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Platform Journal

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- Kurdistan Elections Held Hostage by Minority Seat Row - Sarkawt Shamsulddin

Policy Paper

- Professional and Efficient Electoral Management for Reliable Elections - Sardar Mustafa Rasheed
- Women's Proportional Representation (Legislative Quotas) in Iraq: Opportunities and Challenges Dr. Bushra Al-Zwaini

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Iraq's Ranking in the Global Elections Integrity Report - Ghazwan Al-Munhalawi

Platform Journal

A bi-annual policy journal that explores policy sectors in the aim of promoting policy understanding of these sectors via presenting in-depth insights based on data and evidence.

About the Center

Platform Center for Sustainable Development (PSDIraq) is a registered NGO at the Directorate of Non-governmental organisations in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers under the number (1S2106012). It is a space for thinking, discussing, and working towards postive change in Iraq.

Vision

We seek to establish a platform for dialogue and policies to contribute to achieving sustainable development goals in Iraq.

Mission

Bridging the gap between the state and society in a way that ensures the realization of the essence of democracy represented by the participation of citizens in the decision-making processes, through training, monitoring, analyzing, researching, awareness raising, and advocacy campaigns.

Strategic Goals

- Preparing Youth to fulfill their societal obligations by analyzing root causes of problems, proposing feasible and desirable policy alternatives and advocating for their implementation
- Presenting statistics and issues that occupy the political and societal scene to reflect a deeper understanding of Iraq's realities
- Encouraging youth to work towards achieving sustainable development goals
- Establishing a network of active, informed, and committed citizens towards Iraq's state-building project

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Editorial

Elections in Iraq: A Chance for Change and Risks of Escalation

Hashim Al-Rikabi
Editor-in-Chief

- The upcoming provincial elections in Iraq represent a pivotal moment in the nation's democratic journey. Since their resurgence in 2003 after decades of absence or tokenism during the era of dictatorship, elections have become a prominent feature of the Iraqi political landscape. They have demonstrated the resilience of the Iraqi political system, evolving through several stages to enhance representation and popular accountability. Moreover, these elections have set a shining example in the Middle East, with their regularity and transparency challenging theories that democracy is incompatible with Middle Eastern societies.

- Iraqi elections have always been, and continue to be, an opportunity for change. They provide the ideal platform to prioritize issues, formulate effective policies, and develop programs that translate these policies into tangible results. However, prevailing identity-based and patronage cultures often hinder competition based on policies. Instead, individual and factional demands, such as government appointments and basic services, tend to dominate the electoral landscape. While these demands are legitimate, they miss the opportunity to drive fundamental, long-term solutions and settle for short-term, factional remedies that sometimes harm the public interest.

- As the influence of identity politics wanes, populist rhetoric gains traction, posing a significant threat to the stability of the political system itself. Populist discourse widens the gap between the government and the society it serves.

- Furthermore, elections can potentially lead to escalation, not due to flaws in the procedural rules, but because of the behavior of political actors. Many see elections as a gateway to imposing dominance and control by radically altering local and national equations. This behavior has become more pronounced as the elections draw near, with events like those in Kirkuk serving as a potential indicator of heightened tensions.

- To mitigate these risks, political will is required to encourage accommodation rather than exclusion of competitors, prioritize national interests over partisan or factional ones, and foster competition based on programs that represent and serve local communities, thus rebuilding their trust in the democratic system.

- Historically, elections have reshaped the political landscape, especially at the local level. The absence of elections has led to chaotic appointments of provincial governors, with some provinces witnessing five governors in just one year. This highlights the importance of active participation in creating sustainable change.

- Therefore, this issue of the PSDIraq Journal is dedicated to the elections in anticipation of the Provincial Council elections scheduled for December 18th. It aims to raise societal awareness about the necessity of participating in the electoral process and to initiate a broader societal and political discourse on the most suitable electoral system, women's quotas, and the perspectives and experiences of political actors and key stakeholders.

- In conclusion, the provincial elections in Iraq are not just a routine event but a chance for the citizens and youth in particular to shape their future and influence the trajectory of their nation. While the path may be challenging, the rewards of active electoral participation and responsible citizenship are immeasurable. By participating in the democratic process, the youth of Iraq can be the driving force behind positive change and contribute to the stability and prosperity of their beloved country.

Policy Papers

SYSTEM

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Professional and Efficient Electoral Management for Reliable Elections

- Sardar Mustafa Rasheed
- Director of the Step for Democracy and Elections Organization
  Former Chairman of the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC)

Executive Summary

- Electoral management involves complexities and political interests that need to be addressed, given the importance and sensitivity of the functions entrusted to any electoral management body.

- Therefore, defining the criteria that must be met by an electoral management body should be one of the legislator's foremost concerns when enacting electoral management laws. It should embody professionalism, competence, transparency, and independence to ensure that it carries out its functions effectively, in line with the constitution, laws, and international standards of election integrity and transparency.

An electoral management body's qualifications to carry out its tasks with credibility and gain trust from all electoral stakeholders, especially voters, political parties, non-governmental organizations, and the media, are essential. These stakeholders are crucial, as elections are the means to access and transition in power, ultimately leading to the stability, continuity, and development of the democratic process and, in the end, to the achievement of development and well-being, ensuring their sustainability.

- This paper discusses the required features for electoral authorities, the criteria that define their roles and forms, as well as the essential solutions and alternatives for establishing an efficient and professional electoral administration in Iraq.

Introduction

- For over a century and a half, many countries held their first pluralistic elections in their history. The most significant challenge they faced at the time was the severe shortage of skills, experience, and knowledge resources.
  The greatest focus at that time was on ensuring the complete independence of the electoral administration. However, many newly established electoral administrations lacked sufficient readiness to carry out their tasks and did not possess the experience to enable them to organize elections at the required level of credibility and transparency.

- During that time, there was no general methodology for designing electoral administrations and funding them. Electoral administrations and their personnel were unable to access the best electoral arrangements and comparative practical experiences. Over the years, competitive elections have allowed electoral administrations in most countries worldwide to accumulate experience that can be exchanged for more mutual benefits.

- Consequently, the challenges facing those responsible for electoral management nowadays revolve around achieving the trust of all electoral stakeholders and attaining the highest levels of credibility and transparency in electoral management.

- The trust of electoral stakeholders, the public, and political parties, in particular, is a pivotal factor. The elections are not only a means of achieving electoral success but also a mechanism for citizen involvement in the decision-making process in line with the requirements of the state's current phase. It is a means to achieve the desired alignment between the ruler's will and the governed.

Successful elections are a way to channel social conflicts into constructive dialogues based on respect and shared rules for people's representatives, who can hold positions in the executive and legislative branches and other institutions.

Background

Attributes and Criteria Required in Electoral Bodies

It is essential that the decision-making process within electoral bodies is characterized by a set of attributes, working in accordance with specific criteria that define the roles of these bodies. These attributes and criteria include:

1. Professionalism

Professionalism entails executing all tasks with care and precision by a qualified and trained staff to ensure the credibility of the electoral process. This creates trust among electoral stakeholders, such as political parties, candidates, voters, civil society organizations, and the media, that those responsible for election management can carry out their duties competently, or at least acceptably. The absence of professionalism raises doubts among stakeholders and undermines confidence in the electoral process and its outcomes.

2. Transparency

Transparency involves the electoral management body informing electoral stakeholders about its activities, decisions, and procedures. This enhances trust in the electoral administration and is a crucial means of defining responsibility and accountability.

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Transparency is vital in preventing corruption within the administration. Without it, suspicions of mismanagement and corruption in the electoral process are sown.

3. Independence

Independence refers to the electoral management body's ability to make administrative, financial, and technical decisions without external pressures, including those from the three branches of government. This requires precise and unambiguous legal drafting, as well as a culture of independence within the electoral administration and among electoral stakeholders, including government entities, the judiciary, and political parties. Ensuring the independence of the electoral administration in decision-making is crucial, as a lack of independence weakens trust in the electoral process and democracy in the country.

4. Neutrality

Neutrality means treating all competitors in the electoral process fairly, equally, and without discrimination. This is achieved through the electoral management body's decisions and procedures, which are subject to external oversight. Legal texts should include clear provisions that guarantee the body's neutrality, along with deterrent penalties for any entities attempting to undermine it. This is related to transparency, as it is essential to convince the public and electoral stakeholders of the electoral administration's neutrality.

5. Integrity

Integrity involves the electoral management body operating within legal and financial regulations, preventing various forms of administrative and financial corruption committed by its officials and employees. All individuals should be subject to legal accountability.

6. Efficiency

Efficiency means using allocated financial, human, and technical resources wisely and effectively to achieve election objectives and continuously work on updating and developing these resources. This is done through the ongoing capacity building of staff, the use of modern technology and systems, effective awareness programs, and the development of operational and administrative financial systems and necessary regulations for efficient and successful election management.

7. Service

Service means that the electoral administration effectively fulfills its constitutional and legal duties and provides the best services to electoral stakeholders. Executing transparent, fair, credible, and timely elections is the primary responsibility of any electoral administration, regardless of its form.

Forms of Electoral Administration

To begin with, the tasks assigned to any electoral administration are quite similar, even though they may vary in their details based on the form of the electoral administration, which can take various shapes:

A. Governmental Administrations

- Managed by one of the state ministries or their departments.
- Managed by temporary or permanent governmental committees.
- Managed through local authorities.
- Oversight by the judiciary.

B. Independent Bodies

C. Mixed Governmental and Independent Bodies

4. United Nations, Sometimes the United Nations directly administers and implements elections in certain countries emerging from internal conflicts or foreign occupation.

This occurs under international agreements and as a result of peace treaties.

Since the required criteria for any electoral administration must be defined by the constitution, the founding law regulating its operations, and the electoral law, the mechanism for selecting the administrative body or its board of directors, its administrative structure, decision-making processes, and the legal quorum required for its operations must all be specified in the law. Therefore, decision-makers in any country, particularly the legislative authority, should consider the seven most important criteria that must be met by any electoral administration while legislating the electoral administration law or amending it. This ensures their achievement and enjoyment through supportive legislation and a culture that upholds the neutrality, integrity, independence, transparency, professionalism, and efficiency of any electoral administration.

Legislative Amendments and Their Impact on Electoral Administration

In a brief review of the current Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) Law and past laws, it is evident that the Iraqi legislature has been committed to ensuring that the necessary conditions and standards are met in the IHEC's work. Certain provisions support these principles, while others can diminish their impact, as discussed below:

1. Independence The Iraqi legislature has been keen on safeguarding the independence of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) by specifically addressing it in a dedicated section within the legal framework. Article 102 of the IHEC Law (Law No. 31 of 2019) explicitly states the independence of the IHEC, positioning it outside the three powers of the state. However, a significant financial aspect of its independence was compromised. The Federal Supreme Court invalidated the IHEC's direct submission of its annual budget to the Council of Representatives, altering its financial autonomy. Currently, the law mandates that the IHEC prepares its budget similarly to any government ministry.

2. Professionalism and Neutrality The Iraqi legislature has consistently emphasized the professionalism and neutrality of the IHEC. This is reflected in its laws, which state that the IHEC is a professional and neutral institution, focusing on efficient and unbiased operations. However, practical implementation has seen fluctuations, and different stakeholders have varying assessments of the IHEC in this regard.

3. Competence and Integrity Ensuring the members of the IHEC meet certain qualifications is critical to upholding its integrity and competence. Law No. 11 of 2007 explicitly outlined these qualifications, including good moral character, experience and competence in administrative work, and no convictions for crimes against honor. However, Law No. 31 of 2019, while maintaining good moral character and freedom from convictions for crimes against honor, omitted the requirement for experience and competence in administrative work. This is a significant oversight in ensuring the competence of the IHEC members.

With regard to the IHEC staff, the current law resulted in significant changes, with the elimination of the Capacity Building Directorate and the removal of heads and managers of departments and divisions, shifting them to positions outside the IHEC.

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While these changes took place, individuals with little to no experience within the IHEC were appointed to director-general positions, which raises questions about the overall competence and efficiency of the IHEC in performing its tasks.

Fourth - Transparency

It's important to note that the IHEC Law does not contain explicit provisions that define the steps the IHEC should take to ensure its procedures are transparent and open. However, there is a Public Relations Department within the IHEC's administrative structure responsible for communication and cooperation with electoral stakeholders. The IHEC's decisions and statements are published on its website, and a significant amount of information is shared on its social media platforms. The IHEC also engages spokespersons and communication officers to expand its reach.

Nonetheless, there is still room for the IHEC to enhance its transparency, openness, and communication with electoral stakeholders, particularly in the process of formulating procedures and regulations before their final approval, and in involving electoral stakeholders in lessons learned workshops and seminars.

Fifth - Service

Regarding the service requirement, it's worth mentioning that the mechanism for selecting IHEC members and the required qualifications are among the most critical factors affecting the IHEC's work, independence, and neutrality. Order 92 tasked the selection of IHEC members to the Coalition Provisional Authority, followed by a vote from the Governing Council.

Mechanism of selecting IHEC Commissioners

The method for selecting IHEC members has evolved over time, with the current law favoring the appointment of senior judges to these positions. This evolution reflects Iraq's changing political landscape and the desire to ensure the integrity of the electoral process.

Law No. 11 established a process where a committee of members from the Council of Representatives would choose IHEC members, who would then be voted upon by the council based on a majority vote. In contrast, the current law stipulates that IHEC members must be senior judges selected by the High Judicial Council, two judges from the first rank chosen by the High Judicial Council in the Kurdistan Region, and two consultants from the State Consultative Council appointed by the Judicial Council. A lottery system is used to select IHEC members, and the President of the Republic issues a presidential decree to appoint them.

Here's a summary of the mechanism for selecting IHEC members in Iraq:

- Order 92: Appointed by the Coalition Provisional Authority and approved by the Governing Council.
- Law No. 11: Chosen by a committee of Council of Representatives members and voted upon by the council.
- Current Law: Senior judges from various councils are selected through a lottery system.

Assessing Mechanisms of Selecting Electoral Commission (2004 – Now)

This section outlines the key strengths and weaknesses of the electoral management process in Iraq, including the entities responsible and the relevant legal framework. It appears that the current approach emphasizes competence and neutrality in the selection process. However, there are concerns about the potential influence of political affiliations and the need for practical training for judges involved in managing the electoral process, as seen in Tables 1 – 3.

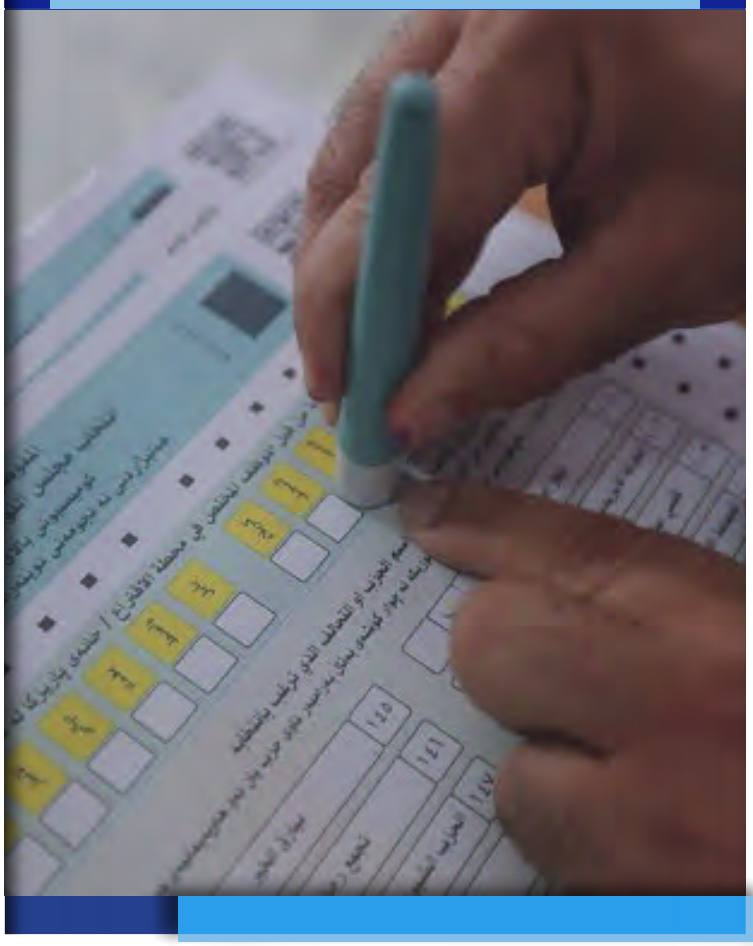

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Table Number (1): Mechanism for Selecting Members of the Electoral Commission in 2004

Legal Framework	Selection Mechanism	Competent Entity	Approval Entity	Positives	Negatives	Outputs
Order of the Coalition Authority No. 92 of 2004.	Nomination of names by citizens and United Nations monitoring organizations. A list of eight names is submitted by the United Nations. The ninth name is proposed by the United Nations Secretary-General. (Paragraph 2, Fifth Section).	Council of Governance.	Administrative Director of the Temporary Coalition Authority.	1. This method is closer to adopting the principle of competence and expertise in commission members. 2. It can be a means to achieve neutrality and independence to some extent, away from political and party affiliations. 3. This method instills trust and acceptance among citizens in the electoral administration. 4. This method achieves greater fairness and ensures the representation of women in the electoral administration. 5. Members of the electoral administration, under this method, are more prepared not to succumb to political and party pressures.	1. Limited opportunity for a broader range of candidates to apply. 2. The only drawback is that the selecting authority was non-Iraqi, but rather an occupying authority. 3. Some may see this method as encroaching on the sovereignty of the country.	Wider acceptance of the electoral administration.

Table Number (2): Mechanism for Selecting Members of the Electoral Commission in 2007

Legal Framework	Selection Mechanism	Competent Entity	Approval Entity	Positives	Negatives	Outputs
		Temporary Committee of Parliament Members	Voting in the Parliament by a simple majority.	1. Opening the field to those who meet the criteria for applying. 2. Selection by representatives of the people (the legislative authority). 3. Monitoring by the United Nations mission for conducting interviews. 4. Better knowledge of the applicants and those chosen by the legislative authority.	1. The Parliament is one of the state authorities, and therefore, it may be considered a limitation on independence. 2. The formation of the Expert Committee from members of Parliament is subject to the principle of quota and representation of parliamentary party blocs, and as a result, those selected are also subject to quota considerations. 3. Selection of some of them may not be based on expertise, qualifications, and integrity but rather on political affiliations.	Undermining trust in the electoral process.

Table Number (3): Mechanism for Selecting Members of the Electoral Commission in 2019

Legal Framework	Selection Mechanism	Competent Entity	Approval Entity	Positives	Negatives	Outputs
Independent High Electoral Commission Law No. 31 of 2019.	Drawing lots among first-class judges and counselors from the State Council. (Article 3 of the Law).	Supreme Judicial Council.	President of the Republic.	1. This mechanism keeps it away from direct interference by political parties through parliamentary blocs in the selection process. 2. Judges, by the nature of their work, are known for their seriousness, and for resolving disputes among individuals and institutions based on law, justice, and fairness, which distinguishes their work with fairness and neutrality. 3. It instills greater confidence in a wide audience of citizens since the judiciary is the body responsible for dispute resolution, making scrutiny of its approach to elections more resistant to challenge and distortion. 4. It enhances trust in the electoral process.	1. Since the judiciary is one of the state authorities, this mechanism is considered a form of government electoral administration, and therefore, it is outside the scope of Article 102 of the Constitution. 2. Involving the judiciary in an executive role is beyond its constitutional scope as one of the three state authorities, and this is a constitutional violation (although the Federal Court rejected a challenge in this regard). 3. The work of judges requires a period that may be short or long to train them on practical aspects and how to communicate with the public (stakeholders in the electoral process), which may affect the way the electoral process is managed and result in conflicting positions among stakeholders regarding the conduct of elections and the acceptance of their results. 4. The judges' independence and non-partisanship are assumed according to the Constitution and the law. What applies to them may also affect others in terms of political, governmental, and media pressures. 5. The strict approach in handling human resources in the institution may undermine their confidence in the work and affect their enthusiasm in performing the tasks assigned to them. Given that the work of judges, and in order to fortify their work and keep them immune from influence, prevents direct interaction with citizens, the media, and the Commission's offices in the governorates.	This mechanism enhanced trust in election management by observers, civil society organizations, and universities. However, the lack of experience in managing the electoral process, especially in terms of result announcement and handling complaints and appeals, weakened trust among some other stakeholders in the electoral process, especially political parties, and some media outlets.

