



A Reporter's Guide to Election Coverage

The contents of this file can be updated at intervals to take account of changing developments.

See webworld.unesco.org/download/fed/iraq
or www.indexonline.org.

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Editor's note

This publication is the work of several organizations and many individuals. The opinions expressed are those of the authors' alone. They are not necessarily shared by other partners in this project, including the UNESCO, the United Nations and its agencies.

About these documents

Introduction

This folder contains the first editions of what will become a regularly updated package of documents covering the election process in Iraq. New editions will be made available on a regular basis. The system is simple. As new sections are published and distributed, just remove the out-of-date section and replace it with the new one.

The new inserts will be made available across Iraq, at selected press conferences and eventually, direct to newspapers, broadcasters and anyone actively involved with the media in Iraq. The inserts can also be downloaded from the web, as PDF files, easily reprinted and cut to fit the folders.

Most often they will be distributed at future training events and media seminars planned for Iraq during 2005. This is the year that Iraq takes charge of its destiny. There will be a new parliament, a new constitution, a referendum and another election. It is the task of Iraq's journalists to report on these events, to understand them, track them and represent them fairly and professionally to the Iraqi people.

Iraq's journalists have another duty - to actively participate in the process of establishing a legal framework for the media as it carries out its duties. One of the new government's first tasks will be to review the media law in Iraq, to draft election rules that will affect the way the media does its job.

No government - especially one under as much pressure as Iraq's - will easily give up influence over the media. Journalists will have to work hard to ensure that their rights are preserved. They can do this by making sure their voice is heard in the debates on media rights that will run through 2005. This folder will contain some of the evidence and the arguments that need to be made.

The training courses and seminars planned as part of this project will cover basic issues such as reporting skills and election news coverage techniques. But it will also raise a debate about the journalist's role in society and his or her professional duties. It will also reinforce the case that fairness and professionalism by the Iraqi media must be matched by fairness and professionalism on the part of government - particularly in terms of regulation and access to information.

"Freedom of expression, including the constitutional right to receive and impart information, is a prerequisite for free and fair democratic elections. In order to enable citizens to make informed democratic choices, media representatives have a heightened responsibility to provide accurate and impartial information to the public during election periods. Media representatives play an essential role in the democratic process. It is imperative that they be afforded the highest level of access to election-related events, access to information, and protection from all forms of harassment and/or intimidation as reasonably possible during the election campaign period."¹

¹ From the International Organisation for Migration Media Code of Conduct.



Further information

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Journalist Safety: Guidelines

Objectives

- Support and develop safety programmes for all news media workers on a global and local level
- Encourage agreements on health and safety matters between employers and staff
- Disseminate information through practical training, advisories and literature
- Promote industry best practice for training, equipment and field work
- Investigate, develop and promote safety services including affordable insurance
- Establish a global network of organisations committed to risk-reduction
- Sponsor awareness-raising initiatives at media events

The INSI Code

1. The preservation of life and safety is paramount. Staff and freelances equally should be made aware that unwarranted risks in pursuit of a story are unacceptable and strongly discouraged. News organisations are urged to consider safety first, before competitive advantage.
2. Assignments to war and other danger zones must be voluntary and only involve experienced news gatherers and those under their direct supervision. No career should suffer as a result of refusing a dangerous assignment. Editors at base or journalists in the field may

- decide to terminate a dangerous assignment after proper consultation with one another.
3. All journalists and media staff must receive appropriate hostile environment and risk awareness training before being assigned to a danger zone. Employers are urged to make this mandatory.
4. Employers should ensure before assignment that journalists are fully up to date on the political, physical and social conditions prevailing where they are due to work and are aware of international rules of armed conflict as set out in the Geneva Conventions and other key documents of humanitarian law.
5. Employers must provide efficient safety equipment and medical and health safeguards appropriate to the threat to all staff and freelances assigned to hazardous locations.
6. All journalists should be afforded personal insurance while working in hostile areas, including cover against personal injury and death. There should be no discrimination between staff and freelances.
7. Employers should provide free access to confidential counselling for journalists involved in coverage of distressing events. They should train managers in recognition of post traumatic stress, and provide families of journalists in danger areas with timely advice on the safety of their loved-ones.
8. Journalists are neutral observers. No member of the media should carry a firearm in the course of their work.
9. Governments and all military and security forces are urged to respect the safety of journalists in their areas of operation, whether or not accompanying their own forces. They must not restrict unnecessarily freedom of movement or compromise the right of the



news media to gather and disseminate information.

