

Note on Collected Monitoring Data

Introduction

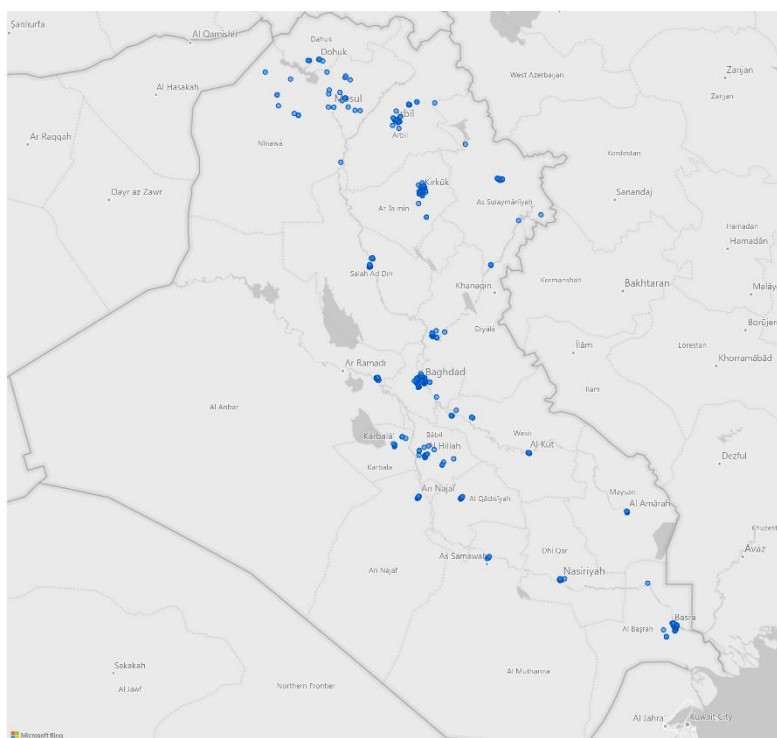
On 10 October, Iraq held parliamentary elections, its fifth under the 2005 Constitution. Advance special voting took place on 8 October for, inter alia, the security forces, internally displaced persons, prisoners and detainees.

In line with its mandate, UNAMI deployed 150 international monitoring experts and approximately 550 national support personnel in advance of, and on, election day.

This note is issued pursuant to the Report of the Secretary-General on Iraq's Electoral Process S/2021/932 which announced that a more detailed analysis of collected monitoring data would be published in due course.

Deployment

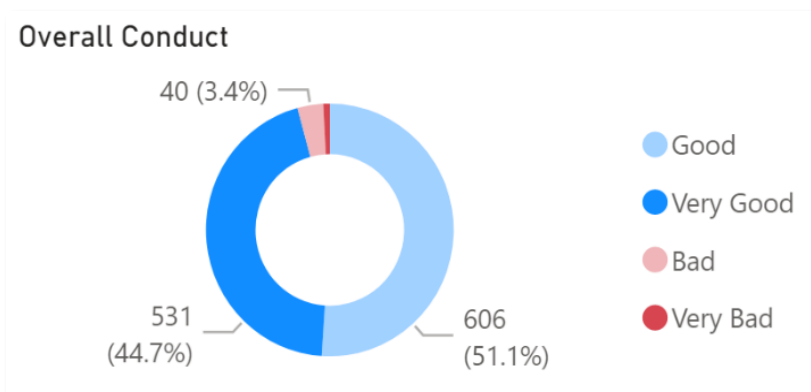
As part of the monitoring efforts, 90 UN expert teams monitored 1,108 polling stations in 301 polling centres in all 18 Governorates on general election day, 10 October. This followed an earlier deployment for advance special voting on 8 October, whereby 12 UN teams visited 79 polling stations in 25 polling centres across 6 governorates (Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Dohuk and Erbil).



General Findings

Overall conduct

Throughout the country, UN monitoring experts were able to visit polling stations without restrictions. In 96% of cases, they rated the overall conduct of the opening, voting, closing and counting processes as “good” to “very good”. The transparency of the voting and counting processes was also largely assessed as “good” or “very good”, totalling 97%.



Overall atmosphere

In 95% of cases, the overall atmosphere in the vicinity of polling centres and in polling stations was reported to be calm and peaceful during both the special voting and general election day. Isolated incidents were reported where political parties held activities or displayed campaign materials. For instance, in one polling centre in Ninewa, a large number of unauthorized party agents and men in military uniform were seen campaigning during the special voting day. While a modest turnout was noted throughout the country, long queues were witnessed in 11% of the polling stations visited.

