

Mosul Poll Optimism

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Voter turnout better than expected in troubled northern city.

After a slow start to election day, voter turnout began picking up in the afternoon as the city's Kurdish and Turkoman populations turned out in droves at polling stations.

Three residents violating the ban on private vehicles on the streets were killed by US forces and the Iraqi National Guard. American military vehicles patrolled the streets while helicopters circled overhead. Sounds of explosions and gunfire were heard sporadically throughout the day.

Eyewitnesses said US forces opened fire on one resident who was trying to travel in his vehicle on al-Rasheedy street. They also killed a driver and injured a passenger in the al-Jazaer neighbourhood. Iraqi National Guard shot a civilian who was driving in the al-Tink neighbourhood.

Election officials had been worried that voters wouldn't come out to the polls because of the unstable security situation in this northern city. Last month, a suicide bomber infiltrated the local US base, killing 22 people.

In the eastern section of the city, voters lined up before polling stations opened at 7 am in the neighbourhood of al-Rashidiya, where many Kurds and Turkoman live. Turnout in the Shia neighborhood of Kokjli also was very high.

Ahmed Ali Muhammed, a college student, said he voted to "lay the foundation of a democratic Iraqi state".

"There has been a lot of discussion in the media over the Mosul vote," he said. "Thank god that we voted in spite of the difficulties to show the other side of our city."

But polling stations in the al-Wahda quarter were virtually deserted as voters stayed home out of fear.

There were posters on the walls in that area that said anyone who voted would be beheaded.

On the western side of Mosul, the Bab Lagash area had a high turnout of voters, including women and the elderly. Hanan Abdulqadir said she voted for the Iraqi List, headed by the interim prime minister, Ayad Allawi, because she believes he will provide security.

But as of early afternoon, turnout was low in other areas like al-Zinjilli, New Mosul and Islah al-Ziraae.

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