10. Security forces must never harass, intimidate or physically attack journalists going about their lawful business.

16 Steps for Safety

1. Be physically and mentally prepared. Go on a Hostile Environment course that includes basic first aid training before your assignment if at all possible.
2. Most conflict zones require an ability at least to run, hike and endure discomfort. Ensure appropriate jabs and carry basic medical kit with clean needles. Wear internationally recognised bracelet with caduceus symbol and record of allergies, blood group etc.
3. Know the background of the people and place of assignment and of the dispute. Learn a few useful phrases in the local language, most essentially “foreign press” or “journalist”. Know the meaning of local gestures that might be important.
4. Do not move alone in a conflict zone. If travelling by road, use a safe and responsible driver with knowledge of terrain and trouble spots. Identify your vehicle as media unless that would attract attack. Travel in close convoy if possible. Do not use military or military-type vehicles unless accompanying a regular army patrol. Make sure your vehicle is sound, with plenty of fuel. In hot conditions check tyre pressures regularly as a blow-out can be disastrous.
5. Seek the advice of local authorities and residents about possible dangers before travelling. Check the road immediately ahead at safe intervals. Inform your headquarters and

colleagues remaining at base of where you are going, your intended ETA and expected return. Check in frequently. Beware of carrying maps with markings that might be construed as military.

6. Meet unfamiliar contacts in public places and tell your office or trusted colleague your plans. Try not to go alone into potential danger. Plan a fast and safe way out before you enter a danger zone.
7. Never carry a weapon or travel with journalists who do. Be prudent in taking pictures. Seek the agreement of soldiers before shooting images. Know local sensitivities about picture-taking.
8. Carry picture identification. Do not pretend to be other than a journalist. Identify yourself clearly if challenged. If working on both sides of a front line never give information to one side about the other.
9. Carry cigarettes and other giveaways as sweeteners. Stay calm and try to appear relaxed if troops or locals appear threatening. Act friendly and smile.
10. Carry emergency funds and a spare copy of your ID in a concealed place such as a money belt. Have a giveaway amount ready to hand over.
11. Keep emergency phone numbers at hand, programmed into satellite and mobile phones, with a key 24/7 number on speed dial if possible. Know the location of hospitals and their capabilities.
12. Familiarise with weapons commonly used in the conflict, their ranges and penetrating power so you can seek out the most effective cover. Know incoming from outgoing. Know what landmines and other ordnance look like. Do not handle abandoned weapons or spent munitions.



13. Wear civilian clothes unless accredited as a war correspondent and required to wear special dress. Avoid paramilitary-type clothing. Avoid carrying shiny objects and exercise care with lenses. Reflections of bright sunlight can look like gun flashes.
14. Be prepared to wear flak jackets, body armour, helmets, gas masks and NBC apparel as appropriate. For demonstrations, use more discreet gear such as hardened baseball-type hats and light undergarment protection.
15. Know your rights, internationally and locally. Know the Geneva Conventions as they relate to civilians in war zones.
16. Journalists who have endured high danger and witnessed dreadful events may experience traumatic stress in later weeks. Do not be embarrassed to seek counselling.

An *Index on Censorship* media rights seminar in Baghdad in May 2004. (Index/Rohan Jayasekera)



