



Months of Complex Negotiations to Form a New Government Expected in Iraq Following Its Recent Parliamentary Election

A recent parliamentary election was held in Iraq last week on November 11th in order to determine the makeup of the country's Council of Representatives. While Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani's coalition won the most seats (46) in the 329-member parliament, no single bloc achieved an outright majority. This sets the stage for what experts and analysts forecast will be potentially months of complex negotiations aimed at coalition-building to form a new government. Previous instances have typically taken such a period of time, with the most recent one even taking approximately a year to form and culminating in the election of Abdul Latif Rashid as president of Iraq and the subsequent designation of Mohammed Shia al-Sudani as prime minister.

The major outcomes stemming from last week's election included the strong showing from the incumbent prime minister's coalition, the higher-than-expected voter turnout, the boycotting of the election by some groups, and the unsurprising likelihood of prolonged negotiations to form a new Iraqi government. Regarding the performance of the current prime minister's coalition, its securing of the highest number of votes overall and in several provinces has seemingly bolstered his chances for a second term according to some experts, but others point out that the long process ahead means that this is far from a guarantee. Additionally, turnout was reported at an unexpectedly high 56.1%, which marked a notable rise from the rate of 43% back in the 2021 election. This was made further unforeseen by the fact that it occurred despite a boycott campaign led by Iraqi politician Muqtada al-Sadr, who implored his supporters to stay at home and not take part in the election. Turnout was deemed to be markedly higher in predominantly Sunni and Kurdish provinces as compared to Shia-majority areas where participation often fell to below 50% – a phenomenon that was likely the result of the aforementioned boycott.

Observers forecast that even with his coalition securing the most parliamentary seats, Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani still faces significant challenges in forming a new coalition government. This is due to several key factors such as the internal divisions within Iraq's Shiite political bloc. Sudani was initially brought to power by the Coordination Framework (CF) alliance of Shiite parties, however, he ran independently in this election and has been at odds with other prominent CF members. As a result, there are suspicions that an alliance could

emerge against the current prime minister. There is also the challenge of how to handle the substantial level of popular support for the influential Muqtada al-Sadr, whose previous withdrawal from the government formation process back in 2022 resulted in unrest which risks manifesting again and potentially threatening the stability of a new government. On top of all of this, Sudani's coalition will need to negotiate with major Sunni and Kurdish blocs in order to form a viable majority – something that will require delicate maneuvering and compromise.

Iraq's political landscape also often sees it engage in an intricate geopolitical balancing act involving navigating relations with major entities on the global stage like the United States and Iran. Just as the current government has been doing, the new one will seek to secure economic cooperation and military assistance from the United States while at the same time managing similar ties with Tehran. To first be in a position to try and accomplish this, above all, a robust coalition will need to be put together in order to allow a new government to come to fruition. The outcome of this will largely depend on which major political blocs in Iraq are able to successfully create alliances. The manner in which the process of forming a new government plays out remains to be seen, but what is certain is that the prolonged negotiations and maneuvering to do so will be challenging.