Department of Political Science
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What is the Future of Democracy in Iraq?

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http:// fas-polisci.rutgers.edu
http://new-middle-east.blogspot.com/
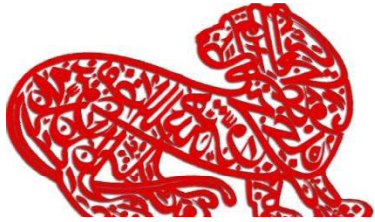
Dynamics of Recent Events in the Arab World: Framing the Arab and
U.S. Responses
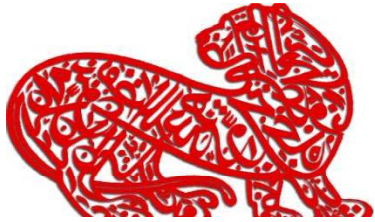National Council on US Arab Relations
October 27, 2011

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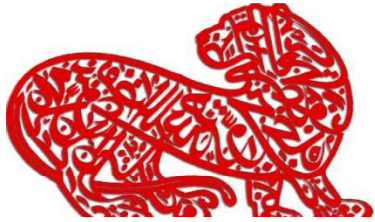
The US invasion and occupation of Iraq: the impact on democratization

How did US occupation affect Iraq's democracy?

❑ Looting US allowed in April 2003 destroyed all Iraqi ministries except oil and defense

❑ US dissolved Iraq's conscript army (385,000 men) and national police in May 2003 and applied a "de-Ba'thification" policy

❑ CPA's elimination of agricultural subsidies (Aug. 2003) made Iraqi farmers' goods less competitive with those from Iran and Syria
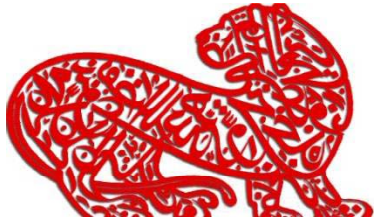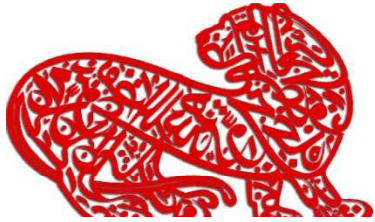
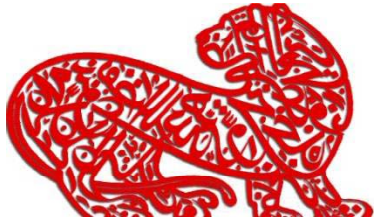# A new phase in building democracy: electoral politics after 2005

Is Islam incompatible with democracy?

❑ Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani has played a positive role in building democracy in Iraq – illustrating that Islam is not incompatible with democracy

❑ Ayatollah al-Sistani has condemned sectarian violence and encouraged national reconciliation

❑ He helped organize United Iraqi Alliance in 2004 in anticipation of first parliamentary elections (12/2005)

❑ He has issued religious decrees informing Shiite women that they must vote in elections

❑ al-Sistani has fought to limit the power of sectarian forces, especially Shiite militias

The elections of 2005

❑ Elections were held in Jan. 2005 for a Transitional National Assembly and full elections in Dec. 2005

❑ 256 political groups and 18,900 candidates registered

❑ In 2005, Iraqis voted according to their ethnic group: Sunni Arab, Shiite Arab or Kurd

❑ Despite al-Qai'da threats, voter turnout almost 60% and elections saw little violence; Iraqis very proud of results

