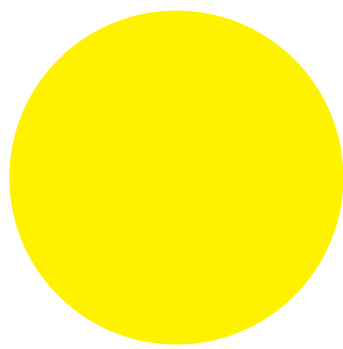


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Iran-Iraq ties too solid to be shaken by election outcome

INTERVIEW
EXCLUSIVE



Iraq's parliamentary elections, held on November 11, recorded a turnout of more than 56% of registered voters, a figure notably higher than the 41% participation seen in 2021. The contest brought together Iraq's main political forces, but absent from the race was Muqtada al-Sadr's Sadrist Movement, which boycotted the vote.

The outcome of the elections will play a decisive role in the formation of the next government, the choice of prime minister, and Iraq's regional positioning, especially in relation to Iran and the United States.

In this exclusive interview with Iran Daily, Iraq affairs researcher and analyst, Seyyed Reza Qazvini, examines the dynamics of the vote, its political consequences, and its implications for Iran.

IRAN DAILY: With voter turnout in Iraq rising from 41% in 2021 to over 55% in the latest elections, what impact might this have on the legitimacy of the new political structure and on the balance of power among the Shia, Sunni and Kurdish blocs? And what consequences could this shift have for stability along Iraq's eastern borders and Baghdad-Tehran relations?

QAZVINI: Let me first make a point about voter turnout. The figure of over 56% announced by Iraq's Electoral Commission falls within that body's own definition framework and has been widely criticized by political and electoral activists. If we consider all eligible voters above 18, the real participation rate would be around 41%. By the same realistic calculation, turnout in 2021 was about 38%. So yes, participation has increased this time, but not to the extent claimed by the commission—it's roughly a 3% rise. Now, let's get back to your question.

The recent elections have had little to no impact on the legitimacy—positive or negative—of Iraq's political system. The foundations of this system remain intact and continue to operate as before. Early indications suggest that the outcome does not point to any major transformation. The balance of power among the three main blocs—Sunni, Shia, and Kurdish—is not easily altered, and this election is unlikely to shake up that equilibrium. However, I believe what we can expect is some internal realignment within each bloc. The vote essentially served as a weigh-in among the parties and factions inside each of these three camps. As for Iran-Iraq relations, they are far too deep-rooted and solid to be thrown off balance by the outcome of a single election. Beyond geography and shared cultural and social ties, Iran's political influence among certain factions—by no means limited to Shia groups—has made Tehran-Baghdad relations quite distinctive.

Considering that the Sadrist movement boycotted the elections while public participation remained relatively high, can we say Muqtada al-Sadr's political weight in Iraq's future equations has declined? If his position weakens, what opportunities or challenges might that create for Iran in its political and security engagement with Iraq's next government?

The Sadrist movement remains a highly influential political and social force, particularly in the political sphere. While its social base is not easily expandable, its key strength lies in remarkable cohesion. In the 2021 elections, when the Sadrists won 73 seats and came out on top, they had secured only 885,000 votes—around 10% of the total. In other words, contrary to what some may assume, their participation or absence doesn't cause a massive gap in turnout figures. In the current elections, about 12 million people voted. Even if we assume one million Sadrists had participated instead of boycotting, overall turnout would have risen by only about 5% or 6%. That's in terms of participation. In terms of results, however, within the Shia camp, their presence could have redrawn the political map among Shia factions.

In my view, though, boycotting the elections was a mistake on Sadr's part. He had certain expectations—like many others, he anticipated low turnout and believed regional upheavals after October might spill over into Iraq, reshaping its politics.

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Iraq's Sudani scores 'major victory' in general election

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Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani shows his ink-stained thumb in a thumbs-up gesture after casting his vote at a polling station in Baghdad during the parliamentary elections on November 11.

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