April 2014

Ahmed Ali

MIDDLE EAST SECURITY REPORT 20

IRAQ'S 2014 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

ISW
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR

Cover: A traffic police officer directs vehicles near election campaign posters in Baghdad April 3, 2014. Iraq's parliamentary election is scheduled for later this month. REUTERS/Ahmed Saad Reproduced with permission.

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IRAQ'S 2014 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Iraq's 2014 national elections are taking place at a difficult time. The country is at a crossroads, presented with the possibility of widely different futures. Deteriorating security conditions frame political thought in ways that harken back to Iraq's first national elections in 2005. The Iraqi state does not hold control of territory in some of Iraq's key political provinces, such as Anbar, Ninewa, and Diyala. The disenfranchisement of Iraq's Arab Sunnis; the rising threat of the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS); and the activation of Ba'athist groups collectively discourage electoral participation.

Shi'a militias that threatened Iraq's security in 2004 have reactivated in 2014. Iranian-backed militias such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), the Badr Organization, and parties affiliated with the Sadrist Trend are actively participating in elections as well. The political mobilization of these groups, some in competition with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, demonstrates a retreat from Iraqi Shi'a political unity; however, it also raises new concerns about public perceptions of the need for protection beyond what the state has been able to provide.

The increasing threat of spillover from the Syrian war and high levels of violence in Iraq have cast doubt on the ability of Iraq's national elections to generate an outlet of healthy political competition that empowers Iraq's population to participate.

The Iraqi public is dissatisfied with corruption, deteriorating security, and lack of progress in service delivery. Iraq's elections can be an opportunity for producing change that can aid in containing the violence instead of following its current trajectory.

Holding the elections despite the threats is important because security is not likely to improve. Iraqi Security Forces are not able to contain the increasing violence. Baghdad, the capital, is under a growing threat of ISIS and Iraqi insurgent groups that seek to undermine the political process. Delaying the elections would exacerbate communal tensions and undermine the political process further. But Washington must not allow the simple fact that elections have been held to obscure the real challenges to a democratic, representative government in Iraq.

Security and local identity are dominant themes in the 2014 elections. This is a stark contrast to Iraq's 2010 elections, which primarily involved strategies of ethno-sectarian unity. Pre-election coalitions in 2014 have re-crystalized around primary stakeholders within the main Iraqi Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish blocs, generating competition rather than unity.

The conduct of elections on April 30, 2014 will have to be free and fair in order to re-inject legitimacy into the political process and allow wider participation. But a good election day will not make up for some of the conditions that have been set before election day to skew the outcome.

Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA) did not fare well in the provincial elections in 2013, causing Maliki to re-think his 2014 campaign. Maliki is relying on popularity among voters, rather than his relations with political blocs in order to secure a third term. Maliki will nevertheless face competition for Iraqi Shi'a votes with the Citizens' Bloc of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Ahrar Alliance, representing the Sadrists.

Iraq's Sunni Arabs will fracture in the upcoming election. Important leaders, including Rafia al-Issawi, have been disqualified for political reasons. The vote among Iraq's Sunnis Arab will likely split among Council of Representatives Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi's Mutahidun [United] for Reform, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq's Arabiyya alliance, and Ayad Allawi's secularist Wataniyya Alliance.

The Kurdish Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) will also compete separately for the first time in several northern provinces for the Iraqi Kurdish vote.

Maliki has been in power for eight of the eleven years since the April 9, 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein. He has been calling for majoritarian rule and preparing to run for a third term. He is resolved upon one desired outcome. Maliki's ambition entails forming a government in which he becomes more dominant, with fewer players in the cabinet, and an opposition that is functionally outside the government. On one hand, the prospect of a real political opposition may energize Iraq's political scene. However, forming a political opposition in the presence of majoritarian rule and in the context of an urgent security demand is unlikely. The development of a sect-based opposition is more likely, which will instead inflame tensions rather than provide a constructive outlet.

Maliki's policies currently leave Iraq facing a monumental crisis. He has rendered the CoR powerless, influenced the judiciary, and his control of the ISF and security apparatus has led to destabilization. He has targeted opponents beyond Iraqi Sunni political figures. His desire to ensure political survival has led him to consistently weaken his Iraqi Shi'a opponents and any other critics as well. The judiciary has overturned attempts to impose term limits on him. Overall, Maliki's centralizing power-consolidation tendencies have stunted the development of Iraq's political institutions. He and his relatives are running in the elections to secure their interests. This desire stems from political ambition, but Maliki's continuation in office will cause further deterioration of the political system and damage prospects of national reconciliation.

Iraqi Shi'a groups, including ISCI and the Sadrist Trend, are both working to unseat Maliki. They must first prevent him from winning an overwhelming plurality. Both parties demonstrated through the 2013 provincial elections that they will ally together to limit and challenge Maliki's powers. The Iraqi Sunni and Iraqi Kurdish political groups will be part of the anti-Maliki effort if the electoral outcomes allow.

Government formation will likely take a long time even if Maliki wins a plurality of votes. It took ten months to form the government in 2010 and this scenario will likely be repeated. The results will determine who carries the momentum headed into government formation. Maliki will utilize all tools available to him to prolong the period of government formation. Maliki's opponents are likely to make pragmatic deals that favor them, even if it means a continuation of the Prime Minister's term in office. They may seek, however, to restrict his powers and ensure he fulfills his promises.

The United States government can be an important actor in these elections. Washington should be prepared to condemn any electoral fraud on election day. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad should participate in monitoring the voting, take claims of fraud seriously, and urge the Iraqi government to investigate such claims. Washington should urge the Iraqi government to ensure a fair tallying process and emphasize the independence of the judiciary, which is likely going to play a role in adjudicating electoral claims. During government formation negotiations, Washington should play the role of the honest broker by urging Maliki not to employ extrajudicial means, or even judicial means, to change the outcome to his own benefit. Very importantly, Washington should exhibit neutrality. Backing any candidate will prevent the United States from being an effective actor. The U.S. Government is in a position to achieve these objectives if it chooses to do so. It can use the provision of arms to the Iraqi government as tangible leverage. Iraqis will look to the United States to play a proactive diplomatic role as well.

But Washington must also recognize the very real risk that the Iraqi Sunni political opposition to Maliki may be destroyed by these elections, increasing the risk that the Sunni violent insurgency will accelerate. Working with Iraqi Sunni tribal and political leaders who do not support Maliki to ensure that they have a voice in parliament and in government is essential for Iraq's long term security. An inclusive and representative government after the elections will be important not only for Iraq, but also for regional security and U.S. national security interests.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ahmed Ali is a Senior Iraq Research Analyst and Iraq Team Lead at ISW. He focuses on the political dynamics of Iraq, including democratization, Arab-Kurdish relations, Kirkuk, national reconciliation, security affairs, relations between the legislative and executive branches of the Iraqi government, and Iraq's foreign policy. Mr. Ali has been researching Iraqi affairs since 2006 and was previously an analyst at Georgetown University where he researched and wrote on Middle Eastern affairs. From 2008-2011, Mr. Ali was a scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy where he authored over 20 reports including coauthoring the Institute's study on Kirkuk "Kirkuk in Transition: Confidence Building in Northern Iraq" and the Institute's study on Iran's influence in Iraq.

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AS SULAYMANIYAH
SANANDAJ
HAMEDAN
MALAYER
KERMANSHAH
ILAM
KHORRAMABAD
ANDIMESHK
DEZFUL
AHVAZ
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Shi'a militias that threatened Iraq's security in 2004 have reactivated in 2014, though Asai'b Ahl al-Haq (AAH), the Badr Organization, and parties affiliated with the Sadrist Trend are actively participating in elections as well. The political mobilization of these groups, some in competition with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, demonstrates a retreat from Iraqi Shi'a political unity; however, it also raises new concerns about public perceptions of the need for personal protection beyond what the state has been able to provide. The increasing threat of spillover from the Syrian war and high levels of violence in Iraq have cast doubt on the ability of Iraq's national elections to generate an outlet of healthy political competition that empowers Iraq's population to participate.

Security and local identity are dominant themes in the 2014 elections. This is a stark contrast to Iraq's 2010 elections, which primarily involved strategies of ethno-sectarian unity. The major Iraqi Shi'a groups in 2010 coalesced and formed the Iraqi National Alliance (INA). At the same time, the Iraqi Sunnis joined forces under the umbrella of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi's Iraqiyya alliance; and the Iraqi Kurds formed the Kurdistani alliance, unifying the efforts of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Instead, pre-election coalitions in 2014 have re-crystalized around primary stakeholders within the main Iraqi Sunni, Shi'a, and Kurdish blocs, generating competition rather than unity.

Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA) did not fare well in the provincial elections in 2013, causing Maliki to re-think his 2014 campaign. SLA member Salman al-Musawi stated on March 10, 2014 that the SLA is not dependent on political blocs in order to secure Maliki a third term, but rather is dependent on his popularity among voters.[1] This message demonstrates a broader trend of targeting local communities for votes in the 2014 elections. Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's SLA will again compete internally for Iraqi Shi'a votes with the Citizens' Bloc of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) and the Ahrar Alliance, representing the Sadrists. This internal Shi'a competition may cause the national elections to serve as a referendum on Maliki's continued rule.

The vote among Iraq's Arab Sunnis may be split among Council of Representatives Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi's Mutahidun (United) for Reform, Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq's Arabiyya alliance, and Ayad Allawi's secularist Wataniyya Alliance. The Kurdish PUK and the KDP will also compete separately for the first time in several northern provinces for the Iraqi Kurdish vote. Rather than ethno-sectarian unity, 2014 pre-elections behaviors bear a new quality of principled pluralism. This may be a potentially positive development for Iraq, if electoral process and security remain intact.

The free, fair, and safe conduct of Iraq's elections and the preservation of Iraq's institutions are necessary for this positive outcome to occur. Successful elections will also be necessary to test the health of the Iraq's political system and the faith of the Iraqi people in that system as a means to provide for their own security. But such electoral conditions may produce new power dynamics within the national government that may threaten the interests of Iraq's main political stakeholders, namely Maliki. Maliki has been in power for eight of the eleven years since the April 9, 2003 fall of Saddam Hussein. He has been calling for majoritarian rule and preparing to run for a third term. He is resolved upon one desired outcome.

Maliki's ambition entails forming a government in which he becomes more dominant, with fewer players in the cabinet, and an opposition that is functionally outside the government. On one hand, the prospect of a real political opposition may

energize Iraq's political scene. However, the opportunity to form a political opposition in the presence of majoritarian rule and in the context of an urgent security demand is not clear. The development of a sect-based opposition is more likely, which will instead inflame tensions rather than provide a constructive outlet.

Maliki's third term ambitions are also part of the calculation of his opponents' electoral strategy. This pertains, in particular, to the Iraqi Shi'a groups. ISCI and the Sadrist Trend are both working to unseat Maliki. Both parties demonstrated through the provincial elections, held in 2013, that they will ally together to limit and challenge Maliki's powers. The results of the 2014 elections will guide both groups' strategy to form an anti-Maliki front. The Iraqi Sunni and Iraqi Kurdish political groups will be part of the anti-Maliki effort based on ISCI's and the Sadrists' orientations. For, Maliki, the 2013 provincial elections results also gave him an opportunity to split opponents and use the judiciary to his advantage. He is likely to do the same in the aftermath of the 2014 elections.

Maliki is poised to compete for a third term, while his opponents will seek to weaken him. With this contentious dynamic, post-elections destabilization is possible given the significance of the elections. Not just domestic political entities are important: multiple other actors will also be influential after the elections. Iraq's Shi'a religious authorities will play a role in resolving differences between associated parties. The Iranian government will devote effort and resources to ensure a friendly government in Baghdad. Washington can be and should be an influential mediator in a likely protracted government-formation period.

The Iraqi public is dissatisfied with corruption, deteriorating security, and lack of progress in service delivery. Iraq's elections can be an opportunity for producing change that can aid in containing the violence instead of following its current trajectory. This report will identify the primary stakeholders in the outcome of the 2014 national elections; examine their electoral strategies particularly in the wake of the 2013 provincial elections; and describe vulnerabilities to the Iraqi people and to the state that have been created during the pre-elections campaign season, and which may persist into the post-election period of government formation.

BACKGROUND

The April 30, 2014 national parliamentary elections in Iraq will determine the shape of Iraq's national government for the next four years. Iraqi citizens in every province vote for members of Iraq's legislative branch, known as the Council of Representatives (CoR). The results of this election also determine who will be allowed to form a government, and therefore who will be Prime Minister. It is important to review how Iraq's national government functions under the Iraqi constitution in order to understand the interests and strategies of the primary stakeholders in the 2014 national elections.

The Iraqi government's legislative and executive branches are bound by electoral term-limits. According to the Iraqi constitution, the Iraqi Council of Representatives (CoR) has a 4-year term. The terms of the President and the Prime Minister and his cabinet are bound to the term of the CoR that elects them to office. From a constitutional perspective, therefore, national elections must occur in 2014 under the management of the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC).

The CoR voted in October 2013 to designate April 30, 2014 as the date for elections even before it voted on the law governing the conduct of elections in November 2013.[2] Voting on the date of the elections before passing the law governing their conduct indicated the CoR's concern that Maliki may choose to delay the elections. A deal between major political groups provided one additional seat for each of the Iraqi Kurdish provinces, including Arbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk, for a total of 328 seats up for voting.[3] Similar to elections for the United States House of Representatives, seats in the CoR are allocated by province: the highest number of seats (69) is allocated to Baghdad province, and the lowest number of seats is allocated to Muthana province.[4] Accordingly, some provinces are considered "key" because of their high number of seats in play.

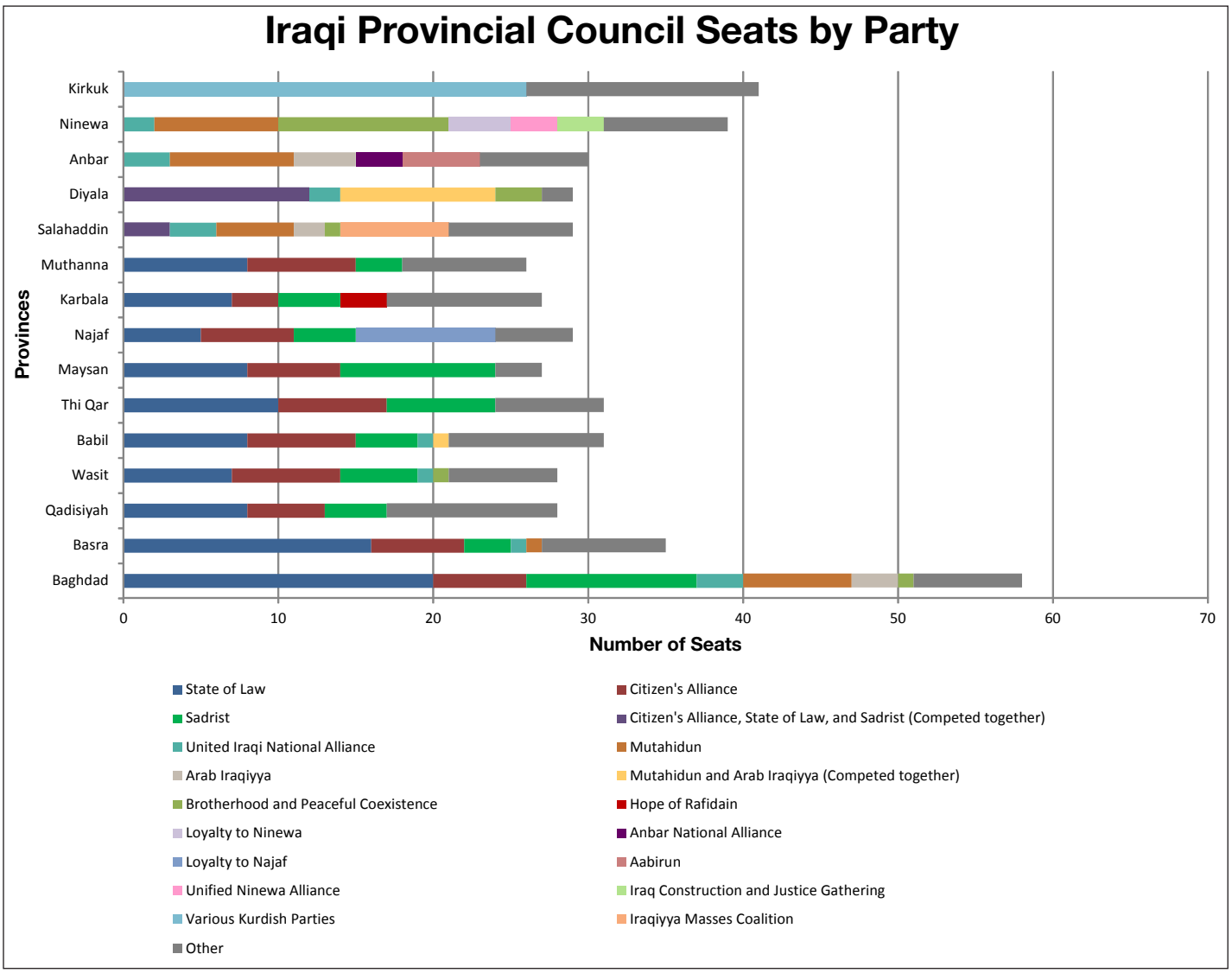
The distribution of these seats plays a role in shaping the electoral strategies of the various groups. Baghdad, for example, will be highly competitive, given its high population and mixed demographic, including Iraqi Shi'a and Sunnis. Furthermore, the changing disposition of Baghdad voters' political inclinations makes the province more permissive for many parties. As such, elections in Baghdad may provide a lens upon the population rather than just the candidates. Similarly, the 12 seats allocated for Kirkuk province in the north may serve as an important measure of the ethnic balance of the population, which has not yet been evaluated through an official census.

The need for individual provincial strategies ahead of 2014 national elections have also led many Iraqi political groups to recruit and nominate candidates who are known locally. This

strategy was evidenced by the nomination of Kirkuk's popular governor, Najm al-Din Karim in the national elections. In Basra, the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) also deployed its member and governor of the province, Majed al-Nasrawi, in order to capitalize on his recent popularity for having secured petro-dollars for Basra.[5]

After the conclusion of national elections, the Iraqi constitution stipulates that the CoR will vote for senior positions in the Iraqi government, including the President, the Prime Minister and his deputies, and the cabinet. Although each CoR member contributes an individual vote, in practice this voting occurs only after an agreement has been reached among the senior leaders of the political groups, invoking party loyalty and voting discipline thereafter. The selection of the cabinet requires an absolute majority of the CoR members' votes (165 votes). In the final negotiations over government formation, even small groups can play a decisive role if they are able to provide the last few votes a governing coalition needs to clear this constitutional hurdle.

National elections in Iraq reflect the results of the provincial elections, which last occurred in 2013. Powerful positions, such as governorships, are leveraged to make political deals at the national level. The performance of a political party on a local level likewise can improve its competitiveness in national elections. For example, after Prime Minister Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA) won the majority of seats in the 2009 provincial elections in Maysan province in southern Iraq, Maliki struck a deal allowing the previous governor and Maliki ally Mohammed Shyaa al-Sudani to be replaced by a Sadrist governor, Ali Dwai, in exchange for the Sadrists' support for Maliki's continued premiership. This move proved strategic for the Sadrists, who were able to capitalize on the position. Dwai became known for joining city workers during their duties, burnishing the credentials of the Sadrists



as a populist bloc.[6] For the 2014 elections, the likelihood exists that provincial offices will be instrumental during national negotiations again.

