

LEBANON VOTES FOR FIRST TIME SINCE START OF CRISIS

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The results of Lebanon's first elections since multiple crises ravaged the country were expected on Monday, with Opposition groups hoping for modest but unprecedented gains.

According to provisional turnout figures, 41% of Lebanon's 3.9 million registered voters cast a ballot on Sunday in 12 hours of polling that saw several irregularities and minor incidents.

A new generation of independent candidates hopes to kindle the kind of change that a 2019 protest movement failed to deliver, and looked likely to do better than the single Assembly seat they clinched last time.

But most of Parliament's 128 seats are expected to remain in the grip of the entrenched groups blamed for the country's woes — chiefly the economic downturn that plunged most of Lebanon into poverty.

For many voters, the election was a chance to vent their anger at the hereditary ruling elite that an October 2019 uprising, the country's financial default and a cataclysmic 2020 explosion in the heart of the capital failed to remove.

Business of democracy

Lebanon shares power among its religious communities, and politics is often treated as a family business. By convention, the president is a Maronite Christian, the premier a Sunni Muslim, and the parliamentary speaker a Shiite.

Preliminary results from the Sunday election indicate that traditional parties will prevail.

One of the most notable changes in the electoral landscape is the absence of former Prime Minister Saad Hariri, which leaves parts of the Sunni vote up for grabs by new players.

In a bankrupt country which can only supply two daily hours of mains electricity to its inhabitants, one of the main challenges facing the Interior Ministry was powering polling centres.

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