



Dimensions
for Strategic Studies

Situation Assessment



Lebanon passes the elections to enter «the unknown»

**Entitlements and crises greater
than Parliament**

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May 2022
www.dimensionscenter.net



Dimensions for Strategic Studies

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Preamble

Lebanon has passed the eligibility for parliamentary elections, moving to a sensitive stage in which constitutional and political entitlements abound, which is accompanied by the urgent need to start implementing an economic and financial rescue plan to confront the continuous and unprecedented collapse that the country has been experiencing for about two years, which has greatly affected the living situation of citizens.

The legislative elections, held on Sunday, 15 May, resulted in a new Parliament, composed of 128 deputies for a four-year term,¹ distributed among denominations and confessions, structured a complex proportionality-based election law with the so-called "preferential vote", which had been drafted prior to the last elections in 2018 and adopted for the first time in those elections.²

This electoral law, which can be summarized as "eccentric", as it was developed and invented its complexities in nomination, voting, and winning mechanisms, according to the interest of a number of politicians and political forces,³ reflected in the form of alliances that preceded the elections, as well as on the results, noting that within the framework of this law, deputies succeeded with a few votes, with one of them having 79 votes (Jamil Abboud, candidate for the Orthodox community in the city of Tripoli in northern Lebanon),

(1) The Lebanese Chamber of Deputies consists of 128 deputies distributed as follows: 64 Muslim deputies and 64 Christian deputies. The Muslim deputies are distributed as follows: 27 Shiite deputies, 27 Sunni deputies, 8 Druze deputies, and 2 Alawite deputies; while the Christian deputies are distributed as follows: 34 Maronite deputies, 14 Greek Orthodox deputies, 8 Roman Catholic deputies, 5 Armenian Orthodox deputies, 1 Armenian Catholic deputy, 1 evangelical deputy and 1 minority deputy.

(2) Based on this law, Lebanon was divided into 15 major constituencies, which in turn were divided into smaller constituencies (districts), with 3 to 13 seats allocated to each constituency. According to the law, every Lebanese who has reached the age of 21 (with the exception of the military and a category of convicts) will vote for a specific list, and for one candidate on the same list (i.e., choosing the list and a candidate within the list, which is called the preferential vote).

(3) Some politicians defend this law, considering it to be the best law for a country like Lebanon; as it guarantees the representation of all different sects in their opinion.



while the winner of the same seat fell with 2,294 votes.⁴

Three others reportedly won a seat with less than 500 votes each: Cynthia Zarzer, who won 486 votes for the minority seat in Beirut, Firas al-Salloum, who won the Alawite community seat in Tripoli with 370 votes, and Ahmed Rastam, who won 324 votes for the Alawite community seat in Akkar.

The electoral battle, in which 718 candidates were distributed over 103 lists, was dominated by two basic titles, the first of which was "Confronting Hezbollah" in exchange for "Supporting the Resistance", and the second of which was "Confronting Corrupt Power" by "The Change candidates" in exchange for the traditional powers seeking to maintain their position.

The polling rate decreased from 49.7% in the 2018 elections to 41.1% this⁵ year, which was expected due to the frustration experienced by the country due to the difficult living conditions, noting that it is difficult for the polling rate in a country such as Lebanon to reach high numbers, for a basic reason, other than the subject of frustration, which is that a large part of the Lebanese people live abroad, and hundreds of thousands have left the country in the last two years, while the expatriate polling was not large relative to⁶ the actual number.

The importance of these elections is that they come at a time when Lebanon is going through unprecedented economic conditions, as the country has witnessed, in the last two years, a major collapse in various sectors, led by a collapse in the Lebanese lira, which lost more than 90% of its value against the dollar, which caused a great price for various goods, with a remarkable phenomenon recorded, which is that a number of applications control the dollar price in the black market, arbitrarily, as this price may change every minute, day and night, and it is not linked to a clear network of supply and demand.