Such political maneuvers pre-suppose that elections will be held in every province on the same day, April 30, 2014, as required by Iraqi law. The province most likely to face challenges in 2014 is Anbar. Its second-largest urban area, Fallujah, has been out of the Iraqi government's control since early 2014. Clashes also persist in Anbar's capital of Ramadi. In January 2014, local officials estimated that 75% of Fallujah's population has left the city.[7] In order to facilitate the process of voting for displaced Anbari citizens, IHEC has decided to allow them to vote using "manual voting" as opposed to the electronic electoral smart cards that the majority will use in the elections.[8] IHEC acknowledged that using the electronic cards for displaced Anbaris is not possible due to distribution difficulties, although the distribution of electronic voting cards is taking place in other areas of Anbar province.

Conditions in Anbar may affect the turnout rate for Anbar and thereby the acceptability of the results. CoR member Liqa Wardi from Anbar expressed concern that IHEC does not have accurate figures of the displaced and that manual voting may produce fraud.[9] Such procedural vulnerabilities give rise to the possible invalidation of 2014 national elections, which may prove useful for stakeholders that do not fare well at the ballot box.

The Iraqi constitution does not provide for a third term for the Prime Minister. The national elections will therefore provide an opportunity for all parties to challenge Maliki on the national level. The Sadrists and ISCI unified after the provincial elections and have worked together to marginalize Maliki's power on the provincial level. They will also challenge Maliki on the electoral stage in 2014. The political future of the Iraqi Sunnis and Iraqi Kurds will depend on who emerges strongest among the Iraqi Shi'a political parties, and what incentives they offer to provide in return for electoral support. Each set of actors has approached these critical elections from a different perspective – the following sections will lay out these actors and their motivating factors.

MALIKI AND THE STATE OF LAW ALLIANCE

The elections are significant not only for groups, but also for political figures, most importantly Maliki. Maliki has consolidated power in the last eight years, and his coalition is seeking to nominate him for a third term. To ensure a third term, Maliki has highlighted his past performance, including in targeting militias, promoting his image as a strong leader on the security front. The elections are also important for Maliki's inner circle, who have a vested interest in his success and political survival, to which they have linked their own political fortunes. Maliki also has close relatives running in the elections.

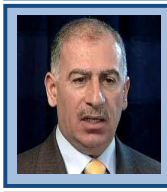
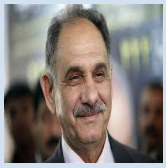
Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki heads the State of Law Alliance (SLA), which is composed of 12 groups. Within the SLA, Maliki is the most dominant individual, and his Islamic Da'wa Party is currently the most entrenched in the Iraqi government. As a result, the SLA is centered around the personality of Maliki. In the March 2010 national elections, Maliki was a candidate in Baghdad, and his strong performance buoyed the fortunes of other politicians on his list. Given Maliki's present incumbency, SLA candidates are counting upon party votes in Baghdad, distributed to them after Maliki crosses the needed number of votes he needs to secure his seat.

In 2014 elections, the SLA also has non-Iraqi Arab allies including Iraqi Turkmen and Shi'a Shabak groups. In this way, the SLA can portray itself as inclusive of minorities that have a shared sectarian background. Iraqi Shi'a Turkmen leader Abbas al-Bayati, for example, is a long-standing Maliki ally and Minister of State for Provincial Affairs. Another figure, Turhan Mufti became a close Iraqi Turkmen Maliki ally in the last four years and was instrumental in actualizing a long-standing Iraqi Turkmen demand of converting the district Tuz Khurmatu into a province.[10] This may contribute to Maliki's localized strategy.

In a March 2013 interview with the German magazine *Der Spiegel*, Maliki stated that results in the elections will determine whether he will compete for the prime minister position.[11] In the same interview, however, Maliki added that "I can't rest, given the challenges the country and Iraqis face." This interview is a positive indicator that Maliki will run for a third term after the Iraqi Supreme Court overturned the law which established term limits for senior posts. Maliki's allies have also been more forward in announcing that Maliki is suitable for a third term. In November 2013, Maliki ally and CoR member, Mohammed al-Saihud, stated that Maliki is "almost certainly" assured a third term because he is the "man of the stage."[12]

Moreover, Maliki intends to protect the interests of the Da'wa party, in particular party members who are part of his inner circle. Inner circle members include but are not limited to his son, Ahmed al-Maliki; his influential personal secretary and inner circle member Gati al-Rikabi, also known as Abu Mujahid; his regional and religious

IMPORTANT FIGURES IN THE IRAQI GOVERNMENT

NOURI AL-MALIKI	Position: Prime Minister Iraqi Shi'a Leader of the SLA's Da'wa party.	**JALAL TALABANI**	Position: President Iraqi Kurd From the PUK. This is his second term in office and according to the Iraqi constitution he will not be able to have another term in office.
HUSSEIN AL-SHAHRISTANI	Position: Deputy Prime Minister for Energy Affairs Iraqi Shi'a Belongs to the SLA's Mustaqilun (independents) bloc.	**KHUDAIR AL-KHUZAIE**	Position: Vice President Iraqi Shi'a From the SLA's Da'wa party-Iraq Organization
ROZH NOURI SHAWYES	Position: Deputy Prime Minister for Economic Affairs Iraqi Kurd From the KDP	 **OSAMA AL-NUJAIFI**	Position: Council of Representatives Speaker Iraqi Sunni Leader of the Mutahidun Alliance.
 **SALEH AL-MUTLAQ**	Position: Deputy Prime Minister for Services Iraqi Sunni Leader of the National Dialogue Front	**QUSAY AL-SUHAIL**	Position: Council of Representatives Deputy Speaker Iraqi Shi'a Member of the Sadrist Trend

affairs advisor, Abdul Halim al-Zuhairi; his most trusted military advisor and relative General Aboud Qanbar; and his son-in-law Hussein al-Maliki, who is also running in the elections. They will be keenly interested in Maliki securing a third term to aid in their political survival, but could also play a role in convincing Maliki to step down under an electoral scenario whereby Maliki is not in a position to compete for a third term. This inner circle greatly influences Maliki's decision-making. Its advice will be important in Maliki's calculus if it realized that attaining the prime minister position is no longer possible.

Maliki's self-perception is important in order to predict his intentions after the elections. He views himself as a historical figure who intends to cement the Iraqi Shi'a in the governing structure of the Iraqi state. This view comes from his family background; he is quick to remind any audience that his grandfather, Mohammed Abu al-Mahasan, fought against the British when they occupied Iraq in the aftermath of World War I. Additionally, he retains a sense of duty and entitlement that he and the Da'wa party deserve to be in power due to their history of anti-Ba'athist stances. He is proud of saying he has been involved in anti-Ba'athist activities since he was 17. This personal profile will be a driving force in dictating Maliki's effort to secure a third term.

THE SADRISTS

The Sadrist Trend is Maliki's most viable Iraqi Shi'a competition. It still enjoys grassroots support derived from Sadrist leader Moqtada al-Sadr's status as the heir and political successor of his father, Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr. The Sadrists were able to win 40 seats in the March 2010 elections and were thus positioned to be the strongest Iraqi Arab political group.[13] This performance was the result of a strategy that included tight control of balloting to cast votes for specific candidates in order not to scatter their votes. The Sadrists' power was demonstrated again in the 2013 provincial elections as they were able to secure seats and positions in Baghdad and other predominantly Iraqi Shi'a provinces in southern Iraq.[14]

The Sadrists enter the elections with the three groups competing, the Ahrar Alliance, The Elites Gathering, and the National Partnership Gathering. In a strategic shift, the Sadrists decided to not be part of a pan-Shi'a alliance like the Iraqi National Alliance in 2010. This is very likely intended to allow the Sadrists to demonstrate their own independent organizational power and street credibility, separate from a broader Iraqi Shi'a unit. The Sadrist Trend has been mobilizing its base to go out and vote. The Sadrist Trend has been able to showcase its organizational power in the street by

Sadrist poster showing slogan, "Servant for the People" and names of Sadrist groups competing in 2014 elections. Source: Sadrist Social Media

organizing the "Day of the Oppressed" only a month before the elections. The "Day of the Oppressed" march is an annual event, but the Sadrists leveraged it to show their street power relative to other Iraqi Shi'a blocs in 2014.[15]

The march was also the Sadrists' method of demonstrating their loyalty to Moqtada al-Sadr. The Sadrist Trend has been restructuring since al-Sadr's announced retirement from politics in February 2014 – even though he is still involved in the trend's political affairs.[16] Given the pre-elections timing of these moves, they are clearly intended to reenergize the Sadrist Trend and ensure a higher turnout. Reflecting its public populist nature, one of the Sadrist slogans heading into the elections is "Servant of the people."

The Sadrists are aiming to unseat Maliki as Prime Minister. They will likely attack Maliki's performance and seek to capitalize on their 2013 provincial elections results, which will be discussed later in this report. In August 2013, a Sadrist CoR member announced that the Da'wa party is "concerned" that the Sadrists are the closest to earning the Prime Minister position.[17] In the event the Sadrists are unable to secure the Prime Minister position alone, they will likely seek to play a king-making role by influencing the choice of Prime Minister. In return, they would be able to protect their interests by occupying senior positions in the government.

THE ISLAMIC SUPREME COUNCIL OF IRAQ (ISCI)

The Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) will also be critical player in determining the shape of the government. Leading up to the provincial elections, the group was underestimated due to its weak results in the March 2010 elections. However, ISCI emerged from the provincial elections as a rejuvenated group after being able to secure 65 seats.[18] In the national elections, ISCI will seek to continue its revival. ISCI will lead the Citizen's Alliance (CA) in the elections which has within its ranks 20 groups. Interestingly, the CA has attracted groups formerly close to Prime Minister Maliki including the Independent Efficiencies Gathering, led by former Iraqi government spokesperson, Ali al-Dabagh.

ISCI's revival was partly due to voter discontent with the SLA, and also due to ISCI's decision to disassociate itself from the Iraqi government as it faced public criticism for being ineffective. This strategy was embodied by the resignation of senior ISCI figure and former vice president, Adel Abdul Mahdi, from his position.[19] In addition to these moves, ISCI leader Ammar al-Hakim was gradually able to establish himself as a rising leader within the Iraqi Shi'a community and has sought to portray himself as a unifying force – for example, when he convened a national gathering for political leaders and proposed initiatives to solve the ongoing crisis in Anbar.[20] Prior to the elections, Hakim stated that the most important card ISCI has is "credibility," likely a reference to its distance from the government after the 2010 elections.[21]

Prime Minister Maliki has identified ISCI as an opponent. In March 2013, both sides engaged in a high-profile stand-off in Basra where ISCI, represented by Majed al-Nasrawi, currently holds the governor position. To pressure ISCI, the SLA in Basra decided to challenge the legality of the formation of the Basra government. ISCI's response included allying with the

Sadrists to protest against Maliki in Basra. Reported meetings between Hakim and Maliki resulted in the SLA halting its legal procedures against Nasrawi. This temporary lull may have also been the result of Iranian government mediation, but tensions will continue between Maliki and ISCI. In Basra in particular, Nasrawi has been able to earn a populist image for ISCI by insisting that the province receive increased allocations of petro-dollars.[22]

ISCI is also eying the Prime Minister position. ISCI leaders realize that they will need to build alliances in order to do so, and their relations with the Sadrists and their anti-Maliki commonality will be the driving force to achieve its objectives. ISCI's prospects of gaining the premiership would be enhanced if the elections results will necessitate the need for a consensus candidate, a role that ISCI could fill. If ISCI offers a consensus prime minister candidate, the groups allowing him to be prime minister will restrict the powers of the office, having learned from Maliki's consolidation of power.

THE NEW POLITICAL PLAYER: ASA'IB AHL AL-HAQ

Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) is an Iraqi Shi'a militia that is backed by the Iranian government. AAH is led by former Sadrist senior figure, Qais al-Khazali, who has been cementing his position as a leader of in the Iraqi Shi'a political community and a direct competitor of Moqtada al-Sadr. The Sadrists and AAH compete for the same constituency. Khazali claims to be the legitimate representative of Moqtada's father, Mohammed Sadeq al-Sadr. AAH has also attempted to spread its influence by opening offices in various parts of the country, although predominantly Iraqi Shi'a Baghdad neighborhoods are still AAH's major spheres of influence and sites of rivalry with the Sadrists.[23] In order to demonstrate its power, AAH has engaged the Sadrists in limited skirmishes throughout the last four years, with high-profile clashes taking place in Kadhmiyah, Baghdad in June 2013. As a result of mediation by influential cleric Kadhim al-Haeri, the factions did not have major clashes in the following months.[24]

In the 2014 elections, AAH has officially entered the electoral fray. This is the first time that it will openly compete in elections since it was formed in 2004, and this decision is likely intended to test AAH's electoral power, weaken the Sadrists, and support Maliki's effort to secure a third term. AAH is competing under a political bloc named Sadiqun [The Truthful]. Although Sadiqun is not running with the SLA in Baghdad, it is running along with the SLA and other Iraqi Shi'a groups in provinces like Diyala, Salah ad-Din, and Kirkuk where the Shi'a minority needs to coalesce in order to compete against non-Iraqi Shi'a groups.

According to Khazali, the main purpose for AAH competing in the elections is "mismanagement of the state, rampant corruption, unjustified and mysterious absence of the republic's president, and the presence of two governments and parliaments." The reference to "two governments and parliaments" refers to the Kurdistan Regional Government and the Iraqi Kurdistan parliament. Khazali's statements are critical of corruption and the Iraqi Kurds. AAH's anti-Iraqi Kurdish platform also includes criticism directed towards Iraqi

AAH leader, Qais al-Khazali, announcing AAH's entrance in the elections on March 17, 2014 in Najaf. Source: Al-Sumaria News

Protesters praying in Ramadi on July 18, 2013. Source: Media Support Committee for the Iraqi Revolution

president, Jalal Talabani, who has been hospitalized in Germany since suffering a stroke in December 2012. Another platform for AAH has been to capitalize on its deployment to Syria in support of Bashar al-Assad's government. With the backing of the Iranian government, AAH is the main Iraqi Shi'a group that has been recruiting and sending fighters to Syria ostensibly to defend the shrine of Sayyida Zeinab in Damascus, but AAH members and other Iraqi Shi'a militias have been deployed to other parts of Syria in support of Syrian government forces.[25]

AAH pre-elections campaigning has also included tribal outreach. Very notably, Khazali has been touring southern Iraqi cities and holding festivals, meeting with tribal figures to project an image of broader appeal. This strategy is intended to compete directly with Moqtada al-Sadr and win over some of his followers, especially in Najaf, where Sadr resides. AAH will likely ally with Prime Minister Maliki after the elections. It will be an electoral surprise if AAH gains more than ten seats in the elections, given its new arrival on the political scene and fierce competitions from the other Iraqi Shi'a political groups. Nonetheless, any seats gained by AAH will be an asset for Maliki who, amid a likely fractured political scene, will need such seats to secure a third term. Further, these seats will come directly at the expense of the Sadrists.

THE CONTINUED DISUNITY OF IRAQI SUNNI POLITICS

Iraqi Sunni politics is more fractured in these elections when compared to the March 2010 elections. In those elections, the majority of Iraqi Sunni political groups competed within Iraqiyya, which had a central leadership under former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi. Since 2010, Iraqiyya faced multiple internal and external challenges, beginning with Maliki's contest to form the government despite Iraqiyya's numerical victory in the elections. Internally, Allawi had to contend with accommodating the various senior figures within Iraqiyya, each of whom had his own powerbase. This dynamic made it difficult for Iraqiyya to negotiate under a unified position. Iraqiyya's internal differences made it easy for Maliki to splinter the group and gradually phase out Allawi's role as coalition leader. Maliki also weakened Iraqiyya by targeting for arrest two of its main leaders, Tariq al-Hashemi and Rafia al-Issawi, whom he had placed in senior government positions in his administration.[26]

The Iraqi Sunni political scene was reenergized by the advent of the anti-government protest movement, which from December 2012-June 2013 represented a unified front for Iraqi Sunni political ambitions and grievances. However, heading into the June 20, 2013 provincial elections, the Iraqi Sunni political scene divided into anti-Maliki forces, pro-Maliki forces, and a diminishing protest movement. These categorizations reflect the Iraqi Sunnis' political landscape prior to the 2014 elections as well.[27]

The major Iraqi Sunni political figure heading into the elections is CoR Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi. He is the leader of the "Mutahidun for Islah" [United for Reform] coalition which includes within it 13 predominantly Iraqi Sunni political

groups. Nujaifi's personal ambition is likely maintaining a senior position in the government after the elections. He would likely seek to maintain his position of CoR speaker, since it is effectively the second most influential position in the government and allows him to exercise influence despite resistance from the executive branch.

Nujaifi will also likely seek to reinvigorate his base of support in his home province of Ninewa after his and his brother's Hadba group underperformed in the provincial elections.[28] From Nujaifi's perspective, the elections are also about renewing his mandate as a national-level Iraqi Sunni political leader and translating Iraqi Sunni grievances into tangible political gains. To do so, he faces a major security challenge.

Mutahidun's powerbase is arrayed in provinces where security has greatly deteriorated since June 2013. The deteriorating security has complicated Mutahidun's strategy to campaign openly. ISIS has launched an anti-elections campaign that will likely have an effect of discouraging Iraqi Sunnis from participating in elections. It is likely, however, that a boycott brought on by threats of violence from ISIS could actually benefit Mutahidun, depressing turnout from non-Mutahidun supporters. Such a boycott would, however, diminish Mutahidun's legitimacy, given the lack of wide participation. In December 2013, Mutahidun countered discussion of a possible boycott among protest movement leaders. Mutahidun member Walid al-Mohammedi condemned statements hinting at a boycott and called clearly on Iraqi Sunni to participate in elections.[29]

Mutahidun will also face the political challenge of the aftermath of the Anbar crisis that started in late December 2013 and is ongoing. Erstwhile Mutahidun tribal ally Ahmed Abu Risha has sided with Maliki ever since ISIS took Fallujah. The de facto Maliki-Abu Risha alliance will severely impact Nujaifi's chances in Anbar even though, officially, Abu Risha is still running with Nujaifi in the same electoral coalition. The disqualification of Nujaifi's other Anbari ally, Rafia al-Issawi, from the elections will also negatively affect Mutahidun's chances, but Issawi can reverse that effect by aggressively campaigning for other candidates.[30]

Finally, for Mutahidun to succeed, it will have to harness the remaining power of the anti-government protest movement, which can still play a role in mobilizing voters. In late March 2014, Facebook pages previously frequented by protest movement sympathizers reacted to events in the town of Buhriz, Diyala when ISIS briefly held the town. After the Iraqi Security Forces regained control over the town, there were reports of extrajudicial killings against Iraqi Sunnis that some attributed to "militias." Mutahidun reacted strongly to the Buhriz events by warning that government strategy in Diyala may be intended to "prevent citizens from participating in elections."[31]

Another factor that will play a role in Iraqi Sunni politics is Ayad Allawi's Wataniyya Alliance. It is competing across the country but has in past elections performed well in predominantly Iraqi Sunni provinces. That scenario may repeat itself and present the possibility of Allawi and Mutahidun working together.