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Policy Alternatives

It is well-known that Article 102 of the constitution establishes the Electoral Commission as an independent body. This implies that the selection process should be free from governmental and party interference. Forming a committee composed of members of the House of Representatives would involve political party quotas in the selection process, which may affect the public's acceptance of the commission's management. Selecting commissioners through the Supreme Judicial Council also raises concerns since the judiciary's primary role is not to carry out elections.

Therefore, alternative methods must be explored that are in compliance with the constitution, particularly Article 102, to ensure transparency and trustworthiness in the electoral process. The selection process should prioritize experience, competence, integrity, and expertise.

The selection of Electoral Commission members can be divided into three separate stages, each assigned to different entities and institutions:

First Stage: Application Phase The United Nations mission (UNAMI) can design the application form and make it available on its website for a specified period. UNAMI should evaluate and shortlist candidates who receive the highest scores, with each application assigned a unique code upon submission. Successful candidates are then invited for interviews by a specialized committee.

Second Stage: Interview Phase It is beneficial to create a committee outside the influence of political parties and government authorities. This committee should comprise representatives from the United Nations, international and local election-related organizations, legal experts, as well as representatives from the Bar Association, Human Rights Union, and the Parliamentary Development Institute. Interviews should be conducted exclusively with candidates whose applications were forwarded by UNAMI, with scores given for their responses to questions. The interview sessions should be recorded and made available for public viewing on a dedicated website. At the end of this stage, nine commissioners, along with two reserves, should be selected, at least one of whom should be a woman, and their names are presented to the House of Representatives for voting.

Third Stage: Selection There are two alternative choices for the selection stage:

1. The first option involves presenting the names of the nine selected candidates to the House of Representatives for a public vote, broadcast live by the media. In case any candidate fails to secure the required number of votes, an alternative reserve candidate's name is presented for voting. If all candidates are rejected, another nine candidates from those who were interviewed and achieved the highest scores should be presented for a vote.

2. The second option involves submitting the names of the nine selected candidates, along with the two reserves, to the office of the President of the Republic for the issuance of a presidential decree appointing them.

Other Alternatives

In addition to the changes in the selection process, it is essential to ensure the continued operation of the commission, maintain its institutional memory, and regulate its budgeting process. This could include:

1. Instituting a system where the commission's work continues uninterrupted, and council members' terms expire at different times. For instance, three members' terms end by lottery, and three new members are selected to replace them, followed by a similar rotation of the remaining members.

2. Restructuring the commission's administrative hierarchy, with all divisions in the National Office being elevated to general directorates.

3. Preparing the commission's annual financial budget in consultation with the Ministry of Finance and directly forwarding it to the House of Representatives without the need to route it through the Iraqi government.

These alternative policies aim to ensure the independence, efficiency, and transparency of the electoral process and the integrity of the Electoral Commission, aligning with the principles of the Iraqi constitution.

Sources

Independent High Electoral Commission Law No. 31 of 2019.

Independent High Electoral Commission Law No. 11 of 2007 (repealed).

Political Parties Law No. 36 of 2015.

Coalition Provisional Authority Order No. 92 of 2004.

Various decisions of the Supreme Federal Court.

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The Role of Electoral Systems in Achieving Political Stability in Iraq

- Dr. Abdulaziz Al-Isawi
- Academic Specialist in Electoral Affairs and Democratic Studies

Executive Summary

- Since 2003, Iraq has witnessed a radical and unprecedented political transformation. However, the democratic experience in Iraq has suffered from political instability, which has diminished the luster of democracy due to ongoing conflicts, disputes, and competition that sometimes exceed the boundaries set by democratic values. The Iraqi experience has relied on unstable electoral systems, which have significantly impacted elections and, consequently, the overall political situation. The electoral system in Iraq has become a crucial pivot for achieving political stability or instability.

- This paper explores the outcomes of the relationship between the electoral systems applied in Iraq after 2003 and the political stability that varied between different governments. The relationship between these two elements is close, as the political system is responsible for shaping the electoral system. On election day, the impact of the electoral system on the stability of the political process begins.

- The events that led Iraq to a dangerous political deadlock after the 2021 elections serve as a prime example. Part of the responsibility for this crisis falls on the electoral system, which introduced multi-districts for the first time. This mechanism contributed to the significant victory of the Sadr Movement in the elections, far ahead of its closest competitors. This encouraged the Sadrists to propose the "Majority Government" slogan, which was met with widespread rejection from other political forces that remained resilient until the Sadr Movement withdrew from the political process and later formed the government in October 2022.

- The paper concludes with several recommendations, mainly emphasizing the need to adopt an electoral system that achieves a minimum level of electoral justice that satisfies both voters and candidates. Proportional representation, when applied proportionally to the Iraqi context, is the closest to meeting the needs of voters and candidates, thus achieving an acceptable level of satisfaction. This can contribute to achieving the political stability that has experienced several setbacks since 2003.

Firstly: Electoral Systems and Political Stability

- The relationship between electoral systems and political stability in democratic countries is significant. A well-crafted electoral system can contribute to political stability when it aligns with the political, economic, and social conditions of a nation. However, some electoral systems are blamed for causing instability in other countries.
- An electoral system is the mechanism through which voters' voices are translated into legislative seats. Political stability represents the political system's capacity to successfully manage crises and balance political conflicts, ensuring the continuity of the political system and averting any potential challenges.
- The importance of the electoral system as a determinant of political stability is evident as it can enhance the political system's ability to deal with crises. Nevertheless, the wrong choice of an electoral system can introduce instability to the political landscape.

The selection of an appropriate electoral system is one of the most challenging tasks for any political system, with profound implications for the state's political present and future. The process of choosing an electoral system is considered a political task because of its ability to resolve conflicts and organize political party competition. Therefore, it differs from a mere question or consultation answered by experts or researchers.

There are more than 200 types of electoral systems worldwide, broadly classified into three main categories: majority systems, proportional representation systems, and mixed systems. The application of these systems varies from one country to another. The success of the electoral system depends on the prevailing political circumstances. The direct relationship between the electoral system and political stability is challenging to measure. However, a relative evaluation can be made by highlighting the features and drawbacks of electoral systems in connection with the nature of the political system.

Table I: Features and Drawbacks of Electoral Systems

Electoral System Type	Features	Drawbacks	Applied in
Majority Systems	- Parliamentary support for the government - Empowering the role of opposition - Limiting party chaos	- Exclusion of smaller parties - Reduced role for women and minorities	Over 100 countries
Proportional Representation Systems	- Multiparty politics - Increased voter participation - Better representation of women and minorities	- Weakened role of the opposition - Government instability - Formation of coalition governments	70 countries
Mixed Systems	- Multiparty politics - Enabling structured consensus - Minimizing wasted votes	- Complexity and difficulty in understanding - Reduced relative result opportunities	70 countries

Source: Adapted from Andrew Reynolds et al., "Electoral System Design: The International IDEA "Handbook

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- After 2003, Iraq underwent a radical political transformation, marking its shift toward democracy. However, this transition was accompanied by the collapse of state institutions, political divisions, varying levels of thinking, and the emergence of influential political powers competing for control. This necessitated the establishment of a new political system that would ensure party pluralism and political stability. The starting point was the elections, considered the way out of the instability Iraq faced at the beginning of its democratic transition.

- The first elections in Iraq took place on January 30, 2005, to elect the National Assembly. Extensive debates surrounded the nature of the electoral system until Iraq as a whole adopted a single nationwide electoral district within a proportional representation system. This move aimed to include all participants and ensure that their votes were not wasted, consequently gaining acceptance for election results among both winners and losers.

- The debate over Iraq's electoral system persisted through subsequent electoral experiences, as the political process participants reached a consensus that the electoral system played a critical role in achieving political stability in Iraq. The controversy over the type of electoral system that can achieve political stability in Iraq remains relevant to this day.

Secondly - The Iraqi Electoral System: Two Decades of Searching for Stability

- The importance of Iraq's electoral system wasn't highly regarded during the initial stages of its democratic transition, which saw its first experiment with elections for the National Assembly on January 30, 2005. However, gradually, it became apparent that the electoral system was not just a set of legal provisions to facilitate the transformation of voters' voices into seats, but a fundamental element in the political process. The political stability was closely linked to the nature of the electoral system and its outcomes.

- All attempts to reach a consensus on an electoral system in Iraq have failed. The proportional representation system initially displeased small parties and independent candidates who believed they didn't have a fair chance of winning. Conversely, the single non-transferable vote system used in the 2021 elections was also contentious, criticized by traditional political forces for causing political instability in Iraq in 2021 and 2022. Consequently, there was a demand for change and a search for a system that would better suit Iraq's circumstances.

- The political forces in control of parliamentary blocs reached an agreement to amend the election law, reintroducing the Sainte-Laguë mechanism for provincial council elections at the end of 2022, and potentially for the upcoming parliamentary elections (whose date has not been set yet). This amendment included increasing the size of electoral districts to match individual governorates, reverting to a previous practice used before the 2021 elections. However, this change was met with opposition from small parties, independents, and emerging political entities. They argued that the election law utilizing the Sainte-Laguë method deprived them of the opportunity they had in the non-transferable vote system of the previous elections.

- Despite the limited relative changes in the political landscape following the 2021 elections, the impact of these changes was still restricted. New parties were unable to form a unified bloc capable of achieving political equilibrium and pushing through the legislation they promised to pass or preventing certain amendments to laws, including electoral laws. Thus, Iraq continues to grapple with the question of the relationship between the electoral system and political stability, as detailed in the following table.

Table 2: Iraqi Electoral Systems and Political Stability

Elections	Electoral Law	Voter Turnout	Government Form	Level of Political Stability
January 30, 2005	Proportional Representation / Highest Remainder	58%	Consensual	Emerging Political Stability
December 15, 2005	Proportional Representation / Highest Remainder	76%	Consensual	Relative Political Stability
2010	Proportional Representation / Highest Remainder and Electoral Quota	62%	Consensual	Crisis Threatening Political Stability
2014	Proportional Representation / Sainte-Laguë	61%	Consensual	Relative Political Stability
2018	Proportional Representation / Sainte-Laguë	44%	Consensual	Political Stability Fluctuations
2021	Single Non-Transferable Vote	43%	Consensual	Improved Political Stability

Compiled based on the Independent High Electoral Commission's voter turnout data

- The table above reveals the impact of the electoral system on voter turnout in elections and, consequently, the formation of the government, which in turn affects the achieved level of political stability. It becomes evident that the electoral system significantly influenced voter turnout in the elections, and the subsequent formation of the government, thus affecting the level of political stability achieved.

- Analyzing these figures demonstrates that the electoral system does have an impact on voter turnout in elections, government formation, and, therefore, the degree of political stability achieved. The trend of voter participation has steadily declined from the parliamentary elections of late 2005 to its lowest levels in the most recent 2021 elections, indicating that the election mechanisms did not serve as an incentive for participation, despite the variety of electoral systems used over the years, from proportional representation with the highest remainder to the electoral quota system and finally the Sainte-Laguë proportional representation mechanism.

- The numbers also suggest that the single non-transferable vote system with multiple districts had a considerable impact on voter turnout in the most recent elections. This change in the electoral system contributed to political stability after months of tension, allowing for a coalition government to form. The broad coalition provided much-needed support and eased the legislative process, enhancing stability in Iraq.

- Therefore, the question of how the electoral system influences political stability remains a key concern in Iraqi politics, a concern that has been persistently examined and explored. It is clear that the political landscape in Iraq is intricately tied to the electoral system used, and achieving political stability continues to be a challenge in this evolving democracy.

  Despite their diversity and the transition between different electoral systems, this has not had a significant impact on the successive governments. These governments have been characterized by a consensus-based approach since 2005 and continue to do so.

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- This suggests that the electoral mechanisms have, until now, failed to contribute to achieving political stability, which begins with governmental stability. This does not mean that consensus-based governments are inappropriate for the Iraqi context. However, this paper aims to highlight that changing the electoral systems, without careful consideration, hasn't led to a marked difference, as long as governments remain consensus-based.

- The recurring presence of consensus-based governments doesn't mean they have achieved the same level of political stability.

- The current government is comparatively more stable than previous ones, while the government following the 2018 elections struggled to last for more than a year. This indicates that the pursuit of political stability should encompass multiple facets, including the electoral system.

- Examining recent electoral experiences, the political deadlock following the 2021 elections was a result of the multi-district law within the single non-transferable vote system imposed in response to the 2019 protests. This implies that the solution for Iraq is tied to the legal framework of elections.

- A survey conducted in 2022 by the National Democratic Institute revealed that only 16% of the surveyed Iraqis found that the multi-districts used in the 2021 elections brought voters closer to the candidates. This suggests a clear deficiency in one of the most important international criteria for fair elections - their legal framework.

  After two decades of political instability in Iraq, marked by various changes in the electoral system and a lack of stability in numerous domains, it is increasingly important to consider serious solutions that can achieve political stability. Among these, the electoral system should meet several key conditions:

  1. It should be in harmony with Iraq's current circumstances.

  2. It should account for foreseeable changes in Iraq on political, social, and economic levels.

  3. It should be designed according to the nation's unique cultural, traditional, and historical characteristics.

  4. The electoral system should be "transparently impenetrable," meaning it should be easily understood by all voters and candidates while remaining resistant to manipulation or exploitation.

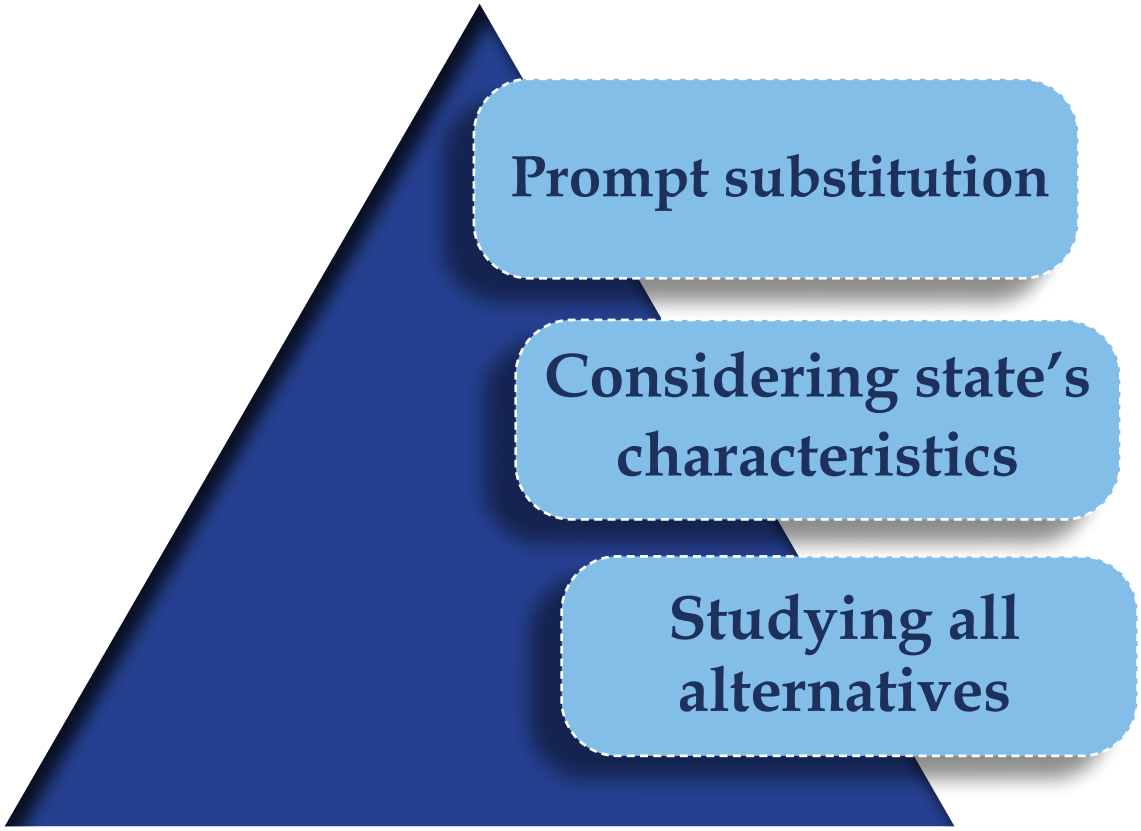
- 5. More importantly, it should have been applied or partially implemented in Iraq to benefit from the actual experience, as opposed to theoretical expectations.
  As the democratic experiment can no longer withstand further delays or trial and error that jeopardizes political stability, the proportional representation system appears to be the primary choice at the moment. This system takes into account the essential need for diversity and includes a significant political and parliamentary majority in support of it.

Thirdly - Changing the Rules of the Game: From Instability to Stability

- Robert Dahl, in his book "On Democracy," offers several important pieces of advice for countries struggling with political instability due to their electoral systems. One of these recommendations is to quickly replace the electoral system if there's a need for change. Another piece of advice suggests that the electoral system should be tailored to the nation's unique cultural, traditional, and historical characteristics. Additionally, the advice underscores that all alternatives should be carefully studied with the help of experts in the field of electoral systems.

  Applying these pieces of advice should be accompanied by flexibility and innovation without fearing experimentation. Moreover, it should aim to gain acceptance among voters and political actors, fostering cohesive political parties. Cohesion is a key element in achieving political stability.

Figure 1: Electoral System Recommendations for Achieving Stability



Prepared by the Researcher

- Political stability cannot be achieved without a public that trusts the legitimacy of the electoral system's outputs. Additionally, political parties should grant themselves and others the opportunity to participate and gain legislative representation, as observed in other countries that achieved political stability after changing their electoral systems, such as Germany's shift from the single non-transferable vote system to the mixed system and South Africa's move away from a majority system towards proportional representation.

- To ensure political reconciliation among Iraqi forces and gain a minimum level of popular satisfaction with the electoral system, Iraq needs a realistic experience that guarantees representation for large, medium, and small forces in the legislative and local councils.

- After reviewing international experiences and what has been implemented in Iraq, the shift from instability to stability requires changing the rules of the political game while retaining proportional representation as the basis for any electoral system. It aims to ensure that political forces secure an appropriate share of the votes, which allows the elected representatives to make the public feel represented through the candidates they voted for.

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- **Moreover, objections from some parties to the Sainte-Laguë method cannot justify scrapping proportional representation altogether.**

- As a result, moving towards the globally accepted mechanism of applying the Sainte-Laguë proportional representation system is the most suitable option for Iraq in the near future, especially concerning parliamentary elections and beyond, given that the legal path for governorate council elections has already been determined.

- The international method has proven successful in promoting coalition democracies based on the formation of governments by a mix of winning parties. The Iraqi experience has demonstrated the inability to achieve consensus on critical issues and the use of mutual vetoes, leading to frequent political deadlocks.

Therefore, proportional representation can foster political stability in the diverse Iraqi society at this stage. It provides a suitable alternative that allows competing forces to form pre-election alliances to secure seats and also, post-election, to work towards establishing a parliament-supported government.

- **In conclusion, the paper arrived at several conclusions and recommendations regarding the relationship between electoral systems and political stability in Iraq.**

Conclusions

1. The lack of stability due to a non-inclusive electoral system has led to political instability in Iraq.

2. There is a real need for a widely acceptable electoral law by candidates and voters as this system, if realized, will lead to smoother democratic processes.

3. Iraq's electoral systems should be designed by electoral experts rather than political parties, especially dominant ones.

4. The applied electoral systems in Iraq in recent years have generated incongruent political alliances, with conflicts being rare during and after elections.

Recommendations

1. Adopt the Sainte-Laguë proportional representation system in the upcoming parliamentary elections, as it has been less problematic compared to other electoral systems applied in Iraq. It should be based on an appropriate mechanism, 1.4, given the current situation.

2. Ensure that the electoral system is proportionate to the Iraqi situation, both in terms of practical applicability and public satisfaction.

3. Include in the electoral law, which an agreement is reached on, a provision that mandates its application for more than one electoral cycle to ensure its impact on political stability.

4. Leverage the expertise of young, capable individuals to conduct serious awareness campaigns that educate voters and encourage them to cast informed votes.

5. Work to increase voter turnout by urging people to go to the polling stations on election day and not succumb to calls for election boycotts.

