



GENDER ANALYSIS OF IRAQ'S OCTOBER 2021 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

March 2022

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* UNAMI's Gender Unit plays a central role in supporting the implementation of UNAMI's mandate on gender, women, peace and security. As such, the work of the Gender Unit is shaped by the priorities of the mission under UN Security Council resolution 2522 (2020), the tenets of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and UN DPPA's Policy on Women and Peace and Security (WPS).



Voter Eligibility, Registration and Turnout

- Nation-wide, eligible voters were 48% female and 52% male.
- Nation-wide, 48% of the registered voters were female.
- On voter turnout country-wide, 48% were female and 52% were male.
- There were 665, 142 more males than females in the final voters' list.
- Per governorate, Diyala registered the highest percentage of female voters at 51% while Anbar, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah had the least at 46% each.

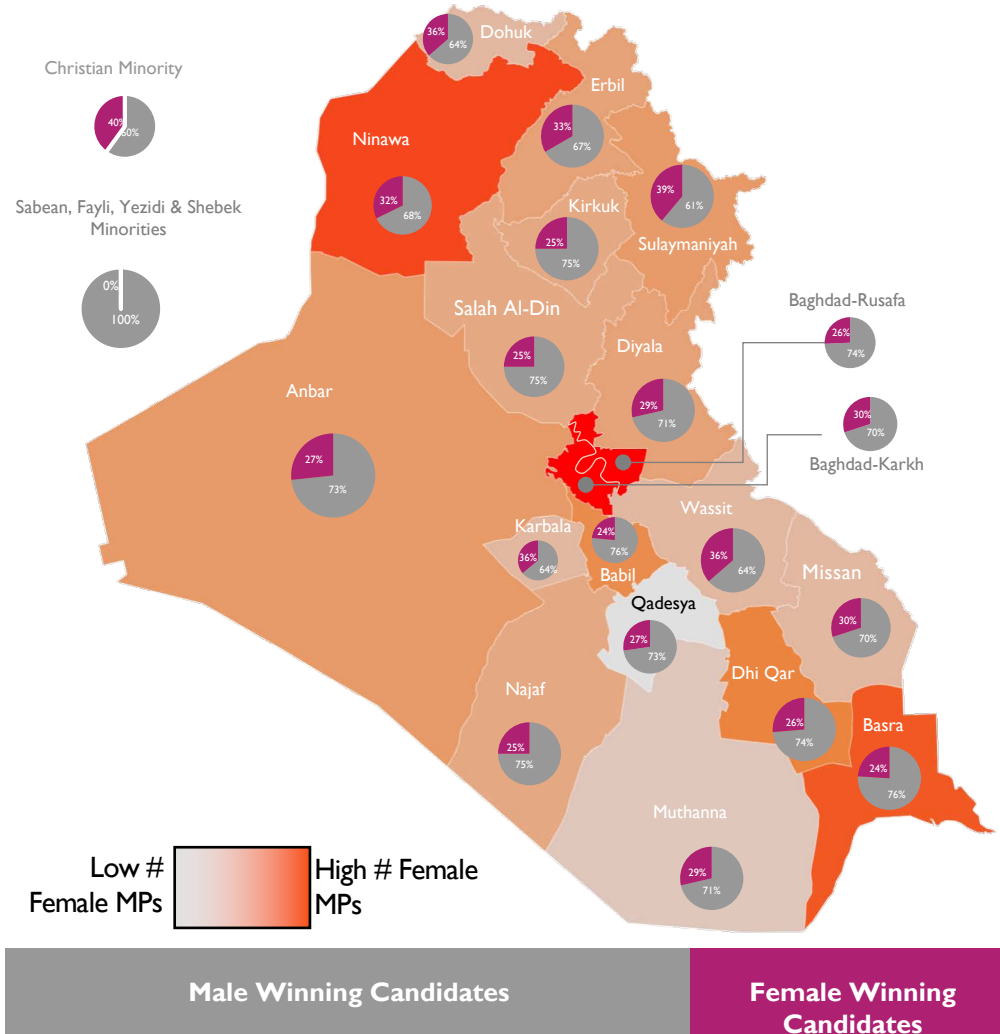
Candidate Registration and Results

- 29.3% of the cleared candidates to compete in the elections were female and 70.7% were male.
- A comparison of independent and party-affiliated female candidates shows that independent candidates were 16.4% while party-affiliated candidates were 83.6%.
- Baghdad - Rusafa had the highest number of female candidates at 142 out of 423 candidates, representing 33.6%.
- Minorities' seats for Fayli Kurds, Shabak and Yazidi components did not have any female candidates competing in the elections.
- Per political party, Qadimon for Change fielded the highest number of female candidates, 68 out of 179 candidates.
- A total of 33 parties i.e., 25.6% of the total parties that participated in the elections, had no female candidates (each of these parties fielded 4 candidates or less).
- According to the final results, male candidates won 71.1% of the seats (234 seats) while female candidates got 28.9% (95 seats).

The Legal Framework



Gender Representation Map



Iraq's legal framework for women's political representation and participation is laid out in its Constitution in Articles 14 and 49. Article 14 under the Civil and Political Rights Chapter, states that "Iraqis are equal before the law without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, origin, colour, religion, sect, belief or opinion or economic or social status". Further, Article 49 part four on the Council of Representatives states that "The elections law aims to achieve a percentage of women representation not less than one-quarter of the Council of Representatives members".

Iraq has ratified various international human rights treaties that promote civic and political rights and women's rights, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) which it ratified in 1986. CEDAW requires state parties to the Convention to protect women's rights to "participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government".¹ CEDAW outlines specific discriminatory acts and elaborates upon the necessary actions required to eliminate all of them.² It defines equality, equal treatment and equal status of women and men in terms of formal recognition in law and in practice.³

3 ¹ CEDAW Article 7
² CEDAW Articles 2, 4 & 7
³ CEDAW Articles 2 & 24



The Iraqi general elections that took place on October 10 under a new electoral system saw 946 women out of a total 3,225 candidates (representing 29.3% of the total) cleared to run. The pre-election period was marked by uncertainty, particularly for female and male candidates running under political parties linked to the Tishreen movement. Moreover, Muqtada al-Sadr's initial withdrawal from the elections and call for boycotts cast doubts on whether the elections would proceed as planned. These factors led some candidates to delay the announcement of their candidacies. The campaign period officially opened on 6 July after the Independent High Elections Commission (IHEC) released the list of verified candidates; it ended on 9 October.