Maliki's strategy with the Iraqi Sunnis is centered on working with allies. He will seek to capitalize on his established relations with Iraqi Sunni figures after the elections, including his Anbari allies represented by Ahmed Abu Risha and Governor Ahmed al-Dulaimi. Maliki has also been working to establish relations with Mishan al-Juburi and Salah ad-Din Governor Ahmed Abdullah al-Juburi who is popular in his home province. Maliki may also seek to work with Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq who, despite his critique of Maliki during his visit to Washington in January 2014, has tended to work with Maliki in the past. The relations these figures have with Maliki will be part of Iraqi Sunni voters' calculation as they cast votes, but the 2013 provincial election results demonstrate that relations with Maliki might not damage politicians' electoral chances.[32]

THE UNUSUAL POSITION OF THE IRAQI KURDS

The Iraqi Kurds enter national elections in a unique position. For the first time since 2005, the two major groups, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) are not competing as a unified front in either Iraqi Kurdistan's provincial elections or in the vitally important provinces of Kirkuk and Ninewa. These two provinces have represented the frontline for the Iraqi Kurds since 2003 as they sought to reclaim what they perceive to be part of Iraqi Kurdistan or "Kurdistani land," meaning part of greater Kurdistan. In past elections, the KDP and PUK have cast aside their internal differences to show a unified front in Iraqi Kurdish-Iraqi Arab relations. Overall, the KDP is seeking to consolidate the dominance that it achieved during the Iraqi Kurdistan September 2013 parliamentary elections, in which the PUK came third, losing to both the KDP and to its geographic and ideological competitor, the Change Movement [Gorran].[33]

The difference between KDP-PUK is the most pronounced in these elections. The KDP and PUK are competing separately

in both Kirkuk and Ninewa even though they engaged in negotiations to form a unified Iraqi Kurdish coalition in Kirkuk that eventually crumbled. On December 8, 2013, all Iraqi Kurdish political parties agreed to form a coalition that named the "Kurdistani Kirkuk List" headed by PUK's Kirkuk governor, Najm al-Din Karim. The coalition had a Gorran member as its spokesperson and a KDP member as the coalition's representative to IHEC. This allocation system was likely intended to placate the different groups that had partisan ambitions. On December 10, 2013, however, the KDP announced that it had withdrawn from the Kurdistani Kirkuk List, citing its disagreement with the decision to allow Karim to head the coalition. Senior KDP representative in Kirkuk, Irfan Kirkuki, stated that governor Karim had "preferred his party's interest to those of the public good" and that the KDP has repeatedly objected to Karim assuming the leadership of a unified Iraqi Kurdish list.[34]

The PUK, however, showed its support to Karim during its Central Council session on December 23, 2013 when convened members welcomed Karim with reported "warm applause." Additionally, Secretary of the Council, Adel Murad, gave a speech highlighting Karim's role in Iraqi Kurdish political history and contributions during Karim's tenure as Kirkuk's governor since 2010. For his part, Karim addressed the session by detailing his work as governor of Kirkuk. He stated his surprise at learning of the KDP's withdrawal decision from the media without prior notification. Karim added that "weakening the PUK in Kirkuk is weakening of the unified Kurdish position."[35]

Through these steps, the PUK is attempting to reassert its credential as a political party seeking to protect Iraqi Kurdish interests in Kirkuk. The PUK has also sought to defend Karim who, while criticized for some policies, is also perceived and praised for being more conciliatory with the non-Iraqi Kurdish groups in Kirkuk compared to Kirkuk's previous KDP governor, Abdul Rahman Mustafa. More importantly, the PUK does not want to appear to be squandering Iraqi Kurdish interests in Kirkuk in the wake of the KDP's decision to withdraw from the coalition.[36]

Kirkuk's contest is the PUK's opportunity to regain footing in the internal Iraqi Kurdish political balance after its underperformance in the Iraqi Kurdistan September 2013 parliamentary elections.[37] In the March 2010 election results, the PUK won five of the six seats gained by the Iraqi Kurds and it is seeking a similar performance in the 2014 elections. The question for the PUK will remain how to translate success in Kirkuk into wider rejuvenation as it attempts to restructure and remain relevant.[38]

In Ninewa, Iraqi Kurds are not unified, as the PUK decided to compete separately citing the "marginalization" that took place after the provincial elections (the KDP had charted and worked with the Iraqi Sunni Mutahidun to form the Ninewa government eventually at the expense of the PUK). According to the PUK's Ninewa chief, Arif Rushdi, the PUK took the decision because "we were not done justice within the '[KDP-led] brotherhood and coexistence list'." As the elections approach, the PUK suffered further losses in Ninewa as Rushi along with other senior Ninewa-based PUK officials split from the PUK and joined the KDP in April 2014. This development will weaken the PUK and likely strengthen the KDP in the province. [39]

The PUK is also grappling with the absence of its leader, Talabani, which presents internal and external challenges to the Iraqi Kurds. Talabani has been hospitalized in Germany since December 2012. Internally, the PUK so far has not been able to develop a counterweight to KDP leader and Iraqi Kurdistan President, Masoud Barzani. Furthermore, Talabani's absence will have an impact on PUK electioneering strategy and power, leaving the KDP is better positioned. Externally, Talabani has in past elections been able to leverage his position and stature in Baghdad and relations with the Iranian government to advance the interests of the PUK and the Iraqi Kurds. This dynamic was particularly important during negotiations with Iraqi Shi'a political leaders who have ties to the Iranian government.[40]

The rise of Gorran will also dilute the Iraqi Kurdish political scene. Gorran will likely do well inside Iraqi Kurdistan's three provinces since its appeal is still limited outside the region. But in any case, this will take away votes from the KDP and PUK. For the PUK, a strong showing in the national elections and the concurrent Iraqi Kurdistan provincial elections is even more significant in light of the April 17, 2014 agreement between the KDP and Gorran to form a Kurdistan Regional Government that froze out the PUK.[41]

The ongoing KDP-PUK competition in these two provinces coupled with the deteriorating security could impact the elections. The Iraqi Kurds will still likely win 5-6 of Kirkuk's 12 seats due to the province's demographics. However, the Iraqi Kurdish parties will need to accept the results in order to deny ISIS the opportunity to discredit the electoral process. Conduct of elections will also be critical for the Iraqi Arabs in Kirkuk, who have highlighted problems in the run-up to the elections including disqualification of candidates and the distribution of electronic voting cards. Notably, the Arab Political Council called for the postponement of elections for these reasons, which lays the groundwork for questioning the results.[42]

In other parts of Iraq, the KDP and PUK decided to set aside differences and run together. In Baghdad, Diyala, and Salah ad-Din, both parties formed coalitions with other Iraqi Kurdish parties. It is critical for the Iraqi Kurds to perform well in these provinces to achieve their goals in the Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIB) areas.[43]

The stakes are high for the Iraqi Kurds in these elections. The Iraqi Kurds will still be sought-after partners who could tip the balance in determining the next government as they did in previous elections. But as the results emerge, the three major parties of KDP, PUK, and Gorran will face questions on how to represent their negotiation positions and avoid transmitting internal Iraqi Kurdistan fractures to negotiations with Baghdad. In these elections, the Iraqi Kurdish posture is even more significant as the KRG works to export oil from Iraqi Kurdistan to Turkey despite objections from Baghdad. Moreover, the Iraqi Kurds will be faced with a dilemma of which positions to bargain for during government-formation negotiations. Talabani cannot be president again due to term-limits, and his successor is unclear if the Iraqi Kurds seek to maintain that position. It is likely that the Iraqi Kurds will seek positions other than the presidency and the foreign affairs ministry, occupied by KDP member Hoshyar Zebari since 2003. If those demands develop, they could revive an Iraqi Shi'a–Iraqi Kurdish alliance, but likely at the expense of the Iraqi Sunnis. Under all these scenarios, the unity of the Iraqi Kurds and their bargaining positions will have a significant impact on the fortunes of the other ethno-sectarian groupings.

MALIKI'S ELECTORAL STRATEGY

Maliki began strategizing for the national elections shortly after discovering he had not performed strongly in the provincial elections in 2013. This was particularly visible when Maliki met with Speaker Osama al-Nujaifi and attempted to reconcile with him in July 2013.[44] Maliki also initially pursued a conciliatory approach with Iraqi Kurdish groups, realizing that he would need their support after the elections. Towards the end of 2013, however, this shifted into a more nationalist, confrontational approach, as Maliki transitioned into a pre-elections campaign mode. In advance of the national elections, Maliki has taken a confrontational approach targeting his Iraqi Shi'a opponents, the Iraqi Kurds, and the Iraqi Sunnis.

For the Iraqi Shi'a, Maliki quickly after the provincial elections set himself in opposition to the Sadrists. In an interview during this time, he emphasized his security credentials – recalling that he had ordered attacks against militias in Basra in 2008. He also issued a string of statements criticizing Moqtada al-Sadr after the latter issued a scathing statement opposing Maliki's visit to the United States in late 2013.[45] Maliki has also targeted the Sadrists in the courts, initiating a change in Diyala's provincial government, which was initially produced by alliance between the Sadrists and the Iraqi Sunni group Mutahidun. Maliki and the SLA have also sought to target a newly re-energized ISCI.[46] ISCI, while less critical of Maliki when compared to the Sadrists, is still more favorable to the Sadrists and could whittle away seats needed by the SLA.

Maliki has many "levers" available to him – rhetorical, legal, and military – and he has shown a willingness to use all of them. As mentioned previously, Maliki initiated legal steps in Basra to challenge the legitimacy of its ISCI governor, Majed al-Nasrawi.[47] Maliki may also utilize his relations with AAH to contain the Sadrists, as evidenced by clashes between AAH and the Sadrists in Kadhmiyah, Baghdad in June 2013.[48]

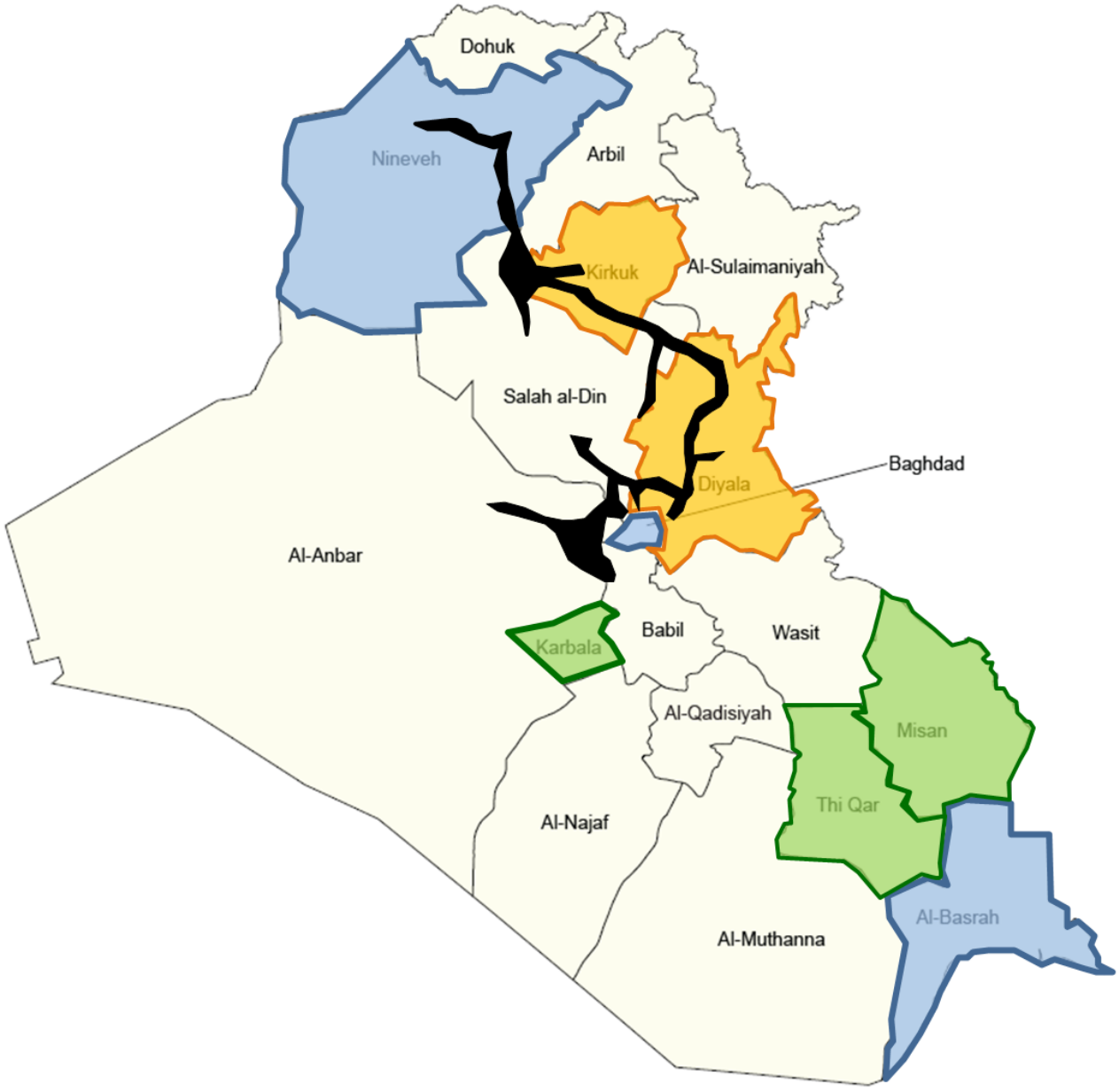
Maliki sharpened his rhetoric against the Iraqi Kurds after the KRG started limited oil exports to Turkey. In addition to verbal attacks, Maliki delayed the salaries of Kurdistan Regional Government employees in February 2014, resulting in the tightening of economic conditions in Iraqi Kurdistan and heightened tensions with Iraqi Kurdistan President Barzani. Maliki's actions are intended to burnish his own credentials as a strong, nationalist leader before the elections. He may soften his stance with regards to the Iraqi Kurds after the elections, but his priority prior to the elections is to rally his base.[49]

Maliki's main target among the Iraqi Sunnis is CoR speaker Nujaifi. The two figures were conciliatory in the wake of the summer of 2013, as ISIS was resurgent and threatening to both of them, as well as Nujaifi's brother, Ninewa Governor Atheel Nujaifi. Governor Nujaifi had to deal with an ISIS's threat emanating from southern Mosul.[50] Prior to the national elections, however, Maliki and his allies have been publically critical of Nujaifi. This includes Maliki's threat to suspend the CoR if it did not pass the budget.[51]

Security

Meanwhile, Maliki has also faced a real security crisis in Iraq over the course of the last two years. This has provided him with an opportunity to wield the ISF for political gain. In August 2013, Maliki launched the "Revenge of the Martyrs" operation to clear ISIS support zones north of Baghdad in the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib Prison attack.[52] The intention of that operation was to portray Maliki as a strong Prime Minister who is able to impose law and order. That operation came at

Provinces to Watch: 2014 Iraqi National Elections



Swing provinces with the most electoral seats

Provinces with ethno-sectarian competition

Provinces with intra-Shi'a competition

Locations where security may impede electoral participation

a cost, as it also resulted in arbitrary arrests of primarily Iraqi Sunnis. "Revenge of the Martyrs" was intended to regain the image of a strong security leader and appeal to recent victims and martyrs of ISIS attacks.

In December 2013, Maliki redoubled his security efforts in Anbar. Maliki initiated the "Revenge of the Martyr Commander Mohammed" operation when the commander of the 7th Iraqi Army division, Brigadier General Mohammed al-Karawi, was killed in an ISIS ambush in the Anbar desert on December 22. The initial effort garnered support from the population, including some Iraqi Sunni figures who perceived ISIS to be a threat against them. However, subsequent steps by Maliki, including a raid to arrest controversial Iraqi Sunni CoR member Ahmed al-Alwani and the shutdown of the Ramadi anti-government protest site sharply turned opinion in Anbar against him.[53]

Subsequent clashes led to the fall of Fallujah to ISIS and other armed groups. The ongoing stand-off in Anbar hurts Maliki's image as a strong leader, demonstrating that he is not able to re-take lost territory in the province. Maliki's image among the Iraqi Shi'a as a Prime Minister who is fighting on their behalf is important, and suggests that the upcoming elections likely impacted Maliki's calculations in pursuing security operations. Although confronting ISIS in Anbar was justified and necessary, Maliki's ordering the arrest of Alwani and the shutdown of the Ramadi protest site seem to have backfired leading to gains for ISIS and Iraqi insurgent groups.

Disqualification of Candidates

The disqualification of critical candidates is also part of Maliki's electoral strategy. Prior to the elections, a large number of candidates were disqualified from the elections for a variety of reasons, including SLA and pro-Maliki candidates. Maliki opponents have faced particular scrutiny, however, particularly former finance minister Rafia al-Issawi. The arrest of Issawi's bodyguards in December of 2012 triggered the anti-government Iraqi Sunni protest movement. Issawi was ostensibly disqualified due to an existing arrest warrant, but Issawi attributed the decision to political motives which appear to have been in play in the initial issuance of the arrest warrant.[54] The disqualification of anti-Maliki candidates raises questions about the independence of the IHEC and the judicial sector in Iraq.

Another prominent case is the secular politician Mithal al-Alusi, who was disqualified due to a charge against him that he violated the electoral law of Good Conduct when he criticized Maliki in a TV interview.[55] Alusi was reinstated on March 18 and is currently a senior candidate within the Civil Democratic Coalition. Nonetheless, his disqualification is emblematic of Maliki electoral strategy to weaken any critics.

Maliki's Challenges

Maliki challenges will be numerous as he seeks to secure a third term. Firstly, his opponents are more distrustful of him and his capacity to keep promises as a result of his governance in the last term and failure to deliver on many agreements. Secondly, 2013 was the deadliest year in Iraq since 2008 and the deteriorating security environment will likely damage his prospects.[56] Thirdly, despite economic improvement and higher standards of living, rampant corruption will be counted against him since it took place during his terms. Fourthly, some of his allies have realized some of his weakening and have chosen to distance themselves from him at least for now. This includes long-time ally Sami al-Askari and former Iraqiyya member, Izzat al-Shabandar.[57] Neither figure enjoys wide popular support, but both have tied their political fortunes to Maliki's in the past. Askari's decision to form his coalition, The Alliance of Iraqi Loyalty, before the elections indicates his desire to set out separately from Maliki. Given the nature of Iraqi politics, Maliki still has some tools to manipulate his allies; Askari was briefly disqualified from the elections, but was later reinstated.[58] The reinstatement was likely the result of Maliki pressuring the Judiciary.

Maliki also needs to factor foreign support into his electoral strategy. Maliki visited both the United States and Iran in late 2013. While the Iranian government has not played a major role in the pre-elections environment, it will likely be involved in the post elections environment. It is important for Maliki to highlight his positions to the Iranian government in person as part of his effort to secure its support vis-à-vis other Iraqi Shi'a groups after the elections. This may include his support to its Syria policy as embodied by the Damascus visit by Maliki confidante and national security advisor, Faleh Fayadh.[59]

Despite these challenges, Maliki enters the elections rejuvenated. He gradually regained momentum lost in the aftermath of the provincial elections by launching the major military operations described above and using them to appear strong.[60] He has also pursued a strategy of shaping the post-elections environment with the Iraqi Kurds by squeezing them financially and proposing the creation of new provinces in districts that they seek to control. Finally, he has attacked his main Iraqi Shi'a rivals, the Sadrists, rhetorically while allying with AAH.

