

Nov 04, 2016 by [Gordon Robison](#)

Now that the votes are counted... [1]

Amman, Jordan

Iraq's election went off better than expected. Now that the results have been announced the hard part begins.

Though Ibrahim Al-Jafaari's emergence as the prime ministerial candidate of the United Iraqi Alliance makes him the leading contender to head the country's next government his grasp on the levers of power remains far from certain. The Shia-led UIA emerged with a thin majority in the 275 seat National Assembly, but it is far short of the two-thirds needed to form a government. This is especially the case since the UIA is hardly a cohesive block. It is hard to imagine any grouping containing both Abdel Aziz Al-Hakim, the leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, and Ahmed Chalabi holding together for long. The current Prime Minister, Iyad Allawi (a secular Shiite) is openly courting some of its members in a bid to keep his job.

The Kurds appear to be watching all of this warily. Their role, or lack of it, in the new government will be a key indicator of the country's future. Kurdistan's two main parties fought the election as a single slate. When facing the rest of Iraq their leadership is relatively united and pretty clear about what it wants. For now their list of demands does not include breaking up the country, but there is little doubt they will do so if they feel that is the only way to preserve the society they have built in northern Iraq over the last dozen years

To no one's surprise there are virtually no Sunnis in the assembly. President Ghazi al-Yawr's list managed only five seats. How the Sunni political class, and the Sunni population at large, deal with this will be one of the great unknowns of the coming months. An intriguing titbit came from an Iraqi friend of mine, a journalist who comes from one of the larger and more important Sunni tribes. A few days after the election he told me he could have voted in relative safety because he works in the Green Zone, but chose not to do so out of solidarity with his neighbors in the overwhelmingly Sunni district of Abu Gharib, on Baghdad's western outskirts. Many of his neighbors, he said, wanted to vote but thought it was simply too dangerous to do so. He says he does expect them to vote in October when the new constitution is put to a referendum. If his reading of his neighbors is correct this is a particularly good sign, and one that reinforces the emerging conventional wisdom that Sunni leaders may now believe their boycotts were shortsighted.

The real question is whether the leaders who are now emerging with some electoral legitimacy can deal with each other with a measure of maturity, farsightedness and statesmanship. The, admittedly short, history of Iraq's emerging political class does not inspire much confidence on this score, but the election was a surprise, so things might go better than expected. Writing a new constitution by October is going to be a tall order. Getting it approved in a vote a month later may be even harder, especially since a two-thirds 'no' vote in any three provinces sends the entire process back to the drawing board. It is going to be a long spring

and summer in Iraq – but one well worth watching.

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