

CIG Current Assessment Note, 9 July 2008

THE IRAQI PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS

This assessment provides a sitrep on the electoral process. The JIC will consider a full paper on potential election outcomes in October.

1. Iraq last held provincial elections in January 2005. The Provincial Powers Law passed earlier this year set a deadline of 1st October 2008¹ for new elections in Government of Iraq controlled areas. The law governing the elections needs to be passed by the end of July for them to take place this year; following this, demanding administrative deadlines will have to be met. We assess the voter registration process will take at least five months. **The earliest elections can now take place is December but it is possible that they could slip into 2009.** Latest reporting indicates that elections in Kirkuk will be postponed until disagreement between the Kurds, Arabs and Turkomans over a power sharing formula is resolved.
2. The Electoral Law will dictate whether the elections will be run under an 'open' list (allowing voters to back individual candidates) or a 'closed' list (limiting choices to political parties). Parties that stand to lose out have been privately lobbying for a 'closed' list or a hybrid system. But **the Iraqi government has expressed a preference for an 'open list' system and diplomatic reporting indicates that this now looks most likely to be approved.** This would represent a significant advance in the quality of Iraqi democratic practice.
3. Prime Minister Maliki supports staggered (as opposed to simultaneous) elections "to guarantee the safety of voters and to halt fraud". But he has no constitutional authority to decree this. The final decision rests with the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) which will oversee and manage the elections. The IHEC appears to prefer simultaneous elections; however, **we assess that pressure from Maliki will probably force it to support a staggered approach.**
4. The elections have the potential to support national reconciliation by providing those who have been excluded from power with an avenue to enter the political process. Many current provincial councils function poorly and are unrepresentative² of their populations. **We assess that greater participation from the Office of the Martyr Sadr (OMS) (who boycotted the last elections), new Sunni political parties, Sunni Arab Tribal "awakening" groups and the many independent candidates will redress the balance of councils** giving underrepresented groups a voice in local issues. But elections are unlikely to improve standards of local governance.

¹ Provincial elections in Kurdish Regional Government areas are scheduled for June 2009.

² E.g. Ninewa council is more than 80% Kurdish in a province that is 60% Sunni Arab.

5. The OMS have not registered as a political party for the elections. Intelligence indicates that Muqtada al-Sadr (MAS) believes participation would be tantamount to support for the "occupation"; we assess that MAS is also wary of assuming responsibility to deliver local governance where most others have failed. However, media reporting supports intelligence that OMS will field "independent" Sadrist candidates on other party lists. It may also back some other independent candidates in the hope that they will support Sadrist views once elected. We judge that any OMS gains will be at the expense of smaller independent parties, Fadilah and, to a lesser extent, ISCI and Dawa.

- 512 political entities have applied to run. 502 have been approved.
- 416 (83%) of these are newly registered; the remaining 86 were renewals.
- Established parties taking part include the Islamic Dawa Party, Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq, the Badr Organisation, Fadilah, Tawafuq, and the Iraqi Islamic Party.

(Council of Representatives report on 22 June)

6. Newly registered parties to look out for include the Iraqi People's Assembly (a possible proxy for JAM Special Groups), First Iraqi Gathering (formerly the Sadrist splinter Iraqi National Gathering), the Independence and Rising Movement (affiliated to Jaysh al-Islami), and the Iraqi Awakening Conference (formerly Sahawa al-Iraq). Not all will win seats.

7. [...]

Assessment Base: [...]