❑ Iraqi constitution, written in 2004 and ratified in 2005, requires that women hold 25% of parliament seats
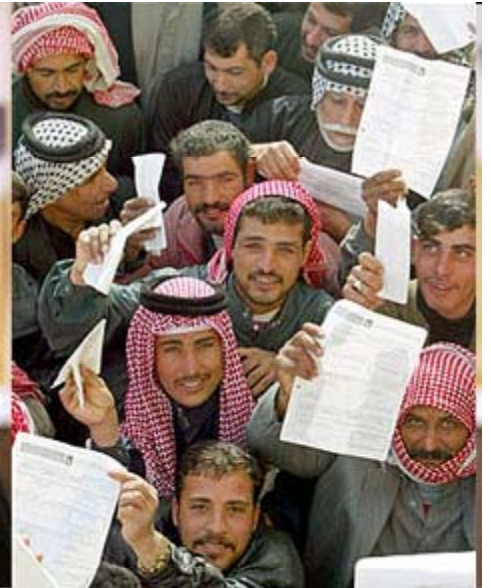
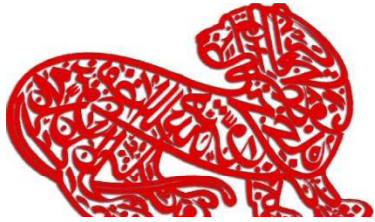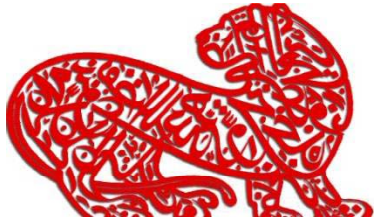Images from the December 2005 elections

Arab Provincial Legislative elections, 2009

❑ In Jan. 31, 2009 Arab Provincial Legislative elections Iraqi voters chose *services* over sectarianism

❑ Biggest loser was the Supreme Iraqi Islamic Council (ISCI) that sought to manipulate religious symbols

❑ Secular parties that emphasized services big winners

❑ High turnout rates (40-65%) and voting patterns show that Iraqis are *pragmatic* in their political choices

❑ *New parties/candidates* point to a strong civil society and interest in politics which fueled 2009 elections

The KRG Assembly Elections, 7/25/09

❑ That Change (*Gorran*) List won 25% of vote, and Services and Reform List won 10% of vote was a major step forward to making KRG more democratic

❑ Campaign shows how civil society provides basis for fighting KRG's authoritarianism and corruption

❑ Role of youth and educated middle classes was key in challenging 2 dominant parties in KRG: KDP and PUK

❑ New opposition parliament members have tried to provide *checks and balances* against KRG's authoritarianism and misuse of public funds
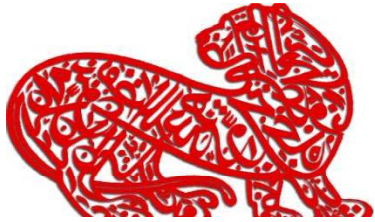
The significance of the KRG Parliament elections
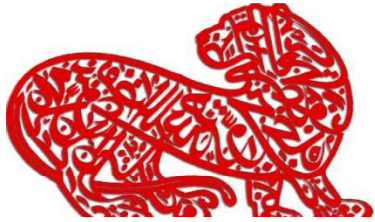

Supporter of the Kurdish "Change List" (Gorran)

❑ KRG's ability to manipulate Kurds against Arab Iraq has declined

❑ Political cleavages have changed from setting Kurds against Arabs, to the Kurdish populace vs. its own Kurdish political elite

❑ Similarities between al-Maliki government and KRG leadership have become more apparent, i.e., corruption and authoritarian rule

The March 2010 parliament elections
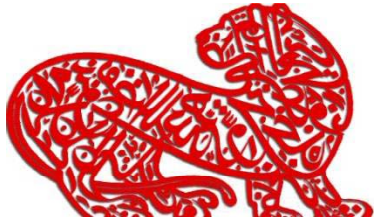
❑ Voters gave the *secular* al-Iraqiya List 91seats, compared to 89 for al-Maliki's State of Law Coalition and 54 for National Iraqi Alliance

❑ Two main religious clerics, Shiite and Sunni (al-Sistani and al-Samarra'i), prevented Maliki from postponing elections and forced him to use *open list* system

❑ Open-list system fostered *transparency* and allowed *independent* women to win seat

The March 2010 parliament elections

❑ Prior to elections, many sectarian politicians abandoned sectarian politics to form *cross-ethnic coalitions*

❑ Average national turnout reached 62.4%, with voter turnout over 70% in Kurdish region

❑ Iraqi High Election Commission and foreign observers indicated that elections were fair

