

Sadrist's Change of Heart

Author: [Zaid Ali](#)

Anti-ballot Sadr follower changes his mind on election day.

Abdul Hussein Hashim had made up his mind that he wouldn't go to the polling station to vote in Iraq's historic elections.

Hashim is a follower of the late Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al-Sadr, who was gunned down in 1999. Al-Sadr's son, rebel Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, did not encourage his supporters to cast their ballots.

So when Hashim, a 53-year-old taxi driver living in the mainly Shia city of Najaf, awoke on the morning of January 30, he was determined to stay at home along with his son, who was also boycotting the election.

Hashim's wife and daughter, however, decided to take part in the vote.

"That is up to them and I don't interfere in the personal affairs of any of my family members," said Hashim.

When his wife saw that he was awake, she asked him to go to the voting centre with her. "I replied angrily, 'Go and leave me alone, I'm fed up and I won't allow you to go'," he said. His wife Alyaa said nothing and walked out the door with their daughter.

While Hashim was washing his face, he thought about the elections and remembered that his wife and daughter could be in danger because of the security threats surrounding the vote.

He ran out of his house and tried to find them in the huge crowd of people in the street.

"At that moment I felt strange and asked myself, 'What makes me different from the rest of the people, why this fanaticism and selfishness?'" said Hashim.

He hurried back home and changed his clothes. He also woke up his son Karrar, telling him to wash his face and get changed to accompany him, "He asked me, 'Where to?' and I told him I would tell him later."

His neighbours expressed surprise to see him on the street, as everyone knew Hashim was boycotting the elections.

Even Karrar was perplexed by his father's behaviour. "He asked me, 'What's wrong with you, dad? Did you have a nightmare?'"

When Hashim got in the line for the nearest polling station, a neighbour asked what had brought him here. "I replied, 'God guided me'. My neighbour laughed and said, 'God willing, God will guide all of us'."

After Hashim voted, he and his son arrived home before his wife and daughter, as the line for women was longer than that for men.

Other followers of Sadr in Najaf ended up voting, according to Hussein Dakhil, an election monitor. Sadr followers make up about 10 per cent of Najaf residents.

For Sanad Wafi, his work as an election monitor caused him to change his mind about participating in the elections. He is a follower of the younger Sadr and had decided to boycott the vote.

"But I was obliged to take part after I was informed by the electoral commission that I would be a monitor," said Wafi. "It was difficult for me to refuse to vote since I was part of the staff that's responsible for making the elections a success. I felt ashamed of myself, so I was obliged to vote."

Meanwhile, Hashim thanks God that he decided to participate in the vote.

"Anyone who did not take part in the elections lost something for himself," he said. "I can say they lost everything."

Zaid Ali is an IWPR trainee journalist in Iraq.

Location: [Iraqi Kurdistan](#)

[Iraq](#)

Focus: [Iraq](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/sadrists-change-heart>