

# Iraq 2025 parliamentary elections

## How votes are won, what results could mean for Iraq’s fragile stability

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ANALYSIS

Iraq’s parliamentary elections are set to take place on November 11, 2025. Yet despite the streets being adorned with campaign posters, there is little buzz in the air. Many Iraqis are expected to stay at home, having grown disillusioned with the ability of elections to deliver change in the two decades of democracy since the US-led regime change. There is already a broad consensus on the likely results of the election. Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani’s electoral list is widely seen as the frontrunner, with the ruling coalition of Shia parties under the Shia Coordination Framework expected to retain power through a consensus government that includes the major Kurdish and Sunni blocs. However, Sudani himself is seen as unlikely to remain prime minister even if his list wins the most votes: This will instead be decided in the complex post-election government formation talks between parties. After every previous vote, the election winner has not gone on to become prime minister. Yet, despite these foreseeable outcomes, the elections remain intensely contested. The major blocs are pouring vast funds into their campaigns. As former prime minister Haider al-Abadi admits, the election “will not depend primarily on popularity; It will depend on spending money, it will depend on buying votes.” Indeed, the election is less a referendum on government performance than an opportunity for deeply entrenched party elites to recalibrate power among themselves. The seats won at the polls will serve as bargaining chips, which elites deploy alongside other levers of power — including violence and street mobilization — as parties vie for senior government positions. The outcome of this bargaining could test Iraq’s stability. The country is entering the election from a rare moment of calm, which rests on a fragile elite pact that has traded reform for order. If the process proceeds smoothly, it will reaffirm Iraq’s managed stability through another cycle of competition within the system. But if rival factions perceive an imbalance or attempt to disrupt long-standing arrangements, even momentary instability could shake Iraq’s fragile equilibrium.

**How does democracy work in Iraq?**  
Iraq’s constitution, which was ratified by referendum in 2005, established the country as a parliamentary democracy with the Council of Representatives as its elected legislature. Every four years, registered citizens across all 19 provinces of Iraq (including those within the Kurdistan Region) are meant to vote for 329 members of the Council of Representatives. Theoretically, the Council of Representatives then nominates the president, a largely ceremonial position, who then nominates a



People drive their vehicles past electoral billboards on a street in Baghdad, Iraq, on October 14, 2025, ahead of parliamentary elections on November 11. ● AHMAD AL-RUBAYE/AFP

prime minister from the “largest bloc” within parliament. However, the largest bloc is not necessarily the bloc that won the most seats in the election, but rather the largest coalition, and the process of government formation involves protracted negotiations and bargaining between parties. While the system does not explicitly divide power by ethnicity or religious sect on paper, in practice, it remains deeply shaped by the ethno-sectarian order that was institutionalized after 2003. Politics has become tethered to identity. Shias primarily vote for Shia parties, Sunnis for Sunni ones, and Kurds for their respective Kurdish groups. Under an informal agreement in place since 2005, the prime minister has been a Shia, the president a Kurd, and the parliamentary speaker a Sunni Arab.

**Who is contesting Iraq elections?**  
Twenty years ago, the first election featured only a few grand coalitions. The United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) represented all major Shia groups and was endorsed by Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani. The Kurdistan Alliance united the dominant Kurdish parties, and Tawafuq represented the few Sunni Arabs who did not boycott the vote. There was also the Iraq list, a secular coalition led by Ayad Allawi. Today, those once-unified blocs have fractured into a constellation of competing electoral lists. The 2025 elections feature 31 alliances, 38 political parties, and 75 independent candidates. From the United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) now emerge a host of competing Shia factions. These include Prime Minister Sudani’s Reconstruction and Development Coalition, the State of Law, led by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki, as well as Qais al-Khazali’s al-Sadiqoun, Hadi al-Ameri’s Badr, and Ammar al-Hakim’s National State Forces Alliance. To varying degrees, some of these groups have historical and political links with Iran. These parties make up the ruling Shia Coordination Framework (SCF), an umbrella bloc of Shia parties that initially supported Sudani as prime minister. They are

contesting the elections as separate electoral lists but are expected to unite again after the election in a bid to form the largest bloc in parliament. The SCF is opposed by the influential Shia cleric Muqtada Sadr, whose movement is boycotting these elections. The Kurds, once united under the Kurdistan Alliance, now contest elections through separate banners: the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), and a range of smaller Kurdish movements. Tawafuq and the Iraq List, too, have fractured, giving rise to a variety of Sunni-led parties, including Mohammed al-Halbousi’s Taqaddum, Khamis al-Khanjar’s al-Siyada, and Muthanna al-Samarrai’s Azm Alliance.