Journalists & media workers killed in Iraq during 2004

1. Duraid Isa Mohammed, producer and translator, CNN - 27 January
2. Yasser Khatab, driver, CNN - 27 January
3. Haymin Mohamed Salih, Qulan TV - 01 February
4. Ayoub Mohamed, Kurdistan TV - 01 February
5. Gharib Mohamed Salih, Kurdistan TV - 01 February
6. Semko Karim Mohyideen, freelance - 01 February
7. Abdel Sattar Abdel Karim, al-Ta'akhi - 01 February
8. Safir Nader, Qulan TV - 01 February
9. Ali Al-Khatib, Al-Arabiya - 18 March
10. Ali Abdel Aziz, Al-Arabiya - 18 March
11. Nadia Nasrat, Diyala Television - 18 March
12. Majid Rachid, technician, Diyala Television - 18 March
13. Mohamad Ahmad, security agent, Diyala Television - 18 March
14. Bourhan Mohammad al-Louhaybi, ABC News - 26 March
15. Omar Hashim Kamal, translator, Time - 26 March
16. Assad Kadhim, Al-Iraqiya TV - 19 April
17. Hussein Saleh, driver, Al-Iraqiya TV - 29 April
18. Mounir Bouamrane, TVP - 07 May
19. Waldemar Milewicz, TVP - 07 May
20. Rachid Hamid Wali, cameraman assistant, Al-Jazira - 21 May
21. Unknown, translator - 25 May
22. Kotaro Ogawa, Nikkan Gendai - 27 May
23. Shinsuke Hashida, Nikkan Gendai - 27 May
24. Unknown, translator - 27 May
25. Mahmoud Ismael Daood, bodyguard, Al-Sabah al-Jadid - 29 May
26. Samia Abdeljabar, driver, Al-Sabah al-Jadid - 29 May
27. Sahar Saad Eddine Nouami, Al-Hayat Al-Gadida - 03 June
28. Mahmoud Hamid Abbas, ZDF - 15 August
29. Hossam Ali, freelance - 15 August
30. Jamal Tawfiq Salmene, Gazeta Wyborcza - 25 August
31. Enzo Baldoni, Diario della settimana - 26 August
32. Mazen al-Tomaizi, Al-Arabiya - 12 September
33. Ahmad Jassem, Nivive television - 07 October
34. Dina Mohamad Hassan, Al Hurriya Television - 14 October
35. Karam Hussein, European Pressphoto Agency - 14 October
36. Liqaa Abdul-Razzaq, Al-Sharqiya - 27 October
37. Dhia Najim, Reuters - 01 November

Reporters sans Frontières



Iraq Votes: A review

The 30 January election

On 30 January Iraqis voted for parties contesting seats in the Iraqi National Assembly, a 275-seat parliament called to serve as a transitional body until elections for a fully fledged assembly under a new constitution are held in December 2005.

There were no voting districts - just a single country-wide election. This option was supported by the UN - advisors to the process - because it was thought easier to organise than drawing up electoral districts based on Iraq's cultures and ethnicities, though they did endorse a separate ballot for provincial councils in Iraq's 18 regional governorates.

In Iraq's Kurdish region, there was a third ballot for the Kurdish National Parliament, with special arrangements for the disputed northern city of Kirkuk. Expatriates in 14 countries were allowed to vote in the parliamentary polls only. On election day a reported 5,232 polling centres opened throughout Iraq's 18 governorates. The first provisional results are due to be announced by 10 February by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), established by the U.S.-run Coalition Provisional Authority in May 2004.

All Iraqis born on or before 31 December 1986 were eligible to vote, provided they could prove their citizenship. Iraq has no current official census, so voters were registered through ration cards used during the sanctions years for the UN oil-for-food programme, which began in 1996. There

were roughly 7,700 candidates running for the 275 National Assembly seats and 11,300 for seats on the 18 regional legislatures, but Iraqis did not vote for individuals or specific parties in the traditional sense. Instead they picked from one of 111 "lists" of combined party groups and factions certified by the IECI.

The parties picked the order in which their candidates' names appeared on their own lists. This was important as seats were allocated to lists in proportion to the percentage of votes the list collected on election day - first names first - so the higher up the list, the higher the chance the candidate would get a seat. Every third candidate in the order on the list had to be a woman.

Most of the campaigners called on supporters to vote for the number of the list, rather than the name. On the day voters ticked off their choice of list from a ballot paper with the name, number, and identifying logos of the 111 lists. A lottery determined the order in which list names appeared on the ballot.

Once convened the newly elected National Assembly must then elect an Iraqi president and two deputies - a trio making up a Presidency Council that will represent Iraq abroad and oversee the running of the country. The Presidency Council will be responsible for naming the prime minister and for approving ministerial appointments.

The National Assembly will immediately be tasked to draft a permanent Iraqi constitution by 15 August. The constitution should be ratified by the Iraqi people in a general referendum by 15 October. If it fails to do this, it can extend the process for another six months. If a constitution is not ratified by then, its mandate will expire, and



fresh elections will be held for a new assembly that will start the process again.

But If the constitution is ratified according to schedule in October, Iraqis will elect a permanent government no later than 15 December. That government should assume office by 31 December.

The role of the Electoral Commission

The elections are organised by the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI), established by the US-run Coalition Provisional Authority in May 2004. The Commission is run by a nine-member Board of Commissioners, which includes seven voting members who are Iraqi citizens, and two non-voting members.

