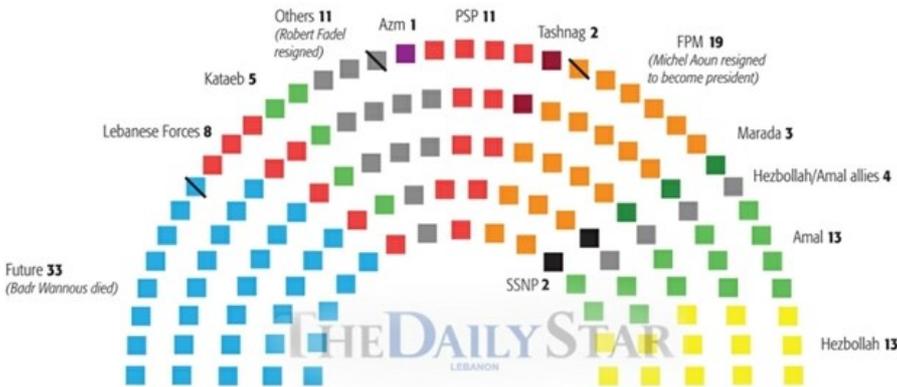


## Lebanon Elections

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# A slain heavyweight, fraud claims: The election in surprises

### Lebanon's old Parliament



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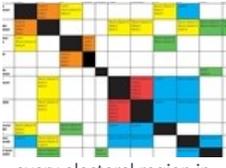
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Benjamin Redd | The Daily Star

BEIRUT: After nine years of waiting, Lebanon got a few surprises in its national elections Sunday. Hezbollah lost a seat everyone thought it would win, a longtime MP was dethroned in Batroun and the Lebanese Forces vaulted from eight to 14 seats, according to the latest results. The upsets, big and small, can be divided into two groups: the foreseen and the unforeseen. Here's a quick roundup of noteworthy tidbits.

### CIVIL SOCIETY WINS, THEN LOSES

Experts had never put chances of the so-called civil society lists very high. It was thought they might get a seat or two in East Beirut and Chouf-Aley. Supporters of Kilna Watani (All for the Nation) and other civil society lists thought they'd get more – perhaps five, including a seat in Metn.



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But when unofficial results started pouring in it looked like they'd get one seat for Joumana Haddad, then another for Paula Yacoubian. Then nothing else. While pessimists were surprised at the stronger-than-zero showing, activists were shocked at the poor result.

Then Monday, everyone woke up to the Free Patriotic Movement saying its candidate, Antoine Pano, had beaten Haddad. Fury ensued, with protesters marching on the Interior Ministry claiming the seat had been stolen by electoral fraud.

#### WHEN WILL THE INTERIOR MINISTRY SAY ANYTHING?

The protesters' anger – and others' suspicions – were only magnified when the Interior Ministry fail to give any results until more than 24 hours after polls were scheduled to close.

Everyone had been expecting results to pour in quickly, even Interior Minister Nouhad Machnouk, who had less than a week before promised an "accelerated" process thanks to electronic vote counting.

But then the Interior Ministry went silent. In contrast, information flowed from campaigns, which had observers watching the vote counting. Machnouk, who in addition to running the elections was also running in them (he won), gave a news conference around midnight Sunday, promising results at dawn. But dawn came and went, with the public left to wonder what was taking so long.

Most results were announced a little after 8 p.m. Monday.

#### A TITAN SLAIN

When the results came in, they confirmed one thing unofficial leaks had already suggested: Longtime MP Boutros Harb had been dethroned.

This was a "known unknown" in Rumsfeldian parlance: Three political majors competing for two spots in Batroun; one had to lose. What we didn't know was who would lose.

Experts had bet Gebran Bassil, son-in-law of President Michel Aoun, foreign minister and president of the Free Patriotic Movement, would win a seat on what was his third attempt.

But more uncertainty surrounded the contest between Harb, who has served as Batroun's MP since 1972, and Fadi Saad, the former secretary-general of the Lebanese Forces.

In the end, Saad won out, ending Harb's 46-year career in Parliament.

#### HEZBOLLAH LOSES IN JBEIL

While Harb's demise could be foreseen as a potentiality; Hussein Zeaiter's loss in Jbeil came as a shock. After failing to form a joint list with the FPM, Hezbollah set Zeaiter as the head of its own independent list. It was a bullish move, with the party fielding a full slate of eight candidates in Jbeil and Kesrouan – surely enough to get one man over the line.

In the end, the gambit failed. Lists for the FPM, the LF and Farid Haykal Khazen gobbled up all the seats in the district, with the Shiite seat going to a candidate for the latter. It was the only Shiite seat in the country not taken by either Hezbollah or Amal.



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### LF WINS BIG

If anything, this election proved planning and organization win elections. While Hezbollah lost the seat in Jbeil, they made gains elsewhere – as expected. Less foreseeable was the scale of the gains for another famously organized party, Hezbollah’s archrival the LF.

Sitting at eight seats before May 6, they walked out with a likely 14-member bloc. While this perfectly sat with the expectations of pollster Kamal Feghali, who had forecast 13 to 15 seats, it was above others’ expectations, which landed around a more modest 12.

A version of this article appeared in the print edition of The Daily Star on May 08, 2018, on page 2.

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