



Lessons Learned from the Iraqi Electoral Scene in the 2025 Elections An Analytical Reading of Voting Patterns and the Redistribution of Political Power

Mustafa al-Saray





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Mustafa al-Saray / Director of Research at Al-Bayan Center for
Studies and Planning

Translation: **Milad Alnofaly**

About

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www.bayancenter.org

info@bayancenter.org

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The 2025 Iraqi parliamentary elections revealed a new phase of political and social transformation in Iraq. Their preliminary results reflected notable changes in voter orientations and a broad reshaping of power balances among major political blocs, in addition to fundamental shifts in the representation of religious and ethnic minorities.

The electoral race concluded amid significant celebration by all sides, despite the political or social boycott adopted by certain social forces, as well as the presence of some qualitative losses among individuals and within the Iraqi social composition. Yet these surprises did not escape the attention of specialists experienced in reading street indicators prior to consultations behind closed doors. It may be said, however, that these elections produced a set of important findings capable of signaling profound shifts within Iraqi society—developments that should draw the attention of stakeholders before they translate into a reality that may prove painful for some and pleasing for others.

This study seeks to analyze the most prominent of these transformations by examining the lessons learned from the electoral experience across a set of variables, such as the decline of civil forces and traditional figures, the rise of major political forces, and the reshaping of the map of minority representation.



First: The Shock of Participation

Contrary to many predictions that expected voter turnout to remain close to the levels recorded in the provincial council elections—ranging between 45% and 48%—the percentage announced by the Independent High Electoral Commission, confirming that total turnout reached 56.11%, came as a major shock for several reasons. This figure reflects a renewed popular dynamism, despite the Sadrist Movement (Muqtada al-Sadr) boycotting the elections.

On another level, it may be said that the frustration or boycott expressed by certain groups does not necessarily signal a collapse of the democratic process; there remains the possibility of attracting other voters or re-energizing participation, particularly when there is a sense of the importance of change or meaningful involvement. This can occur through activating ready-made motivational frameworks such as sectarian identity or the appeal of economic and service-related demands.

Although this percentage is, technically speaking, the subject of considerable debate—since it reflects the number of voters who updated their biometric card data rather than the total number of citizens eligible to vote, which is estimated at roughly 29 million Iraqis—the percentage was calculated based on approximately 21 million updated voters alone, within which also exist boycotting groups.

Furthermore, new generations entered these elections—those born in 2004, 2005, and 2006—who contributed to increasing turnout through their participation; however, their impact was not clearly visible in the election outcomes.



The Iraqi elections highlighted important lessons in electoral transparency within a political landscape full of challenges. The 56% turnout indicates a moderate level of civic engagement, yet it also raised questions about the underlying political enthusiasm among voters. Many expressed skepticism about the possibility of achieving meaningful change, reflecting a broader sense of disappointment in the political process and a notable lack of genuine commitment to democratic reform among leading political blocs.

Moreover, the elections were held amid significant geopolitical tensions and internal unrest, which may have influenced voter behavior and perceptions of electoral legitimacy. The political polarization—intensified by external conflicts and local power struggles—underscored the need for a unified political vision that transcends factional interests. As Iraq navigates these complexities, the lessons learned from the 2025 elections can help inform future electoral practices, ensuring that transparency and accountability remain at the forefront of the political agenda.

Second: Civil Forces — From Setback to Major Shock

These elections revealed a major shock for the civil forces in Iraq, despite the fact that such expectations were known to the majority of elites. Even the surveys conducted by the Bayan Center for Studies and Planning regarding the elections had uncovered a large part of these expectations early on, yet some continued to make an effort nonetheless.

The election results demonstrated the failure of all forces and figures affiliated with the civil current—whether running as independents or allied with major and traditional parties. This failure





is attributable to two factors. The first relates to a set of errors committed by these blocs and forces during the period from 2021 to 2025; the second concerns the practices of the political system toward these forces, aiming to dissolve them and redirect their supporters back to the traditional bases.

Regarding the first factor, the civil forces faced a series of missteps that ultimately led to their failure. Most prominent among these was the transformation of the role of civil forces and the parliamentarians who had adopted a civil orientation, especially after the Tishreen protests. They had been viewed as an opposition bloc to the existing power structure, yet the public was surprised when these deputies and forces shifted to become part of the traditional power system, even going so far as to run on its electoral lists. The public had expected them to form a strong opposition bloc that would reflect the voice that rose during the protests.

