



## CRS Report for Congress

# Iraq: Government Formation and Benchmarks

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### Summary

Elections in 2005 produced a permanent constitution and a broad-based but Shiite-led government that has been unwilling or unable to reduce Sunni popular resentment and is showing significant internal strain. The lack of progress on national reconciliation is assessed in September 2007 Administration and GAO reports required by an FY2007 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 110-28), and with little movement since, but there have been some limited Iraqi political accommodation moves. See CRS Report RL31339, *Iraq: Post-Saddam Governance and Security*, by Kenneth Katzman.

The current government is the product of a U.S.-supported election process designed to produce a democracy, although many now believe it produced a sectarian government incapable of reconciling Iraq's communities. This sentiment has grown to the point where there appears to be increasing support in the United States for ideas to create a decentralized Iraq with substantial autonomy for each community.

### Elections and Constitutional Referendum in 2005

After about one year of formal occupation, the United States handed sovereignty to an appointed Iraqi government on June 28, 2004. A government and a constitution were voted on thereafter, in line with a March 8, 2004, Transitional Administrative Law (TAL). The first election (January 30, 2005) was for a 275-seat transitional National Assembly, provincial assemblies in each of Iraq's 18 provinces (41 seats each; 51 for Baghdad), and a Kurdistan regional assembly (111 seats). The election system was proportional representation (closed list) — voters chose among “political entities” (a party, a coalition of parties, or individuals). A female candidate occupied every third position on electoral lists in order to ensure 25% female membership. A total of 111 entities were on the national ballot, of which nine were multi-party coalitions.

In all 2005 votes, vehicle traffic was banned, Iraq's borders were closed, and polling centers were guarded primarily by Iraq's security forces (ISF), with U.S. forces as backup. Violence did not disrupt voting. As shown in the table at the end of this paper, the January election was dominated by the Shiite Islamist “United Iraqi Alliance” (UIA),

consisting mainly of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), which in May 2007 changed its name to the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and the Da'wa Party, as well as the Kurds, and a few secular parties. The two main Kurdish parties, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) offered a joint list. Sunni Arabs (20% of the overall population), perceiving electoral defeat, mostly boycotted and won only 17 seats and very few provincial council seats. Sunnis won only one seat on Baghdad province's 51-seat council. The factions formed an interim national government that U.S. officials said was not sufficiently inclusive of Sunnis, although it had Sunnis as Assembly speaker, deputy president, deputy prime minister, defense minister, and five other ministers. The presidency went to PUK leader Jalal Talabani and Da'wa leader Ibrahim al-Jafari became Prime Minister.

**Permanent Constitution and Referendum.** The elected Assembly was to draft a constitution by August 15, 2005, to be put to a referendum by October 15, 2005, subject to veto by a two-thirds majority of voters in any three provinces. On May 10, 2005, the Assembly appointed a 55-member drafting committee which included only two Sunni Arabs, prompting Sunni resentment, although 15 Sunnis were later added as committee members (and 10 more as advisors). On August 28, the talks produced a draft that set a December 31, 2007, deadline to hold a referendum on whether Kirkuk will join the Kurdish region (Article 140); designated Islam "a main source" of legislation and said no law can contradict the "established" provisions of Islam (Article 2);<sup>1</sup> set a 25% electoral goal for women (Article 47); allowed families to choose which courts to use for family issues such as divorce and inheritance (Article 41); made only primary education mandatory (Article 34); and said that the federal supreme court would include Islamic law experts and civil law judges and experts (Article 89). These provisions concerned many women who fear that too much discretion was given to males of their families, and many women say the provision is being misused by Islamic extremists in southern Iraq and elsewhere to impose, including through killings, restrictions against women.

The major disputes were and are centered on the draft's allowing two or more provinces together to form new autonomous "regions" and to allocate oil revenues. Article 117 allowed each "region" to organize internal security forces, which would legitimize the fielding of militias, including the Kurds' *peshmerga* (allowed by the TAL). Article 109 required the central government to distribute oil and gas revenues from "current fields" in proportion to population, and gave "regions" a role in allocating revenues from new energy discoveries. Sunnis opposed the draft on these grounds; Sunni-dominated areas of Iraq have few oil or gas deposits, although some oil fields might lie in Anbar Province. Article 62 established a "Federation Council," a second chamber with its size and powers to be determined by subsequent law (not passed to date).

With contentious provisions unresolved, Sunnis registered in large numbers (70%-85%) to try to defeat it, prompting a U.S.-mediated agreement (October 11) providing for a panel to propose amendments within four months after a post-December 15 election government took office (Article 137). The amendments would require a majority Assembly vote of approval and, within another two months, would be put to a referendum under the same rules as the October 15 referendum. However, in the referendum, the Sunni provinces of Anbar and Salahuddin had a 97% and 82% "no" vote, respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> [<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/12/AR2005101201450.html>].

Mostly Sunni Nineveh province voted 55% “no,” which meant that the constitution was adopted (only two provinces, not three, voted “no” by a two-thirds majority).