The two non-voting members are the chief electoral officer, an Iraqi, and the Colombian UN expert Carlos Valenzuela, a veteran of 13 previous UN election missions. The UN selected the IECI membership from 1,878 applications short-listed to 25. The Iraqi Commission members were sent on a three week training course in Mexico by the UN.

Thirty other UN election specialists provided technical expertise to a staff of about 6,000 Iraqi election clerks and monitors. These teams faced severe violence, including a 19 December ambush in central Baghdad, in which three were killed. The US army reported that virtually every election worker in Nineveh province, which includes predominantly Arab Sunni Mosul, quit before the election because of security fears.

There were other resignations reported in several other cities, though the Commission frequently disputed or dismissed reports, or claimed that the staff who had resigned had been promptly replaced.

Voting papers were printed in Switzerland to avoid counterfeiting and centres established in each of the 18 provinces to collate results before sending them on to Baghdad.

The better than expected turnout and the relatively limited scale of the threatened insurgent assault on the process reflected well on the IECI. Its performance was not without its critics among both Iraqi & international media. IECI spokesman Farid Ayar was reported to be in dispute with the commission membership in the days before the vote, while on the day his delivery of interim turnout results to the media was confusing – some said unintentionally misleading.

The process itself did not appear flawless. Some polling stations in the so-called 'hot areas' did not open when insufficient numbers of election workers turned up to run them. On the day Ayar said that voters in these areas could vote at other stations, without saying where or how they could be reached with regional travel so heavily restricted.

As with the turnout figures, the commission's tally of polling stations that opened as planned on 30 January seemed over-estimated, given the flow of media reports from the field, including Samarra, the oil refinery town of Beiji and Baghdad's mainly Iraqi Sunni district of Azamiyah, and ravaged al-Fallujah where no voting at all was said to have taken place.



There was no independent monitoring body to confirm or support the validation of interim results from the commission. The UN, having helped organise the election, had made it clear in advance that it would not be involved in observing it, and Carlos Valenzuela, its lead official at the Commission distanced himself and the world body from the IECI's early statements on turnout and totals.

A hastily organised independent monitoring group of foreign election experts remained in Amman, Jordan, its members unable to get security clearance to move its operations into Iraq. Instead the specially-founded International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) plans to 'audit' and 'assess' the data from Iraqi observers and evaluate the process after the event. The IECI itself, with UN support, had trained several thousand Iraqi election observers, and briefed thousands more from the parties, but their true effectiveness has yet to be independently assessed.

In its preliminary statements, the IMIE team in Jordan said it had identified "several strong points



Index on Censorship media trainers in Iraq: Sihem Bensedrine, Yahia Shukkieer & Yousef Ahmed. (Index/Rohan Jayasekera)

regarding today's election, including the extent and quality of (the IECI's) election planning and organisation, and its independence." But it added that "areas recommended for further development include transparency regarding financial contributions and expenditures, improvements to the voter registration process, and reviewing the criteria for candidate eligibility".

Registration of candidates, parties and voters

Any Iraqi who is at least 30 years old, has a high-school diploma and was not a high-ranking member of Saddam Hussein's Ba'ath Party or responsible for atrocities under Hussein's regime was allowed to run for office. Lower ranking members of the Ba'ath Party who have renounced their affiliation may run. Current serving members of the Iraqi armed services were barred from standing.

Under the 30 January system, which like all else in the current voting process, is open to review and may be changed by the National Assembly during 2005 ahead of the next vote, candidates may run as independents or on a list. A list is defined as a political party, an association or a group of people with a common political agenda – such as women's or human rights groups - that submits candidates.

Individuals can also apply and, if certified, they can run alone or form a coalition with other certified political entities.

Names must appear in rank order on the party lists and every third candidate in order must be a woman. Seats were allocated through a system of



proportional representation, with seats allocated proportionate to the percentage of the vote given to each of the 111 lists. The actual names of the 7,471 candidates on the 111 lists were kept secret up until two days before the poll to protect them against insurgent attack.

Iraqis born on or before 31 December 1986 were eligible to vote, provided they can prove their citizenship. Iraq has no official census, so voters were registered through ration cards used for the UN oil-for-food programme, which began in 1996.

Those voters who did not have ration cards were allowed to vote if they produced two official papers, such as citizenship certificates, identity cards, passports, or military service documents. Where the security situation permitted the process went smoothly, despite some problems with the registration of would be voters born in 1986.

