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## IRAQ GOES TO THE POLLS

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By Catherine Hardy

Iraqis go to the polls on Saturday For the first time since driving out ISIL.

The election will shape attempts to heal the countrys deep divisions and could shift the regional balance of power.

Iraq's three main ethnic and religious groups, the majority Shi'ite Arabs and the minority Sunni Arabs and Kurds, have been at loggerheads for decades.

15 years after the fall of Saddam Hussein, the country is coming to terms with its sectarianism.

"We are done with sectarianism and with Daesh (Islamic State) and all the areas have been liberated. There were a number of closed roads in Baghdad, as I told you because of the sectarianism and these issues. Day after day, the situation is getting better," one man told reporters.

Nonetheless, security is tight.

The election for the new prime minister and parliament also takes place the same week US President Donald Trump announced he was pulling out of the Iran nuclear deal, raising tensions between Iraq's two main allies, Tehran and Washington.

Whoever wins the May 12 poll faces the challenge of rebuilding the country, jump-starting the flagging economy and maintaining the country's fragile unity.

Incumbent Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi is considered by analysts to be marginally ahead but victory is far from certain.

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