

# MP-IDSA

## *Issue Brief*

# Iraq Parliamentary Election 2025: An Assessment

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## Summary

The complexity of Iraq's political system—marked by fragmented representation, sectarian considerations and external Iranian interference—ensures that government formation remains a delicate balancing act.

## Introduction

Iraq held its parliamentary election on 11 November 2025, the sixth after the US-led invasion of 2003, demonstrating a certain resilience in the country’s governance system. A total of 7,743 candidates contested 329 seats, with voter turnout reaching 56.11 per cent, a significant improvement from 46 per cent in 2021. The results reflected a highly fragmented parliamentary mandate, as none of the parties secured a majority.

The Reconstruction and Development Party of Muhammad Shia al-Sudani won the largest number of seats, 46, by securing 1.3 million votes out of the 11 million cast. The Iran-aligned State of Law alliance, led by Nouri al-Maliki, secured the second spot with 29 seats and 370,000 votes. The third position was secured by the Al Sadiqoun bloc led by Qais al Khazali, which got 27 seats.<sup>1</sup> The CF-led Badr organisation won 18 seats.<sup>2</sup> The results reveal sectarian tensions within society. This, combined with the likelihood of a delay in the formation of the government, as is evident from experience, leads one to surmise that polls alone will not contribute to greater stability in Iraq.

## Process of Government Formation

Iraq’s political system is based on a consociational power-sharing model. It is called *Muhasasa Ta’ifia* (sectarian apportionment), according to which the presidency is reserved for a Kurd, the premiership (Prime Minister) for a Shia, and the position of Speaker for a Sunni.<sup>3</sup> Iraq is a parliamentary democracy with the Council of Representatives as its elected legislature.<sup>4</sup> Every fourth year, voters in 19 provinces elect 329 seats, of which 25 per cent (83 seats) are reserved for women, while nine seats are reserved for minorities (Yazidi, Christian, Sabeans, Shabak and Feyli).

The government formation process in Iraq is a labyrinth of constitutional provisions, informal conventions, judicial interpretations and raw political bargaining that complicates and often delays it. Under the law, the elected Council of Representatives first nominates the President, who then appoints the Prime Minister from the largest

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<sup>1</sup> James Jeffrey and David Schenkar, “[Iraq’s Election: Outcomes and Next Steps](#)”, The Washington Institute of Near East Policy, 17 November 2025.

<sup>2</sup> Hassan Abu Hussein, “[Who Won and Who Lost in Iraq’s 2025 Parliamentary Election?](#)”, BBC Monitoring, 18 November 2025.

<sup>3</sup> Toby Dodge, “[Iraq and Muhasasa Ta’ifia; the External Imposition of Sectarian Politics](#)”, The Foreign Policy Centre, 12 November 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Renad Mansour, “[Iraq Elections 2025: How Votes are Won and What the Results Could Mean for Iraq’s Fragile Stability](#)”, Chatham House, 21 October 2025.

bloc within 15 days. The invited bloc has to present a cabinet for parliamentary approval within 30 days.<sup>5</sup>

This step involves comprehensive pre-negotiations among politicians, including not only the selection of ministers and the Prime Minister but also the determination of policy priorities and the allocation of resources. This ‘nothing is decided until everything is decided’ approach usually delays government formation. For example, in 2010 it took eight months, and in 2021 eleven months, to form the government.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the current election has reproduced the same deadlock, with fragmented electoral outcomes and prolonged elite bargaining once again stalling the timely formation of a new government.

## Performance of the Parties

The Reconstruction and Development Coalition, led by Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, emerged as the largest bloc in the election, securing 46 seats. This coalition comprises several parties united under al-Sudani’s leadership. The State of Law coalition, led by Nouri al-Maliki, secured the second-highest number of seats. Despite long-standing accusations against al-Maliki of fuelling sectarian strife and failure to stop the Islamic State from capturing Iraqi territory, during his tenure from 2006 to 2014, he remains a potent political figure in Iraqi politics.<sup>7</sup> He derives his support from armed militias, security forces and the judiciary. His comeback with 29 seats in this election is evidence of his shrewd political manoeuvres.