Registration was allowed right up to election day on 30 January in the violence-plagued governorates of al-Anbar and Nineveh, where Mosul is located. But in many areas insurgents made verification of the voter lists virtually impossible. Iraq's interim president Ghazi al-Yawar conceded before the vote that there were areas where not one voter registration sheet had been handed out.

Some 200,000 refugees who fled the November 2004 US assault on al-Fallujah also faced severe practical difficulties registering and voting, beyond the physical threat posed by insurgents.

Even in the relatively peaceful northern governorates, Human Rights Watch reported up to 90 percent of the voter registration forms in Arbil province had mistakes that needed correction and

that up to 70,000 people in the area might lose their right to vote as a result.

The development of a more rigidly operated registration list, possibly as part of a nationwide census, will be a priority for the Iraqi government in 2005. This will be a politically contentious task, especially in disputed areas such as Kirkuk, and among minorities – Assyrian Christians, and Turkomans in particular - who do not believe their political presence should be measured only by their numbers.

Iraq has a population of more than 25 million people, but it is a young country - 40 percent of the population are under the age of 14, twice the percentage recorded in the United Kingdom & United States. That left just 15.5 million Iraqis eligible to vote, with 1.2 million of them living outside the country.

Overseas voting was supervised by the International Organisation for Migration, though only 281,000 of the 1.2 million eligible expatriates registered to vote and of them just over two-thirds actually cast a ballot, despite intensive efforts by the IOM. Future overseas registration and voting will probably be managed by Iraqi embassies abroad, as is the case with other nations.

Main Party Lists – 30 January 2005

United Iraqi List

- Iraqi National Congress (secular) – leader Ahmad Chalabi
- Islamic Action Organisation (Shi'ite Islamist) – leader Ibrahim al-Matiri



- Islamic Dawa Party in Iraq (Shi'ite Islamist) – leader Iraqi Vice President Ibrahim Jaafari
- Islamic Dawa Party Iraq Organisation (Shi'ite Islamist) - leader Abdul Karim Anizi
- Islamic Virtue Party (Shi'ite Islamist) - leader Nadim Issa Jabiri
- Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (Shi'ite Islamist) - leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim
- Turkmen Islamic Union (Turkmen) - leader Abbas Hassan al-Bayati
- Also includes nine other Shi'ite and Turkmen parties and prominent Saddam-era dissenter Hussain al-Shahrstani

Iraqi List

- Iraqi National Accord (secular) - leader Prime Minister Iyad Allawi
- With five other secular parties and one individual

Kurdistan Alliance List

- Kurdistan Democratic Party (Kurdish) - leader Massoud Barzani
- Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Kurdish) - leader Jalal Talabani
- With nine other Kurdish parties

Patriotic Rafidain Party

- Assyrian Democratic Movement (Christian) - leader Yonadim Kanna
- Chaldean National Council (Christian)
- People's Union
- Iraqi Communist Party (secular) - leader Hamid Majid Moussa
- With one additional individual candidate

Main Single Party Lists

- Constitutional Monarchy (secular) - leader al-Sharif Ali Bin Hussein
- Independent Democratic Movement (secular) - leader Adnan Pachachi
- Iraqi Islamic Party (Sunni Islamist) - leader Mohsen Abdul Hamid
- Iraqi National Gathering (secular) - leader Hussein al-Jibouri
- Iraqis (secular) - leader Iraqi President Ghazi al-Yawar
- Reconciliation and Liberation Bloc (secular) - leader Mishaaan Jibouri

Electoral boundaries

There were no voting districts for the National Assembly vote - just a single country-wide election. This controversial plan was endorsed by the UN because it was thought easier to organise than drawing up electoral districts based on Iraq's cultures and ethnicities. But the system, not uncommon in Europe and Asia, has its problems. A key part of building representative parliaments and governments is building a sense of confidence that both are accountable to their constituents. Iraq's 30 January system weakens that confidence.

Under the 30 January system politicians are more accountable to their party leaders than to Iraqi voters. The party leader can 'punish' MPs who put local interests ahead of party interests by pushing them down the order of names in the party list.

That way they will be less likely to retain their seat in the next election. Party leaders can also use the list system to promote individuals – including some with Ba'athist era records or hardcore agendas



– who would never win popular votes in a straight vote for individually named candidates.

Generally, the use of nationwide party lists elsewhere in the Middle East has tended to bolster religious, ethnic and sectarian parties there. The agenda is fixed on the national not local level. And under the 30 January system, because the National Assembly elections are not tied to districts, there will be towns that have no local citizens in the Iraqi Assembly and other towns with scores of them.

