The online space showed few signs of mounting narratives, reacting to offline events rather than shaping it. In addition, the mission identified forms of manufactured amplification (so-called "electronic armies") on Twitter through accounts significantly retweeting and pushing hashtags.

Participation of Women

The absence of measures to enhance women's representation in decision-making bodies is contrary to Lebanon's international commitments.

Traditionally, women's participation in Lebanese political life has been minimal, and many of the female candidates reported cultural, financial, or political barriers to their participation. There were 118 women candidates (16.4 per cent), a two per cent increase compared to previous elections. While 18 women candidates were affiliated with political parties, only seven are party members, and 93 were independent. Only six women were elected to the parliament following the 2018 elections, cementing Lebanon's consistent ranking at the bottom of women's parliamentary representation in the Middle East and worldwide (183rd out of 190).

The parliament did not include in the legal framework positive measures to accelerate equality between men and women and encourage women's representation in the decision-making bodies, in line with Lebanon's international commitments.⁴

No steps were taken either to address the discriminating legal provisions regarding the nationality law, which still do not allow women to pass their citizenship to their children, and those related to the automatic transfer of their voter registration, once married, to their husband's place of registration.

Female candidates and journalists throughout the country reported to the EU EOM being seriously threatened and discredited online. The mission's social media monitoring picked up degrading comments, threats and insults of sexual nature, and incitement to violence.

Participation of Persons with Disabilities (PWD)

The exercise of political rights of persons with disabilities is still not fully guaranteed in practice.

The legal framework on the rights of persons with disabilities (PWD) is limited and lacks enforcement measures, and PWD face complex barriers to achieving their rights. The Law

⁴ Lebanon ratified CEDAW in 1996, thus has an obligation based on art. 7 to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women and advance gender equality, including by the "adoption by States parties of temporary special measures aimed at accelerating de facto equality between men and women."

2020/2000 on the Rights of Disabled Persons was not implemented, and neither were various ministerial decrees, decisions, and circulars issued in the past years. As a positive development, on 29 March 2022, the parliament authorised the government to ratify the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol.

The MoIM took, for the first time, the decision to place polling stations on the ground floor of 103 schools in order to facilitate the access of PWD. According to EU EOM observations, even if 51 per cent of the observed polling stations were situated on the ground floor, only 43 per cent were accessible to people with reduced mobility. In the absence of Braille ballot papers, visually impaired voters continued to be limited in the independent exercise of their right to vote. Voter education in sign language was insufficient,⁵ although all but one of the 13 videos shared by the SCE on Facebook were doubled with sign language. In 14 per cent of the visited polling stations, EU observers noted persons with reduced mobility being carried to their polling station and offered inappropriate assistance.

Domestic Observers

The legal framework allows for election observation according to international standards, and domestic observers reported no restrictions in their work.

The election law sets the conditions for domestic and international election observation and generally allows for observation according to international standards. The Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE), responsible for observer accreditation, published the principles and procedures of election observation for these elections, as foreseen by law.⁶ Domestic observers reported no difficulties regarding their accreditation nor restrictions in their work in the period up to election day.

As of March 2022, the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) deployed 42 long-term observers to monitor the campaign, plus 1,000 short-term observers for election day. The Lebanese Union for People with Physical Disabilities (LUPD) deployed 200 observers mainly to monitor the accessibility of polling stations. As for international observers, apart from the EU EOM, the SCE accredited observers of the Arab League, the National Democratic Institute (NDI), and the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie.

Out-of-country voting (OCV)

Despite the lack of financial resources, the logistics went smoothly, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs increased transparency.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) was responsible for the implementation of the out-of-country voting (OCV), in coordination with the MoIM. Lebanese citizens could register to vote abroad via an MFA website until 20 November, more than a month before the call for elections. The final number of voters was 225,624, corresponding to 5.68 per cent of the total voter register. OCV took place on 6 May in 10 Middle Eastern countries and on 8 May in 48 other countries.

⁵ According to the EU EOM social media monitoring. The SCE shared seven videos between 1 March and 28 April. The only video that was not doubled was shared on 8 March to encourage women's participation in the elections.

⁶ SCE Decisions No. 4 and No. 5, both published on 25 January 2022.