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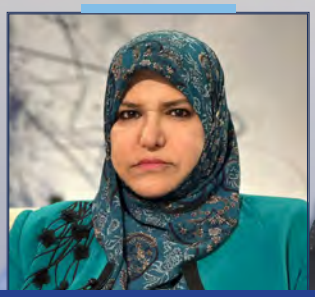
Women's Proportional Representation (Legislative Quotas) in Iraq

Opportunities and Challenges



Dr. Bushra Al-Zwaini

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Executive Summary

- Proportional representation, specifically legislative quotas, holds a significant place in Iraq's political landscape since 2003, particularly concerning women's political rights. The notion of proportional representation gained substantial attention from civil activists and politically engaged individuals. This attention culminated in the issuance of Order No. 96 for the year 2004 by the Interim Coalition Authority.

- This order mandated that each electoral list must include at least one woman within the first three candidates and, likewise, at least two women within the first six candidates, and so forth, until the end of the list. This order served as a temporary constitution until the permanent Constitution of Iraq in 2005 was established. According to Article 49(IV) of the Iraqi Constitution, a legislative quota of no less than 25% of the total members of the Council of Representatives is required.

- This paper assesses the legislative performance of Iraqi women, and the findings reveal that it did not meet expectations, particularly in laws relating to Iraqi women.

- However, women's participation in general legislations was proportionate to their presence in the Iraqi Council of Representatives. In terms of oversight performance, women's performance was deemed good, if not better than their male counterparts when considering their proportional representation within the Council. It is evident that women's roles are more effective when mechanisms promoting proportional representation (quotas) are in place, as witnessed in the fifth term. It is imperative that equitable laws are legislated to benefit Iraqi women.

- The paper aims to provide recommendations that could enhance the role of female parliamentarians. Perhaps the most crucial recommendation is to legislate laws that empower the effectiveness of Iraqi women within the Iraqi Council of Representatives or draw on the experiences of other nations to enhance the opportunities for Iraqi women's active participation within the Council of Representatives. This, in turn, will reflect positively on legislative performance and the oversight function of the legislative authority in passing laws that are not only in the interest of the Iraqi public but also prioritize the interests of Iraqi women.

  "The Reality of Women's Proportional Representation (Legislative Quotas) in the Rounds of the Council of Representatives in Iraq (2005-2023)"

- Analysis and Overview: Women's political participation in Iraq through the legislative quota system, also known as legislative quotas, is one of the most significant outcomes of the democratic process that began after 2003.

- It was first introduced in the Order of Administration for the State (Order No. 96) issued by the Interim Coalition Authority in 2004, and later enshrined in the permanent Iraqi Constitution of 2005. The constitutional provision mandates that no less than 25% of the total members of the Iraqi Council of Representatives must be women.

- Before delving into the impact of legislative quotas in the Iraqi Constitution, it is essential to define what legislative quotas entail. Legislative quotas involve allocating a specific percentage or number of seats in elected bodies, such as parliamentary and municipal councils, to ensure women's representation in legislative decision-making.

- Quotas are considered a positive discrimination mechanism used to enhance women's participation in public life, particularly in countries and societies facing challenges in promoting women's involvement.

- It's worth noting that women's legislative quotas, which are the focus of our study, emerged as a human rights demand. They draw their strength and legitimacy from the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995, which recognized the necessity of adopting quotas as a positive means to activate women's participation in public life.

- Quotas were considered a mechanism to address the low participation of women in political life, their reluctance to participate in decision-making roles, and to counteract exclusion or underrepresentation.

- Hence, legislative quotas are an essential component of political empowerment, specifically aimed at women's representation in the political arena, encompassing their involvement in elections, candidacy for leadership positions, important roles, and affiliations with political parties or civil society organizations.

- All the aforementioned aspects of political empowerment, legislative quotas, and international obligations present opportunities for women to be present in the legislative field, commensurate with the responsibilities entrusted to them after 2003. Women's presence in parliamentary representation began with the establishment of the National Assembly, the first legislative mechanism elected by the people based on the Order of Administration.

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This presence has continued up to the current fifth electoral term, as shown in the table below:

Table 1: Actual Women Representation in Electoral Rounds (2005-2023)

Round Name	Total Number of Seats	Women's Seats	Women won by popular vote	Percentage of Women to the Total Number of Representatives
The National Assembly (2004-2005)	275	85	Not Applicable	30%
First Electoral Round (2005-2010)	275	73	Not Applicable	26.5%
Second Electoral Round (2010-2014)	325	82	19	25.2%
Third Electoral Round (2014-2018)	328	82	22	25.2%
Fourth Electoral Round (2018-2021)	329	83	18	25.2%
Fifth Electoral Round (2021-2024)	329	95	57	29%

Source: The table was created by the researcher based on the data from Bushra Hussein Saleh's study titled "The Proportional Representation of Women (Quotas) in the Iraqi Council of Representatives: Between Empowerment and Political Marginalization. and from an interview with Ms. Ahlam Al-Jabri, a member of the Higher Electoral Commission, on August 24, 2023.

The representation of women has exceeded 25% in some electoral Rounds due to various factors:

1.The National Assembly and the First Electoral Round: In these early Rounds, the use of a closed list electoral system meant that voters did not have the right to form or prioritize the electoral list. The acceptance of the list and the voting for it were determined by the party's order. As the constitution mandated a minimum of a quarter of the council's members to be women, women were placed third on the list after every two men. Therefore, the representation of women, as indicated in Table 1, did not reflect an optimal use of the constitutional provision or the political will of the time.

2. The Second, Third, and Fourth Electoral Rounds: These Rounds did not surpass a 25% representation for women due to the mechanisms of implementing the election law and the open list system, considering the highest competitive votes within the quota system.

3. The Fifth Electoral Round: The electoral system contributed to an increase in the number of women due to the division of Iraq into 83 electoral constituencies, a result of Law No. 9 of 2020. This division increased the chances for women to win parliamentary seats by adopting the highest vote principle. Political parties capitalized on this by nominating influential women in constituencies where they held significant influence. For the first time, women secured the top positions in their electoral constituencies in 13 Iraqi provinces, and eight women received more than 20,000 votes each.

Women were also present in most parliamentary committees during the electoral Rounds, as indicated in the table below:

Table 2: Distribution of Women in Parliamentary Committees from 2005 to 2023

Committee Name	Round (1)		Round (2)		Round (3)		Round (4)		Round (5)	
	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
1. Foreign Relations	15	3	16	6	20	4	14	6	13	3
2. Security and Defense	15	0	17	0	18	0	23	1	23	1
3. Legal Affairs	13	1	16	2	18	4	15	4	19	2
4. Oil and Energy	9	0	16	4	17	2	20	4	18	5
5. Finance	7	3	16	2	18	4	19	4	20	3
6. Integrity	12	6	17	1	12	1	21	3	20	6
7. Economy and Investment	12	4	16	3	17	4	19	5	11	4
8. Education	15	9	15	8	15	10	9	8	8	6
9. Health and Environment	12	5	16	5	18	7	11	6	9	9
10. Services and Reconstruction	11	6	16	9	17	9	12	9	17	7
11. Regions and Governorates	12	4	11	2	10	3	9	1	9	1
12. Human Rights	12	5	15	7	11	6	4	3	4	3
13. Culture and Media	7	1	7	2	8	3	4	1	8	3
14. Awqaf and Religious Affairs	10	3	10	1	8	1	7	4	21	4
15. Displaced and Displaced Persons	7	5	9	5	10	3	Merged		12	4
16. Agriculture, Water, and Marshes	9	0	13	3	14	2	13	1	8	3
17. National Reconciliation	7	0	8	0	6	0	Merged		Canceled	
18. Martyrs	8	4	8	3	10	6	7	1	10	6
19. Youth and Sports	7	1	10	1	5	1	3	1	14	3
20. Women, Family, and Childhood	7	7	6	6	6	6	13	1	0	24
21. Labor and Civil Society Organizations	7	4	7	3	7	3	8	1	6	11
22. Tribes	Merged		Merged		7	0	7	0	5	0
23. Member Affairs	3	0	9	2	2	0	Merged		Canceled	
24. Higher Education	Merged		Merged		11	5	16	4	6	4
25. Tourism and Antiquities	Merged		Merged		7	1	7	2	Merged	
26. Labor and Social Affairs	Merged		Merged		8	1	5	0	7	3
27. Complaints	9	3	Canceled		Canceled		Canceled		Canceled	
28. Economy, Industry, and Commerce	Canceled		Canceled		Canceled		Merged		12	5
29. Electricity and Energy	Canceled		Canceled		Canceled		Canceled		13	6
30. Strategic Planning and Program Review	6	6	3		10		4		10	
31. Transport and Communications	Canceled		Canceled		Canceled		6	4	10	3

Source: The table was created by the researcher based on data from the official website of the Iraqi Council of Representatives, https://iq.parliament.iq.

In summary, the tables demonstrate the following:

he challenges faced by women in Iraq in forming effective parliamentary blocs and political parties within the Council of Representatives are multifaceted. Some of the key reasons for these challenges include:

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Regarding the Formation of Parliamentary Blocs:

1. Influence of Party Leaders: Women parliamentarians often face strong control from the leaders of political parties and blocs. These leaders may exert significant influence over the female members, often aligning them with the political views and priorities of the party rather than encouraging independent parliamentary blocs. This situation limits the formation of effective women's parliamentary blocs.

2. Absence of Women-Led Political Blocs: In Iraq, there is a scarcity of political blocs led by women that are built on structured foundations. The political landscape is largely dominated by established parties, and there has been limited success in creating independent women-led political blocs.

3.Lack of Political Support: Women's parliamentary blocs may face limited political support from the broader political establishment. This can hinder their ability to function as effective, influential groups within the Council of Representatives.

Regarding the Formation of Women-Led Political Parties:

1. Financial Constraints: Establishing a political party requires substantial financial resources for various activities, such as organizing events, campaigns, and maintaining party infrastructure. Many women do not have access to the financial means necessary to create and sustain a political party.

2. Need for Political Freedom: Political parties operate differently from other political activities. They require a high degree of independence, which may not align with the societal norms or expectations for women's political participation.

3. Female Aversion to Party Membership: Many women in Iraq are not inclined to join political parties due to various factors, including perceived gender bias within political parties and a general reluctance to participate in formal political structures. This can further discourage women from supporting or creating women-led political parties.

The multifaceted nature of these challenges highlights the difficulties women face in Iraq in forming effective parliamentary blocs and political parties that can advocate for their interests. Overcoming these barriers requires addressing social, economic, and political factors that limit women's participation in the political sphere. It also involves advocating for changes within existing political parties and creating an environment that encourages women to lead and participate actively in politics.

Analyzing the legislative and oversight performance of women in the Iraqi Council of Representatives requires consideration of both general legislative functions and specific women-related legislative actions.

General Legislative Function:

Your table (Table 5) presents an overview of national legislation during various election cycles from 2004 to 2023. The data indicates that women's participation in legislating general laws in Iraq is limited.

Here are some key observations:
• Women have had a role in legislating general laws, contributing to only 1% of the total laws passed during this period.

• The period of the first election cycle saw the formation of a committee to draft a permanent constitution for the country, in which 9 out of the 60 members were women.
• Challenges included the prioritization of drafting the constitution over women's issues, and the politicization and marginalization of women-related legislation.

Legislation on Women's Issues:

Despite the challenges faced, there have been specific pieces of legislation aimed at addressing women's issues:

• Law Number 2 of 2013: This law addresses the ban on violent games.

• Law Number 33 of 2011: This law abolishes Iraq's reservations on Article 9 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

• Social Protection Authority Law Number 11 of 2014: This law establishes an entity aimed at providing social protection, which can have a significant impact on vulnerable women.

• Law Number 38 of 2013: This law concerns the care of individuals with disabilities and special needs.

• Law Number 48 of 2013: This law aligns Iraq with the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction.

While women have been involved in these legislative efforts, the percentage of women in Iraq's legislative process remains low. The challenges faced include political opposition, lack of political will, and the sensitivity surrounding women's issues in Iraqi society. Women-related laws have often been considered less urgent or politically charged compared to other legislative priorities.

The fifth election cycle brought an increase in women's representation to more than 25%, which is promising for women's legislative influence. However, as you noted, challenges persist when it comes to legislating laws specifically related to women. Overcoming these challenges requires not only increasing women's representation but also addressing societal and political attitudes towards women's issues and fostering a more inclusive and supportive legislative environment.

Second Subsection: Parliamentary Oversight

Parliamentary oversight, as you mentioned, is a critical aspect of political governance that allows parliamentarians to monitor the activities of the executive branch and hold them accountable through various procedures. In the Iraqi constitution, multiple forms of oversight are specified, including debate, questioning, hosting, inquiry, and withdrawal of confidence. Here, the role of women in parliamentary oversight is outlined based on data provided in Table 6.

Table 6: Women's Role in Parliamentary Oversight (2005-2023)

• General Debate: In the first legislative term, there were 18 male participants in general debates, while gender-specific data was not specified. In the second legislative term, there were 48 male participants and 17 female participants in these debates. In the third term, there were 14 male participants, 9 female participants, and data was unavailable for the rest.

• Questioning: No women were involved in questioning during the first legislative term, but in the second term, 8 women participated. In the third term, 18 women participated. Data was unavailable for the fourth term.

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• Hosting: There were no available data about women's involvement in hosting during the first legislative term. In the second term, 2 women participated, and in the third term, 3 women participated. Data was unavailable for the fourth term.

• Inquiry: During the first legislative term, 4 men and 1 woman were involved in inquiries. In the second term, 2 men and 1 woman were involved. In the third term, there were 3 men and 4 women participating. No data was available for the fourth term.

This data illustrates that women have increasingly participated in parliamentary oversight activities over the years, particularly in questioning and inquiries. This increased participation is a positive development in Iraq's parliamentary system, indicating growing confidence and engagement among female parliamentarians.

Thirdly: Mechanisms to Enhance Women's Political Participation in Elections

Historically, there have been limited mechanisms to promote the presence of women as members of parliament in Iraq. However, a significant achievement, as you mentioned, is the change brought about by the Second Amendment to the Replacement of Council of Representatives Members Law (Law No. 15 of 2023).

This law stipulates that if a vacant seat is designated for a woman, it must be filled by another woman from the same electoral district, regardless of the minimum quota for women's representation. This is a groundbreaking development that promotes women's presence in the Iraqi Council of Representatives.

To continue enhancing women's political participation in the future, it is crucial to consider the following measures:

1. Reforming Election Laws: Amend electoral laws to include mechanisms that promote gender equality, such as ensuring an equitable distribution of seats between male and female candidates and encouraging the inclusion of more independent female candidates.

2. Women's Leadership in Parliamentary Committees: Encourage women's active participation in parliamentary committees and give priority to women's contributions during Rounds, discussions, and voting. This helps ensure that women's voices are heard and that their issues are addressed effectively.

3. Political Support: Provide political support for women's participation in parliamentary elections, including creating an enabling environment for female candidates, training, and mentoring programs, and highlighting the importance of gender diversity in political leadership.

4. International Best Practices: Learn from international best practices in promoting women's participation in politics. Several countries have implemented successful strategies to increase the representation of women in parliaments. Iraq can adapt and implement these strategies as needed.

Overall, Iraq has made some progress in enhancing women's political participation, and the recent legislative amendment is a significant step in the right direction. However, continued efforts are essential to further promote gender equality in politics and ensure that women's voices are heard in the political decision-making process.

Policy papers

A. Rwanda: Rwanda has made significant strides in empowering women in the aftermath of the civil war. Given that women constituted 7% of the population in the post-war period, the women's movement played a vital role in keeping their families alive, supporting orphans, widows, and rebuilding the nation. Women in Rwanda have actively participated in various aspects of life, including serving as directors, judges, and key witnesses in truth and reconciliation committees.

The country also repealed discriminatory laws against women, such as those preventing women from inheriting land. Rwanda has adopted a quota system, as enshrined in the 2003 constitution, which reserves 30% of decision-making positions for women. This constitutional change paved the way for legislation addressing domestic violence, child abuse, and voluntary party quotas for female candidates.

Today, women in Rwanda hold a remarkable 61.3% of seats in the parliament, making it the highest representation of women in the world. They also occupy 50% of cabinet positions and 44% of local council seats, including half of the judges in the Supreme Court.

B. Tunisia: Tunisian women have achieved remarkable progress since 2011, and their accomplishments have outpaced many other countries in the Arab world. Political will was manifested through the 2014 constitution, which enshrined gender equality under Article 21, stating that all citizens are equal before the law without discrimination.
Article 34 guarantees women's representation in elected bodies, while Article 46 is dedicated to women's rights, obligating the state to protect their acquired rights, support and enhance their position, and ensure equal access to responsibilities in all fields, aiming to establish gender equality and eradicate violence against women.
This constitutional framework allowed Tunisia to implement measures such as vertical and horizontal gender parity in electoral lists, the elimination of discrimination in passport laws, and the removal of reservations on the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

By adopting these rights, Tunisia has allowed women to excel in various fields and surpass their counterparts in the Arab world, particularly in terms of achievements. Tunisia has made significant progress in two essential areas: education and political participation through civil society organizations.

Drawing from the models of Rwanda and Tunisia, Iraq, which has been at the forefront of women's rights, can further enhance women's political participation by strengthening political support, legislation, and reforming discriminatory laws that hinder women's participation. Measures such as adjusting election laws, supporting female candidates, and amending laws related to political parties, independent electoral commissions, and human rights commissions can further promote gender equality. Iraq has the opportunity to build on its past achievements and ensure a more integrated and just society by providing clear and transparent regulations for women's representation in political roles.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the post-2003 democratic experience in Iraq has contributed to women's political participation, with the most significant being the implementation of the quota system (the kuta) in the Iraqi parliament. From this participation, several key findings and recommendations can be derived:

Findings:

1. Legal and constitutional texts implemented after 2003 had a significant impact on increasing women's participation in the legislative authority.

2. Women actively participated in various parliamentary committees, with the second parliamentary term standing out as one of the most legislatively productive terms, especially for women's issues, while the third parliamentary term excelled in providing effective oversight.

3. Political party leaders played a crucial role in deciding the membership of these committees, impacting the distribution of women in sovereign parliamentary committees.

4. Proposals related to women's issues and their rights often became subject to political manipulation and pressure by political blocs. The limited political experience and political savvy of women contributed to the rarity of equitable laws specifically addressing women's rights.

Recommendations

1. Enact laws to protect the gains achieved by women before or after 2003, with exceptions only for what contradicts the 2005 constitution.

2. Enact electoral laws and implementing regulations that are women-friendly and supportive of positive discrimination.

3. Learn from the experiences of other nations to enhance opportunities for women's participation in proportional representation (the kuta) within the Iraqi Parliament.

4. Remove the Parliamentary Women's Committee from party quotas and appoint female leaders with expertise in women's issues.

5. Institutionalize parliamentary women's blocs by developing internal systems and drafting a four-year plan for their objectives.

6. Mandate elected female representatives to participate in training programs both before and after their election, supported by the Parliamentary Development Institute in the Iraqi Parliament.

7. Mandate performance evaluation for all members of the Iraqi Parliament semi-annually as indicators for parliamentary development.

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• Interview with Ms. Ayat Mazhar, a prominent figure attempting to establish a political party, August 22, 2023.

