



مركز البيان للدراسات والتخطيط
Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies

Manipulation methods and means of fraud threaten early elections

Research Department



Al-Bayan Center Studies Series

About

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Since 2014

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Introduction

The upcoming legislative elections, scheduled to take place on 10th October 2021, are the most mysterious electoral experiment since the first elections in early 2005, for several reasons relating to its new law, which has never been applied in Iraq, the conditions for the formation of the Independent High Electoral Commission, the political environment surrounding the electoral process, and the eyes of States and external actors that used to intervene in Iraqi elections, pushing their output in specific directions.

This ambiguity is compounded by fears of possible manipulation and fraud in the early election results, which some consider being the most important transition in the electoral experiment, accompanied by demonstrations and clashes between State-related parties and protesters, radical political changes, perhaps the most notable was the departure of a controversial Government, and the emergence of a more controversial Government in the light of the challenges it faces, including the extent to which it can achieve fair and satisfactory elections for Iraqis, and the acceptance of the international community, which insists on

monitoring them.

As attention was drawn to the elections, their timing, and participation rate, concerns began to be raised about possible manipulation and fraud that might lead the election results away from the voter trends they would express by voting at the ballot box.

First: procedures to reduce manipulation and forgery

The Independent High Electoral Commission has made considerable efforts to limit manipulation and fraud in the upcoming elections, because of the popular and political importance of the elections, as well as abroad, especially following the decision of the United Nations to send international observers to observe the conduct of the electoral process.

One of the most important procedures to reduce the manipulation of election results in the eyes of the Commission is the adoption of the Biometric card, which significantly limits fraud because the voter's fingerprints in the card information make it necessary for the real voter to be present on election day.

Despite the great importance of the Biometric card, this procedure remains incomplete after the Electoral Commission allowed those who do not have this type of card to vote in the elections, which may open the door to manipulation in case of voter cards sale just like 2018's elections and previous, especially among the category of refugees.

The Government has also set up a committee called the “High Electoral Security Committee” to maintain security during the electoral process, by ensuring that voters are protected from the pressure that can be put on them, or by inducements that can be given to them on the day of voting, and by giving them the ability to vote freely.

Coordination has also taken place with the United Nations and other international actors to ensure international observation of the elections. The United Nations has already agreed to monitor, and the authorities and the Commission believe that this would reduce manipulation and fraud.

Second: Manipulation Methods

No elections in the world happen without attempts to manipulate, even in the most democratic countries, albeit in varying proportions between countries, as evidenced by the 2016 US presidential election when Donald Trump was accused of winning through foreign-aided manipulation, repeated in the 2020 election when Trump rejected the election results accusing President Joe Biden’s winning team of tampering.

This is what happened in an established democracy like America, so the likelihood of manipulation increases in emerging democracies like Iraq, where no elections have been held without accusations of manipulation. As early elections approach, political forces, especially those experienced in politics and elections, have different methods of manipulation, some of which have occurred, others of which may occur:

1. Selective division of constituencies

Having found themselves in the face of a new electoral law that could reduce their chances in the upcoming elections due to a plurality of constituencies giving small parties and independents a greater chance of winning, the power parties resorted to manipulating the division of constituencies selectively away from the geographical reality that is one of the conditions for the division of constituencies in the world, and instead of dividing the provinces into constituencies from the geography of the regions within them, Political blocs in the House of Representatives have pressed for the demarcation of electoral districts with non-contiguous areas to achieve narrow party interests. In Baghdad, for example, “Aladil” District shared an electoral district comprising “Abu Ghraib” and other areas far from the center of the capital. It has not been attached to the constituency, which includes “Al-Mansour” district, “Al-Jamia’a”, and other districts, although the distance between the “Al-rabie” and “Al-Mansur” districts is only 25 meters. This has been repeated in other governorates, such as Al-Anbar, where the city of “Al- Rutba” near the Jordanian border merged with “Amiriya Al-Fallujah”, located east of the governorate, near the border of the capital, Baghdad.

The resort by some forces to a selective division of constituencies can be explained by two things:

- a. An audience of political leaders and candidates dispersed throughout the province mobilized within a single constituency.

- b. The dispersal of audiences expected to vote for opponents in more than one constituency to ensure that they do not win elections, for example: If a party with the upper hand finds that areas (A, B, C) are adjacent and will vote for a competing candidate if it remains in a single constituency, so the district (A) is attached to another constituency, merging of (B) with another constituency and annexation (C) to a third district, so the contender candidate will not win because his or her masses are dispersed, at the same time the party with the upper hand can hack into persuading the electorate. (A, B, C) to vote for him/her by convincing the people that their votes would be of no value if it went to their previous candidate.

2. Size of electoral propaganda

A follower of electoral propaganda launched three months before the election notes that there is a significant difference in the volume of propaganda between candidates who own armies of advocates, money, space, and giant electoral machines, and other candidates who have entered individually, or through emerging parties, and here the large electoral propaganda can control the will of a few voters and guide them along the path they want, even if it is through various fake promises and temptation. It is clear, a party that possesses power, funds, and means will be able to manipulate and direct the will of the voters, even if it is contrary to their tenets.