THE POSITION OF IRAQ'S RELIGIOUS AUTHORITIES

Iraq's religious authorities, particularly the Shi'a institution known as the Marjai'a, will play a critical role in these elections given their political and social influence among Iraqis. The Marjai'a headed by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, has attempted to play a mediating, quietist role when Iraq faced major political crises. In the post-2003 Iraqi political culture, Iraqi Shi'a political factions tend to seek Sistani's approval and blessing prior to taking major decisions. One prominent example is the U.S.-Iraq Security Agreement in 2008, for which Maliki sought Sistani's opinion in order to bolster his public position.[61]

The Marjai'a has not endorsed any political group before the 2014 elections, in keeping with its desire to appear neutral and "keep the same distance" from all Iraqi Shi'a political groups. Sistani's current political approach is only to intervene when necessary. For that reason, Sistani has chosen to disengage from direct politics by not meeting with Maliki or SLA members for the last three years.[62] Sistani's stance is also the product of his desire not to appear as supporting a government that the public perceives as ineffective. Sistani's approach is a direct contrast to the Iranian theocratic political order, the *velayat-e faqih*.

Sistani's position vis-à-vis Maliki has limited Maliki's stature, as Sistani's endorsement is important. Sistani has been active personally and through his representatives in the lead-up to the 2014 elections in taking stands to make the process more democratic. In July 2013 as the debate of the elections law was taking place, Sistani's representative in Karbala Abdul al-Mahdi al-Karbalai expressed the Marjai'a rejection of a proposed closed-list electoral system. The closed-list system would have favored the major political parties and disenfranchised voters. The CoR voted for an open-list system when it passed the elections law in November 2013.

In February 2014, an IHEC delegation visited Sistani in Najaf and emerged after the meeting to announce that Sistani emphasized the need to hold elections as scheduled and facilitate the participation of Anbar voters. Although Sistani has only endorsed the elections process in general terms, various candidates are attempting to appear close to his authority. This primarily concerns ISCI, which has adopted Sistani as its spiritual leader since 2007. Senior ISCI leader, Humam Hamoudi, in a March 31 post on his Facebook page stated that ISCI is characterized by its "closeness" to the Marjai'a, emphasizing that ISCI considers that the "Marjai'a's orders must be executed."[63]

As the 2014 elections approach, early indications point to Sistani's intention to call for change as evidenced by a Friday sermon delivered by Karbala on April 4, 2014, during which he described Iraq's "difficult conditions" and called on the public to vote for officials who will change these conditions. The sermon did not name Maliki, but many Iraqi Shi'a will likely perceive it to mean the Prime Minister. Pre-election coolness from Sistani towards Maliki was also exhibited by Sistani's reported refusal to meet Maliki who was visiting Najaf on April 10.[64] Sistani's role after the elections will be crucial. He will remain quietist and not intervene on behalf of a party or candidate, but he will also remain in a position to challenge Iraqi Shi'a groups if they try to alter the election results unduly or try to overturn them violently. Sistani is likely still interested in maintaining Iraqi Shi'a political unity.

THE IRANIAN GOVERNMENT'S CALCULUS

The Iranian government will closely monitor the outcome of the Iraqi elections. In 2014, the Iranian government is fully engaged in an effort to buttress its ally Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Although Syria appears to be the focal point of Iran's Middle East strategy, Iraq plays an important role as well – both as a tacit logistical partner and source of militia members able to deploy to Syria. In the run-up to the elections, the Iranian government does not appear to have repeated its 2010 push for the formation of a pan-Shi'a Iraqi political alliance. This is likely the result of Iraqi Shi'a political parties' desire to test their own powers as separate entities. It is also likely that the widening gap between Maliki and his Iraqi Shi'a rivals rendered any Iranian government effort to unify Iraqi Shi'a political groups impossible.

Nevertheless, the Iranian government does have direct allies running in the elections. Chief among them are AAH; the Badr Organization, which is running with the SLA; and one of the Iranian government's protégés within the SLA, the Risali Trend. The Risali Trend is headed by former Sadr student and current Maliki ally Adnan al-Shahmani. AAH and the Badr Organization have been significant recruiters of militia fighters deploying to Syria to fight along the Assad government. AAH is reported to receive up to $2 million a month from the Iranian government. This support will help make these groups viable in the elections.[65]

The Iranian government will likely be more active after the elections. It is already seeking to decrease tensions between Iraqi Shi'a political parties as evidenced by the reported

visit carried out by Qassim Soleimani, the commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Quds Force, to mediate tensions between the various Iraqi Shi'a groups. Furthermore, three major Iraqi Shi'a leaders, namely Maliki, Sadr, and Hakim, have each visited Iran before the elections. Senior Iraqi Sunni officials have also engaged the Iranian government before the elections. Speaker Nujaifi met with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Hassan Danafaer, on March 17, 2014 to discuss bilateral relations and the 2014 elections. In September 2013, Nujaifi visited Iran where he met with senior Iranian officials including making an appearance at the funeral of Soleimani's mother.[66]

These visits point to a post-election strategy by the Iranian government that will seek to unify the ranks of the Iraqi Shi'a and ensure that the next government in Baghdad will be friendly to Tehran.[67]

PRE-ELECTIONS DESTABILIZATION

The run-up to national elections has already had and will likely continue to have a destabilizing effect on the country. This is partly the result of the typical pre-elections posturing and the hardening of rhetoric by political parties in order to appeal to their electoral base. During the run-up to the 2014 elections, however, the impact has also affected the security environment.

Elections and the Security Environment

Security has consistently represented a threat to the electoral process during Iraq's multiple elections, especially on election day itself. Attacks against voters, polling sites, candidates, and electoral officials persisted in the run-up to the 2013 provincial elections particularly in Ninewa, Anbar, Diyala, Salah ad-Din, and Babil. It is clear that ISIS was focused on disrupting the electoral process in some of these provinces.[68]

Despite the postponement of elections in Ninewa and Anbar on security grounds, the elections in both provinces took place on June 20, 2013 and were not permanently impeded by ISIS's pre-elections violence.[69] While the eventual successful conduct of elections in these two provinces is a hopeful sign for the resilience of the electoral process, the security situation facing Iraq in April 2014 is in many ways more grave than it was a year ago.

The Iraqi government is experiencing loss of terrain for the first time since 2008. This includes the highly contentious

ISIS photo of battle with ISF in Ramadi. Source: ISIS social media

cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in Anbar, parts of Salah ad-Din, and parts of Diyala, as part of a security stand-off that has been developing since late 2013. The previously mentioned security operation in Anbar, "Revenge of the Martyr Commander Mohammed," came in response to a significant ISIS ambush. The operation was justified as a necessary step for the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and Iraqi government to contain the continuous ISIS threat.[70]

The operation initially generated public solidarity with the Iraqi government and the ISF even among Iraqi Sunnis. However, the arrest of Iraqi Sunni member of the CoR, Ahmed al-Alwani, on December 28, 2013 and the closure of the long-running protest site in Ramadi on December 30, 2013 sparked a wide uprising against the Iraqi government by the people of Anbar. For Maliki, the closure of the Ramadi site and more relevantly the arrest of the controversial Alwani serve to bolster his image as a strong commander-in-chief before the elections. These decisions, however, led to a severe deterioration in security across other parts of the country.

Concurrently, these decisions allowed for the reemergence of a renewed insurgency against the federal government under the auspices of "Tribal Military Councils" (TMCs). These TMCs include a variety of anti-government groups, predominantly the Ba'athist Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN) and reportedly also the Muslim Scholar Association (MSA). These developments were likely the unintended consequence of Maliki's actions, and have increased tensions and resulted in significant challenges for the Iraqi Security Forces ahead of the elections.[71]

These events have also increased rhetorical tensions between the Iraqi Sunnis and the Iraqi Shi'a, Maliki's SLA and Mutahidun in particular. In January 2014, senior SLA figure, Maliki ally, and member of the CoR Yassin Majid accused Mutahidun of coordinating with ISIS in Anbar. Mutahidun member Ahmed al-Masari retorted that "Maliki's forces brought ISIS to Anbar in order to provide a pretext to attack the city."[72] This verbal sparring will likely increase the popularity of both the SLA and Mutahidun with their constituencies, but lead to less cooperation and further sectarian tensions on the streets, as political statements and posturing have an impact on the Iraqi public.

For ISIS, the pre-election period allowed it to target the elections and elections infrastructure. The organization opposes holding the elections, deeming it to be un-Islamic, and has violently targeted past elections. On March 20, 2014 a distribution center of electronic voting cards was targeted in western Mosul and three soldiers were killed along with an IHEC employee.[73] Attacks have also been directed against candidates, as a Mutahidun candidate in Mosul, Wathiq al-Ghathanfari, was killed in a drive-by shooting on March 27.[74] These tactics will have an impact on the elections as the ISF lose control of territory to ISIS. Most of those areas are predominantly Iraqi Sunnis and voters there may be denied the opportunity to vote as a result of ISIS intimidation. This dynamic can lead to further disenfranchisement caused by ISIS but will have consequences on the future sectarian relations in the country.

Pre-Elections Heated Rhetoric and Iraq's Intra-Group Challenges

The pre-elections period has also sharpened ethno-sectarian tensions. Part of this dynamic pertains to the relations between the Iraqi Kurds and Iraqi Arabs. Iraqi Kurdistan, in the form of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), has been seeking to establish an independent economic stream of revenue through an oil pipeline to Turkey. The flow in this pipeline started in December 2013.[75] The federal government in Baghdad, which asserts that exporting oil is the sole purview of the federal government, has rejected these steps.[76]

Baghdad attempted to pressure Iraqi Kurdistan by delaying the salaries of KRG employees for the month of February 2014, which led Iraqi Kurdistan president Masoud Barzani to describe the delays as "a declaration of war against the citizens of the Kurdistan Region."[77] Maliki denied the delay, countering that spending its portion of the funds it receives from the federal government is the KRG's responsibility.[78] The dispute was seemingly resolved after possible U.S. government mediation on March 21, 2014 with an agreement that permits the export of 100,000 barrels of oil per day with the revenue to be deposited with the federal government.[79] This temporary agreement may have resolved the issue, but will prime the political parties involved to posture as extra-nationalist before the elections.

Intra-Iraqi Shi'a and intra-Iraqi Sunni tensions have risen as well. Prime Minister Maliki has targeted the Sadrist Trend as his main Iraqi Shi'a competitor, criticizing the political leadership capabilities of the Trend's leader Moqtada al-Sadr. These statements led to anti-Maliki Sadrist protests and violence against Maliki's political infrastructure.[80] It is in the interest of both Maliki and the Sadrists to raise tensions – Maliki wants to project an image of an anti-militia figure, while the Sadrists want to show their popular support and "street power."

Fragmentation among Iraqi Sunni groups is also apparent before the elections. Prominent leaders in Anbar, such as

tribal leader Ahmed Abu Risha and Anbar's governor Ahmed al-Dulaimi, sided with Prime Minister Maliki in the aftermath of the Anbar crisis, creating a fissures within the Iraqi Sunni political leadership as Speaker of the CoR Nujaifi continues to cement his position as the most prominent political leader of the Iraqi Sunni community.[81]

THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2013 PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS ON THE 2014 ELECTIONS

Iraq's 2013 provincial elections served as a barometer for the 2014 national elections. The results revealed four trends that likely influence the 2014 electoral strategies of the various stakeholders. First, clear fronts emerged, including an anti-Maliki front, a pro-Maliki front, and a consolidated Nujaifi-Iraqi Kurdish Alliance. Second, political alliances in Anbar province disbanded. Third, Diyala and Baghdad witnessed unique cases of cross-sectarian government-formation. Fourth, smaller political groups played a significant role in government formation. These trends provide a useful starting point for a discussion of the political climate in Iraq before elections, as political groups prepared for the campaign season ahead.

The 2013 provincial elections demonstrated a path to forming an anti-Maliki front that can be replicated after the 2014 elections. They also showed that election results play a major factor in forming an anti-Maliki front, a lesson they did not derive in the 2010 national elections in which the winning coalition did not get to form a government. The interests of Maliki's Iraqi Shi'a opponents, ISCI and the Sadrists, lie in continuing the provincial alliances on the national level and challenging Maliki for the Prime Minister position. Their ability to succeed will be shaped by the elections results and also by their abilities to reach out to the Iraqi Sunnis and the Iraqi Kurds.

The Anti-Maliki Front

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki's electoral success and subsequent consolidation of power resulted from his strong showing in the 2009 provincial elections. Maliki's State of Law Alliance (SLA) was able to achieve dominance in Baghdad and Iraq's central and southern provinces.[82] These results had marginalized the Sadrist Trend and ISCI. The scenario was reversed in the 2013 provincial elections. These two groups took the opportunity after the 2013 elections to secure provincial gains and local positions with an eye towards the 2014 elections. ISCI and the Sadrists set aside their historical rivalries in 2013 in order to challenge Maliki and weaken him on the provincial level. This anti-Maliki strategy required outreach to non-Iraqi Shi'a groups in order to gain power and sideline Maliki's SLA.

ISCI and Sadrist provincial government coalitions emerged in three provinces, namely Basra, Baghdad, and Wasit. In Basra, the Sadrists and ISCI together were able to form an alliance named "Basra First" that garnered 19 seats out of province's 35 and thus was positioned to form the local government.[83] Basra's governorship was given to ISCI's Majed al-Nasrawi, a physician who is also a long-time ISCI member and the head of the group in Basra.[84] The Sadrists, on the other hand, secured the position of first deputy governor. The character of "Basra First" was decidedly anti-Maliki. Despite their electoral success, "Basra First" failed to secure an overwhelming majority in the council or the overwhelming popular mandate. Consequently, ISCI and the Sadrists had to include the SLA's incumbent governor, Khalaf Abed al-Samad, as head of the provincial council, likely because of his high popularity (he garnered 130,000 votes).[85] The exclusion of Samad by ISCI and the Sadrists would have been a risky political move, and thus his inclusion shows the parties' willingness to compromise in order to have tenable success.

The success of ISCI and the Sadrists in outmaneuvering the SLA in Basra is notable given Basra's significance for Maliki since 2009. Maliki's fortunes began to rise after he launched the "Charge of the Knights Operation" in Basra in 2008, targeting Moqtada al-Sadr's Mahdi Army. Charge of the Knights rewarded Maliki as voters in Basra voted for the SLA, allowing it to garner 21 seats in the 2009 elections.[86] Maliki's reversal of fortunes in Basra in the 2013 provincial elections indicates that the appeal of Charge of the Knights is not dominant any longer for Basra voter choice.

In Baghdad, the effort to sideline Maliki and the SLA was even clearer. The SLA had enjoyed an overwhelming majority in the council after the 2009 elections, winning 31 seats out of 57. In 2013, this share dropped to only 20 seats, placing it at a significant disadvantage. The SLA's main competitors, ISCI and the Sadrists, were in a better position; both groups secured 17 seats and put together a coalition named "The Coalition for Baghdad."[87] In order to undercut the SLA, the coalition was broadened to include the Iraqi Sunni group Mutahidun and Ayad Allawi's Unified National Iraqi Alliance (UNIA). This coalition was eventually able to form a government that sidelined the SLA; it appointed Sadrist member of the Council of Representatives Ali al-Tamimi as governor and Mutahidun member Riyadh al-Adhadh as chairman of the provincial council.[88] Meanwhile, ISCI was

awarded the positions of deputy governor and Baghdad *Amin* (essentially the Baghdad mayor).

In Wasit, ISCI and the Sadrists formed what became known as the "Wasit First" coalition against Maliki.[89] Wasit First was able to form the government by allocating the governorship to ISCI member Mahmoud Abed al-Ridha Talal and the chairmanship of the council to Sadrist member Mazin Kandouh.[90] This emerging Sadrist-ISCI alliance will be highly important headed into the national elections as the primary challengers among the Iraqi Shi'a to Maliki's continued governance. Separately, neither party has sufficient votes to challenge the SLA.

While the attempt to minimize Maliki's influence characterizes the power balance in these three provinces, there are differences in the leadership of the anti-Maliki forces. In Basra, ISCI drove the anti-Maliki movement as it won more seats than the Sadrists. As a result, ISCI gained the governorship. Their victory did not, however, provide them a sufficient mandate to exclude a popular incumbent; Samad's electoral performance made it necessary for ISCI and the Sadrists to include him. Conversely, in Baghdad, the Sadrists gained more seats and led the anti-Maliki front while forming the government. Here too, electoral realities forced the Sadrist-ISCI coalition to broaden itself by including Mutahidun. This can be seen as an indicator that opposition to Maliki was strong enough to justify a cross-sectarian political alliance.[91] Also notable in the formation of these councils is that figures close to Maliki, such as Deputy Prime Minister Saleh al-Mutlaq and his group Arab Iraqiyya (in 2014, this group is competing as Arabiyya), decided to join the anti-Maliki front. This dynamic is an indicator of future political alliances after the 2014 elections, which may include ISCI, Sadrists, and Iraqiyya.

Overall, one remarkable outcome from these provincial government formations in 2013 is the success attained by ISCI. The group was marginalized after a poor showing in the 2009 provincial elections and 2010 national parliamentary elections. Its recent electoral performance and post-elections maneuvering, however, now place it in an advantageous position. ISCI will make a stronger contender as the 2014 national elections approach.

The Pro-Maliki Front

The setbacks suffered by Maliki's SLA in the provinces mentioned above were offset by success in other provinces. In Karbala, the SLA was able in June 2013 to put together a government headed by former ministry of interior inspector general Aqil al-Turaihi as governor and Nasyef al-Khitabi as chairman of the council. The election of these two pro-Maliki figures came after the SLA, along with other groups, was able to form the "Karbala Coalition" that retained 17 seats.[92] The Karbala Coalition excluded ISCI and the Sadrists from the government, clearly in an effort to retaliate against both groups for their efforts in forming the governments in Basra and Baghdad. The SLA evidently considered success in Karbala to be of paramount significance, and the group dispatched one of its senior leaders and Deputy Prime Minister, Hussein Shahristani, to mediate the formation of the government.[93] Unlike in Baghdad and Basra, ISCI, Sadrists, and the previously incumbent Hope of Rafidayn list were excluded from the Karbala government.

In Najaf, Maliki's SLA was also able to form the government along with the Loyalty to Najaf list. Incumbent governor Adnan al-Zorfi was reelected and Khudair al-Juburi was elected as head of the council. Many smaller groups, such as the Just State Trend, gained ground as a result of the new seat-allocation system that favored them. Some of these smaller groups appear independent, but are typically affiliated with larger political entities. The Just State Trend, for example, appears close to the SLA.[94]

The SLA was doubly successful in Dhi Qar. It was able to win the highest number of seats among the Iraqi Shi'a political groups and also form the government. Its alliance with smaller local groups produced the "Sons of Dhi Qar Alliance."[95] The SLA coalesced with the independent but pro-Maliki group Tathamon, allowing Tathamon to occupy the governorship while the SLA's National Reform Trend was able to secure the chairmanship of the council.[96] Dhi Qar's governor is Yahiya al-Nasri, who is the son of local Ayatollah and SLA supporter Mohammed Baqir al-Nasri.[97] .

The partnership between the National Reform Trend and Tathamon, although still under the auspices of the SLA, is pragmatic. The coalition could fall apart if both groups developed a sense that their partnership with Maliki is dispensable. This calculation will become particularly important after the 2014 national elections, depending on the results gained by the SLA.

Very importantly, the SLA's Dhi Qar success depended on peeling off members from ISCI and the Sadrists. Sadrist member of the provincial council Hassan Laweis split from his group, while Nasser Turki from ISCI also split. Laweis was subsequently fired by the Sadrist Trend.[98] In exchange, both of them were rewarded with senior positions in the local government. The independent action by these two members is stark demonstration of the difference between plans set by national leaders and decisions made by local politicians that are often driven by personal

ambition. It is likely that personal ambition will again play a pivotal role in the 2014 elections, as single votes will play an important role in deciding senior positions.