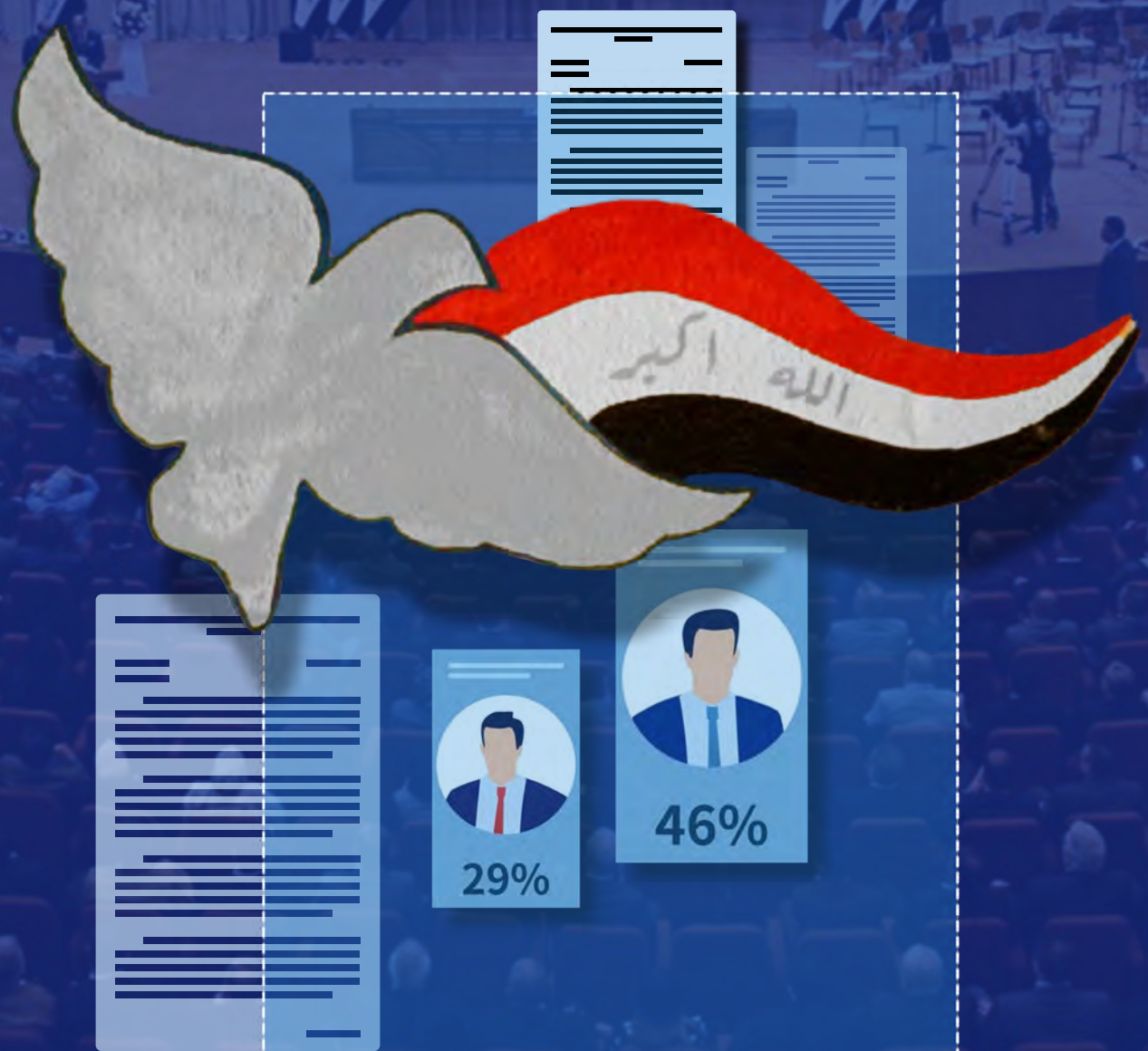
• Interview with Ms. Ahlam Al-Jaberi, Member of the Independent High Electoral Commission, August 24, 2023.

• Interview with Ms. Dina Al-Shamri, Chair of the Women, Family, and Child Committee, Fifth Term, August 19, 2023.

• Interview with Ms. Safiya Al-Sahil, Head of the Parliamentary Women's Bloc, First and Second Terms, August 26, 2023.

• Interview with Ms. Mahdia Al-Lami, Member of the Women, Family, and Child Committee, Fifth Term, during the visit to the Iraqi Parliament, August 21, 2023.

Articles



Policy Article

Kurdistan Elections Held Hostage by Minority Seat Row

- Sarkawt Shamsulddin
- Former Member of Iraqi Parliament- Fourth Round

Elections for the Kurdistan Regional Parliament, set for February 2024, are embroiled in a dispute threatening to delay the vote indefinitely. What are the contentious issue? How many seats should be allocated to ethnic and religious minority groups?

Since the first Kurdish parliamentary elections in 1992, some seats have been set aside for minorities like Assyrian Christians, Armenians, and Turkmen. This quota began at just four seats but has steadily grown. In the last election in 2018, 11 seats out of 111 total were reserved for minorities. That's over 10 percent of seats going to groups that make up a fraction of the population. Ironically no seats allocated to Yazidis, and Kakaies, two other religious minority groups.

Although, actual voters' size of Christians in Kurdistan region estimated to be around 35,000 votes, but in the last elections only 6000 votes were casted for them that led to 6 seats for them.

On the surface, these minority quotas seem a benevolent attempt at inclusion. But a closer look reveals a system rife with exploitation. The minority seats have become a lynchpin in the ruling Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) strategy to dominate government. By courting minority politicians, the KDP has constructed a dependable pro-KDP voting bloc. These 11 seats, combined with the KDP's own 45 seats, are enough to control parliament and sideline other parties like the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and opposition groups.

Minority representatives have reaped rewards for allying with the KDP. Some allegedly get elected with votes from KDP security forces rather than actual minority support. And they're granted access to senior posts and patronage resources.

The Turkmen seats illustrate this farce. Most Turkmen don't even consider themselves minorities requiring quota representation, which they lack in Iraq's national parliament. Yet the KDP defends these seats that empower its Turkmen cronies.

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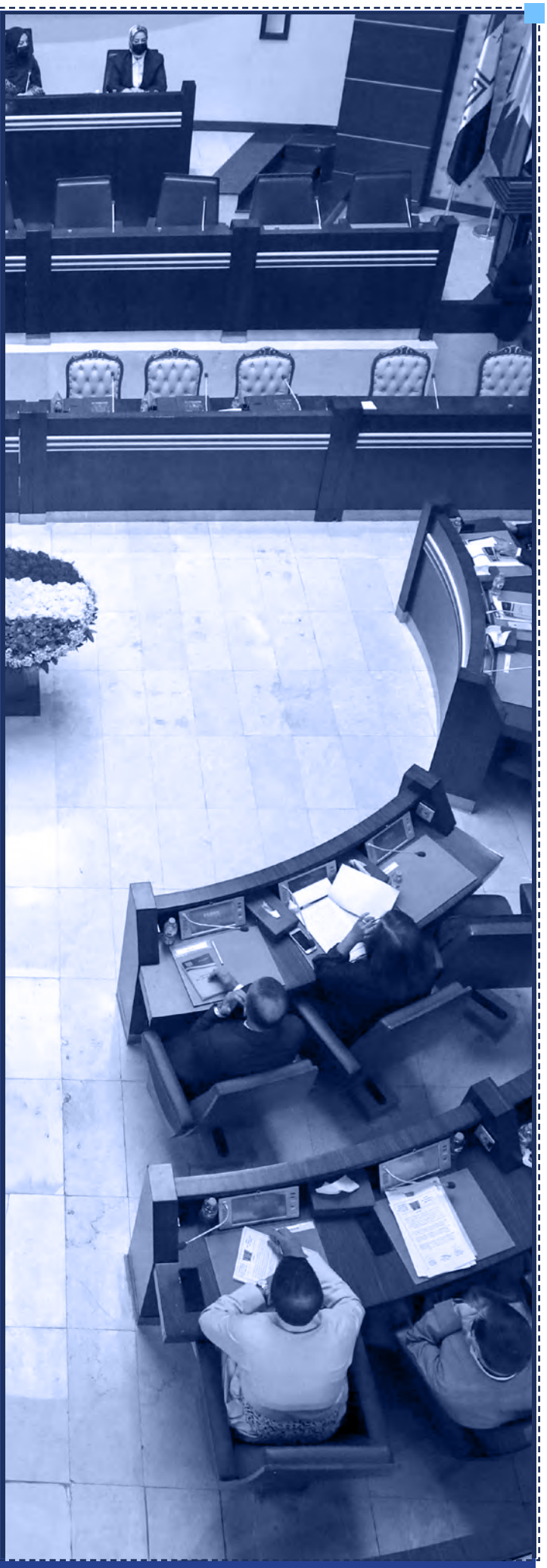
Other parties smell a rat. In 2009 and 2013, the opposition Gorran party has decried the swelling minority quotas that prop up KDP dominance. Now, even the PUK, formerly an equal to the KDP, wants the game exposed. The PUK demands minority seats be evenly split between KDP and PUK strongholds. Otherwise, it says, scrap the Turkmen quota and shrink other seats.

The KDP rejects any changes that would threaten its control. Thanks to the minority bloc, it can unilaterally form governments and steamroll legislation. But the PUK is deadly serious, petitioning federal courts to cancel Turkmen seats and reduce minorities' share to 3 percent in Iraq's parliament. The KDP threatens to flout any court ruling against it.

And so, the feuding has brought Kurdistan to an impasse. The last parliament's term expired, leaving the regional government unaccountable. Still, the KDP obstructs new elections rather than compromise on its rigged minority seats advantage.

This cynical exploitation of diversity quotas demeans Kurdistan's democratic aspirations. Seats are meant to empower minorities instead of disenfranchising other voters. The KDP's obstinance further erodes public trust in government.

Kurdish leaders must rise above partisanship and self-interest. Compromise can break the stalemate, restore parliament, and re-enfranchise voters. The KDP should accept modest reforms like redistributing some minority seats between Erbil and Sulaymaniyah. Religious and ethnic inclusion shouldn't be an election spoiler. It's time to return sovereignty to Kurdistan's people.



Policy Article

The Dilemma of Emerging Movements in the Electoral Race

The Fragile Party Within Electoral Alliances

- Omar Al-Rifa'i
- Active in Emerging Iraqi Parties

Iraq leads democratic countries in terms of registered entities, most of which are rarely effective due to political or financial constraints. Despite significant challenges and real obstacles, various emerging movements intend to participate in the upcoming provincial council elections scheduled for December 18 of this year.

However, they face numerous challenges, making them the weakest link in the numbers game amid the "elephant battle" represented by traditional powers. These challenges are exacerbated by the fact that emerging movements have been overshadowed by newer factions, entering the race with even fewer resources compared to the original emerging movements.

Winning Powers: Gaining Votes but Losing Seats To discuss emerging entities, it is crucial to understand their historical context. "Istidhad Movement" garnered significant popular and financial support. Some saw it as a vehicle for change in what was referred to as the "electoral revolution," while others perceived it as a form of "retribution" against traditional parties. In the 2021 elections, Istidhad Movement secured 16 parliamentary seats but couldn't maintain its presence due to a controversial decision. The movement's parliamentary bloc voted in favor of Muhammad al-Halbousi, the Speaker of the Iraqi Parliament, leading to the withdrawal of 17 members, including founders. The second wave witnessed internal discord within the parliamentary bloc, with five MPs resigning. The resigning members approached the "Independents Bloc" led by Deputy Speaker of Parliament, Mohsen al-Mandalawi, leading to the formation of the "Iraqi Watad Alliance."

On the other hand, "Ishraqa Kanoon" managed to maintain its cohesion, preserving its identity despite defections.

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The resilience of the "Tayyar al-Furatayn" can be attributed to the decision of former Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, who suspended his participation in the next local elections. He also froze the participation of his deputy, Bashar al-Saadi, amid allegations of electoral competition. Furthermore, the influence of his private office members and advisers within the "Tayyar al-Furatayn" waned.

It's worth noting that the majority of other emerging entities experienced losses in the 2021 elections, leading to internal party conflicts. "Tmoh Movement" split from "Tahrir Movement" after disputes over electoral defeat and financial support. "Arak Movement" separated from "Awakening National Movement." Other divisions occurred within the "Saviors Party" led by Mohammed Taufiq Allawi, resulting in the resignation of 180 party members just five months after its founding.

Boycott Movements: Major Emerging Entities Boycott and Splinter The "Homeland Alliance" still holds a prominent position among emerging movements. This is despite the decision to boycott the elections, based on an inaccurate reading that ignores the government's previous directives. The party opted to boycott in May 2021, a decision shared by the "Phase Movement," which has close ties to former Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi. The latter withdrew from participation in April 2021.

Both of these entities enjoyed strong popular support, financial resources, and the patronage of the former Prime Minister. Despite these advantages, the "Phase Movement" experienced internal divisions due to various reasons, causing some of its leaders to join the "Democratic Social Awakening Movement." After a period of relative quiet, this organization resumed its political activities.

In contrast, the "Homeland Alliance" faced a wave of mass resignations. The first took place in April 2022 when over 235 members resigned. The second wave, in April 2023, saw prominent leaders and over 420 members of its organizations resign. This resulted in the formation of four political entities, two at the local level – "Ansaf Movement" in Basra and "Idrak Movement" in Najaf – and two at the national level – "Democratic Civilizational Movement" and "National Guide Party" with their presence extending across multiple Iraqi governorates.

National and Local Alliances

The political schisms within emerging political entities have significantly impacted the formation of alliances as they stand today. These divisions have led to a sense of alienation between several entities and their splintered offshoots, preventing them from forming a unified front where the main entity and its breakaway faction coexist side by side. Most electoral alliances that include emerging movements only rally around the slogan of "secularism" as their common theme. Looking at the alliance landscape, it's clear that the allies aim to challenge traditional powers.

Sometimes, they assume the role of opposition, as seen in the "Qaim Civil Coalition," co-headed by independent MP Sajjad Salem and Ali Al-Rifai, Secretary-General of the "Democratic Social Awakening Movement," along with other parties like the "Watan Bloc," the "Iraqi Communist Party," the "Nasal Ahz Movement," and the "Homeland Alliance," with some other movements within the alliance. Alternatively, the political challenge may be through a national and non-sectarian political coalition that also raises the banner of "secularism" and separates itself from traditional parties and armed forces.

An example of this is the "Iraqi Foundational Coalition," led by Deputy Speaker of Parliament Mohsen Al-Mandalawi and the Secretary-General of the "Iraqi Watad Alliance." Within this coalition, there are emerging powers, including "Watqun Party," "National Majority Alliance," and the "Iraqi Promise Movement," which departed from the "Forces of Democratic Change" after the latter.

Additionally, some entities have not officially joined the coalition, such as the "Liberal Amargi Party," among others, as they have not completed the legal registration process with the electoral commission.

It's worth mentioning that some emerging movements have aligned with traditional coalitions. "Arak Movement," for example, joined the "National State Powers" led by Sayyid Ammar Al-Hakim. "Tmoh Movement" has joined the "Abshir Ya Iraq Coalition" led by Sheikh Hamam Hamoudi, albeit informally. Separately, "Taqadum Movement" did not enter "Qaim Civil Coalition" in certain Iraqi governorates. In Muthanna, the "Democratic Civil Coalition" consisting of the "Democratic Social Awakening Movement," "Iraqi Communist Party," and "Homeland Alliance" formed a coalition with independent MP Basem Khushan, headed by Khushan himself, who has ambiguous political affiliations aligned with the "Coordination Framework."

"Iraqi Foundational Coalition" did not field its candidates in Najaf, allowing "Watqun Party" to take a significant role in the province due to its strength there and in a political agreement with some of its allies.

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It is expected that "Ishraqa Kanoon" will participate independently in the upcoming elections. Additionally, some insiders claim that "Istidhad" has fielded some of its candidates under the label of "independent candidates" in close alliances with the party, without explicitly using its name in the elections, following its call to abolish the provincial councils during its 2021 election campaign.

Decrease in Voter Registration and Delayed Conflicts

These divisions have been a disappointment for supporters of emerging entities and their supporters. They have led these entities to follow in the footsteps of some traditional parties, failing to present a clear political program or realistic discourse.

Moreover, they have struggled to establish a solid party system and a real project. Observers have described this phenomenon as a "political adolescence" characterized by narcissism and a focus on the self. All of this has contributed to the waning influence of these entities in the Iraqi political landscape, causing them to lose their protest appeal.

Some activists and Twitter users had hoped for an increase in the number of registered voters, but the entry of new voters (born in 2004-2005) onto the voter register and the update of some biometric ID cards to over 871,000 voters does not necessarily mean higher participation rates. There are indications that suggest a decline in participation to half of the number of participants in the 2021 elections.

The first indicator is the heavy turnout for ID card updates in provinces like Nineveh, Baghdad, Kirkuk, and Salah al-Din, but there was a lack of enthusiasm in provinces like Wasit, Muthanna, Diwaniya, and Thi Qar in terms of updated cards.

This discrepancy has been attributed by the electoral commission's media team to the high number of cardholders in the latter provinces.

The second indicator is the absence of votes from the autonomous region of Kurdistan, comprising Arbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Duhok, which account for about 1.5 million voters. Additionally, most votes from the Shiite heartland were absent, with the Sadr movement receiving over 885,000 votes in the previous elections.

The third indicator is that most candidates are relatively unknown figures who do not enjoy popularity. These elections are considered "straw elections" compared to the parliamentary elections, which receive much higher attention from voters.

In contrast, there are speculations about postponing the elections to the next spring for legal reasons, including the acceptance of appeals against the Sainte-Laguë electoral law. This might lead some MPs to seek modifications beyond the four contested clauses.The tension will once again return to the parliament, and it's important to note that the mandate of the electoral commission expires on January 13, 2024, complicating the situation if elections are postponed. This raises questions about whether to renew the commission's mandate or to find a replacement, both of which involve time-consuming processes that disrupt the established timelines.

In my estimation, postponing the elections will open the door to conflicts within alliances and may cause the political contract between allies, expected to end after the elections, to unravel due to conflicting party interests after submitting candidate lists.

The majority of candidates are imported by emerging entities to gain votes, and they are not members of these entities. Additionally, some factions may try to dominate at the expense of their allies in the same coalition. These emerging entities are purely electoral alliances.

The Sainte-Laguë voting law is expected to serve civil and emerging alliances, given their geographically dispersed constituencies and their lack of established databases that define their influence.

However, there have been concerns that these emerging parties are competing with each other, making accusations within the same alliance, and working separately from the alliance's party machines.

Furthermore, they are relying on traditional mobilization methods rather than organizational ones, indicating a lack of political foresight and electoral experience.

These emerging parties will pay the price of this competition, whether they win or lose.

The dominant party within the alliance will seize the victory, sidelining the others, or blame others for their defeat, leaving them with a loss that affects all alliance members.

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Policy Article

Provincial Councils: Constitutional Obligations and Multiple Roles

Ali Mubarak
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Provincial councils in Iraq are a matter of both constitutional necessity and practical functionality. Despite occasional calls for their abolition, these councils serve several critical roles that should not be overlooked.

From a legal perspective, provincial councils are constitutionally mandated. The 2005 Iraqi Constitution established the principle of administrative decentralization and provided for provincial councils to represent the local population, oversee the work of governors and local government entities, and make local legislation.

The Constitution explicitly states that provincial councils must be elected, emphasizing the requirement for their formation through elections. The Federal Supreme Court has upheld this principle, emphasizing that elections must occur within specific timeframes, and that the Council of Representatives (Parliament) cannot extend these terms beyond the stipulated four years.

In practice, the establishment of provincial councils is essential, particularly given the priorities outlined by the new government, such as reconstruction and completing existing projects.

These priorities necessitate local oversight and people's participation in decision-making, making provincial councils crucial. Provincial councils hold several responsibilities, as outlined in Law No. 21 of 2008, dealing with unregulated governorates in Iraq.

These responsibilities include issuing local legislation, regulations, and instructions, crafting local policies, setting priorities, and supervising all state agencies within their respective governorates. Additionally, they have financial functions, such as approving the governorate's budget, accepting donations, and more. They also play a significant role in selecting individuals for high-ranking positions within their governorates.

Provincial councils contribute to achieving administrative decentralization, allowing the governorates to manage their affairs according to the principles of the constitution, within the framework of national development.

The suspension of provincial councils or their prolonged absence has significant consequences:

1. Diminished Oversight: Provincial councils have a critical role in overseeing the activities of local government bodies. The absence of these councils results in a lack of local oversight, which can lead to issues like mismanagement, corruption, and the misuse of resources.

2. Limited Accountability: Without provincial councils, there are no formal mechanisms to question or remove governors or their deputies. This affects the checks and balances within the local administration.

3. Deviating from Decentralization: Provincial councils are instrumental in implementing decentralization by crafting local legislation and setting policies. Their suspension can lead to a centralization of power, which may hinder local development.

4. Impact on Planning: Provincial councils help set priorities and draw up strategic plans for their governorates. The absence of these councils can disrupt long-term planning and impact the governorate's development.

