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Subject: NYT Analysis: Election Turnout

Election Turnout: Analysis

By [Alissa J. Rubin](#)

The New York Times
1 Feb 2009

Across Iraq there were complaints from tens of thousands of people who wanted to vote but were prevented from doing so 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. During the sectarian and ethnic fighting of the last several years as many as a million people were displaced. While some have returned home, the majority remain in other provinces. While some updated their voting registration, the majority appear not to have done so.

Despite a lower than expected turnout nationwide few parties said they would file formal complaints or protest the outcome even though many complained that significant numbers of their voters had been prevented from casting their ballots. Most seemed to feel that the addition of those votes either would not substantially affect the outcome.

In Anbar Province the 40% turnout was the lowest in the country, surprisingly for an overwhelmingly Sunni-majority area where most expected voters to come back in from the cold after boycotting or being intimidated away from participation in the 2005 polls.

In the provincial capital Ramadi Omer Abood, a 22-year-old student, said: "I was supposed to vote but I could not. My father and my brother cast their votes. I suggested that I use my food ration card but they did not accept that." Mustafa al-Dulaimi, 30, a day laborer said he was unable to reach his polling station in the al-Jazeera district, which lies outside Ramadi, because of the curfew.

In nearby Fallujah many repeated the complaints common elsewhere: apathy, cynicism and confusion. Maher Naji, 37, a day laborer, said: "I did not vote because I could not

find a qualified candidate that I can trust, all those candidates came for their personal benefits.”

Abu Ahmed Al-Jumaili, 45, a government employee, said: “I went to a polling center in my neighborhood but I did not find my name. I visited more than one, but I didn’t find it.” Apathy was the reason singled out by Khalil al-Azawi, an adviser to Vice President Tariq al-Hashemi of the Iraqi Islamic Party.

“I think the reason for the low turnout in this election is frustration among the people. They participated in the elections hoping that it improve things but the result was that things went backwards,” he said.

“The other reason is a logistical one, which is the impossibility of reaching some polling centers for some people. The low turnout concerns us, as it would any other political party. Any party seeks a high turnout in order to increase its chances of winning.”

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