**December 15, 2005 Elections.** In the December 15, 2005, elections for a four year government, a formula was adopted to attract Sunni participation; each province contributed a predetermined number of seats to a “Council of Representatives” (COR). Of the 275-seat body, 230 seats were allocated this way, with 45 “compensatory” seats for entities that would have won additional seats had the constituency been the whole nation. 361 political “entities” registered, of which 19 were multi-party coalition slates. The UIA slate formally included Sadr’s faction as well as other hard line Shiite parties including *Fadilah* (Virtue). The major Sunni slate was a three-party “Iraq Consensus Front” led by the Iraq Islamic Party (IIP), which had entered but then withdrew from the January elections. Another major Sunni faction (Saleh al-Mutlak’s National Iraqi Dialogue Front) ran separately. The hardline Muslim Scholars Association (MSA) did not participate, although it did not, as it had in January, call for a Sunni boycott. Violence was minor because Sunni insurgents, supporting greater Sunni inclusion, facilitated voting. Still, voters chose lists representing their sects and regions, not idea platforms, and the UIA and the Kurds dominated the new COR, with nearly two-thirds of seats.

The COR was inaugurated on March 16, and was quickly engulfed in wrangling over positions. Kurdish and other opposition caused the UIA to agree to Jafari’s Da’wa deputy, Nuri Kamal al-Maliki, as Prime Minister. On April 22, the COR approved Talabani to continue as president, and selected his two deputies — ISCI’s Adel Abd al-Mahdi (incumbent) and Consensus Front/IIP leader Tariq al-Hashimi. Another Front figure, the hardline Mahmoud Mashhadani (National Dialogue Council party), was chosen COR speaker. Maliki won COR majority vote approval of a 37 member cabinet (including himself and two deputy prime ministers) on May 20, 2006. Three key slots (Defense, Interior, and National Security) were not filled permanently until June 8 because of infighting. Of the 37 posts, there were nine Sunnis; eight Kurds; nineteen Shiites; and one Christian. Four are women.

## **Iraqi Performance on Benchmarks**

In August 2006, the Administration and the Iraqi government agreed on a series of “benchmarks” that, if adopted and implemented, would presumably achieve reconciliation among the major communities. Under Section 1314 of the FY2007 supplemental appropriation (P.L. 110-28), “progress” on eighteen political and security-related benchmarks — as assessed in Administration reports due by July 15 and September 15 — is required for the United States to provide \$1.5 billion in Economic Support Funds (ESF) to the Iraqi government. The president may provide the aid, even if no progress is reported, if he provides written justification; he has exercised that option. The law mandated a separate assessment of Iraqi progress by the Comptroller General (GAO), by September 1, 2007, of the degree to which the benchmarks have been actually achieved (rather than progress toward achievement), as well as an assessment of the Iraqi security forces (ISF) by an outside commission (headed by ret. Gen James Jones). Results of these assessments, as well as subsequent actions, are shown in the chart below. (The July and September 2007 benchmark reports are at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/iraq/>]. *More extensive analysis is in CRS Report RL31339.*)

**Table 1. Assessments of the Benchmarks**

Benchmark	July 12 Administration Report	GAO Report	Sept. 14 Administration Report	Subsequent Actions
1. Forming Constitutional Review Committee and completing review	satisfactory	unmet	satisfactory	no progress
2. Enacting and implementing laws on De-Baathification	unsatisfactory	unmet	satisfactory	two readings in COR on De-Baathification reform law; no progress due to Shiite and Kurdish opposition
3. Enacting and implementing oil laws that ensure equitable distribution of resources	unsatisfactory	unmet	unsatisfactory	no passage, but revenue being distributed equitably
4. Enacting and implementing laws to form semi-autonomous regions	satisfactory	partially met	satisfactory	Awaits implementation in April 2008
5. Enacting and implementing: (a) a law to establish a higher electoral commission, (b) provincial elections law; (c) a law to specify authorities of provincial bodies, and (d) set a date for provincial elections	satisfactory on (a) and unsatisfactory on the others	overall unmet; (a) met	satisfactory on (a) and (c).	No passage of provincial powers law, but provincial governors pressing for passage
6. Enacting and implementing legislation addressing amnesty for former insurgents	conditions do not allow a rating	unmet	conditions do not allow a rating	No amnesty law passed, but gov. announced Nov. 11 amnesty plan for former insurgents
7. Enacting and implementing laws on militia disarmament	conditions do not allow rating	unmet	conditions do not allow rating	No progress; Sunni "militias" forming in cooperation with U.S. forces
8. Establishing political, media, economic, and services committee to support U.S. Baghdad "surge"	satisfactory	met	met	No change
9. Providing three trained and ready brigades to support U.S. surge	satisfactory	partially met	satisfactory	No change
10. Providing Iraqi commanders with authorities to make decisions, without political intervention, to pursue all extremists, including Sunni insurgents and Shiite militias	unsatisfactory	unmet	Mixed: satisfactory to pursue extremists, but political interference continues	No significant change.

