



United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI)
بعثة الأمم المتحدة لمساعدة العراق (يونامي)

Iraq's Electoral Preparations and Processes - Report No. 5
Baghdad, 5 February 2021

Iraq's Electoral Preparations and Processes*

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Highlights for December-January

- The Council of Ministers (CoM) approves, in consultation with the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), a new election date of 10 October.
- IHEC presents electoral calendar in a media event attended by the UN Special Representative for Iraq.
- The voter registration update and candidate nomination processes start countrywide.
- IHEC approves nine regulations governing the upcoming elections, including the candidate registration regulation.
- Two companies submit bids to audit the electoral results management IT systems.
- Parliament passes legislation to finance the 2021 parliamentary elections.

New election date

A series of meetings, attended by UNAMI, was organised by the IHEC Board of Commissioners to brief senior Iraqi leaders on the progress of electoral preparations. In these meetings, IHEC committed to further review the timelines for each stage of the electoral process, particularly in regard to biometric registration, party and candidate registration, and the finalisation of the ballots.

On 19 January, the CoM decided on the date of Iraq's early parliamentary elections: 10 October 2021 (instead of 6 June). The CoM had considered a proposal submitted by IHEC, citing several technical reasons for a postponement of the elections from June to October. These included the need for more time to register political alliances and candidates, to expand biometric registration, and to deploy UN international electoral expertise and international observers on the ground.

As provided in the electoral law, the date of the election is set by a decision of the CoM, in coordination with IHEC. The Presidency must issue a decree formally announcing the date at least 90 days before elections. In line with constitutional provisions, early elections shall take place within a maximum period of 60 days upon the dissolution of the Council of Representatives. The Council of Representatives may be dissolved by an absolute majority of the number of its members, or by the Prime Minister upon the request of one-third of its members, with the consent of the President of the Republic.

* This report, the fifth in a series, is prepared pursuant to UN Security Council Resolution 2522 (May 2020). In extending UNAMI's mandate, the Council instructs that the Special Representative of the Secretary General and UNAMI shall: "further advise, assist and support the Government of Iraq and the Independent High Electoral Commission with efforts to plan and execute genuinely free and fair Iraqi-led, Iraqi-owned elections and referenda, including through regular technical reviews and detailed reporting on electoral preparations and processes, as part of the Secretary-General's regular reporting cycle".



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Electoral Operational Planning

The electoral timeline, setting out detailed preparatory activities and a timeframe for the new 10 October election date, has been updated by IHEC. It was presented during a media event on 28 January in Baghdad in the presence of the UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq. The timeline contains the schedule of major preparatory activities leading to the election, including the finalisation of the voter registry, accreditation of candidates, the electoral campaign period, procurement and logistics processes for the delivery and retrieval of electoral materials, outreach campaigns, election security, testing of software and systems, recruitment and training of staff, the polling period and the announcement of the election results.

During its finalisation, UNAMI shared detailed feedback on the timeline with suggestions on the timing of several activities, including staff training, procurement, out-of country voting, technology audit, and ballot paper design and printing.

Voter Registration Update

The voter registration update (VRU) commenced on 2 January. The VRU process offers an opportunity to voters to view the preliminary voters lists (PVL) and request any correction to their records. It also enables security forces and internally displaced voters to register, and carries forward the process of biometric data collection and voter card distribution.

All of IHEC's 1,079 voter registration centres countrywide are currently operational for purposes of the VRU. The preliminary voters list contains a total of 25,139,375 voters. Based on an allocation of 400-450 voters per polling station, IHEC is planning to set up a total of 58,915 polling stations for the upcoming elections.

Biometric Voter Data Collection and Distribution of Voter Cards

As of late January, IHEC reports that of the 25,139,375 total registered voters, 14,869,360 (59%) have so far undertaken the biometric registration process. A total of 12,711,889 voter cards have been distributed. The greatest biometric coverage of voters is recorded in Diyala (77%), Wassit (75%) and Muthanna (74%); the lowest coverage is in Ninewa (42%), Baghdad Rasafa (48%), Baghdad Karkh (51%) and Anbar (52%).

IHEC decided to cancel 'short-term' voter cards printed between 2013 and 2018, with holders of these cards given the opportunity to register biometrically.

To intensify the biometric registration drive, IHEC has begun deploying mobile teams to bring the registration process closer to voters' locations. Around 890 mobile teams have so far been deployed. IHEC also considered repurposing some electronic verification devices as registration kits, to enable the deployment of more registration teams. UNAMI has suggested conducting pilot testing to generate better field information on whether this application is suitable.