(4) The competitor failed, although he obtained a higher number of votes; because the list to which he belongs did not get an additional "electoral quotient" (i.e., an additional seat), a number that results from dividing the number of voters by the number of seats in the constituency.

(5) 3,9 million voters were invited to vote, of whom around 225,000 were abroad.

(6) Based on a pre-registration of their names, about 225 thousand Lebanese abroad were invited to vote in the parliamentary elections (compared to 92 thousand in the 2018 elections), in two rounds: the first (Friday, 6 May) took place in nine Arab countries in addition to Iran, while the second (Sunday, 8 May) took place in 48 countries in addition to the UAE. The polling rate abroad was about 60%.



Argument ahead of the elections:

The elections were preceded by a great controversy on more than one level, especially about whether or not to hold elections, on the basis of local and international fears of not holding them, for several reasons, including security, logistics, and technology, including political, noting that those fears were supported first by a previous experience represented by the council elected in 2009, which extended to itself until 2018; and secondly by the idea that the political forces in Lebanon may do anything to "nullify" the elections when they wish to do so.

Another controversy took place around the election of expatriates, as the Lebanese Forces party accused Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib (from the Free Patriotic Movement's share) of placing obstacles in front of expatriates, by allocating voting centers far from their residence, although there are other centers near them.

The deputies of the "Forces" put confidence in the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives, but the session was not held due to the absence of a quorum, knowing that accusations and high-pitched speech were exchanged between the head of the "Free Patriotic Movement", Gibran Basil (the son-in-law of President Michel Aoun) and the "Lebanese Forces" against the background of this issue.

On the other hand, some politicians in Lebanon, headed by Basil, demanded that the votes of the expatriates be limited to six new seats, instead of voting for all seats in the House of Representatives (that is, an increase of six seats for the expatriates over the 128 seats), but this matter fell in the Constitutional Council, and thus the expatriates were elected, each according to the place of his registration in Lebanon.

In addition, there was controversy shortly before the elections regarding the so-called "Mega Center", which is a large polling center that enables voters to vote on the lists and candidates, each according to his place of registration,



in his place of residence through the electronic magnetic ⁷ card, thus avoiding citizens to move to their hometown for polling.

However, this item has not been implemented due to the objection of a number of political forces, in addition to requiring money for its implementation and taking time, while Interior Minister Bassam Mawlawi announced that the election law did not provide for the establishment of Mega Center centers, and the law must be amended to establish these centers.

Added to all this, naturally, is the controversy caused by the announcement by former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, who is currently residing in the United Arab Emirates, to boycott the elections as a nomination and a vote.⁸

This matter, which constituted a shocking confusion in the Sunni street, opened the door to many discussions about the participation or non-participation of Sunnis in the elections, and at what level would this participation be in the event that (by voting or by nomination and voting?) takes place, and who will inherit the "Future Current" in the Sunni sect and at the national level, especially since the Hariri family represents -since the days of the late Prime Minister Rafik Hari- the majority of the Sunnis in Lebanon.

(7) There was talk about equipping nine Mega Centers: 3 in Mount Lebanon, 2 in Beirut, and 3 in Sidon, Zahle and Tripoli- one in each.

(8) On 24 January, Hariri announced his “suspension” of political activity. And, along with his “Future Current”, he declared the non-participation in elections. In this regard, he said: “There is no positive opportunity for Lebanon in light of Iranian influence, international confusion, national division, the inflammation of sectarianism, and the decaying of the state”



Argument accompanying the elections:

In the end, the legislative elections took place on their constitutional date, four years after the 2018 elections, and the issuance of the results was accompanied by a political, media, and popular debate, which spanned over two stages:

■ The first phase began after the closure of the ballot boxes and before the issuance of the official final results, as the results began to be issued by the machines of the candidate forces, especially the political forces, which were collecting data and figures through their delegates located in the counting centers.

The controversy continued as the counting continued, as the percentages obtained by the candidates changed as the number of opened boxes increased.

While this controversy was noticed in various circles, it was particularly prominent in two places:

- Circles in which the two main Christian forces compete, the Free Patriotic Movement led by Basil (the President's party) and the Lebanese Forces Party led by Samir Geagea.

