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Subject: Incumbents and Secular Parties Gain in Iraq Vote

February 2, 2009

Incumbents and Secular Parties Gain in Iraq Vote

By [ALISSA J. RUBIN](#)

The New York Times

BAGHDAD — Although only about half of those registered to vote nationwide cast a ballot in provincial elections on Saturday, Iraqis appeared willing to accept early results that indicated significant victories for large, incumbent parties and unexpectedly strong support for secular parties.

Voter turnout nationwide was 51 percent, though in the two provinces of Baghdad and Anbar in the west, turnout was just 40 percent, according to Faraj al Haideri, the head of the Independent High Electoral Commission.

Mr. Haideri described the election as fair and said there was no evidence of major fraud. He said the commission was “very pleased with the turnout,” Adding: “Very rarely in other parts of the world do you get such a high percentage voting in provincial elections.”

Most parties said they would not contest the results for now, although a few, including the=20Iraqi Front for National Dialogue, said that they had not ruled out such a move and that they were taking their complaints to the electoral commission.

While official results of how many seats each party won are still several days off, interviews with election officials in several provinces as well as independent observers and representatives of political parties indicated that the Dawa party of Prime Minister [Nuri Kamal al-Maliki](#) gained electoral support in most provinces, potentially strengthening his hand in his dealings with Parliament.

Other incumbent parties also did well in several provinces, including the secular Iraqi National List, led by [Iyad Allawi](#), a former interim prime minister; the Iraqi Islamic party, led by Vice

President Tareq al-Hashimi, a Sunni; and the nominally independent parties backed by Shiite cleric [Moktada al-Sadr](#).

The party that relied most on its religious identity during the campaign, the [Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq](#), appeared to have lost some seats in several provinces, according to unofficial reports, but was still among the top three or four vote-getters in most provinces south of Baghdad.

It was the relative success of secular parties that was the surprise development, suggesting that a significant number of Iraqis are fed up with the religious parties that have done little to deliver needed services to the people.

“The outcome reflects that the public are interested in services and this election has shown them that they can change anything by democratic means if they are not satisfied,” said Qassim Daoud, a member of Parliament and one of the leaders of an independent, secular-leaning party.

Mr. Daoud, along with the leaders of other small secular lists that garnered just a few seats, said that they would be pleased if they won any seats at all.

“When we decided to run, it was a very big challenge for us,” he said. “We were new, we had no money, we were paying for everything ourselves. And with all those limitations that we got any seats this really reflects that Iraqi society is looking for alternatives,=2 0they do not necessarily believe that the Islamists should lead the country.”

Members of another independent party, the National Reformation Movement, had similar views. “At least we will get some seats and we will make alliances with other blocs,” said party member Moad al-Obaidi.

There was an outcry, however, from people across the country who tried to vote and were unable to do so. Most were prevented either because the strict curfew prevented them from reaching their polling center or because when they got there, their names were not on the center’s voter roll.

Part of the problem was caused by the large number of internally displaced Iraqis who no longer live in the province where they are registered to vote. While some updated their voting registration, the majority appeared not to have done so.

Reporting was contributed by Timothy Williams, Suadad Salhy and Mohammed Hussain in Baghdad, and Iraqi employees of The New York Times from Baghdad, Babil, Karbala, Nineveh, Salahuddin, Anbar, Diyala and Najaf.

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