❑ Maliki's court challenge failed to overturn results

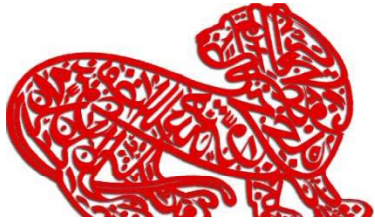# Electioneering for March 2010 parliament vote

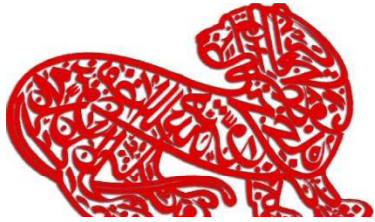2 posters for Fayruz Hatim, UNA

The role of women in Iraqi elections
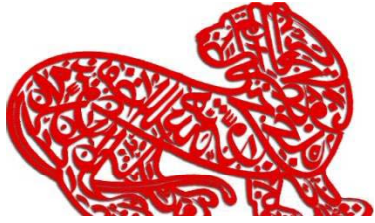
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Iraqi politics today

How has politics evolved since 2010?

❑   Despite peaceful elections in 2005, 2009 and 2010, political elite suffers from intense *internal conflict* and *competition*

❑   Ayad Allawi is resentful that he was not been allowed to form a government despite al-Iraqiya winning majority of seats in March 2010 elections

❑   His "consolation prize" was to become president of a new National Council for Strategic Affairs (NCSA), proposed by US

❑ IG cannot implement any major new policies – creating jobs and improving services - as long as crisis between Maliki and Allawi persists

The Kurds as "Power brokers"?

❑ The Kurds initially welcomed the *power vacuum* created by the Maliki-Allawi rift because they saw themselves as potential kingmakers in resolving the rift

❑ Now they have changed their view as they see the negative consequences of the conflict

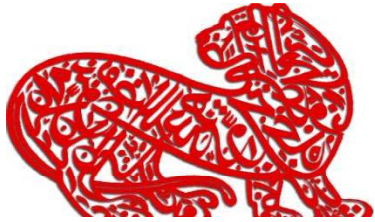❑ Pres. Talabani has called on Maliki to cede powers to NCSA and allow al-Iraqiya to help in choosing the defense & interior ministers

The Rise of the Shiite militias

❑ Elite conflict and withdrawal US/UK forces has allowed militias to emerge in southern Iraq

❑ Militias are encouraged and supported by Iran

❑ Lack of jobs and rising rural-urban migration, given water shortages, provides new recruits

❑ Militias threaten IG authority in south and intimidate government representatives

❑ By producing gridlock, *elite crisis* strengthens militias and radical elements throughout Iraq

Has the "Arab Spring affected Iraq?

❑ The Arab Spring has encouraged Iraqis, esp. youth (Arab and Kurdish) to demand change

❑ Weekly demonstrations occur in Baghdad, Sulaimaniya, and other Iraqi cities, and demonstrators have been killed and wounded

❑ Arab Spring has encouraged Iraqis to expand the number of civil society organizations

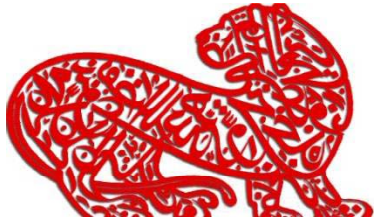❑ Arab Spring shows Iraqis want more personal freedoms and a more responsive government
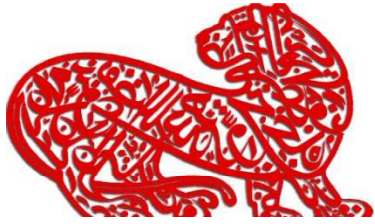
Arabs and Kurds demonstrate for more democracy

International community needs to support democratic aspirations of the Iraqi people

Corruption and Iraqi democracy

❑ Iraq's most serious problem is *lack of jobs*, *sub-standard government services* and *massive corruption*, *not* sectarianism

❑ Iraq's political parties "divide up the spoils"

❑ All ministries provide patronage that is dispensed by the party that controls a particular ministry

