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# 2018 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE KRG



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# 2018 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS AND THE FUTURE OF THE KRG

## About the Author

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Bilgay Duman has been carrying on his doctoral study at Abant İzzet Baysal University, Department of International Relations Ph.D Program. He has frequently carried out field studies in the Middle East. He took part in international observer teams and served as UN electoral observer during the elections in Iraq and Afghanistan. He continues to serve as Iraq Studies Coordinator in ORSAM.

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## Introduction

Following long-lasting debates and a one-year delay in the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), regional parliamentary elections were held on September 30, 2018. KRG's dynamics in the last 5 years seem to influence the consequences that are drawn from the 2018 elections. The most important concrete outcome of the last 5 years was that, unlike the 2009 and 2013 elections, the KRG presidential elections were not carried out with the parliamentary elections. In the post-election period, the presidential post of the KRG was abolished and its duties were transferred to the Prime Ministry and to the Parliament. On the other hand, one of the most substantial changes that the 2018 elections brought was the voter turnout. The rate of participation in the elections fell to 58 percent with a 15 percent loss compared to the last parliamentary elections in the KRG. This rate remained below the participation compared to the Iraqi parliamentary elections held on May 12, 2018. In this sense, it is concurred on that the Kurdish people in Iraq lost hope and abandoned their expectations over about the political process. For what took place before and after the elections revealed the situation of the political process in the KRG.

The Iraqi Constitution rules that the parliamentary elections are held every four years. In this regard, the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) conducts the elections in its own parliament consisting of 111 seats every four years as well. Hence, although the KRG parliamentary elections were scheduled to be held in 2017, it was postponed due to the independence referendum in the KRG. Then, the Independent High Elections and Referendum Commission (IHERC) announced that the election is scheduled for October 24, 2017. However, the elections were postponed indefinitely on the grounds of political parties have failed to nominate candidates within the identified period of time. Upon delaying elections, the KRG extended the mandate of the parliament based on current po-

litical problems, the security situation, the threat of ISIS and financial difficulties.

On May 8, 2018, the KRG's Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani announced a rescheduled parliamentary elections for September 30, 2018. The majority of the political groups outside the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) took a stand for a re-postponement of the elections arguing that the KRG was not ready. The most significant party among the political groups that wanted to postpone the elections was the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Nevertheless, the PUK made preparations for the elections. After the elections had been held in the KRG Parliament on September 30, 2018, the IHERC announced its timetable for elections. According to the timetable, the 20-day propaganda period was to start on September 11 and end on 30 September 2018.

Despite the expectation for the elections to be postponed, special ballot boxes were set up on September 28-29, 2018 in order for the security forces to be able to vote. On September 30, the elections were held with the participation of voters. Unlike the Iraqi parliamentary elections, the whole of the KRG is considered the constituency. In this sense, the voters were able to vote for any candidate in any province.

KRG's independence referendum and Iraqi Parliamentary Elections following the military intervention of the federal government in the "controversial regions" reveals the stance of constituency towards politics. The withdrawal of political participation can be observed from a comparison of 2013 and 2018 KRG Parliamentary Elections.

Elections	Turnout (%)
2013 KRG Parliamentary Elections	73
2018 KRG Parliamentary Elections	58



Party name	Number of Candidates
Kurdistan Democratic Party	100
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	100
Gorran (Change)	100
Coalition of Democracy and Justice	100
Serdem (Modern) Coalition	100
Alliance towards Reforms	61
New Generation Movement	50
Kurdistan Islamic Movement	45
Kurdistan Communist Party (Azadi)	43
Other	74
<b>Total</b>	<b>773</b>

ing the elections. It's possible to say that, final results of voted parties will therefore no longer reflect the public opinion due to the assumption that the elections were fraudulent.

The results of the 2018 KRG Parliamentary Elections were officially announced by the IHERC on October 20, 2018. The tables below reveal the number of seats won by the parties.

The dynamics experienced by the KRG in the last 5 years seem to be effective and its repercussions can be observed in the 2018 elections. The most crucial concrete outcome of the last 5 years, unlike the 2009 and 2013 elections, is that the KRG presidential elections were not carried out with the parliamentary elections. In the post-election period in KRG, the presidential post in the KRG was abolished and its duties

“ In particular, during the special voting where the security forces are elected, the situation regarding the quota chairs prevailed. Because, the quota chairs are assigned by the votes passed through the peshmerga and public security forces under the KDP control. ”

The intervention of the security forces in the election centers was shared in the media. Again, according to the photos and video footages on social media, while voting was continuing, it was seen that the ballot officers and party representatives were battered by the security forces. Besides, photos of those who forge multiple identity cards were spread all over in social media platforms.

