

Polling Lebanon's electorate

44% of voters believe elections are not transparent

The preamble to Lebanon's Constitution declares that "Lebanon is a democratic, parliamentary republic, founded on the respect of public liberties, starting with freedom of belief and opinion... The people are the source of authority and sovereignty; they shall exercise these powers through the constitutional institutions."

Those principles uphold the vital role of elections in promoting democracy, but ever-changing legislation has resulted in the adoption of election laws that are inconsistent with the principles stated in the Constitution, say critics. They point to representatives who are being assigned posts instead of being elected, as an illustration of how the system has gone wrong.

Since the adoption of Lebanon's Constitution in 1926, the country has witnessed a series of elections on the parliamentary, municipal and mayoral levels, summarized in [Table 1](#) below.

While election laws are vital to the election process, the opinions and perceptions of voters are equally important. To that end, *Information International* conducted an opinion poll tackling election issues, with the first results of the two-part poll reviewed below.

Support for elections

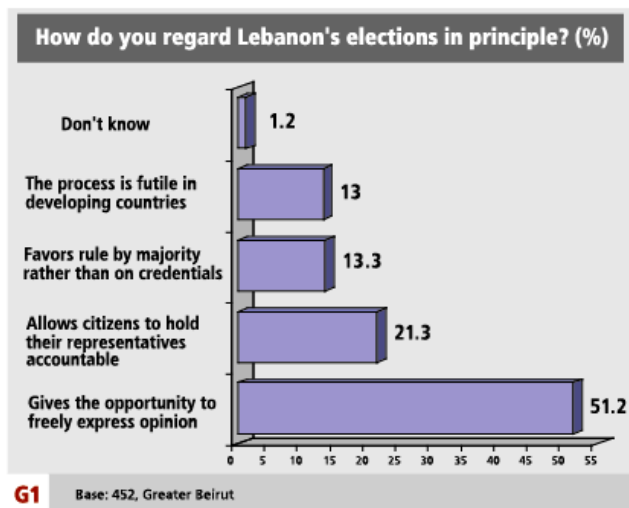
As shown in [Graph 1](#), the majority of respondents (72.5%) supported the principle of elections. 51.2% felt it gave citizens the opportunity to freely express their opinions and choose their representatives, while 21.3% noted that elections allow citizens to hold their representatives accountable.

This is in contrast to 26.3% of respondents who opposed the election process. Out of those, 13.3% said it favors rule on the basis of the majority, rather than on the basis of credentials. Another 13% argued that the process is futile in developing countries. The remaining 1.2% did not know.

The 26.3% who perceived the elections process as "bad" or "futile" suggested other alternatives: 51.3% preferred that qualified people take over official posts, 7% proposed a monarchy arrangement, 5.7% felt that sons of reputable families should govern, 3.8% suggested that the electorate should propose an alternative, 1.9% said that honest people would be right for the job, while the remaining 30.3% replied they didn't know.

Participation in elections

Although 72.5% of those polled supported the idea of elections, not all of them actually voted, as illustrated in [Graph 2](#). Out of the above category, 52.7% voted in previous elections, compared with 19.5% who never voted, and 27.8% who voted occasionally.



ELECTIONS SUMMARY (1929–2004)

Table 1

Date	No. of electoral districts	No. of deputies
1929	5	30
1934	5	45
1937	5	63
1943	5	55
1947	5	55
1951	9	77
1952 mayoral/municipal elections		
1953	33	44
1957	27	66
1960	26	99
1963 mayoral/municipal elections		
1964	26	99
1968	26	99
1972	26	99
1992*	12	128
1996	10	128
1998 mayoral/municipal elections		
2000	13	128
2004 mayoral/municipal elections		

* Elections did not take place during the war and the previous council's terms in office were extended until 1992.

Source: Compiled by Ii from election laws and decrees

The 80.5% who have exercised their right to vote (27.8%+ 52.7%) did so in the following elections:

- 2004 municipal elections: 33.3%
- 2000 parliamentary elections: 25.2%
- 1998 municipal elections: 12.7%
- 1996 parliamentary elections: 14.8%
- 1992 parliamentary elections: 8.5%
- 1972 parliamentary elections: 3.2%
- 1968 parliamentary elections: 2.3%

Free and fair elections?