Among Sunni parties, the Taqaddum party, led by Mohamed Al Halbousi, secured 27 seats, down from 37 in the 2021 election. Al Halbousi served as a speaker after the 2021 election, before a court ruling removed him in a case driven by Sunni rivals. By securing a substantial number of seats, he is the frontrunner for the position of Speaker. Still, his candidacy remains uncertain due to deep rivalries within Sunni ranks and resistance from Shia and Kurdish power brokers, whose backing is necessary to secure the position.<sup>8</sup> He will also face opposition from Muthanna al Sammarai, the leader of the Azm coalition, who secured 15 seats in the election.

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<sup>5</sup> [“A Guide to Iraq’s Government Formation Process, as Stated in the Constitution”](#), Embassy of the Republic of Iraq, Washington D.C.

<sup>6</sup> Marina Ottaway, [“Iraq and the Problem of Democracy”](#), Wilson Center, 13 January 2023.

<sup>7</sup> [“Former Iraq PM Maliki Could Heavily Influence Next Week’s Election Despite Sectarian Outlook”](#), The Arab Weekly, 8 November 2025.

<sup>8</sup> [“Iraq Parliament Speaker Battle Exposes Deep Sunni Divisions”](#), Middle East Online, 18 December 2025.

The Kurdish Democratic Front secured 26 seats, with over 1 million votes. It consolidated its dominance by capturing three of the five reserved Christian seats, as well as the Feyli Kurds' and Yazidi quota seats.<sup>9</sup>

On the other hand, their rival, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, fell from 17 seats in 2021 to 15 this time. Their underperformance can be attributed to internal rivalry among the leaders and competition from the better-organised Kurdistan Democratic Party. In addition to the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, other small Kurdish parties also performed well. For instance, the newly established National Stance Movement, which emerged from a teacher movement in Kurdistan, secured five seats, Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) secured four seats, and New Generation Movement (NGM), led by business and media tycoon Shaswar Abdulwahid, collapsed from nine seats in 2021 to three this time.<sup>10</sup> The result reflects minimal changes in the power balance of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Another significant outcome of this election was the shortfall of reform-oriented independents and Tishreen-associated parties. The Tishreen (October) protests were a series of demonstrations that began in 2019, expressing dissatisfaction with the government. While COVID-19 and targeted violence against protesters dampened their morale, they still significantly shaped the electoral discourse, as reflected in the rise of protest-influenced candidates in the elections. These candidates fell from 40 seats in 2021 to two or three in 2025.<sup>11</sup> Targeted violence against the activists, lack of funding, rigging of votes and cooperation of some leaders with al Sudani are some of the reasons for their decline.

The results demonstrated that Iraq's political system actively resists reform, with protest momentum and visibility proving insufficient against entrenched structural barriers. Muqtada al-Sadr's relationship with reform movements and the Tishreen protests has been marked by opportunistic engagement and strategic abandonment. He initially supported the Tishreen protesters, but later abandoned them when they refused to join an anti-American protest in January 2020.<sup>12</sup>

Moqtada al-Sadr's decision to boycott the election constitutes a significant variable in Iraq's contemporary political dynamics. His boycott is a calculated response to his strategic positioning and to failed negotiations with the political establishment. This,

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<sup>9</sup> “[KDP Achieves Landslide Victory in Iraq's Legislative Vote](#)”, *Rudaw*, 12 November 2025.

<sup>10</sup> Hassan Abu Hussein, “[Who Won and Who Lost in Iraq's 2025 Parliamentary Election?](#)”, no. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Khairuldeen Makhzoomi, “[The 2025 Iraq Elections: What Increased Participation Conceals](#)”, Gulf International Forum.

<sup>12</sup> Zeidon Alkinani, “[Iraq's Tishreen Protest Movement: The Exceptional Domestic Pressure Tool](#)”, Arab Center, 10 November 2021.

of course, does not mean he is out of politics, instead, he is waiting for the right time to step in.

