

Iraqi Women: Looking Beyond the Veil

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Photographs by Jamal Penjweny, September 2008.

Abayas are floor-length cloaks worn by some Muslim women as a sign of modesty and a statement of religious faith. The garment of choice in many parts of Iraq and throughout the Gulf, abayas help shield women from unwanted attention and protect them from the elements.

In Iraq, most abayas are black cloaks, also known as chadors. They are most popular with Iraqi Shias and older women, but can also be seen on young women, and as far north as Iraqi Kurdistan.

Iraqis say that more women are wearing abayas and conservative clothing in post-Saddam Iraq, particularly as religious parties gain ground.

Men are taught to respect women who wear abayas, with many refusing to even glance at a cloaked woman. As security has tightened in Iraq, insurgent groups have recruited women to carry out suicide bomb attacks, using their abayas as cover. These cases have been widely covered in the press but are relatively rare.

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Topic: [Women](#)

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