

Electoral Law Proposal for a Women's Quota in the Lebanese Parliament

Kamal Feghali

This article is an abridged version of the two electoral law proposals "Women Quota in the Lebanese Parliament" prepared by Kamal Feghali (pollster, election specialist, and head of The Bureau for Statistics and Documentation) in July 2008 upon the request of the Woman and Child Parliamentary Committee with the participation of several women's organizations and associations. The editorial team of Al-Raida, and for the purpose of this issue, decided to translate and summarize the two draft laws to make them accessible to our readers.

Despite the fact that since 1953 Lebanese women enjoy full political rights, female participation in decision-making and representation in national and local elected councils is still very low (4.7 percent in national parliament). Considering that Lebanon is signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Declaration which provides for a minimum of 30 percent female representation in elected and appointed political bodies, Lebanon is committed to adopt temporary measures aimed at enhancing equality between men and women.

The following two proposals were submitted in August 2008 to introduce the women quota without jeopardizing the existing regional and sectarian distribution of seats in parliament.

The First Proposal

The first proposal entails the adoption of a women quota of a minimum of 30 percent and its gradual implementation. The first stage starts with temporarily reserving a 10 percent of the seats for the first electoral session, i.e. the temporary allocation of 14 parliamentary seats out of the current total number of 128. Table 1 shows the proposed distribution of the 14 seats.

The distribution of seats

The gender distribution will be added to the regional and sectarian distribution of seats already in effect. The 14 seats are to be exclusively reserved for women. Only women are entitled to compete for the seats allocated for women. As for the remaining 114 seats, men and women can compete without discrimination.

Candidacy

Only women can run for the seats reserved for women according to the geographical and confessional distribution of those seats. For example, one Maronite seat is reserved for women in the Keserwan district, where 5 seats are reserved for Maronites. Consequently, women and men from the Maronite confession can run for the other four seats reserved for Maronites in the district, and the first four candidates win. Only Maronite women can run for the seat reserved for women and the first among them wins.

Criteria for the distribution of seats

Out of the 128 seats in the Parliament, the seats reserved for women are distributed on the basis of the following criteria:

On the basis of religion and confession

The 14 seats reserved for women will be distributed

equally among Muslims and Christians. The 14 seats reserved for women will be distributed proportionately among the major confessions in the two religions.

Out of the 14 seats 7 seats are reserved for Muslims: 3 seats will be allocated for the Sunnis, 3 seats for the Shiites, and 1 seat for the Druze. For Christians, 7 seats will be reserved and distributed as follows: 4 seats will be allocated for the Maronites, 1 seat for the Greek Orthodox, 1 seat for the Catholics, and 1 seat for the Armenian Orthodox communities.

At the district level

The quota will be implemented in the district where the maximum number of seats is reserved for a particular sect. For the Sunni seats for example, the priority is given to Beirut District III and to the Tripoli District, each one having 5 seats for the Sunnis. Priority will be given to the urban district rather than to the rural one for social reasons. For the third Sunni seat for example, priority is given to the city of Sidon rather than to the rural district of Akkar. Priority will also be given to the district where the voters from a specific confession constitute the absolute majority: For the Druze

Table 1

District	Distribution of total seats													Proposal for confessional distribution of parliamentary seats for women					
	Number of seats	Sunnis	Shiites	Druze	Alawit	Maronites	R. Catholics	R. Orthodox	Evangelical	Armenian C.	Armenian O	Minorities	Sunnis	Shiites	Druze	Maronites	Catholics	Orthodox	Armenian O.
Beirut I	5					1	1	1		1	1								
Beirut II	4	1	1								2								1
Beirut III	10	5	1	1				1	1			1	1						
Akkar	7	3			1	1		2											
Tripoli	8	5			1	1		1					1						
Minye-Denniye	3	3																	
Becharre	2					2													
Zghorta	3					3													
Koura	3							3											
Batroun	2					2													
Chouf	8	2		2		3	1									1			
Aley	5			2		2		1							1				
Baabda	6		2	1		3										1			
Maten	8					4	1	2			1					1			1
Keserwan	5					5										1			
Jbeil	3		1			2													
Saida	2	2											1						
Zahrani	3		2				1												
Tyr	4		4											1					
Jezzine	3					2	1												
Nabatiyeh	3		3											1					
Marjeyoun & Hasbaya	5	1	2	1				1											
Bint Jbeil	3		3																
West Bekaa & Rachaya	6	2	1	1		1		1											
Zahle	7	1	1			1	2	1			1						1		
Baalbeck & Hermel	10	2	6			1	1							1					
Total	128	27	27	8	2	34	8	14	1	1	5	1	3	3	1	4	1	1	1

