
Voting Behavior in the Kurdistan Region

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Authors

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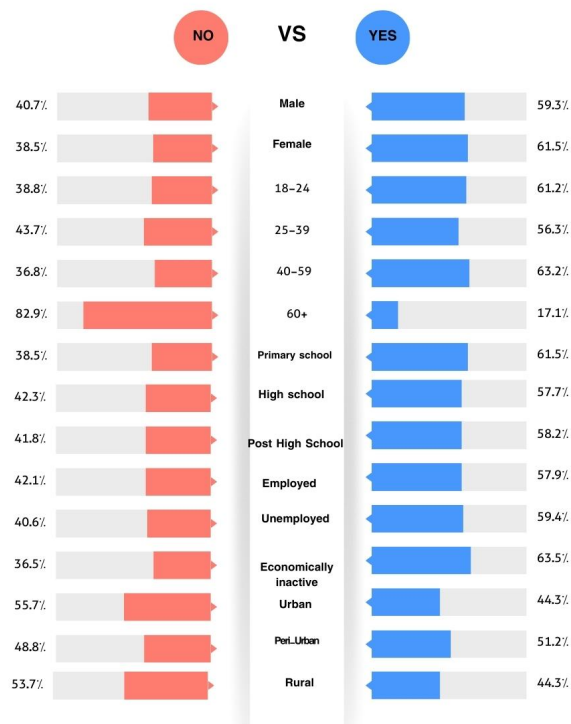
Summary : The upcoming elections hold the potential for unexpected results, as revealed by the poll, primarily due to several factors related to voter demographics and changing population figures in the Kurdistan Region. In the 2018 Kurdistan Parliamentary elections, the voter count stood at 3,085,461. Since then, the Iraqi Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) has projected the number of voters to be 3,227,551 for 2021, and currently, it stands at 3,641,000 voters. Certainly, in anticipation of the upcoming parliamentary elections, set to take place on February 25, 2024, as per the most recent directive issued by President Nechirvan Barzani, the projected number of voters is expected to rise.

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Two key reasons explain the expected similarity in voter turnout in the upcoming elections compared to the previous round. Firstly, the influx of new voters and the enthusiasm of young people to participate in the electoral process contribute to this trend.

THE EXPECTED VOTER TURNOUT FOR THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS

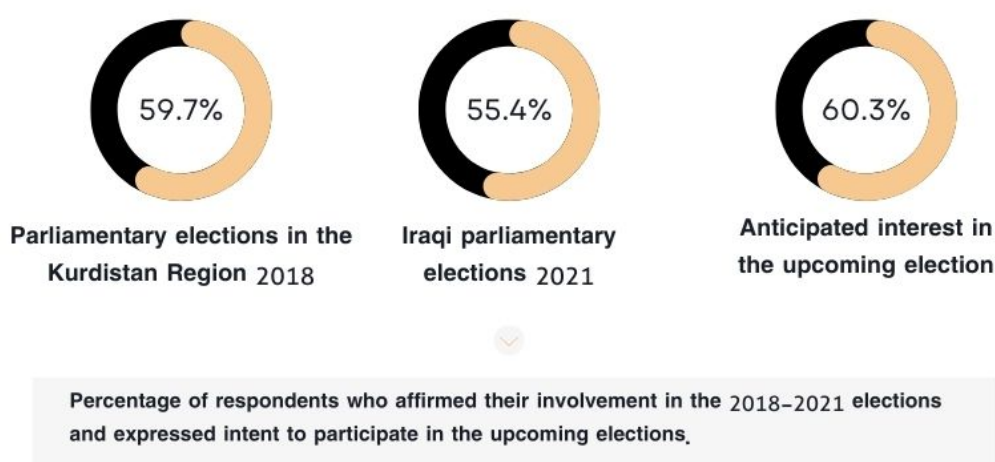


The first-time voters



Secondly, the prevailing political situation and increasing political polarization may serve as incentives for voters to engage in the elections. According to the survey results, 59.7% of respondents answered "yes," indicating their willingness to participate in the elections of 2018, while 40.3% said "no" to participation.

ELECTION TURNOUT IN THE KURDISTAN REGION



In the Kurdistan Region, the Independent High Electoral Commission reported a total of 3,085,461 eligible voters, out of which 1,845,979 citizens participated, resulting in a 59% turnout in the previous election.