defend them against external threats. More recently, Iraq’s protest movements — which called for an end to the ethno-sectarian system — have given rise to mobilization that uses the language of civic reform. However, in 2025, amid declining turnout, the defining feature of this election will be politicians using their positions and finances to gain votes. Those who do turn out at the polls are less likely to be ordinary citizens casting a free ballot, but rather those who are bound to the system in one way or another. Politicians are spending vast amounts this time around in what an expert at a Chatham House roundtable dubbed “the billionaires’ election”. Elections

Bloc	Electoral List	Leader
Shia-led	Reconstruction and Development Coalition	Mohammed Shia al-Sudani (Current PM)
	State of Law Coalition	Nouri al-Maliki
	National State Forces Alliance	Ammar al-Hakim
	Badr Organization	Hadi al-Ameri
	al-Sadiqoun Bloc	Qais al-Khazali
	Ibshir Ya Iraq Alliance	Humam Hamoudi
	Tasnim Alliance	Asaad al-Eidani
Sunni-led	Huquq Movement	Hussain Moanis
	Taqaddum Party	Mohammed al-Halbousi
	al-Siyada Party	Khamis al-Khanjar
	Azm Alliance	Muthanna al-Samarrai
Kurdish-led	Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)	Masoud Barzani
	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)	Bafel Talabani
	New Generation Movement	Shaswer Abdelwahid
Other	Ishraqat Kanoon	Hayder al-Mutairi
	al-Badeel	Adnan al-Zurfi

Major electoral lists competing in Iraq’s 2025 parliamentary elections ● CHATHAM HOUSE

How votes are won in Iraq: mobilizing the few  
Although Iraqis are theoretically free to vote for who they want, in practice, many of those who still vote do so based on patronage networks, financial or material incentives, and dependence. Elections are therefore seen by many Iraqis as an exercise in clientelism and corruption. Historically, Iraqi politicians evoked identity politics and ethno-sectarian loyalties to rally their bases, persuading voters that only one of their own can safeguard their interests or

have become high-stakes investments for the elite: Strong results translate into greater leverage during post-election bargaining, where influence and access to state resources are negotiated. Recent US-imposed restrictions on Iraq’s banking sector mean many rich Iraqis are directing their capital into domestic ventures, including politics. This election has therefore become another lucrative investment opportunity. To secure votes, the incumbent prime minister often wields his executive authority and the



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power to dispense public sector employment. During Sudani’s three years in office, the government’s payroll has swollen dramatically, with around one million new job positions announced. Ahead of the election, Sudani issued nearly 9,000 “thank-you” letters that can aid in future promotions to state employees. The timing, however, drew sharp criticism. President Abdul Latif Rashid warned that the move breached the government’s recent pledge to safeguard electoral transparency. Then, there are the men and women in uniform — employees of the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of Interior, and the various groups that make up the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and the Peshmerga. They cast their ballots early, on special voting days arranged just for them. Their turnout is tightly managed. Commanders keep watch. Their votes are more easily channeled toward the political parties that have given them their position and that command them. Beyond the military barracks lies another circle of voters: the clients woven into Iraq’s vast party networks. Families have learned to navigate the political seasons, understanding when loyalty is expected and when rewards are due. Parties also deploy service delivery as an electoral tool in areas where they hope to gain support. For example, Taqaddum candidate Raad al-Dulaimi launched a campaign to extend drinking water networks to underserved and Sunni communities north of Baghdad. Such initiatives, while addressing genuine infrastructure gaps, underscore how political actors increasingly take on the role of the state, delivering services to secure loyalty at the ballot box. There are also more overtly transactional ways that votes are purchased. Iraq’s thriving trade in votes has evolved for the 2025 election. A black market for biometric voter cards has emerged, with investigations revealing that cards are being bought and sold for around \$100 each. Voters typically receive half the payment upfront and the remainder on election day, in exchange for either casting a prearranged vote or abstaining altogether. Iraq’s political class is also turning to social media. Candidates and parties are said to pay influencers to post favourably about them, promote campaign narratives, or discredit rivals. Influencers told us that the going rates in this election are significantly higher than in previous years; A single post from a widely followed account

Turnout in Iraq’s previous parliamentary elections ● INTERNATIONAL IDEA/IFES