❑ Iraqis resent the lack of jobs and services despite Iraq's extensive wealth from oil and natural gas

❑ Iraq is #175 of 180 on the NGO Transparency International's List of most corrupt countries
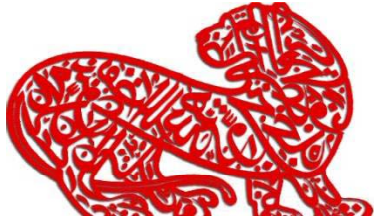
The Public Opinion Environment

All sects see democracy as improving quality of life

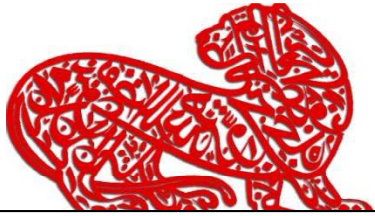■ Making Iraq more democratic will likely improve services and our quality of life.

■ Making Iraq more democratic would likely make services worse and hurt our quality of life.
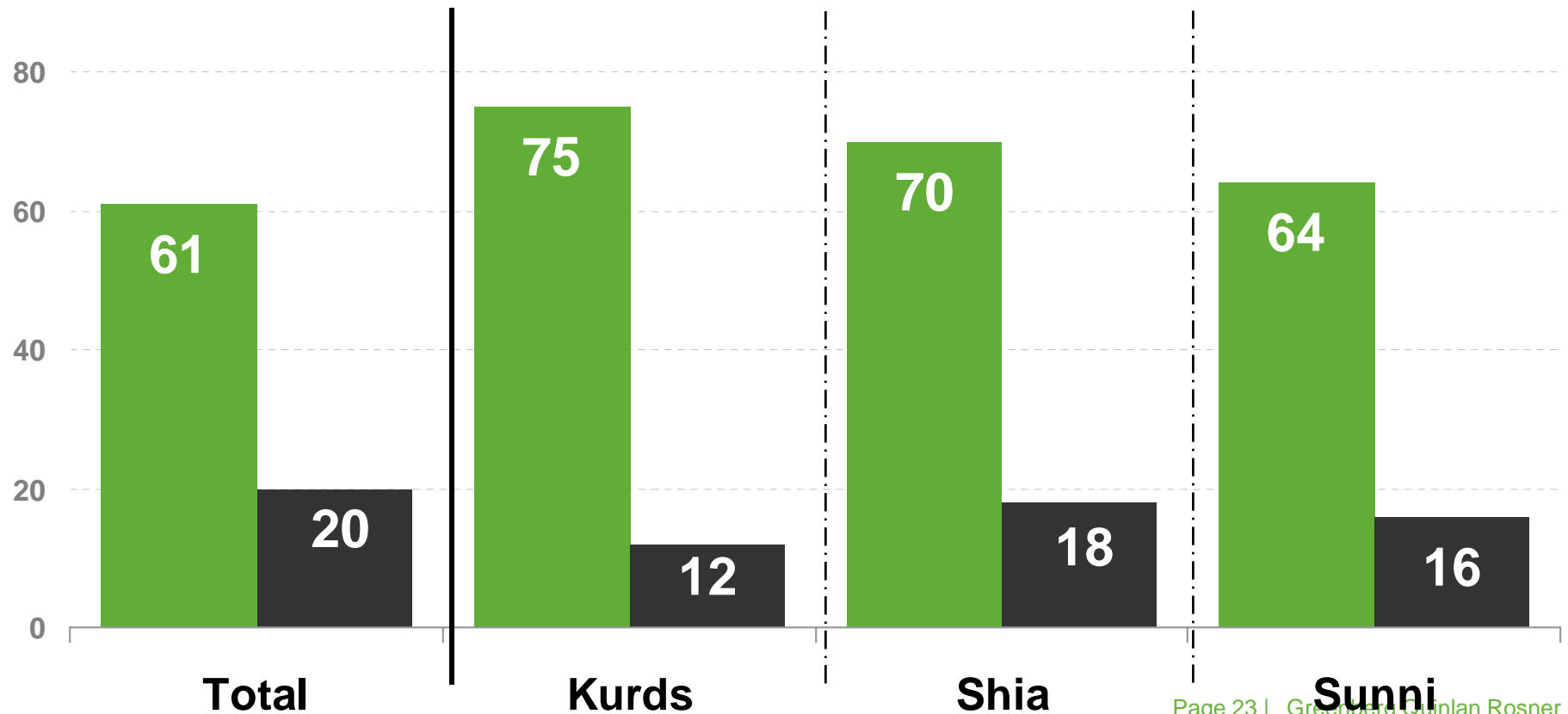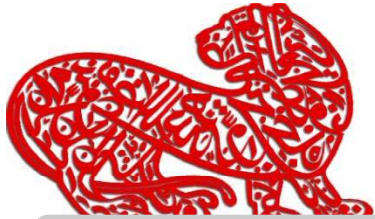
Now, I am going to read you a list of concerns that some people may have. Please tell me which TWO of these are the most important for the government to address.