The final results of the elections indicate that Iraqi women got 95 seats out of 329 seats, demonstrating a remarkable increase in their representation from 25% in 2018 to 29%. An analysis of the data shows that 57 women won outside the quota by garnering the highest number of votes in their respective electoral constituencies. Baghdad governorate had the highest number of women who won outside the quota with 16 seats, followed by Sulaymaniyah with 7. Ninewa and Basra each had 5 seats, Erbil had 4, while Kirkuk and Dhi-Qar governorates each had 3 seats.

While women's representation in the new Council of Representatives has increased beyond the stipulated 25% minimum constitutional quota seen in previous parliaments, experiences of female candidates in the October 10 elections show that women faced similar challenges as in 2018, namely: online gender-based attacks, gender stereotyping, inadequate financial resources to run effective campaigns and patriarchal structures across society.⁴

⁴ Some candidates had been reluctant to announce their candidature early on due to those concerns. The interviews also confirm the findings of the research study conducted in 2020 by the Gender Unit jointly with the UN Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the Free Iraq Foundation on needs and challenges of Iraqi women entering politics

Voter Eligibility and Registration



A total of 22,116,368 voters were eligible to cast their vote during the 2021 Council of Representatives Elections. These are voters who registered for the Biometric Voter Card and those who had the Electronic Voter Card. This includes 20,919,844 regular voters, 120,126 IDPs, and 1,076,398 Special Voters.

- 11,390,755 (52%) were male voters while 10,725,613 (48%) were female.
- As a comparison, females make up about 49.4% of the Iraqi population, according to World Bank data (source: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL.FE.ZS?locations=IQ>).
- Baghdad Rusafa had the greatest number of voters, with 1,350,443 (49%) being female and 1,407,456 (51%) being male, with a difference of 57,013.
- Diyala, Qadisiya, Babylon, Wassit and Muthanna governorates had more female than male voters.
- Anbar, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates had the lowest percentage of female voters as compared to male voters.



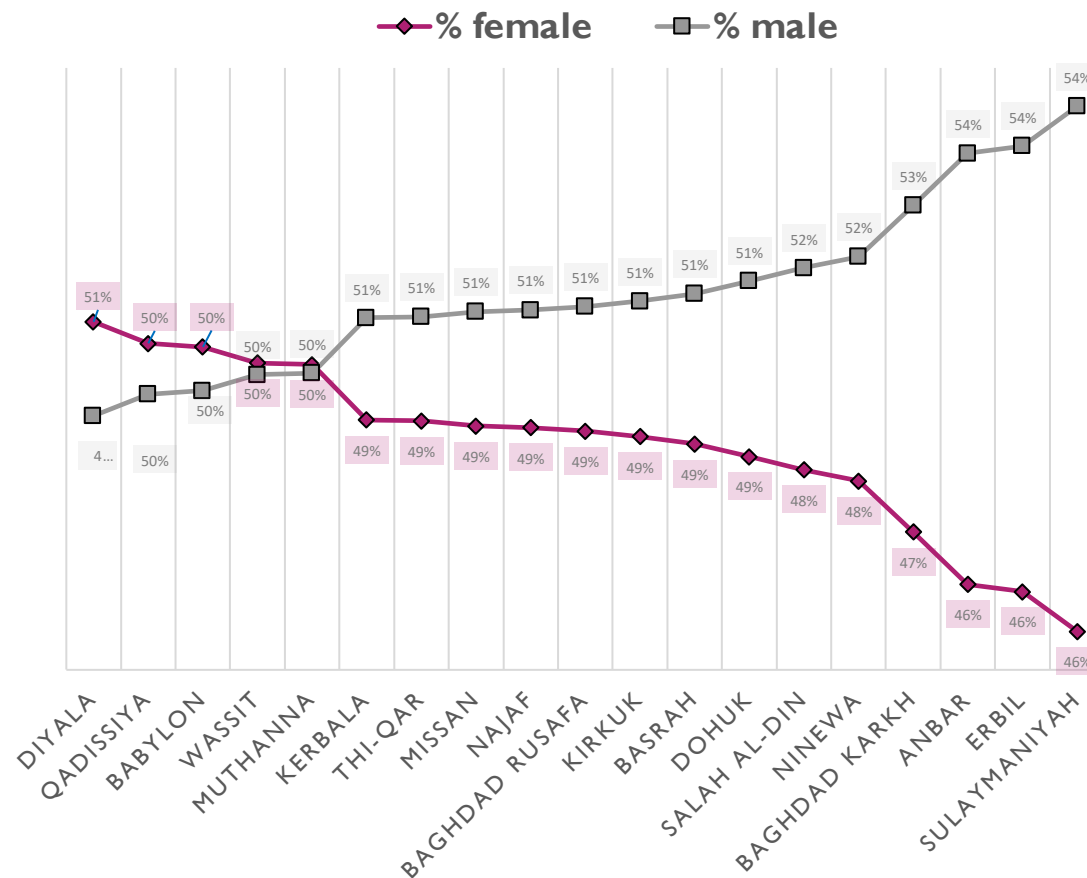
Voter Eligibility and Registration



Table I: Sex-Disaggregated Data for Eligible Voters Per Governorate

Governorate	Female Voters	% female	Male Voters	% male	Total Voters
Diyala	515,364	51%	499,503	49%	1,014,867
Qadissiya	363,054	50%	356,942	50%	719,996
Babylon	579,006	50%	570,613	50%	1,149,619
Wassit	388,602	50%	387,068	50%	775,670
Muthanna	234,585	50%	233,903	50%	468,488
Karbala	338,830	49%	350,493	51%	689,323
Dhi-Qar	559,035	49%	578,709	51%	1,137,744
Missan	314,592	49%	326,769	51%	641,361
Najaf	409,606	49%	425,936	51%	835,542
Baghdad Rusafa	1,350,443	49%	1,407,456	51%	2,757,899
Kirkuk	484,916	49%	507,202	51%	992,118
Basra	799,831	49%	840,688	51%	1,640,519
Dohuk	404,080	49%	428,344	51%	832,424
Salah Al-Din	421,765	48%	451,009	52%	872,774
Ninewa	884,986	48%	953,474	52%	1,838,460
Baghdad Karkh	1,060,136	47%	1,181,707	53%	2,241,843
Anbar	493,271	46%	569,323	54%	1,062,594
Erbil	533,085	46%	618,335	54%	1,151,420
Sulaymaniyah	590,426	46%	703,281	54%	1,293,707
Total	10,725,613	48%	11,390,755	52%	22,116,368