The number of votes cast is explained in the table below. However, the province-based participation rates have been increased by 10 percent compared to the statement made upon the closure of ballots. Then, the political parties joining the elections asserted that elections were compromised due to the false identity cards. Gorran and the New Generation Movement announced that they would not accept the election results unless the IHERC compensates for the inconveniences dur-

were transferred to the Prime Ministry and to the Parliament. On the other hand, one of the most substantial changes regarding the 2018 elections was the voter turnout. The rates of participation in the elections in Erbil, Duhok, and Sulaymaniyah were respectively 58, 61 and 51 percent. Hence, with the Iraqi presidential elections held on May 12, 2018, the rate of participation in the KRG elections is declining. However, these figures should be taken into account by taking into account false and invalid voting. As a matter of fact, almost all parties accused the other parties of fraud immediately after the elections. Moreover, the New Generation and Gorran announced that they would not accept the election results if the IHERC does not correct the fraudulent situation in the election results. However, this is not very different from the previous elections. Apart from the KDP, the PUK and Islamist parties did not raise a big ob-

Province	Number of votes
Erbil	755,577
Duhok	487,429
Sulaymaniyah	886,840
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,129,846</b>

#	List	List Number	Number of votes	Number of seats
1	Kurdistan Democratic Party	183	688.070	45
2	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	105	319.912	21
3	Gorran	148	186.903	12
4	New Generation Movement	134	127.115	8
5	Komal	194	109.494	7
6	Azadi List (Communist)	164	86.063	1
7	Reform List	119	79.912	5
8	Serdem List (Socialist)	127	15.434	1
9	Kurdistan Lawyers' Party	156	3.628	0
10	Coalition of Democracy and Justice	172	2.983	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>1.619.514</b>	<b>100</b>

#	List (Turkmen)	List Number	Number of Votes	Number of Seats Obtained
1	Turkmen Development Party	215	3.318	2
2	Turkmen Reform Party	258	3.125	1
3	Iraqi Turkmen Front	272	1.545	1
4	National List	224	885	1
5	We Turkmen	246	846	0
6	Erbil Turkmen Coalition	239	760	0
7	Erbil Turkmen List	267	695	0
8	Turkmen Democratic Movement	203	298	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>11.472</b>	<b>5</b>

#	List (Christian)	List Number	Number of Votes	Number of Seats Obtained
1	National Unity Coalition	368	8.088	3
2	Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian, Popular Council	344	2.963	1
3	Rafidain List	306	2.626	1
4	Christian Democratic List	384	238	0
5	Children of Nahrain	317	108	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>14.023</b>	<b>5</b>

#	Candidate(Armenian)	List Number	Number of Votes	Number of Seats Obtained
1	Aram Bozo Hamo	542	611	0
2	Yervent Nisan Marcos	489	590	0
3	Fahik Kamal Seranian	497	590	1
4	Adkar Hakob	423	439	0
5	Morad Mardros Wartan	476	425	0
6	Nobar Sypar Qarib	408	290	0
<b>Total</b>		<b>-</b>	<b>2.945</b>	<b>1</b>

jection. Therefore, the government formation process was initiated by the KDP, even though the post-election political process was controversial. On November 6, 2018, the KRG Parliament held its first meeting after the elections. At the first meeting, elected deputies swore in.

When the data are analyzed, it is seen that KDP has achieved significant success and increased its number of votes and seats compared to the 2013 elections. This outcome relates to KDP's mobilization and consolidation of the party grassroots and organization. As a matter of fact, despite all the crises experienced in the last 5 years, the KDP has been protecting its range of influence as the results indicate. The 38 seats in the previous elections did not provide a comfortable space for the KDP in the parliament and forced the party to rely on other groups. However, the results of the 2018 elections have risen KDP to power in the parliament on its own given that one must hold 56 deputies to ensure a majority in the parliament. It's widely acknowledged that KDP ensures the election of 8 or 9 of the quota chairs, which is 11, from the parties, groups, and people that are close to itself. In particular, during the special voting

where the security forces are elected, the situation regarding the quota chairs prevailed. Because, the quota chairs are assigned by the votes passed through the peshmerga and public security forces under the KDP control. Added to the number of seats of the KDP, the support of quota chairs also allows for the mobility of the KDP without the need for support from a large group in the parliament. This very situation seems to have made the KDP the biggest power in the politics of KRG.

