



2010 Municipal Elections in Lebanon

Electoral Systems Options

Municipal elections in Lebanon are scheduled for Spring/Summer 2010. The current electoral system used for electing members of municipal councils is known as the 'bloc vote' system, the same as is used for parliamentary elections in Lebanon; however, no municipal council seats are reserved for any different confessional groups. Political and public debate has now begun to focus on the possibility of introducing an alternative electoral system for municipal elections.

This document has been prepared by IFES to provide background information on some of the available options for alternative electoral systems that could be used for electing municipal councils. The paper also provides an assessment on the impact the choice of electoral system has on the possibility of the introduction of standardized ballot papers. It is designed to contribute to the debate on electoral system and does not necessarily define IFES policy in relation to the 2010 municipal elections in Lebanon.

1. Bloc Vote System

Electoral System	Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Can be used in multi-member districts - Voters have as many votes as there are seats to be elected. - The candidates who win the highest number of votes win, e.g. if there are 5 seats, the top 5 candidates are elected. - Voters can vote for candidates from different lists or party affiliations. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In municipalities with a mixed confessional electorate, the Bloc Vote system can encourage cross-confessional voting as parties/candidates increase the likelihood of winning votes by making an alliance with parties from other confessional groups. - The bloc vote system is regarded as being simple to use and understand. - This system gives a chance for popular independent candidates to be elected as voters can choose between individual candidates from different lists rather than necessarily choosing for candidates from just one list/party. - This system can strengthen the development of political parties as a coherent and well organized party is more likely to win a majority of seats. - This system minimizes the risk of 'hung councils'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Electoral dominance by one political group The Bloc Vote is a 'Winner Takes All' system that allows all seats to be won by just one list if all candidates on that list win the most votes. - Disproportionate outcomes As with all 'majoritarian' systems, seats, In very close contests, a popular list/party or candidate may still win no seat despite having a large share of the popular vote in the municipality (the concept of 'wasted votes'). - Political dominance by one group: All seats on a council can be won by a single list/party, leading to political dominance of that list/party in the municipality, undermining the possibility of accountability and oversight of council members. This can undermine public confidence in the credibility of the council. - Under-representation of women: As with all majoritarian systems, the Bloc Vote systems has systemic limitations in promoting the role of women to be elected (i.e. no effective quotas can be imposed). - Fragmentation of the Party System: the Bloc Vote system enables popular candidates with no party affiliation to be elected.

Impact of the Bloc Vote on the possibility of introducing standardized ballot papers

Option 1: Standardized Single Ballot Paper issued by the electoral authorities

- Candidates or lists could be placed in alphabetical order or by date of candidacy application or by lottery.
- The ballot paper could display all candidates as individual candidates OR it could display candidates by their affiliation to a 'list', with one list having a single column. All candidates not affiliated to a list would be put in a separate column.
- Candidates/lists could display their names only or be allowed to have different logos and colors.
- Pictures of candidates could be displayed on the ballot paper (either standardized digital photos taken by the Ministry, or photos supplied by the candidates themselves according to specifications issued by the Ministry).
- This type of ballot paper is very simple for voters because it displays the candidates in party lists and individually at the same time. The voters would mark the ballot paper next to the candidates they wish to vote for.
- The production of such ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates and party lists.

Option 2: Standardized Ballot Papers issued by electoral lists

- This option allows **lists to produce their own ballot papers, including their own candidates list only according to specifications produced by the Ministry**. Lists would be instructed to produce as many ballot papers as there are voters in the district, plus an additional supply of extras. They would be distributed to the polling stations by Ministry staff.
- Each ballot paper would have different color and different logo and the pictures of the list's leader. The ballot paper could include the candidates' names with their pictures.
- The ballot paper would include a space at the bottom to add candidates from other lists.
- Voters would be obliged to take all the ballot papers provided at the polling station. They enter the booth; they choose one ballot paper for the party they wish to vote for. They put the ballot paper in an envelope and they throw the other ballot papers in the basket bin inside the booth.
- This system is very simple for illiterate voters because they can easily recognize the color of their party and choose their correspondent ballot paper instead of making mistakes in ticking the wrong box when many lists are displayed on the same ballot.
- All polling stations must be equipped with large basket bins that should be cleaned from time to time.
- The production of ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates and party lists.