Jobs dominates as leading concern

Concern	Value
Jobs and unemployment	56
Security	36
Basic services like electricity and water	29
Corruption	22
High prices	12
Sectarianism	11
Education	10
Infrastructure development	10
Health care	8

0   20   40   60
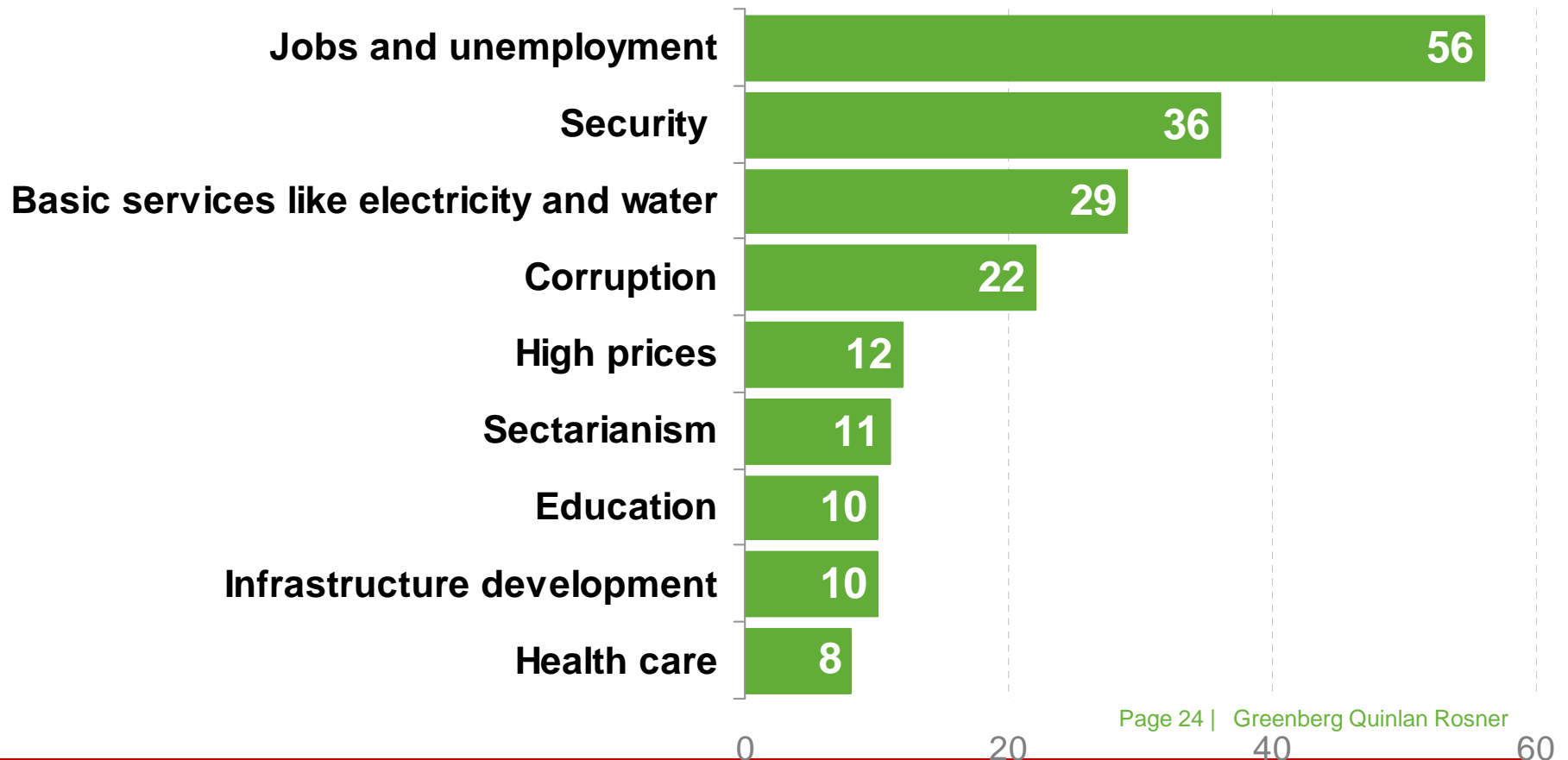
How many times per week did you attend the Friday prayer (*khutba*) in the last month?

