

Hamas-backed bloc wins West Bank student elections

Wed, 2022-05-18 22:18

RAMALLAH: The Islamic bloc affiliated with Hamas won the student council elections at Birzeit University in the West Bank on Wednesday, defeating their Fatah rivals in the tightly contested vote.

The Hamas-backed bloc with 5,060 votes won 28 seats, while the Fatah-supported bloc with 3,379 votes bagged just 18 seats.

Five blocs contested 51 seats, while the voter turnout was 78.1 percent.

Students witnessed an intense debate between representatives of the rival blocs the previous day, with both parties' policies and programs coming in for criticism.

The Islamic bloc has led the student council in recent years.

Their Fatah-backed rivals say they are paying the price for the mistakes of the Palestinian Authority in terms of corruption, nepotism and security coordination with Israel, and losing elections frequently.

A day before the vote, seven senior student members of the Islamic bloc were arrested by an Israeli undercover unit, which generated sympathy for the group and translated into votes, experts told Arab News.

Ghassan Al-Khatib, vice president of the university, said that the student council vote is an indicator of Palestinian public opinion and political balances in Palestinian society "because of the credibility, integrity and democracy at the Birzeit elections."

Mohammed Daraghmeh, a senior Palestinian writer, told Arab News that Birzeit students are not influenced by employment interests or work, so the electoral process takes place "in a democratic atmosphere and with great integrity."

He added: "If Hamas wins, the street is supportive and biased toward it. If Fatah wins, this means that the street is with it."

Daraghmeh said that both Fatah and Hamas make great efforts to win the students' backing.

The election "helps Hamas strengthen its political discourse, and show that Palestinian public opinion in the West Bank supports its path and political line," he said.

Meanwhile, Fatah "wants to defend the legitimacy of the Palestinian political system in light of its inability to organize Palestinian general elections."

Birzeit elections are held every two years, with about 15,000 students voting

for 51 seats. There was no vote in 2021 owing to the coronavirus pandemic.

The secretariat of the administrative body of the council consists of 13 members.

Birzeit was established in 1973 as a public university, and is the only West Bank academic institution that allows Hamas to practice its activities and politics without interference from Israel or the PA.

A number of prominent Palestinian leaders have graduated from the university, which offers 36 bachelor's degree programs and 13 master's programs, and employs 500 teachers.

Students from the West Bank and a few hundred Palestinians living in Israel study there.

Basem Naim, a prominent Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip, told Arab News that the political group views the student vote as "an essential indicator" because it highlights the direction of future generations.

"The Birzeit University elections constitute an essential platform for Hamas because most Palestinian leaders are university graduates. Therefore, their strength today indicates the type of future leaders of the Palestinian people in all sectors and fields," he said.



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Palestinians commemorate 74th anniversary of Nakba amid outcry over funeral attack
Uprouar over Israeli plan to build 4,000 settlement units in occupied West Bank

[Hezbollah chief Nasrallah acknowledges loss of Lebanon parliamentary majority](#)

Author:

Reuters

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Wed, 2022-05-18 22:23

BEIRUT: The leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah acknowledged his party and its allies had lost their parliamentary majority in elections but said no single group had taken it, in his first televised speech since Sunday's elections.

"Unlike the situation in parliament in 2018, no political group can claim a majority," he said.

Hezbollah and its allies scored 62 seats during Sunday polls, according to a Reuters tally, losing a majority they secured in 2018, when they and their allies won 71 seats.

Hezbollah and its ally Amal held on to all of parliament's Shiite seats. But some of its oldest allies, including Sunni, Druze and Christian politicians, lost theirs.

The elections saw gains by the anti-Hezbollah Lebanese Forces party and more than a dozen reform-minded newcomers, as well as a smattering of independents.

The results mark a blow for Hezbollah, though Nasrallah declared the results "a very big victory."

Nasrallah called for "cooperation" between political groups including newcomers, saying the alternative would be "chaos and vacuum."