Figure I: Female and Male Registered Voters % By Governorate



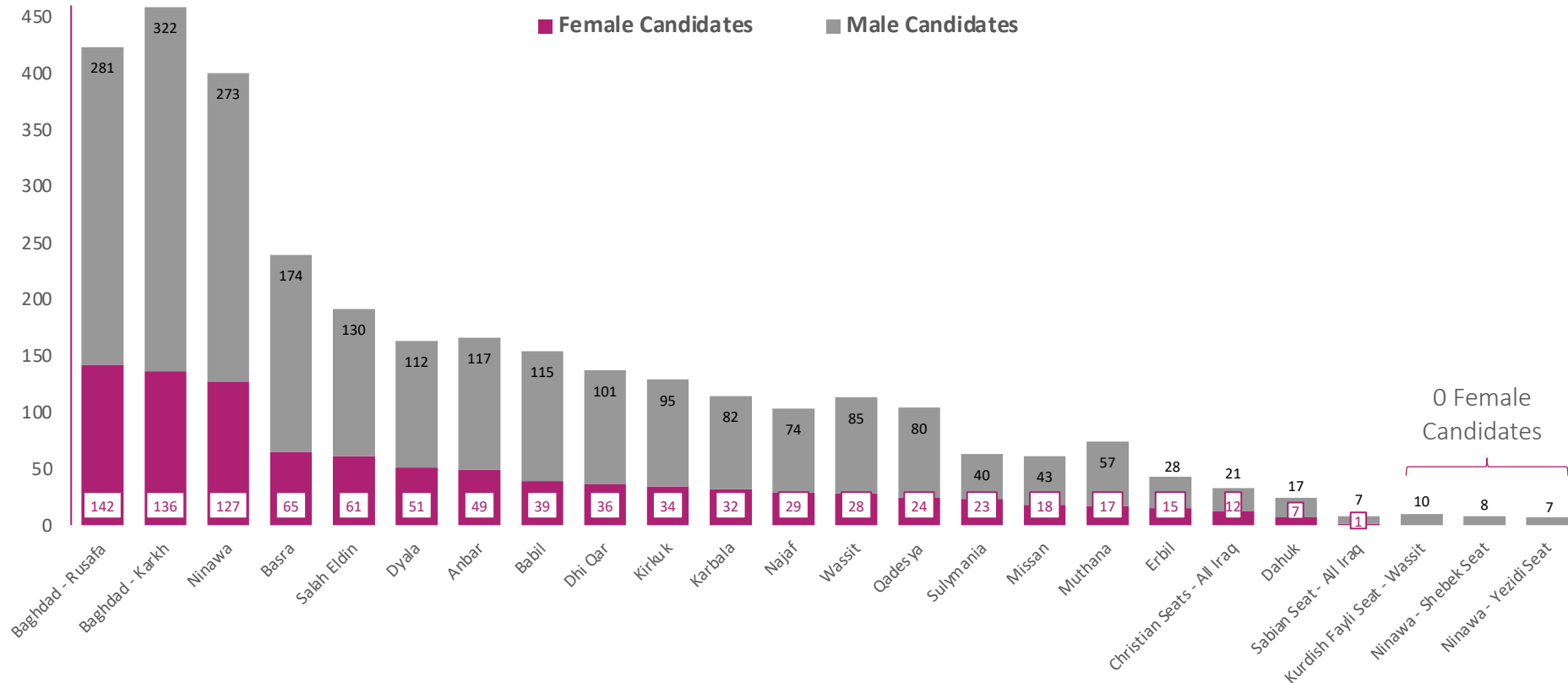
Candidate Registration



The stacked column chart below shows the number of candidates per governorate (and minority components) by sex. The following observations can be seen from the chart:

- In Fayli Kurds, Shabak and Yezidi components, no female candidates participated in the elections.
- Baghdad Rusafa had the highest number of female candidates at 142 out of a total 423 candidates, representing 33.6%.