As shown in **Graph 3**, around half of those polled (49.6%) felt the elections were transparent, compared with 26.5% who suggested there were fraudulent ballots (out of those, 51.6% alleged fraud in the municipal elections and 48.4% in the parliamentary elections). A further 14.6% contended that irregularities had occurred, while 6.4% did not specify.

Respondents who claimed that irregularities or fraud took place in the parliamentary elections specified the following elections:

- 2000: 70.2%
- 1996: 16%
- 1992: 9.9%
- 1972: 1.5%
- 1968: 0.8%

Those who made the claims against the municipal elections, considered the following fraudulent:

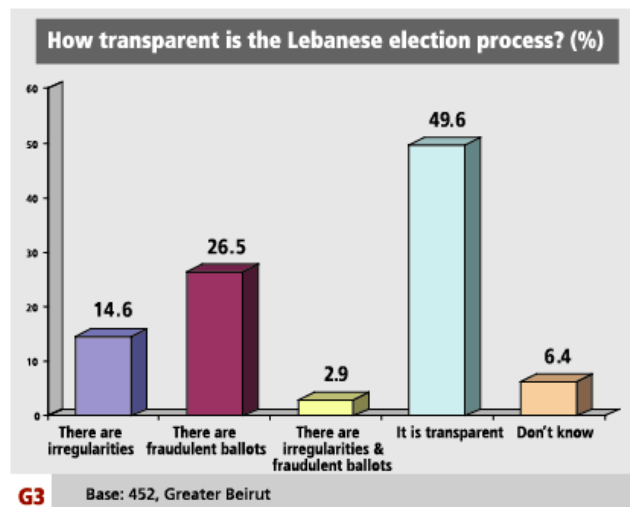
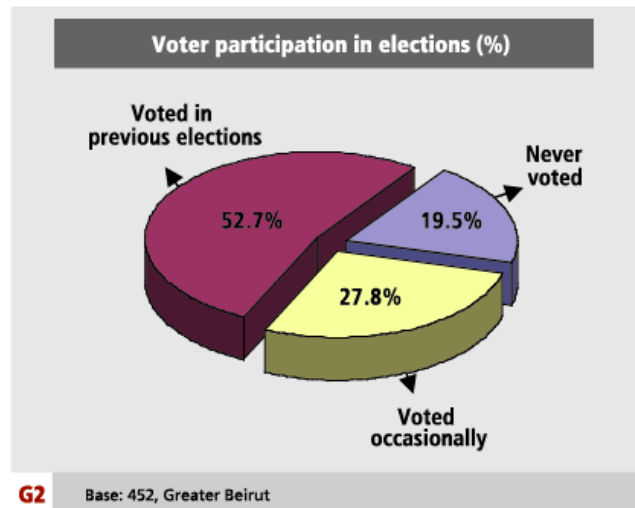
- 2004: 86.6%
- 1998: 12.7%

Voting behavior

Almost half the respondents, or 46.9%, vote by formulating their own list of candidates, 35.6% vote for one full list as it appears on the ballot, 9.3% vote for only one candidate and 8.2% said it depends on the circumstances.

Around one quarter of respondents (25.3%) consider a candidate's political affiliation to be their main voting criteria, 18.8% consider the candidate's political platform, 16.8% noted family background, 12% consider the sect and 11% look at the candidate's financial and employment background. Another 9.3% consider image and reputation, while 5.4% look at personal relations, 1.2% deliberately support or oppose a candidate based on his opponents and a minor 0.2% adopt their party's stance when voting.

The type of nominee most favored by the electorate is an intellectual, according to 44.7% of those polled. Another 31.3% prefer a veteran politician, while 11.2% favor businessmen, 6.6% prefer religious candidates and 6.2% favor a military man. ■



Sample and methodology

This poll, based on a stratified random sample of 600 respondents in the Greater Beirut area, was conducted between 16–21 June 2004. Face-to-face interviews were used and the poll had a margin of error of $\pm 1.9\%$

Respondents' gender distribution was 51.2% males and 48.8% females, while age distribution was as follows: 21.8% between the ages of 18–24, 30.5% between 25–34, 23.4% between 35–44, 12.5% between 45–54 and 11.8% above the age of 55.