The results have left parliament split into several camps, none of which have a majority, raising the prospect of political paralysis and tensions that could delay badly needed reforms to steer Lebanon out of its economic collapse.



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UN chief calls for 'inclusive government' after Lebanon vote
Lebanon reformists weigh choices after election surge

[Egypt hands down death sentence for priest's murder](#)

Author:

AFP

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Wed, 2022-05-18 21:31

CAIRO: An Egyptian court on Wednesday sentenced to death a man accused of the murder last month of a Coptic priest in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, judicial sources said.

The Alexandria court's ruling is subject to approval by the mufti of the republic.

The sources said the defendant was found guilty of voluntary homicide after a

court-ordered psychological assessment found him “responsible for his actions.”

Father Arsanios Wadid died of his wounds in hospital after being stabbed on April 7 on Alexandria’s seafront promenade as he accompanied a group of young parishioners.

The assailant was grabbed by passers-by and handed over to police, who detained him in a psychiatric hospital because of doubts over his mental health.

Coptic Christians, the largest non-Muslim religious minority in the Middle East, make up roughly 10 to 15 percent of Egypt’s predominantly Sunni Muslim population of more than 100 million.

The community has long complained of discrimination and underrepresentation. In February, however, Egypt for the first time swore in a Coptic judge to head its constitutional court.

Copts were targeted in a series of sectarian attacks after the military in 2013 deposed Islamist president Muhammad Mursi. Such attacks focused largely on remote villages in southern Egypt.



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Egypt refers man accused of killing Coptic priest to trial
Egypt's Coptic Church mourns death of former patriarch

Lebanon reformists weigh choices after election surge

Author:

Wed, 2022-05-18 21:12

BEIRUT: Newly elected reformist MPs in Lebanon are planning strategies following election breakthroughs that grant them significant sway in the parliamentary balance of power.

Thirteen reformist MPs in Lebanon who entered the legislative race on the values of the 2019 anti-establishment uprising, as well as 21 independent MPs, have entered the newly elected Lebanese Parliament.

Analysts have added up MPs to figure out the size of the parliamentary blocs, which are divided between sovereign blocs and pro-Hezbollah groupings.

Figures show that elected MPs may be positioned within 13 blocs divided into two opposite larger camps, forming the 128-MP Parliament.

The sovereign MPs can be classified based on their previous positions. A total of 68 MPs are opposed to Hezbollah. They include members from the Lebanese Forces Party, the Progressive Socialist Party, the Islamic Group and the Lebanese Phalanges Party, as well as independents and reformists.

Meanwhile, the pro-Hezbollah camp includes the party itself, the Amal Movement, the Free Patriotic Movement, the Marada Movement, the Tashnaq Party and Al-Ahbash, for a total of about 60 MPs.

There is much speculation about how the new independent MPs will deal with upcoming events, and how they will position themselves on the parliamentary map.

A political observer told Arab News: "We will see the true colors of every MP when topics related to core issues are discussed."

The observer added: "Will these MPs change their stance regarding Hezbollah's illegal weapons, although some have avoided addressing this sensitive issue in the past? Will these MPs be able to form a unified bloc that can influence decisions within Parliament, or will they remain independent, each working alone?"

Suleiman Franjeh, head of the Marada Movement and a candidate for the Presidency, appealed to reformist MPs, saying: "Do not place strict

conditions on yourselves so that you do not become isolated, because theory is one thing, and practice is another.”

Fouad Siniora, former Lebanon PM, who backed a list in Beirut and whose candidates all failed to reach parliament, said: “Sovereign MPs must develop a correct vision for the future on how to confront Hezbollah’s domination and control in order to restore the Lebanese state.”

He added: “In 2008, the sovereign forces had won 72 seats in parliament, but Hezbollah at that time refused to form a majority government.”

Siniora warned against backing down as the March 14 forces did in 2009, which cost them their power.