**Table 1. A Comparison of the 2021 and 2025 Election Results**

Party/Coalition	2021 Seats	2021 %	2025 Seats	2025 %	Seat Change
<b>Sadrists Movement</b>	73	21.25%	0 (Boycotted)	-	-73
<b>Reconstruction &amp; Development Coalition (Sudani)</b>	-	-	<b>46</b>	11.74 %	+46 (New)
<b>Progress Party (Taqaddum)</b>	37	10.77%	<b>27</b>	8.37%	-10
<b>State of Law Coalition</b>	33	9.61%	<b>29</b>	6.49%	-4
<b>Al-Sadiqoun Bloc</b>	-	-	<b>27</b>	6.12%	+27 (New/Realigned)
<b>Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)</b>	31	9.03%	<b>26</b>	9.81%	-5
<b>Fatah Alliance</b>	17	4.95%	0 (Split)	-	-17
<b>Badr Organization</b>	(Part of Fatah)	-	<b>18</b>	4.96%	+18 (Independent)
<b>Alliance of Nation State Forces</b>	-	-	<b>18</b>	4.57%	+18 (New)
<b>Azem Alliance</b>	14	4.08%	<b>15</b>	4.31%	+1
<b>Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)</b>	17	4.95%	<b>15</b>	4.89%	-2

Source: *Media Reports*.

## Shia Coordination Framework (SCF)

The most dominant coalition that influences government-making in Iraq is the Shia Coordination Framework (SCF), which is an umbrella coalition of established Shia Parties with a strong militia network and Iran’s backing. It was formed in opposition to Moqtada al-Sadr in the 2021 election. Parties that are part of this coalition include State of Law (Dawat al Qanun), led by Nouri al-Maliki; Badr Organisation, led by Hadi al-Amiri; Al Sadiqoun bloc, led by Qais al-Khazali; National Wisdom (al-Hikma), led by Ammar al-Hakim; and several other Shia parties.<sup>13</sup>

Within a few days of the declaration of the result, the SCF-led coalition announced that all its leaders had agreed to form the largest parliamentary bloc and were ready to form the government.<sup>14</sup> This was a surprising move, as creating a post-election bloc typically takes months. This move speaks of lessons learned from the 2021 election. SCF was strategically contested by multiple parties this time, which helped it capture votes across different constituencies and preserve the post-election coalition. Another major political stunt was undertaken by Sudani, who declared his Reconstruction and Development coalition an essential part of the SCF.<sup>15</sup> But there are fewer chances of him serving a second term, because of the lack of support from the SCF.

The race for the next Prime Minister will involve intense debate and negotiations among the SCF. Approximately 10 candidates are under discussion; three will be shortlisted and subsequently presented to SCF members to reach a consensus candidate. The candidates include incumbent Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, National Security Advisor Qasim al-Araji, intelligence chief Hamid al-Shatri, Basra Governor Asaad al-Eidani, presidential advisor Ali Shukri, Chairman of the National Commission for Justice and Accountability Basim al-Badri, former Communications Minister Mohammed Tawqif Allawi, former Youth and Sports Minister Abdul Hussein Abtan, and Abdul Ilah al-Naeli (head of Iraq's Martyrs' Foundation).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Victoria J. Taylor, Nibras Basitkey and Daniah Jarrah, “[Tracking Iraq's 2025 Elections and Coalition Building](#)”, Atlantic Council, 9 November 2025.

<sup>14</sup> “[Deep Dive: Ruling Shiite Alliance Moves to Form Iraq's Next Government](#)”, Amwaj Media, 20 November 2025.

<sup>15</sup> Tamer Badawi, “[Iraq Elections Return Incumbents, Testing US and Iranian Influence](#)”, RUSI, 19 November 2025.

<sup>16</sup> “[Exclusive: Ten Candidates Likely to Become Iraq's Next Prime Minister](#)”, The New Region, 20 November 2025.

## External Influence

Iran has a significant influence on Iraq's political landscape. It has used its sectarian connection to engage with various political parties. Thus, it remains a significant external power influencing public opinion in Iraq. The presence of SCF and Popular Mobilisation Forces, two major actors in Iraqi politics, which Iran reportedly backs, has played an essential part in the formation of the government in Iraq.

On the other hand, the US presence in Iraq is also very much evident. Their primary concern is to control Tehran's influence in Iraq, which can be done by weakening the PMF militias and disarming them. Recently appointed Trump's envoy Mark Savaya had worked to avoid the formation of an Iranian-backed government in Iraq. Several US and European policy analysts have argued for a coordinated post-election alignment bringing together Kurdish parties—particularly the KDP—Sunni Arab blocs such as Mohammed al-Halbousi's Taqaddum, and pragmatic, non-militia-aligned Shia actors. The US has signalled its preference for Sudani to continue, as he was appreciated for maintaining a balance between Iranian and US influence.