The elections also revealed these forces' inability to organize at the party, grassroots, and political levels, whereas organized forces demonstrated their capacity to achieve success through unified alliances that reflected strong internal structure. By contrast, the civil forces failed to build effective party and grassroots organizations, as well as to organize themselves electorally. This failure became evident as early as the 2023 provincial council elections. They were expected to learn from that experience, yet they did not succeed, leading to their fragmentation among traditional blocs such as State of Law, Reconstruction and Development, and the State Forces Alliance. Some individuals even joined the al-Sadiqoon Bloc, which civil forces had previously heavily criticized. This shift pushed the public away from them, as they came to be seen as part of the problem rather than the solution.



Additionally, these forces did not succeed in presenting themselves as a genuine alternative possessing a strong and clearly defined program capable of changing the current reality. Instead, they pursued the same traditional methods based on rhetorical messaging—the very rhetoric they had rejected in 2019.

In the aftermath of the setbacks experienced by the protest movement in 2021, and the arrival of deputies affiliated with it into parliament, the civil sphere witnessed a notable vacuum. These deputies ceased engaging with the public through open meetings or participation in research centers, organizations, and social activities. Likewise, many civil writers and journalists stopped addressing civil issues, which emptied the civil space of its opinion leaders and influencers.

On another front, the political system exploited the weakness and disunity of these forces to employ both incentives and intimidation—offering positions and privileges to some, and using power and authority against others. Moreover, these civil forces—belonging to the Shi'i social environment—compete with traditional powers within the same milieu, yet they adopted an approach that detached them from their core base: the same public that had taken to the streets demanding reform and had voted for them in the 2021 elections.





From all this, we may conclude that the civil forces failed due to:

1. Fragmentation of the civil discourse and weak party organization.
2. Limited resources compared to state-backed parties.
3. Declining popular support after 2019.
4. Punitive voting.

Third: The Triangle That Was Broken (Capital Holders, the Tribe, and the Traditional Candidate)

These elections highlighted a formula and configuration that may have occurred for the first time in Iraqi electoral history. The Iraqi voter had long been accustomed to seeing candidates with substantial financial resources—businessmen, traders, and entrepreneurs—win due to the influence of their money on the electoral process, in addition to candidates from tribal sheikhs, especially prominent tribes and well-known sheikhs such as the al-Jubouri, al-Maliki, al-Tamimi, al-Shammari, al-Atabi, al-Watifiy, and others. To this were added political figures such as current and former members of parliament, ministers, governors, and other political personalities holding positions within traditional blocs.

However, these elections removed this tripartite structure smoothly and simply, as all three categories—particularly their most prominent figures—failed to win. This reflects a heightened voter awareness, as the Iraqi voter has become far more conscious of electoral behavior and how to exercise the weight of their vote.

This development may have multiple explanations, but the key reasons can be summarized as follows:



1. The tribe is a social culture, not a political bloc: This is evident from the shifting perception of tribal affiliation. Loyalty to the tribe has declined among younger generations (aged 18–35), who no longer vote automatically for their tribal sheikh. Instead, they seek employment opportunities, services, and education—not tribal representation. Thus, a young person may vote for someone from his tribe, but only because he views tribal solidarity as rooted in demands and service provision, not in traditional subordination. At the same time, internal fragmentation within tribes—particularly when multiple candidates from the same tribe run in the same district—has led to vote dispersion and collective loss.

Moreover, the tribe's influence has diminished relative to that of the state or dominant political parties. The political system today rests more on organized partisan forces than on traditional tribal power. Additionally, a negative perception of “tribal politics” has recently grown, especially among youth, who increasingly view tribal sheikhs in parliament as having failed to deliver genuine achievements. Many young voters now believe these sheikhs are more effective within the “tribal diwan” than in parliament, prompting them to cast their votes for new figures.

2. Money alone is not enough: These elections saw a large number of businessmen, traders, and investors—especially high-profile figures—run for office, many of whom were appearing publicly for the first time and remained unknown to voters beyond their projects, products, or commercial and industrial enterprises. These financiers expected victory to be guaranteed, drawing on the precedent of the 2021 elections, which had produced several MPs from among investors and traders.



Yet they failed. The public mood had shifted substantially regarding “political money.” Iraqi society has become more sensitive to financial influence and now tends to view businessmen as part of a patronage network rather than as agents of change. Similarly, the votes of impoverished communities increasingly shifted toward forces that provide direct services, whereas businessmen often mounted strong media campaigns but lacked genuine grassroots support. Many voters now seek tangible achievements rather than broad developmental promises.