Accessibility

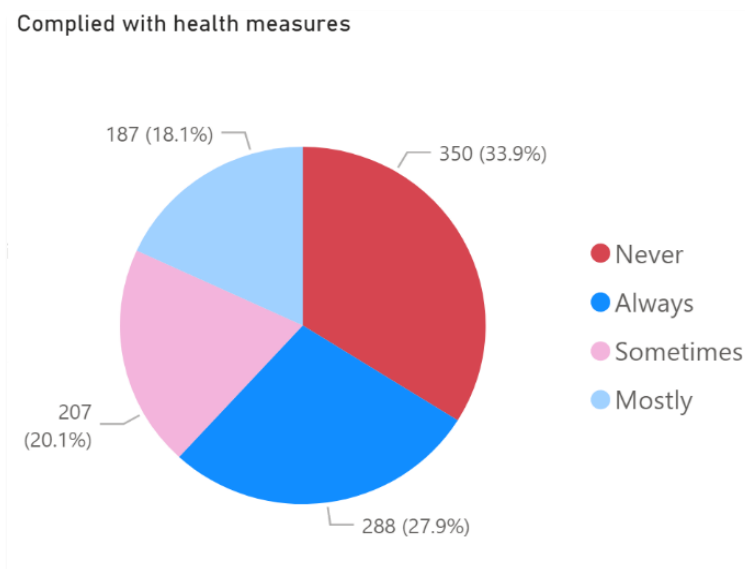
Of all polling centres visited, 92% were accessible to voters with reduced mobility. However, in a few instances, mainly in Baghdad, Babil and Wasit, UN monitoring experts came across polling stations located on the second floor without accessibility. Fully step-free access and other arrangements, such as a designated polling booth with seating, were absent in most polling centres.

Polling station staff

Of all polling stations visited, 96% were fully staffed. Although UN monitoring experts assessed a good gender balance among polling staff, the polling station managers were men in over 90% of the polling stations visited.

Compliance with COVID-19 protocols

COVID-19 protocols were put in place to mitigate the contagion risk for polling staff and voters. However, in 54% of polling stations visited, polling staff never or sometimes complied with the protocols, including physical distancing, wearing masks and disinfecting hands.



Opening Procedures

For both the special voting and general election day, UN monitoring experts reported that 65% of the polling stations opened on time. Accredited observers and party/candidate agents were present in 84% of cases, and able to observe the opening process without restrictions. Delays observed were mainly related to difficulties in setting up the IT devices, including technical issues in activating the optical scanners¹. These issues were resolved by the Independent High Electoral Commission throughout the morning.

The opening process was positively assessed in 92% of the polling stations visited. In 52% of cases, opening procedures were followed completely; they were followed mostly in 40% of the cases: showing the empty ballot box, sealing it securely, and applying the appropriate stickers. Ballot boxes were shown to be sealed securely in 98% of polling stations visited.

¹ Once the system has been activated, it cannot be turned off and on again without receiving a new one-time password from the Independent High Electoral Commission. In certain cases, devices had apparently been switched on and off beforehand, requiring the issuance of a new password.

Voting Procedures

UN monitoring experts assessed the overall conduct of the voting process as “good” to “very good” in 96% of polling stations visited. No major irregularities were reported. In 97% of cases the voting process was assessed as transparent. Accredited observers and party/candidate agents were present during the voting process in 94% of polling stations visited, and able to observe the process without restrictions in 98% of these cases. Furthermore, the voters’ understanding of the voting procedures was assessed positively, with 90% of ratings either “good” or “very good”.

Inside the polling station

The layout and organization of 97% of polling stations visited was conducive to the seamless flow of voters. Polling staff performed the identification process diligently, checking documentation consistently in 86% of all cases, inserting the voting card into the electronic verification device in more than 90% of the cases, and scanning the QR code as required.

In 80% of the polling stations visited, voters were able to mark their ballots in secrecy. However, in 12% of polling stations, across 15 Governorates, UN monitoring experts noticed instances where women were accompanied in the voting booth by a male relative. In some cases, UN monitoring experts clearly witnessed men carrying, stamping and submitting the ballots while their female relatives were getting their fingers inked. The main explanation given was that these women were illiterate and could not make an informed choice. In Ninewa, it was alleged that local cultural norms did not permit women to vote alone. In other instances, the secrecy of the vote could not be fully guaranteed when ballot box controllers assisted voters to avoid paper jams in the optical scanner. However, by doing so, the marked ballots were unintentionally visible.