The heat of the battle fueled this controversy, as the "National Trend" sought to maintain or increase its share (it owned the largest bloc in the previous parliament with 29 seats), while it was estimated that the "Forces" party was heading to increase its share (it had a bloc of 15 deputies).

- Quarters that are considered the center of gravity of the Shiite duo, in the south and the Bekaa (Hizballah and Amal), where the opponents of Hizballah were looking for creating a breach in its regulations.

■ The second stage came after the announcement of the official results, where the distribution of seats on the blocks and on the independents began, while the discussion at this stage focused on the following:

- There was a conflict of information about the affiliation of a number of those who won without being party to certain powers but were merely allies with them.



- Some of those who won made surprises by showing their affiliation to one team over another.

It appeared that some of those who were placed in the category of independents are not actually independent but rather supportive of one political party or another in one way or another.

Breaches:

Naturally, as in every election in Lebanon, breaches have occurred at more than one level.

While the Government has attempted to downplay the importance of these violations, the preliminary report of the "LADE" Society (the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections) spoke of violations, which are summarized ⁹ as follows:

- The Association said: "If the political authority and the body concerned with organizing and managing the elections considered that the mere holding of these elections is an achievement in itself, but the volume of violations and breaches that were documented in the last phase does not reflect the status of achievement at all"
- The Association spoke about "the looseness of the Ministry of Interior and Municipalities in enforcing the law, by not deterring attacks on its observers, as well as attacks on candidates and regulations," noting that it has demanded the Ministry of Interior more than once to "ensure the safety of its observers, as well as voters and delegates; especially in cases where the matter has evolved into security problems," but "without receiving the appropriate response."
- Throughout the election day, the Assembly recorded "flagrant violations of the secrecy of the ballot in most constituencies, with intensive electoral propaganda, and pressure on voters, who have been pursued by the delegates of many parties since the moment they arrived at the polling stations,

(9) "Laddie 's Initial Report on General Elections in Lebanon", Laddie Society 16/05/2022: [bit. ly/39GkbAA](https://bit.ly/39GkbAA)



and directed them," and recorded "hundreds of escorting voters to the secret election booths; in addition to flagrant violations of the electoral silence."

- During the counting of ballots, «irregularities continued on a large scale, with delegates intervening in a gross manner in the process, and videos documenting some of the controversial practices, which could constitute an election contestation, were published in a chaotic manner, in addition to the power interruptions in some centers despite previous promises by the authorities concerned with securing the elections.

Official Results:

Although the official results have been released, the actual size of the two teams, formerly known as the March 8 team (Hezbollah, Amal Movement, and the Patriotic Free Current together with their allies) and the March 14 team (the Lebanese Forces, Battalions, the Socialist Progressive Party and their allies) remains ague, for three main reasons:

- With a number of so-called "change candidates" winning a number of seats, and despite the talk by some of them about forming an independent parliamentary bloc, there are signs that some of them will join one of the two main axes in the country, if not permanently, according to the different issues, and according to the entitlements that need a vote in the House of Representatives.
- Also, despite the success of a number of the so-called "freelancers," some of them are showing a tendency towards one of the two main axes.
- There is no doubt that the official exit of the Future Movement from the electoral process deprived the forces of March 14 of a basic component, but it is likely that those close to the Future Current, who won the elections, will align with "March 14".



According to the Lebanese newspaper Al-Nahar, the Free Patriotic Movement and the Lebanese Forces won 18 seats, while Hezbollah won 13 seats, Amal Movement ¹⁰ won 15 seats, the Socialist Progressive Party won 8 seats, and what has been called the Future Veterans Party won 9 seats, ¹¹ the Phalangist Party won 4 seats, and Hezbollah's allies won 7 seats (the full table is attached).

