

LADE Monitoring Report on the 2025 Lebanese Municipal and Mukhtar Elections



LADE
LEBANESE ASSOCIATION
FOR DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS

Executive Summary

lade.org.lb



1- Background

The 2025 municipal and mukhtar elections in Lebanon marked a critical democratic milestone after nine years without local elections, following three consecutive extensions of municipal mandates since 2016. These delays, enacted in 2022, 2023, and 2024, were justified by successive governments on logistical, political, and security grounds, including overlap with parliamentary elections, administrative strikes, lack of funding, and the Israeli war.

Despite repeated attempts by some political actors to postpone the vote yet again, elections were eventually held in May 2025 in four phases across governorates. They took place in a highly complex national environment:

- **Political:** Two years of presidential vacancy ended in January 2025 with the election of President Joseph Aoun and the formation of a new cabinet in February under PM Nawaf Salam, which pledged to respect constitutional timelines.
- **Economic and Social:** The deep financial crisis since 2019 severely weakened municipal capacities, with many councils unable to provide basic services such as waste collection, street lighting, and infrastructure maintenance. Limited revenues, delays in Independent Municipal Fund transfers, and the collapse of local tax collection mechanisms compounded the problem.
- **Security:** Post-October 2023 Israeli war, especially in the South, Bekaa, Baalbek-Hermel, and Beirut's southern suburbs, affected voter safety, campaign activity, and candidate mobility.

LADE's monitoring operation covered the pre-election, election day, and post-election phases, documenting both structural weaknesses in Lebanon's municipal governance framework and deficiencies in the administration of elections.

2- Challenges: Legal, Institutional, and Structural Gaps

A. Election-Specific Issues

- **Law 44/2017 Misalignment**

Municipal elections remain governed by the 1977 Municipal Law but partially reference the parliamentary electoral framework. For the 2025 elections, a hybrid legal approach was applied— Law 44/2017 governed procedural aspects, except for the proportional representation system. This created inconsistencies, particularly in regulating campaign spending and oversight, since Law 44 provisions are designed for parliamentary elections and proved largely inapplicable to the context of municipal elections.

- **Absence of the Supervisory Committee**

The Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE), mandated under Law 44/2017, was not reconstituted after its 2022 parliamentary role. This left municipal elections without a central independent oversight body to monitor campaign finance and media coverage, enforce the silence period, and review and address violations. In practice, there was no effective enforcement against overspending, illegal advertising, or misuse of public resources.

- **Lack of Spending Ceilings and Enforcement Mechanisms**

No realistic spending caps were set for municipal races, enabling the unchecked use of political money. Campaign silence period rules also lacked meaningful enforcement.

B. Structural Governance Issues Affecting Elections and Municipal Performance

While not unique to electoral periods, these long-standing deficiencies in Lebanon's local governance framework weaken both municipal autonomy and electoral integrity:

- **Overlapping Authorities and Central Tutelage**

Municipal councils remain under heavy administrative and financial control from the Ministry of Interior, governors, and district commissioners. Key decisions, such as budgets, loans, large-scale contracts, require prior central approval, creating delays, politicized interference, and limited space for independent decision-making.

- **Chronic Financial Vulnerability**

Municipal budgets rely heavily on transfers from the Independent Municipal Fund, which are often delayed, politicized, and distributed without transparent criteria. Many councils, particularly in small municipalities, lack significant own-source revenues, impairing their ability to maintain services or plan for development.

- **Capacity Deficits**

A shortage of trained administrative and technical staff, compounded by public sector hiring freezes and attrition during the economic crisis, limits municipal ability to deliver services or manage projects. Only a few municipalities benefit from systematic training or technical assistance.

- **Outdated Role of Mukhtars**

Mukhtars' duties, largely limited to administrative certifications and personal status documentation, are increasingly redundant in light of potential digitization of civil registry services. Their functions remain disconnected from strategic governance or development work, prompting LADE to recommend abolishing the position in future reforms and reallocating resources toward municipal capacity-building.

