



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

Iraq's Parliamentary Elections 2021: The Harsh Lessons

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Al-Bayan Center Studies Series

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Since 2014

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The electoral race concluded with a large-scale boycott, and the surprises that occurred were evident among the specialists who know how to deal with society sensors, before their consultations in the closed rooms.

The Iraqi parliamentary electoral competition resulted in several important factors, indicating profound transformations in the Iraqi society, and these transformations should receive the attention of those concerned before they would translate into unimaginable consequences.

Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning's large-scale survey, which was published ten days before the elections, indicated a significant increase in the fortunes of the State of Law coalition, Taqaddam coalition, the independents and the Octoberists, especially Imtidad. While also predicting a significant decline in the fortunes of Al-Fatah coalition and Al-Aqed Al-Watany. The survey also showed clear progress for the Sadrist bloc and Kurdistan Democratic Party, and a decrease in people's tendency towards Azem. Perhaps the only difference that occurred between the survey and what really occurred was about the coalition of State Forces, and we will explain the reasons below.

In general, several basic lessons can be drawn from what happened in the electoral surprise on October 10, 2021:

1- Perhaps the most prominent shock in the elections was the limited impact of the supreme religious authority on the course of this electoral process. The 2021 elections were the first that did not witness

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a clear and decisive impact on the call made by the supreme religious authority in which it called on people to participate in the elections, after its voice had a significant impact on the popular boycott in the 2018 election, while its calls had an important impact on the increase in participation rates in the previous elections.

The decline in the influence of people who are considered centers of gravity in society in general and the institution of supreme religious authority in particular, portends the society's loss of impenetrable dams that prevent it from being emotional and reckless in important historical moments facing nations. Regardless of the reasons of this societal orientation, those engaged in political work are on a date with other grave entitlements in which the supreme religious authority may not have an impact as in the past.

2- The elections were in general – (not completely) – free of sectarian rhetoric and other phenomena that were a source of legitimacy for the candidates in the previous elections. This coincided with a public opinion, which rejecting the sectarian division that results from quotas at the level of government. Thus, the return of some political forces to a vague and opaque entity, such as the (Shiite Coordination Framework), represented a response to the nature and atmosphere of the elections. In addition, such a framework (which is supposed to be Shiite) appeared and in the midst of the crisis of acceptance the election results is nothing but (a framework that follows Wilayat Al-Faqih, and an opposition framework), because it is not possible to assume that mentioned framework will include other Shiite parties and movements like the Sadrist bloc and about 10% of the new parliament members who they are Octoberists and independents. Not to mention the large Shiite public who boycotted the elections (more than the number of participants). This paradox in political action may have more severe effects on the Shiite community itself, which is resentful of its political

forces and representatives.

3- According to the preliminary results, the representatives of the October protests (the Octobersits) won an impressive number of seats in the next parliament. The secular communist left, in particular, used to dominate three arenas (the media, civil society organizations, and the political opposition active in the protest arenas), but the new rising wave in the parliament represented the liberation of reconciled civil secularism with religion, from secularism in its laïcité version that rejects religion and the religious. Unless the traditional political forces notice, acknowledge, and deal with this shift in the mood of the young Shiite community, this shift is likely to return to the arms of the left wing once again.

Iran, the neighbor, shocked after 2014 three shocks in its dealings 4- with the Iraqi file. These shocks showed the depth of the wrong strategic reading of Tehran. The first of these shocks was the fall of Mosul, which was an indication of the corruption and failure of leaders entrusted with the task of building the Iraqi state, and communicating with representatives of the objecting provinces, regardless of regional positions and internal transformations in those provinces, which had the main impact in the fall of large parts of the country on hand of ISIS. On the other hand, the events of the October demonstrations were the second shock, which showed the depth of the gap between the political leaders and the Shiite street that is revolting and rejecting its political forces. And, the results of the 2021 elections were the culmination of the successive shocks of Tehran. The Islamic Republic had previously strongly supported Al-Fatah political block and Al-Aqed Al-Watany, as they represent the Shiite and Islamic depth in Iraq. These two lists support the well-known Islamic Republic project in the region, but the election results showed that the bet on a political project that was not stemming from the priorities of Iraqi society in general and Shiites

in particular was waste. Here, of course, it is necessary to separate the project of the PMF, which still represents a strategic choice in the face of terrorism and other internal and external dangers, and the political project of Al-Fatah block

5- The Iraqi voter banged the political process tow times, the first by boycotting and the second by participating in the elections. Boycotting the elections represented a clear rejection of the system and its political forces, which insisted on facing the citizens – (or not in many examples within these elections!) – with the same repeated faces, and without “programs” literally. It is as if the voters are required to vote on history, slogans and moods, and not according to goals and programs. As for the participating voters, they directed their votes in a “punitive” manner wherever they had the opportunity to do so.