Figure 2: Number of Candidates by Gender by Governorate/Minority Component



Gender Analysis Of Iraq's National Elections October 2021

Key Points

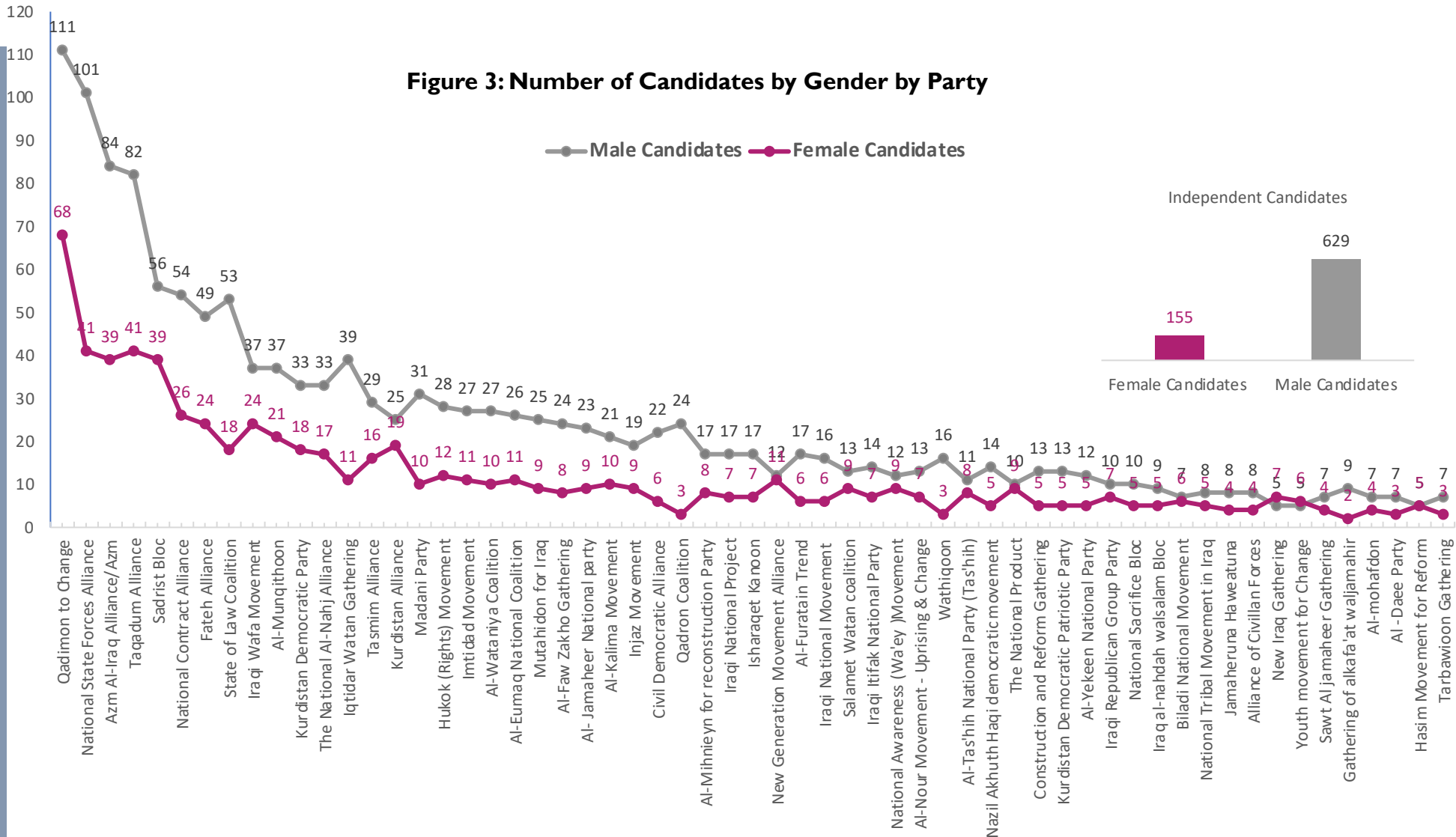
Of the 946 female candidates participating in the elections, 155 (16.4%) were Independents while 791 (83.6%) were party-affiliated.

A total of 33 parties (25.6% of total number of parties that participated in the elections) had no female candidates (each of these parties fielded at most 4 candidates).

Per political party, the Qadimon to Change Party fielded 68 female (37.99%) and 111 male candidates (62.01%). The 2 candidates from the Al-Wihda Al-Wataniya Front were female. The sole candidates from both the Al-Wa'aad Al-Iraqi and Tantheem Al-Dakhil parties were female.

Of the parties with at least 10 candidates, the New Generation Movement Alliance fielded 47.8% female candidates, followed by The National Product Party at 47.3%. The Sadrist Bloc, which got most seats in the Parliament, had 41% female candidates.