The other important actor of the region, PUK, has again become the second party according to the current results. In the 2018 elections, it retains the second place in the 2013 elections despite all internal turmoil and problems. One of the main reasons for this result is that Gorran lost its capacity of influence and Barham Salih rejoined the PUK. However, it should be taken into consideration that the PUK received almost half the votes of the KDP. On the other hand, it would be appropriate to say that despite the economic power, military structure and administrative power in and around Sulaymaniyah, the range of influence of the PUK is larger than the potential of the votes it obtained. It is possible





to say that the existence of PUK in the KRG politics cannot be ignored, especially when it is thought that it has good relations with Baghdad and that it can play a facilitating role in the solution of the problems between Erbil and Baghdad or the agreements to be made. In this regard, the PUK will continue to be one of the two executive powers of the KRG together with the KDP. Therefore, it is necessary to think of the PUK as a part of the power plans. Given the case after the 2013 elections, the PUK will not want to remain out of power. It might resort to

balance the internal collapse of the party as power.

However, there seems to be a significant movement in the Kurdish political movement based on Sulaymaniyah, which includes the PUK. Gorran encountered a crucial representation problem after the death of its leader Nawshirwan Mustafa. Omar Said Ali, who had succeeded the party leadership after Mustafa, was ineffective in the party organization and the politics of the region weakened the motive power of Gorran.

“As a matter of fact, it is very easy for KDP to form a coalition government by taking a small party with its current voting rate. However, whether the KDP will like to exclude the PUK or whether the PUK will choose to remain out of power will also be an important element.”

For that, it is assumed that some of the votes of Gorran, who shared the same voter ground with the PUK, switched to the PUK. On the other hand, the effect of the New Generation Movement, which has become a political movement with the support of the referendum process and is led by Shahsuvar Abdulvahit, seems to have quickly faded away. As a matter of fact, according to the votes of the New Generation Movement in the elections of the Iraqi Parliament on May 12,

2018, there is a steep decline in the number of votes it received in the KRG parliamentary elections. This may be considered as one of the main reasons for the increase in the votes of the PUK. However, it is very important that both Gorran and the New Generation Movement have received more than 15,000 votes, even in the special voting confined to the security forces. For the control of the security forces is actually in the hands of KDP and PUK. However, there



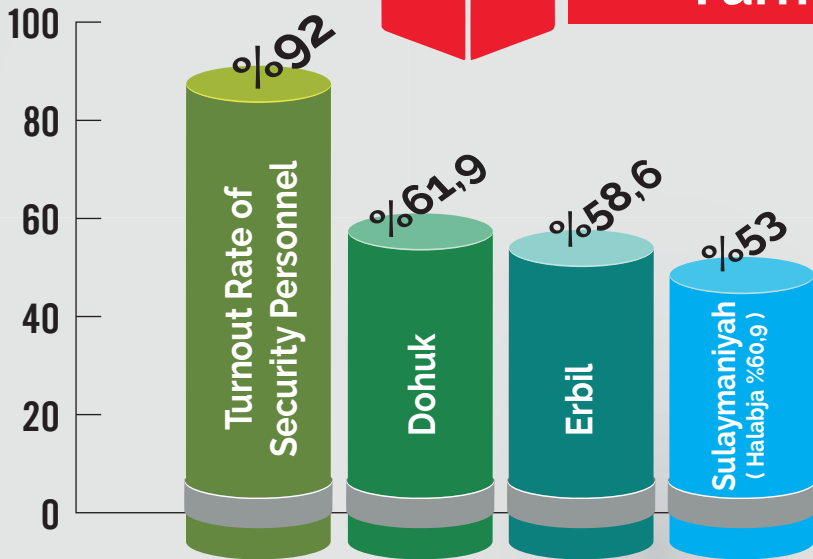


# KRG PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Elections held on  
30 September 2018

21 Electoral Lists Participated

Turnout Rate 58%



Formation of the Parliament	
111 Seats	
General	100
Turkmen Minority	5
Christian Minority	5
Armenian Minority	1

## ELECTION RESULTS

(Vote and Seat Counts of the Electoral Seats)

### GENERAL

Kurdistan Democratic Party	688.070	45
Patriotic Union of Kurdistan	319.912	21
Gorran	186.903	12
New Generation Movement	127.115	8
Komal	109.494	7
Azadi List (Communist)	86.063	1
Reform List	79.912	5
Serdem List (Socialist)	15.434	1

### CHRISTIAN

National Unity Coalition	8.088	3
Chaldean, Syriac, Assyrian, Popular Council	2.963	1
Rafidain List	2.626	1

### ARMENIAN

Fahik Kamal Seranian	590	1
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### TURKMEN

Turkmen Development Party	3.318	2
Turkmen Reform Party	3.125	1
Iraqi Turkmen Front	1.545	1
National List	885	1



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is a solid structure within Gorran that it will not go to the PUK. The weakening of Gorran's power may lead to its weakening as an organization. In this case, the opposition grassroots, which will not shift from Gorran to PUK, is very likely to pass to the New Generation Movement. Moreover, considering the votes of the New Generation Movement in Erbil (approximately 48 thousand) in the parliamentary elections on May 12, 2018, it may be the new destination for not only the Sulaymaniyah region but also the opposition structure in Erbil.