A video shared on social media shocked voters in Tripoli and around the country. The elected MP Firas Salloum, who was on the Real Change list with the Islamic Group, was filmed celebrating his victory by dancing to a song supporting the regime of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The video prompted the Islamic Group to issue a statement renouncing Salloum. It said: “He does not represent us as he seemed proud of his affiliation to the criminal tyrant, who blew up the Al-Taqwa and Al-Salam Mosques in Tripoli, and killed our people in Syria.”

The statement demanded that Salloum resign “because he does not represent the city and does not resemble its people.”

Reformist MP Elias Jarada said: “Taking the revolution from the street to the Parliament necessitates adopting a policy of reaching out to all for dialogue so that the 17 October revolution becomes a model for dynamic political action. It is important to be realistic because parliament includes groups that represent other categories of the Lebanese people.”

Several reformist MPs rushed to convene with their groups to determine their next steps in Parliament.

Elected reformist MP Ibrahim Mneimneh, whose list won three parliamentary seats in Beirut’s second constituency, said: “The reformist MPs will be the revolutionary voice in parliament. We will not compromise with the criminal regime that destroyed our lives, and we will not compromise in the face of intimidation with weapons, nor over the sale of state assets, the money of depositors, or the path of justice with the Beirut port blast and the explosion in Akkar.”

Leaked news suggested that reformist MP Melhem Khalaf, former head of the Beirut Bar Association who took part in protests against state corruption and helped release detained protesters, could possibly be elected deputy parliament speaker, succeeding Elie Ferzli, who has held the position since 2000, but failed to reach Parliament in the recent elections.

Meanwhile, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, who is seeking a new term, is reportedly making efforts to win over civil society, and supports having Khalaf as his deputy.

Major challenges await the newly elected house, the first of which is electing a speaker and a deputy speaker, followed by parliamentary consultations to assign someone to form a new government, then electing a new president in September or October after Michel Aoun's term ends.

There are also significant legislative obligations, within the framework of reforms required by the international community to extricate Lebanon from its worsening economic crisis.



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Reformists surge in Lebanon pollsUN chief calls for 'inclusive government' after Lebanon vote

[Tech booms in the GCC, but women in danger of being excluded](#)

Author:

Tue, 2022-05-17 22:43

DUBAI: Tech is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, and the

Arab Gulf is increasingly viewed as one of its global centers. At the heart of the region's tech scene is Dubai, dubbed the "tech hub of the Arab world."

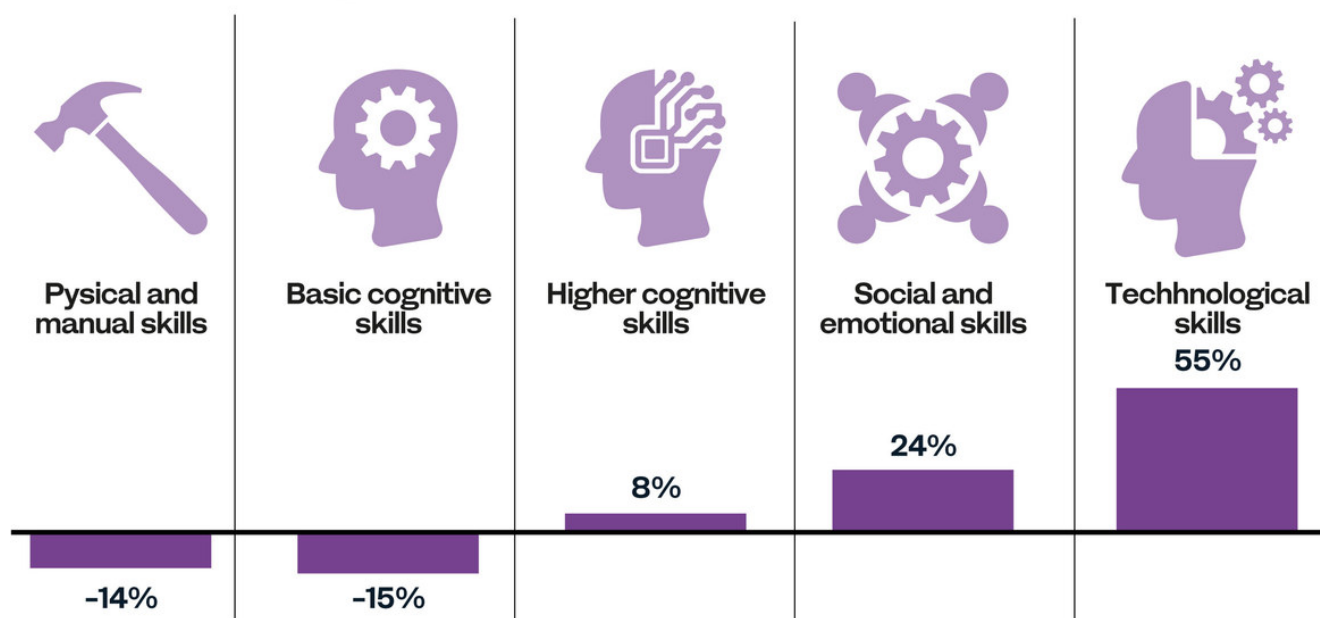
The UAE's commercial capital continued to grow over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic, in part, perhaps, because of its decision to keep its borders open while most of the world went into prolonged lockdowns.