Furthermore, conflicts of interest became clearer to the public. Voters began to distrust businessmen entering politics, seeing them as pursuing personal gain or government contracts, which alienated the electorate. This dynamic reinforced the rise of a national, anti-corruption, anti-quota discourse, in which businessmen came to represent the stereotypical image of the “corrupt” or the “beneficiary of the state,” even if that perception was not always accurate.

3. Public fatigue with repetitive faces: The Iraqi voter has grown weary of MPs who reappear every cycle with the same promises and no tangible results. This has triggered a natural “replacement” wave favoring change-oriented movements. This wave has intensified, especially in major cities, due to the public desire to break free from the model of the “perpetual politician” who holds office for years with declining performance over successive terms.

Most traditional MPs have failed to deliver clear service projects, and many appeared ineffective within parliament, rendering them unpopular electorally. Thus, much of the voting was aimed at weak-



ening the quota system, as voters consciously opted to remove traditional figures and prevent the recurrence of old alliances and power-sharing arrangements.

4. From this, it can be said that the Iraqi voter has become more pragmatic, inclined toward those who are believed capable of delivering services, development, and livelihood opportunities—rather than those who represent identity, tribe, wealth, or political history. This has produced a simple equation composed of three points.

SHIFTING PUBLIC MOOD + DECLINING TRUST + RISING VOTER PRAGMATISM

The following table provides a brief comparison between the 2021 and 2025 elections, highlighting the shifts based on the factors discussed above:

Category	Change Compared to 2021	Reasons for Decline
Civil Forces	Major decline	Weak organization – Absence of realistic programs
Businessmen	Clear decline	Loss of trust – Perceived conflicts of interest
Tribal Sheikhs	Moderate decline	Shifts in young generation's awareness
Old MPs	Sharp decline	Punitive voting – Voter fatigue

Source: Prepared by the researcher



Fourth: The Rise of Major Political Forces and the Reshaping of Power Dynamics

The election results revealed a reconfiguration of the major traditional political forces, as well as the renewed forces emerging from within those traditional formations and aligned with them in discourse and constituency. These forces rely either on sectarian-based rhetoric or on a discourse focused on economic and service-oriented demands. This gave them a significant opportunity to reposition themselves through these elections, particularly in light of several enabling factors, such as the existence of an electoral law that secures such gains for them, the absence of the Sadrist Movement—their primary competitor—and the lack of a genuine parliamentary opposition. This produced several indicators, including:

- 1. The rise of the Reconstruction and Development Alliance and the service-oriented discourse:** The Reconstruction and Development Alliance, led by Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, adopted a developmental discourse centered on services and investment, which earned it broad public support. This shift reflects an important transformation in voter awareness, as voters now measure performance by outcomes rather than affiliations.
- 2. The repositioning of traditional Shi'a forces:** Forces within the Coordination Framework, such as State of Law, Badr, and Sadiqun, succeeded in rebuilding their electoral base. This resurgence became evident in Shi'a-majority areas with politically stable attitudes. The electoral gains achieved by these forces and others demonstrate that traditional forc-



es (including those of Shi'a origin) were not sidelined but instead reorganized themselves.

This may suggest that voters do not seek a complete break from the old guard, but rather a relative change through new alliances led with greater effectiveness—possibly accompanied by concessions from traditional actors. Their victory also reflects the fact that they possess strong grassroots bases and organizational capabilities that allow them to compete vigorously.

Conversely, the success of alliances such as the “Alliance of State Forces” indicates the presence of a pragmatic centrist current that seeks to balance religion and state, and to harmonize among various societal components. This points to an evolution in the political landscape, not merely along the axis of (religious–secular), but toward the emergence of a moderate center capable of drawing votes from multiple groups.

3. The rise of Sunni forces (Taqaddum and Azm): The election results show a clear expansion of the influence of Taqaddum and Azm, indicating that the Sunni voter has shifted toward a moderate discourse blending decentralization, development, and reconstruction, and moving away from previous identity-based rhetoric.

4. The continued strong Kurdish presence: The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) maintained a stable presence, with the KDP even expanding into minority seats, thereby increasing its parliamentary weight.





Fifth: Reshaping Minority Representation

One of the most significant outcomes of the 2025 elections was the restructuring of the electoral landscape related to minority seats in a manner that goes beyond a mere redistribution of seats, revealing instead a deeper transformation in the very nature of political competition. Although the number of quota seats is fixed by law, the way they were utilized electorally witnessed a qualitative shift, reflecting in practical terms the transition of political parties from treating minority seats as a narrow electoral privilege to using them as instruments for rebuilding political influence and legitimacy.