2. Party Bloc Vote System	Electoral System	Advantages	Disadvantages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A variant of the Bloc Vote system, used in multi-member districts, but where voters have only a single vote, where they must vote for a single list of candidates. - The list that wins the most votes wins all the seats. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In municipalities with a mixed confessional electorate, the Party Bloc Vote system can encourage cross-confessional voting as parties/candidates increase the likelihood of winning votes by making an alliance with parties from other confessional groups. - The bloc vote system is regarded as being simple to use and understand. - This system encourages a party system. - This system can ensure women representation if a quota is introduced where every list would be obliged to include a certain percentage of women. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This system leads to political and electoral dominance of one political group and highly disproportional results where one list wins all the seats with a simple majority of votes. Other lists will be left without any representation and there will be a big number of “wasted” votes.

Impact of the Party Bloc Vote on the possibility of introducing standardized ballot papers

Option 1: Standardized Single Ballot Paper issued by the electoral authorities

- The ballot paper could be presented to the voters where the names of all lists would be included.
- The ballot paper could include the party lists’ names with their logos and the pictures of the lists’ leader or could include for each list and in a separate column all the candidates’ names along with their pictures and the party’s logo.
- The list that registers first would get the first column on the ballot paper (or by lottery).
- Each list could have a different color and a different logo.
- This type of ballot paper is very simple for voters because they need only to tick next to the list’s name without choosing candidates.
- The production of such ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates and party lists.

Option 2: Standardized Ballot Papers issued by electoral lists

- This option allows **parties to produce their own ballot papers, including their own candidates list only according to specifications produced by the Ministry**. Parties would be instructed to produce as many ballot papers as there are voters in the district, plus an additional supply of extras. They would be distributed to the polling stations by Ministry staff.
- Each ballot paper would have different color and different logo and the pictures of the list’s leader. The ballot paper could include the candidates’ names with their pictures.
- Voters would be obliged to take all the ballot papers provided at the polling station. They enter the booth; they choose one ballot paper for the party they wish to vote for. They put the ballot paper in an envelope and they throw the other ballot papers in the basket bin inside the booth.
- This system is very simple for illiterate voters because they can easily recognize the color of their party and choose their correspondent ballot paper instead of making mistakes in ticking the wrong box when many lists are displayed on the same ballot.
- All polling stations must be equipped with large basket bins that should be cleaned from time to time.
- The production of ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates and party lists.

3. Closed List Proportional Representation (PR) System	Electoral System	Advantages	Disadvantages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Closed List PR involves each party/political group registering a fixed list of candidates. - Voters vote for one of the lists. Voters are not able to express a preference for a particular candidate. - Parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the votes according to a defined calculation methodology (e.g. the D'Hondt or Saint-League methods) - The individual candidates elected are according to the order of the candidates on the list as predetermined by the parties. - A threshold can be used (i.e. only lists receiving more than a certain percentage of the valid votes qualify to receive seats). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This system ensures that seats are allocated in proportion to the votes cast so that the municipal council is seen as more representative of the voters' will. - It enables small parties (and by extension small groups in the society) to gain representation in the municipal council. - It encourages the formation of political parties. - It can enhance women representation because it facilitates the adoption of women quota on candidate's lists, and especially if women are placed (or required to be placed) towards the top of the candidates list. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The voters cannot influence how the parties compile their lists and in what order. - Candidates would have to appeal to the party's leader in order to be placed on the top of the list. - This system may not enable the most fluid functioning of the municipal council if many lists win seats. The decision making process could be challenging due to diversified interests. - This system may lead to confessional polarization in mixed places, since a sizable confessional group will be able to win seats in the municipal councils without having to make alliances with the other confessional groups.

Impact of the Closed List PR system on the possibility of introducing standardized ballot papers

Option 1:

- One ballot paper would be presented to the voters where the names of all lists would be included.
- The ballot paper could include the lists' names with their logos or could include for each list and in a separate column all the candidates' names along with their pictures and the party's logo. Each list could have a different color and a different logo. The ballot paper could include the candidates' names.
- The list that registers first would get the first column on the ballot paper (or by lottery).
- This type of ballot paper is very simple for voters because they need only to tick next to the list's name without choosing candidates.
- The production of such ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidate lists.

Option 2:

This option allows the parties to **produce their own ballot papers, including their own candidates list only according to specifications approved by the Ministry**. Parties would be instructed to produce as many ballot papers as there are voters in the district, plus an additional supply of extras. They would be distributed to the polling stations by Ministry staff.