But this continued growth is also the result of the rising number of technology startups drawn to the UAE, Dubai's appeal for entrepreneurs and its ability to woo international venture capital firms.

According to Dubai-based research platform Wamda, investments in Middle Eastern tech firms, excluding those in Israel, quadrupled to \$2.87 billion last year – with roughly half of that capital flowing into the UAE.

MASSIVE DEMAND FOR TECH SKILLS BY 2030

Change in skills required in Europe and the US from 2016 to 2030



Source: McKinsey Global Institute, May 2018

ARAB NEWS

Dubai is now home to several tech startups worth at least \$1 billion – known in the business community as "unicorns" for their statistical rarity.

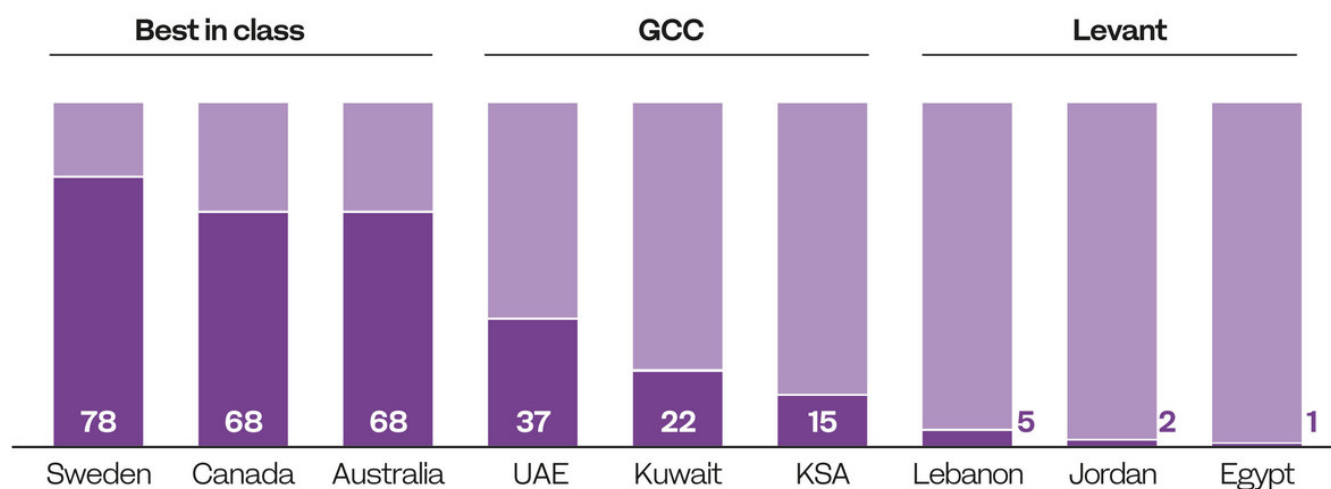
These include Vista Global, a private aviation platform; Kitopi, a cloud kitchen platform; and Emerging Markets Property Group, which manages classified listing websites in Egypt, the UAE and elsewhere.