The new National Assembly will be looking closely at the effectiveness of the separate ballot for provincial councils in Iraq's 18 governorates held on 30 January and the regional ballot for the Kurdish National Parliament as options when it comes to decide on how local the next elections will be.

But again, provincial level elections tend to favour tribal identities or the wishes of locally power-

ful clergy. In Jordan they found that by dividing election areas into smaller voting districts changed the political agenda and cut the Muslim Brotherhood vote by half.

In other countries the local focus has strengthened the hand of parties such as Hezbollah where they have turned to active community-level activism. Voters in single-member districts tend to focus on local issues, such as schools, health provision, electricity, and policing – and in Iraq the polls are clear that it is these issues that are the priority.

Finally one of many factors driving the pre- 30 January calls for an Iraqi Sunni election boycott was the understanding that under the agreed system, that 20 percent of the Assembly seats would be the best they could expect in any circumstance. In a vote based purely on national identities, this would inevitably be seen a defeat. But in a vote

Examining the lists of candidates in the Iraq elections.
(Reuters/Ali Jarekji)



based on local factors, sectarian matters would be less essential to the voters' choice.

NB: Up to mid-January, Kurdish political parties threatened to boycott elections in Kirkuk, alleging that Kurdish residents of Kirkuk who had been expelled from the area during Saddam Hussein's 'Arabisation' programme in the 1980s and 1990s were forbidden to vote in the provincial election.

On 14 January the IECI ruled that displaced Kurds from the area – up to 100,000 people – could vote in Kirkuk for the al-Tamin provincial government locally. Arab and Turkmen leaders in Kirkuk condemned the decision, complaining that the decision gave the Kurds leadership of the al-Tamin local government throughout 2005, when Kirkuk's territorial status in Iraq is scheduled to be determined.

How the media managed

"We feel defeated and we are frustrated... We fear that we will be branded as the spies and collaborators of the occupation. There are many whom we fear: The Board of Muslim Clerics, the foreign Jihadis, Muqtada al-Sadr, Zarqawi's people, and finally Saddam's henchmen." - Ali Hasan, Institute for War and Peace Reporting.

The Iraqi media entered the start of the election campaign period on 15 December working on what media rights groups had already dubbed the world's most dangerous assignment. Nearly 40 journalists and media workers, most of them Iraqis, were killed in the line of duty in 2004.

Journalists are no longer seen as impartial observers – by either side. Reporters were beaten, threatened, detained without cause, kidnapped for criminal and political reasons and killed, sometimes deliberately, all too often carelessly by trigger-happy troops. And afterwards it was often impossible for reporters to discover the true circumstances of their colleagues' deaths – whether deliberate or accidental - let alone see the perpetrators brought to justice.

This encouraged a climate of impunity, where perpetrators could expect to escape serious consequences for their acts. Conflicting messages were sent out by the US authorities – on the one hand advocating a free media, while on the other, closing down newspapers and detaining accredited journalists. The handover to an interim Iraqi government had not improved matters, as the new authorities had learnt bad lessons from their predecessors.

"We face different dangers now and there is no law to protect journalists in Iraq," Hussein Muhammad al-Ajil of al-Mada newspaper told Iranian-American journalist Borzou Daragahi. "There are threats from three sides: the Americans might shoot you if they're ambushed; the Iraqi security forces might stop you or beat you if they suspect you're with the resistance; and the resistance might kill you if they think you're a spy."

The danger increased in the run up to the election. On 12 September 2004 al-Arabiya journalist Mazen Tumeisi died in an US helicopter attack. He was the eighth al-Arabiya staffer to die since March 2003, and one of three killed by the US army in circumstances that have yet to be fully explained..



Al-Arabiya reporter Abdel Kader al-Saadi was detained by US troops despite being clearly identified as a journalist and in circumstances that gave rise to allegations of deliberate intimidation. His station has also received numerous threats from claimed supporters of the Jordanian insurgent leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, demanding that it support the “jihad” against the US occupation and Iraqi government.



Guarding a polling station in Mosul.
(Reuters/Zohra Bensemra)

The insurgents and the country’s criminals have also struck. Al-Sharqiyya television reporter Likaa Abdelrazzak was killed in the street in Baghdad on Oct. 27. Sada Wasit newspaper reporter Raad Beriaej al-Azzawi was kidnapped in November, one among many. Another Iraqi journalist reporting on police patrols in the town of Allawi was caught by the insurgents. They took his notes and tapes and told him to get out of town.