- Each ballot paper could have a different color and different logo and the pictures of the list's leader. The ballot paper could include the candidates' names.
- Voters would be obliged to take all the ballot papers provided at the polling station. They enter the booth; they choose one ballot paper for the party they wish to vote for. They put the ballot paper in an envelope and they throw the other ballot papers in the basket bin inside the booth.
- This system is simple for illiterate voters because they can easily recognize the color of their party and choose their correspondent ballot paper instead of making mistakes in ticking the wrong box when many lists are displayed on the same ballot.
- The production of ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates and party lists.

4. Open List PR System	Electoral System	Advantages	Disadvantages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Open List PR involves each party presenting a list of candidates. - Voters vote for one party but may show a preference for one or more candidate within the same list. - Parties receive seats in proportion to their overall share of the votes. - The winning candidates within each list are those who get the highest number of preferential votes. - A threshold can be introduced. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This system leads to proportional outcomes and a more representative municipal council. - It can enable small parties, and by extension small groups in the society, to gain access to the municipal council. - Voters can express their preferences for candidates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - This system can lead to internal party conflict and fragmentation. - Unlike the closed list PR, it may not enhance women representation because voters may not give their preferential votes for women. - This system can polarize the work of the municipal council if many lists get represented. The decision making process could be challenging due to diversified interests. - This system may lead to confessional polarization in mixed places, since a sizable confessional group could be able to gain access to the municipal council without having to make alliances with other confessional groups. - This system can be quite confusing for voters experiencing PR for the first time. This can lead to many spoilt ballots, if voters select individual candidates from across a number of different party lists.

Ballot papers could be presented in 2 different ways:

Option 1:

- One ballot paper would be presented to the voters where the names of all parties' lists would be included.
- The ballot paper would include for each list and in a separate column all the candidates' names along with their pictures and their party's logo.
- The list that registers first would get the first column on the ballot paper (or by lottery).
- Each list could have a different color and a different logo.
- Voters tick the list they wish to vote for and the candidates they prefer within the list.
- The production of such ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates lists by parties.

Option 2:

- Voters would be given a number of ballot papers equal to the number of lists running.
- This option allows parties to **produce their own ballot papers, including their own candidates list only, according to specifications approved by the Ministry.** Parties would be instructed to produce as many ballot papers as there are voters in the district, plus an additional supply of extras. They would be distributed to the polling stations by Ministry staff.
- Each ballot paper could have a different color and different logo and the pictures of all candidates.
- Voters would be obliged to take all the ballot papers provided at the polling station. They enter the booth; they choose one ballot paper for the party they wish to vote for. They put the ballot paper in an envelope and they throw the other ballot papers in the basket bin inside the booth.
- This system is very simple for illiterate voters because they can easily recognize the color of their party and choose their correspondent ballot paper. Then, voters would tick next to the pictures of their preferred candidates.
- All polling stations would have to be equipped with large basket bins that should be cleaned from time to time.
- The production of such ballot papers on time requires early registration of candidates lists by parties.

5. PR – Single Transferable Vote (Ireland, Malta)	Electoral System	Advantages	Disadvantages
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For use in multi member districts. - Voters rank candidates in order of their preference; - Candidates that surpass a specified quota of first preference votes (calculated as follows: total number of valid votes/number of seats to be elected +1) are immediately elected. - In successive counts, votes are redistributed to the other candidates, according to their second preference (and so on) until the number of candidates surpassing the quota equals the number of seats to be elected; - Votes are redistributed by a) distributing the surplus of votes (above the quota) from candidates already elected, and b) from least successful candidates who are eliminated. - Voters are, in effect, voting for individual candidates rather than for political parties, but can give their second and third preference, etc., to their preferred party candidates if they so choose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - It allows voters to choose between parties and between candidates within parties. - It gives proportional results. - It provides incentive for parties that may represent one confessional group only to “move across” to other confessional groups in order to arrange for the reciprocal exchange of preferences between parties. The system therefore promotes confessional integration. - It provides a better chance for the election of popular independent candidates. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The system demands a degree of literacy and numeracy. - The counting is very complex. - The system can lead to party fragmentation. Sitting members of parliament and councilors often lose their seats to candidates from their own party rather than from opposing parties.

Ballot paper considerations:

- Ballot papers need to show both the name/photo of each candidate as well as the logo for each candidate.
- It is not possible for parties to instruct their supporters on the ballot paper as to where they should give their second and third preferences, etc. This must be a verbal agreement. The system thus requires a degree of trust between parties agreeing to transfer their votes.