	Ages 12-18	Ages 18-25	Ages 25-30	Total	Percent
Never	140	137	146	423	72.00%
Four Times	17	20	15	52	9.00%
Three Times	4	6	11	21	4.00%
Twice	8	18	19	45	8.00%
Once	14	21	9	44	8.00%
Total	183	202	200	585	100.00%

Focus groups conducted by Eric Davis with 600 Iraqi Youth – ages 12-30 (November 2010 – March 2011), with a grant from the *United States Institute of Peace*

How would you identify yourself religiously?

	Ages 12-18	Ages 18-25	Ages 25-30	Total	Percent
Conservative	28	52	44	124	21.00%
Moderate	133	121	114	368	63.00%
Liberal	12	17	27	56	10.00%
Don't Know	10	12	15	37	6.00%
Total	183	202	200	585	100.00%

Do you prefer to belong to a political party?

	Ages 12-18	Ages 18-25	Ages 25-30	Total	Percent
Yes	16	26	23	65	11.00%
No	167	176	177	520	89.00%
Total	183	202	200	585	100.00%

How much do you feel young people's lives have improved?

	Ages 12-18	Ages 18-25	Ages 25-30	Total	Percent
Very much	64	39	29	132	23.00%
Somewhat	47	58	65	170	30.00%
Not much	32	57	65	154	27.00%
Not at all	30	36	34	100	17.00%
Not sure	10	12	7	29	5.00%

What sources do Iraqi youth trust for news?

Source	Total	Percent
Iraqi	128	22.00%
Arab Non-Iraqi	192	33.00%
Western-based	150	26.00%
Iranian	6	**1.02%**
Other	118	20.00%

If given the opportunity, would you leave Iraq permanently?

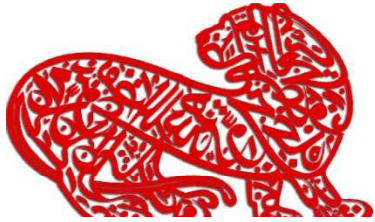|	Ages 12-18	Ages 18-25	Ages 25-30	Total	Percent
Yes	25	32	**36**	93	31.00%
No	**68**	61	45	174	57.00%
Maybe	10	8	18	36	12.00%
Total	103	101	99	303	100.00%

Do you think we can find a balance between Western and Middle Eastern cultural views?