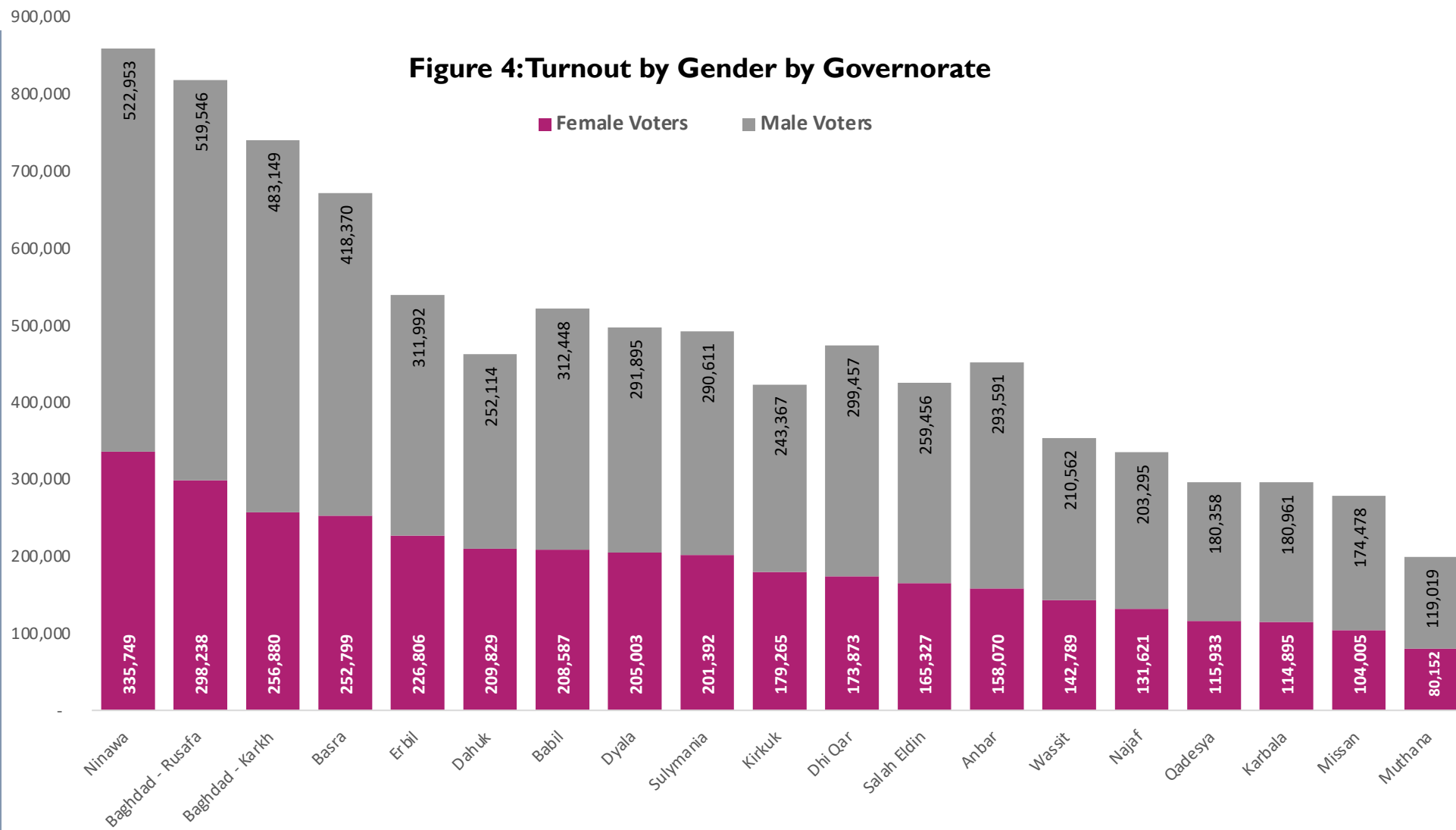
Candidate Registration



Voter Turnout



Figure 4: Turnout by Gender by Governorate



Observations

The Sadrist Bloc won 73 seats, of which 31 (42.5%) were won by women while 42 (57.5%) were won by men.

The Kurdistan Alliance won 17 seats of which 9 (52.9%) were won by women while 8 (47.1%) were won by men.

Of the 9 minority component seats, only the Christian component had female winners, with 2 of their 5 seats won by women.

15 out of the 34 (44.1%) political alliances/coalitions that won seats had no winning female candidates. Of these, the Tasmim Alliance had 5 winning candidates in total while the rest had 1 winning candidate each.

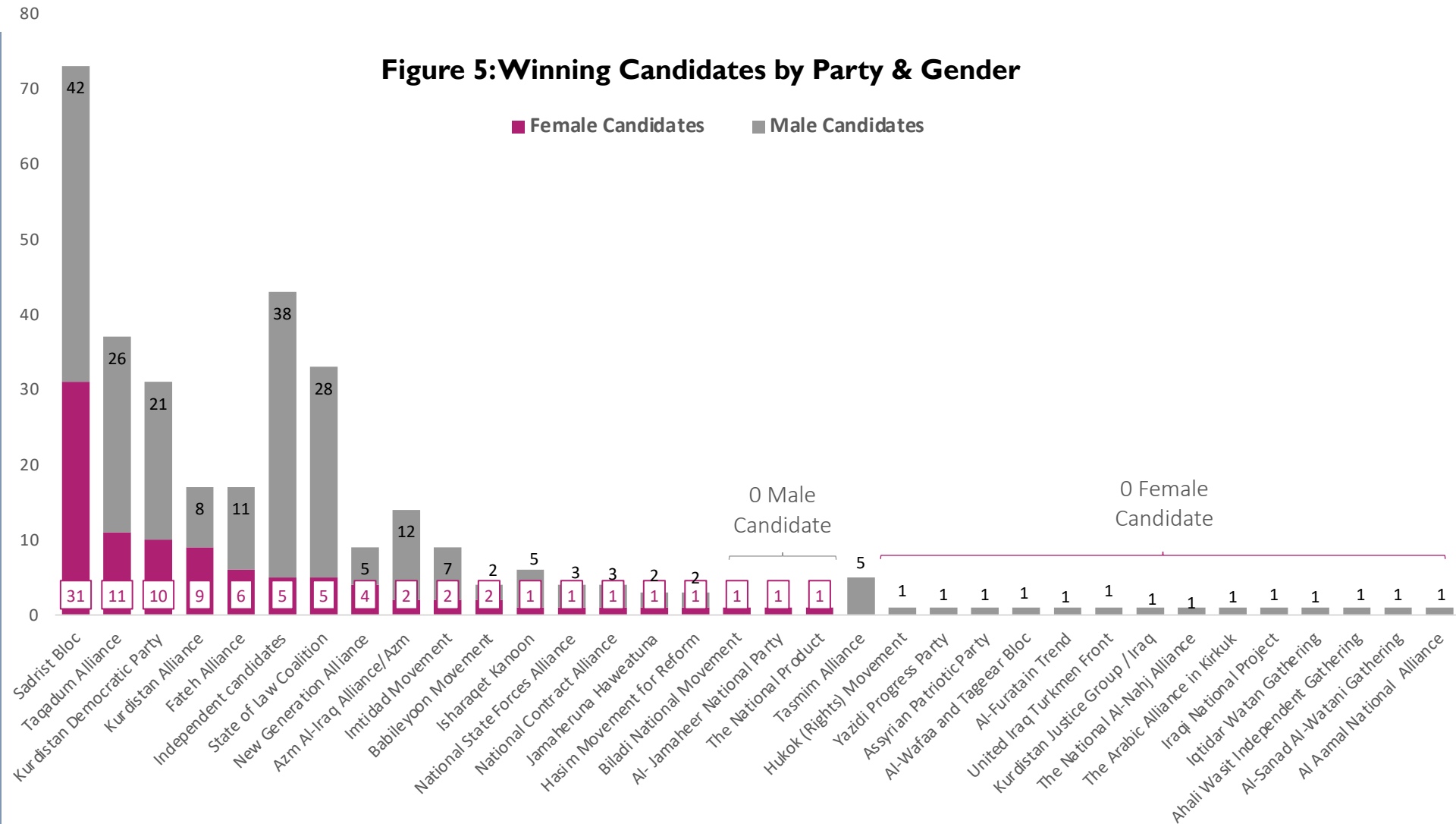
3 political groupings had their only winning seat won by women. Each of these got 1 seat.

5 seats (11.6%) out of 43 winning independent candidates were won by women.