Despite the SLA's success in forming the government in Dhi Qar, ISCI and the Sadrists still attempted to form a government, bringing together the "Unified Dhi Qar Coalition" as a countervailing force to the SLA.[99] The Unified Dhi Qar Coalition boycotted the council's sessions to protest the SLA's occupation of the senior positions within the council and only returned to the council in September of 2013 to engage in talks about divvying up other positions.[100]

The pro-Maliki front also appeared in Babil, as the SLA was able to form the government with the appointment of its member, Sadiq al-Sultani, as governor. Sultani is not a member of Maliki's Da'wa party but rather is from a branch of Da'wa called the Da'wa-Iraq Organization. The significance of smaller groups was again on display as Raad al-Juburi from the Independent Competencies Gathering was appointed chairman of the provincial council.[101] ISCI and the Sadrists were excluded by the SLA. Because Sultani and Juburi are aligned with Maliki but not directly members of his party, they could reallocate their support after the 2014 elections in ways that would weaken Maliki. For example, Juburi's group is now competing along with ISCI and as a result could shift its allegiance after the elections. The results of the 2014 elections will determine these very pragmatic calculations.

The Consolidation of the Nujaifi and Iraqi Kurdish Alliance

When Osama al-Nujaifi became the Speaker of the Council of Representatives in 2010, he became a major political player. Nujaifi cemented his leadership as he and his brother, Atheel al-Nujaifi, the governor of the predominantly Iraqi Sunni province of Ninewa, reached out to the Iraqi Kurds. The Nujaifis ran in the provincial elections under the new Mutahidun alliance.[102] It was clear from the results, however, that Nujaifi would need to expand his coalition and rely on the Iraqi Kurds for support to retain his position.[103] In order to avoid the appearance of complete reliance on the Iraqi Kurds and thus the appearance of relative weakness, Nujaifi formed a coalition with smaller local political groups named al-Nahda [the Renaissance].[104] Al-Nahda had 14 seats and its formation allowed Nujaifi to be on an equal footing with the Iraqi Kurds in the alliance. Subsequently, Nujaifi was re-elected and Bashar Hamid from the Iraqi Kurdish Brotherhood and Coexistence List became the chairman of the council.[105]

This new power configuration, in which the Nujaifis and Kurds cooperate, reversed the situation that had followed the 2009 provincial elections, when the Nujaifis came into office on a purely anti-Iraqi Kurdish platform. The decision in 2009 to form the government then without Iraqi Kurdish participation divided Ninewa into two administrative units. Iraqi Kurds even forbade governor Nujaifi from visiting some districts in the province that they had control over.[106] By 2013, relations between the Nujaifis and the Iraqi Kurds have changed, primarily motivated by the desire to limit the influence of the federal government in Baghdad.

Political cooperation between these groups is possible in the face of potential federal government attempts to control the oil fields in the province, particularly the fields that fall in Disputed Internal Boundaries (DIBs). The Nujaifi-Iraqi Kurdish alliance will be crucial to watch after the 2014 elections. Separately, each group will seek to maximize its gains. If they coordinate positions together, they can function as kingmakers.

Iraqi Shi'a Political Outreach to Iraqi Sunnis

In addition to cementing the Nujaifi-Iraqi Kurdish Alliance and easing ethnic tensions, the 2013 provincial elections also offered the possibility of cross-sectarian cooperation. For example, ISCI lent its one seat in Ninewa to help Nujaifi's bid to be re-elected.[107] However, government-formation in Baghdad and Diyala is more relevant for discerning possibilities of cross-sectarian alliances after national elections.[108]

In both Baghdad and Diyala, the Sadrists decided to test the possibility of an alliance with the Iraqi Sunnis and endure the ramifications. The Sadrist outreach in Baghdad was less controversial for their base since it was part of an anti-Maliki effort that included other Iraqi Shi'a groups, including ISCI. Although gaining power in Baghdad's local government is significant and can provide position-holders with a patronage network to dispense and win support, Baghdad remains the seat of the federal government and this fact allows Maliki more control over the security and services affairs of the province no matter who controls the local government. Maliki's influence in the capital mitigated the real impact of the Sadrists within the Baghdad government.

Diyala, on the other hand, is more significant given its mixed ethno-sectarian composition and its importance for both Iraqi Shi'a militias and the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), formerly known as al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI).[109] A Sadrist received the chairmanship of the Diyala provincial council while Mutahidun kept the governorship. The Sadrist Trend generated political backlash against itself, including street

protests, when it alone among Iraqi Shi'a groups formed the government with Mutahidun and other Iraqi Sunni groups. Even ISCI criticized its behavior.[110]

The Sadrist alliance with Mutahidun in Diyala must be viewed within the framework of early courting of Iraqi Sunnis for the 2014 elections. Sadrist Trend leader, Moqtada al-Sadr, has been conciliatory towards the Iraqi Sunnis because their support is an essential pillar for his bid to secure the Prime Minister position for his group after the elections. The Sadrist decision to align with Mutahidun in Diyala is also a savvy political tactic that allows the party to secure provincial gains at the expense of other Iraqi Shi's groups. Cross-sectarian political outreach offers another advantage to Sadr: Sadr's posture makes him appear to be a better alternative to Sadrists' militia rival, Asai'b ahl al-Haq, which has taken a more divisive sectarian approach with the Iraqi Sunnis.

Sadr's vigorous and unique outreach will not go unchallenged by Sunni or Shi'a rivals. The Sadrist Mahdi Army, rebranded into the Promised Day Brigade in 2008, was a major player in the sectarian cleansing in Baghdad and Diyala during Iraq's civil war of 2006-2007. Iraqi Sunni political leaders are likely to calculate that their constituents have not forgiven Sadrists for their complicity. Maliki is capitalizing on those memories in 2014 by reminding the population of the Mahdi Army's role in 2006. Furthermore, the Mahdi Army has been active in both Baghdad and Diyala, including organizing a parade in Diyala's epicenter of sectarian conflict, Muqdadiyah, in November 2013.[111]

There are also further reports that the Mahdi Army is targeting Iraqi Sunnis in Baghdad. Sadr has attempted to contain the situation by announcing that he has disbanded the Mahdi Army in Diyala.[112] These developments will complicate Sadr's effort to establish a cross-sectarian coalition. For Sadr to succeed, he will have to ensure absolute discipline of the Mahdi Army, a degree of control that he has rarely exercised. This task will become more complicated as ISIS continues to target Iraqi Shi'a civilians in order to elicit an Iraqi Shi'a military response.

The Sadrist-Mutahidun alliance in Diyala was, however, short-lived. In January 2014, the Diyala Council voted to reseat the government after 3 Iraqi Sunni members of Iraqiyyat Diyala split from their group and joined the Badr Organization in forming the local government. As a result, former Iraqiyyat Diyala member, Amer al-Majmai, became governor and Muthana al-Tamimi of Badr became chairman of the council. The three members were officially expelled after continuous legal challenges from Iraqi Shi'a groups. The new arrangement still represents a continuous cooperation between the Iraqi Sunnis and the Iraqi Shi'a. However, it was meant to target the Sadrists and Mutahidun by Maliki's ally, the Badr Organization.[113]

Empowered Provincial Councils and Maliki's Response

The provincial councils received a considerable boost after the conclusion of the 2013 elections. In June 2013, the Council of Representatives (CoR) amended the Provincial Powers Law, granting more power to the provinces.[114] The law gives provincial authorities expanded powers vis-à-vis the federal government in issues related to security, administrative affairs, finances, and, importantly, the energy sector.

Ninewa's provincial council was the first to utilize the law in the energy sector. In September 2013, the council authorized Governor Nujaifi to negotiate and sign contracts with oil companies for oil fields in the province.[115] This step is consistent with the ambitions of Nujaifi and the Iraqi Kurds to chart independent policies for the oil-producing provinces. It is a clear challenge to Maliki's power and consistent plan to be in control of the oil industry. No contract had been signed by mid-April 2014, and no other province has followed suit and similarly authorized its governor. It will be extremely challenging for the federal government if Basra – Iraq's largest oil producing province – decided to pursue an independent energy policy. The federal government announced shortly after the authorization of Nujaifi that Baghdad is the only party responsible for oil policy and production. It further described the authorization as "unconstitutional."[116] This description of the law is more rhetorical since the newly-amended provincial law does allow provinces to sign these deals.

The newly-inaugurated councils have also used the provincial powers law to challenge Maliki's authority to select police chiefs in the provinces. Traditionally, police chiefs have been hand-picked by Maliki based on their loyalty. Provincial councils sought to upset that status quo by attempting to replace those figures. In Basra, the council voted to dismiss General Faisal al-Abadi in September 2013.[117] There have been similar attempts to remove Baghdad's police chief and close Maliki ally General Ali Daham, and Wasit's provincial police chief. Sadrists in Maysan have also called for the removal of the police chief there.[118] All of these provincial councils are dominated by groups aligned against Maliki and their actions are part of an effort to curtail Maliki's provincial influence. Importantly, none of these attempts has yet succeeded because the federal government has intervened.

Maliki and his allies have contested the legality of the councils and the newly-amended law by leveraging his influence on

the judiciary to overturn the law and to re-compose the councils. The amended Provincial Powers Law is currently being reviewed by the Federal Supreme Court, and figures from the SLA express confidence that it will be overturned.[119] Moreover, the Supreme Court decided that some members of the councils must be replaced for failing to meet the quota of female representation. There have been reports that the Baghdad Provincial Council would require a revote due to a flaw in the mechanism of electing officials in the first session.[120] The change in Baghdad did not take place, but as illustrated earlier, the Diyala government was finally dissolved by a court's order for the apparent lack of quorum in the session that resulted in the appointment of the government.[121] The mitigation of 2013 provincial election results has likely exacerbated frustration with Maliki among many Iraqi constituents, set against the backdrop of worsening security.

The Anti-government Protest Movement after the Provincial Elections

Another significant element of Sunni provincial politics involves the anti-government protest movement that began in December 2012. The anti-government protests acted as a vehicle for Iraqi Sunni political leaders to rally their base and shape their messages for the provincial elections campaign. This was particularly the case in Ninewa and Anbar province, where the Nujaifi brothers have the strongest base of support. The Nujaifis' growing electoral momentum in these two provinces likely drove at least in part the postponement of provincial elections in these provinces from April 20 to June 20, 2013.[122]

The delay interrupted the momentum of the protest leaders, and Iraqi Sunni political groups fractured during the elections. In Ninewa, the Nujaifis could not repeat their performance from the 2009 elections. Their chances were likely hurt due to their improved ties with the Iraqi Kurds as well as the loss of key allies such as prominent tribal leader Abdullah al-Yawer. Meanwhile, allies of Maliki performed well in both Anbar and Ninewa. However, supporters of the protest movement were able to form the governments in both Ninewa and Anbar.[123] Political deal-making, as well as the significant popularity of the protest movement, helped these protest-supporters outmaneuver their rivals.

The Participation of the Iraqi Sunnis in the 2013 Provincial Elections

The 2013 provincial elections were an important barometer for the political direction of the Iraqi Sunni electorate. In Iraq's first provincial elections in 2005, the Iraqi Sunnis boycotted the process, believing that the system was stacked against them. Subsequent years witnessed a rise in insurgent activities in majority-Iraqi Sunni provinces including Ninewa and Anbar. Sunnis voted in large numbers in the 2009 provincial elections.

In Ninewa, the political center of the Iraqi Sunnis since 2009, voter turnout in 2013 was 38% – considerably lower than the 60% achieved in 2009. Meanwhile, the 50% turnout in Anbar was an improvement over the 2009 elections turnout of 40%.[124] This decline may have been a function of local disenchantment with politicians and the chronic underperformance of local officials. Nonetheless, the lowered turnout took place as the province started to experience increased level of armed activities by both the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the Ba'athist organization Jaysh Rijal al-Tariqah al-Naqshabandia (JRTN).

The increase in violence culminated with the resurgence of ISIS in areas south of Ninewa and armed group's capabilities to control areas in Ninewa's most populous city, Mosul.[125] Both groups have expressed opposition to elections in the past. ISIS issued a statement three days before the 2013 elections urging Iraqi Sunnis to boycott the elections. The statement discounted the elections as a mechanism to achieve goals and dismissed them as anti-religious. It further addressed the Iraqi Sunnis by telling them, "you have tried the electoral process before and got to know the politicians who sold you for a cheap price."[126] Finally, ISIS' statement included a threat to anyone working with the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), the body which manages Iraq's elections. Given IHEC's critical role, ISIS's message was intended as a threat to the structural foundation of elections in Iraq.

Iraqi Sunni political figures, in turn, encouraged participation in the elections and the protest movement. In Anbar, Fallujah preacher Ahmed al-Alwani stated on June 14, 2013 that boycotting the elections would result in the "ascendance of personalities that do not deserve a position in the province's council." Samarra Friday preacher and influential figure Mohammed Taha al-Hamdoun also urged residents of Ninewa and Anbar to elect candidates who can serve the people.[127]

These conflicting statements by ISIS and Iraqi Sunni figures are emblematic of the choice facing the Iraqi Sunni community as it heads towards the 2014 elections. Political leaders have clearly learned the lessons from the 2005 boycott that denied the Iraqi Sunni community the chance to have any power. Their support of electoral participation is representative of their view that politics is still a viable option. On the other hand, ISIS seeks to convince Iraqi

Sunnis that elections will be fruitless and prefers to push them towards carrying arms and targeting the state.

In the lead-up to the 2014 elections there are early indications that a higher turnout in Ninewa may again be difficult to achieve. On November 24, 2013, Ninewa governor Atheel al-Nujaifi voiced concern that not many Iraqi Sunnis in Ninewa have updated their voter registry for the 2014 elections as required by law. Nujaifi added that only about 3-4 % of eligible voters have updated their records compared to 20% among the Iraqi Kurds and other non-Arab groups in the province. In Anbar, IHEC's office also expressed concern on December 4, 2013 by stating that out of 900,000 eligible voters only 30,000 had updated their records.[128]

To be sure, voter record updates are generally depressed in other parts of the country as well. According to electoral monitoring organization Shamas, only 4 million voters out of 21 million eligible voters updated their records. Shamas' December report linked this to voter dissatisfaction with the electoral process and government performance.[129] This discontent is present across the spectrum of Iraqis, although with different focuses. For the Iraqi Shi'a, the discontent is with the government's performance and the prevalent corruption. Meanwhile Iraqi Sunnis have more existential concerns about their viability as a process to pursue demands and grievances through political means.

THE ROLE OF IHEC IN 2014 AND THE SMART VOTING CARD

IHEC will have to contend with the new challenge of using the electronic voting card in 2014. The cards are being introduced for the first time in elections, and the process of distributing has been marred with disorganization and logistical challenges. The introduction of the card has also raised questions about the electoral process and possible fraud in elections. The distribution process has been slow, and as a result IHEC has decided to extend the distribution process until April 27, 2014, only ten days before the elections.[130]

The "smart cards" have also faced allegations of fraud, including reports that political parties have been buying the cards in order to gain fraudulent votes. Card-buying is familiar in other countries that use this system, such as Jordan. However, it is unlikely that wide fraud can happen due to the abuse of cards. The presence of political party representatives and use of indelible ink by voters after voting will make it difficult to manipulate the cards. IHEC still has a ways to go in educating the public and raising awareness about the usage of the cards given voter unfamiliarity with the role they now play.

THE VULNERABILITY OF THE ELECTIONS LAW

The elections law for the 2014 elections discussed above represents a vulnerability to the electoral process. The law was passed in November 2013 after a long process, although it was less tense than prior elections law discussions. The relative ease of passing the law was the result of the major groups largely getting what they wanted. Moreover, the contentious issue of Kirkuk was not as hotly debated as it had been in previous elections. All in all, passage of the elections law presented a new and more conciliatory dynamic to the political process.

Nevertheless, the law is vulnerable due to the mechanism by which the law was introduced. The law was proposed by the CoR without going through the Council of Ministers as required of new laws. As part of his efforts to consolidate power, Prime Minister Maliki was able to get a Supreme Court ruling that deprived the CoR of its legislative power in 2011 – all new laws must be proposed by the Council of Ministers first. This quirk makes it possible that a likely successful appeal of the law could be used to nullify the results after the fact.[131]

To avoid an appeal scenario, Vice President and Maliki ally, Khudhair al-Khuzaie, issued a statement after the law was passed stating that the law cannot be appealed, basing that statement on a 1951 law that allows the presidency flexibility in granting laws.[132] Given that Khuzaie is a Maliki ally, it is likely that Maliki would not like to challenge the elections law prior to the elections. However, Khuzaie's statement is not legally air tight. Maliki or other parties may choose to appeal the law after the elections, particularly if the results are not in their favor. In a post-elections appeal scenario, Maliki stands to gain an advantage given his influence over the Federal Supreme Court, which will arbitrate the issue. The prospect of nullifying the results of elections would be highly disruptive, especially given the current violence.

THE POST - ELECTIONS ENVIRONMENT AND DESTABILIZATION

Pre-election tensions are not a novelty in Iraqi politics. Nonetheless, in the 2014 elections the tensions and destabilization are accompanied by a resurgent ISIS, mobilized militias, and a tense regional atmosphere that is directly affecting Iraq. Although these tensions are to a certain extent inevitable, and post-elections tensions are also likely, they must be minimized in order to avoid destabilizing effects.

The first possible destabilizing factor is the conduct of voting on elections day. Previous elections days have been largely

free and fair, and major fraud did not affect the direction of the voting or the results. Free and fair voting on elections day will be important to deny impetus for violence and tensions based on procedural issues. The Iraqi government, along with independent elections monitors, will play a major role in preventing irregularities on election day that would render the results unacceptable to major parties.

The second destabilizing factor will be the potential rejection of results by competing parties. The acceptance of the results will be a necessary step for incumbents and challengers. In the 2010 elections, Maliki and the SLA initially rejected the results and demanded a nationwide vote recount – this request was denied and ultimately limited to include only Baghdad. Other political groups also called for a recount but Maliki and the SLA's demand was unusual for their status as incumbents.[133] The Baghdad recount was further disputed by the SLA and, although it did not dramatically change the seat count, it was a signal from Maliki and the SLA that they intend to use all available means to challenge unfavorable results.[134] During the recount, U.S. forces had to secure the IHEC headquarter in order to prevent any possible manipulation of the vote by the Iraqi Security Forces.[135]

U.S. forces acted as honest brokers then, but there are no similar actors during these elections. If such a scenario should repeat itself, the likelihood of destabilization would be higher. The acceptance of the results will be particularly important for the Iraqi Sunnis in the aftermath of the elections. The rejection of the results and any narrative of marginalization by the Iraqi Sunnis will fuel the violence and validate ISIS's message that politics are not a viable method for the Iraqi Sunnis to politically co-exist with the Iraqi Shi'a.

The third possible destabilizing factor is a boycott by the population or lower turnout rates in the elections. It is very likely that the Iraqi Kurds will turn out in large number in the elections and so will the Iraqi Shi'a. The boycott and lower turnout challenge will concern the Iraqi Sunni community that is contending with rising security threats from ISIS. According to a pre-elections poll conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) released in April 2014, 56% of Iraqis in Western Iraq – which is predominantly Iraqi Sunni – indicated that they are unlikely to vote in the elections. In the same poll, 58% in the west indicated that they "question elections' fairness." Another worrisome result from the NDI poll is that 34% of Iraqi Sunni indicated that they will only support the elections results if the groups they backed "win."[136]

These figures confirm the voting trends from the 2013 provincial elections during which Iraq's Sunnis participated in the elections at lower numbers compared to the 2009 provincial elections. In Ninewa, the turnout percentage in 2009 was 38%, 22 points less than the 60% that registered for the 2009 elections.[137] This percentage was achieved even in a more stable security environment compared to spring 2014. It was, therefore, largely due to voter disaffection with the political process. With the 2014 elections, armed groups including ISIS and JRTN are active in Ninewa and are able to spread influence and control terrain.[138] Therefore, they will be able to more effectively disrupt the electoral process and intimidate voters. In Anbar, deputy provincial council chairman Faleh al-Issawi stated on March 24 that he informed IHEC that elections cannot be held in 40% of the province due to the fact that "gunmen control" those parts.[139] These conditions will create an automatic boycott of the elections and can damage the legitimacy of the electoral process in the eyes of the Iraqi Sunnis.

