

Iraq's October 2021 Election

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Iraqis Rebalance Forces in Parliament, Turn to Government Formation

On October 10, 2021, Iraqis voted in an [early](#) election to determine the makeup of the unicameral Council of Representatives (COR), Iraq's national legislature. The COR elects Iraq's president and approves the prime minister's program and cabinet nominees. The election results will inform negotiations among political groups to identify the [largest bloc](#) in the COR, which nominates a prime minister and shapes the selection of cabinet nominees. The largest bloc may or may not include the coalition or party that wins the most COR seats. Past government formation negotiations have taken months to resolve. Iran-aligned parties won fewer seats, which may make it less likely that Iraq's next government will request a fuller or earlier U.S. military withdrawal.

Iraqi [officials](#) and [clerics](#) encouraged voters to participate, but turnout was low, reflecting some [boycotts](#) and Iraqis' [lack of confidence](#) that participation would produce change. Although no party won an outright majority, the improved performance of some parties relative to the [2018 election](#), the weaker showings of others, and the electoral success of new parties and independents associated with the 2019-2021 protest [movement](#) may change some of Iraq's political dynamics.

Some pro-Iran/anti-U.S. forces fared less well than they had hoped and, among some others, are challenging the results. Pro-Iran groups appear to have [lost](#) some support by suppressing protests, but Iraqi analysts [expect](#) they will use resources and intimidation to [maintain their influence](#). Iraqi analysts expect a compromise coalition government to emerge from post-election negotiations that includes these groups alongside their rivals. Such a government could lower the risk of violent confrontation between armed supporters of competing parties, but also may make less likely some of the systemic reforms sought by protestors who brought down Iraq's last government.

Election Framework and Results

Under a new voting law finalized in 2020, Iraq [adopted](#) a single nontransferable vote system (one vote, one candidate, multiple seats per constituency). Voters selected 320 candidates across 83 local constituencies and nine candidates for seats reserved for minority groups. At least 25% of the COR seats were reserved for women, with one seat per constituency designated for female candidates. Prior elections saw voters choose party lists in province-wide constituencies. The provincial list system favored larger parties and enabled them to seat loyalists who might not have attracted support as individual candidates.

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Election results remain provisional, with certification expected after courts consider challenges. The European Union cited the findings of its election observers in saying the election was “largely peaceful and orderly” and that “[the polls were well managed and competitive](#).”

As of October 16, results indicate the following outcomes for selected parties, coalitions, and independents:

- **Sadrist Bloc (73 seats).** Supporters of Shia religious figure and militia leader [Muqtada al Sadr](#) won the most seats, improving on their 2018 electoral performance through [effective](#) party organizing and voter turnout activities. Sadr, whose movement maintains a militia of its own, emphasized the importance of state authority and control of armed groups in his post-election remarks. Sadrists campaigned against corruption, but Sadrists [face](#) related allegations. Sadr appears [determined](#) to wield influence over government formation, but he must navigate rivals’ concerns.
- **Taqaddum (Progress, 38 seats).** COR Speaker Mohammed Halbusi’s Taqaddum bloc prevailed in the competition among Sunni Arab coalitions, outperforming its rivals in the Al Azm bloc (Resolve, 12 seats).
- **Independents (37 seats).** Unaffiliated candidates attracted support across the country, but some have quietly aligned with organized coalitions.
- **State of Law (35 seats).** Former prime minister Nouri al Maliki’s coalition improved on its 2018 outcome, and other groups may seek its support to form the largest COR bloc. State of Law includes the Shia Islamist Dawa (Call) Party and smaller Shia Arab and Turkoman parties critical of the U.S.-Iraqi partnership.
- **Kurdish Parties.** The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP, 33 seats) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan ([PUK](#), 16 seats) remain the [dominant](#) parties in the federally recognized Kurdistan Region. The opposition New Generation movement won 9 seats.
- **Fatah Coalition (Conquest, 16 seats).** This coalition of Shia, Iran-friendly [opponents](#) of the U.S. military presence in Iraq won two-thirds fewer seats than in 2018, which may reflect some voters’ discontent and the coalition’s failure to adapt tactically to the new electoral system. Fatah leaders allege “[fabricated results](#)” and intend to challenge some outcomes legally. Fatah allies in the Babilyun movement won four of the seats reserved for Iraqi minorities.
- **Imtidad party (Reach, 9 seats).** Imtidad, a new protester-led party has demonstrated the political potential of [parties](#) that have organized to advance the movement’s demands with [various](#) agendas.
- **Coalition of the National State Forces (4 seats).** This coalition of supporters of former prime minister Hayder al Abadi’s Nasr (Victory) bloc and Shia leader Ammar al Hakim’s Hikma movement (Wisdom) attracted some voters’ support, but [diluted](#) its result in part through poor coordination.
- **Haquq (Rights) Movement (1 seat).** Supporters of U.S.-designated FTO [Kata’ib Hezbollah](#), which is widely considered a close [ally](#) of Iran and its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps—Qods Force (IRGC-QF), lead this party.

Implications for the United States

The Biden Administration congratulated Iraq on holding the election and [said](#) the United States hopes “Iraq will form a government that reflects the will of the Iraqi people.” The Administration [seeks](#) a multifaceted partnership with Iraq, and alongside U.S. aid programs, 2,500 U.S. military personnel [support](#) Iraqi operations against tenacious Islamic State [remnants](#). In July, U.S. and Iraqi leaders [decided](#)

that “there will be no U.S. forces with a combat role in Iraq by December 31, 2021.” Congress is considering [authorization](#) and [appropriations](#) legislation to support an advisory mission beyond that date., Fatah’s loss of seats may make them more intransigent in government formation negotiations and insistent on maintaining influence over the [Popular Mobilization Forces](#) (militias officially incorporated in the security sector). Iraqi parties may again choose inclusive power sharing to avoid confrontation, but a new government seen by Iraqi activists as reinforcing corrupt and unaccountable governance could drive renewed (and potentially destabilizing) protests.

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