Voter Turnout



Figure 5: Winning Candidates by Party & Gender



Gender Analysis Of Iraq's National Elections October 2021

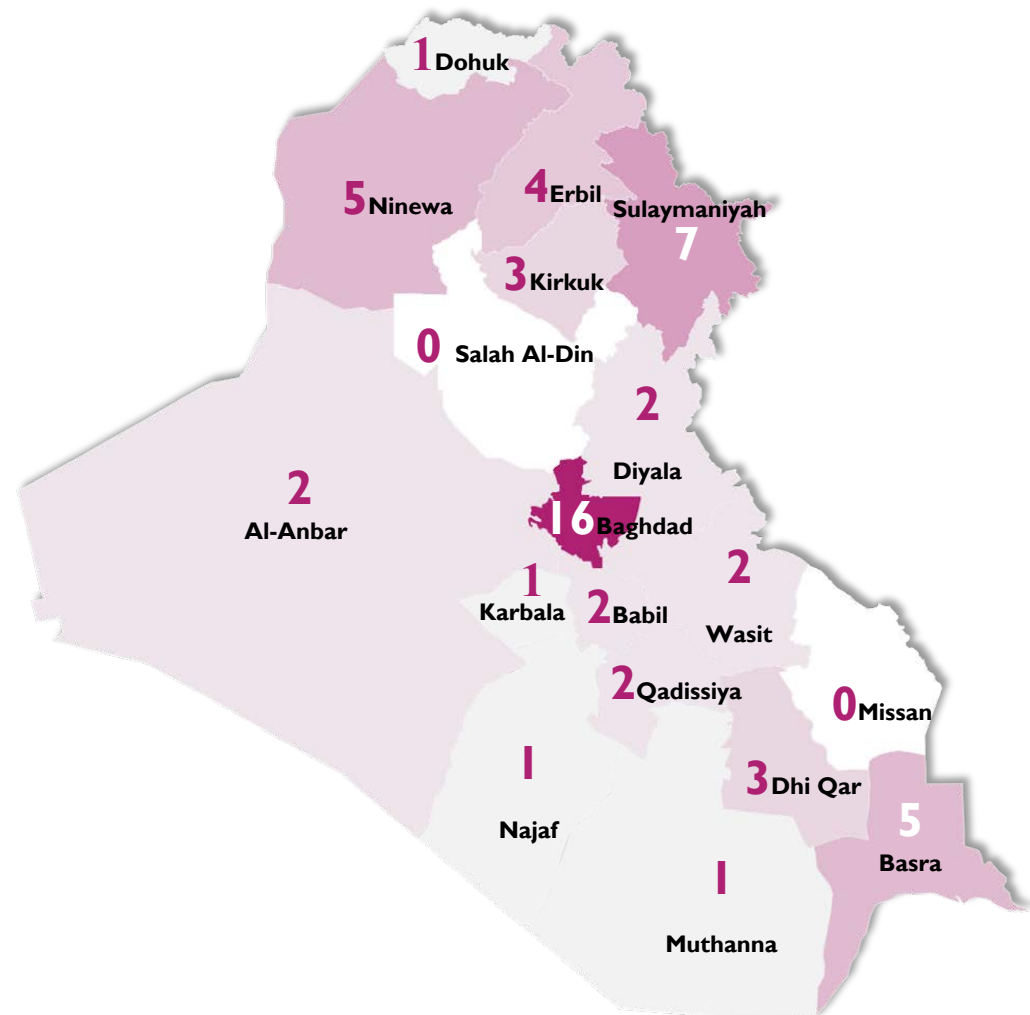
Table 2: Highest number of Votes for females and males per governorate

Top 10 Female winners by votes			Top 10 Male winners by votes		
Governorate	Constituency	Votes	Governorate	Constituency	Votes
Sulaymaniyah	4	28,987	Dohuk	1	56,702
Dhi Qar	4	28,140	Erbil	1	44,928
Sulaymaniyah	2	25,022	Dhi Qar	2	41,399
Erbil	2	24,626	Kirkuk	1	37,744
Diyala	4	21,722	Erbil	1	37,099
Kirkuk	1	21,510	Anbar	1	36,793
Dohuk	2	21,457	Dhi Qar	1	34,870
Baghdad - Karkh	11	21,138	Erbil	1	33,656
Dohuk	1	19,265	Dohuk	3	29,990
Dohuk	3	18,695	Dohuk	1	29,083

Voter Turnout



Number of Women Who Won without the Quota per Governorate, TOTAL 57



The female candidate with the highest number of votes is from Sulaymaniyah, with 28,987 valid votes. She had the highest number of votes in the constituency, thereby winning without applying the quota.

The male candidate with the highest number of votes is from Dohuk, with 56,704 valid votes.

A total of 12 female candidates came first (got the most votes) in the constituencies they competed in.

The winning female candidate with the least number of votes got 1,730 votes in Karbala. She won the seat via the quota system.

The winning male candidate with the least number of votes got 3,988 votes for the Yezidi minority seat.

The losing candidate with the most votes got 27,604 from Erbil. He lost due to the quota system as his seat was taken by the female candidate with the most votes, 12,843.

Table 3: Breakdown of Seats Won by Women Per Political Party/Coalition

Total # Seats Won by Women			
Political Entity	Province	# Seats Won by Women	
Al-Sadr Bloc	Baghdad Rusafa	8	Highest Number of Votes Obtained
	Baghdad Karkh	2	
	Babil	1	
	Karbala	1	
	Wassit	2	
	Najaf	3	
	Qadisiya	2	
	Muthanna	1	
	Dhi -Qar	4	
	Missan	3	
	Basra	4	
National Progress Alliance/Taqadom	Baghdad Karkh	4	11,418 (Constituency No.1)
	Ninewa	2	
	Diyala	2	
	Anbar	2	
	Babil	1	
Kurdistan Democratic Party	Dohuk	3	21,457 (Constituency No. 2)
	Erbil	2	
	Sulaymaniyah	1	
	Ninawa	3	
	Kirkuk	1	
Kurdistan Alliance	Dohuk	1	21,722 (Constituency No. 4)
	Erbil	1	
	Sulaymaniyah	4	
	Ninewa	2	
	Diyala	1	

