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SUCCESS STORY

Youth in Tripoli Vote to Make Their Voices Heard



A young man votes in the shadow election in Tripoli. The event was covered by major Lebanese media organizations.

“I voted today because I want to be heard. We don’t want anymore wars and guns. We want to live normal lives. We youth should be able to express our opinion and politicians should have more projects benefiting youth in their platform.”

—Allam Jaaydih, 19, a voter from Tripoli’s conflict-ridden Bab El-Tebbaneh neighborhood

June 2009 – Lebanon’s next generation of voters is getting ready for its turn at the ballot box in 2010. The Lebanese Parliament voted in March to reduce the voting age from 21 to 18, but a constitutional amendment is still needed to enact the law.

Anticipating that the law will be enacted, nearly 2,500 young people “voted” for the first time on June 7 in a shadow parliamentary election in Tripoli.

The Lebanese youth organization Shabab al Balad, partnering with USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives, sponsored the shadow election to engage youth in the democratic process, preparing them to take part in their country’s future.

“I wanted to vote because it’s my right, because youth are the future of this country. I’m hoping the politicians will see how important our voices are,” said Tarek Baroudy, 20.

Prior to the election, a group of 40 Shabab al Balad activists led as many as 30 awareness sessions at universities, schools, and youth hangouts to educate young people about the electoral process and get out the vote. In addition, Tripoli youth were invited to participate in a series of four public debates with parliamentary candidates from the district. These debates offered a rare opportunity for young people to directly question candidates about their stance on contentious issues like civil marriage and sectarianism, as well as their approach for responding to youth priorities.

Shabab el Balad also engaged young people to develop an agenda focused on their concerns to form the basis of a campaign platform for youth candidates in the 2010 municipal elections. This agenda will help them advocate for their priorities and needs.

Minister of Interior Ziad Baroud commended these efforts and plans, joining the organization to announce the youth agenda and shadow election results to the public. In addition, the mayors of Tripoli and neighboring Mina visited the polling stations to show their support for the youth election.

Some results from the shadow election were at odds with the results of the national polls. While most Tripoli voters chose candidates based on their political alliance or sectarian identity, the youth voters said they selected candidates because of their platforms.

“I want the right politicians to win, according to their program and [the] services they will offer our region, not the ones who impose their opinions on the people and bribe them,” said 19-year-old Samir Bassam Al-Jamal.