

# Iraqi Elections: A Crucial Step in the National Reconciliation Process

By [Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

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Montreal – Despite the threat of assassination attempts and other sorts of reprisals, approximately 12 million Iraqis – 62.4 percent of those eligible to vote – went to the polls on March 7 for the second election held since the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. This election—less than six months prior to the initiation of the gradual withdrawal of American troops—is a decisive one for Iraq’s national reconciliation process. Prime Minister Nouri Al-Maliki urged voters to turn out in large number, saying that their participation would strengthen democracy. President Jalal Talabani echoed the Prime Minister, saying that the elections were both a step in Iraq’s march toward democracy, and a test of it.

Iraqis had to choose among 86 factions running for the 325 seats in Parliament. Preliminary results released by Iraq’s independent Electoral High Commission, with 93 percent of the vote counted, indicate that outgoing Prime Minister Al-Maliki’s right-wing State of Law party is lagging by 8000 votes behind the Iraqiya list led by former Prime Minister Iyad Allawi, after having been in the lead since March 11. Following the announcement of the new results, Al-Maliki demanded a manual recount of the ballots throughout the country in order to, in his words, “preserve the credibility of the political process, and [...] political stability, and to prevent a deterioration of the security situation and the return to violence.” His request was rejected by the Electoral Commission, which has meanwhile been hinting about the possibility of verifications in certain centres after complaints were filed by the political parties.

Although the final results will not be known for several days, there is already intense speculation regarding the eventual negotiations and alliances that will be formed in order to obtain key posts in the next Iraqi government. If neither of the two leading candidates – Al-Maliki or Allawi— obtains a majority of the parliamentary seats, the winner cannot be sure of being able to form a government without making alliances with the other political parties, be they with the Iraqi National Alliance, to which the Iraqi Supreme Islamic Council and Moqtada Sadr’s movement belong, or the Kurdish political parties, who dominate in the northern region of the country. These long and arduous negotiations to form a new government have observers concerned about the possibility of a political vacuum that may spell disaster for the country’s security.

“Even though the coming weeks promise to be difficult ones, Iraqis have demonstrated courage and perseverance in exercising their right to vote last March 7,” says Thomas Woodley, President of Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East (CJPME). CJPME will continue pressing the Canadian government to play a positive role in Iraq and to work with

other members of the international community, especially through the United Nations, to support the Iraqi people in dealing with the potential challenges that will arise in the wake of these elections. "This is an extremely critical time in Iraqi history. With the American experiment in Iraq concluding another phase with the imminent withdrawal of US troops, Canada and the international community must be prepared to support the needs of the Iraqi people," Woodley adds.

Over 12,000 Iraqis living in Canada exercised their right to vote, 40 percent more than in the general elections of 2005.

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