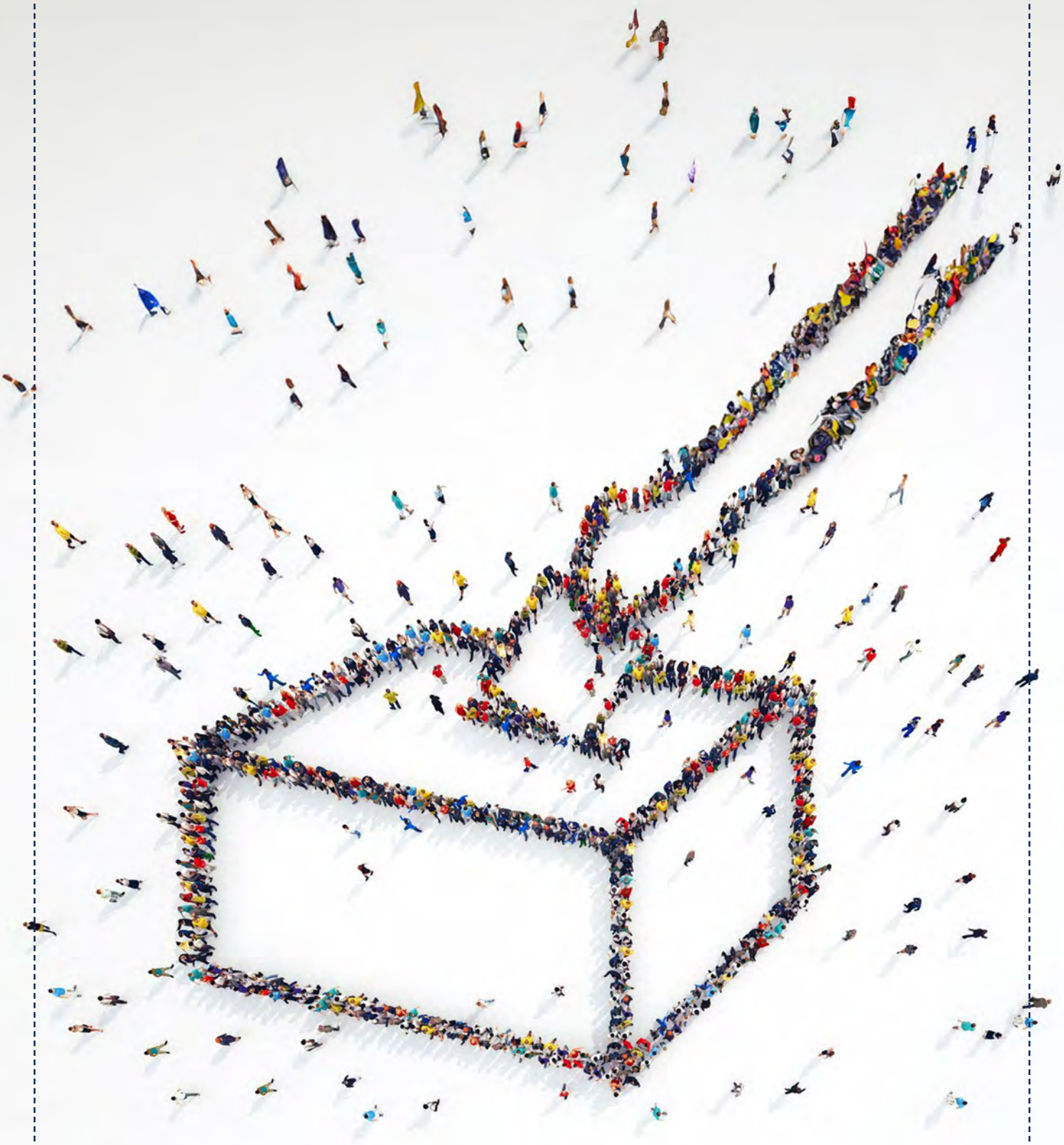
While there have been calls to suspend the work of provincial councils in response to public protests, it is essential to consider the constitutionality and the functional role of these councils. They provide an avenue for local participation, oversight, and decision-making that aligns with the principles of decentralization and local development outlined in the Iraqi constitution. It is essential to strike a balance between addressing public concerns and preserving the democratic and constitutional framework in the country.

The issue of electing and appointing governors in Iraq involves a complex interplay between provincial councils and the central government. In 2019, the Iraqi Council of Representatives passed an amendment to the law on the elections of provincial councils, which led to the suspension of all provincial councils' activities. This suspension has had a significant impact on the continuity of governance in various governorates.

Firstly, some governors have continued to serve in their positions for extended periods, exceeding the duration of their electoral terms. For example, in Baghdad, the governor has continued in office since October 2019. In Ninawa, the governor has remained in office since November 2019. Similar situations exist in other governorates, as seen in Table 1.

Table Number (1): Governors Continuously Serving in Their Roles Since Provincial Councils' Approval Until Now

Governorate	Governor's Name	From	Until	Duration
Baghdad	Mohammed Jaber Al-Atta	October 14, 2019	Present	4 years
Nineveh	Najm Abdullah Al-Jubouri	November 26, 2019		4 years
Basra	Asaad Abdulameer Al-Eidani	August 27, 2017		6 years
Anbar	Ali Farhan Al-Dulaimi	September 9, 2018		5 years
Karbala	Nasif Jassim Al-Khattabi	July 1, 2019		4 years
Diyala	Muthanna Ali Al-Tamimi	May 26, 2015		8 years
Maysan	Ali Dawai Lazim	June 9, 2013		10 years
Al-Muthanna	Ahmad Munfi Jouda	December 2, 2018		5 years
Wasit	Mohammed Jameel Al-Mayahi	November 13, 2018		5 years



Secondly, during this period, several governors have been appointed by the central government and have been replaced for various reasons, such as incapacity to manage responsibilities, administrative failures, corruption, and financial mismanagement. Many of these appointees either resigned or were relieved of their positions, as seen in Table 2.

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Table Number (2): Governors Appointed by the Central Government, Dismissed, or Resigned After Suspending Provincial Councils' Activities

Governorate	Governor's Name	From	Transition To	To	Status
Najaf	Luay Jawad Al-Yasiri	July 13, 2015	Elected Provincial Council	December 24, 2021	Resigned
	Majid Azab Al-Waeli	November 3, 2022	Appointed by the Cabinet	Present	
Dhi Qar	Yahya Mohammed Al-Nasiri	June 16, 2013	Elected Provincial Council	February 19, 2015	Dismissed
	Adel Abdullah Aldakhili	August 8, 2019	Elected Provincial Council	November 29, 2019	Resigned
	Nazim Hameed Al-Waeli	May 3, 2020	Appointed by the Cabinet	February 26, 2021	Resigned
	Abdulghani Ajil Al-Asadi	February 26, 2021	Appointed Temporary Governor Until the Selection of a New Governor by the Prime Minister	April 6, 2021	Ended Appointment by the Prime Minister
	Ahmed Ghani Al-Khafaji	April 6, 2021	Appointed by the Prime Minister	December 23, 2021	Resigned
	Mohammed Hadi Al-Ghazi	December 23, 2021	Appointed by the Prime Minister	Present	
Diwaniya	Zuhair Ali Al-Shaalan	August 5, 2019	Elected Provincial Council	January 10, 2023	Dismissed
	Maitham Abdul Ilah Al-Shahadah	June 21, 2023	Appointed by the Prime Minister	Present	
Salahuddin	Amar Jabbar Al-Jubouri	September 9, 2018	Elected Provincial Council	May 19, 2022	Dismissed by the Parliament
	Ismaeil Khudair Al-Haloub		Appointed as the First Deputy	Present	
Babil	Sadeq Mudlul Al-Sultani	June 15, 2013	Elected Provincial Council		Resigned due to Elevation to Parliament
	Karar Sabah Al-Abbadi	October 24, 2018	Elected Provincial Council	September 24, 2019	Dismissed from Provincial Council
	Habib Hashim Al-Halawi	October 24, 2018	Appointed as the First Deputy by the Provincial Council	December 19, 2019	Resigned
	Hassan Mindeel Al-siryawi	December 19, 2019	running the local government for being the second deputy of governor	May 28, 2022	Fired by prime minister
	Ali Waad Allawi	May 28, 2022	Appointed by the Prime Minister	November 1, 2022	Removed by the Prime Minister
	Wissam Aslan Al-Jubouri	November 10, 2022	Appointed by the Prime Minister	Present	

The continued presence of some governors beyond their electoral terms raises questions about the democratic process. Provincial councils play a vital role in overseeing the governors and holding them accountable, but with their activities suspended, this oversight mechanism is largely absent.

In some cases, the central government's ability to appoint and remove governors has been a subject of debate. While the central government has appointed interim governors in some instances, this approach can also be contentious, as it can bypass the principles of local representation and democratic governance outlined in the Iraqi Constitution.

It's essential to acknowledge that the presence and role of provincial councils are not only constitutionally mandated but also serve important functions in local governance. They play a vital role in overseeing governors, holding them accountable, and ensuring the democratic representation of the local population. The suspension of their activities has resulted in governance challenges, making it necessary to consider how these issues can be addressed while maintaining democratic principles and the rule of law.

The situation in Kirkuk, where local elections haven't been held since 2005, exemplifies the administrative instability that can result from the absence of local elections and functioning provincial councils.

In conclusion, despite calls to suspend provincial councils, their presence is constitutionally and legally justified.

The law on unregulated governorates, their importance, and the multiple roles they play are anchored in the Iraqi Constitution and the law. The continuity and role of provincial councils are essential in ensuring local governance, democratic representation, and accountability.

The issue of electing and appointing governors in Iraq should be addressed while upholding the democratic principles and legal framework established by the Iraqi Constitution.

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International Indicator

Iraq's Ranking in the Global Elections Integrity Report

- Ghazwan Al-Manhalawi
- Researcher focuses on Institutional Reforms & International Indicators

The Global Elections Integrity Report is issued annually by the Electoral Integrity Project. This report aims to evaluate the integrity of elections in 169 countries. It involves a systematic survey conducted by experts who assess each country based on a questionnaire consisting of 49 questions related to the electoral process. The report includes countries that have held direct national elections, whether legislative or presidential, during the year in which the report is published.

The Electoral Integrity Project, established in 2012, focuses on producing innovative research related to election policies worldwide. In addition to the Global Elections Integrity Report, the project publishes a series of encyclopedias that concentrate on various aspects related to the electoral process. Currently, the project produces numerous books, policy papers, reports, and surveys related to elections. It also provides consultations and training in these areas.

The project addresses three main questions: why and when elections fail throughout the electoral cycle, what are the consequences of failed elections in terms of security, accessibility, and trust, and what can be done to mitigate these issues based on academic evidence.

The project is currently headquartered at the Canadian Forces College at Queen's University and the University of Anglia. Its original location was at Harvard University and the University of Sydney.

International Indicator

Approach of the Global Elections Integrity Report

The Global Elections Integrity Report relies on a statistical survey using purposive sampling (expert sample), conducted online through a questionnaire consisting of (49) questions distributed across (11) aspects representing four phases, namely (pre-election, campaigns, election day, and post-election). The questionnaire is designed according to a five-point Likert scale, with one of the responses for each question being (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree).

A total of (40) experts, both from within and outside the country, specializing in elections from political and social sciences, are selected to evaluate each country included in the assessment. Not all experts answer the questionnaire, and the number of respondents varies for each country and each survey.

Countries where only one expert responds to the questionnaire are excluded. The concept of election integrity is defined by the project by referring to international standards agreed upon in agreements and global criteria that apply universally to all countries worldwide during the electoral cycle.

The following table illustrates the variables, dimensions, and questions used in the report to measure the integrity of elections in countries.

	Question	
PRE - ELECTION	1. Electoral Laws	Electoral laws were unfair to smaller parties Electoral laws favored the governing party or parties Election laws restricted citizens ' rights
	2. Electoral procedures	Elections were well managed Information about voting procedures was widely available Election officials were fair Elections were conducted in accordance with the law
	3. Boundaries	Boundaries discriminated against some parties Boundaries favored incumbents Boundaries were impartial
	4. Voter registration	Some citizens were not listed in the register The electoral register was inaccurate Some ineligible electors were registered
	5. Party registration	Some opposition candidates were prevented from running Women had equal opportunities to run for office Ethnic and national minorities had equal opportunities to run for office Only top party leaders selected candidates Some parties / candidates were restricted from holding campaign rallies

Question

CAMPAIGN

6. Campaign Media

- Newspapers provided balanced election news
- TV news favored the governing party
- Parties / candidates had fair access to political broadcasts and advertising
- Journalists provided fair coverage of the elections
- Social media were used to expose electoral fraud

7. Campaign Finance

- Parties / candidates had equitable access to public political subsidies
- Parties / candidates had equitable access to political donations
- Parties / candidates publish transparent financial accounts
- Rich people bought elections
- Some state resources were improperly used for campaigning
- Voters were bribed

International Indicator

Question

ELECTION DAY	8. Voting Process	Some voters were threatened with violence at the polls Some fraudulent votes were cast The process of voting was easy Voters were offered a genuine choice at the ballot box Postal ballots were available Special voting facilities were available for the disabled National citizens living abroad could vote
POST - ELECTION	9. Vote count	Ballot boxes were secure The results were announced without undue delay Votes were counted fairly International election monitors were restricted Domestic election monitors were restricted
	10. Results	Parties / candidates challenged the results The election led to peaceful protests The election triggered violent protests Any disputes were resolved through legal channels
	11. Electoral authorities	The election authorities were impartial The authorities distributed information to citizens The authorities allowed public scrutiny of their performance The election authorities performed well

Statistical Steps for Calculating a Country's Score:

1. Survey Encoding: The questionnaire results are encoded by converting the responses from descriptive phrases describing the direction to quantitative values using the following coding:

Answer	Coding
Strongly Agree	5
Agree	4
Neither Agree Nor Disagree	3
Disagree	2
Strongly Disagree	1

Negative statements are reversed to positive statements based on the assessment result. Responses of "I don't know" or "Not Applicable" are not considered.

2. Calculating the Score for Each Question: The score for each question is calculated by converting the score to a scale of 0-100. The average expert responses for each question represent the question's score.

3. Calculating the Score for Each Dimension: The score for each dimension is calculated by averaging the scores of the questions representing that dimension.

4. Calculating the Country's Final Score: The country's score is calculated by averaging the scores of the 11 dimensions, resulting in a score ranging from 0 to 100. It is then classified as follows:

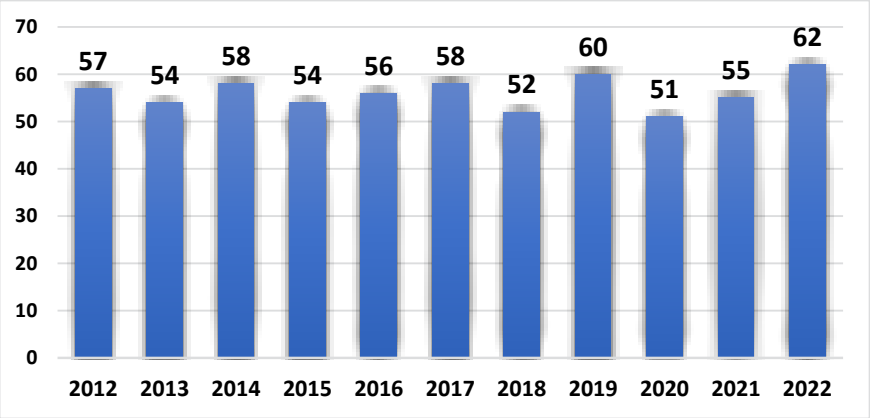
Score Range	Election Integrity Classification
70 and above	Very High
60-69	High
50-59	Moderate
40-49	Low
below 40	Very Low

International Indicator

Global Index Results for the Years 2012-2022:

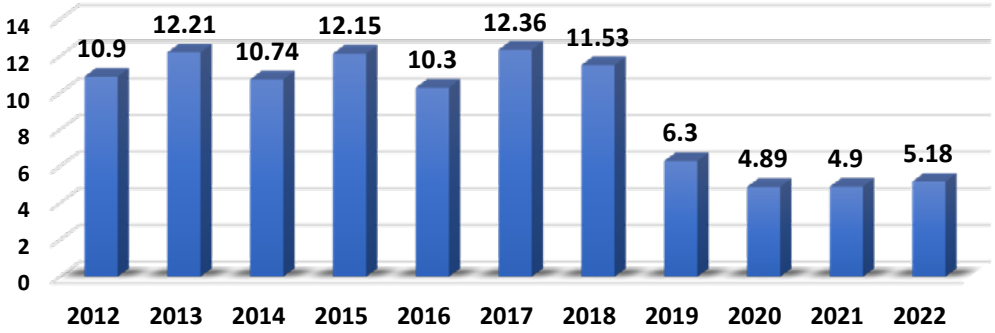
The global average index for election integrity indicates that countries were classified as moderately rated from 2012 to 2018. In 2019, the rating increased to a high, and for the years 2020-2021, it remained at a moderate level. In 2022, it reached a high level.

Figure Global Index Results for the Years 2012-2022



The level of expert response varies from one country to another and from one election to another. The response rate indicates that the highest response rate was achieved in 2017, while the lowest level was in 2020. The following figure illustrates response rates over the years 2012-2022:

Figure depicting response rates over the years 2012-2022



Analysis of Iraq's Evaluation in the Global Elections Integrity Report:

Since the launch of the report in 2012, Iraq has conducted three legislative elections in the years 2014, 2018, and 2021. Iraq received the following evaluations:

Analysis of Iraq's Evaluation in the Global Elections Integrity Report:

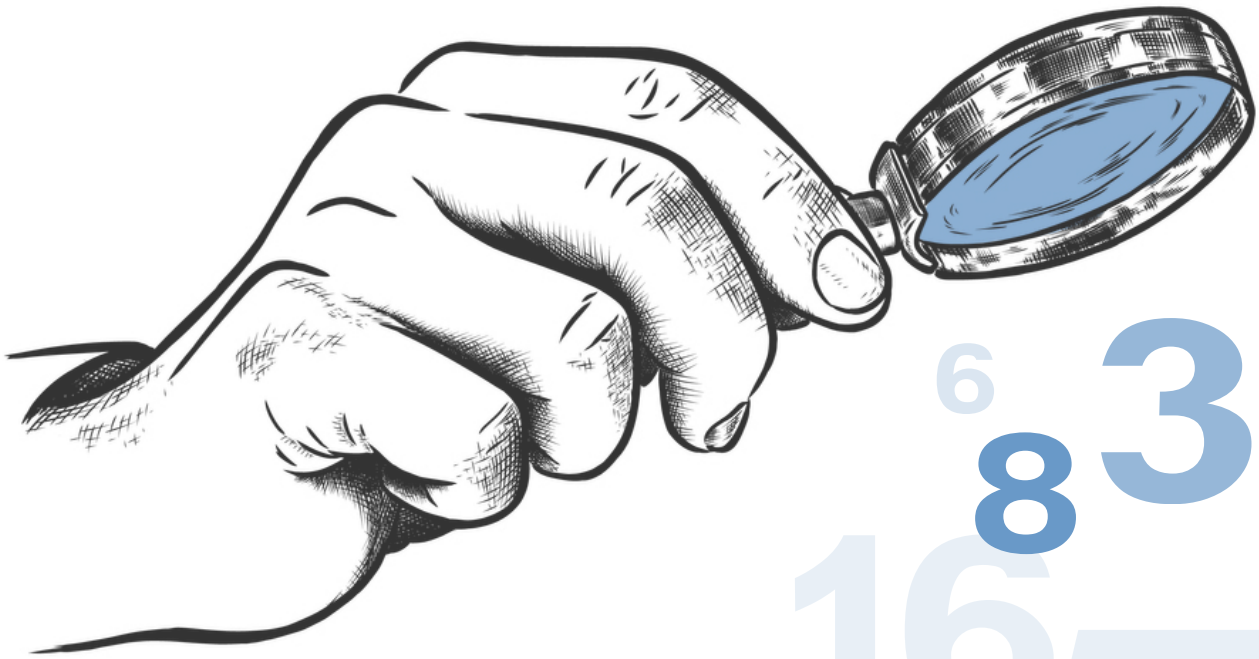
Iraq's election integrity has shown fluctuations, with a significant improvement in 2021, where Iraq achieved a score of 54 out of 100. The results for Iraq across the 11 survey dimensions are as follows:

Table showing Iraq's scores across the 11 survey dimensions for the years 2014, 2018, and 2021

Year	Election Date	Number of Experts Responding to the Survey	Election Integrity Score	Classification
2014	04/30/2014	9	44	Low
2018	05/12/2018	8	32	Very Low
2021	10/10/2021	3	54	Moderate

There is a clear improvement in all indicators of election integrity in the recent 2021 elections, which can be attributed to the development of the Independent High Electoral Commission's experience in Iraq. The adoption of biometric cards and triple authentication in the voting process, as well as the use of electronic counting and tabulation of voters' votes, contributed to this positive trend.