seat, for example, priority is given to the district of Aley which is the only district in Lebanon where the Druze voters are the absolute majority. It is important to note that the quota must not be implemented in a district which has only one seat for a specific confession. Moreover, the quota implementation must preserve a balance among districts and guarantee a maximum of one seat for women in each district.

Distribution of seats when a quota for women can be introduced

For the Sunnis: Beirut third district, Tripoli and

Sidon. These are the three main cities where the Sunnis have an important electoral impact
For the Shiites: Baalbeck, Tyr and Nabatieh (The priority is given to Nabatieh for being the center of the Nabatieh district)

For the Druze: Aley (The only district where the Druze voters are the absolute majority)

For the Maronites: Keserwan, Matn, Chouf and Baabda (The main districts for Maronites are in Mount Lebanon)

For the Orthodox: Koura district

For the Catholics: Zahle district

For the Armenian Orthodox: Beirut second district

Table 2

District	Distribution of total seats											Proposal for confessional distribution of parliamentary seats for women							
	Number of seats	Sunnis	Shiites	Druze	Alawit	Maronites	Catholics	Orthodox	Evangelical	Armenian C.	Armenian O	Minorities	Sunnis	Shiites	Druze	Maronites	Catholics	Orthodox	Minorities
Beirut I	5					1	1	1		1	1							1	
Beirut II	4	1	1								2								
Beirut III	10	5	1	1				1	1			1	1						
Akkar	7	3			1	1		2					1						
Tripoli	8	5			1	1		1					1						
Minye-Denniye	3	3																	
Becharre	2					2													
Zghorta	3					3													
Koura	3							3											
Batroun	2					2										1			
Chouf	8	2		2	3	1													
Aley	5			2	2		1							1					
Baabda	6		2	1	3											1			
Maten	8					4	1	2		1									1
Keserwan	5					5										1			
Jbeil	3		1			2										1			
Saida	2	2																	
Zahrani	3		2				1												
Tyr	4		4											1					
Jezzine	3					2	1												
Nabatieh	3		3											1					
Marjeyoun & Hasbaya	5	1	2	1				1											
Bint Jbeil	3		3																
West Bekaa & Rachaya	6	2	1	1		1		1											
Zahle	7	1	1			1	2	1		1							1		
Baalbeck & Hermel	10	2	6			1	1							1					
Total	128	27	27	8	2	34	8	14	1	1	5	1	3	3	1	4	1	1	1

The Second Proposal

The second proposal entails a gradual adoption of the minimum 30 percent of the total number of parliamentary seats. It involves reserving temporarily 10 percent of the seats i.e. 14 seats will be temporarily reserved for women. This number will not be taken from the original 128 seats but will be added to it thus increasing the number of the members of Parliament to 142 members, provided that the seats are distributed according to the enclosed table (see Table 2).

Distribution of seats

The gender distribution of seats will be added to the sectarian and regional distribution already in effect. The 14 seats will be exclusively reserved for women. Only women are entitled to compete for the seats allocated for women. As for the rest of the 128 seats, men and women can compete without discrimination.