Audit of the Results Management IT Systems



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IHEC has launched a tender process to select a company to audit the electoral results management IT systems. Letters inviting bids and tender documentation were sent to ten shortlisted companies. IHEC also organised, with UNAMI support, a videoteleconference with bidders to explain the tender requirements. Two companies formally submitted offers by the 18 January deadline, and their bids are now under evaluation.

Acquisition of Additional Electronic Vote Counting and Voter Verification Devices

IHEC completed contract negotiations with its suppliers for the provision of additional and replacement electronic vote-counting and voter verification devices to replace those damaged in stores in Baghdad-Rasafa and Erbil. Contracts also include the supply of additional equipment for Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaimaniyah not covered by previous contracts. At the request of IHEC, UNAMI attended IHEC's meetings with suppliers and provided inputs on technical requirements. The additional equipment, included as annexes to the existing contracts, are to be delivered in the next three months.

Out-of-Country Voting

IHEC has established a dedicated team to address the provision in the electoral law on out-of-country voting (OCV) for Iraqis living abroad. However, an OCV plan has yet to be firmed up, and there is no clarity regarding specific countries where OCV will take place. (In the 2018 CoR elections, IHEC opened OCV facilities in 21 countries.)

As part of the planning discussions, UNAMI shared an advisory on options for implementing OCV biometric registration, procedures for OCV registration and voting, as well as modalities the deployment of OCV personnel. UNAMI, through the Electoral Support Project, will be providing electoral advisers to support OCV operations.

Electoral Regulations

IHEC has so far approved nine electoral regulations necessary for the conduct of the elections. These are: the Voter Registration Update Regulation; the Regulation on the Registration and Certification of Candidates for the Election of Iraq's Council of Representatives 2021; the Regulation for Political Parties, Coalitions and Alliances; the Regulation on Accreditation of International Election Observation; the Regulation on Accreditation of Domestic Election Observers; the Regulation on Media Accreditation; the Regulation on Electoral Campaigns; the Regulation for the Accreditation of Agents of Candidates, Political Parties and Electoral Alliances; and, the Electoral Complaints Regulation.

IHEC is in the process of finalising, with UNAMI input, several other regulations and detailed electoral procedures, including in regard to polling and counting processes.

Electoral Budget

On 17 December, the Council of Representatives approved legislation on funding for the 2021 parliamentary elections. The President ratified the law on 24 December. IHEC had requested, after some



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revisions, a budget of IQD 329 billion. Of this, IQD 133 billion will be sourced from the balance of the 2019 electoral budget allocation, while the rest will be sourced from government borrowing.

The approval of the electoral budget enables IHEC to proceed with several contracts for the procurement of essential goods and services and other requirements for the elections.

Other Technical Preparations

Developing strategies for communicating electoral information

UNAMI has provided a guidance document for IHEC to develop its communication strategy and communication plan, aimed at finetuning messaging for various electoral stakeholders. This should help IHEC to timely and effectively disseminate information to target audiences.

Political party, alliance registration and candidate nomination

IHEC continued to receive registration applications from political parties, with 432 applications received so far. Of these, 231 political parties applications have been approved and 85 applications are under evaluation. IHEC regularly posts updates on its website regarding political party registration.

IHEC announced that the period to register electoral alliances and coalitions wishing to participate in the 2021 elections will be 9 January-10 February 2021. The nomination period for candidates is 9 January-1 March 2021.



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Visits of the Election Supreme Security Committee to governorate electoral offices

The Election Supreme Security Committee, composed of high-level representatives from Iraq's security institutions and representatives from IHEC, conducted field visits to the governorates to assess the security requirements of IHEC electoral facilities, including offices, registration centres and warehouses. This is part of the process to develop an overall security plan for the elections. The committee also continues to meet regularly at IHEC to coordinate security preparations for the elections.

COVID-19 countermeasures

Despite preliminary discussions on the topic, IHEC has yet to develop a systematic and coherent plan to address the potential impact of the pandemic on electoral procedures and processes. UNAMI has shared guidance documents and expressed readiness to participate in any planning team. The UN Electoral Support Project includes two dedicated COVID-19 compliance specialists who could help define strategies and safety measures for electoral personnel, voters and electoral stakeholders at the various stages of the electoral process.

Note: UNAMI reminds all stakeholders that electoral preparations must remain free from political interference at all stages. This independence is essential to build public trust in the elections and their outcome.