Aside from the US and Iran, Türkiye has a reasonable influence and interest in the border areas and in Iraqi politics. Ongoing operations against the PKK in the border area and the Iraq-Türkiye pipeline negotiations are some of the regions where Türkiye plays an important role. Under Al-Sudani, Turkish-Iraqi relations have expanded from a security-focused agenda to a broader partnership centred on economic and developmental cooperation, prompting Türkiye to view Iraq not as a problem to manage, but as a key strategic partner.<sup>17</sup>

Ankara's interest in Iraq has extended from controlling the PKK to encompass substantial economic and development cooperation. In electoral politics, Türkiye has supported Sunni political parties and maintained strategic relations with Kurdish parties. Reports indicate Turkish (alongside Qatari) mediation efforts aimed at narrowing differences among rival Sunni leaders and securing positions for leaders such as Halbousi.<sup>18</sup>

## Strategy deployed by Political Leaders

Although Iraqis are free to vote, voting patterns reflect clientelism and corruption, with votes manipulated through economic incentives and patronage networks.

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<sup>17</sup> Sinem Cengez, “[Ankara Fixes Its Gaze on Iraq's High-stakes Elections](#)”, *Arab News*, 7 November 2025.

<sup>18</sup> “[Iraq Parliament Speaker Battle Exposes Deep Sunni Divisions](#)”, *Middle East Online*, 18 December 2025.

Positions of power are also used to promote appealing reforms before elections. For instance, the incumbent Prime Minister, Sudani, increased public-sector employment and issued approximately 9,000 ‘Thank you’ letters to employees before the election, which helped him attract voters.<sup>19</sup>

Sudani’s success can be attributed to his carefully organised strategic reforms. He prioritised visible development, such as infrastructure, particularly in areas like Baghdad, where the construction of roads, buildings, bridges and other projects provided tangible evidence of the government’s actions.<sup>20</sup> He consciously avoided unpopular economic reforms, eschewing the previous government’s recommendations to reduce subsidies, downsize the public sector and devalue the currency. Instead, he expanded public-sector employment by 1 million, a fiscally unsustainable move but crucial for his popularity ahead of elections.

Sunni voters were influenced by Sudani’s infrastructural reforms in their underdeveloped region and appreciated his work. Thus, they formed a crucial base of support for him, and their doubled voter turnout since the last election also reflects their dynamism. On the other hand, Sudani carefully avoided direct involvement in regional conflicts between Iran and Israel, aiming to show himself as a guarantor of stability, despite pressure from the Iraqi militia to join the ‘Axis of Resistance’ of Iran.

Another strategy employed by the opposition was to appeal to voters by providing basic necessities in underprivileged areas. Taqaddum party’s candidate Raad al Dulami launched a campaign to develop drinking water networks in the Sunni-dominant, impoverished area of north Baghdad.<sup>21</sup> Former Prime Minister Nour al-Maliki is also accused of securing votes not only from families but also from the whole tribe through handouts to tribal leaders. Votes cast by armed militias, which are employees of the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Interior, as well as other PMF groups and formations, are tightly controlled. They vote on specific days and in designated booths, and their voting behaviour is strongly influenced.

## Conclusion

Iraq’s latest elections have produced a fragmented parliament outcome, underscoring the persistence of coalition politics. Additionally, the inherent political uncertainty that characterises government formation persists. Notably, the sectarian distribution

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Hamzeh Hadad, “[The 2025 Iraqi Election: Will Sudani Serve a Second Term?](#)”, Arab Centre, 20 November 2025.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

of seats after the election reveals that Shias continue to dominate the political landscape. In the latest polls, Shia parties won 197 seats, Sunni parties 67, and Kurdish parties 56.

As the incumbent Prime Minister, Sudani enjoys certain advantages, including established political networks and administrative experience. In the coming months, he is likely to be invited to form a government, and, as prime minister-designate, he has 30 days to form his cabinet. Should he fail, the invitation will then be directed to the State of Law Alliance, which secured the second-highest number of seats. The complexity of Iraq’s political system—marked by fragmented representation, sectarian considerations and external Iranian interference—ensures that government formation remains a delicate balancing act. The future government, regardless of its composition, will have to carefully navigate these multifaceted challenges and negotiate the consequences of its actions in the months and years ahead.

## About the Author

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