Candidacy

Only women can run for the seats reserved for women according to the geographical and

Table3: The Proportional Distribution of Seats According to Religion and Caza

District	Muslims	Christians	Total	Muslims	seats	Christians
West Bekaa-Rachaya	100200	32262	132462	3,1	1,6	5,0
Zahle	73331	100900	174231	2,2	5,1	6,6
Zahrani	81358	26560	107918	2,5	1,3	4,1
Jezzine	13766	46886	60652	0,4	2,3	2,3
Tyr	167483	12883	180366	5,1	0,6	6,8
Saida	56961	5225	62186	1,7	0,3	2,4
Batroun	4064	56127	60191	0,1	2,8	2,3
Denniye-Menye	96767	15801	112568	3,0	0,8	4,3
Koura	9505	50124	59629	0,3	2,5	2,3
Becharre	28	48080	48108	0,0	2,4	1,8
Zghorta	9694	67681	77375	0,3	3,4	2,9
Tripoli	194076	23828	217904	5,9	1,2	8,3
Nabatiyeh	133809	5525	139334	4,1	0,3	5,3
Bent Jbeil	121094	15451	136545	3,7	0,8	5,2
Marjeyoun-Hasbaya	132330	24821	157151	4,0	1,2	6,0
Baalbeck-Hermel	272801	46904	319705	8,3	2,3	12,1
Beirut	367003	213721	580724	11,2	10,7	22,0
Chouf	123532	75964	199496	3,8	3,8	7,6
Maten	10577	170473	181050	0,3	8,5	6,9
Baabda	77380	90847	168227	2,4	4,5	6,4
Jbeil	18594	63054	81648	0,6	3,2	3,1
Aley	73989	54559	128548	2,3	2,7	4,9
Keserwan	1939	92850	94789	0,1	4,6	3,6
Akkar	185733	77887	263620	5,7	3,9	10,0
Total	2326014	1418413	3744427	71,0	71,0	142,0

confessional distribution of those seats. For example, one Sunni seat is reserved for women in the Tripoli district. Consequently, women and men from the Sunni confession can run for the other five seats reserved for Sunnis in this district and the first five of the two genders win. Only Sunni women can run for the seat reserved for women and the first among them wins. Moreover, women and men can run for the Orthodox, Maronite, or Alawite seats.

Criteria for the distribution of seats

The seats reserved for women are to be distributed on the basis of the following criteria:

On the basis of religion and confession

The additional 14 seats reserved for women will be distributed equally among Muslims and Christians. The 14 seats reserved for women will be distributed proportionately among the major confessions in the two religions.

Out of the 14 seats, 7 seats are reserved for the Muslims: 3 seats will be allocated for the Sunnis, 3 seats for the Shiites, and 1 seat for the Druze. For Christians, 7 seats will be reserved and distributed as follows: 4 seats will be allocated for the Maronites, 1 seat for the Greek Orthodox, 1 seat for the Catholics, and 1 seat for the Armenian Orthodox communities.

Criteria for the regional distribution of seats:

The quota will not be implemented in districts which suffer from lack of representation. Priority should be given to the urban districts rather than

to the rural ones due to social reasons. Priority should also be given to the districts in which the voters of a specific confession represent the absolute majority. There is a need to take into consideration the voters of a particular confession in the districts where no seats were allocated for them and compensate this lack in the districts of the *Mouhafaza*.

The distribution of seats

For the Sunnis: Beirut third district, Tripoli, and Akkar.

For the Shiites: Baalbeck-Hermel, Tyr, and Nabatiyeh

For the Druze: Aley

For the Maronites: Jbeil, Keserwan, Baabda and Batroun

For the Orthodox: Beirut

For the Catholics: Zahle

For the minorities: Matn

Remark:

Along with the two quota proposals, Feghali submitted 2 proposals concerning the amendment of Article 24 of the Constitution to allow for the introduction of the women quota and adding it to the already existing sectarian and regional distribution of parliamentary seats. The amendments were prepared in anticipation of objections to the proposed women quota, considering that it constitutes a breach of the principle of equality among the Lebanese, as consecrated in the Lebanese constitution.