Yet, despite the burgeoning success of tech startups in the Middle East, Arab women remain poorly represented in the industry.

BENEFITS OF CONNECTIVITY

Internet and smartphone penetration gives GCC an advantage

■ % of women with access to online banking



Source: Global Findex, 2017 / McKinsey

ARAB NEWS

Despite female involvement in the Emirates Mars Mission, which successfully placed a probe in orbit around the red planet in February 2021, “the lack of presence in this region of women in tech is very visible,” Dr. Nour E. Raouafi, a project scientist with NASA’s Parker Solar Probe Mission, told Arab News.

“If you look at some domains, like space where I am working, the participation of women is not at the level where it should be,” Raouafi added, speaking ahead of his appearance on a panel at the Arab Women Forum, which took place in Dubai on May 17.

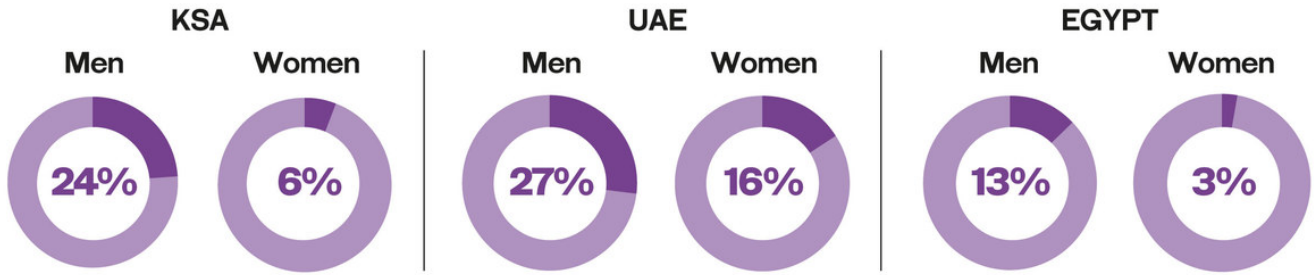
According to Endeavor Insight, Saudi Arabia and the US boast a similar participation rate among women in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields, known as STEM, at 28 percent. This is higher than the UK, which has a rate of just 22 percent.

Nevertheless, experts believe there is far more work to be done to encourage more women to pursue degrees and careers in STEM fields, both in the Arab world and globally.

“We should be striving toward equality at all levels – from management downward – and the best way to do this is to start from the grassroots, from colleges and schools, and to encourage young women to work in space and other fields of tech by providing fellowships and other incentives,” said Raouafi

TECHNICAL LIMITATIONS

Fewer women take college courses equipping them for the digital future



Source: UNESCO, 2016 / McKinsey

ARAB NEWS

There are reasons for optimism. Measures designed to enhance the business environment in the Gulf and to eliminate gender discrimination in the workplace are already moving things in the right direction.

“Young professionals, women and men, are now flocking to the Middle East while working for European or US based technology companies,” Philippe Blanchard, founder of Futurous, told Arab News.

“Concrete actions have been taken by the GCC leadership, in support of the IT industry, in setting up an efficient education system, as well as tackling the gender pay gap such as in the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.”

However, social perceptions remain an obstacle. “Technology is still considered a man’s world, but there are opportunities to change the mindset,” said Blanchard.

For example, “ensuring the parents, the school teachers and university professors are not pushing specific curriculum based on gender – like nurses for young women and engineers for young men.”





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