A tight turnout was indicated in 2018 elections by the poll. According to the Independent High Election Commission (IHEC), out of the 3,277,551 eligible voters in the Kurdistan Region, only 1,601,730 citizens cast their ballots, resulting in a turnout percentage of 48.86%, with an abstention rate of 51.14%. The survey's findings showed that 55.4% of the participants answered "yes" when asked about their intention to vote, while 44.6% selected "no." It's worth considering that the discrepancy in the results could be attributed, in part, to the votes of communities that ran under distinct lists in the Iraqi parliamentary elections but were not divided in the poll.

The Independent Election Commission has released the provincial turnout figures for the Iraqi parliamentary elections, showing a turnout of 50.8% in Erbil, 40.70% in Sulaymaniyah, and 58.8% in Duhok.

In contrast, the survey conducted for this study asked respondents directly whether they had participated in the Iraqi parliamentary elections or not. The affirmative responses were 61.1% in Erbil, 37.6% in Sulaymaniyah, and 65.1% in Duhok. This indicates a noticeable discrepancy between the commission's official findings and the results of the survey,

particularly in the provinces of Erbil and Duhok.

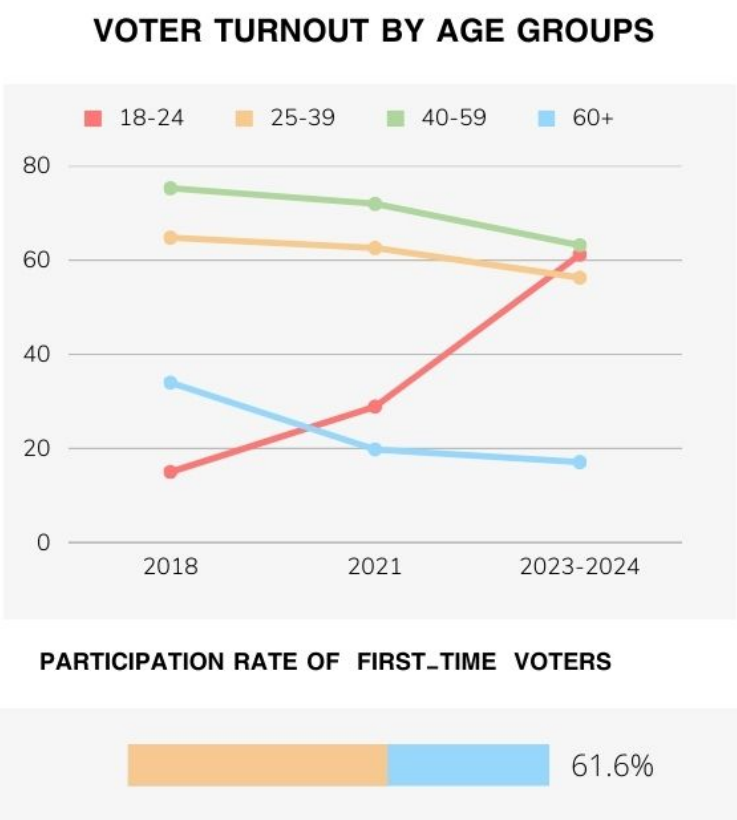
Voter turnout in 2021



Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq

Two factors might account for this difference. Firstly, the poll did not differentiate between the votes of distinct communities as they had distinct lists in the Iraqi parliamentary elections, which could have contributed to the disparity. Secondly, some voters in certain surveyed areas might have been considered as part of provinces outside the Kurdistan Region in the context of the Iraqi elections, leading to the variation in the reported numbers.