Highlights & Analysis



Stakeholders in the Electoral Process

Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC)

The Independent High Electoral Commission is an autonomous governmental body responsible for organizing, executing, and overseeing all types of elections and referendums. Established under Article 102 of the Iraqi Constitution, it initially came into existence through Law No. 11 of 2007 (repealed), replacing the Transitional Electoral High Commission, which conducted the 2005 elections and the constitutional referendum.

The IHEC was reconstituted by Law No. 31 of 2019, and its Board of Commissioners is now selected by the Higher Judicial Council. The IHEC consists of two main departments: the General Secretariat and the Department of Parties and Political Organizations. It operates a national office in Baghdad and offices in all provinces, including the Kurdistan Region.

It forms the Electoral Administration, headed by one of its Commissioners elected by the Board, and includes four departments: Administrative and Financial, Legal, Operations and Information Technology, and Media and Public Relations.

The Government

The independence of IHEC, acting as the executive body in the electoral process, means that the government and its affiliated institutions have no direct tasks or functions in the electoral process. Their support is mainly in a supportive role, including providing financial allocations for the elections, ensuring the necessary security for transparent voting and elections, and providing the required infrastructure, including polling stations.

The Supreme Judicial Council

Law No. 31 of 2019 expanded the responsibilities of the Supreme Judicial Council beyond its previous role. According to Article 3 of the law, the Council of Commissioners consists of nine members: five are first-class judges appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council, two members are also first-class judges but appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council upon nomination by the Higher Judicial Council in the Kurdistan Region, and two members are consultants from the Council of State, appointed by the Supreme Judicial Council from among the candidates. This means that all members of the Board of Commissioners, as well as the head of the Independent High Electoral Commission, are judges who take the legal oath. The head of the Supreme Judicial Council does not possess executive authority within the Commission but has responsibilities for appointing its members and managing it after approval by the President of the Republic.

Council of Representatives

As the highest legislative and oversight authority, the Council of Representatives is elected freely by the voters every four years. The number of members is allocated at a rate of one seat for every 100,000 citizens, as defined in Article 61 of the Constitution. The Council's powers include legislating federal laws, overseeing the performance of the executive authority, electing the President of the Republic, approving international treaties and agreements, granting and withdrawing confidence from the Prime Minister and ministers, and other important tasks. The Council of Representatives plays a crucial role before the start of the electoral process, as it legislates the Commission Law and the Electoral Law, which define the electoral process and methods, including vote counting and other aspects. However, the Council does not have a role during or after the electoral process.

The Federal Supreme Court

The Federal Supreme Court is an independent judicial body both financially and administratively. It is mandated by the Iraqi Constitution of 2005, according to Article 92. Its functions and operations are regulated by Law No. 30 of 2005. The Court comprises a President, a Vice President, and seven members who are appointed from first-tier judges. The Constitution, in Article 93, assigns several tasks to the Court, including the approval of the final results of the general elections for the Council of Representatives. Therefore, the Federal Court's endorsement of the election results is what gives legitimacy to these results. Additionally, Article 52 of the Constitution addresses the validity of decisions made by the Council of Representatives concerning the membership of its members. The Court's decisions are binding and final for all authorities.

Highlights & Analysis

Political Parties and Candidates

Both political parties and political candidates are integral parts of the democratic and electoral process.

Political parties may enter elections independently or through coalitions with other parties that share similar political goals and choices to form a single electoral list.

Iraqi election laws typically allow for individual nominations as well, where individuals not affiliated with any particular party can run as independent candidates. The choice between running independently or within a party coalition is often decided by a careful study of election laws, the electoral system, and the potential advantages of each method.

Local and International Election Observers

Elections are subject to monitoring by both local and international entities, which can consist of individuals and organizations, either independent or aligned with political entities participating in the elections. International organizations, including the United Nations through its mission to assist Iraq (UNAMI), engage in monitoring elections. These organizations do not have executive authority but are responsible for overseeing and ensuring free, fair, and transparent elections.

Voters

Voters are individuals who have the right to vote in elections. Specific requirements must be met for an individual to exercise the right to vote, including being an Iraqi citizen who fulfills legal conditions and eligibility to vote, being at least eighteen years old on the day of the election, and having a voter ID card.

Media

Media is a fundamental element of democracy, as elections cannot be truly democratic without media involvement. Free and fair elections not only depend on the freedom to vote and knowledge of the voting process but also on a participatory process in which voters engage in discussion and have access to sufficient information about parties, policies, candidates, and the election process itself. Additionally, the media plays a watchdog role in democratic elections, safeguarding the transparency of the electoral process. Democratic elections cannot exist without media freedom, and restricting media freedom during elections contradicts the very concept of democratic elections.

Civil Society Organizations

Civil society organizations have various roles in the electoral process. They have a supervisory role in ensuring that the election process adheres to laws and procedures and respects citizens' rights to vote and participate freely and equally in the electoral campaign.

Their role is pivotal in guaranteeing free, fair, and transparent elections that genuinely represent the will of the voting population. Civil society organizations also play a supporting role in the electoral process by educating voters about the importance of participating in elections, the consequences of not participating, and raising awareness about election culture and citizens' rights.

Supporting Institutions

There are several supporting institutions involved in the electoral process, responsible for executing various procedures required for the elections. Some of these institutions include:

1. Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education (Verification of documents).

2. The Integrity Commission (Ensuring candidates are not convicted of crimes).

3. The Higher National Commission for Accountability and Justice (Ensuring candidates are not associated with the Ba'ath Party).

Highlights & Analysis

Elections' Concepts

1. Elections

Elections are the process through which eligible citizens express their will and preferences by choosing representatives from a pool of candidates, whether for the national parliament or local councils.

2. Electoral System

The electoral system comprises a set of rules that determine how elections and referendums are conducted, as typically outlined within electoral laws.

3. Electoral District

An electoral district is a specific geographic area designated to have a certain number of seats allocated according to the election law.

4. Registration Center

An administrative unit under the jurisdiction of the Electoral Office in a province, responsible for managing elections within a specific area defined by the province's administrative boundaries.

5. Polling Center

The location designated by the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) for conducting the voting process within an electoral district. Polling centers are set up across all provinces and each contains multiple polling stations.

6. Polling Station

A component of the polling center where eligible voters cast their ballots, and where the count of the cast ballots takes place. Each polling station typically serves around 450 voters.

7. Biometric Card

A card issued by the Electoral Commission to each registered Iraqi voter with biometric data, including personal information, fingerprints of all ten fingers, and a photograph. This card is used for both general and special voting and allows the voter to cast their ballot after verification at the polling station.

8. Voter

Any individual whose name is listed on the voter register. The voter is a crucial component of the electoral process since their votes represent the means by which the electoral process operates and representatives are selected. To be eligible, a voter must possess a biometric card, be at least 18 years old, and meet all legal requirements.

9. Candidate

Any individual who officially registers their candidacy with the Independent High Electoral Commission and seeks to become a member of the national parliament, local councils, or other elected positions.

10. Polling Staff

Employees responsible for specific tasks within a polling station, such as managing the voter register, monitoring the ballot box, issuing ballots, and other related responsibilities.

11. General Voting

General voting includes all eligible voters from the general population, excluding groups that vote during the special voting day. General voters constitute the majority of voters.

12. Special Voting

Special voting encompasses specific groups, including security forces, healthcare workers, and prison inmates, who cast their votes prior to the general voting day due to their inability to vote on the regular voting day.

13. Electronic Count and Tally

This process involves a device attached to the ballot box, equipped with a scanner for electronically scanning the paper ballots. After the voter marks the ballot, the device reads and tallies the vote, which is then deposited into the ballot box.

14. International Observation

International observation involves monitoring elections by international entities such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the United Nations. These international bodies play an essential role in ensuring the fairness of elections in countries undergoing political transitions or experiencing specific conflicts, enhancing voter confidence, and assessing the legitimacy of the electoral process.

15. Election Campaigns

Election campaigns are the period preceding voting in which candidates promote themselves and their electoral programs to garner support. They typically involve well-planned efforts that require extensive coordination, with the candidates themselves as key figures in this process.

16. Election Program

An election program is a candidate's future action plan that they intend to implement upon winning an election. This program forms the core of voter interest during the election period.

17. Quota System

The quota system involves the allocation of a certain number of seats to specific categories, such as women or certain minority groups. It aims to achieve social justice and secure the rights of specific segments of society.

Elections in Numbers

Highlights & Analysis

Parliamentary Elections

Electoral System	Number of Candidates	Number of Seats	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Voters	Number of Voters	Number of Participating Parties	Number of Political Alliances	Voter Turnout	Percentage of Women Winners
Proportional Representation (Closed List)	7761	275	1	14,379,169	8,456,266	75	9	58,6%	31%

Jan 2005

Electoral System	Number of Candidates	Number of Seats	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Voters	Number of Voters	Number of Participating Parties	Number of Political Alliances	Voter Turnout	Percentage of Women Winners
Proportional Representation (Closed List)	7655	275	18	15,456,266	11,888,906	307	19	79,36%	26%

Dec 2005

Electoral System	Number of Candidates	Number of Seats	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Voters	Number of Voters	Number of Participating Parties	Number of Political Alliances	Voter Turnout	Percentage of Women Winners
Proportional Representation Sainte-Laguë) (1.6	6281	325	18	18,900,000	11,793,600	305	12	62,4%	25%

2010

Electoral System	Number of Candidates	Number of Seats	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Voters	Number of Voters	Number of Participating Parties	Number of Political Alliances	Voter Turnout	Percentage of Women Winners
Proportional Representation Sainte-Laguë) (1.6	9039	328	18	22,000,000	12,000,000	277	36	60.53%	25%

2014

Electoral System	Number of Candidates	Number of Seats	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Voters	Number of Voters	Number of Participating Parties	Number of Political Alliances	Voter Turnout	Percentage of Women Winners
Proportional Representation Sainte-Laguë) (1.6	6986	329	18	24,352,253	10,840,989	204	25	44,52%	25%

2018

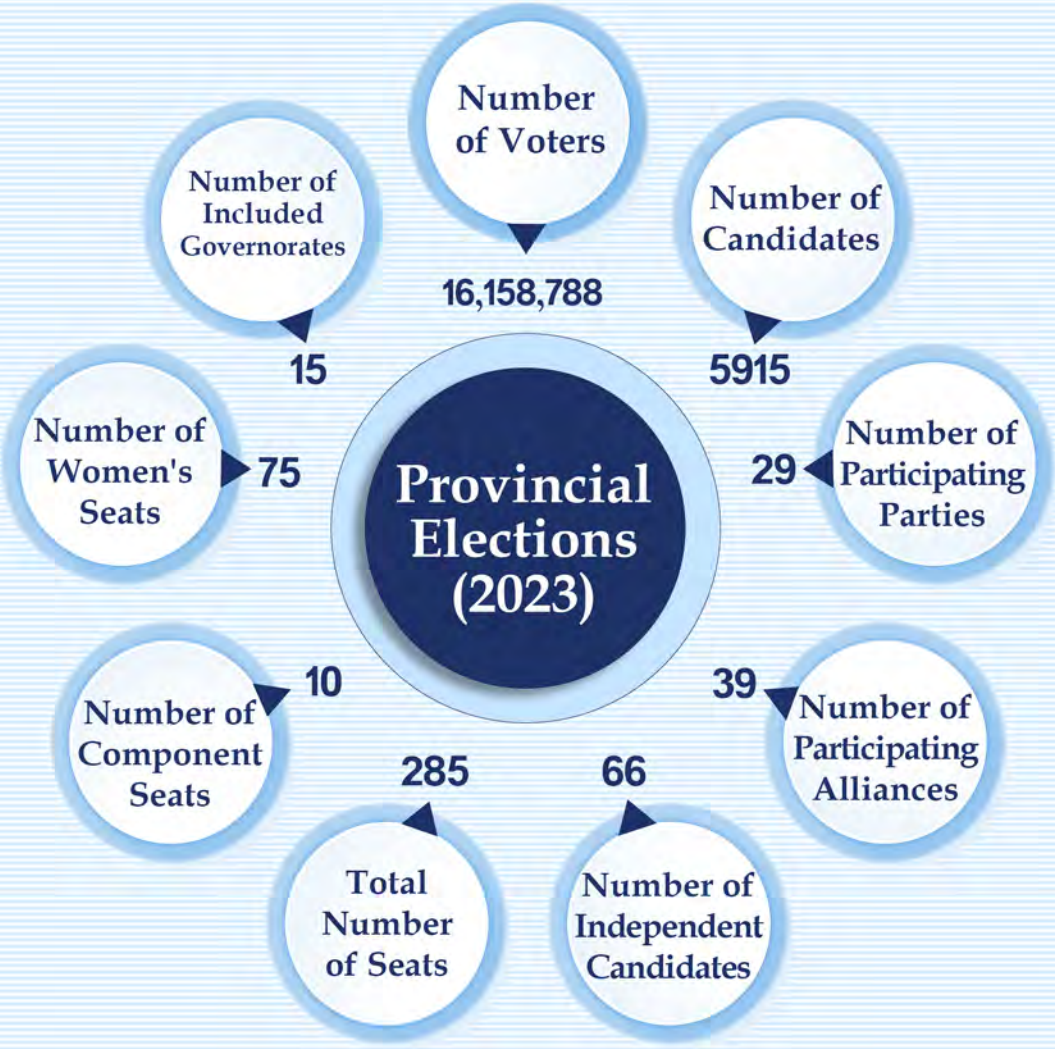
Electoral System	Number of Candidates	Number of Seats	Number of Electoral Districts	Number of Voters	Number of Voters	Number of Participating Parties	Number of Political Alliances	Voter Turnout	Percentage of Women Winners
Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV)	3225	329	83	22,116,368	9,629,601	108	21	43,54%	29%

2021

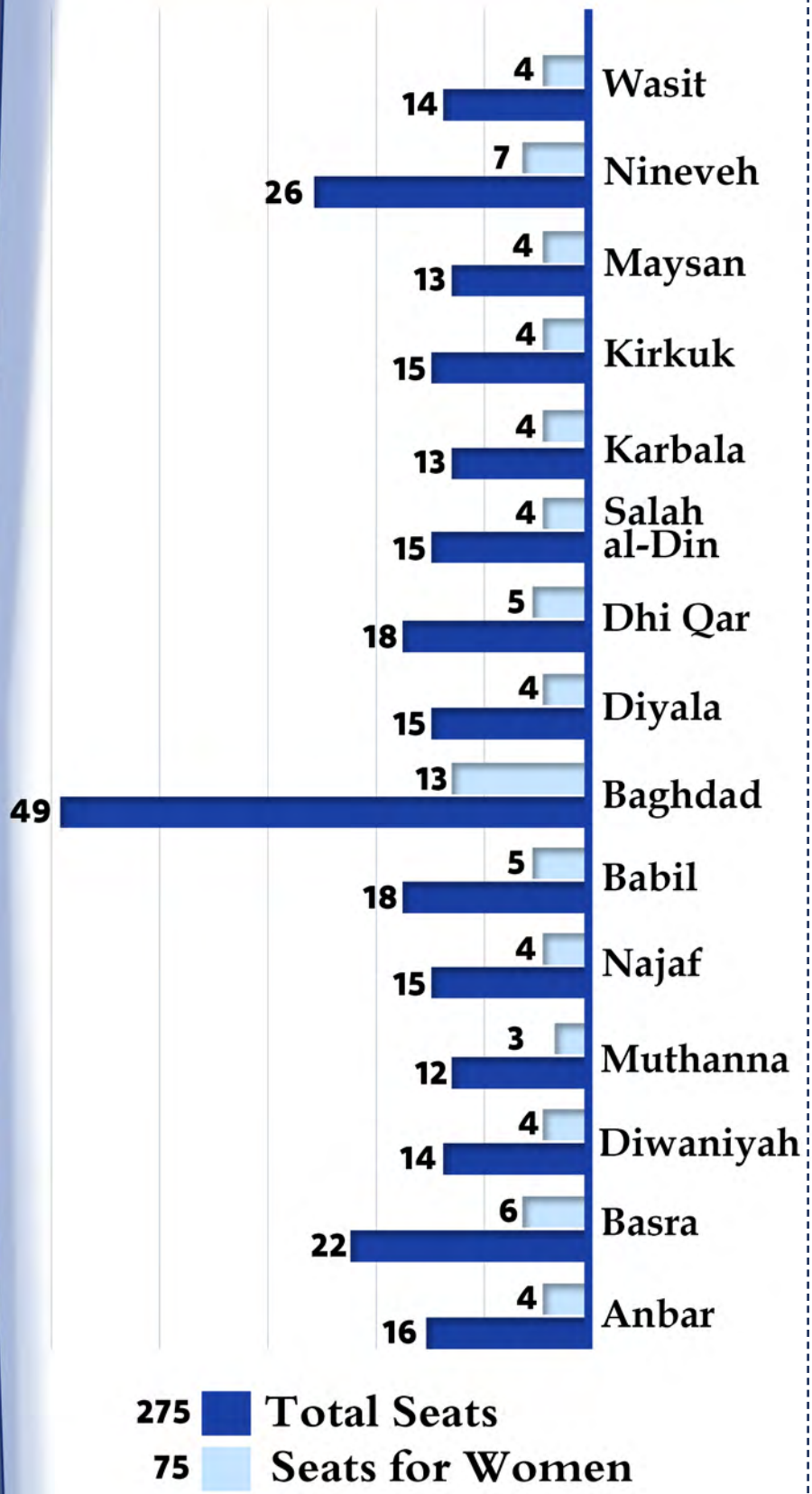
Highlights & Analysis

Provincial Elections

	Number of Governorates	Number of Voters	Number of Valid Votes	Voter Turnout
2005	15	Data not available		
2009	14	14,860,655	7,142,994	48%
2013	14	13,571,192	6,217,238	45,8%



Seats Distribution of Provincial Elections



Book Summary

Forms of Electoral Systems

Authored by
Andrew Reynolds – Ben Reilly – Andrew Ellis

Introduction

The choice of an electoral system is one of the most crucial decisions for any democratic system. The selection of a particular electoral system often has far-reaching consequences for the future of political life. While the choice of an electoral system is typically a deliberate process, it was not always the case. In many instances, electoral processes were ad hoc, resulting from extraordinary circumstances, popular preferences, or sudden historical changes.

Any emerging democratic system needs to select a specific electoral system for electing its legislative authority. Political crises within an established democratic system can lead to changes in the adopted electoral system. Political reform advocates may push for changing the electoral system in a country.

Decisions to change or maintain the adopted electoral system are typically influenced by two factors:

1. Lack of Political Awareness of Electoral Systems: Political parties often lack sufficient knowledge about electoral systems, resulting in a lack of full awareness of various options and their implications.

2. Exploitation of Political Parties' Understanding: On the contrary, political parties with a deep understanding of electoral system details may manipulate the system to adopt options that better serve their partisan interests.

Types of Electoral Systems

I. Majority Systems

Majority systems are based on a simple principle where winning candidates or parties are those with the highest number of votes after they are counted. There are five types of majority systems:

1. First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) System: This is the simplest electoral system where the candidate with the most votes, even if not an absolute majority, wins. This system is typically used in single-member constituencies, where voters cast their ballots for individual candidates. It is most common in countries with historical ties to the United Kingdom, such as Canada, India, the United States, and others.

2. Block Vote (BV) System: This majority system is used in multi-member constituencies. Each voter is allowed a number of votes equal to the number of representatives to be elected in their electoral district. Candidates with the highest votes win the seats. Voters often cast individual votes, not party votes. This system is used in countries with relatively weak political party structures, such as the Cayman Islands, the Maldives, Guernsey, Kuwait, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, and others.

3. Party Block Vote (PBV) System: in multi-member constituencies, the voter casts one vote for their preferred party list, without choosing individual candidates. The party with the most votes wins all seats allocated to that electoral district. Similar to the First-Past-The-Post system, winning candidates don't necessarily require an absolute majority. This system is used in four countries, including Cameroon, Chad, Djibouti, and Singapore.

4. Alternative Vote (AV) System: This preferential majority system is used in single-member constituencies. Voters rank candidates in order of preference on their ballot. The candidate with more than 50% of the first-preference votes wins directly. If no candidate achieves an absolute majority, the lowest-ranking candidates are eliminated, and their second-preference votes are redistributed until one candidate gains a majority. This system is employed in Australia, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea.

5. Two-Round System (TRS): An electoral majority system that organizes a second round of elections if no candidate or party secures a specific majority in the first round. The absolute majority, often more than 50% of the votes, defines the threshold. In the second round, usually only the two candidates with the highest votes from the first round compete. This system may or may not utilize a proportional majority principle. It is used in several countries, including France and many nations that were once regions or colonies under French influence, such as Central African Republic, Congo, Gabon, Mali, Mauritania, Egypt, Iran, and several former Soviet Union countries like Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, among others.