In the Christian context, the dominance of the Babylon Movement—which had nearly monopolized Christian seats in the 2021 elections—declined, as it lost a significant share of its influence in 2025, forfeiting three seats to candidates backed by major forces, particularly the KDP. This shift cannot be understood outside the broader context in which major parties now view minority seats not as marginal electoral bonuses, but as tools to bolster the legitimacy of “values” and the legitimacy of “protection,” both before their constituents and before the international community.¹

In contrast, there was a clear rise in Yazidi representation, particularly through the Ezidi Cause Alliance, which succeeded in securing candidates via the quota and beyond it—either within its own list or through its support of others outside it. This reflects an advancement in Yazidi political awareness in the post-genocide era,

1- Interview with Dr. Saad Salloum, expert on religious diversity affairs in Iraq, Baghdad, 16 November 2015.



and a transformation from the position of victim to that of a political actor with its own agenda. As articulated by researcher Saad Salloum, this may open the possibility for minority issues—if well utilized—to become a basis for redefining the concept of political legitimacy from “numerical legitimacy” to “legitimacy of values and justice.”²

A noteworthy paradox in this context is that the preliminary results showed the KDP winning around five minority seats, reflecting the ability of major parties to redraw their alliances and expand their base through minorities in a manner that extends beyond the electoral dimension to strengthening their negotiating position within the political system. This pragmatic use of minorities as a bridge for cross-identity alliances may reinforce the notion that minorities could become pivot points for building new coalitions not based on sectarian identity, but on platforms such as protecting diversity, human rights, and equitable development.³

Thus, the results of minority seats in the 2025 elections were not merely numbers, but indicators of a broader political shift: the transition of minorities from the margins to the center of competition, and their transformation into instruments for redefining the electoral landscape and testing the political system’s capacity to adopt a new legitimacy grounded in pluralism rather than demographic size alone.

2- Interview with Dr. Saad Salloum, expert on religious diversity affairs in Iraq, Baghdad, 16 November 2015.

3- Saad Salloum, “Minorities and the Reconstruction of Political Legitimacy in Iraq: From Muhasasa to Pluralistic Justice,” Al-Mada Newspaper, Issue No. 6027, 13 November 2025.





The following table illustrates the redistribution of minority seats:

Category	Quota Seats	Winners 2025	Changes
Christians	5	5	Babylon Movement lost three seats
Yazidis	1	3 seats: 1 quota, 1 Ezidi Cause Alliance, 1 KDP	Entry through quota and party lists
Shabak	1	1 quota, 1 outside quota	Entry through quota and party lists
Mandaeans	1	1	Stable
Fayli Kurds	1	1 + several outside quota	Expanded within KDP
Minority Seats	9	9 quota + several outside	Increased political openness

Source: Table prepared by the researcher

The KDP's winning of a notable number of minority seats reveals a clear shift in how major parties integrate quota seats into their electoral strategies. Minority seats no longer represent a symbolic margin but have become part of the equation of parliamentary influence and enhanced bargaining power.



Conversely, the influence of forces that previously dominated minority representation declined—most notably the Babylon Movement, which had monopolized Christian representation in the previous cycle. This reflects intensified competition over these seats as a sphere through which power is redistributed within the political system.

This shift confirms that quota seats are no longer merely guarantees of minority presence in parliament; they have become effective political instruments that major parties invest in to reshape their electoral map and expand their legitimacy. However, this investment carries problematic dimensions, as it has led to diminished credibility of genuine minority representation and rising criticism that some quota candidates have become closer to representatives of the parties supporting them than to representatives of their own communities. This raises questions about the limits of representation and the meaning of defending diversity under these new political dynamics.

Conclusion

We can say that the 2025 elections represent the beginning of a gradual transition toward a more pragmatic political landscape that is less subject to traditional identity-based divisions. They also highlight the importance of redesigning the electoral system—particularly quota mechanisms—to ensure more just and effective representation. The 2025 elections reveal that Iraq is entering a new phase of political transformation through a set of indicators, including:





1. The voter has become more rational and pragmatic, distancing themselves from rigid identity-based loyalties.
2. Major political forces have regained their standing, but this time through a developmental discourse rather than solely an ideological one.
3. Minorities are experiencing a process of redefining their representation, caught between their desire for political independence and the pressures imposed by major parties.
4. The formation of the next government will serve as a real test of the winning forces' ability to produce a stable and effective model of governance.

Today, Iraq stands before a new—and perhaps final—opportunity to rebuild citizens' trust in the state by investing this electoral shift into genuine development projects and bold political reform that includes all, without exclusion or monopolization.





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and a participating society**

www.bayancenter.org
info@bayancenter.org