On the other hand, there is a decline in the votes of Islamist parties. Indeed, the Islamist parties were unable to reach the number of seats they had won in the parliament established following the 2013 elections. One of the main reasons for this is the fact that these parties, which appear to be an alternative to KDP and PUK, could not play this role very well. It would also be appropriate to say that the Islamist parties, which appear to be opposition parties, are also affected by the failure of opposition movements in the KRG in general. On the other hand, although it has conservative grassroots, the development and modernization of the KRG seem to reduce the interest in Islamist parties. However, it is likely that the negative impact of Islamist parties' efforts to unite has brought a loss of faith to their constituency. However, in the race going on within the Islamists wing represented by the three political parties, the Towards Reform alliance founded by the Kurdistan Islamic Movement and the Kurdistan Islamic Union which represents Muslim Brotherhood *ecole* fell behind the Kurdistan Islamic Group which has a more conservative and radical Islamic view. In this sense, it can be observed that the Islamist grassroots in the KRG stand behind the Kurdistan Islamic Group, which maintains its solid structure as a discourse and organization instead of Kurdistan Islamic Union known as the largest Islamic party in the KRG.

Considering the pre-election dynamics in this table, it is possible to argue that a broad-based

coalition government will not emerge in the KRG, unlike the previous period. As a matter of fact, it is very easy for KDP to form a coalition government by taking a small party with its current voting rate. However, whether the KDP will like to exclude the PUK or whether the PUK will choose to remain out of power will also be an important element. The KDP and PUK have faced a very strong challenge in the Iraqi presidential elections. The PUK, led by the Talabani family, sent Barham Salih to Baghdad, eliminating a strong leader and thus increasing control over the party organization. The fact that the central Iraqi policy preferred Barham Salih, the candidate of the PUK, is a prominent factor in relations with Baghdad in terms of KDP. For that, KDP is challenged to be effective in Sulaymaniyah as the KRG administration and to remove the PUK completely given the terms of its relations with Baghdad.

However, it is also possible to argue that KDP will not opt for being alone with the PUK in the government formation process. Although the PUK has received fewer votes than the KDP, it is still in a politically strong position due to its presence in Sulaymaniyah and its influence on Baghdad. The KDP may want to invite another party in the coalition to provide a range of motion and to balance the PUK within the government. However, the establishment of a broad-based government after 2013 seems quite challenging. As a matter of fact, the difficulties in the implementation of this broad-based government bothered the KDP in the previous process. From this point of view, one of the most likely scenarios for the establishment of a government is that KDP would take a small party alongside the PUK. It would be appropriate to say that Gorran has come forward in this regard. Despite the incident in 2015 during Massoud Barzani's term (Speaker of the Parliament Yusuf Muhammed Sadiq, a Gorran member, was not let into Erbil and that Gorran member ministers were removed from their offices), the KDP considers Gorran as a balancing power in the government as the latter was the first party that KDP reached an

agreement after the 2013 elections and is still the most effective organization to balance and limit the PUK in Sulaymaniyah. As a matter of fact, the KDP delegation which went to Sulaymaniyah for the establishment of the government gathers only with the PUK and Gorran. On the other hand, it was announced that Nechirvan Barzani was nominated for the Presidency and Masrour Barzani for the Prime Ministry. It is acknowledged that Nechirvan Barzani and Masrour Barzani were drawn to a secret feud for the leadership in the post- Massoud Barzani period. Even if Mesut Barzani, as the KDP leader, were not to allow the emergence of a dispute within the party for now, that both Masrour Barzani and Nechirvan Barzani assume that the responsibilities of authorized posts in the KRG could

create conflicts within the KRG. Although most of the duties and powers of the KRG President have been handed over to the Prime Minister, it retains a strong position as the representative office. Given the KRG's foreign policy and relations with other countries, the rivalry between Masrour Barzani and Nechirvan Barzani may reveal itself in the future. Besides, the KDP forms the government with a small party without the PUK may further exacerbate the administrative and political divide in the KRG which is morally and politically in decline after the referendum. In this case, the KDP will have cut off the branch on which it sits. Therefore, it would not be inaccurate to say that the KDP is trying to achieve a balance where it can control crises and manage the government.

## Notes









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## ORSAM Publishes

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