CONCLUSION

Iraq's 2014 national elections will face challenges in producing an inclusive and representative government in Iraq. Iraqi Shi'a militia groups are active south of Baghdad and in Diyala, and are likely to use voter intimidation to favor the political parties these militias represent. Fallujah is largely emptied of its population and some polling stations in Anbar will not open. Internally displaced persons from Anbar have generally not received voter cards to participate from their remote locations. Iraqi Sunni and Shi'a rivals to Maliki have been disqualified from running for election, and Iraq's Supreme Court continues to pursue judgments that favor Maliki. ISIS is actively intimidating voters throughout northern and central Iraq, seeking to have them boycott the elections through fear. These poor security conditions and strong-handed policies of Maliki have the potential to delegitimize the elections and create further disenfranchisement especially among the Sunni population. Furthermore, these conditions could cause the public to lose faith in the political process, which, despite its flaws, has been providing an avenue for Iraqis to seek change and express their opinions.

Holding the elections despite the threats is important because security is not likely to improve. The ISF is not able to contain the increasing violence. Baghdad, the capital, is under a growing threat of ISIS and Iraqi insurgent groups that are seeking to undermine the political process. Delaying the elections would also exacerbate communal tensions and undermine the political process further. But Washington

must not allow the simple fact that elections have been held to obscure the real challenges to a democratic, representative government in Iraq.

The conduct of elections on April 30, 2014 will have to be free and fair in order to re-inject legitimacy into the political process and allow wider participation. Maliki should refrain from pressuring the members of the Iraqi Security Forces to vote for the SLA. Additionally, conditions have to be set to remedy any malfunctions associated with the usage of electronic voting cards. But a good election day will not make up for some of the conditions that have been set before election day to skew the outcome. Maliki's role after the elections will be crucial in determining Iraq's future. His governance style over the last eight years has achieved mixed results. Economically, there has been positive development as the country's oil revenue increased. However, Maliki's policies currently leave Iraq facing a monumental crisis. He has rendered the CoR powerless, influenced the judiciary, and his control of the ISF and security apparatus has led to destabilization. He has targeted opponents beyond Iraqi Sunni political figures. His desire to ensure political survival has led him to consistently weaken his Iraqi Shi'a opponents and any other critics as well. The judiciary has overturned attempts to impose term limits on him. Overall, Maliki's centralizing power-consolidation tendencies have stunted the development of Iraq's political institutions. He and his relatives are running in the elections to secure their interests. This desire stems from political ambition, but Maliki's continuation in office will cause further deterioration of the political system and damage prospects of national reconciliation.

When the results are announced, Maliki's opponents will be in the position to challenge him. Maliki, in response, will seek to divide, pressure, and coerce them into political outcomes favorable to him. This strategy may include deploying the Iranian-backed militias of AAH and Badr to intimidate Iraqi Shi'a opponents. If this happens, possibilities of violence will be high and voter marginalization and disenfranchisement will include the Iraqi Shi'a.

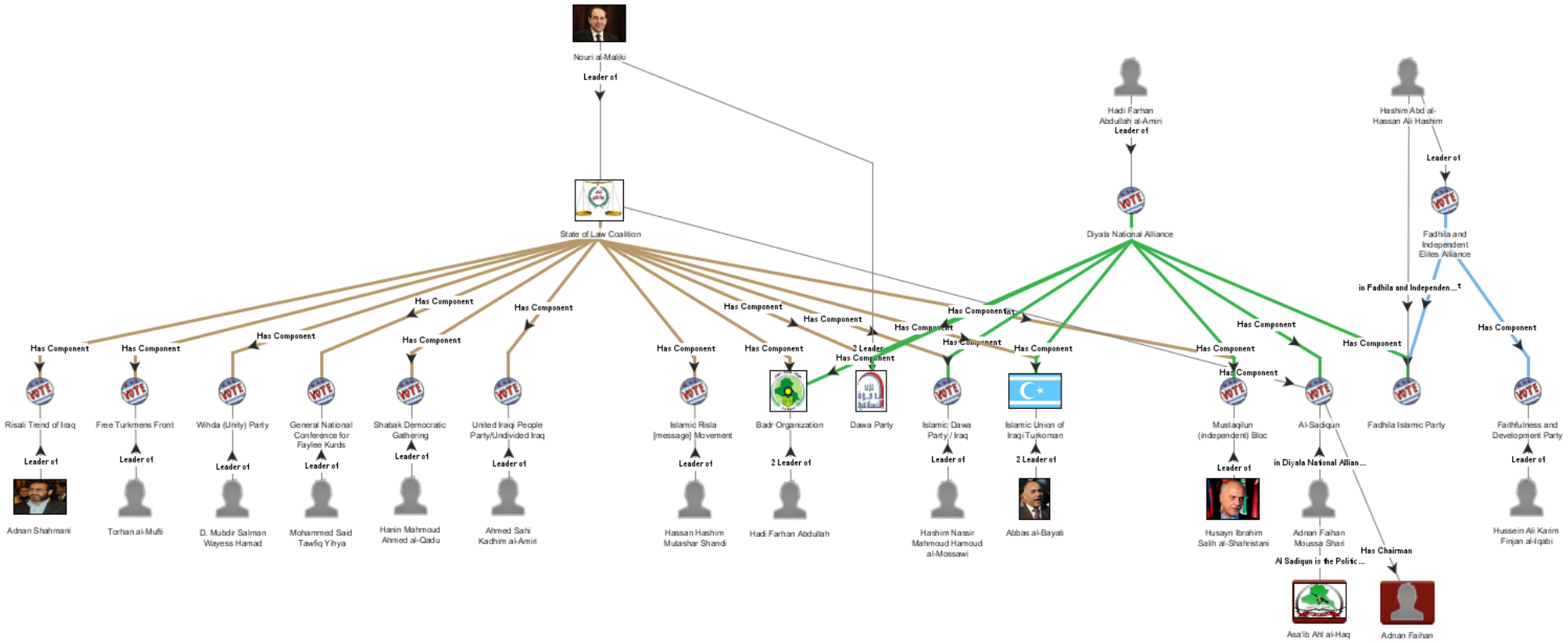
Government formation will likely take a long time. It took ten months to form the government in 2010 and this scenario will likely be repeated. The results will determine who carries the momentum headed into government formation. Maliki will utilize all tools available to him to prolong the period of government formation. Maliki's opponents are likely to make pragmatic deals that favor them, even if it means a continuation of the Prime Minister's term in office. They may seek, however, to restrict his powers and ensure he fulfills his promises.

The Iraqi Sunni have the most to lose in this election. Disqualified candidates who were targeted politically, like Rafia al-Issawi, will have to be reintegrated into the political system. Otherwise, their exclusion will be a recipe for continued security and political deterioration.

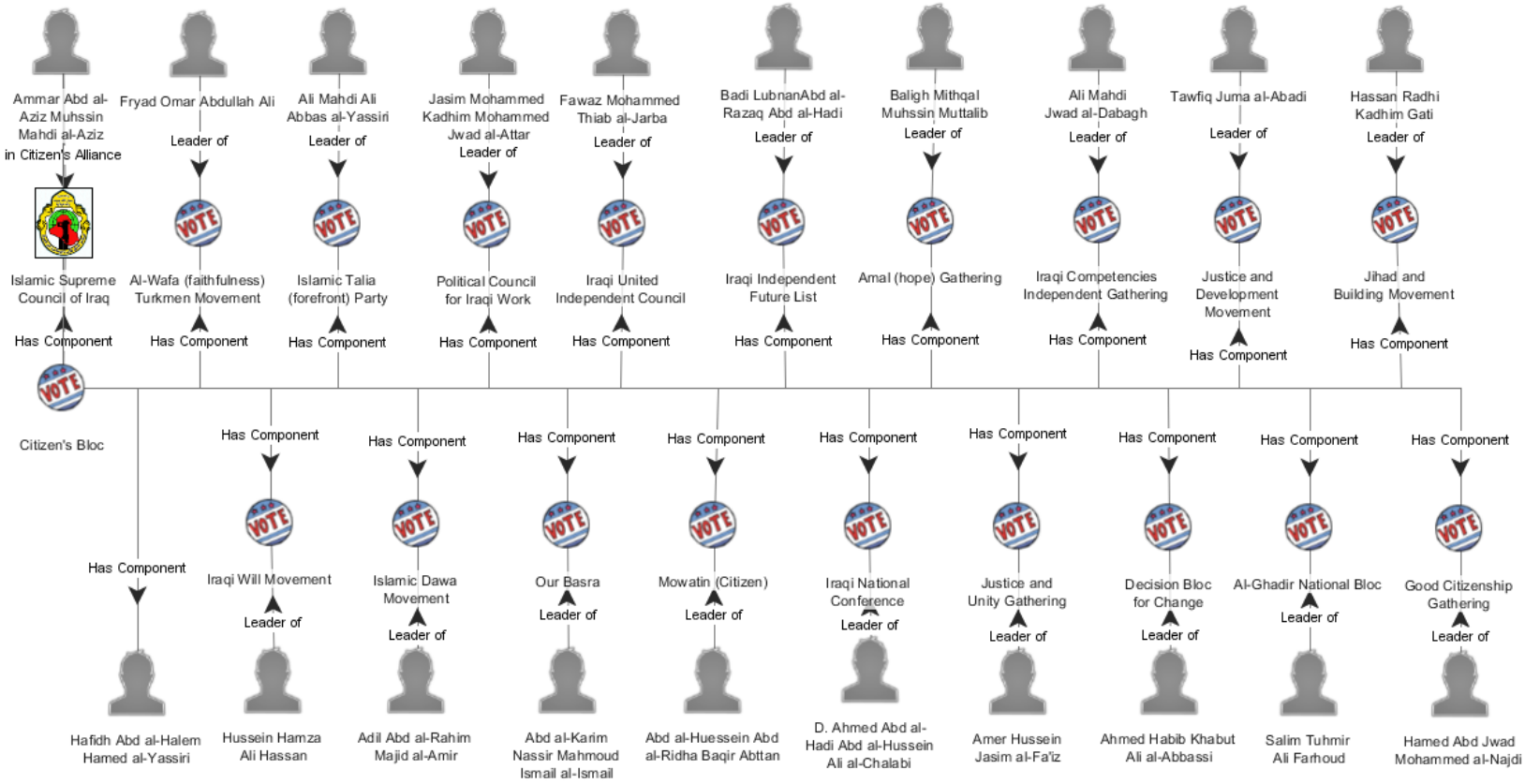
The United States government can be an important actor in these elections. Washington should be prepared to condemn any electoral fraud on elections day. The U.S. Embassy in Baghdad should participate in monitoring the voting, take claims of fraud seriously, and urge the Iraqi government to investigate such claims. Washington should urge the Iraqi government to ensure a fair tallying process and emphasize the independence of the judiciary, which is likely going to play a role in adjudicating electoral claims. During government formation negotiations, Washington should play the role of the honest broker by urging Maliki not to employ extrajudicial means, or even judicial means, to change the outcome to his own benefit. Very importantly, Washington should exhibit neutrality. Backing any candidate will prevent the United States from being an effective actor. The U.S. Government is in a position to achieve these objectives if it chooses to do so. It can use the provision of arms to the Iraqi government as tangible leverage. Iraqis will look to the United States to play a proactive diplomatic role as well.

But Washington must also recognize the very real risk that the Iraqi Sunni political opposition to Maliki may be destroyed by these elections, increasing the risk that the Sunni violent insurgency will accelerate. Working with Iraqi Sunni tribal and political leaders who do not support Maliki to ensure that they have a voice in parliament and in government is essential for Iraq's long term security. An inclusive and representative government after the elections will be important not only for Iraq, but also for regional security and U.S. national security interests.

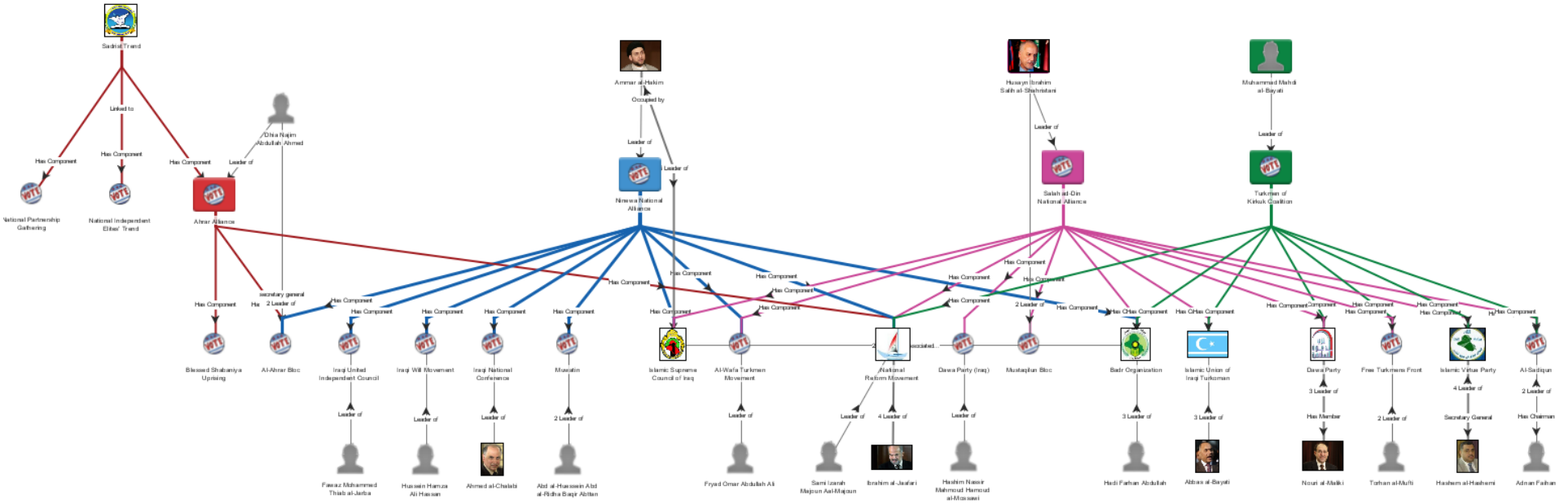
APPENDIX I: THE STATE OF LAW ALLIANCE AND AFFILIATED COALITIONS



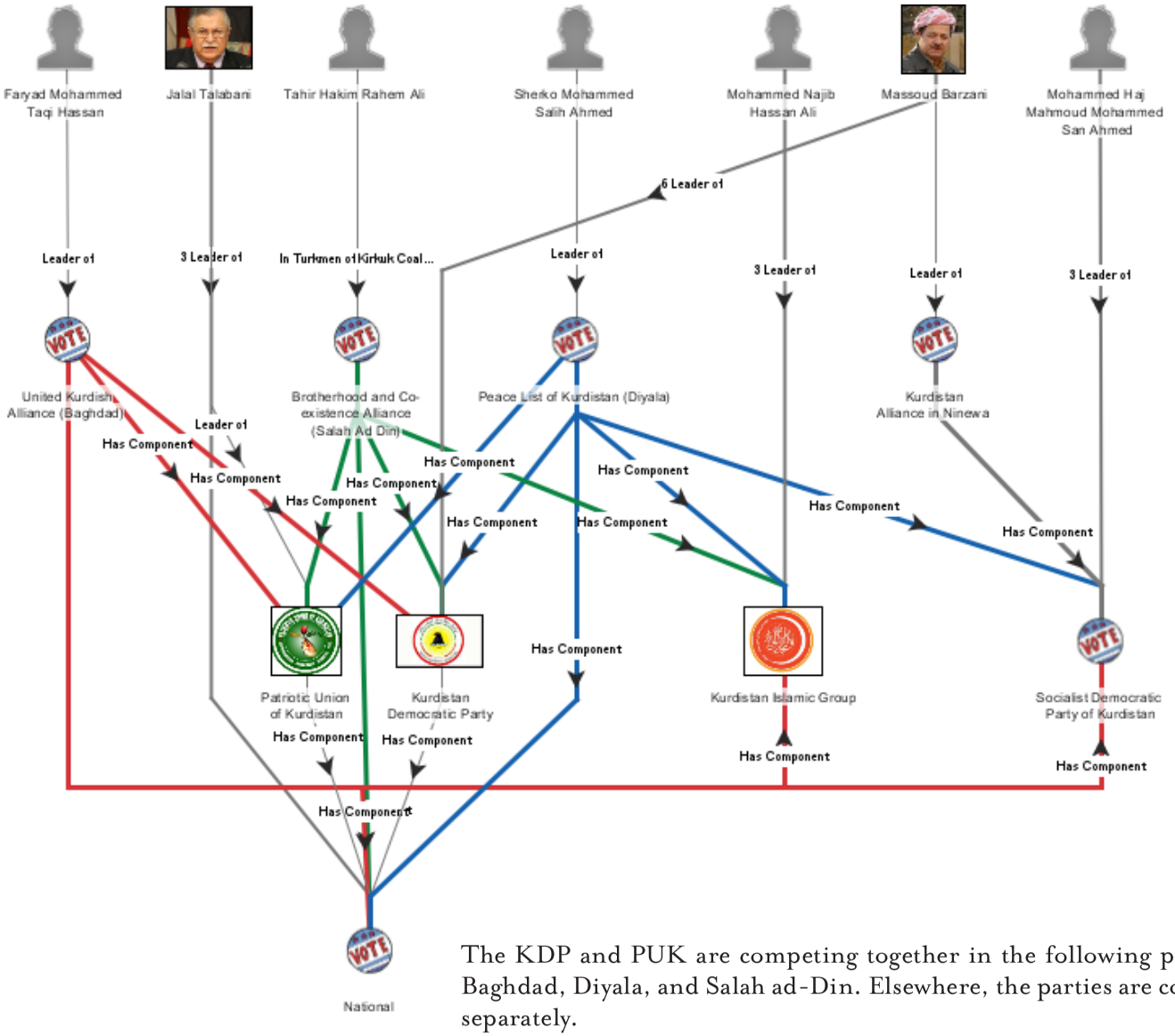
APPENDIX II: CITIZEN'S BLOC (ISLAMIC SUPREME COUNCIL OF IRAQ)



