

# Teim



## TEIM Election Watch Analysis

**OCCASIONAL ANALYSIS:**

**IRAQ/ Forming a government after the legislative elections**

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The polls were accurate in their estimates of the participation rate, which at 62.4% in the legislative elections held in Iraq on 7 March, was significantly lower than the 76% reached in 2005.

The highest participation was recorded in the Kurdish provinces: Duhuk 80%, Erbil 76% and Sulaimaniyah 73%. In the restive province of Kirkuk, participation reached 73%. Meanwhile in Salah al-Din it stood at 73%, in Nineveh 66%, in Diyala 62%, Anbar 61%, Babil 63%, in Karbala and Diwaniyah 62%, in Muthanna and Najaf 61%, Dhi Qar and Wasit 60%, in Basra 57%, in Maysan 50% and in Baghdad 53%.

As for participation abroad, where 1.4 million Iraqi citizens were eligible to vote, only 272,000 did so, in sixteen countries. The highest number of voters (43,000 approximately) was registered in Syria, followed by 37,000 in Sweden, 28,000 in the U.S.A., 25,000 in Jordan and 24,000 in Iran.

In the final election results issued on March 26, the al-Iraqiyya Bloc of former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi won the most votes, garnering 91 out of the total 325 seats that make up the Iraqi Parliament (National Assembly). According to the 2005 Constitution in its Article 76, the group that wins the most votes should form a government and appoint the prime minister. Nevertheless, despite the fact that the final results of these elections were announced over a week ago, the political formations aspiring to form part of the next government are still far from reaching an agreement.

Acting Prime Minister al-Maliki, whose list obtained 89 seats, at first rejected the results and has asked the Independent High Electoral Commission to conduct a manual recount of the votes. At the same time, he threatened to bring about a popular revolt if not elected prime minister for a second term. Since then, it seems that he has accepted the results but has not given up the possibility of continuing in office in a new government.

At the centre of the endeavours to form a government, is the rivalry between two options, one secular and one religious. Al-Maliki's State of Law alliance is a formation with a marked sectarian and religious character, which has clearly demonstrated its failure to improve the country's political, economic and social situation, and has seen the country descend into chaos and violence. His government has topped the list of most corrupt governments in the world according to UN reports. Furthermore, the government's relationship of dependency and subordination to the Iranian authorities has been more than noticeable.

In contrast, Allawi's al-Iraqiyya list, brings together different political and secular groups and has successfully filled an existing void, taking advantage of the discontent of broad sectors of society disappointed by the religious figures and clerics who have dominated the government from 2006 until present. In these four years sectarian crimes have continued and drug abuse by young people has reached unprecedented levels in Iraq.

Al-Iraqiyya has been able to achieve good results despite the persecutions and pressures it underwent in the weeks before the elections. Several of its members were killed and many of its branches in different cities attacked and destroyed. Exactly one week before the election, the Panel charged with purging former Baathists from politics, decided to cancel the candidatures of 500 candidates who were part of this party's list.

Contacts between the different political groups to reach an agreement and form a government have already commenced. Al-Maliki has met with Ammar al-Hakim, the politician who leads the Islamic Supreme Council and the Iraqi National Alliance (a coalition of Shiite parties) which won 70 seats, in order to

explore the possibility of forming a government. The two groups were allies in the previous general elections, but differences between the two prevented them from renewing the agreement in the provincial elections held last year, which resulted in a reduction of the levels of trust between the two formations.

In his meeting with al-Maliki on Thursday, April 1, al-Hakim made it clear that in his bloc's opinion, it would be a mistake to marginalise al-Iraqiyya, which received the most votes. He also condemned the accusations made by al-Maliki's group against the symbols used by Allawi's bloc. These accusations associate the members of al-Iraqiyya with the banned Iraqi Baath party, and hold them responsible for ongoing violence. Despite the good relations that link him with Iran, al-Hakim seeks to be a balancing factor between the heavy influence of Iran on the Shiite parties and that of some Arab countries which attempt to influence certain parties such as the Iraqiyya Bloc.

Allawi in turn, is attempting to find partners to form a coalition government. He has met with acting-President Talabani, who also heads the Kurdish Alliance which won 42 seats.

Each and every one of the groups which could possibly form part of a new government are trying to gather support. To this end, they are sending delegations to highly influential individuals such as the spiritual leader al-Sistani, or even neighboring countries like Iran and Syria.

Iran, in particular, has a lot in its favour, and the real possibility of changing the course of negotiations. Its power and sway over Shiite parties, including al-Maliki's group, is undeniable.

In contrast, Allawi's relationship with the Ayatollahs' regime has never been a smooth one. For this reason, some believe that Iran will do everything possible to avoid the next Prime Minister coming from al-Iraqiyya. Some analysts believe that the U.S. has decided to hand Iraq over to Iran, to see if, for once, security can reign in the land of the two rivers - allowing American troops to withdraw.