II. Proportional Representation Systems

The fundamental concept of proportional representation systems is to translate the share of votes a political party receives in an election into a corresponding or proportional share of seats in the parliament. There are two main types of proportional representation systems: the List Proportional Representation (List PR) system and the Single Transferable Vote (STV) system.

Implementing proportional representation systems typically requires the presence of multi-member electoral districts since distributing a single seat proportionally is not possible.

1. **List Proportional Representation (List PR) System:** In this system, each political party presents a list of candidates in each of the multi-member electoral districts. Voters cast their votes for political parties, and each party wins a share of the seats in the electoral district that corresponds to its share of the votes from the electorate. The winning candidates come f rom the party lists, and they are elected in the order they appear on the list. This system has been applied in emerging democracies such as South Africa, Indonesia, and Sierra Leone, and it has proven to allow political parties to present lists of candidates from diverse ethnic and ethnic groups.

2. **Single Transferable Vote (STV) System:** The Single Transferable Vote system is a preferential proportional representation system used in multi-member districts. Voters rank candidates in order of preference on their ballots. A candidate can win directly if they receive a number of first-preference votes exceeding the required quota. If no candidate reaches an absolute majority, surplus votes from elected candidates and the votes of eliminated candidates with the fewest votes are redistributed until candidates achieve the required quota for victory. Voters cast their votes for individual candidates, as opposed to political parties. This system is used in various countries, including the Australian Senate elections, elections for Australian state parliaments, and local elections in Northern Ireland, among others.

III. Mixed Systems

Mixed electoral systems combine features of both majority and proportional representation systems. There are two main forms of mixed electoral systems: Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) and Parallel Electoral Systems.

1. **Mixed Member Proportional (MMP) System:** In the MMP system, seats are distributed to compensate for the imbalances in the proportional results of single-member districts elected under majority systems or other systems integrated into the mixed system. Voters use two different electoral systems concurrently.

The first system is the List Proportional Representation system, and the second typically follows a majority system. For example, if a party received 10% of the national vote under the proportional representation list but didn't win any seats under the other system, they would receive enough seats from the proportional representation system to make up the 10% of the seats in the elected legislative body (parliament). This system is used in many countries, including Germany, Italy, Mexico, Bolivia, Venezuela, and others.

2. **Parallel Electoral System:** Parallel electoral systems use a hybrid of a proportional representation system and a majority system, but unlike MMP, the two systems operate independently, with no connection between the results from each system. Voters might be given a single ballot paper, similar to MMP, where they vote for both their preferred candidate and their chosen party, as seen in South Korea.

Alternatively, they could be given two separate ballots, one for a seat elected under the majority system and the other for seats allocated under the proportional system, as used in Japan and Lithuania. The parallel system is employed in 21 countries, as it combines the advantages of both the list proportional representation and majority systems or other systems.

IV. Other Electoral Systems

In addition to majority, proportional representation, and mixed electoral systems, there are several other electoral systems that do not neatly fit into these categories. These include three systems: Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV), Limited Vote (LV), and Borda Count (BC). These systems tend to produce electoral results that fall between those of majority and proportional representation systems.

1. Single Non-Transferable Vote (SNTV): In the Single Non-Transferable Vote system, voters in multi-member districts cast their votes for a single candidate. The candidates with the highest number of votes win the seats. Voters do not vote for political parties but for individual candidates. This system is currently used in legislative elections in countries like Afghanistan, Jordan, elections for the Regional Representative Council in Indonesia, and Thailand. It is most famously associated with Japan and was used for its House of Representatives elections between 1993 and 1994.

2. Limited Vote (LV): The Limited Vote system revolves around individual candidates. It is applied in single-member or multi-member districts, and voters are given more than one vote but fewer votes than the number of representatives to be elected in the district. Candidates who receive the most votes win. While this system is more common in local elections, it is used for national elections in Gibraltar and Spain. In the latter, voters have one fewer vote than the number of representatives in a given multi-member district, making the system relatively proportional.

3. Borda Count (BC): The Borda Count is a preferential voting system that can be used in both single-member and multi-member electoral districts. It relies on voters ranking candidates in order of preference on their ballots. Each preference is assigned a specific value for counting purposes, and candidates accumulate points based on these preferences. The candidates with the highest point totals win. The Borda Count system is used in only one country, Nauru, an independent island nation in the Pacific.

Table (1) Distribution of Electoral Systems Used in Legislative Elections Around the World

Type of Electoral System	Number of Countries/Regions	Percentage of System Usage out of Total Systems	Established Democracies	Emerging Democracies	Other Countries
First Past the Post	47	23.6%	22	4	21
Bloc Voting	15	7.5%	8	0	7
Party Block	4	2%	0	0	4
Alternative Vote	3	1.5%	2	0	1
Two-Round System	22	11.1%	3	2	17
Proportional List	70	35.2%	21	19	30
Single Transferable Vote	2	1%	2	0	0
Mixed-Member Proportional	9	4.5%	4	1	4
Parallel	21	10.6%	2	5	14

Unaltered Single Vote	4	2%	2	0	2
Modified Borda	1	0.5%	1	0	0
Limited Vote	1	0.5%	1	0	0
Total	199	100%	68	31	100

Table (2) Summary of the Distribution of Electoral Systems in Legislative Elections Around the World

System/Continent	Africa	The Americas	Asia	Eastern Europe	Western Europe	Oceania	Middle East	Total
First Past the Post	15	17	5	0	1	7	2	47
Bloc Voting	1	3	2	0	3	2	4	15
Party Block	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	4
Alternative Vote	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	3
Two-Round System	8	3	6	1	1	1	2	22
Proportional List	16	19	3	13	15	0	4	70
Single Transferable Vote	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	2
Mixed-Member Proportional	1	3	0	2	2	1	0	9
Parallel	4	0	8	7	1	1	0	21
Unaltered Single Vote	0	0	1	0	0	2	1	4
Modified Borda	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Limited Vote	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	48	45	26	23	26	18	13	199

Table (3) Features and Drawbacks of Five Electoral Systems

Electoral System	Features	Drawbacks
List Proportional (List PR)	• Proportional outcomes • Party plurality • Minority representation • Few wasted votes • Ease of electing women • No/less need for constituency delimitation • No need for by-elections/supplementary elections • Ease of remote voting • Limits single-warlord control areas • Potential for increased voter turnout	• Weak geographic representation • Weakened accountability and oversight • Potential difficulty for the executive to secure legislative support • Potential for coalition or minority governments • Empowerment of political parties • Facilitation of extremist parties • Inability to exclude a party from power
First Past the Post (FPTP)	• Strong geographic representation • Accountability and oversight made easier • Simple and easy to understand • Provides clear voter choices • Encourages cohesive opposition • Helps exclude extremist parties • Enables voters to choose among candidates • May provide greater legislative support for the executive • Potential for majority-backed governments	• Excludes small parties • Excludes minorities from representation • Excludes women from representation • Results in a significant number of wasted votes • Often leads to by-elections/supplementary elections • Requires constituency delimitation • Facilitates gerrymandering for illegitimate purposes • Difficult to organize remote voting
Two-Round System (TRS)	• Gives voters a second chance to choose • Limits vote splitting more than most systems • Simple and easy to understand • Strengthens geographic representation	• Requires constituency delimitation • Requires a costly financial and administrative second round • Often leads to by-elections/supplementary elections • Widens the time gap between voting and final result announcement • Can introduce result distortion • Contributes to the fragmentation of political parties • May be a factor in instability in divided societies

Parallel	• Party plurality • Minority representation • Limits the fragmentation of political parties • Easier to reach consensus on it more than others • Empowers accountability and oversight • Reduces the number of wasted votes	• Relatively more complex than others • Requires constituency delimitation • Often leads to by-elections/supplementary elections • Can lead to the emergence of two different groups of elected representatives • Encourages strategic voting • Difficult to organize remote voting • Does not guarantee proportional outcomes
Mixed-Member Proportional (MMP)	• Proportional outcomes • Party plurality • Strengthens geographic representation • Empowers accountability and oversight • Reduces the number of wasted votes	• More complex than other systems • Requires constituency delimitation • Often leads to by-elections/supplementary elections • Can lead to the emergence of two different groups of elected representatives • Encourages strategic voting • Difficult to implement remote voting

Key Considerations When Designing Electoral Systems:

1. Simplicity of the Electoral System: It's crucial to design an electoral system that is easy to understand and work with for both voters and political actors. Complex systems can lead to confusion and potentially undermine voter confidence in election results.

2. Innovation and Adaptation: Don't be afraid to innovate and adapt electoral systems to address specific problems. Learning from the experiences of other countries, even those that might seem drastically different, can provide valuable insights.

3. Consider the Political and Social Context: Electoral systems do not exist in isolation. They must be designed with consideration for the political and social context in which they are implemented. Is the design intended for a permanent electoral system or to respond to the specific requirements of a transitional phase?

4. Respect for the Electorate: While simplicity is important, do not underestimate the ability of voters to comprehend and use complex electoral systems. Some democracies, even in less affluent nations, have successfully employed intricate preferential systems, which highlights the importance of distinguishing between levels of awareness, practical knowledge, and political awareness.

5. Inclusiveness of the Electoral System: Electoral systems should be based on inclusivity, whether in divided or more homogeneous societies, ensuring that all interests are represented in the parliament. Regardless of minority groups' affiliations to ideological, ethnic, racial, linguistic, regional, or religious identities, excluding significant segments of public opinion from parliamentary representation, especially in developing countries, can have disastrous consequences.

6. Method of Electoral System Selection as a Crucial Element: The method of choosing an electoral system plays a vital role in reinforcing its legitimacy. The selection process should involve all relevant groups, including the electorate. This broader participation results in higher acceptance of the final outcome, as opposed to a process limited to the expression of party or individual interests. Although it may be challenging to completely avoid partisan considerations, choosing a system that garners varying degrees of satisfaction from different parties and the broader public is essential for acceptance.

7. Establishing Legitimacy and Acceptance Among Key Actors: All groups and classes interested in participating in the democratic process should feel that the electoral system is fair and offers equal opportunities for all to win in the elections. Ensuring that losers do not translate their election result disappointments into a rejection of the electoral system or an excuse to destabilize the entire democratic system is of paramount importance.

8. Enhancing Voter Impact: Voters should feel that the electoral process empowers them to influence government and policies. Voter impact can be increased in several ways, such as enabling voters to choose among different political parties, candidates from different parties, or even candidates within the same party.

Voters should believe that their votes hold real weight in shaping the government, not just in the composition of the elected parliament.

9. Balancing Voter Impact with Encouragement of Cohesive and Effective Political Parties: Striking a balance between increasing voter influence and the need for cohesive, effective political parties is vital. Granting voters a high degree of choice among candidates from different parties can result in fragmented, divided parliaments that fail to produce the desired outcomes.

10. Not Neglecting Long-Term Stability in Pursuit of Short-Term Gains: When political actors negotiate the adoption of a new electoral system, they often push for proposals that they believe will enhance their party's interests in the next election. However, such strategies can be unwise, particularly in developing countries. The short-term success of a single party may lead to long-term political breakdown and social unrest.

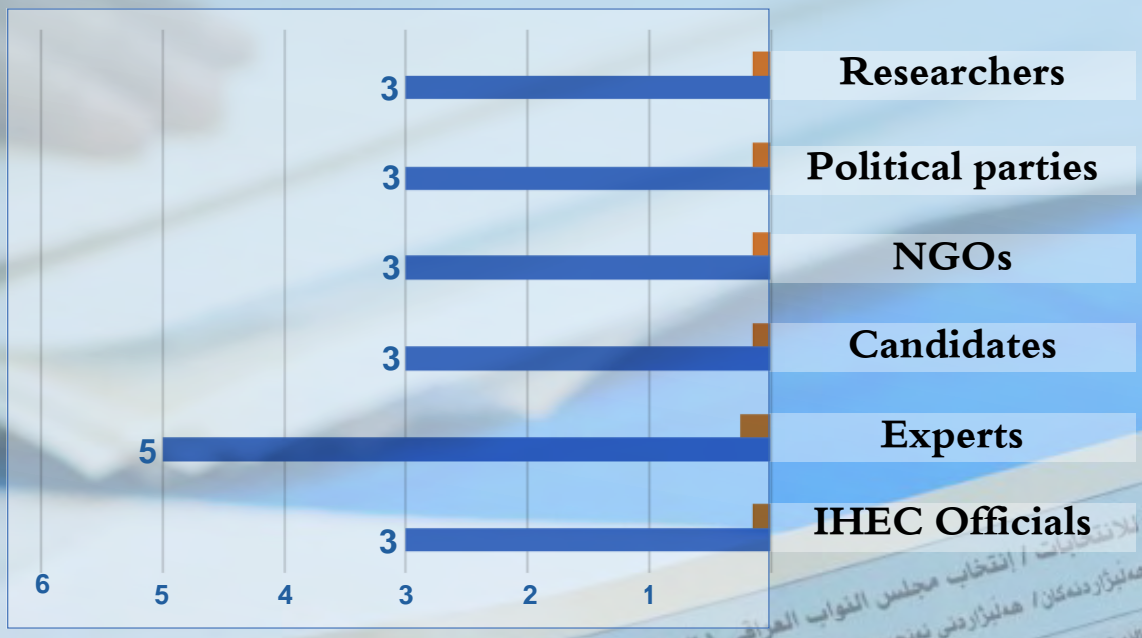
11. Not Regarding Electoral Systems as a Panacea for All Problems: Electoral systems can be the optimal means to change the criteria governing the nature of political competition. However, they cannot be the cure for every political ill afflicting a country. Often, the impact of other factors may have more substantial ramifications for the democratic system.

12. Not Underestimating the Effects of the Electoral System: Electoral systems are subject to many challenges and constraints, but they still provide opportunities for conscious strategies that can either aid or hinder the democratic process. While electoral systems do not offer a solution for every issue, they play a central role in achieving stability within any political system.

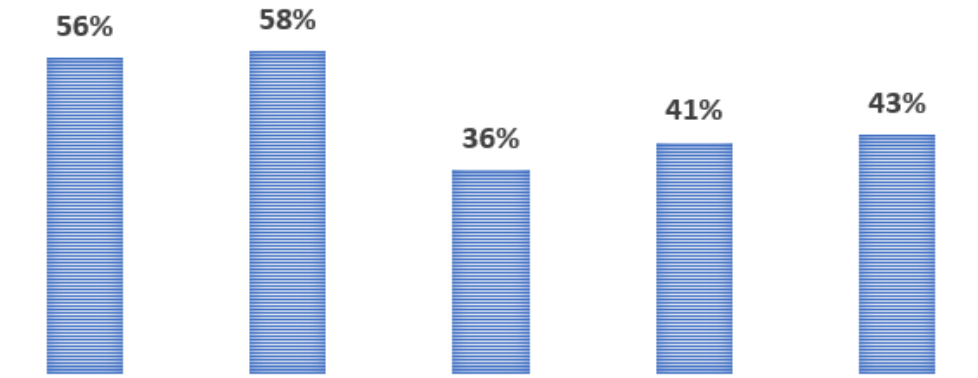
Views of Experts and Practitioners

Experts Assessment

- This assessment aims to gauge the opinions of specialists (experts, political parties, candidates, civil society representatives, researchers, and former IHEC officials) through a set of indicators. Six axes covering the electoral process from various perspectives have been formulated, including electoral systems, representation, accountability, justice, transparency, and political stability. Data collection occurred from November 1st to November 11th, utilizing a Likert five-point scale to express the tendencies of the sample group consisting of 20 respondents chosen purposively (a sample of specialists).



Electoral System



Proportional representation is the most suitable electoral system for Iraq.

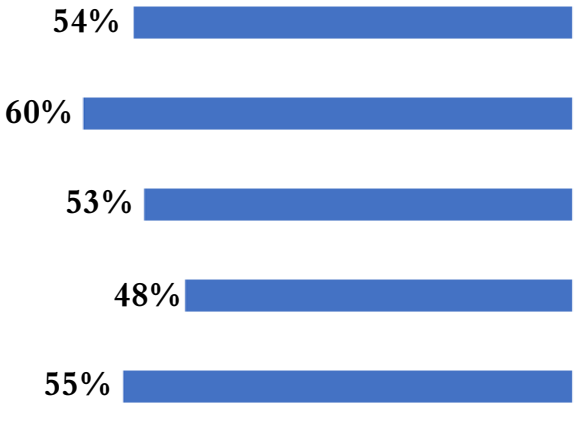
The electoral system does not allow drawing districts in a way that favors one party over another.

The current electoral system encourages high levels of electoral participation.

The current electoral system enjoys support from most segments of Iraqi society.

The current electoral system has features that ensure its continuation in future elections.

Representation



The electoral system allows real representation of minorities.

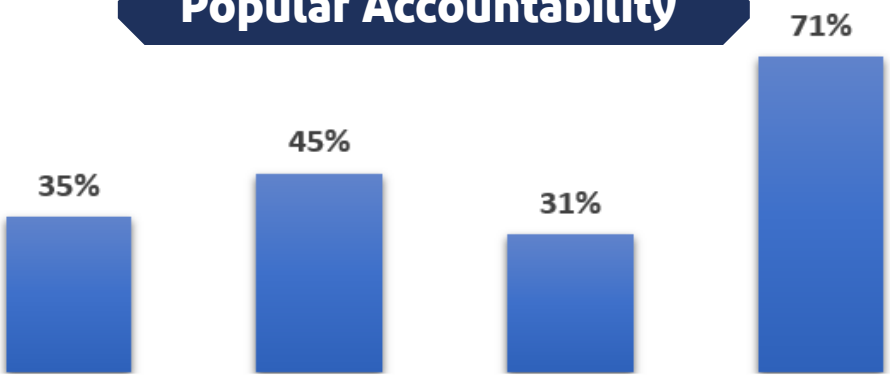
The electoral system allows real representation of women.

The current electoral system deals better with the representation of displaced persons and migrants.

There are no regional representation disparities in the electoral system.

The current electoral system ensures effective representation of various ethnic and religious groups in the government.

Popular Accountability



The current electoral system enhances popular accountability towards elected officials well.

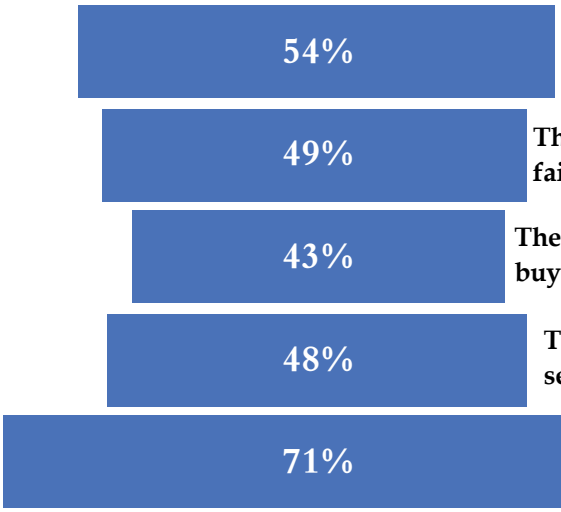
The current electoral system encourages candidates to rely more on grassroots than party leadership.

The electoral system requires winning candidates to fulfill their electoral promises.

The commission committed to preventing the candidacy of those charged with crimes or offenses compromising honor, including cases of administrative and financial corruption.

Views of Experts and Practitioners

Fairness



The electoral system provides equal opportunities for all eligible citizens to run for elections.

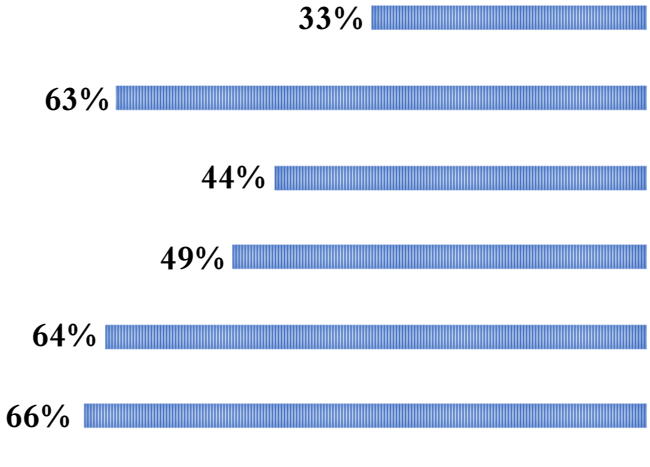
The electoral system treats all political parties and candidates fairly in terms of access to media and resources.

