

For Immediate Release



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## **AUB students practice democracy with heightened sense of responsibility: Student elections held on proportional basis**

American University of Beirut (AUB) Students proved once again their trust in AUB's electoral system as they successfully completed a smooth and impeccable Student Representative Council (SRC) and the University Student Faculty Committee (USFC) election process this year. This trust is proven by students' participation rate in terms of number of candidates as well as voter participation, by the campaigns held in sophisticated and democratic fashion, by the level of interest expressed by all, by debates held on campus during the campaigns, as well as the fact that several groups were involved and all were represented in the process.

65 % of the student body voted for their respective faculties through an electronic voting system on proportional basis that was held from 10 am to 5 pm at polling stations throughout AUB faculties in a calm yet competitive manner. This came after a two-day campaign on Tuesday and Wednesday that followed a new process of campaign allocation [booths] and presented sophisticated platforms per party. A live and lively debate took place at the end of the campaign on Wednesday allowing representatives of all groups to answer on a stage questions from the AUB community attending.

The electronic voting system is a pioneering first in Lebanon, fully homegrown at AUB by experts from its IT team who have been coordinating for months with AUB's Dean and Associate Dean of Student Affairs to design a system that is meticulous, reliable, and most importantly fool-proof as well as hack-proof. It is not an internet system for online voting but an internal server for e-voting to protect from hacking or other outside manipulation. The result? A simple yet accurate system that is accessible only to the students on the day of elections. The only hardware cost was that of the ID scanners. AUB was the first university in Lebanon to consult with the Lebanese Association for Democratic Elections (LADE) for their reports, observations, and as external election monitors alongside faculty members as internal observers in each poll station. According to Dean of Student Affairs, Dr. Talal Nizameddin, this year, LADE considered the invented voting system efficient and useful for use in Lebanon and other countries.

A solid team-work between AUB's Office of Student Affairs, Registrar, and IT (Banner) not only guaranteed that an automated list of eligible candidates was crafted based on received online applications and shared within 48 hours of nominations, but it also continued and intensified throughout election time. Each voter had their ID scanned and checked for eligibility to vote as a fulltime AUB student. Cases of ambiguity regarding inter-faculty transfer, or exact number of academic credits that render the students of a specific year (as SRC votes are cast by class or year), are some of the issues that all three offices collaborate with to clear things out on the spot on the day of elections. A fully updated banner list is provided in advance by the Registrar's office with the names of eligible students and the classes they are in, inserted into the synchronized system and accessible at all polling stations. All else was left for the students: from nominating themselves, to voting and electing their favored candidates.

A significantly high number of candidates 212 (compared to 266 last year) represented various factions, including the major: Lead the Change coalition, Students for Change, and the Campus Choice secular club.

In a ritual of enthusiasm, the results were out within the hour from end of voting. A large computer-linked screen set up facing West Hall broadcast beaming election results to spirited students. Dean Nizameddin said that the voters showed a true sense of civic responsibility and the candidates have promised to dedicate their time to serve others around them. "Their conduct has been exemplary. AUB students have once more made us proud."

Nizameddin congratulated the gathered students on a smooth and successful election process and said "Democracy, tolerance, dialogue, peaceful political competition and diversity are values that AUB cherishes with all its will. The student election process for some 8500 students is a message of defiance to Lebanon and the world that democracy can exist in the Middle East."

As in every election, access to campus was confined to students and staff with valid AUB IDs, in addition to print, radio and TV reporters covering the event. The Office of Student Affairs, which oversees elections every year, enforced voting rules in the strictest fashion and banned all political flags, posters, flyers, and photos on campus.

Student elections at AUB have a long history that dates back to 1949, when the first general elections took place. This annual event was interrupted in 1982 at the height of the 1975- 1990 Lebanese war, only to resume in 1994.

The cabinets for both the SRC and USFC will be elected in the coming 48 hours.

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**Note to Editors**

### **About AUB**

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 700 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 8,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 130 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 420-bed hospital.

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