During both the special voting and general election day, issues with voter verification devices, whereby voters’ fingerprints could not be read properly, were reported. UN monitoring experts reported such incidents in 15% of polling stations visited on the general election day. Polling staff in all stations visited came up with different solutions to mitigate the problem, including the use of the so-called skip button (which was not allowed to exceed 5% of the total number of votes per polling station), requesting voters to clean their hands, to return at a later stage, allowing them to try numerous times or turning them away. This issue created frustration in certain polling stations, although no complaint was lodged on this particular issue during the voting process. According to UN monitoring reports, the difficulty in properly reading fingerprints mainly affected women and the elderly.

In 28% of polling stations visited, voters were turned away on various grounds: because they were registered in another polling station, presented an unreadable electronic voter card, were unable to show a proper identification document or voter card, or presented an electronic voter card whereas they were registered biometrically.

Although some party and candidate agents complained unofficially to UN monitoring experts about technical issues in general, UN monitoring experts reported that official complaints were lodged during the process in only 2.3% of polling stations visited.

Closing and Counting Procedures²

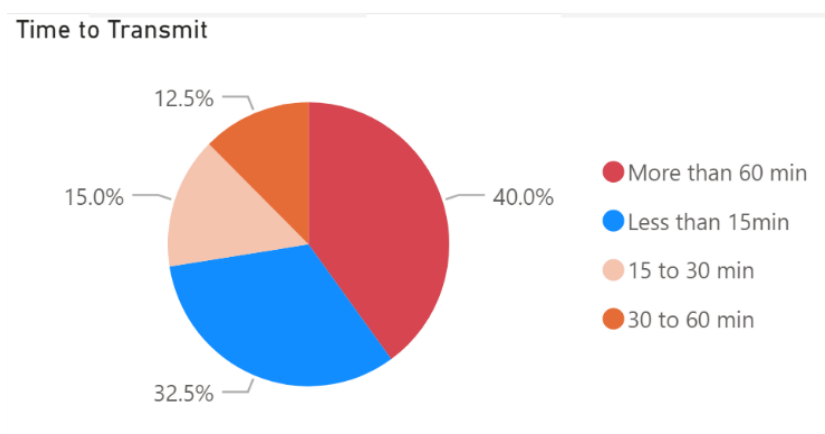
The overall atmosphere during the closing process was reported as calm and peaceful. Of all polling stations visited, 95% closed on time. In accordance with electoral rules and regulations, the electronic devices automatically shut down at 6 pm. Consequently, no votes could be cast after 6 pm, including in certain instances where voters were still queuing.

In 93% of polling stations visited, accredited observers and party/candidate agents were present during the closing and counting process, although in certain cases party/candidate agents left after the electronic count instead of awaiting the manual count.

Electronic Sorting and Counting

In 75% of all polling stations visited, polling staff followed all electronic sorting procedures: showing the undamaged seals; counting the numbers of signatures and fingerprints; recording them in the reconciliation form; counting the ballots; identifying the spoiled and discarded ballots; following the reconciliation protocols; and implementing the sensitive material packing process.

In 98% of polling stations visited, the electronic verification report was printed and, in most cases³, the data was successfully transmitted to the Independent High Electoral Commission's National Office using the results transmission device. On average, it took 45 minutes for the data to be transmitted.



² Due to security and movement limitations, only 29 teams managed to monitor the closing and counting processes in Erbil, Kirkuk, Baghdad, Dohuk, and Basra.

³ In 26% of cases, UN experts did not witness the transmission of results as they had to leave the polling station beforehand due to security requirements.

Manual Counting

The Law on the Election of the Council of Representatives of Iraq (Law No. 9 of 2020) requires one polling station per polling centre to be randomly selected for a manual count, totalling 8,960 polling stations.

According to the data collected by UN monitoring experts, most polling stations were organized in such a way that allowed for an efficient and transparent manual count. The process was generally transparent and conducted in an orderly manner. UN monitoring experts could follow it without restrictions. However, polling staff seemed to be insufficiently aware of the requirement to announce the ballots aloud and/or to show the ballot papers to all present.

In all polling stations visited, the initial electronic count of votes matched the manual count. No evidence of falsification or fraud was witnessed by the UN monitoring experts and no formal complaints were lodged during the closing and counting process in the polling stations visited.