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2026/1/7

A Reading of the Explanatory Variables of the Iraqi Situation Divergent Paths Toward a New Consociational Equation

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● **Analyses**

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Series of publications of Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning
Research Department / Political Studies

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About

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Introduction

The Iraqi electoral landscape is distinguished by the breadth of its electoral experience, the frequency of political surprises, and the difficulty of accurately predicting outcomes and trajectories, given the shifting variables that govern the mechanisms of alternation of power as determined by the ballot box-whether in voting blocs or political weight.

Following the ratification of the election results by the Federal Supreme Court, and the judiciary's reaffirmation of the need to adhere to constitutional timelines, responsibility has shifted to the winning political forces. These forces have commenced negotiations to select the new presidencies and form the upcoming government, which -despite potential differences in its formation pathways- will inevitably adhere to the consociational equation. This is due to several decisive factors, foremost among them: the narrow margins among the results of winning forces, the inability of any political party to secure a unilateral majority, and the importance of this equation in fulfilling political entitlements within the constitutional deadlines.

Given the difficulty of predicting the future of Iraq's political landscape, this paper examines the explanatory variables shaping Iraqi political reality and the corresponding response variables that arise from them, in order to identify the future trajectories dictated by the consociational condition that has long characterized -and continues to shape- the Iraqi political system.

First: Explanatory Analysis

Explanatory analysis is based on identifying variables that help clarify the issue under examination, with the aim of generating results that support the anticipation of potential scenarios related to that issue.

Explanatory variables resemble independent variables, yet they are not entirely independent. Although the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably, an important distinction remains: a truly independent variable is not influenced by other variables, and therefore cannot serve as an explanatory variable. However, when a variable retains partial -though not absolute- independence, it may function as an explanatory variable.

To illustrate, academic literature provides numerous examples. One such example concerns weight gain and its relationship to fast food and soft drinks. At first glance, each appears to represent an independent variable affecting weight gain. However, closer analysis reveals interactions between them: fast-food restaurants often bundle soft drinks with meals or incentivize their purchase; likewise, stopping to buy a soft drink may lead a person to also buy fast food available in the same or nearby locations. Thus, these variables are not fully independent, though both contribute to weight gain. They are therefore classified as explanatory variables, because each offers a partial explanation of the phenomenon.

This distinction may seem minor to a casual observer but is essential to researchers dealing with multiple interacting variables.¹

Growing academic interest in explanatory variables has led to their occasional designation as “predictive variables,” owing to their central role in future-oriented analysis - where enhanced understanding depends on identifying response variables closely linked to the explanatory variables that constitute causal factors

1. Response vs Explanatory Variables: Definition & Examples, Formplus, July 2021.

in the subject being studied. The effects or outcomes are then classified as response variables.

A hypothetical example may be cited: a school develops a new method to help students speak publicly without anxiety. An experiment is designed to assess the success of this method compared to the previous approach. Students are randomly assigned to either instructional method, after which their level of public-speaking anxiety is measured. In this case, the type of instructional method represents the explanatory variable, while the measured anxiety level constitutes the response variable.²

Second: The Explanatory Variables of the Iraqi Situation

Despite the difficulty of deconstructing the Iraqi situation in the post-election phase - due to the complexity of the political landscape, the interconnection of its factors, and the challenge of predicting outcomes amid the multiplicity of winning forces and the uncertainty surrounding future alliances and agreements- this does not imply the absence of analytical indicators that can inform the anticipation of potential scenarios in the upcoming stage. By analyzing a set of explanatory variables, it is possible to construct

2. Explanatory & Response Variables, Penn state University, college of science.

preliminary assessments of expected political trajectories. The most prominent of these variables are as follows:

1. Electoral Variables

The sixth electoral cycle exhibited several notable electoral variables, including the increase in voter turnout, the close distribution of parliamentary seats among the winning forces, and the restoration of traditional forces' active presence in the Council of Representatives - after emerging forces had previously undermined their competitive edge in the 2021 parliamentary elections due to the application of the multi-constituency electoral law in that cycle.