	Ages 12-18	Ages 18-25	Ages 25-30	Total	Percent
Yes	36	33	72	141	24.00%
No	71	62	58	191	33.00%
Maybe	76	107	70	253	**43.00%**
Total	183	202	200	585	100.00%

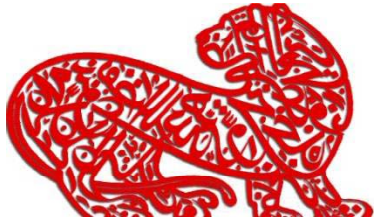## This table suggests need for greater interaction between US, EU and foreign NGOs and Iraqi youth

Iraqis show strong support for democracy

❑ From the *citizens'* perspective, Iraq appears well placed to make a transition to democracy

❑ Voter turnout, political participation, and public opinion polls all show support for democracy

❑ Voting patterns suggest support for sectarianism is on the decline

❑ However, the al-Maliki government remains dysfunctional and corrupt

❑ If corruption continues and key services are not forthcoming, support for democracy could be undermined (remember instability of 1960s)

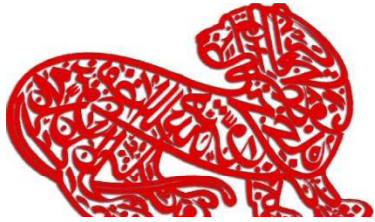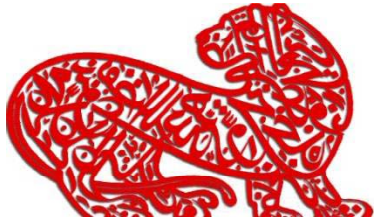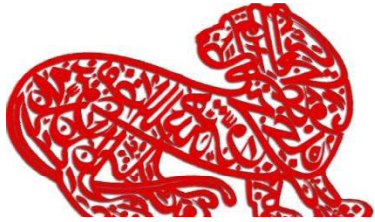# Whither Iraq?
Scenarios for the future

Worse case scenarios

❑ The worse case scenario is an Iraq paralyzed by elite conflict, as corruption and lack of services continue

❑ Iran and radical Sunni elements in KSA and Arab Gulf benefit from the stalled transition to democracy

❑ Armed militias challenge the IG's authority in rural areas and poor urban quarters

❑ Instability undermines foreign investment

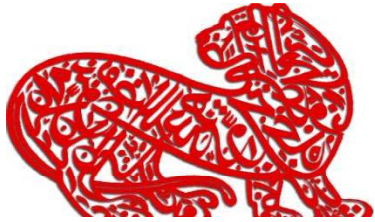❑ Progress fails to be made in the oil and gas sectors, both in terms of exploration and their modernization

A new authoritarianism?

❑ PM Nuri al-Maliki has undermined the process of democratization

❑ He has sought to control the Independent Higher Electoral Commission, the Central Bank and influence way in which judiciary adjudicates cases

❑ PM al-Maliki has created special military units that only report to him

❑ He threatened a parliamentarian, Sabah al-Saadi, with 7 years imprisonment for criticizing him
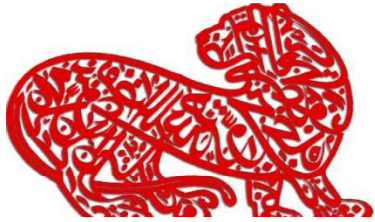
❑ His policies show little respect for *Rule of Law*

Will US influence decline?

- ❑ Even though US will withdraw most if not all troops by 12/31/11, US still will have influence in Iraq

- ❑ It will help Iraq build its air force and train its army and security services

- ❑ It will promote Iraqi interests in international financial institutions and conferences

- ❑ US will facilitate relations with Saudi Arabia and Arab Gulf states and provide counterweight to Iran

- ❑ US needs to use its influence, to push al-Maliki government to take seriously in Iraq

What is the impact of "neighborhood effects"?

- ❏ Iraq lives in a dangerous neighborhood

- ❏ None of Iraq's neighbors wants Iraq to become a democracy based on tolerance and pluralism

- ❏ Iranian regime sees Iraq as threat to its control over its majority Shiite population

- ❏ KSA sees Iraq providing model for its own Shiite population which lives in oil rich areas

- ❏ Syria sees democratic Iraq as further eroding support for Bashar al-Asad's Baᶜthist regime

Turkey as a "good neighbor"

❑ Turkey has invested heavily in Iraq

❑ Turkey works to create closer ties with KRG

❑ Both Turkey and KRG was to suppress PKK radicals who attack Turkey from Iraq mountains

❑ Turkey is working with Iraq to try and ease Iraq's sever water shortage problems