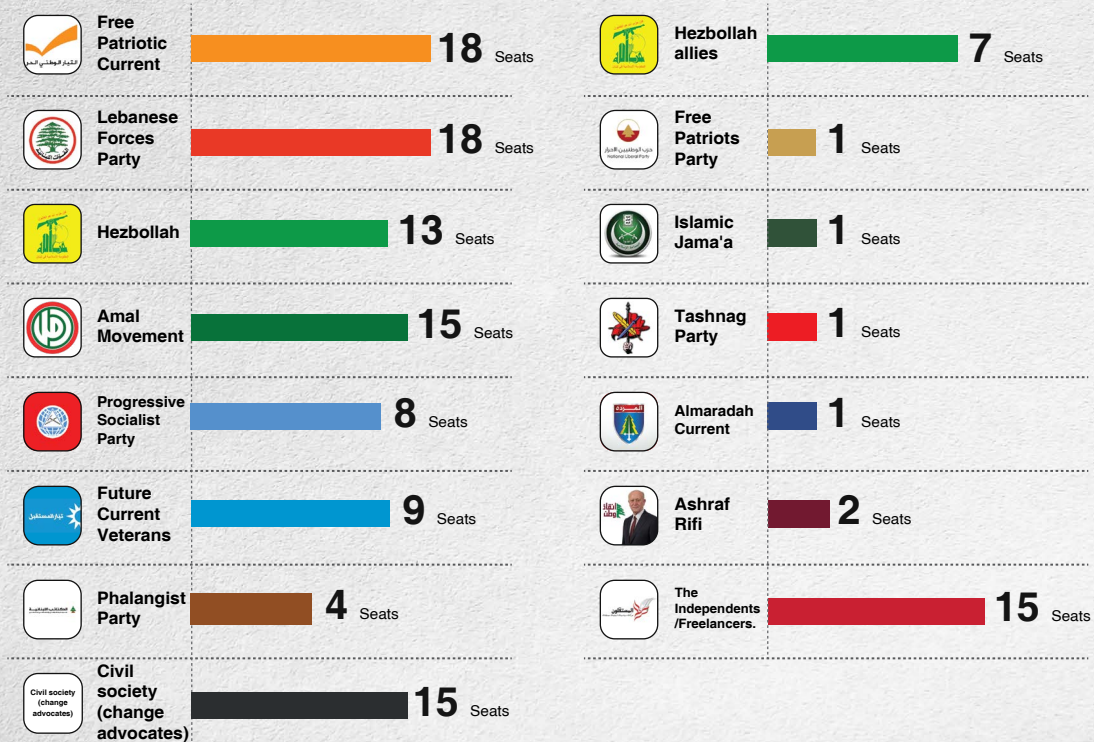
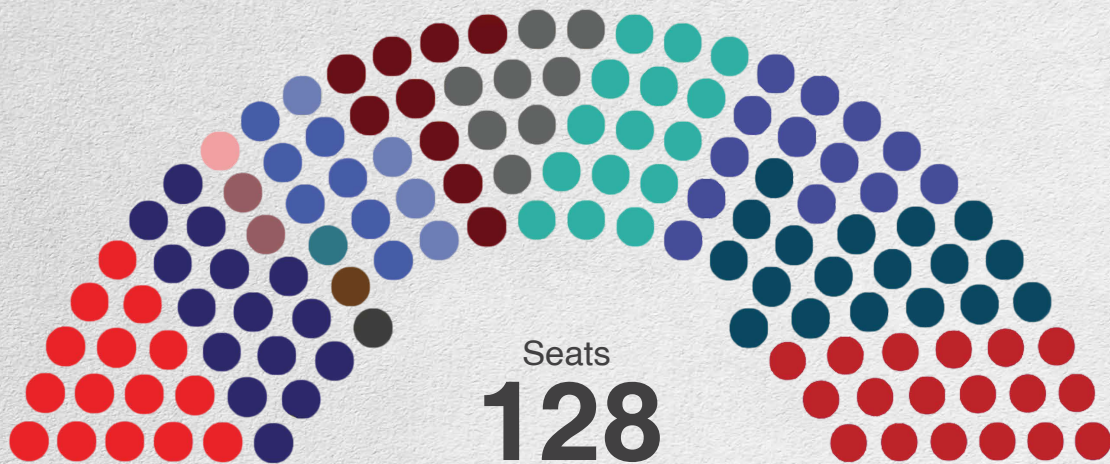
(10) It has become known that Hezbollah waives votes in favor of its allies, albeit at the expense of its parliamentary share, knowing that it has won the largest number of preferential votes in Lebanon (its media announced that it got about 355,000 votes).