APPENDIX III: AHRAR ALLIANCE AND SADRIST AFFILIATED COALITIONS

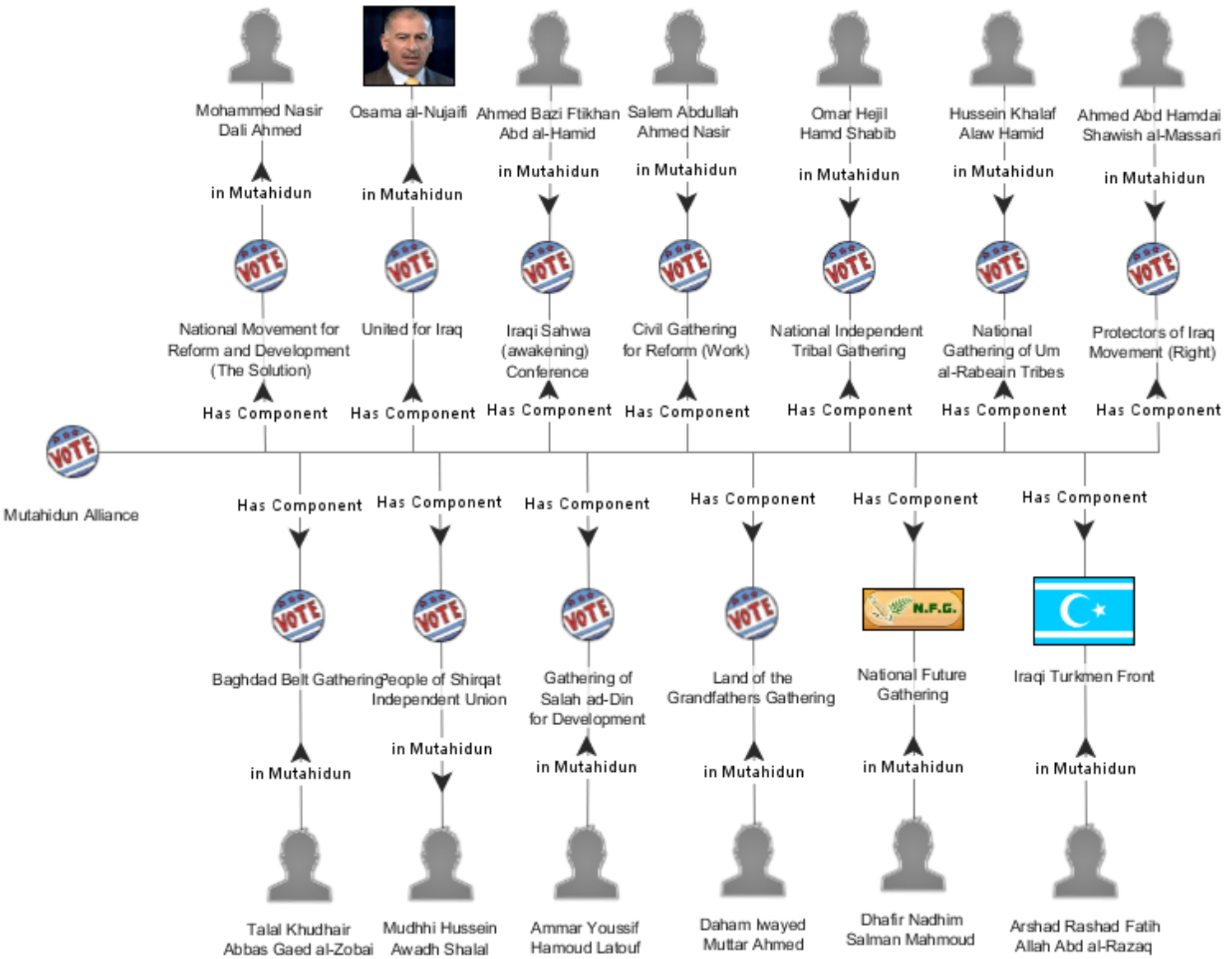


APPENDIX IV: KURDISH ALLIANCES

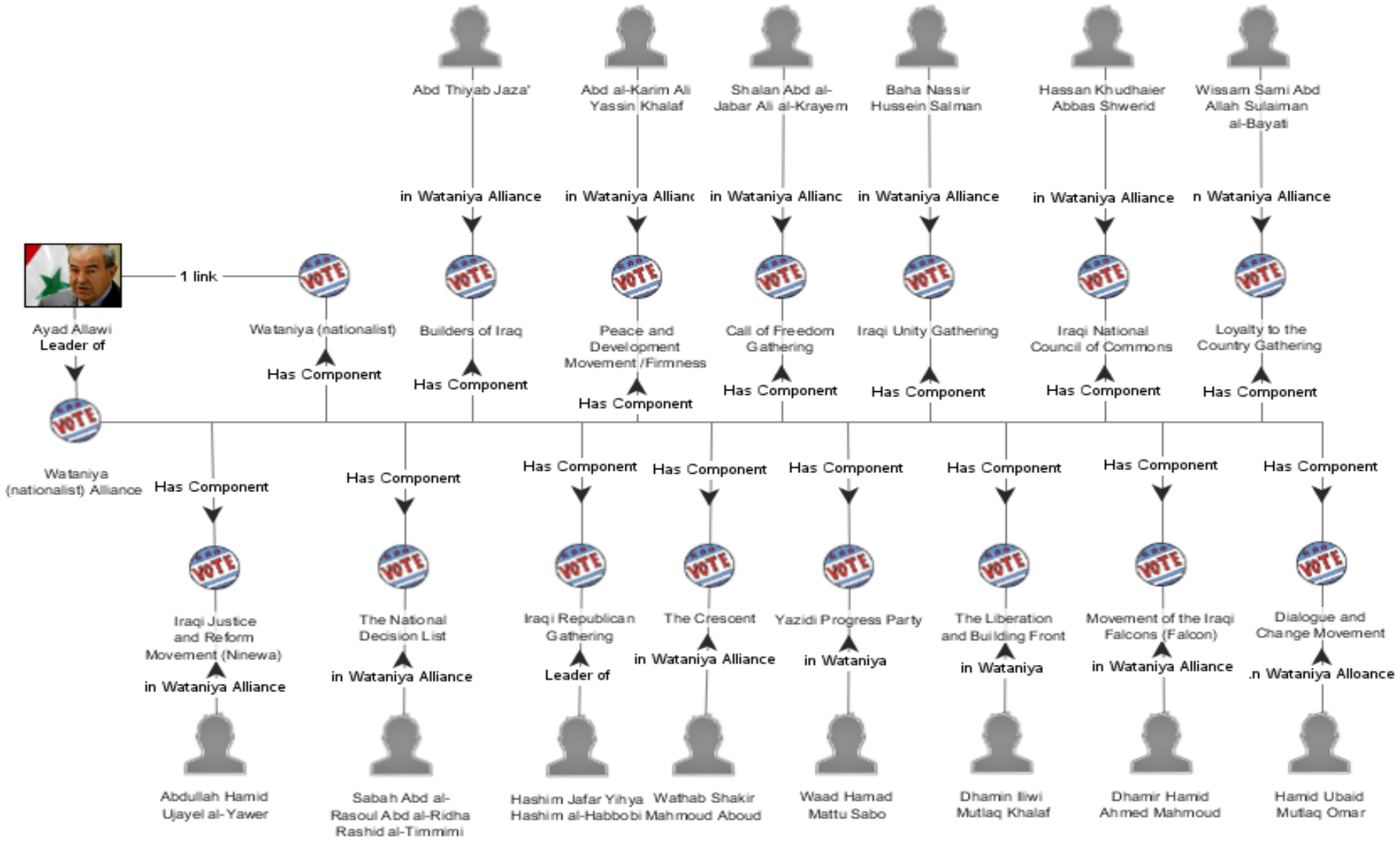


The KDP and PUK are competing together in the following provinces: Baghdad, Diyala, and Salah ad-Din. Elsewhere, the parties are competing separately.

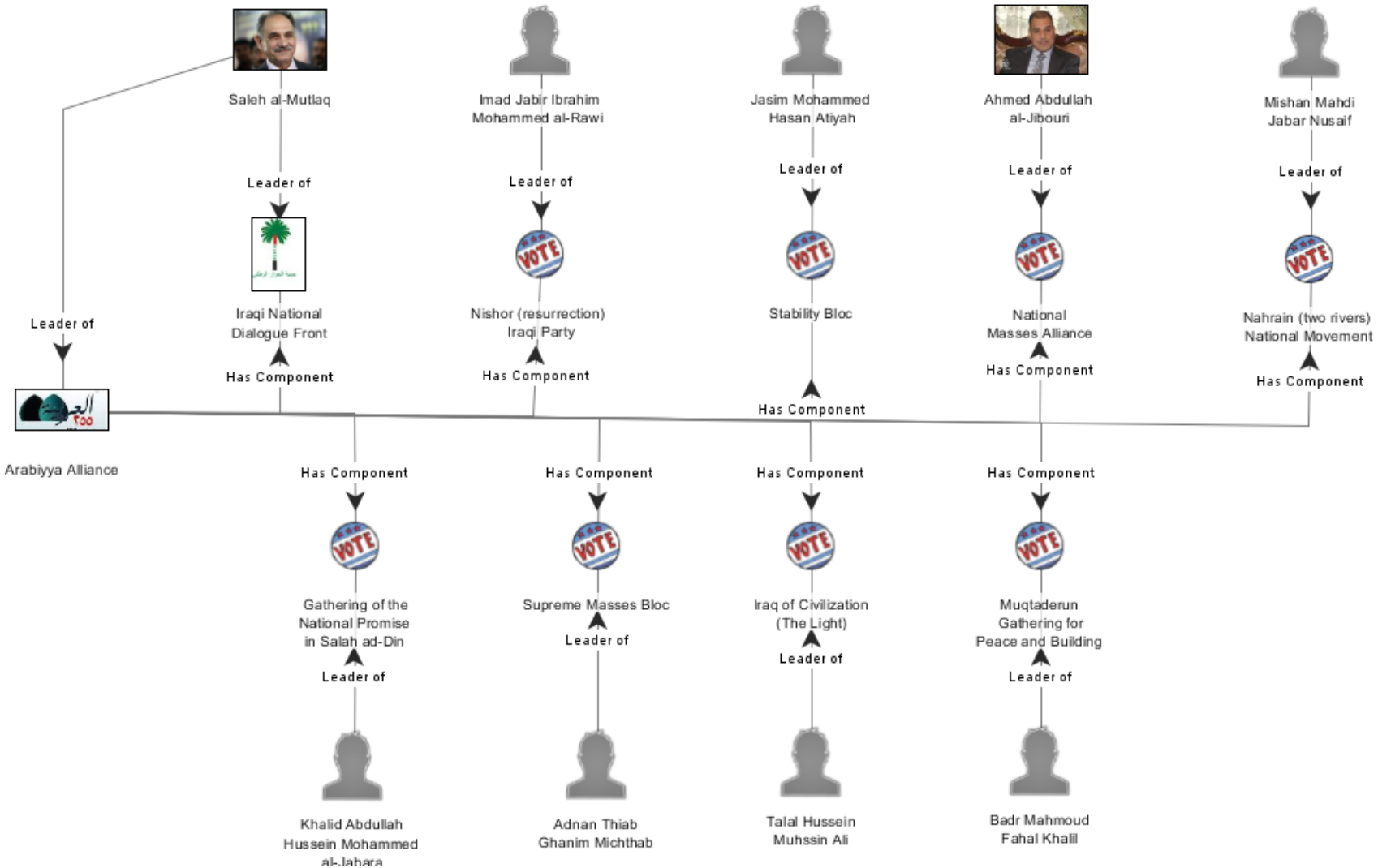
APPENDIX V: MUTAHIDUN ALLIANCE



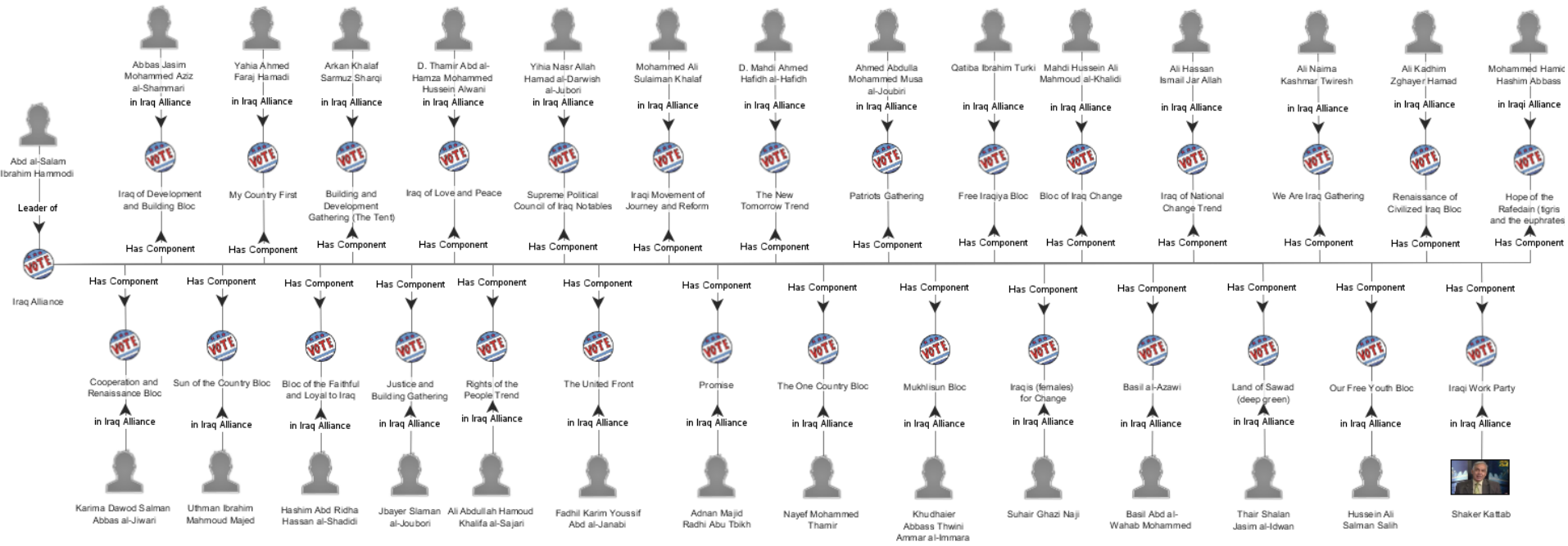
APPENDIX VI: WATANIYYA ALLIANCE



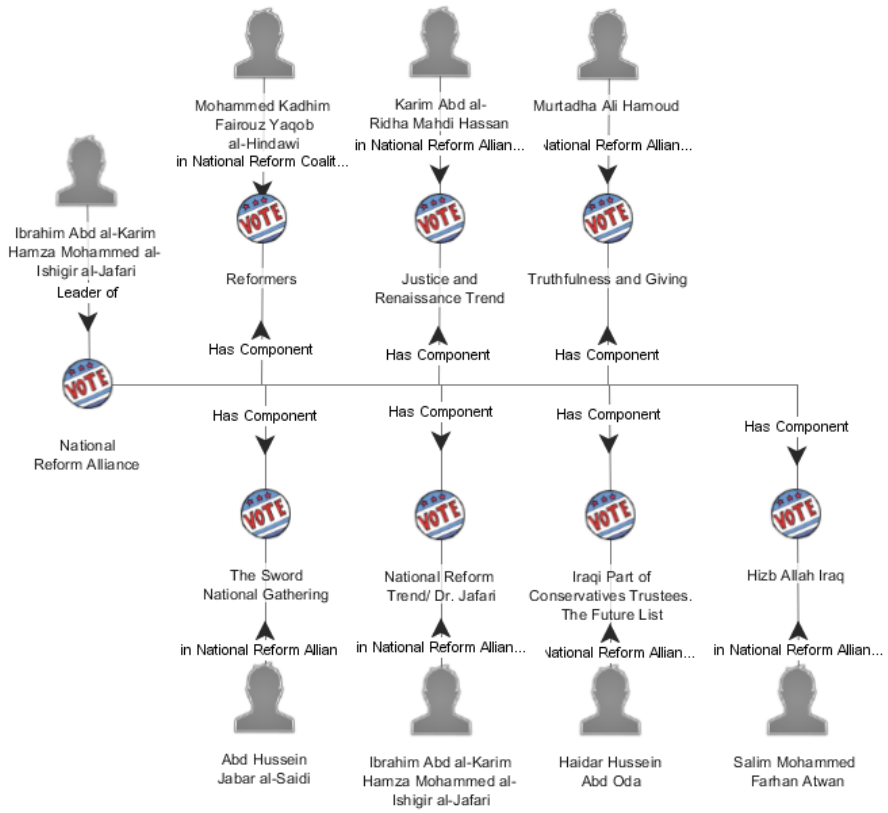
APPENDIX VII: ARABIYYA ALLIANCE

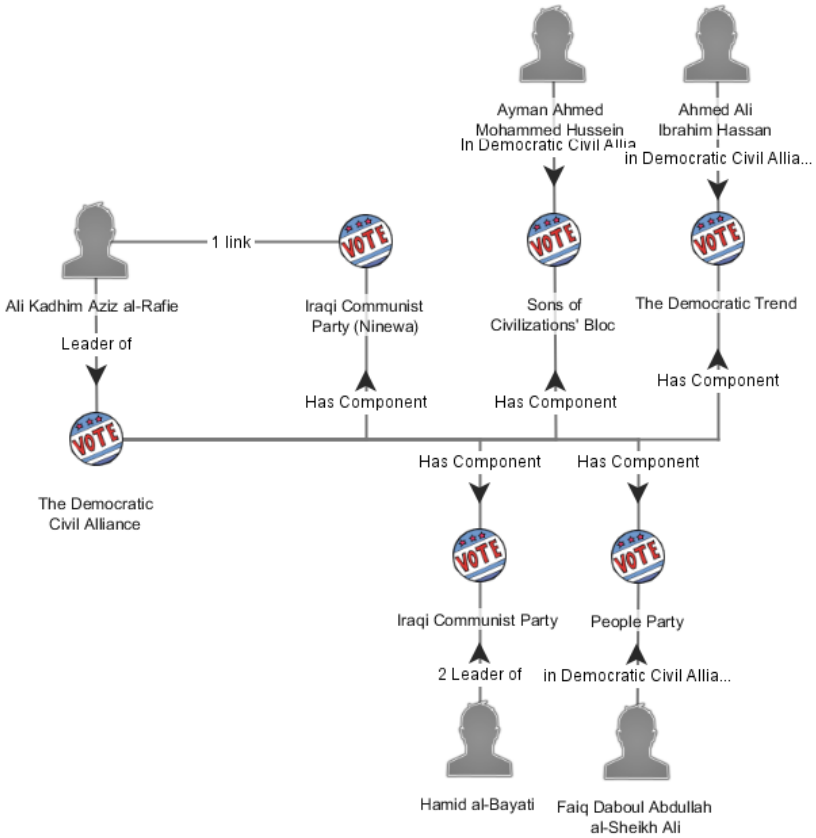


APPENDIX VIII: IRAQ ALLIANCE



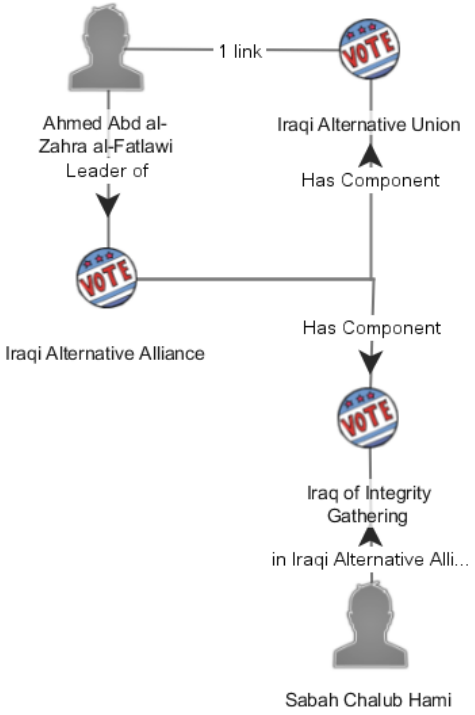
APPENDIX IX: 2014 NATIONAL ELECTIONS – OTHER COALITIONS

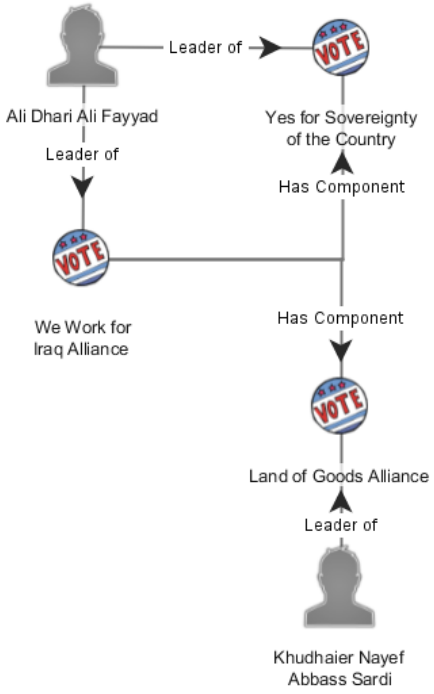


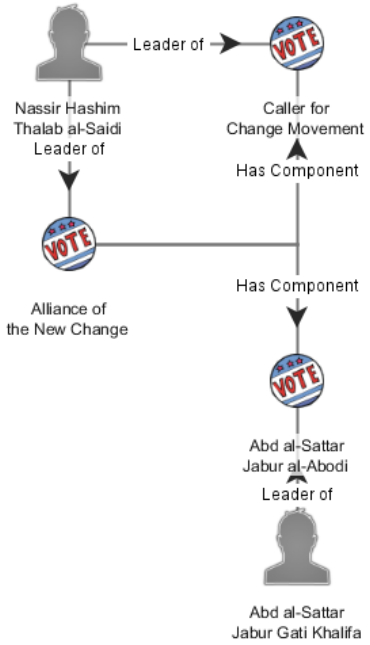


The National Reform Alliance is considered to be Pro-Maliki

APPENDIX IX: 2014 NATIONAL ELECTIONS – OTHER COALITIONS







APPENDIX X: ISIS THREATS AGAINST ELECTIONS

ISIS has issued statements criticizing the elections and threatening against participation. One such statement was issued on March, 3, 2014 by the ISIS Sharia Commission in the "State of Kirkuk" (referring to a sub-division of the Islamic state the group has declared spanning parts of Iraq and Syria).[1] This statement, along with similar leaflets, were distributed to young students and citizens in Kirkuk.