The electoral system provides mechanisms to prevent vote-buying or undue influence on the electoral process.

The electoral system achieves justice in the distribution of seats for both lists and individual candidates.

The election administration treats all candidates and lists fairly.

Transparency



The electoral system ensures transparency in campaign financing.

The electoral system allows for significant party and societal oversight at all stages of the electoral process.

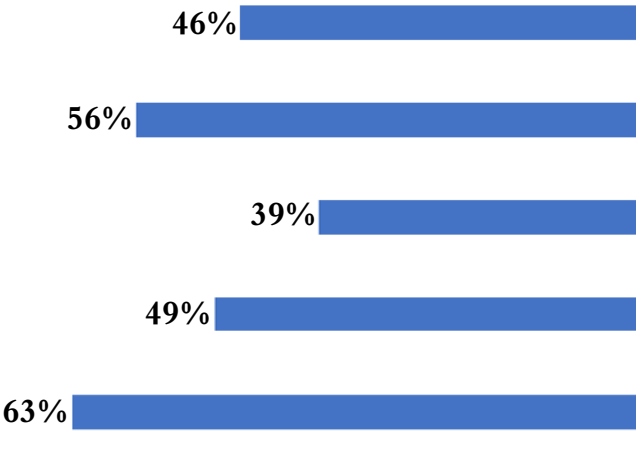
Lack of international monitoring does not affect the transparency of elections.

Prioritizing manual counting and sorting reduces manipulation of votes.

The Independent High Electoral Commission provides sufficient electoral information to the public.

The measures taken by the Independent High Electoral Commission are characterized by high transparency.

Political Stability



The provinces will not witness political conflict after the announcement of election results.

The results of provincial council elections will peacefully change the local political scene.

The results of provincial council elections will be accepted by all competitors.

The current electoral system leads to politically stable provincial councils.

The electoral system limits the fragmentation of the political landscape in Iraq.

Election of Provincial Councils - Opportunities and Challenges

Roundtable Discussion

Introduction

The Platform Center for Sustainable Development (PSDIraq) held a roundtable discussion on Saturday, October 28, 2023, to explore the opportunities and challenges in the upcoming elections for Provincial Councils. The discussion covered various topics, including the likely impact of elections on the level of services and public representation, turnout, and electoral competition. The session was attended by a group of experts, academics, researchers, and some fellows of the Iraq Policy Program (Third Round) who presented their policy papers on elections.

Mr. Hashim Al-Rikabi, PSDIraq President opened the session, welcoming the attendees and highlighting the center's most important activities and projects. He emphasized the center's commitment to its vision of bridging the gap between youth and state institutions through various means, including sessions and dialogues with youth, experts, and decision-makers to diagnose issues in different sectors and provide suitable solutions and alternatives. He commended the researchers from the Iraq Policy Program (Third Round) for their policy papers and invited them to share their ideas during the session. He emphasized that the report resulting from this roundtable discussion would be published in the second issue of the Platform Journal.

Mr. Al-Rikabi emphasized the importance of today's session, particularly in light of the upcoming elections. He noted that Iraq's elections have demonstrated the flexibility of the political system. With each electoral cycle, there are changes in the electoral system, and there's a growing desire among the youth to run for office. Since 2003, the electoral system has become more transparent, transitioning from a closed-list system to an open-list system, allowing both individual candidates and lists to run for elections. He concluded by stating that the inputs and insights from the attendees would contribute to the maturation of ideas and discussions, and the fundamental question was whether these elections would lead to stability within the provinces.

Dr. Abdul Jabbar Ahmed

Former Dean of the College of Political Science at the University of Baghdad

• Provincial councils represent a constitutional pillar that embodies political decentralization, a crucial aspect of Iraq's democratic life. Although there are challenges in decentralization, it distinguishes Iraq's modern experience.

• This pillar wasn't firmly rooted in the political culture. For instance, the issue of transferring authorities saw differing perspectives. Additionally, the experience of provincial councils and their subjection to the Federal Court's rulings, was followed by renewed demands of dissolving these councils during the period of protests.

• We conducted a field study on the number of meetings and recommendations in provincial councils. We found that one provincial council held only one 10-minute meeting, during which a single decision was made – to purchase cars. In contrast, other provincial councils had bylaws, meeting minutes, and adherence to attendance, illustrating that the problem isn't the decentralized system itself but rather those who practice it.

• The current Prime Minister has emphasized reviewing the Law of Provinces not incorporated into regions. However, the efforts were limited to amending election law. Merging provincial and parliamentary elections in one law created an incorrect overlap.

Views of Experts and Practitioners

• It's probable that the elections will be postponed by 4-6 months due to the events in Gaza and their repercussions. I advise the government to consider an alternative date.

• The question remains: will the upcoming elections under the new law lead to genuine development in the provinces? Will there be a restoration of trust in the current system after the elections? I quote one of the leaders of the ruling parties who mentioned that they intend to transfer the federal government's experience to the provinces, which implies securing most of the provinces, especially where there's a lack of competition. Conducting elections hastily in this manner won't serve development in these provinces.

• Regarding transferring powers, was there any study conducted on this topic, whether by the government or think tanks? We need to know what the citizens want. They're concerned about services, not who governs them. A poll of Arab youth revealed that 99% of them are primarily interested in services rather than governance. Yet, Iraq tends to focus on governance.

• The government's efforts to promote decentralization are commendable. However, they should be supported with more extensive discussions and deliberations to study the experience. If the elections are postponed, the government should engage with the public to understand the requirements of the provinces and provincial councils.

Dr. Abdul Aziz Al–Isawi

Academic and Electoral Affairs Specialist

• It's worth noting that the title of the Elections Law is subject to appeal, as its title is The Third Amendment Law for the House of Representatives and Provincial Councils. Yet, the House of Representatives elections law was not amended, which may lead to legal challenges after announcing the election results.

• Some provinces improved after the suspension of their provincial councils. Moreover, there's no popular conviction that provincial councils can significantly enhance service levels.

• There are no indications that genuine public representation will exist in the upcoming elections. For instance, no political entity dares claim to cover the entire electoral landscape, given the vast influence of the Sadrists, the Tishreen Movement, and civil space. There's also widespread dissatisfaction with the current parliamentary representatives.

• Concerning electoral competition, it lacks basic elements of fairness. A new phenomenon is the inheritance of candidacies, where a member of parliament nominates their relatives by exploiting their resources, networks, and cars to promote their relatives' candidacy. We've identified approximately 15 such cases, which will reduce the citizens' representation.

• Following the Tishreen protest's events and the failure of those who claimed to represent the protest, a significant gap emerged between the public and the political class. This will likely lead to increased voter abstention and non-participation, benefiting the ruling parties.

• In some provinces, there is talk about predetermined outcomes for certain lists, which diminishes the scope for choice and trust. Moreover, some provinces have begun considering candidates for governor even prior to the conduct of elections.

• The political forces are determined to make the upcoming provincial council elections a trial run for the parliamentary elections to capitalize on the results.

• There's no sign that the future provincial councils will feature opposition forces, as voters are seeking meaningful voting. This voting, however, remains controlled by specific parties, and there is no hope of new forces representing opposition.

Mr. Mujtaba Al-Qadi

Supervisor of the Studies and Research Department at the Ashur Center for Democracy Support

• I like to start from a different perspective and shed light on the voter's psychological aspect, which is important. As an observer of the electoral situation in Najaf, I find a pressing need for candidates to satisfy the behavioral and psychological needs of the voters. However, this does not happen, as candidates tend to focus on materialistic behaviors, neglecting the psychological aspect. As a result, voters transition from being behavior-oriented to materialistic, in exchange for specific services or items. Political parties and alliances lack mechanisms to satisfy the psychological needs of the voters.

Views of Experts and Practitioners

Ms. Aya Al–Jamili

Bayan Center for Studies and Planning

• I would like to emphasize the issue of the failure of the political process to create awareness. Voters lack awareness of their rights towards the candidates they elect. Therefore, when a candidate offers any simple service, the voter considers it important and representative of the role of a deputy or a provincial council member. I propose focusing on awareness among university students by involving and hosting them in awareness sessions since they all have the right to vote. Thus, it is essential to invest in this demographic.

Mr. Ali Abdul Zahra

Fellow of the Iraq Policy Program (Third Round) – Journalist Interested in Electoral Affairs

• I do not want to differentiate between traditional parties and post-Tishreen parties because, if we want to discuss the establishment, objectives, and formation of these parties, they operate in the same way in terms of lacking clear programs.

• Voters are divided into two groups: partisan voters and patronage voters. This division results in the challenge of low voter turnout, and we witness even lower participation rates in every election.

• We emphasize the importance of voter turnout, even though the Constitution does not specify a particular percentage. Participation ensures political stability and legitimacy for those in power.

• Some citizens lack awareness and sell their voting cards. Parties also buy voters' support in this way. Therefore, civil society organizations should engage with citizens to raise awareness about the electoral process, ensuring political stability and successful elections.

Mr. Ahmed Al-Wandi

Spokesperson for the Victory Alliance

• Regarding the topic of holding or postponing the elections, I believe the elections will proceed as scheduled. Preparations have been made by political blocs, and a significant amount of money has been spent. However, there may be exceptional circumstances that could delay the elections.

• We have several concerns, the first being the voter turnout. The expectation is that voter turnout will be lower than in the 2021 elections, despite reservations about the previous electoral law, which only represented 5 million out of 9 million eligible voters in the parliament.

• We are concerned about the large sums of money being spent by some political parties to ensure the victory of certain candidates in specific regions. This poses a threat to the integrity of the electoral process. If this continues, I do not see a genuine effort to combat the issue of political patronage in the country.

• There are future economic challenges despite the favorable financial state of the country, as the economic situation is unstable and reliant on fluctuations in oil prices. The government lacks real capability to address these challenges without adopting a reformist approach.

Mr. Hashem Al-Husseini

Specialist Trainer in Political Development and Good Governance

• I believe it is difficult to postpone the elections as the electoral law has set a date no later than December 20, 2023. Any postponement would require returning to the parliament, which is challenging.

• Regarding electoral appeals, the Ashraqat Qanoun Bloc has filed appeals against specific legal provisions with the Federal Court. The Federal Court's decision accepted the appeal, requiring a review by the parliament and amendments in line with the constitution.

• Regarding provincial councils, they are a good platform for monitoring governors. After the suspension of the provincial council, governors have had unrestricted power in certain areas not within their authority. Additionally, they have control over the province's resources for their personal benefit.

• As for fair electoral competition, it is challenged by incumbent governors who utilize all state resources to ensure winning seats in the upcoming elections. The budget has been approved before the elections, providing incumbent governors with greater authority in utilizing state resources for their benefit.

• Voter participation rates are likely to be reasonable. Parties are mobilizing their supporters to ensure the success of these elections, as they serve as a gateway to parliamentary elections.
• Emerging parties may suffer as they lack a dedicated ideological and organizational base and rely on undecided voters who may not be guaranteed to participate.

• No entity can fill the vacuum left by the Sadr Movement, but there is an opportunity for candidates to connect with this audience by addressing their needs and concerns, potentially attracting some of their votes.

Dr. Amjad Al-Hathal

Legislative Department in the Parliament

• Many of the issues being raised are tactical and strategic issues that, in Iraq, are not subject to genuine scientific evaluation. We face two experiments: first, the dissolution of the Offices of the Inspector Generals, and second, the suspension of the provincial councils. These institutions are supervisory bodies in the structure of the Iraqi state.

There should be an evaluation of the performance of these institutions, areas of their failure, and their success. I haven't observed a scientific evaluation by the executive and legislative authorities. I believe the existence of research centers and intellectual institutions opens the door for the executive authority to collaborate with them in studying experiences and reducing improvised decisions.

• I wonder whether the amendments to the electoral law and the electoral systems within have undergone an objective evaluation of the transition from one system to another, and what is the scientific basis upon which these changes were made.

• Is it correct to merge the electoral laws for provincial councils and the national parliament, given that these are two distinct institutions in terms of objectives, performance, candidates, representation, and roles? This issue affects stability and participation.

• We have an electoral system, Sainte-Laguë, which is a complex system that is difficult for citizens to understand, while the system used in 2021 was clear, explicit, and easy to comprehend, as the winner was the one who received the most votes.

• There is manipulation within the Commission regarding the timing of the candidacy of one candidate over another from the same bloc. This occurred in the previous elections and requires real resolution.

• Voter turnout depends on two factors: first, services and addressing major issues like poverty, unemployment, and infrastructure improvement. How can you convince voters to participate when elections yield the same results? Second, what are the electoral programs that address internal problems in the province? As long as the mindset, performance, and outcomes are the same, I don't believe there is hope for increasing turnout.

• I highly doubt the ability of any political party to capitalize on the vacuum left by the Sadr Movement in the electoral arena, as it has ideological and direct control from the movement's leader.

• The performance of the new blocs faces challenges, affecting the appeal of independents and new blocs, meaning there is no increase in participation.

• There are 9 million voters who will not participate in the elections because they do not possess a biometric card, which will decrease participation.

• There are no elections in the world with equal opportunities, but in Iraq, the gap between one candidate and another is very significant.

Dr. Osama Al-Shebibi

Executive Director of Al-Baider Center for Studies and Planning

• Even after 20 years, we are still debating the importance and necessity of provincial councils despite them being a constitutional and essential cornerstone. They cannot be dispensed in the context of the modern state.

• In a country with diverse responsibilities and characteristics like Iraq, having a decentralized system is a fundamental issue that cannot be overlooked. In the midst of political instability, provincial councils serve as a primary and essential source of executive authority. Therefore, their existence is fundamental and important, and unfortunately, some attribute poor performance to the reason for having this institution.

• Provincial councils have faced fundamental theoretical and practical challenges, with the first one being theoretical, represented by the unclear vision of the constitutional drafter regarding the establishment of these councils, as the mentality behind drafting the constitution was more of a confederal one. Are provincial councils legislative and supervisory bodies, or are they administrative and service-oriented councils? This issue has affected the legislative aspect of the law.

• In practical terms, provincial councils have transformed into political councils rather than the developmental and administrative bodies they were meant to be. This transformation has influenced the performance of the national parliament as well, and the administrative and service aspects have been neglected. It is a mistake to merge two institutions with different roles, objectives, and candidates under one law.

• The elites should encourage citizens to participate, but some of them repeat in the media what citizens are already saying, which discourages citizens from participating. Even though the electoral process has evolved, as in the first elections, the vote was cast for a closed list, and no one knew the candidates inside. Now, everything related to the candidate is closely scrutinized.

• One of the problems with elections in Iraq is that everyone believes they should establish political parties and engage in political activities, which has led to chaos within the parliament and provincial councils. This is not true, as politics requires work, expertise, and influence. Despite freedom guaranteeing political engagement for all, not everyone is well-suited for political work.

Dr. Hussein Al-Fadhli

PSDIraq's Director of Public Relations

• The third amendment law No. (4) of 2023 provides an opportunity to build trust in the upcoming elections by placing cameras at polling stations for monitoring. The law also supports manual vote counting alongside electronic counting.

• It restricts elected members from changing their political affiliations until the council is formed, reducing political fragmentation. However, the challenge is the overlapping responsibilities between council members and members of parliament, as many MPs are increasingly involved in service roles.

Views of Experts and Practitioners

Dr. Ghassan Al-Saad — Political Science Specialist

• The merger of the two electoral laws has faced several criticisms without specific details or clear objections to the law.

• While we may not prefer an elected member of parliament to be from the same family, there's no legal issue with it. If the MP is not performing well, they wouldn't dare to nominate a relative and gain the electorate's support.

• The weak points include concerns about money in politics, the Electoral Commission's timid approach to this issue, and the legitimate and illegitimate use of power in distributing land that incumbent governors and ministers utilize, which impacts the rise of independent political blocs.

Ms. Lamea Al-Ameri — Journalist and Election Monitor at Shams International Network

• There is exploitation of people in remote areas through food baskets and buying voters' cards. Addressing this issue starts with raising awareness among citizens to prevent them from falling victim to such practices.

• We have leaders and national media outlets that can contribute to raising awareness among voters and stopping the exploitation of vulnerable citizens by some parties that make false promises of services and jobs.

• We must all work together to increase awareness and reduce exploitation.

Mr. Omar Ayad

Election Monitoring Network Member

• The current electoral law aligns with the ruling party's desires and undergoes continuous changes based on political circumstances.

• New parties and movements received a substantial number of votes but struggled to secure seats, as their supporters are not as organized as established parties. There is a perception that elections will not be postponed.

• The focus on Gaza's situation and the beginning of election campaigns at this time does not favor the electoral process. Voter turnout may not exceed 10%.

Dr. Walid Al-Zaidi

Former General Director of Operations at the Independent High Electoral Commission

• Many have criticized the merger of the two laws without specifying detailed concerns. The main purpose of the merger was to legislate both laws within a single basket to prevent future amendments within the next two years before the parliamentary elections.

• Those who wrote the election law lacked experience in electoral operations. Even if they had experience within the Electoral Commission, it differs from working in the operational department.

• The law introduces the establishment of counting and verification centers, which will take time to set up and has raised concerns about transparency since votes were counted at polling stations in the presence of political entities in the 2021 elections.

• The current focus on the situation in Gaza and the start of electoral campaigns may not be in favor of the electoral process. There are discussions about postponing the elections due to concerns about low participation, which may not exceed 10%.

Mr. Khalid Al-Marsoumi

Spokesperson for the Nazil Akhith Democracy Movement

• The 2021 elections provided us with the opportunity to engage with the electoral environment, and while we did not win any seats, we did gain about 30,000 votes.

• A candidate relies heavily on communication and social engagement, with the presentation of electoral programs coming in the second phase. We have candidates in 15 governorates under the name Civil Values Alliance and candidates in 4 other governorates under different names. Each candidate focuses on their area of expertise and the issues that matter most to the voters.

• Our main goal is to enter these councils to create an opposition, expand horizontally across governorates, develop the political and party scene, and emphasize non-partisanship and anti-corruption measures.

• We submitted a complaint to the Electoral Commission regarding some parties' exploitation of state resources for self-promotion. The commission responded that they were studying the matter, and we have also lodged complaints with the Higher Judicial Council on other election-related issues.

Ms. Aala Al–Tamimi

Secretary–General of the Arak Party and Candidate for Provincial Council Elections – Baghdad

• I'd like to share my experience as a candidate for the parliamentary elections in 2021 and as a current candidate. I must say that the previous elections were much easier than the current ones, which seem to facilitate the dominance of major parties in power.

• I've observed that voters are becoming more informed, especially in impoverished areas. They are increasingly discerning, demanding services in exchange for their votes.

• Some candidates are still engaging in buying votes, and I've heard that you can purchase 1,000 votes for 12 million dinars. However, the electorate is shifting towards evaluating candidates based on service delivery to citizens.

In conclusion, the President of the Center, **Mr. Hashim Al-Rikabi,** emphasized the development in the electoral system. There are five fundamental criteria to evaluate electoral systems: representation, accountability, transparency, fairness, and political stability. In Iraq, the system has made improvements in representation and transparency, with the presence of political entity observers and election monitoring networks. Small parties benefit from the Sainte-Laguë system, which encourages them to form coherent alliances, which, in turn, makes the law beneficial in several ways. From my perspective, participation might increase given the large number of candidates representing various political spectra.

It's important to emphasize that the negative discourse around elections and perceptions that they are predetermined can deter voters.I conducted a study on re-election rates, comparing the US to Iraq. In the US, re-election rates are about 50%, while in Iraq, they do not exceed 20%. This highlights the significance of elections in Iraq.

Regarding provincial councils, their performance has faced challenges, but it's important to note that these challenges are not exclusive to provincial councils. Reports indicate shortcomings in the performance of the national parliament and ministries. Having these councils is essential for achieving political and administrative stability, as governors can work for four years, which reduces the frequent changes seen in the absence of provincial councils in various governorates.

Recommendations

• Focus on raising voter awareness to help them exercise their constitutional right without undue pressure, including sessions on the Sainte-Laguë system.

• Work towards achieving minimum fairness in election campaigning to ensure acceptable electoral competition by actively curbing political money and power abuse.

• Conduct scientific studies to assess oversight experiences and guide decision-makers on enhancing them, including provincial councils.

• Promote a culture of checks and balances in provincial councils to improve their performance and reinforce the democratic experience.

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