6- The losers reaped what they sowed, through their arrogance in front of people, their lack of awareness of the people’s concerns, and their weak interest in the rising young generation, they even paid attention to files that are not among the priorities of citizens’ lives! Clear signs have emerged from the street indicating that there is no longer anyone who demands the provision of water and electricity, but people become convinced that the problem is in the political system that no longer preserves the dignity of “Iraqis”. The burning of the consulates, the way the Saudi team was received in Basra a few years ago, and even October protests itself, were confronted with bullets, kidnappings, militia parade and humiliating threats that affected even the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces, instead of trying to understand and self – criticism.

7- The winners in this round like Sadrist bloc, took advantage of the large-scale boycott of the elections by organizing their audience and communicating directly with their voters. While a number of facts formed the reason for the remarkable rise of State of Law coalition,

including the fact that this coalition is the qualitative opposite of the Sadrist movement, as well as the voters' conviction in the ability of the State of Law coalition and its leader, Al-Maliki, to control loose weapons and return the country to the stage of economic prosperity. Also, an important part of Al-Fatah's public who objected to the policy of the Al-Fatah Alliance, cast its votes for the State of Law, according to the data. As for Taqaddam's list, their bet on youth and communicating with them, as well as bypassing traditional social networks, was the reason for their electoral progress that took place in the western governorates.

8- The political process won 97 women in the next parliament – (as a preliminary announcement of the results) – a remarkable number that exceeded the quota of 83 women. What the political forces did in these elections, and it cannot be overlooked, is that they nominate strong women figures in order to win votes, and they won their seats with their votes, which could result in an increase in the effectiveness of women in the next parliament, even if the assertion is delayed for time.

9- The political meeting of the October protests leaders produced important phenomena, as the leader of "Imtidad" who got more votes than leaders and names that have a heavy weight without costly electoral propaganda. Also, they presented the youngest young female candidate, and they achieved the highest votes for a female candidate, and won in the most prominent religious city (Najaf al-Ashraf), and competed fiercely with top candidates in the most difficult electoral districts such as Karrada in Baghdad. All these phenomena should not be lost sight of observers.

On the other hand, the political meeting of the traditional conservatives on the Shiite side showed an irrational rush. There were cases that had a clear impact on the low results of the Shiite side in the elections, results they did not expect. Cases such as their nomination

of candidates in the guise of independents alongside official candidates. Also, their unjustified confidence in the multiplicity of candidates in some electoral districts. And, their lack of direct communication with the people, and their contentment with costly propaganda.

Post-election: Crucial Entitlements

The post-election political process requires a set of decisive measures and policies that change the status of the political process, in the light of the change that happened in the mood of public opinion and the entitlements of the political blocs according to the results and numbers. The following is part of those required policies:

- Acceptance of the results of the elections and submission to the equation of change, which required by the masses, and controlling the passive rhetoric that threatens civil peace, is an essential part of the entitlements of the democratic system that the Iraqis have sacrificed precious blood to obtain and maintain.
- The elections with its results are either a motive for a radical change in the orientations of the regime, which is the demand of the boycotters and the desperate on the one hand, and the demand of the participants who punished the traditional political forces on the other hand, or that the results of the elections lead to a repetition of the previous consensual quota equation, which means that a serious impasse would face the political system and a motive to renew the protests in which the events of October are just a joke!
- The public that did not vote in the elections, which constitutes the silent majority in Iraqi society, may not remain so in the political impasse. Political forces are required to understand this public and adapt to it, and note it in the government formation as well as the upcoming policies.

- The political forces have greatly trusted international legitimacy, but the latter has apparently become conditioned on real reforms. Unless the political system is convinced of its voluntary isolation from the international community if they will produce a kleptocratic system, which re-creates coercive tyranny through the suppression of political and civil liberties, and the clientelistic rentier economic system, but we will see what will happen.
- A careful reading of the number of votes obtained by the winners, and those obtained by the losers, shows that the great loss of votes was the phenomenon of this election. Since the proportional representation system at the governorate level (as in the 2018 elections) did not meet the ambition of representation, the formulation of a moderate electoral system seems more important. The electoral system can be modified through a mechanism in which half of the parliament is elected individually (as in the current election), while the votes of political lists are collected to choose the other half of the parliament, as in the electoral systems in Germany and Japan. Thus, the advantages of individual elections can be combined with a more powerful presence of political parties and blocs, so that the upcoming parliamentary sessions will be more representative and capable of leading the country.