

Lebanon's 2022 Parliamentary Elections

May 12, 2022

Lebanon plans to hold parliamentary elections on May 15, the first since the emergence in 2019 of a protest movement calling for the removal of the country's ruling political elite. Parties allied with the March 14 political coalition—which seeks close ties with the United States, France, and Saudi Arabia—hope to win a majority in parliament. The 2018 elections resulted in a parliamentary—and therefore cabinet—majority for the March 8 political coalition of Hezbollah and its allies, which seeks close ties with Syria and Iran (see **Figure 1**). As of 2022, forces opposed to Hezbollah remain splintered, and some analysts [question](#) whether the election can overturn the current March 8 majority. The relative strength of Hezbollah and its allies in the next government may impact congressional consideration of additional aid to Lebanon, as the country struggles with an economic crisis the World Bank [described](#) as possibly among the top three “most severe crises episodes globally since the mid-nineteenth century.”

Lebanon's Confessional System Shapes Elections

Lebanese politics operate through a confessional system, which divides posts among the country's various religious groups in proportions designed to reflect each group's share of the population as of the 1932 census. This system is the organizing principle for the parliamentary elections: Lebanon's electoral law [assigns](#) each seat in the country's 15 electoral districts to a specific religious sect (see **Table 1**). This ensures that Muslims and Christians are equally represented among the 128 Members of Parliament (MPs), as required by the Taif Accords that ended the country's 1975-1990 civil war.

Elections are administered via a system of proportional representation. Candidates run as part of an electoral list, which must receive a certain percentage of votes (known as the electoral threshold) for its members to win seats. Voters may cast a “preferential vote” to select a single candidate within their chosen list. [Some analysts](#) see this mechanism as favoring established elites, making it difficult for less-established candidates, including women, to win seats.

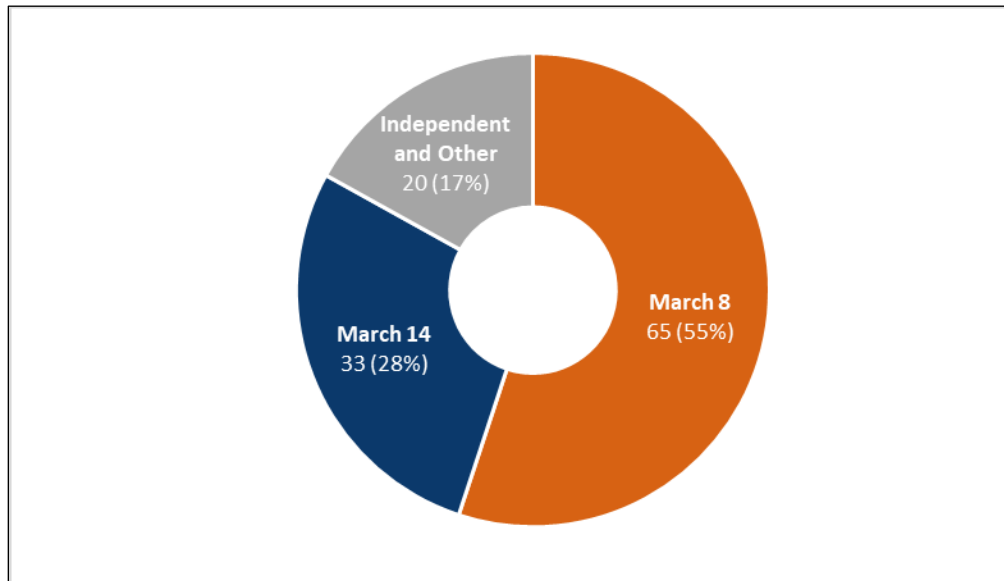
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IN11924

Figure 1. Lebanon's Political Coalitions

March 8 and March 14 seat distribution in Parliament as of 2021



Source: CRS calculations. Does not include the 10 MPs that have resigned or passed away since 2020.

Notes: March 8: Free Patriotic Movement, Hezbollah, Amal, and smaller parties such as Marada and Tashnag. March 14: Future Movement, Lebanese Forces, and Hiwar. Both coalitions also include MPs not formally affiliated with a specific party, but aligned with a March 8 or March 14 political bloc in parliament. Kataeb MPs, formerly allied with March 14, resigned from parliament following the August 2020 Beirut port blast. Independent and Other: the Progressive Socialist Party, Al Azm Movement, and MPs not formally aligned with either March 8 or March 14.