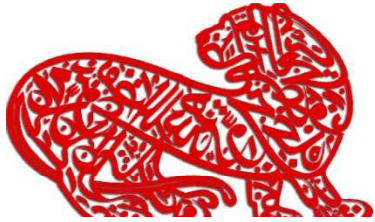❑ Turkey and Iraq are cooperating to build the Nabucco natural gas pipeline
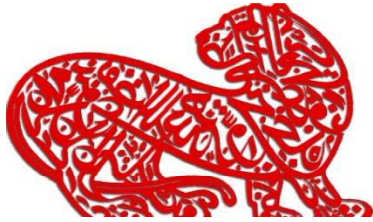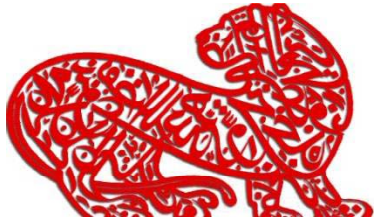
NABUCCO PIPELINE'S POSSIBLE ROUTES

Nabucco Pipeline

Turkey and Iraq cooperate to build
Nabucco Pipeline to take Iraqi
natural gas to Europe
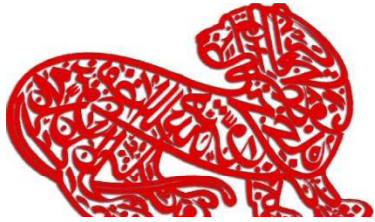
The "Libyan" plot

❑ When National Transitional Council seized Libyan capital, Tripoli, in August, discovered Qaddafi plot to help bring Ba^{c}th back to power

❑ Former NTC PM Mahmud Jibril flew to Baghdad to inform Nuri al-Maliki of plot

❑ Maliki used word of plot to dismiss many Sunni Arabs from government posts, e.g., 145 professors from Tikrit University fired
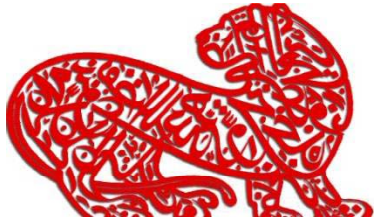
Plot has inflamed sectarian tensions

- ❑ Sunni Arabs say plot overblown by Maliki
- ❑ They argue it has become an excuse to get rid Sunnis who he doesn't like
- ❑ Maliki replies he must protect Iraq's security
- ❑ Tensions inflamed just as US troops leaving
- ❑ Tensions have encouraged Sunni Arab provinces to call for forming autonomous region like KRG
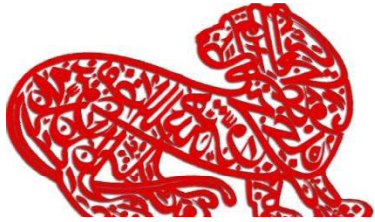
Could Iraq fragment?

❑ Elite crisis in Baghdad could promote Iraq's fragmentation into 3 mini states

❑ Iraq's Sunni Arab provinces have asked to become a separate region

❑ KRG is nervous about remaining part of Iraq without US protection

❑ Better ties with Turkey and Iran could create incentive to declare independence

❑ Such action would leave rump Shiite state in south

Summary comments

❑ Iraqi democracy is at a crucial turning point

❑ If Nuri al-Maliki doesn't promote national reconciliation, Iraq's fragmentation could result

❑ US, EU, UN and Turkey are key actors in assuring that Iraq does not fragment

❑ Further instability in Iraq would have negative consequences for a shaky global economy

❑ Instability favors Iranian expansionism

❑ Iraqis and international; community need to actively support expansion of democracy in Iraq

Bibliography

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Davis, Eric, "Sectarianism, Historical Memory and the Discourse of Othering: The Mahdi Army, Mafia, Camorra and 'Ndrangheta," in Chris Toensing and Mimi Kirk, eds., *Uncovering Iraq: Trajectories of Disintegration and Transformation*, Washington, DC: Center for Contemporary Arab Studies, Georgetown University, 2011, 67-139; available at: http://fas-polisci.rutgers.edu