

Polling Lebanon's electorate (Part II)

67.5% prefer the president be elected directly by the public

Following Part I of *Information International's* poll on election issues, Part II examines the general public's views on the new electoral law to be issued, the legal voting age and the present system of electing a president to office.

Lebanon's Constitutional Council was established on 14 July 1993, based on Law No. 250 to "supervise the constitutionality of laws and to arbitrate conflicts that arise from parliamentary and presidential elections." In order to contest the results of an election, an appeal must be submitted to the Council by a losing candidate no later than 30 days after the results are announced.

Appealing election results

Since the Council was established, 17 petitions have been submitted, out of which 13 were rejected. The four that were upheld led to new elections, but only one of them resulted in a new winner (Deputy Robert Ghanem defeated the previous winner, Henri Chedid, in the mohafaza of the Bekaa). After the 2000 parliamentary elections, 13 petitions were submitted, and all were rejected. According to the poll, 42.3% of respondents felt those results were fair, 32.2% said they were biased and 25.5% were unsure.

Voting age

The legal voting age in Lebanon is 21, although appeals to reduce the age to 18 have been made. According to the poll, 65.5% of the respondents would support such a move, 29.3% would oppose it and 5.2% don't know, as shown in [Graph 1](#).

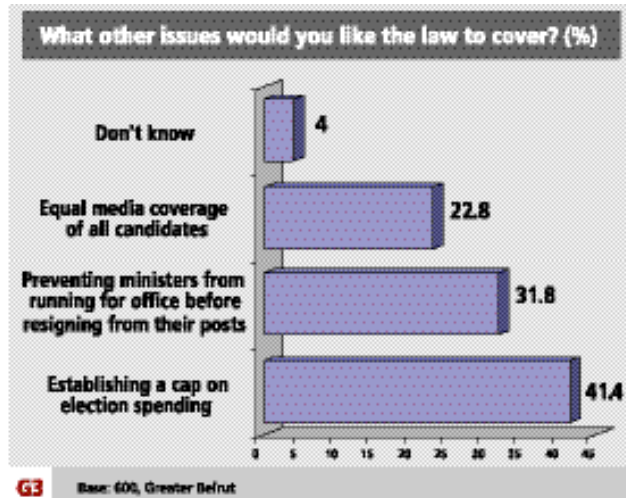
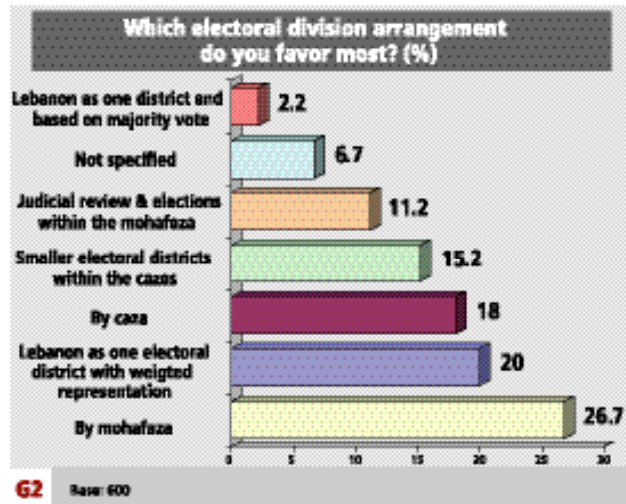
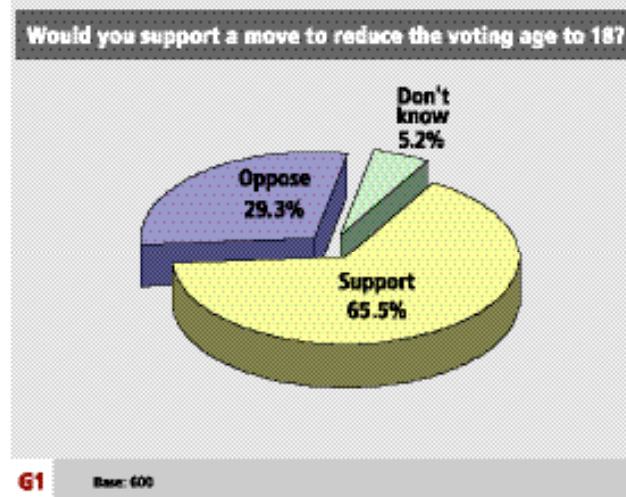
When broken down by sect, the percentage of those approving the change was as follows:

- Maronites: 75.3%
- Druze: 75%
- Greek Orthodox: 72.9%
- Shiias: 67.7%
- Catholics: 66.7%
- Sunnis: 61.9%

Election law

Next spring, voters will head to the polls to cast their votes on a law that has yet to be issued, regarding a reorganization of electoral districts. The new divisions in the election law are expected to be hotly debated, and various scenarios were presented to those polled in the survey, as shown in [Graph 2](#).

The most favored arrangement was breaking down electoral districts by mohafaza (26.7%). As shown in the graph, other divisions included considering Lebanon as one electoral district with weighted representation (20%); by caza (18%); by smaller electoral districts within the cazas (15.2%); judicial review and elections within the mohafaza (11.2%); and



Lebanon as one district and based on majority vote (2.2%). In addition, 6.7% of respondents did not specify. Those positions are also shown in [Table 1](#) below by sect.

Other issues that respondents would like the law to cover, as shown in [Graph 3](#), include establishing a ceiling on election spending (41.4%), preventing ministers from running for office before resigning from their posts (31.8%) and equal media coverage of all candidates (22.8%). Another 4% of respondents did not know.

Presidential elections

According to Article 49 of the constitution, the president is elected by secret ballot and by a two thirds majority of Parliament. After a first ballot, an absolute majority is sufficient.

However, the way presidential elections are conducted in Lebanon could be improved, according to the poll. The majority of respondents, or 67.5%, said they would prefer a system of direct elections, rather than the present system via Parliament, which was supported by 21%. Another 8.2% suggested electing representatives to elect the president, 0.3% proposed that Syria appoint the president, while 3% did not know. In terms of sect, those results were distributed as follows:

• Druze

75%: Direct elections
25%: Through Parliament

• Sunni

70.7%: Direct elections
21%: Through Parliament
6.1%: Through representatives
0.5%: By Syria
1.7%: Don't know

• Shiia

53.5%: Direct elections
30.3%: Through Parliament
6.1%: Through representatives
1%: By Syria
9.1%: Don't know

• Maronite

70.4%: Direct elections
19.8%: Through Parliament
7.3%: Through representatives
1.7%: Don't know

• Greek Orthodox

67.8%: Direct elections
15.3%: Through Parliament
15.2%: Through representatives
1.6%: Don't know

• Catholic

66.7%: Direct elections
19.4%: Through Parliament
11.1%: Through representatives
2.8%: Don't know ■

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 respondents' gender distribution was 51.2% males and 48.8% females. 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.

The poll had a margin of error of $\pm 1.9\%$

FAVORED ELECTORAL DIVISIONS BY SECT

Table 1

Preferred electoral district	Maronite	Greek Orthodox	Catholic	Sunni	Shiia	Druze
Lebanon as one district, based on majority vote	0%	0%	0%	2.8%	1%	0%
Lebanon as one district, based on weighted representation	28.4%	18.6%	30.3%	12.7%	35.4%	33.3%
The mohafaza as one electoral district	27.2%	25.4%	25%	33.1%	29.3%	33.3%
Judicial review and elections in the mohafazas	4.9%	15.3%	5.6%	18.2%	1%	8.4%
The caza as one electoral district	17.3%	15.3%	16.7%	17.1%	13.1%	0%
Smaller electoral districts within the cazas	18.5%	18.6%	13.9%	11.6%	9.1%	0%

Source: Information International poll, June 2004