3. Weak procedures for deterring electoral crimes

Electoral crimes are temporary crimes committed before and during the electoral process, from electoral propaganda to the announcement of results. The many States have established deterrent sanctions for the perpetrators of such crimes, which affect popular sovereignty. To date, Iraq has no such sanctions that can be applied. This may increase the audacity to manipulate because manipulators will be free from punishment. To clarify further, Iraq has not witnessed any legislation containing a specific provision or fine that could be applied to those who vote on behalf of others.

4. Infiltration of election observation teams

In each election, there are two types of observers, one belonging to political entities, the other supposed to be neutral, and the risk is that some parties will have access to neutral observers, so that they will come out after the election and express views on the results that are seemingly neutral, but that is biased. These teams and their elements must be diagnosed from now on to remove their neutrality.

5. Violence and threats

With repeated warnings that the arms may affect the election, there are fears that voters may be subjected to pressure and threats that could lead them to vote for specific candidates.

6. “Politicized” protests

It is expected that some political parties who believe they will

not gain election gains will try to raise a class of people and move their supporters in the name of “protests,” which may remove images of electoral propaganda, or prevent voters from reaching polling stations.

7. Burning or theft of ballot boxes

The previous legislative elections in 2018 saw burning to the ballot box at the Electoral Commission’s warehouses beside Al-Rashafa. Suspicions were raised at the time that some of the beneficiaries were standing behind it. Today there are fears that this could happen again and that the ballot box could be burned, robbed, or theft on election day in the presence of objectors and those working to manipulate its results.

Third: Counterfeiting Methods

1. Concerns in the run-up to the early elections are not limited to fears of manipulation, as there are also other fears of possible direct fraud through the use of, inter alia:

Concealment and purchase of non-biometric cards

It is known that counterfeiting is easier using non-biometric electronic cards, owing to the lack of a fingerprint and the fact that the voter is not required to be present on election day, these cards can be used for counterfeiting, which according to politicians is more than 4 million cards, a number that IHEC said was exaggerated except that it did not deny electronic cards. The concern, in this case, is that some parties have obtained a large number of voter cards since the previous election and that they

may be able to buy new ones, which could be used to change results.

2. Non-neutral administration

The existence of a non-neutral administration of polling stations represents the greatest risk to the integrity of the upcoming elections, and this issue should be addressed early to address it quickly because the bias administration of the centers towards one party to another means that the results will not properly represent the wishes of the voters. There is also a fear of a possible change in the results of the elections in the event of an agreement between parties and staff members who could breach IHEC's fortifications.

3. Family voting

The masculine nature of Iraqi society has imposed the phenomenon of "family voting" since the first elections in 2005, from which the head of household proceeds to vote instead of his family members. This phenomenon still exists to date. Some people have begun to pledge the votes of their families and relatives to specific candidates. This can continue until polling day when they go to polling stations to ensure that their family and relatives vote for specific candidates.

4. Refugees' votes

Candidates from the northern and western governorates have already used the Refugees' case to increase the number of seats in the House of Representatives, and today the "Sunni"

component is in a raging conflict over the votes of 150,000 Refugees. The recent serious argument between the two heads “Mohamed Al-Halbousi” of “Takadum” Party and “Khamis Al-Khanjar” of “Azm” over the Refugees of “Jurfa al-Nasr” is a clear demonstration of the severity of this conflict. There are fears of pressure by the conflicting parties to illegally seize the voices of Refugees.

5. Buying votes near polling stations

Some parties used to use illegal means of obtaining votes, including payments to voters near polling stations in exchange for voters vowing to give their votes to them. There is still no clear procedure that can limit this, so this issue could be an entry point for changing the course of the election results.

6. Sorting Mechanism

Previous accusations of electronic counting and screening place this mechanism in the dock as potentially one of the instruments of fraud in the upcoming elections, according to the concerns of parties and politicians who do not trust electronic counting and screening devices.

Conclusion

It must be said that elections are closely related to the democracy that represents the people's self-government. As a result, elections play a vital role in the management of state affairs by the people they bring to power. As the election is all that important, it will certainly be the focus of attention to the powerful political forces, some of whom do everything to remain in power, even though it is through manipulation or fraud, that can be reduced during Iraq's upcoming elections through the following:

1. Penalties amounting to imprisonment and large fines for individuals found guilty of electoral offenses of any kind.
2. Help voters to move on polling day within their constituencies, which include non-contiguous areas, to allow them to vote freely.
3. Strict censorship of the exaggerated electoral propaganda of some candidates, accountability for its sources, and preventing officials from exploiting their posts and capabilities for electoral publicity.
4. To ensure the integrity and impartiality of the electoral observation teams, which is a condition for their continued operation, and to draw on individuals with experience in this area even if they are from outside the country.
5. Introduce credible and impartial research centers and civil society organizations on the Electoral Watch Line as means of transmitting elections to public opinion through daily reports

issued from the day of voting until the results are certified by the Federal Court.

6. Take appropriate security procedures that can ensure that voters arrive and vote without threats, pressures, or temptations, as well as prevent any congregations that may turn into protests that may occur on polling day.
7. To assign the security of the ballot box to a special force that will move it from the centers to the warehouses and continue to guard it until the results of the elections are certified.
8. Verify the identity of voters through electronic cards in the presence of representatives of political entities to prevent fraud.
9. Reliance on qualified and impartial staff to manage electoral centers and important joints in the Electoral Commission.