Total # Seats Won by Women			
Political Entity	Province	# Seats Won by Women	
Al-Fateh Alliance	Baghdad Rusafa	1	Highest Number of Votes Obtained
	Baghdad Karkh	1	
	Ninewa	1	
	Wassit	1	
	Qadisiya	1	
	Basra	1	
		8,067 (Constituency No. 1)	
State of Law	Baghdad Karkh	2	21,138 (Constituency No. 11)
	Babil	1	
	Wassit	1	
	Muthanna	1	
Independent Candidates	Kirkuk	1	21,510 (Constituency No. 1)
	Anbar	2	
New Generation Movement	Salah al-Din	2	28,987 (Constituency No. 4)
	Erbil	2	
Imtidad Movement	Sulaymaniyah	2	28,140 (Constituency No.4)
	Dhi-Qar	1	
Babylon Movement	Babil	1	
	Minorities/Christian Component	2	
Iraq Azim Alliance	Baghdad Rusafa	1	7,265 (Constituency No.2)
	Diyala	1	
National Contract Alliance	Kirkuk	1	9,967 (Constituency No.3)
National State Forces Alliance	Karbala	1	4,026 (Constituency No.2)
Ishrakat Kanon	Karbala	1	8,357 (Constituency No.1)
National Product	Karbala	1	1,730 (Constituency No.3)
Jamahiruna Hawiyatuna Alliance	Salah Al-Din	1	7,840 (Constituency No.3)
Biladi National Movement	Basra	1	2,656 (Constituency No.4)
Hassim Movement for Reform	Ninewa	1	4,919 (Constituency No.4)
Al-Jamheer al-Wataniyah	Ninewa	1	5,040 (Constituency No.5)

The Gender Unit conducted interviews with female candidates in the October 10 elections to better understand their experiences and analyze the security, social and political context in which they were participating. Additional debriefing meetings with those who won and lost were conducted through 23 December in Najaf, Diwaniyah, and Kirkuk. The information gathered indicates continued hindrances faced by women in their bid to political office and confirms the findings of the research study undertaken by the Gender Unit on “Needs and Challenges of Iraqi Women Entering Public Office” conducted in 2020. Moreover, the information points out factors that worked in favor of candidates and those that contributed to losses.

Approximately 60 candidates, both winners and losers between 28-65 years, were interviewed from different governorates including Baghdad, Ninewa, Kirkuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Diyala, Anbar, Dhi-Qar, Diwaniyah, Basra, Wassit, Muthanna, Missan and Salah al-Din, representing Iraq’s diverse sectarian, ethnic and religious components. The interviewed candidates had varied political experiences with some having previously served as MPs, members of provincial councils and civil servants. Others were new entrants with civil society activism backgrounds. Some winning candidates had neither prior political nor civic activism experience, while others had run for previous elections unsuccessfully.





Summary of Issues Highlighted

Security challenges: Candidates from governorates that had experienced the Tishreen protests cited security challenges as a key concern that led to some of them delaying the announcement and launch of their candidacy. An incident of a candidate being attacked after announcing her candidacy in Baghdad was documented and verified early on, before the start of the campaign period. The candidate had announced her candidacy on social media for a seat in a constituency in Baghdad believed to be controlled by armed groups. Candidates running in disputed areas also cited security concerns hindering their ability to campaign freely. While the Supreme Elections Security Committee had established a telephone hotline to receive complaints on elections-related security incidents during the campaign period, some female candidates informed the Gender Unit that the hotline was ineffective, as no actions were taken to address reported complaints.

New Electoral Law: By a large majority, female candidates said that the new law was favorable to women because they could run individually and in smaller districts, and the votes they received were non-transferable. Under the old law, electors were voting for a party when they voted for a candidate, and candidates had to campaign across the governorate in areas where they may have not been known to the electorate. Additionally, votes were transferrable. The new law gave women more visibility and an opportunity to demonstrate their capabilities. Women were able to rely on themselves, their own capabilities, and their achievements to win votes, rather than relying on a political party. This led to their success in the October elections. From candidates who did not win, the view is that the new electoral law is much better because it made it difficult for political parties to “steal” votes from women as had happened in the past. The new law provided valuable experience in running for office and showed that women can do better.

Summary of Issues Highlighted

Issues around the Campaign Period: Several candidates opined that the campaign period was too long, putting a strain on campaign planning and resources. For candidates from southern governorates (Basra, Dhi-Qar, Missan, Diwaniyah, Wassit and Muthanna), delays in commencing electoral campaigns were caused by observation of the 10th of Moharram and Arbaeen of Iman al-Hussein commemoration and announcement of Muqtada al-Sadr’s withdrawal from the elections. Some female candidates informed the Gender Unit that they had resorted to social media campaigns rather than campaigning in person during the religious events, unlike some male candidates who undertook physical campaigns amidst public criticism. Some female candidates were of the view that they would have experienced more backlash from the public should they have undertaken physical campaigns during the religious events. Concerns due to the COVID-19 pandemic also limited candidates’ ability to conduct outreach activities in-person.

Culture and Traditional Gender Roles: Candidates running for seats in rural areas, especially in southern governorates, reported experiencing gender stereotypes while at the same time receiving support of tribal and community leaders to overcome them.

For example, a first-time female candidate from Basra who was running in the rural area of al-Harthah District stated that the head of her tribe had asked her to send a male representative to meet with male potential voters in the area while she met with female voters. The tribal head had said that it was “a shame for a woman to meet with men”. Similarly, other candidates from the south reported that they had organized segregated meetings in their outreach to potential voters and supporters during the campaign period.

Violence against Female Candidates: While no serious violations against female candidates were documented during the elections campaign by UNAMI, social medial attacks were widely reported. On 26 January, the Free Iraq Foundation along with other local NGOs launched a report on GBV and Hate Speech against Female Candidates in the October elections in Baghdad, Basra, Diwaniyah, Kirkuk, Najaf, Ninewa and Salah al-Din. According to the report, 166 candidates were subjected to various incidents ranging from hate speech and fake news to defamation. Baghdad registered the highest number of reported cases, followed by Kirkuk.



Summary of Issues Highlighted

Political Party Support: Some winning candidates from different parties informed that they had received backing from their political parties, including funds for campaigns. Lack of political party support was also cited by some candidates, particularly first-time candidates. A number of candidates informed the Gender Unit that their political parties' leadership preferred to visit constituencies where their male candidates were vying, openly campaigning for them and thus demonstrating unequal treatment of male and female candidates.

