



## [Iraq's Parliament Elects a Speaker as It Makes Steps Toward Establishing a New Government](#)

After a brief delay in the Iraqi parliament's opening session, the 329-member body has successfully elected a new speaker, Mohammed al-Halbousi. Speaker al-Halbousi, who will hold this position for the second time, defeated the acting speaker, Mahmoud al-Mashhadani, who was also speaker of the first parliament set in 2006. The delay in the election of the speaker occurred when certain political blocs of parties, including one led by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, claimed to hold a majority of seats. The largest political bloc, led by cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, objected to these declarations. While the election of the speaker proceeded according to the results of the recent October 2021 parliamentary elections and with the support of Muqtada al-Sadr's party, analysts and issue experts point out that some lawmakers could still switch parties to form a different majority bloc and unilaterally determine who will head the presidency. The election of speaker is an important step in the process of attempting to establish a new government, but it also begins what is likely to be a period of political jostling among rival blocs.

Parliamentary elections were held in Iraq back on October 10th of last year in 2021. This occurred months ahead of schedule in response to major anti-corruption protests that had been taking place across the country since 2019. Some observers contend that approximately 60 percent of the Iraqi population did not vote in the 2021 elections. No party won an outright majority of seats that would have enabled them to unilaterally name the next prime minister. Therefore, the Iraqi parliament has 30 days from its first session to elect the country's next president, before the largest bloc can then try to form a new government.

According to election results released in October, candidates led by the Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr won the most seats of any political bloc. The al-Sadr alliance increased its representation in parliament from 54 seats in the 2018 elections to 73 seats in 2021. Muqtada al-Sadr led an insurgency campaign against U.S. forces after the 2003 invasion, and was a target of the U.S. military. He has called for the withdrawal of the remaining American troops in Iraq, and has also been very critical of Iran for its close involvement in the politics of the country. Kurdish parties, including the Kurdistan Democratic Party and its rival the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party, won 61 seats. The coalition representing Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi won 38 seats.

Most Iraqis voted for parties that are hostile to those controlled by Ismail Qaani, the head of Iran's Quds Force. A bloc of candidates representing Shiite militias supported by Iran, known as the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), were the biggest losers in the recent October 2021 election. The PMF's representation decreased from 48 seats in 2018 down to 15 seats. Pro-Iranian parties have called the elections a "manipulation" and the results "fabricated." They have stated that they will not accept the results, with hundreds of PMF supporters having participated in sit-ins in Baghdad to protest the outcome. Many analysts and experts argue that the prospective stability of the government was not improved due to the suspected record low voter turnout. The concern is that the inability of any group to secure a majority of seats leaves room for certain political actors to negotiate their own coalition with independent candidates and in doing so aim to exert greater influence in Iraqi parliament.