## CRS-5

Benchmark	July 12 Administration Report	GAO Report	Sept. 14 Administration Report	Subsequent Actions
11. Ensuring Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) providing even-handed enforcement of law	unsatisfactory	unmet	overall mixed. Satisfactory on Iraqi military, unsatisfactory on police	No significant change.
12. Ensuring that the surge plan in Baghdad will not provide a safe haven for any outlaw, regardless of sectarian affiliation	satisfactory	partially met	satisfactory	No change. Mahdi Army still present, but operating at greatly reduced level of activity
13. (a) Reducing sectarian violence and (b) eliminating militia control of local security	Overall mixed. Satisfactory on (a) but unsatisfactory on (b)	unmet	same as July 12	Sectarian violence continued to drop, but militias still operating, incl. cooperating Sunnis
14. Establishing Baghdad joint security stations	satisfactory	met	satisfactory	No change
15. Increasing ISF units capable of operating independently	unsatisfactory	unmet	unsatisfactory	Continuing but slow progress training ISF
16. Ensuring protection of rights of minority parties in Iraqi parliament	satisfactory	met	satisfactory	No change
17. Allocating and spending \$10 billion for reconstruction projects, on an equitable basis	satisfactory	partially met	satisfactory	Additional \$9 billion in yet-to-be passed 2008 Iraqi budget
18. Ensuring that Iraqi authorities are not undermining or making false accusations against ISF members	unsatisfactory	unmet	unsatisfactory	No change

**Further Reconciliation Efforts.** Amid press reports that U.S. efforts to achieve reconciliation have been scaled back to: passage of an Iraqi 2008 budget, renewal of the U.N. mandate for U.S. forces (due to expire December 31, 2007), and passage of a De-Baathification reform law – splits within the power structure to the point where some question whether a strong, cohesive central government can ever be established. Although U.S. support for decentralizing Iraq into autonomous regions, expressed in adoption of a Senate amendment to H.R. 1585 in September 2007, appears to be increasing, Maliki is now widely assessed as having stabilized politically, perhaps helped by a decrease in violence attributed to the U.S. “troop surge.” Deputy President Hashimi continues to promote reconciliation, signing on to an August 26, 2007, “Unity Accord” — along with Maliki, Talabani, deputy President Adel Abd al-Mahdi (ISCI) and Kurdish regional president Masoud Barzani — to try to pass the de-Baathification law, hold early provincial council elections, and release (mostly Sunni) detainees. All blocs, including the Consensus Front, have ended their 2007 boycotts of the COR. Still, the number of vacant cabinet posts is at least 12 out of 37 positions, reflecting the April 2007 withdrawal of the Sadr faction’s five members, the August withdrawal of the six seats held by the Consensus Front, and the withdrawal by Allawi of four of his ministers (one refused his order to resign). Maliki filled two vacancies (agriculture and health ministers) in October 2007 with independent Shiites, replacing resigned Sadrists, but failed in November 2007 to win COR confirmation for new ministers of justice or communications. Administration officials say that, at the very least, political “accommodation” is occurring at the national level and some reconciliation at the local level.

**Table 2. Election Results (January and December 2005)**

Slate/Party	Seats (Jan. 05)	Seats (Dec. 05)
UIA (Shiite Islamist). Now 84 seats. ISCI- 29; Da’wa (two factions) - 25; independents - 30. Sadr ( 29 seats) and Fadilah (15 seats) left bloc in 2007.	140	128
Kurdistan Alliance (PUK and KDP).	75	53
Iraqis List (secular, Allawi); added some mostly Sunni parties for Dec. vote (2 members left the bloc in September 2007, leaving it with 23 seats)	40	25
Iraq Consensus Front (Sunni). Main Sunni bloc; not in Jan. vote	—	44
National Iraqi Dialogue Front (Sunni, Saleh al-Mutlak) Not in Jan. vote	—	11
Kurdistan Islamic Group (Islamist Kurd) (votes with Kurdistan Alliance)	2	5
Iraqi National Congress (Chalabi). Was part of UIA list in Jan. 05 vote	—	0
Iraqis Party (Yawar, Sunni); Part of Allawi list in Dec. vote	5	—
Iraqi Turkomen Front (Turkomen, Kirkuk-based, pro-Turkey)	3	1
National Independent and Elites (Jan)/Risalyun (Message, Dec) pro-Sadr	3	2
People’s Union (Communist, non-sectarian); on Allawi list in Dec. vote	2	—
Islamic Action (Shiite Islamist, Karbala)	2	0
National Democratic Alliance (non-sectarian, secular)	1	—
Rafidain National List (Assyrian Christian)	1	1
Liberation and Reconciliation Gathering (Sunni, secular)	1	3
Ummah (Nation) Party. (Secular, Mithal al-Alusi, former INC activist)	0	1
Yazidi list (small Kurdish, heterodox religious minority in northern Iraq)	—	1

Number of polling places: January: 5,200; December: 6,200; Eligible voters: 14 million in January election; 15 million in October referendum and December; Turnout: January: 58% (8.5 million votes)/ October: 66% (10 million)/ December: 75% (12 million).