Financial Resources: Insufficient financial resources were mentioned mainly by independent candidates as a key factor hindering effective campaigning. Differential ability to access political funds between male and female candidates was also alluded to as a possible factor contributing to electoral losses for women. Some female candidates were of the view that male candidates could easily access campaign funds due to extensive social and political networks.

Candidate Training: Several trainings were provided by government entities, IHEC and NGOs for female candidates to enhance their knowledge of the new electoral system, campaign rules and regulations and to increase their capacity to effectively compete.

Some first-time candidates informed that they had received training on leadership, communication skills and use of social media from the Free Iraq Foundation, the National Democratic Institute, and Iraqi-al Amal Association which, in their view, had helped them bolster their campaigning skills and increase their confidence. Some of the candidates interviewed attended training offered by the office of the National Security Advisor that was targeting female candidates – both independent and political party-affiliated - as part of the work of the Higher Committee⁵ for Women's Political Empowerment established in March 2021. While some candidates described the trainings as beneficial, a number were of the view that the initiatives should have begun earlier. Moreover, the trainings provided by the office of the National Security Advisor were only being offered in Baghdad, making it difficult for candidates outside the capital to participate.

⁵ Members of the Committee are representatives from the Ministry of Interior, the Ministry of Higher Education, the Independent High Elections Commission, the Department of Women's Empowerment, the office of the Office of the National Security Advisor, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights, the Iraqi Media Network, the Iraqi Communication and Media Commission, and UNW.

Summary of Issues Highlighted

Political Experience: Campaigns for the October 10 elections were described as competitive, protracted (two months) and grueling. For female candidates, the expectation to conform with prevailing gender stereotypes created additional burdens on the campaign trail. For example, candidates from Muthanna, Basra and Salah a-Din reported having had male relatives accompany them in campaign events for traditional reasons such as commitments to family and concerns around “preserving a woman’s honour given that women should not be coming home late”. For candidates with previous political experience, the elections campaigns were less difficult to manage compared to new entrants, as past experience helped them improve campaign planning and outreach. Despite lacking political experience, some first-time candidates managed to win seats based on their campaign messaging and strategies e.g., door-to-door campaigning, social media and use of professional and civil society networks to garner broad support.



1 Political parties remain the primary vehicle for entry into politics and parliament for both male and female candidates. Out of a total 329 seats in parliament, 43 seats were won by independent candidates, of which 5 were women. That means that out of the total 95 seats won by women, 90 were affiliated with political parties.

2 Addressing security concerns for candidates before and during electoral campaigning remains a key factor impacting candidate decisions to run and stay the course. Security also impacts how candidates run their campaigns. Moreover, commitments to addressing electoral-related security should be adequately resourced, as exemplified by the lack of resources to operationalize the hotline established to report violations against female candidates.

3 Campaigning is necessarily costly and women – both independent and political party-affiliated – tend to be more disadvantaged than men in accessing resources (money, networks, tribal backing, time etc.). While Iraqi women have demonstrated their capability to take part in politics, there is a need to better understand the dynamics around these issues in the Iraqi context to better identify appropriate support for those intending to enter competitive politics.

4 As highlighted in the interviews with female candidates, there were some benefits from the capacity-building initiatives offered to them. However, these were only available in Baghdad. There is a need to identify how such initiatives could have a wider reach, if offered in the future.

5 A key element highlighted as beneficial in the interviews with female candidates was the smaller size of the constituencies, especially where candidates were known to the electorate due to their professional engagement, civic activism, or community work. Moreover, running in smaller constituencies allowed for the use of less costly activities including door-to-door campaigning and use of existing social and professional networks to garner support.

Conclusion



Overall, the performance of Iraqi women in the October 10 elections marks a major improvement from the 2018 elections, with 29% representation up from 25%. For women who won seats, there are several influential factors. Among these are support from political parties, use of effective campaign strategies, support from tribal leaders, and use of the political experience advantage. The fact that 57 women from 16 governorates out of the 95 won outside the quota demonstrates Iraqi women’s ability to win on their own. Notwithstanding that achievement, the quota remains a key instrument to guarantee women’s representation at the Council of Representatives. Missan and Salah al Din Governorates do not have women who won outside the quota.

The challenges highlighted by female candidates such as gender stereotyping, discrimination, violence against women in politics and insufficient funds for election campaigns are not new and should be addressed to enable women to participate in political and public life fully and equally.

4



Measures are needed to bring Iraq into compliance with its Constitution and international standards such as CEDAW to which it is party, to end gender-based discrimination in politics and create a more enabling environment for women's political participation and electoral representation. Moreover, more work needs to be done to empower women not only as candidates or elected representatives, but also as political and civil society activists, electoral officials and observers. A combination of measures beyond quotas could be considered. Such measures could include inter alia financial support; lower thresholds for candidate nomination; training programmes for candidates; targeted recruitment; outreach programmes; extra security. Below are some recommendations to ensure that future elections are more gender-responsive:

- IHEC could consider rewarding political parties for promoting women's full and active participation as a strong incentive, e.g., by reducing candidate registration fees for political parties that field a certain minimum percentage of women. Offering gender auditing to political parties could also be considered.
- When the Council of Representatives reviews and amends the electoral legislation, it is important to assess the differential impact of proposed amendments on women and men respectively.
- Once constituted, the Council of Representatives could be encouraged to pass legislation addressing violence against women in politics, online and offline. Moreover, commitments to address intimidation and violence around elections including hotlines to report incidents should be sufficiently financed and properly linked to relevant authorities within the judiciary, police and IHEC.
- Efforts could be undertaken by non-UN entities to support funding for female candidates to enable them to run effective campaigns in future elections. Further research to examine how women may be supported in their political pursuits could be conducted using the experiences of Iraqi female candidates in the October 2021 elections.
- There is a need to continue promoting capacity building for women who aspire to run for office, and to develop civil society as a space that enables and nurtures women's entry into public life. Capacity building initiatives should start well in advance of election campaigns.



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