

Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
Fragmentation of Iraq's Political Spectrum

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ELECTION ANALYSIS OF THE 2010 IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

With a combined total of 296 parties and independent candidates registered to compete for a place in a 275-seat parliament, Iraq displays a degree of political fragmentation usually found in first-time multi-party elections but rarely seen thereafter. Even the number of coalitions—at least six, at present—suggests deep fragmentation.

Several factors explain the continuing fragmentation of the Iraqi political scene. First, the legacy of the struggle against Saddam Hussein already led to fragmentation. Much of Saddam's opposition was organized along confessional lines, with exiles in different countries creating separate organizations and drawing backing from different sources. But none of the organizations was particularly effective, so in 2003, there was no group that could claim the glory of having liberated the country. The 2005 elections created a fragmented parliament, worsening the problem.

The electoral system chosen by the November 8 election law—proportional representation with open lists—is likely to perpetuate the fragmentation. Not only will it do nothing to reduce the number of parties and coalitions competing against each other; but it also will encourage an undesirable degree of competition among candidates of the same parties.

In general, intraparty competition is a positive outcome of open-list systems in that it gives more power to the voters than to the party hierarchy. In situations of extreme fragmentation, however, open-list systems may deepen divisions and exacerbate problems.