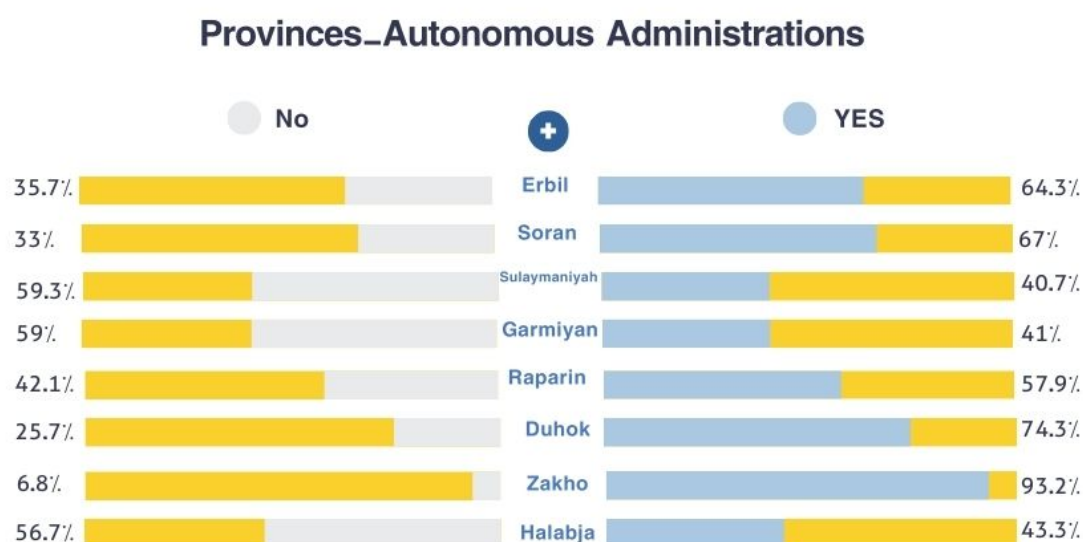
In the analysis of provincial survey outcomes, discernible disparities in participation rates across distinct provinces have been observed. Specifically, in the province of Erbil, the participation rate is documented at a level of 61.1%, contrasting with Sulaymaniyah Province where it registers at 37.6%, and further diverging with Duhok Province where participation ascends to a notable 65.1%.



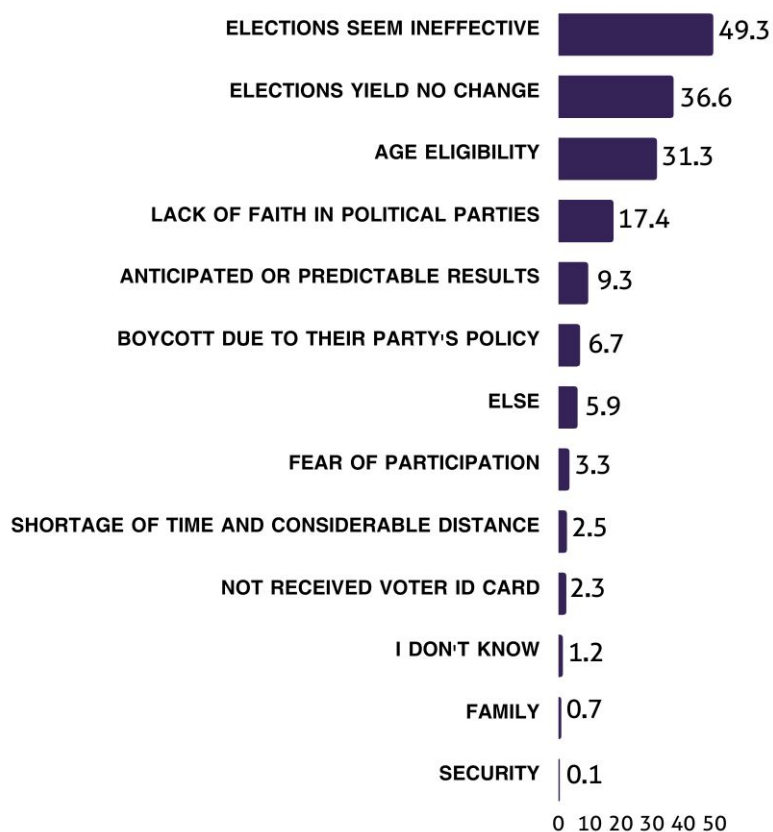
In a contrasting narrative, findings disseminated by the High Commission for the Independence of Elections in Iraq reveal divergent figures, indicating a participation rate of 49.58% for Erbil Province, 50.8% for Sulaymaniyah Province, and 58.8% for Duhok Province.

In a broader scope, an aggregate analysis underscores that 60.3% of the surveyed populace has articulated their intention to actively engage in the forthcoming parliamentary elections, thereby manifesting a marked inclination towards civic involvement. Concomitantly, a discerning 39.7% of respondents have chosen to abstain from such participation. Of note, a captivating dimension unfolds when scrutinizing those individuals who had hitherto refrained from electoral participation: an intriguing 38.5% of these respondents affirm a newfound registration status, presumably in response to an evolving political climate, and an even more notable 69.1% among them have since received their voter cards subsequent to completing the registration process.