(11) The term "veterans" does not mean that they left the "Future Current", but that they ran as independent candidates after the Current boycotted the elections.



Figure No. 1:

Preliminary distribution of political blocs in the House of Representatives





The uncertainty surrounding the election results, however, increased with Basil's announcement on 21 May that the "Free Patriotic Movement" bloc includes 21 deputies, while he announced that this bloc will rise to 23 deputies after the judiciary decides on the appeals to be filed (he talked about buying votes by opponents).

Highlights:

Elections in Lebanon have recorded significant landmarks, which will affect the country's future landscape, albeit to varying degrees depending on the different issues. The most notable of these are the following:

First: the “change advocates” facing the ruling class, part of whom were instrumental in the “17 October” movement, the so-called “17 October revolution,” succeeded in winning a number of seats (15 seats).

However, it is not known to what extent they will succeed in forming a single, unified bloc.

Second: Hezbollah, and its ally in the so-called "Shiite duo," the "Amal Movement," won all the seats allocated to Shiites in Lebanon (27 seats), while the "duo" recorded a loss on two levels, on which their opponents focused:

1- They lost one Druze and one Orthodox seat in the south (to two civil society candidates), which was expected with the controversy surrounding the duo candidates for the two seats. The list of the "duo" Hizballah and Amal was also violated by the "Lebanese Forces" party in the Maronite seat in Baalbek-Hermel (this seat was also for the "forces" in the outgoing council).

2- A number of the party's allies, including Talal Arslan, Wiaam Wahab (a Druze in the mountain), Elie Farzili (an Orthodox from the western Bekaa who was Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives), and Faisal Karami (a Sunni from Tripoli), fell in the election.

Thirdly: it appeared that the Hariri boycott had not received significant resonance except in some ranks of the Future current. The Sunni reaction was generally a warning of the consequences of absenteeism from the elections,



which was announced by Dar al-Fatwa, the highest Sunni reference in Lebanon, which warned of the "danger of abstaining" from participating in the elections, but called for heavy participation in the polls.

However, areas with a large number of Sunni voters registered the largest decline compared to 2018, specifically in Saida (-16%), Minya (-15%), Tripoli (-10%), and Deniyah (-15%),¹² but this decline is also due to the general decline in the polling rate for the reasons previously mentioned.

The election; however, created a new Sunni situation, with a scattered representative map, without a core force or a strong pole.

According to "International Information", the seats of the "Future Current" (20 seats in the Parliament of 2018) were replaced by several forces, independents and change advocates, as follows: 5 seats for change advocates, 5 seats for those close to the "Future Current", 3 seats for the "Free Patriotic Movement", 3 seats for the independents, 2 seats for the "Islamic Group" (the Muslim Brotherhood in Lebanon), a seat for "Hezbollah", a seat for those close to former Prime Minister Fouad Siniora.¹³

It should be noted that Siniora fell in the election, having been put forward by some as the heir to Hariri in the leadership of the Sunni Street, or at least seen as capable of forming a partial leadership of the Lebanese Sunnis.

Hariri, the candidate who won the largest number of votes in Beirut's second constituency, Ibrahim Minimna, who got 13,281 votes (Hariri had received 20,751 votes in 2018), was replaced by 41.7% (including 5,795 invalid/canceled¹⁴ ballots), compared to 40.48% in the¹⁵ 2018 elections.

After the elections, Hariri tweeted that Lebanon is before a new juncture.

He said: "elections are over: and Lebanon is before a new juncture" "The real victory is the entry of new blood into political life."