Table 1. Sectarian Allocations in Lebanon's Parliament

per Lebanon's 2017 electoral law

Muslims		Christians	
	Reserved Seats		Reserved Seats
Sunni	27	Maronite	34
Shi'a	27	Greek Orthodox	14
Druze	8	Greek Catholic	8
Alawi	2	Armenian Orthodox	5
		Armenian Catholic	1
		Protestant	1
		Other	1
TOTAL	64	TOTAL	64

Source: Law No. 44 of 2017 (Annex 1), Constituencies and Seat Allocations for Parliamentary Elections.

Notes: Lebanon's electoral law classifies Druze as Muslim, although Druze generally do not identify as such.

Hariri Boycott Splinters Sunni Groups; Creates Possible Opening for Hezbollah

In January 2022, Future Movement and March 14 leader Saad Hariri [announced](#) that he was suspending his political career, and called on his party not to participate in the May elections—creating what analysts describe as [a political void](#) in the Sunni community. (In 2018, [nearly two-thirds](#) of Sunnis elected to

parliament were Future Movement members or part of its parliamentary bloc). Analysts attributed Hariri's decision [in part to tensions with Saudi Arabia](#), which had criticized what Saudi leaders [described as](#) Hezbollah's dominance in the country. Some Future Movement members continued their electoral bid as independents; others called on Sunnis to boycott the vote—[raising concerns](#) that a boycott could benefit Hezbollah. Saudi [re-engagement](#) with Lebanon since early April, including the [return](#) of its ambassador and [outreach](#) to Sunni candidates—may reflect such concerns.

A Sunni boycott would [lower the electoral threshold](#) in heavily Sunni districts, reducing the number of votes that an electoral list would need in order to seat candidates. This could benefit “weaker” lists—those comprised of newer parties (such as those affiliated with the October 2019 protest movement), or those running outside of their traditional strongholds (such as Hezbollah or its allies in mixed or mostly Sunni districts). Lebanon's electoral law [reserves 27 seats for Sunnis](#), irrespective of Sunni voter turnout (see [Table 1](#)). In the case of low Sunni turnout, March 8 supporters could play a decisive role in determining which Sunni candidates will enter parliament.

Hezbollah's ability to capitalize on divisions within the Sunni community remains unclear. In addition to concerns about [renewed Saudi outreach to Sunni political leaders](#), Hezbollah also [reportedly fears that expected electoral losses among its Christian ally](#), the Free Patriotic Movement, could reduce its March 8 majority in parliament.

Opposition Groups Divided

The 2019 protest movement generated new civil society and opposition parties, but disunity among them may constrain their ability to make electoral gains. With one exception, opposition figures in each district are [split](#) among multiple electoral lists, reducing the likelihood that any single list will receive enough votes to meet the electoral threshold. Divisions include [internal power struggles and disagreements](#) over whether—for the purposes of meeting the electoral threshold—to join electoral lists with traditional political elites that recently have rebranded as “opposition,” such as the Lebanese Forces and Kataeb (formerly aligned with March 14).

Outlook and Issues for Congress

Lebanon's parliamentary elections will shape the composition of Lebanese governments over the next four years, as the cabinet traditionally reflects the balance of political forces in parliament. Lebanon's next government will need to implement wide-ranging reforms in order to receive urgently needed economic assistance. In April, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) [announced](#) that it had reached a “staff-level agreement” with Lebanon on a \$3 billion economic package, but noted that the package requires approval by the IMF management and Executive Board following Lebanon's implementation of a set of reforms, including the restructuring of the financial sector.

A further deterioration of economic conditions in Lebanon could generate requests for additional U.S. funding. The United States has provided [more than \\$5.5 billion in total foreign assistance](#) to Lebanon since 2006, including more than \$2.5 billion in bilateral security assistance to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF). The Administration's FY2023 request for Lebanon seeks \$282 million in aid funding, including \$112.5 million in Economic Support Fund (ESF) and \$150 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF).

Significant electoral gains by Hezbollah could challenge U.S. engagement with Lebanon. Hezbollah and its allies need 65 seats to retain the simple majority that they have held in parliament since 2018; it seems less likely that they would garner the two-thirds majority (86 out of 128 seats) needed to unilaterally push through major initiatives. A renewed March 8 majority in parliament would leave the U.S. Administration and Congress balancing the longstanding U.S. aim of isolating Hezbollah against the urgent economic and humanitarian needs in Lebanon that risk undermining the country's stability.

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