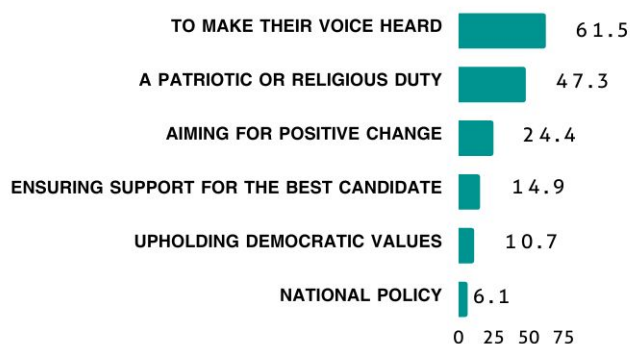
The highest percentages of prospective voters were recorded in Soran 72.4%, Zakho 68.7%, Erbil 58.3%, and Duhok 52.4%. Other regions reported lower figures, with approximately 20% participation.



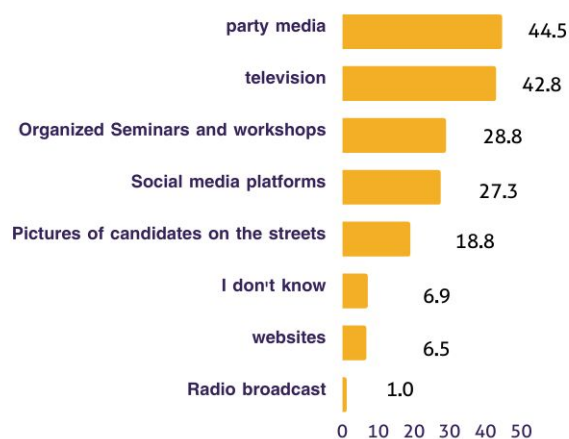
Factors contributing to non-participation in the elections



Motives for engaging in the elections



Influential tools that motivate citizens to actively engage in the electoral process



The increase in the number of voters in the Kurdistan Region compared to the 2018 and 2021 elections can be attributed to the influx of new voters rather than the return of non participating voters. Based on the figures provided by the commission officials, the estimated number of voters for the 2021 elections accounted for 3,227,551 and for the 2023 elections is 3,641,000, indicating approximately 413,449 new voters, and it is expected to increase in 2024. Among the age groups, those aged 18-24 had the highest proportion of registered voters at 52.6%, surpassing other age groups by more than double. Among this age group, 63.8% had received their voting cards.

Regarding gender, 59.3% of male respondents intended to vote, while 40.7% declined. On the other hand, 61.5% of women expressed their willingness to participate, while 38.5% did not intend to vote.

The survey results indicate that 60.3% of voters in the Kurdistan Region are expected to participate in the upcoming elections. This figure seems to be influenced by two significant factors: political polarization and the addition of more than 400,000 new voters.

Among different age groups, young people aged 18-24 show the highest turnout rate at 61.2%, with over 52% of them registered to vote, and 63.8% already having received their voter cards. On the other hand, citizens over the age of 60 exhibit the lowest willingness to vote, with only 17.1% expressing interest in participating, and a registration rate of 20.4%. The greatest eagerness to participate was observed within the 40-59 age bracket, reaching 63.2%. Nonetheless, only 23.3% of this demographic completed the voter registration process. Consequently, it can be inferred that, broadly speaking, there exists a declining inclination among voters in the Kurdistan Region to engage in elections as their age advances.

In terms of educational status, those with lower educational backgrounds tend to have a higher desire to participate. Occupation, however, does not seem to have a significant impact on voter behavior, as the proportions of those willing to participate and those not interested are similar across all three occupational groups (working, unemployed, and economically inactive individuals). The desire for participation is higher in suburban areas and villages compared to the center of big cities. Soran, Zakho, Erbil, and Duhok show the highest demand for participation, while the lowest is observed in Raperin, Halabja, Garmian, and Sulaymaniyah.

Media campaigns conducted by political parties are among the primary factors influencing citizens' engagement in elections. Followed by dedicated election programs on television, which contributed to a participation rate of 42.8%. Additionally, media owned by participating political parties played a significant role, accounting for 44.5% of citizens' involvement in the electoral process. Other factors include conferences and meetings 28.8%, social media platforms 27.3%, and public space photos of candidates 18.8%. This aspect of the study specifically highlights the impact of television shows on voter turnout.