3- Violations: Overview and Numbers

A. Pre-Election Period

LADE monitored the pre-election phase and published four separate reports, recording violations which included:

- **Campaign Finance and Clientelism:** Vote buying and provision of services or goods.
- **Campaign Period Breaches:** Unregulated field advertising and uncontrolled media coverage, causing unequal candidate exposure.
- **Pressure and Intimidation:** Targeting candidates and voters, including in-person coercion and threats.

- **Sectarian, Inflammatory, and Defamatory Speech:** Use of divisive rhetoric and personal attacks to influence voter behavior and polarize communities.
- **Misuse of Administrative Power:** Public employees engaging in partisan activity, use of municipal facilities for campaigns, and misuse of public resources..
- **Uncontested Wins and Late Withdrawals:** Many municipalities recorded uncontested victories due to local political or social pressure, compounded by Ministry of Interior circulars allowing candidate withdrawals until the eve of election day.

B. Election Days

Across the four voting rounds, LADE recorded **2,945 violations**. The most frequent categories included:

- **Logistical Shortcomings:** Poor organization and lack of adequate training for polling staff, leading to procedural errors.
- **Breaches of Ballot Secrecy:** Voters' choices compromised due to improper booth setup or interference by others.
- **Crowding and Disorder:** Overcrowded polling stations and inadequate crowd management, disrupting the voting process.
- **Security Problems:** Incidents of tension or confrontation affecting the safety of voters and polling staff.
- **Breaches of the Electoral Silence Period:** Continued campaigning by media outlets, candidates, and political leaders in support of certain lists.

4- Recommendations

First: Legal and Legislative Recommendations

A. On Legislation Governing Municipalities and Mukhtars

The legislative framework for local elections should guarantee free, fair, and transparent polls that reflect the popular will, ensure proper representation, and strengthen local governance. It must empower municipal and mukhtar authorities to drive sustainable development, effective administration, and accountability.

Given the persistent gaps—particularly the lack of a dedicated law for municipal elections—LADE calls for urgent reform, either through a new standalone law tailored to local governance or by overhauling the current framework to free it from dependence on Parliamentary Electoral Law No. 44/2017, and to establish a system based on participatory democracy, accountability, and equality.

This modern legislative framework should be built on key legal and institutional principles, most notably:

1. Expanding the Scope of Political Participation

- Lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 years (amending Article 21 of the Constitution).
 - Lowering the candidacy age from 25 to 22 years (amending Article 7 of Law 44/2017).
 - Allowing members of the military to vote (abolishing Article 6 of Law 44/2017).
-

2. Adopting a Proportional Representation System for Municipal Elections

A proportional representation system would allocate council seats according to the real power of political and social forces in each area, replacing the exclusionary winner-takes-all model. It requires list-based candidacies, allowing voters to choose programs and development platforms over personal or clientelist ties, which often weaken local governance. This approach fosters structured majorities and minorities, enhancing oversight, accountability, institutional work, and development planning—the foundations of effective local democracy.

3. Enhancing Women’s Participation in Local Governance

Introducing a temporary women’s quota of no less than 30% on candidate lists, in line with Lebanon’s obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

4. Regulating Electoral Spending and Political Advertising

Setting clear spending limits, establishing effective monitoring mechanisms, and imposing meaningful sanctions to ensure a level playing field among candidates.

5. Addressing Gaps Caused by the Unregulated Reference of the Municipal Law to the Parliamentary Electoral Law

- Setting clear and binding deadlines for nomination and withdrawal to ensure electoral stability and prevent arbitrary administrative interpretations.
- Holding elections on a single day nationwide to ensure equality among voters and facilitate oversight.
- Granting the right to run and vote in one’s actual place of residence, with the option to choose if multiple legal residences exist.
- Taking legal and procedural measures to enable persons with disabilities, the elderly, patients, and pre-trial detainees to vote without physical or procedural obstacles.

6. On the Supervisory Commission for Elections (SCE)

- Amending the law to explicitly and unequivocally guarantee the SCE's independence from the Ministry of Interior, granting it sole authority to manage and monitor both parliamentary and municipal elections.
- Establishing the SCE as a permanent, independent administrative body with legal personality, administrative and financial autonomy, and full executive, regulatory, and oversight powers—free from prior oversight or control by the executive branch.
- Allocating it a permanent, independent annual budget in the state budget to protect it from political or financial pressure.
- Expanding its jurisdiction to include direct enforcement of its decisions and full access to candidates' and lists' campaign accounts at any time.