(12) «Decline in General Ballot Ratio», «International Information», 16/05/2022: bit.ly/3yR9TYX

(13) "Who inherited the seats of the future current?", International Information, 20/05/2022: bit.ly/3wBeMma

(14) «Details of the calculation of election results for 2022», Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 17/05/2022: bit.ly/3Ns8Y5b

(15) "Detail of Calculation of Election Results 2018", Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities, 11/05/2018: bit.ly/3wISJdq



"Our decision to withdraw was right." "It has shaken the structures of political dysfunction; and it does not mean abandoning our responsibilities."

"We will stay where we hold Rafik Hariri's dream and open our hearts and homes to people." "We ask God to protect Lebanon."

Fourth: the media discourse, that prevailed after the closing of the ballot boxes, was the success of the Lebanese Forces in obtaining a greater number of seats than its sworn opponent among Christians and ally of Hezbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement.

Perhaps the main focus in this context was the number of preferential votes obtained by both parties at the level of Lebanon, where the Lebanese Forces party - in a number of media reports - focused on the latter obtaining more preferential votes in a large number of areas, and thus at the level of Lebanon as a whole.

According to Al-Jadid channel, the "National Movement" received 16,459 preferential votes, compared to 133,892 preferential votes in the 2018 elections, a decrease of about 30,000 votes, while the "Forces" party obtained 202,204 preferential votes compared to 14,763 preferential votes in 2018, an increase of 54,000 votes.

Fifth: there have been many media reports and political comments about Hezbollah's assistance to the Free Patriotic Movement in winning a number of seats by giving it votes in several areas.

This is normal, as they are allies, but the focus was on the fact that without the help of Hezbollah, the Free Patriotic Movement would not have been able to reap all the seats it got.



Critical juncture:

With the announcement of the final official results, Lebanon has entered a critical juncture, with important and possibly critical entitlements, which are summarized as follows:

First: the most prominent post-election entitlements is the election of the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the second position in the state which is traditionally Shia.

While a number of political blocs announced that they would not elect the head of the "Amal Movement" Nabih Berri, who has been in office since 1992, it is expected that there will be political differences, and perhaps a constitutional charter crisis, with the absence of any Shiite deputy outside the framework of the "duo" consisting of "Hezbollah" and "Amal Movement", and thus the absence of any competing candidate to Nabih Berri.

In the detail, according to the internal charter of the Lebanese Parliament, "the House of Representatives shall meet at the invitation of its eldest member and under his presidency to elect the Bureau of the House at its first meeting after renewing its election, within a maximum period of fifteen days from the commencement of its mandate."

In the new Majlis, with regard to age, Berri (84 years old) is the eldest. Therefore, he is the one to call the session for electing the Parliament speaker.¹⁶

Some independent members called for electing a non-Shia Speaker of Parliament as it is a custom rather than a provision in the Constitution.

This call was met by a surprise by some political forces, as it requires agreement on the rotation of the three presidencies among the Maronites, the Shia, and the Sunnis.

(16) Pursuant to article 44 of the Constitution, the Council shall first elect, for the duration of its term, the President and Vice-President, separately, by secret ballot and by an absolute majority of the votes cast. If such a majority is not present at the present session and at a subsequent second session, a third round of balloting shall be held, the result of which shall be satisfactory by a relative majority. If the votes are equal, the older person shall be considered the elect.



Bree responded to the idea of nominating a non-Shia personality in his place, saying: “The meaning of this is direct in the application of the abolition of sectarianism, and this is what I have been calling for a long time, so it does not provoke me.”

In the same context, there have been leaks that the "Free Patriotic Movement" would possibly nominate the elected representative Elias Abu-Saab to the position of Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, which raises the possibility of the current agreement, "Hezbollah" and "Amal Movement" on the joint vote for the election of Berri and Abu-Saab.

Second: the entitlement of appointing a new Head of Government ¹⁷ (which is traditionally from the Sunni quota), followed by the formation of the government, are events that could plunge the country into a new crisis for months, as compared with the formation of Governments in previous years.

