



Outline of the process to amend the Lebanese Constitution

Parliament's Vote to Lower The Voting Age

On 19 March 2009, Parliament voted unanimously to adopt a Constitutional Law to reduce the voting age in Lebanon from 21 years to 18 years. The Law proposes that Article 21 of the Constitution should be amended to read as follows:

Every Lebanese citizen who has reached 18 years old can be a voter if he/she meets all eligibility conditions. (Unofficial translation taken verbatim from Speaker Berri's opening address)

The 2008 Election Law (Article 3) states:

Every Lebanese who has attained the legal age stipulated in the Constitution, whether or not resident on the Lebanese territory, shall be entitled to vote.

Next Steps for the Constitution to be Amended

The Constitutional Law adopted on 19 March is the first in a four-stage process to amend the Constitution. The Law will now be forwarded to the Cabinet (Council of Ministers) for the second stage.

The Cabinet must approve the Constitutional Law by a vote supported by at least two-thirds of its members. This must be done within four months of the Cabinet receiving it. Assuming the Cabinet approves the lowering of the voting age to 18 years, it will prepare a draft Constitutional Amendment which will then be returned to Parliament.

The third stage of the procedure requires Parliament to vote on the final text of the Amendment approved by the Cabinet. As with the vote on 19 March, Parliament must have a quorum of two-thirds of its members, and the vote will succeed only if the Amendment is then supported by at least two-thirds majority of all Deputies in Parliament.

The final stage before the Constitutional Amendment can come into force is for the President and Prime Minister to co-sign a Promulgation of the Amendment.

Impact on the 7 June 2009 elections

Even if all three remaining stages were undertaken promptly, the Constitutional Amendment will not have an impact on this year's parliamentary elections unless Parliament also votes to change the Election Law. Under the Election Law, the voter register will be closed on 30 March 2009 so newly enfranchised 18-20 year old citizens could not be added to the register unless that date is extended.

During the parliamentary debate on 19 March, there appeared to be consensus by all present that the Parliament's support to lower the voting age should not jeopardise holding the 2009 elections on schedule.

Impact on future elections

The Constitutional Amendment, if fully adopted, would mean that 18-20 year olds could vote in the 2010 municipal elections and the 2013 parliamentary elections. The voter register for the 2010 elections will be updated from 5 December 2009.