Table 1: Electoral Explanatory Variables and Response Variables

Explanatory Variable	Explanatory Question	Analytical Indicator	Response Variable
Voter turnout	Was the turnout rate acceptable?	Increased turnout rate	Confidence in the electoral process
Seat proximity	Is there a large gap between winners?	Relatively small gap compared to previous elections	Political consensus
Traditional forces	Have traditional forces regained their position?	Large number of seats	Accelerating government formation
Voter orientations	Did voter orientations affect the post-election stage?	Concentration of votes on specific alliances	Alliances' commitment to voters

Prepared by the researcher.

The responses to the questions raised by these electoral explanatory variables reveal the following:

A. Voter Turnout

The notable rise in turnout in the latest legislative elections signals a clear resurgence of confidence in the electoral process as a mechanism for power transfer in Iraq - following the marked decline observed in previous elections. This confidence extends not only to the electoral process itself but also to the victorious forces and parties that earned their seats through intense competition, thereby granting them greater leverage to assert their entitlements based on the number of seats secured. This increase may facilitate political understandings through mutual recognition of electoral weights, particularly given the relative closeness of results, as discussed below.

B. Seat Proximity

Despite numerous pre-election surveys and forecasts, none anticipated the pronounced closeness observed in the 2025 election results. This proximity -surprising to some actors and encouraging to others- serves as a clear indicator that the large gaps between winners, characteristic of previous electoral

experiences, are no longer present. Contributing factors include the political maturity of parties, the electorate's awareness, and a nuanced understanding of the electoral law. Regardless of the variety of potential scenarios, these results point toward the establishment of a new consociational political reality for the next parliamentary term.

C. Traditional Forces

A prominent variable in the 2025 elections is the demonstrated ability of traditional forces to restore their representative weight at will - after the multi-constituency law in 2021 had allowed emerging forces to challenge them. This resurgence is attributable to several factors, foremost among them professional organization, stable popular bases, and extensive experience in managing electoral competition. Consequently, this is expected to generate a significant response variable: the acceleration of government formation, given these forces' strong negotiation capacity reinforced by the number of seats they hold.

D. Voter Orientations

The impact of voter orientations on the political landscape extends beyond election day. Political forces that secured

significant voter support are now obligated to respond to their constituencies' expectations, even if only partially. This variable is likely to exert a strong influence in post-election negotiations among political forces.

2. **Political Variables**

Political variables have strongly shaped the post-election phase through the cohesion of the Coordination Framework, the accession of new actors to it, and the formation of the National Political Council, which includes forces representing the northwestern provinces. Additionally, the political weight of the Kurdish forces constitutes a decisive factor, as progress in political understandings cannot occur without their inclusion. A notable variable, however, is the absence of civil forces from influencing the new political landscape.

Table 2: Political Explanatory Variables and Response Variables

Explanatory Variable	Explanatory Question	Analytical Indicator	Response Variable
Coordination Framework	Is the Coordination Framework still cohesive?	Increase in the number of Coordination Framework forces	Formation of the largest bloc
National Political Council	Can it achieve political stability?	Inclusion of most relevant political forces	Formation of the second-largest parliamentary bloc
Kurdish parties	Can they adopt a unified position?	Temperate discourse	Undeclared understandings
Civil forces	Are there justifications for their absence from the political scene?	Noticeable decline	Lack of realistic engagement

Prepared by the researcher.

The responses to these political explanatory variables reveal the following:

A. The Coordination Framework

The weeks following the announcement and ratification of the election results by the Federal Supreme Court demonstrated the cohesion of the Coordination Framework, which now controls more than half of the seats in the Council of Representatives. This facilitated its path toward declaring the formation of the largest bloc, which, according to the Constitution, holds the right to nominate the new Prime Minister. The Framework quickly opened the door for premiership candidates, and its forces -whose numbers have increased compared to previous elections- held multiple meetings to discuss the criteria for nominees. According to statements by prominent politicians, nine candidates are currently under consideration. The Framework retains additional time for negotiation, with the nearest constitutional entitlement being the selection of the Speaker of the Council of Representatives in the first session, followed by the election of the President of the Republic one month after the first session convenes.

B. The National Political Council

The formation of the National Political Council was unsurprising in conceptual terms, as previous experiences have seen representatives of the northern and western governorates unite into a single alliance to coordinate positions such as the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and related entitlements. However, the designation “National Political Council” is being used for the first time. The Council has held multiple meetings, though no announcement has yet been made regarding its nominee for Speaker, who will be determined in the session scheduled before the end of the current month.

