

# Teim



## TEIM Election Watch Analysis

### OCCASIONAL ANALYSIS:

### LEBANON/ Municipal elections in Mount Lebanon

**Roberto Barroso**

**Amaia Goenaga**

This publication was made possible thanks to the Department of Education, Research and Universities of the Basque Government

EUSKO JAURLARITZA



GOBIERNO VASCO

**Latest revision: 12 December 2010**

### **Observatorio Electoral**

Taller de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos  
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid

[www.election-watch.org](http://www.election-watch.org)

ISSN: being processed

www.observatorioelectoral.es

Sunday 02 May 2010 was the first date in Lebanon's municipal election calendar - in this case, in the region of Mount Lebanon. The other regions around the country will be holding elections over the course of the month of May. According to Interior Ministry data, the participation rate was 59%. However, it should be noted that while participation in some localities reached only 20% in other municipalities it reached 75%.

The two major highlights of the day were undoubtedly Jbeil and Jounieh. Jbeil city (Byblos) saw the most politicized electoral battle of the region, with a clear March 14 – March 8 division, and the ultimate victory of the March 14 backed list headed by Ziad Hawat. With regard to the province of the same name, a battle of influence was fought between President Michel Suleiman, a native of the region, and Michel Aoun. Despite the president's attempt to appear neutral in all his declarations, he was behind the formation of several local lists. Ultimately, the loser was Michel Aoun who only scored victories in the two localities of Jaj and Ehmej, which was a major setback for the Christian leader, who had carried the region in the legislative elections.

Concerning Jounieh, capital of Kesrouan province, a different logic prevailed. In this city, the industrialist Neemat Frem's list - with candidates hailing from various political parties, including members of Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), members of the Lebanese Forces (FL) and of Kataeb - comfortably beat the list of the outgoing mayor Juan Hobeich. With regard to the results in the rest of the region, it is noteworthy that in most municipalities it was family and not political ties that counted, leading to the formation of alliances of the most diverse variety, even contradictory ones in many places. Those districts that merit being named include Ghosta or Zouk Mikael - Aounist districts when it comes to national politics, but where the FPM failed to break family influences. In the case of Zouk Mikael for example, the FPM supported the list that ran against local notable Nouhad Nawfal, but the latter once again won by a comfortable margin.

With respect to Metn *caza*, at stake were only ten of the fifty localities that make up the province. In the remaining forty, pre-election agreements left no room for surprise. However, even in places where lists did do battle, it became clear that the former minister and major local notability, Michel Murr, still dominates the area. The most representative case is probably that of Zalka, where thanks to the always ambiguous Armenian vote, the list of the candidate supported by Michel Murr defeated that sponsored by Michel Aoun, causing a further blow to the strategy of the latter and his party.<sup>1</sup>

In the Druze *cazas* of Aley and Chouf, the alliance between the two principal Druze leaders, Walid Jumblatt and Talal Arslan, joined by Michel Aoun, left little room for surprises. In the vast majority of municipalities, especially those that are wholly Druze, the makeup of the councils had been agreed on in advance. In Christian areas, the outcome was not so clear, although the lists supported by the coalition (Arslan / Jumblatt / Aoun) did end up winning almost all of them. However, there were several notable surprises. Firstly, in Deir el-Qamar, where Antoine Boustani's list supported by the FL and Dory Chamoun (National Liberal Party, NLP) won 13 of the 15 municipal councilorships. Secondly, Damour, where two lists faced off, the winning one including members

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth recalling that Tachnag garners the bulk of the Armenian vote in Lebanon, and that the party positions itself very differently in each region. While in the Metn it gives its unconditional support to Murr, in Beirut it supports Aoun in regional council elections and Saad Hariri's list for municipal council elections.

of the FPM and FL, and the rival one also including members of the FPM and Jumblatt's Progressive Socialist Party (PSP).

Finally in Baabda, a much more heterogeneous district than the previous ones, the results were mixed. Notably, in the south, a region controlled by Hezbollah and Amal, the Shiite coalition won everything at stake. Concerning the rest of the region, there were several locations worth noting: Chiyah, where the FPM-FL-NLP-Kataeb coalition won the day and, of course, Hadath, where Michel Aoun won his consolation prize for this first day of municipal elections. Here it was George Aoun who won a landslide victory against the outgoing mayor Antoine Karam.

The results in Jbeil and Kesrouan have meant that part of the press has been quick to qualify Aoun as the major loser of these elections, reading the elections in national political terms. However, what these elections in Mount Lebanon show is the force that clan and family ties continue to have in different regions of the country. Probably what these results do really indicate is bad strategy on the part of Aoun and his party - a sign of their inability to adapt to the realities of the country at local level. It is worth bearing in mind that March 14's Christian parties have smaller structures, are well-rooted regionally and have an operating model well adapted to Lebanon's local/regional realities. The recently created FPM on the other hand, is a major organization with a national structure, which has been seen having trouble adapting to the complex logic that governs municipal life in this region of the country. Taking this into account, the results obtained by the party are not so bad. Of the 3,055 municipal councilorships at stake, the FPM won some 800, which represents an important step forward in relation to the 2004 elections. For that reason, it is difficult to determine to what extent these results indicate a significant loss of Aoun's popular support between 2005 and 2009.