The elusive proportionality in Iraq

By Muayyad Al-Chalabi

The preliminary results announced by the Iraqi Independent High Elections commission (IHEC) show that the major seats were divvied up among four major blocs. Of the total 325 seats in Parliament, Iraqiya, led by Iyad Allawi, won 91 seats; State of Law (SoL), led by Nuri al-Maliki 89 seats; Iraqi National Alliance (INA), led by Ibrahim Jaafari, 70 seats; and the Kurdish Alliance (KA), 43 seats. The remaining 32 seats were spread among 10 blocs with the largest, the Kurdish Goran party, getting eight seats.

In a tight race where the major blocs are locked up in a fierce fight, a slight advantage in the way votes converted to seats make an important difference. The Iraqi system is based on a proportional allocation scheme. There are two main proportional allocation methods, successive proportional allocation (d'Hondt, Sainte-Lague), and straight proportional allocation (largest remainder). Iraq uses the successive proportional allocation schema in dealing with the remainder after dividing the number of votes by the divisor (number of votes per seat).

The successive proportional allocation method is past-step dependent – in the jargon "previous iteration" – while the largest remainder is past-step independent. This means that if several parties compete for a given number of seats, and one of the parties receives a much higher proportion than the others, that "dominant factor" trumps the proportional system by reinforcing the largest vote getter. In effect, the scheme gives the votes that were not sufficient for a smaller party to get a seat to the dominant party. Indirectly, the vote for a small bloc ends up supporting the largest bloc.

This can be illustrated in the Iraqi elections as follows: in Ninawah, Salahuddin, Anbar and Diyala, the Iraqiya Bloc won the largest number of votes compared to the other blocs.

In the north (Suleimaniyya, Irbil and Dohuk) were dominated by the Kurdish Alliance. And in the south, the vote was split between INA and SoL with no notable dominance factor. The capital Baghdad was split between Iraqiya, SoL and INA, again without a notable single dominance.

Take the example of Diyala and Basra: the use of successive-proportional allocation produces different results than those of the largest remainder method. Table (1) summarizes the seat allocations results under the different methods used.

The four major blocs received 442,564 votes. If we allocate the seats to the largest remainder, SoL and Tawafuq would get one additional seat while Iraqiya and INA would get one less seat in Diyala.

In the successive allocation scheme in contrast adopted by IHEC, Iraqiya was rounded up from 6.33 to 8 and INA from 1.23 to two while the other parties were rounded down.

In Basra, 814,810 votes were cast for 24 seats. The largest blocs collectively received 743,614 votes. We present the results in Table (2).

If we give the seats to the largest remainder, Tawafuq would get one more seat and Iraqiya would get one less based on the fact that Tawafuq's remainder is 0.49 while Iraqiya's remainder is 0.22. The split votes between INA and SoL explain the difference between the final IHEC results (successive proportion method) and the alternative largest remainder method.

Table (3) shows the results for Ninawa where the dominant bloc, Iraqiya, also got the benefit of rounding up the numbers

at the expense of the bloc that received less number of seats. There were 1,054,798 votes cast for 31 seats (excluding compensatory seats for minorities).

Kirkuk provides a final illustration. In Kirkuk, 12 seats were allocated, six each to Iraqiya and KA. Iraqiya and KA received 211,675 and 206,542 votes respectively.

The total for the two blocs was 418,217 votes. The total votes for the governate was 556,348. This means that

Goran, the Islamic Kurdish Parties and Tawafuq which received the balance of 138,13, an equivalent to 25 percent (three seats) of the vote, ended up with no seats at all. The smaller parties did not pass the threshold of 46,365.3 votes per seat. Since success in Kirkuk was evenly divided between Iraqiya and KA, they both were the beneficiaries of the votes of the smaller blocs.

In the light of results for Diyala, Basra and Ninawa, and

Kirkuk, the method used for allocating the remainder of the division of votes to divisor "denominator" has been a major factor in allowing dominant Blocs to benefit from the votes of the smaller blocs. Proportional system remains elusive in Iraq.

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| Table 1: Diyala Bloc Seats Allocation according to two methods | | | | | |
Bloc Name	Number of Votes	Votes (Number of votes per seat)	IHEC Results	Largest Remainder method	Difference
Iraqiya	245025	6.33	8	7	-1
Iraqi National Aliance	85821	2.21	3	2	-1
State of Law	63969	1.65	1	2	+1
Kurdish Alliance	47749	1.23	1	1	0
Tawafuq	23463	0.6	0	1	+1

| Table 2: Basra Bloc Seat Allocation according to two methods | | | | | |
Bloc Name	Number of Votes	Votes (Number of votes per seat)	IHEC Results	Largest Remainder method	Difference
Iraqiya	75387	2.22	3	2	-1
Iraqi National Aliance	237010	6.98	7	7	0
State of Law	431217	13.91	14	14	0
Tawafuq	16533	0.49	0	1	+1
Total	743614		24	24	

| Table 3: Ninawa Bloc Seat Allocation Results | | | | | |
Bloc Name	Number of Votes	Votes (Number of votes per seat)	IHEC Results	Largest Remainder method	Difference
Iraqiya	593596	17.44549762	20	18	-2
Iraqi Nationa Aliance	38693	1.137168444	1	1	0
State of Law	18820.3	0.55311946	0	1	+1
Tawafuq	64204	1.886924321	1	2	+1
Wihdat Iraq	53897	1.584006606	1	2	1
KA	239109	7.02729717	8	7	-1
Total	1008319.3		31	31	0