

Teim



TEIM Election Watch Analysis

OCCASIONAL ANALYSIS:

LEBANON/ Municipal elections in Southern Lebanon

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

ISSN: being processed

www.observatorioelectoral.es

May 23 was Day Three of Lebanon's 2010 municipal elections. This time, the setting moved south to the region formed by the southern *muhafazahs* or governorates, as well as Nabatieh. The participation rate of 52% was relatively high in comparison with that of Beirut.

In this predominantly Shiite region, the *maîtres du jeu* are Amal and especially Hezbollah, which on this occasion ran together in joint lists to avoid the conflict that had occurred in previous electoral bouts (1998 and 2004). As was expected, the Shiite tandem swept the board in almost all the territory.

That said however, there were some remarkable features in a few localities. Some eminent families, displaced as a result of the Amal/Hezbollah agreement, teamed up to try to contest the supremacy of the major Shiite organisations - in some cases, this meant families which tend to compete against each other in such situations. However, generally speaking, this type of initiatives did not have much success. Indeed, the Amal/Hezbollah alliance was beaten in just 15 locations.

Leaving aside the Shiite areas, one of the key points of the day was Saida, a predominantly Sunni city. Here, the local grandee Osama Saad, was out to avenge his defeat at the last legislative elections, in which the list led by outgoing Prime Minister Fouad Siniora and sponsored by Hariri, left the local notable without a seat in Parliament. A major electoral battle was expected - supporters of both parties had been very active and tension has been very high in the city for days before the election. In the end though, Saad was unable to keep up with the impressive electoral machine deployed by Mustaqbal and the Hariri family. Defeated, Saad did not hesitate to accuse Mustaqbal of large-scale vote buying and of having the total support of the state machinery, including the allegation, according to declarations by Saad to Magazine that: "military and security agents have supported our opponent." The more negative side of this battle was violence. Despite an impressive security deployment, the security forces were unable to avoid incidents that caused 60 arrests and 5 wounded in the city.

For the Hariri family this was an important victory that consolidates their ascendancy in the area. It must be remembered that while Mustaqbal won the legislative elections of June 2009 there comfortably, the party led by the Hariri family was largely defeated in the past, namely in the 2004 municipal elections. It should be reiterated that in Lebanon, local and national political rationales do not always coincide. This result thus demonstrates the supremacy of the Hariri family in the area at all levels, to the detriment of the traditional notables of the region.

In the other focus of attention of the day, Jezzine, victory went to Aoun's Free Patriotic Movement (FPM). However, Aoun's victory was very tight in this mostly Christian city. The difference in votes between the last candidate elected and the following was only 112. Thus, FPM's list won 51% of the votes while March 14's list obtained 49% of the vote. Jezzine's situation is peculiar. In this city there is a Christian section of the population traditionally very close to Nabih Berri (Shiite), the Parliamentary Speaker. This has been a source of tension within March 8 from the moment of its formation, given that Michel Aoun also has great influence in the municipality. Jezzine thus becomes a problem for the coalition before any electoral date, and especially for Hezbollah whose role it is to mediate between these two allies. With regard to the present elections, Berri officially stayed on the sidelines, although one of his traditional allies in the city, Samir Azar, did appear in the March 14 list.

As for the fairness of the electoral process, the organization LADE (Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections) reported more than 200 irregularities: candidates who declared victory early in the morning, religious leaders using the mosque to call for votes for a particular candidate, fights between party representatives in the voting centres, vote buying, etc. However, the association announced its satisfaction that, given the tension experienced in the days preceding the elections, things went off relatively peacefully in most areas. However, it should be remembered that at the end of the day there were 18 people injured and 90 arrested.