The statement regarded the participating in or facilitating the elections and legislative councils as *kufr* [infidelity] for replacing "God laws" with the laws of "infidels." It warned that ISIS will target voting card distribution centers, personnel in charge of distributing the cards, and "anybody" who supports the efforts of the "government of Rafidha" [a derogatory term for Shi'a] to accomplish "its Safavid project" [referring to an early Persian empire] in the area. The statement also declared polling sites as targets.

The ISIS Sharia Commission in Diyala released a similar statement about the elections, dated March 2014. The message stated that voting for a candidate from any background is *kufr*, and that both the candidates and the voters are equally *kafirs* [infidels]. The statement warned Iraqi Sunnis against participating in the elections, declaring that they would be targeted if they did. The statement also threatened to attack mosques that called for participation in the elections.[2]

Below is translation of the statements:

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

الدولة الإسلامية في العراق والشام

لا إله إلا الله

ولاية ديالى

الهيئة الشرعية

التاريخ: جمادى الأول/١٤٣٥ للهجرة

تحذير المسلمين من فتنة المضلين

الحمدُ لله معز الإسلام والمسلمين ومذل الكفر والكافرين والصلاةُ والسلام على إمام المتقين وخاتم الأنبياء والمرسلين وعلى اله الطيبين ورضي الله عن الصحابة والتابعين وبعد: قال الله تعالى: {ولا تركَنوا إلى الَّذين ظَلَموا فتَمسَّكُمُ النَّارُ وما لَكُم مِن دُونِ اللَّهِ مِن أَولِياءَ ثُمَّ لا تُنصَرُون } [هود: ١١٣] ، وقال النبي صلّى اللّهُ عليْهِ وسلّم: (من أعان ظالماً ليدحض باطله حقاً فقد برئت منه ذمة الله و ذمة رسوله).

فبعد سلسلة طويلة من الفشل والخيبة للعمليات الانتخابية، والتي تخرج أصحابها الخصص ألوانا ثم تجبحوا زوراً بالمشاركة العريضة للناخبين !(زعموا) وبعد قيام المجاهدين برد كيد المارقين والذين سعوا حاثيين الى تمرير التجربة الديمقراطية الزائفة المزوقة، قام أذنابهم اليوم بحيلة من وحي شياطينهم، بدعوة الناس وتشجيعهم الى تحديث السجل الإنتخابي وتيسير ذلك قدر المستطاع وتسهيل الطريق الى اختيار الوالي المنتقى المزعوم من قبل الناخب، تحت يافطة الغير والنهوض وإيراد حفنة من الشبه الجاهزة المعدة سلفاً !.

ونقول وبالله التوفيق : إن ترويج هذه المهزلة هي الكفر الواح والوثنية بعينها بلا مرية، فإن حقيقة الأمر هي اختيار نائب مشرع تحت قبة البرلمان يحلل ويحرم ويشرع ويقنن ويبدلي بدلوه فيما رغب وبدر ما كره ولو على حساب الإسلام وشرعه المحكم، فيحلون ما حرم الله ويحرمون ما أحل الله ويصدون عن سبيل الله بأسم الدستور والعملية السياسية! وهذا هو الكفر والله لا يرتاب في ذلك عاقل.

والإنسانُ متى حلّل الحرام – المُجمَع عليْهِ – أو حرّمَ الحلالَ – المُجمَع عليْهِ – أو بدّلَ الشّرْعَ – المُجمَع عليْهِ – كانَ كافِرًا مُرتَدًّا بالمَفاهيمِ المُفهُمةِ، كما حكاه أهل العلم، وعليه فإن قيام الناخب باختيار أي نائب كان، من أي حزب كان، من أي مكون كان، إنما هو إعانة على الكفر والعدوان ! ورضى بقانون البرلمان عن شرع الواحد الديان والله المستعان.

ألا فليعلم أن– الناخب والمنتخب– في الكفر سواء ولا فرق، كما أرباب المؤسسات الحكومية والمدنية أو وكلاء بطاقات الممون أو بعض المربوين ولا تربة في المدارس والثانويات! ممن قام بترويج آلية الانتخاب وتسهيلها هم في الكفر سواء، وهذا معلوم بالضرورة من دينا الحنيف فإن فاعل الكفر والراغب فيه والمعين عليه والراضي به كلهم في الحكم سواء { إِنَّ فِرْعَوْنَ وَهَامَانَ وَجُنُودَهُمَا كَانُوا خَاطِئِينَ } [القصص: ٨] وصح عن نبينا صلّى اللّهُ عليْهِ وسلّم مَنْ كَثَّرَ سَوادَ قَوْمٍ فَهُوَ مِنْهُمْ ، وَمَنْ رَضِيَ عَمَلَ قَوْمٍ كَانَ شَرِيكًا لِمَنْ عَمِلَهُ.

والذي ساق الناس الى هذا الشر هو جهلهم بالدين الحق، وعدم رجوعهم للعلماء الربانيين الصادقين الناصحين– لا العلماء الزائفين– وكذلك سعيهم وراء المصالح والمطامع الشخصية الأنانية الدنيوية ضاربين عرض الحائط بمصالح الأمة العظيمة واجتماع كلمتها.

وإن ما قام به ثلة الهالكي وجعل بطاقة الناخب بطاقة رسمية خاسة ما هي الا تحويفكم، فما حصلتم من السنوات الماضية الا التهجير والقتل على أيدي المليشيات والجيش الرافضي، لذلك نقدم النصح الأخير لكل عاقل من أهل ولايتنا على اختلاف طبقاتهم من المقفين وغيرهم وخصوصاً أصحاب المساجد والمنابر بعدم التحريض والدعوة للمشاركة في الإنتخابات وإلا فدماننا رخيصة للدفاع عن هذا الدين، فو الله لن يطيب لنا العيش حتى نستظل بشريعة الرحمن لا شريعة الطغيان، فإذا علم أنكم يا أهل السنة وبعد هذه النصائح ذهبتم الى الإنتخابات.... فلا تلام بعدها! وما ارتدعتم وما ازجرتم فما كان لكم منا الا السيوف المرفعة تعمل في رقابكم النحرة وقد أعذر من أنذر، فأنتم لنا هدف مشروع توجه اليكم أفواه البنادق فمذيقكم الموت الزؤام ونسقيكم كأسا لطالما تجرعها إخوانكم سلفاً وهم الآن في ظلمة اللحود، فأما أن تؤوبوا الى رشدكم وتقلعوا عن ذنبكم وباب التوبة مفتوح ولكم منا الصون وحقوق المسلم ، واما أن تقيموا على الغي والعوج فعندئذ نقوّمكم بأسيافنا (هي لغة الحديد والنار) ولا بد.....

فكل من شارك في الترشح أو الدعوة الى هذا الكفر فقد رضي بالكفر.

*تحذير الى الناس عامّة / إن المراكز الإنتخابية مستهدفة لنا ونحن مستهدفوها بكل أنواع الوسائل فلا تقربوا منها أو الذهاب اليها وقد أعذر من أنذر.....

*تحذير الى وكلاء بطاقات الممون والتربويين في المدارس والثانويات وغيرهم / ممن قام بترويج آلية الانتخاب (البطاقة الإنتخابية) وتسهيلها ولم يرتدع فهو هدف لنا ونحن مستهدفوه وقد أعذر من أنذر.

وَاللَّهُ غَالِبٌ عَلَى أَمْرِهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

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Statement from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham – Diyala State

APPENDIX X: ISIS THREATS AGAINST ELECTIONS

In the name of god most merciful

"Islamic State in Iraq and Sham" **March 3rd 2014**

The Shari'a law committee

In Diyala State

Warning to Muslims from the plans of infidels

All the glory and thanks to Allah who sat the rules for his followers. May God also bless the spirit of his glory messenger to us, Mohammed (PBUH). [Here the letter quotes a verse from Quran (Hud 113) which implies that Muslims should not listen to those who lost the path of the goodness].

After a long sequence of fails made by those who adopt the electoral process in Iraq, and after Mujahdeen have stroked those who came with the deceiving "democracy", the traitors and the small slaves of those in power within this government came up, inspired by the Satan himself, a well thought plan to force Muslims to participate in the upcoming elections.

Oh Muslims, we want to steer your attention to the following; do you really think that it will be right to elect a non-cleric person with a suit and tie and give him the power to sit in the so called parliament to tell us all what is right and what is wrong without going back to Quran or Sharia law?, all in the name of "constitution" and "political process".

The voter and the candidate are both equally against the Sharia of Allah and therefore both the voter and the candidate will be equally targeted and punished.

What brought people to this mess is their lack of education & information when it comes to Shari'a laws, and not following the clerics who are merit to be followed and have devoted their lives for this purpose, to be well informed so they can inform those who ask and seek knowledge. Muslims should not seek benefits of this live; they should seek the rewards and benefits of the eternal life after death.

Maliki's smart card is no doubt a smart one; it is designed to intimidate you! And you all have gained nothing from Maliki before but mass killing campaigns carried out against you by the dirty hands of his militias. We ask all of the teachers, Mosque Imams and everyone who have audience to warn his audience from participating in elections. Those who participate in elections are infidels, there will be no excuses, in case you did NOT know, you DO know after this warning!

- Warning to the public\ Electoral centers are high-likely targets for our men. Stay as far as possible.

- Warning to food rations' centers' owners and operators in addition to teachers\ promoting the "voter's card" or encouraging the public to obtain it is an act that is severely punishable by us.

God will always win, and his word should always be the truth

In the name of god most merciful

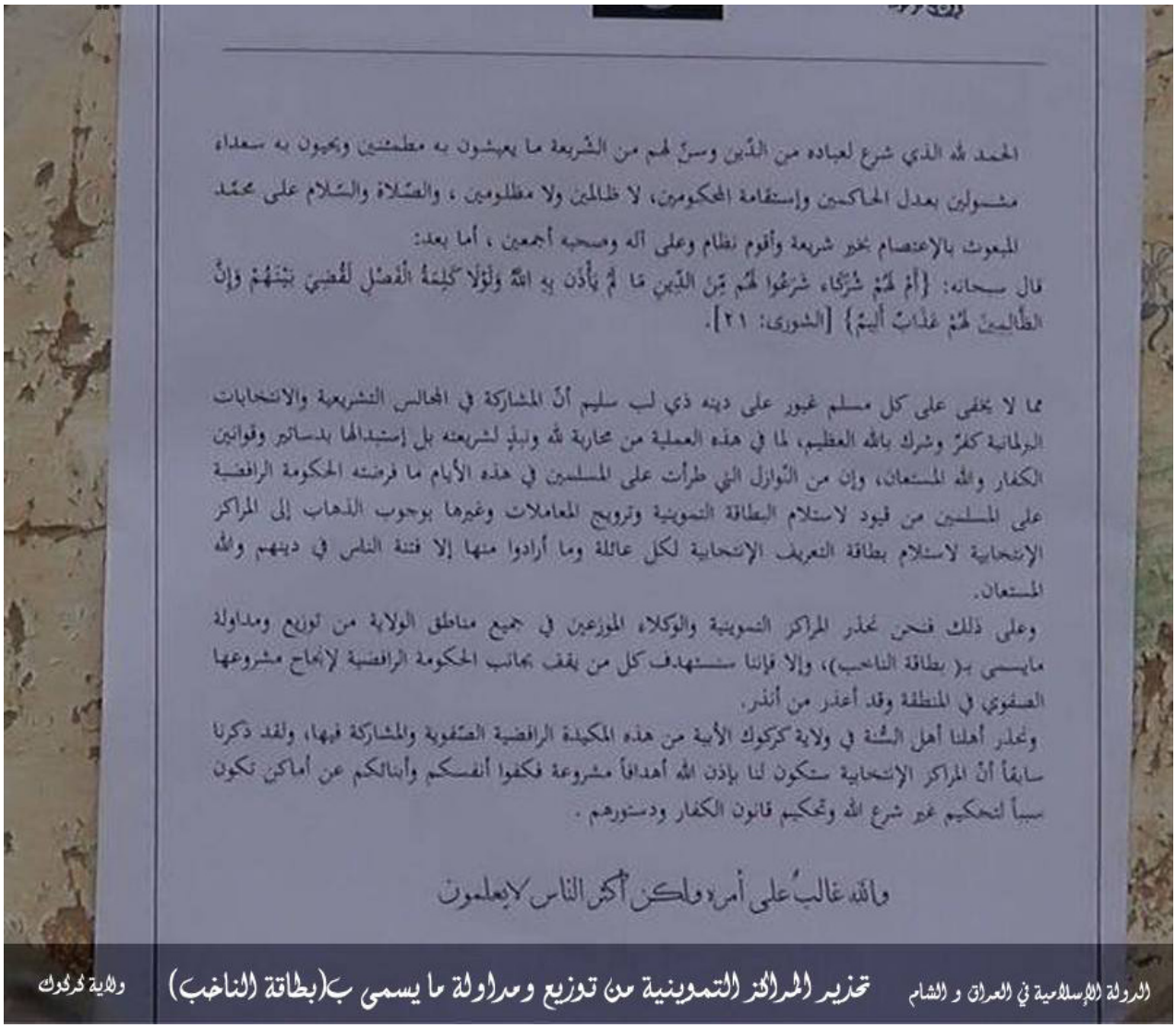
"Islamic State in Iraq and Sham" **March 3rd 2014**

The Shari'a law committee

In Kirkuk State

All the glory and thanks to Allah who sat the rules for his followers, the rules that should keep them living happily and peacefully in this life under the justice of just and fair rulers, in a perfect world where there should be no powerful-unjust men nor there

APPENDIX X: ISIS THREATS AGAINST ELECTIONS



الحمد لله الذي شرع لعباده من الدّين وسنّ لهم من الشريعة ما يعيشون به مطمئنين ويحيون به سعداء منشرحين بعدل الحاكمين وإستقامة المحكومين، لا ظالمين ولا مظلومين ، والصّلاة والسّلام على محمّد المبعوث بالاعتصام بخير شريعة وأقوم نظام وعلى آله وصحبه أجمعين ، أما بعد:

قال سبحانه: {أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ شَرَعُوا لَهُم مِّنَ الدِّينِ مَا لَمْ يَأْذَن بِهِ اللَّهُ وَلَوْلَا كَلِمَةُ الْفَصْلِ لَقُضِيَ بَيْنَهُمْ وَإِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ} [الشورى: ٢١].

مما لا يخفى على كل مسلم غيور على دينه ذي لب سليم أنّ المشاركة في المجالس التشريعية والانتخابات البرلمانية كفرٌ وشرك بالله العظيم، لما في هذه العملية من محاربة لله ونبذٍ لشريعته بل إستبدالها بدساتير وقوانين الكفار والله المستعان، وإن من النّوازل التي طرأت على المسلمين في هذه الأيام ما فرضته الحكومة الرافضية على المسلمين من قيود لاستلام البطاقة التموينية وترويج المعاملات وغيرها بوجوب الذهاب إلى المراكز الانتخابية لاستلام بطاقة التعريف الإنتخابية لكل عائلة وما أرادوا منها إلا فتنة الناس في دينهم والله المستعان.

وعلى ذلك فنحن نحذر المراكز التموينية والوكلاء الموزعين في جميع مناطق الولاية من توزيع ومداولة مايسمى بـ(بطاقة الناخب)، وإلا فإننا سنستهدف كل من يقف بجانب الحكومة الرافضية لإنجاح مشروعها الصفوي في المنطقة وقد أعذر من أنذر.

ونحذر أهلنا أهل السّنة في ولاية كركوك الأبية من هذه المكيدة الرافضية الصّفوية والمشاركة فيها، ولقد ذكرنا سابقاً أنّ المراكز الإنتخابية ستكون لنا بإذن الله أهدافاً مشروعة فكفوا أنفسكم وأبنائكم عن أماكن تكون سبباً لتحكيم غير شرع الله وتحكيم قانون الكفار ودستورهم .

والله غالبٌ على أمره ولكن أكثر الناس لا يعلمون

الدولة الإسلامية في العراق و الشام — تحذير المراكز التموينية من توزيع ومداولة ما يسمى بـ(بطاقة الناخب) — ولاية كركوك

Statement from the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham – Kirkuk State

are victims. May God also bless the spirit of his glory messenger to us, Mohammed (PBUH). [In this part the letter quotes a verse from Quran (Shura21) which implies that Muslims should not set laws that have no roots in Sharia law].

All Muslims know the following fact; participating in elections is severely prohibited in Islam, because this process replaces the laws of Shari'a, which are the laws of Allah, with laws that are manmade, furthermore, those laws are created by the infidels themselves. The Rafidhi government in Baghdad has forced our Muslim people to obtain the electoral-smart card by linking those smart cards to the food rations' supplies for each family, which is a coward way that aims to swerve our people from the path of God.

Because of the above; we warn the owners of the food rations' centers in this state [Kirkuk] from processing any of those so called "the voter's card" [same as the smart-card mentioned above] or else!

We also ask our Sunni people in this glorious state [Kirkuk] to not fall victims to the plans of this Safawite and rafhidhi government. And as a friendly reminder; we have previously warned everyone that electoral-centers will be targeted during elections' days. Thus, we again remind you to stay far as possible from those centers.

God will always win, and his word should always be the truth

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