C. Kurdish Parties

The positions and statements of the Kurdish forces have not clarified which party will obtain the Presidency of the Republic. Members of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) have asserted their party’s entitlement to this position, though this has not been formalized through an official statement. What is certain, however, is that the KDP’s leadership among the Kurdish forces will grant it the decisive role in determining Kurdish entitlements -whether the Presidency of the Republic or other positions.

D. Civil Forces

Civil forces have been absent from the new political landscape resulting from the 2025 elections, losing the relative presence they held in previous cycles, even under non-civil designations. Consequently, they will remain outside the power equation for the next four years.

Third: Consociational Pathways

Before examining the trajectories of the political landscape in the coming months, it is necessary to present the response variables generated by the explanatory variables of the Iraqi situation, as shown in the following table:

Table 4: Analysis of Response Variables

Response Variable	Leads To
Confidence in the electoral process	Decisions based on public satisfaction
Political consensus	Consociational entitlements
Accelerating government formation	Consociational government
Alliances' commitment to voters	Gaining public approval
Formation of the largest bloc	Negotiations with other forces on a consociational basis

Formation of the second-largest bloc	Negotiations with other forces on a consociational basis
Undeclared understandings	Consociational framework
Lack of realistic engagement	Non-participation in the political equation

Prepared by the researcher.

Table 4 demonstrates that five out of eight outcomes point toward consensus. Moreover, two additional outcomes -gaining public approval and decisions based on public satisfaction- also rely on consensus. This indicates a new analytical approach shaped by the Iraqi context, which rests on three potential pathways for the future of the political scene, all operating within a consociational framework. Consequently, this analysis does not consider a majority-government scenario, which is currently impractical. The three pathways are as follows:

First: Fragile Consensus

The inability of political alliances to finalize nominees for the three presidencies within the constitutional deadlines confirmed by the judiciary may lead to this scenario. Fragile consensus could be adopted to avoid exceeding the constitutional timelines, which expire in mid-March 2026. While current indicators

do not strongly suggest this outcome, the absence of official nomination announcements keeps all possibilities open. Under fragile consensus, unresolved decisions before voting sessions may result in multiple candidates being presented during those sessions.

Second: Partial Consensus

Partial consensus occurs when not all winning forces participate fully in the political equation or in governing the state. This scenario may arise when some parties are dissatisfied with the entitlements they receive or fail to secure positions they believe they deserve. It would lead to a government resembling a coalition in which only certain parties participate, rather than a broader consociational government that includes all -or most- winning forces.

Third: Cohesive Consensus

Arend Lijphart conceptualized consociationalism as a mechanism to include diverse societal components in governance and preserve the stability of democratic systems. This requires a broad, cohesive consensus among majority forces, medium-sized forces, and minorities. Current indicators in Iraq suggest a

high likelihood of moving toward a cohesive-consensus scenario, contingent upon agreement among the Coordination Framework forces, convergence within the National Political Council, and the Kurdish forces' commitment to securing their entitlements.

Conclusion

The participation of 56% of Iraqis in the 2025 elections indicates that the democratic process has reached a mature stage, accompanied by heightened voter awareness regarding post-election political directions, which remain oriented toward consensus. Accordingly, voters supported large alliances accustomed to forming governments through consensus, reflecting a consociational tendency in voter behavior. Influential forces are therefore motivated to stabilize a consociational reality aligned with their electoral weight, enhancing public confidence - a factor reflected in the increase of their parliamentary seats and their influence in the new consociational order.

Based on these considerations, this paper favors the third scenario -cohesive consensus- given the unity of the Coordination Framework and its prompt declaration of forming the largest bloc, the commitment of its members to temperate discourse regarding the nomination of the new Prime Minister, and the National Political Council's determination to resolve the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and other remaining entitlements through repeated negotiations. Additionally, the Kurdish forces

are intent on securing entitlements commensurate with their role as consociational partners. Collectively, these actors constitute a broad parliamentary majority capable of achieving the two-thirds vote required to elect the President of the Republic, as well as the necessary majority to elect the Speaker of the Council of Representatives and grant confidence to the new government.



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