

## **Northeastern Town's Kurds and Arabs Split Over Participation**

**Author:** [IWPR](#)

By Dhya Rasan in Jalawla (ICR No. 99, 25-Jan-05)

Ali Fadhl, an Arab, said he was not interested in voting because he had no information about the candidates. "I don't know who the candidates are," he said. "So who should I vote for?"

Although they make up about 20 per cent of Iraq's population, Sunni Arabs were the group in power during the Saddam Hussein era. Now they fear they will be left out of government because of likely electoral wins by the majority Shia community, which accounts for some 60 per cent of the population.

Abu Jalal, an Arab, said his decision whether or not to vote will depend on the final position taken by Sunni groups on participation. The Association of Muslim Scholars, a Sunni religious group, has called for a boycott.

Jalal said that while the election is important, it cannot be held if a particular group is boycotting it.

Kurds in Jalawla said they were excited by the chance to take part in elections. Many people from this ethnic group, which was persecuted by the Baathist regime, see the vote as their chance to assert Kurdish aspirations within the context of a nationwide political process.

Azad Ali said the Kurds here have been organising themselves for the election, and will vote for one of the Kurdish coalitions. Another man, Muhammad Ahmad, said he is not normally interested in politics, but would vote on January 30 "if it is necessary" for his community.

Meanwhile, the Wahhabis, followers of the strict form of Sunni Islam prevalent in Saudi Arabia, have taken an extreme position on the elections, threatening anyone who votes.

Dhya Rasan is an IWPR trainee journalist in Iraq.

**Location:** [Iraqi Kurdistan](#)  
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