

Wary Baghdadis Give Leaders a Last Chance

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By IWPR-trained reporters in Baghdad (ICR No. 283, 9-Feb-09)

Baghdad is still covered in election posters. With parliamentary polls due in December, some people wonder whether there is any point in taking them down.

Many Baghdadis say they will not vote in December if the leaders that have been elected this time do not deliver on their promises. Turnout in the capital was among the lowest in the country, at around 40 per cent.

Few believe the political process can effect change. We don't want elections, they say, we don't want to participate – we just want things to get better.

A small minority say Iraq would be better off under another dictator, rather than having to go through elections again.

All eyes are now on the Iraqi prime minister, Nouri al-Maliki, whose alliance did well. Everyone wonders what his next move will be – who will be in his coalition?

He is reasonably popular among Baghdad's relatively secular urbanites. In addition to bringing some much-needed stability to the capital, they like the fact that some nightclubs and fashionable restaurants have reopened over the past few years and alcohol is again available.

Although security has improved, public services are still in a poor state.

There were fears the vote would trigger fresh violence but fortunately there have not been any attacks yet. Life on the streets is coming back to normal – the usual checkpoints and traffic jams.

No one is really celebrating the election result. Shia Baghdadis are observing a 40-day period of mourning for the festival of Ashura.

Turnout was lowest in the capital's Shia areas and higher in the Sunni districts. The Shia generally seem disenchanted with the religious parties. There were some reports from poor Shia neighbourhoods of elderly, illiterate voters being forced by polling station officials to vote for particular lists.

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