In accordance with Article 53 of the Lebanese Constitution, the President of the Republic shall designate the Prime Minister who shall consult the Speaker of the House of Representatives on the basis of binding parliamentary consultations and shall formally inform him of the results thereof.

Thus, the appointment of a new head of government is based on the vote of deputies on a specific name, which is likely to get the country into the crisis of forming a government; especially since there is no clear majority for one of the main parties, taking into account that even when there was an explicit majority with the forces of 8 March (71 deputies) in the outgoing parliament, the subject of appointing a head of government was not an easy one.

First, it was controlled by disagreements within these same forces, and secondly, it is subject to issues related to the pact, that is, a head of government representing the Sunnis, and the quotas of the various parties in the government.

Third: the rescue path that the new government must follow, in cooperation with the House of Representatives, which must approve a number of laws, is a path full of obstacles, starting with completing negotiations with the International Monetary Fund and meeting its demands,

(17) With the expiration of the mandate of the Council of Representatives, the Government of Najib Mikati became a caretaker Government.



passing through taking real steps to combat corruption and improve the living conditions, and not ending with finding a solution to the crisis of banks and depositors' funds, as well as matters of no less importance, especially the electricity crisis, and oil and gas extraction.

Fourth: the entitlement to elect a new President of the Republic (from the Maronite quota), which comes with the end of the term of the current President of the Republic, Michel Aoun, on 31 October this year, as the Constitution stipulates that the House of Representatives shall convene upon the invitation of its President to elect the new President, and if the House is not called for this purpose, it "shall be obliged to convene on the tenth day before the expiry of the term of the President."

This entitlement is expected to witness a lot of political disagreements, and even within the same political team, with the emergence of two main names so far, who are both allies of Hezbollah: namely, the head of the Free Patriotic Movement, and the son-in-law of President Aoun, Gibran Basil, and the head of the Muradah Movement, Suleiman Frangieh.

In conclusion, the importance of the elections lies in the fact that they come in economic and financial circumstances that Lebanon has not witnessed before, and that they were held after it was rumored that they could be postponed and the mandate of the house of representatives extended, but it is unlikely that these elections in themselves will constitute a turning point, despite the entry of some independent and some civil society activists from the "changes" into Parliament.

If the number of seats for the "March 8" team has decreased in the House of Representatives, it does not mean that it will be reflected in the general scene, as the number is not everything, as in the past this team had 71 deputies, i.e., the majority, but could not rule or accelerate the formation of governments.

In addition to the controversies witnessed by this group, there is the fact that the nature of the Lebanese regime and the requirements of the sectarian pact,



albeit at a minimum, impose terms and conditions that exceed the size of parliamentary blocs, while the political game is always open to all possibilities, and can sometimes be controlled by the smallest political group, whether in constitutional institutions or on the street.

However, the real juncture is that the country is done with the elections to get into important constitutional entitlements that may trigger political clashes and possibly more complex things that might be accompanied by an economic collapse that needs¹⁸ to be addressed, in a country that is heavily affected by the geopolitical climate, especially with regard to developments at the level of the Iranian nuclear file, at the level of "Arab-Iranian" relations and, of course, at the level of developments in neighboring Syria, as well as the possibility of war with Israel looming in the horizon on daily bases.

In the most optimistic scenario, even if a government is formed quickly and an agreement with the IMF is sought, the amount of evident waste declared monthly, as well as the size of the collapse, is far greater than what can be obtained from the IMF.



The second part of the agreement with the Fund, i.e., the implementation of reforms, seems almost impossible at this stage in a country like Lebanon, which is struck to the core by corruption, and its ruling and the controlling system has roots and arms that led the Lebanese recently - as a matter of coercion-paid humor -to say: "There is no solution except by a meteor"

(18) The value of the lira continued to collapse against the dollar, and the collapse proceeded at a faster pace after the elections, with the dollar rate surpassing 32,000 lira on Sunday, 22 May.



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