Daragahi also reported that one journalist at al-Mada was threatened with death after he wrote about alleged corruption in an Iraqi government ministry and had to flee the country. Al-Mada newspaper was also targeted by rockets. Western journalists, largely trapped in their hotels, relied on Iraqi reporters (stringers) to get infor-

mation they couldn’t, and as the target profile of western journalists increased, so did the threat to Iraqis working with them. A leaflet circulated in al-Fallujah offered money to anyone giving information about Iraqi journalists, translators and drivers working with foreign media.

All the Iraqi media faced similar threats, plus the attentions of an interim authority that has sought in the past to impose its views on the media and ordering it not to attach ‘patriotic descriptions’ to the insurgents and criminals,” and asked the media to “set aside space in news coverage to make the position of the Iraqi government, which expresses the aspirations of most Iraqis, clear,” or face the consequences.

Yet with most election hopefuls unable to get out and campaign on the streets, names of candidates kept secret until shortly before the election, and the vote itself judged on national issues, not local agendas, the Iraqi media became the main player in the campaign.

The view is that they performed better than expected. “Sunni groups opposed to participating in the election regularly espouse their views in supporting newspapers and are often quoted in what would be considered the popular press, owned by independent or pro-election party newspapers,” noted Kathleen Ridolfo of Radio Free Europe before the election. “Sunni groups that will participate in the elections despite some hesitancy over the issue have also made their platforms known.”

Reports and commentaries in the print media did not shy from discussions about the role that Islam will play in a future Iraqi state with a Shi’ite majority, the possible withdrawal of multinational



forces, the Kurdish issue and the coming constitution. Newspapers have covered the activities of the Election Commission.

As for television, said Ridolfo, Allawi – “whether by virtue of being prime minister or by intention -- has dominated the airwaves”. A new feature for Iraqis was the use of sleekly-produced TV adverts to persuade people to vote and close to election day, to try and persuade Iraqi Sunnis to defy boycott calls. Chat shows on Iraqi radio made a dramatic impact. Party supporters filled streets with campaign posters, replaced as soon as they were ripped down by rivals with new ones.

A variety of alternative promotional techniques emerged: the Iraqi Hezbollah published a calendar with its campaign message, another party distributed video CDs with party messages interspersed with comedy clips.

The role of election observers

The United Nations said from the outset that it would encourage the electoral commission to ask for international observers for the election, though the world body, having helped organise the poll, would not be involved in observing it. About 7,000 representatives of Iraqi political parties and nongovernmental organisations have registered to observe voting, and each list has the right to have members present while votes are counted.

International monitoring of the 30 January elections in Iraq was heavily restricted. The United Nations said from the outset that it would encourage the electoral commission to ask for international

observers for the election, though the UN, having helped organise the poll, would not be involved in observing it. A group of two dozen experts brought together by the specially-founded International Mission for Iraqi Elections (IMIE) did its work from over the border in Amman, Jordan.

The high profile of some of the figures concerned their national governments, all senior election officials from countries ranging from Albania to Yemen under team leader, Elections Canada chief Jean-Pierre Kingsley. In the end their home governments barred them from crossing the border into Iraq. Observer team members argued that not crossing the border made their job impossible, but others said that trying to cover the election under strict security restrictions would give an inaccurate impression that the vote had been properly observed and validated.

In the end Kingsley's team opted for a limited mission, 'auditing' and 'assessing' the data from Iraqi observers and evaluate the process after the event. Their election day studies focussed on the following areas:

- legal framework
- voter registration
- electoral preparations
- voter information and education
- equitable access to media
- out-of-country registration and voting
- pre-polling complaint procedures
- certification of political parties, coalitions and candidates
- polling
- vote counting and compilation of results
- post-election complaints

Some 6,000 volunteer Iraqi monitors from some 150 Iraqi organisations were trained by a UN spon-



sored programme to act as independent observers, registered with the Election Commission while there were a reported 23,000 registered observers from different political parties who stood by to watch the process in action. But this is an unusual methodology. Normally foreign observers are heavily in attendance at this kind of vote.