7. Reforming the Municipal System: Towards Effective Oversight, Fair Financing, Local Participation, and Improved Performance

- Strengthening municipal financial and administrative independence, linking resources to actual needs based on a fair legal classification system, and ending absolute dependency on the Ministry of Interior.
- Requiring each municipality to establish a permanent administrative and technical unit proportionate to its size and responsibilities, supported by continuous legal and administrative training for elected members.
- Creating an independent body to monitor and evaluate municipal performance, ensuring post-audit oversight, and mandating municipalities to publish budgets, projects, and plans online.
- Expanding municipal powers in urban planning, local taxation, and basic service delivery.
- Clearly defining the relationship between mayors and council members to avoid overlaps and ensure participatory decision-making.
- Embedding citizen and civil society participation in municipal planning and linking funding to performance and evaluation.

B. Adopting an Expanded Administrative Decentralization Law

1. Gradually and transparently transferring certain powers from the central administration to elected local authorities with administrative and financial competence and independence.
2. Ensuring fair distribution of financial and human resources according to balanced development criteria.
3. Reviewing criteria for establishing municipalities and implementing a strategic consolidation policy to reduce the excessive number of small, under-resourced municipalities.

C. Abolishing the Mukhtar Position in the Context of Digital Transformation

LADE calls for the elimination of the mukhtar position in any future administrative framework, as personal status transactions are expected to be digitized and integrated into interoperable electronic databases.

The legal framework governing the role of the mukhtar no longer meets the requirements of good governance, nor does it ensure standards of qualification, oversight, and accountability. Instead, it confines the position to a traditional, unproductive role, hindering the development of a professional and transparent local administration based on competence and institutional structures rather than family or personal representation.

Second: Administrative and Institutional Recommendations

1. Launch a permanent national training program for municipal and mukhtar administrative staff on local governance, administrative law, crisis management, and public accounting.
2. Develop a comprehensive plan to digitize municipal administration through unified electronic platforms for service delivery, budget publishing, and citizen feedback.
3. Adopt clear criteria for redrawing the municipal administrative map, including mergers where necessary, based on demographic, geographic, economic, and institutional factors.
4. Improve election administration by requiring mandatory training and qualification tests for polling station staff.
5. Strengthen the independence of registration committees through transparent appointment processes and independent resources.
6. Implement an electronic, unified polling station log that is instantly transmitted to the SCE and Ministry of Interior.
7. Adopt a unified manual for local elections outlining all stages, timelines, documents, and appeals procedures.

Third: Financial and Developmental Recommendations

1. Increase municipal budgets fairly, using transparent criteria based on demographic and developmental needs.
2. Establish a national fund to support marginalized municipalities, subject to independent financial oversight.
3. Enable municipalities to implement development projects without central approval, expanding their powers in public works, environment, and social services.
4. Allocate financial resources for municipal digital transformation to improve efficiency and reduce corruption.
5. Allow municipalities to obtain capped, conditional loans from national or international institutions for essential projects, subject to independent review.
6. Enhance fiscal decentralization by gradually transferring certain revenue sources from the central government to municipalities.
7. Subject municipalities to regular independent financial and legal audits.

Fourth: Political and Oversight Recommendations

1. Guarantee local elections are held on their constitutional schedule to uphold democratic alternation of power.
2. Shield municipal councils from partisan and central government interference.
3. Empower citizens to monitor local authorities through participatory oversight tools such as neighborhood committees and public consultations.
4. Launch national awareness campaigns to encourage participation in local elections.
5. Require mandatory transparency in municipal council work through publishing meeting minutes, budgets, and decisions online.
6. Establish effective, accessible complaint mechanisms within each municipal council with defined response deadlines.
7. Require annual municipal reports to oversight bodies and the public, detailing achievements, budgets, stalled projects, and spending.



LADE

الجمعية اللبنانية من أجل
ديمقراطية الانتخابات

Sodeco, Petro Trad St.,
Sodeco 7 Bldg., 5th Fl.,
Beirut, Lebanon
+961 1 333713/4
info@lade.org.lb
lade.org.lb

