

Rival camps emerge with split USJ student election results across country

Fierce electoral battles vie for university faculties in campuses throughout Lebanon

Wassim Mroueh

Daily Star staff

BEIRUT: Both the March 14 coalition and the March 8 camp appeared to have split student representation at the 10 major faculties at the Universite Saint Joseph (USJ) after fierce electoral battles across the university's campuses across the country.

The electoral race pitted the March 14 coalition, including the Lebanese Forces (LF), the Phalange and Future Movement, against the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), Hizbullah, the Amal Movement and other March 8 forces.

The Lebanese Communist Party (LCP) and the Progressive Socialist Party boycotted the polls.

Student supporters of the FPM and its allies won five of the university's 10 major faculties, while supporters of the Lebanese Forces and its allies won four faculties while the tenth appeared split three ways with independents.

March 14 student candidates won the majority of the university's smaller faculties and institutes.

The March 14 candidates won the faculty of business and management, the largest of USJ's Huvelin campus in the Monnot neighborhood of Beirut, which includes an estimated 2,500 students. It also won the faculties of economics, law and insurance at the same campus.

Meanwhile, March 8 candidates took over the engineering, medicine, pharmacy, dentistry and literature.

At the Huvelin campus, the Faculty of Business saw the fiercest battle due to the presence of a considerable number of Hizbullah and Amal supporters. Officials from rival sides traded accusations despite the calm atmosphere in which the elections were held.

Joe Awwad, an FPM official at the Faculty of Business, said the elections were held amid a calm atmosphere because "we're mature people, who tolerate others," adding that the electoral race was "political."

"We are facing sectarian rhetoric that's being adopted by the Lebanese Forces; they are trying to put sectarian barriers [between students] which we are trying to eliminate," he told *The Dai-*

ly Star.

Asked about the program that the FPM plans to implement if its students win the elections, Awwad repeated that the battle was political.

Jean-Jacques Mananian, an FPM official for Beirut's private universities, stressed that his group "knows what resistance means - we used to resist in this campus and today we are resisting their [LF] dirty sectarian rhetoric."

He warned that the FPM might launch legal proceedings starting Monday over the LF's use of sectarian tone in their speeches.

Charbel Eid, who heads the LF's Student Department, dismissed the claims.

"We are telling the students that you are responsible for your country. Your vote will prove that you are with establishing the state and boosting its sovereignty along with restricting to it the acquisition of arms, and not with March 8 forces, who are against the Special Tribunal for Lebanon (STL) and put forth the slogan 'Thank You Syria,'" he told *The Daily Star.*

Eid vowed to hold a news conference after the elections to detail how FPM leader Michel Aoun and some MPs in his bloc personally intervened in polls at the USJ's medical school campus.

He also attributed the intense competition at the Faculty of Business to the presence of "Shiite electoral weight."

"In this faculty, we have to mobilize up to 80 percent of the Christian votes to ensure victory," he said.

Despite the quiet atmosphere, anti-riot police took positions outside the campus.

USJ's student elections come as Lebanon witnesses mounting tensions over the STL, established by the United Nations to try the assassins of former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri.

The Hizbullah-led March 8 coalition slammed the tribunal as "an Israeli project" designed to spark civil strife in the country, stressing that members of the party would be targeted by an impending STL indictment.

On the other hand, March 14 parties have maintained that the STL represents the only opportunity to punish the criminals, voicing confidence that the Special Tribunal is not politicized.

Mohammad, a student majoring in business management, said he voted for the March 8 list out of political considerations and because it included some of his friends. "Political considerations are what matter, and the electoral program is secondary," he said.

Karim Moustafa, a third-year business student who is also a Hizbullah candidate, said the LF was using the term "invasion, when they refer to our increasing number in the campus."

"As if we are not students [like others]," said Moustafa.

He said his main plans were to improve the university and organize a "decent prom party" for graduating business students along with traveling trips.

Rami Fawwaz, an LCP official, said his party decided to boycott the polls in order to express its opposition to the fact that the concerns of students were being ignored by rival candidates.

"The price of 1 credit in business

courses has increased from \$96 to \$130, and sectarian mobilization is at peak at the campus," he said, as he complained about being prevented by the university from circulating fliers that called for abandoning the race.

MARCH 14 CANDIDATES CLAIM VICTORY IN NOTRE DAME UNIVERSITY STUDENT ELECTIONS

BEIRUT: March 14 coalition candidates claimed victory Friday in Notre Dame University (NDU)'s student elections, while their rivals in the parliamentary opposition camps remained silent on the results.

The contest saw the March 14 coalition, including Lebanese Forces (LF), the Phalange Party and allies, against the rival March 8 coalition, including the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM) and its allies. The Progressive Socialist Party boycotted the polls.

A heated battle took place at the Louaizeh campus, where two incidents of fistfights broke out between students waiting in line to cast their votes.

The Central News Agency (CNA) quoted LF

officials as saying Friday that the quarrels were caused by FPM students.

"[They] try to come up with problems to obstruct the electoral process and the work of LF students in universities," said one source, adding that the disputes were resolved because the LF "absorbed the matter."

The students competed for 33 posts representing the seven faculties of the campus, with each faculty having a separate election. Pro-March 14 media outlets claimed to have achieved victory, but the university has yet to post the official results.

A statement issued by NDU said the electoral process was supervised by Father Salim Raji, who heads the university's student affairs

office, assisted by deputy head Ziad Fahd and a number of university staff and students.

After touring the university campus, Raji said the elections were held amid "a rational and democratic spirit," adding that students were wise and responsible."

The CNA quoted Roy Haddad, who heads the LF student group at the campus, as saying that students supporting the LF and Phalange voted for the unified list formed by both sides, adding that FPM students "tried to drag us into many problems this morning, but we avoided them." Meanwhile, Jad Ghanem, the FPM official at the campus, said student participation was "very modest," attributing it to "students' despair in the university." - *The Daily Star*