The EU EOM deployed 16 observer teams to 12 EU countries and Switzerland.⁷ No logistical issues were noted, and none of the essential material was missing in the observed polling stations (PS). Procedures were mostly followed, with minor deviations that did not affect the process. Long queues of voters were noted around noon and in the afternoon. Party agents were present in all PS observed, mainly from FPM, LF, and Amal, wearing clothes with party symbols and keeping lists to control voters' attendance. In Paris and Berlin, party agents were observed putting pressure on voters outside of the polling centres by intimidating them or suggesting how to vote.

The MFA set up an operations room and hired students to monitor the process, which was streamed live from each PS. Any problems identified were reported to diplomatic staff, who then contacted the relevant embassy abroad to resolve the issue. Domestic observers also monitored the OCV and expressed satisfaction with the responsiveness of the MFA to deal with reported issues.

After the closing of the PS, the ballots were packed, the boxes sealed and placed in pouches with a GPS tracker from DHL, the company contracted to transport them. According to the MFA, all the pouches arrived in Lebanon on schedule by 13 May. They were stored at the Banque de Liban until 15 May, when they were taken to the Justice Palace in Beirut. There the ballot envelopes were sorted by minor districts and dispatched, several hours later than planned. This led to delays at the tabulation centres where the ballots were counted by the registration committees and the results entered into the tabulation software.

Polling and Counting

Election day was marked by localised tensions, weak performance of the polling staff, and an often intrusive presence of candidate agents.

The polling stations (PS) observed by the EU EOM opened mostly on time. The transparency of the opening process was good, and observers, as well as candidate agents, could observe the process without restrictions. However, in 46 out of 73 PS, the received ballots and envelopes were not counted before the opening, which constitutes a major procedural error.

During the election day, the atmosphere varied according to the area of the country: while it was described as calm in most places, tensions were reported from Shia polling centres (in Beirut 2 and Tyre) and Shia areas (Baalbek-Hermel, West Beqaa, Zahle, Mount Lebanon I). Armed security forces were present in large numbers in the polling centres across the country, and most observers qualified their presence as professional. Throughout the day, problems were observed in the vicinity of 14 per cent of PS, mostly campaign activities or distribution of material. As for the situation inside the PS, 12 per cent of PS were overcrowded, and in 10 per cent, some of the essential material was missing.

In 74 per cent of the PS observed during the voting, there were only two polling staff present, and no assistants were chosen among voters. Candidate agents were widely represented at PS during the entire day, mostly from the LF, independent candidates, FPM, Hezbollah, Kataeb, Amal, and candidates from lists representing new political forces. LADE observers were present at 19 per cent of PS during the voting. According to LADE, at least 37 of their observers

⁷ Opening and closing were observed in 16 PS, whereas voting was observed in 62 PS during the day.

were threatened or harassed by party representatives, mostly in the Saida Villages district; in Saida and Baalbek, LADE observers were physically aggressed.

The lack of training of polling staff became visible during the day through procedural errors. The lack of training, combined with the massive presence of candidate agents, led to situations in which the polling staff was not fully in control of the process. Candidate agents were controlling voter attendance with their own voter lists and with the help of the polling staff, who read out loud the name of each voter. Overall, the EU EOM observed cases of candidate agents interfering in the work of the polling staff or influencing voters in all 26 minor districts. Such cases were observed in 15 per cent of PS.

The secrecy of the vote was not always guaranteed. EU EOM observers reported that in 12 per cent of PS, the layout of the PS did not sufficiently protect the secrecy of the vote, and in 14 per cent of PS, the voters did not always mark their ballot in secrecy.

Most of the observed PS (57 out of 67) closed on time whilst also guaranteeing that voters in line could cast their ballot. In Kfar Sheila, Dinnieh, EU EOM observers reported fighting and unrest within a PS which could not be controlled by the security forces. All but one EU EOM teams were able to observe the closing and counting without restrictions. The observer team in Rashaya was expelled from a polling centre by the Lebanese Armed Forces and only allowed back in when the counting process had finished. There were errors related to the closing and counting procedures. E.g., in 15 PS, the polling staff did not count the number of signatures on the voter list, and in 10 cases, no reconciliation was done between the number of ballots cast and the number of voters who signed the voter lists. On a positive note, the EU EOM only observed one case in which electricity cuts hampered the closing and counting process.

An electronic version of this Preliminary Statement is available on the Mission website (lebanon2022.eueom.eu). For further information, please contact:
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