The European Union declined an invitation from Iraq to send observers while the Carter Center, which has monitored more than 50 elections overseas, also decided not to send observers. The 9 January Palestinian elections drew 800 official observers, led by former US president Jimmy Carter and two former European prime ministers. Even the October 2004 Afghanistan polls, where

the threats to foreign observers was well stated in advance, drew more than 100 foreign observers.

"An election is "free" when it reflects the full expression of the political will of the people concerned. Freedom in this sense involves the ability to participate in the political process without intimidation, coercion, discrimination, or the abridgment of the rights to associate with others, to assemble, and to receive or impart information. The "fairness" of an election refers to the right to vote on the basis of equality, non-discrimination, and universality. No portion of the electorate should be arbitrarily disqualified, or have their votes given extra weight." - Human Rights Watch

Women waiting to vote in Iran's February 2004 elections. (Reuters/Damir Sagolj)



Measures of support - Estimates & opinion polls

Numbers – and predictions of numbers – were the all important issue during the 30 January election. For the US-led forces in Iraq, the actual turnout of voters in the face of the threat of violence was used as a measure of the insurgents' weakness, for example. But the major numbers debate spun around the calls for an Iraqi Sunni boycott before the vote.

The decision to base the 30 January elections on a national slate of party lists was logical, but it left Iraqi Sunnis in a quandary. The national slate system could leave them with only no more than 20 percent of the representation in the National Assembly if they voted as Sunnis, but what would it give them if they voted as Iraqis?

As it became clear that the closer the number of Iraqi Sunni voters got to 20 percent of the total votes cast, the more the new government would be able claim legitimacy, the issue of the Iraqi Sunni turnout on election day took on major significance.

Pre-vote polls by foreign organisations focused heavily on this issue. A poll by the US International Republican Institute from early January projected that 65 percent of Iraqis were 'likely' to vote, and 20 percent 'very likely'. The difference between the first and the second number was in the people's perceptions of threat, and the appeal of the very diverse arguments for a boycott.

It was here that the Iraqi media played a key role. The threat of violence deterred extensive studies by opinion pollsters, and exit polling on the day.

Security rules requiring pollsters to stand about 700 yards away from polling stations – outside the security cordons – inhibited them from carrying out exit polls. Though neither are wholly reliable guides to the real level of voter opinion, without them the Iraqi media was given extra responsibility to accurately represent the situation before and during the vote.

The media is always tasked to provide the information that the people need to make informed decisions, but here it was also backing up decisions on physical safety. The tone of the coverage as well as the facts reported played as much of a role in this. In addition there were non-sectarian party lists with Iraqi Sunni involvement trying to appeal to voters in the four predominantly Iraqi Sunni provinces where the threat of violence was high and campaigning was largely impossible.

The local media – and to an extent, the Arab satellite TV networks – was one of their few means of reaching voters in these areas, and its effectiveness in doing so may have been the Iraqi media's greatest test in the run up to 30 January.

Security

Security was set predictably high for the election, with major restrictions on movements around election day. Iraq's land borders were closed from January 29-31; only pilgrims returning from the Hajj in Saudi Arabia were allowed to enter the country. Travel between Iraq's provinces was allowed only by special permits, and most civilian travel of all kinds barred on election day to obstruct car bombers. The ban on car travel made it difficult for some voters to reach the polls, especially if



they have moved from the neighbourhood where they are registered.

The media were required to get special accreditation and coverage from the polling stations was strictly regulated. A reported 100,000 Iraqi police and 60,000 Iraqi National Guardsmen were deployed to protect the stations, backed up by 150,000 US and 10,000 British soldiers.

Radio Free Europe reported that an unsigned directive posted to a jihadist website in early January advised militants in Iraq to “prevent the continuation of participation by any members of the election committees through persuasion, threats, kidnapping, and other methods.”

It continued: “Make sure that once they agree to withdraw from the election committee, their withdrawal is not announced except during the critical and narrow time frame (so that) the government cannot replace them with other (workers).... This will make it extremely difficult to find trained people to manage the elections in such a short period of time.”

In the week before the election, the government announced the arrest of several senior aides to Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, suggesting it was making inroads against the group that had sworn to turn polling day into a bloodbath. However, Reuters reported some government officials had cast doubt on the importance of the arrests, suggesting the announcements were designed to build confidence in security arrangements.

- This report was compiled on 30 January by Rohan Jayasekera, associate editor at Index on Censorship. He is currently directing Index’s programmes of monitoring, publishing, training and advocacy in Iraq. Its conclusions are the magazine’s and do not necessarily reflect those of its partners.

