

Long term Observation Report 1 :

Voter Registration

(March 25 to May 2019 ,11)

Noorakib Project

Domestic Observation of Provincial Elections.

Long term observation one-pager

The Voter Registration Process

Long term observation one-pager

Voter registration

In March 2019, the Al-Noor Universal Foundation (NUF) launched a project titled *Noorakib*, which aims to ensure the integrity, impartiality, and fairness of the electoral process through, honest and effective long-term monitoring. The project is implemented in eight provinces: Anbar, Basra, Baghdad, Diyala, Kirkuk, Najaf, Nineveh, and Salahaddin, with support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Between March 15 and May 11, 2019, the Iraqi High Elections Commission (IHEC) permitted Iraqi voters to register and/or update their biometric information in the voter register. To do so, IHEC opened 906 voter registration centers nationally and deployed several mobile voter registration teams. During this period, al-Noor deployed a long-term observation mission of 42 monitors to observe 242 voter registration centers, representing 37 percent of the registration centers in the eight target provinces. Al-Noor utilized a strategic deployment methodology, wherein LTOs were deployed to areas where there was likelihood of election related problems (based on the 2018 parliamentary elections); there are concentrated populations; and voter registration centers were easily accessible.

Main Findings:

- Low citizen participation in the voter registration and voter registry update, as well as low rate of voter cards distribution. Mobile registration teams were the champions of the voter registration process, driving the participation rate up.
- Delays ranging from one week to a month in the opening of 62 of 242 centers visited by LTOs, particularly in Anbar and Kirkuk.
- Lack of transparency due to failure to disseminate detailed reports and statistics relating to the voter registration process, especially regarding the work of mobile registration center staff.
- Registration center agents in all centers visited by observers followed the procedures correctly, indicating the high quality of their training and the clarity of the procedures put forward by the IHEC.
- Extremely low number, 6 percent, of women in the leadership of the voter registration centers visited.
- Only 10 percent of voter registration centers visited were properly equipped to accommodate persons with disabilities.
- Total absence of political party agents and civil society organizations in the voter registration centers visited by observers.

Recommendations:

- Al-Noor calls on the Council of Representatives to amend the Provincial Elections Law no. 12/2018 in a timely manner, to encourage a clear and stable environment ahead of the elections in accordance with international principles and good practices, in particular the principle of legal certainty and predictability.
- Al-Noor reminds IHEC of its responsibility to comply with its obligations and international standards for transparent elections, in particular the right of access to information, through the publication of detailed reports and statistics on the results of the voter registration process.
- The Foundation calls on IHEC to provide periodic and timely updates to the data on its official website, including publishing all decisions related to the administration of the voter registration process.
- Provincial IHEC offices should comply with all procedures and decisions of the National Office of IHEC, especially with regard to the registration and accreditation of civil society observers.
- We encourage IHEC to search for and adopt effective mechanisms aimed at enhancing the participation of women in the administration of the elections and taking leadership positions within the institution, conforming to the principle of equality stipulated in the Constitution and international obligations.
- Al-Noor calls on all actors in the electoral process, such as political entities, civil society organizations, and media, to reinvigorate civic and voter education efforts to ensure that all Iraqis understand how elections relate to citizen rights and responsibilities and how they can make informed choices.

- Al-Noor reminds civil society organizations and political entities of the need to conduct comprehensive election monitoring that is concerned with all aspects and stages of the electoral process, including pre-election and post-election day activities, and not restricted to the monitoring of Election Day only.
 - Al-Noor encourages IHEC to take into account the participation of persons with disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women in all election related activities by removing barriers which prohibit their full and direct participation in the electoral process.
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Long term Observation Report 1 : Voter Registration (March 25 to May 11, 2019) Project Noorakib

Long term observation one-pager

Voter registration

On March 2019, the Al-Noor Universal Foundation (also NUF, the Foundation) launched a project titled Noorakib, which aims to enhance voter confidence in the electoral process and to ensure the integrity, impartiality and fairness of the electoral process through honest and effective long-term monitoring. The project is being implemented in eight provinces: Anbar, Basra, Baghdad, Diyala , Kirkuk, Najaf, Nineveh, and Salahaddin. The project is conducted with support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI).

Between March 15 and May 11, 2019, the Iraqi High Elections Commission (IHEC) opened the door to Iraqi voters to update their biometric information and to register for the upcoming elections if their names did not appear in the voter register. During this process, 906 voter registration centers opened their doors to voters and a number of mobile voter registration teams were deployed. In the target provinces, according to the IHEC, the number of registration centers were as follows: Anbar (71), Baghdad (208), Basra (76), Diyala (41), Kirkuk (43), Najaf (30), Ninveh (140), and Salahaddin (38).

- Low citizen participation in the voter registration and voter registry update as well as low rate of voter cards distribution. Mobile registration teams were the champions of the voter registration process driving the participation rate up.
- Delays ranging from one week to a month in the official opening of voter registration centers in 62 out of 242 centers visited by the long term observation mission, in particular in Anbar and Kirkuk. Delays are mostly due to delays in hiring the registration center agents.
- Lack of transparency in the dissemination of detailed reports and statistics relating to the voter registration process, daily registration results, statistics by ethnicity and gender, number of registration centers and numbers of staff, especially in reference to the work of mobile registration center staff.
- The registration centers agents followed the voter registration procedures correctly in all the centers visited by the observers, indicating, at least with regards to the voter registration activity, the quality of the training and the clarity of the procedures put forward by the IHEC.
- An extremely low number, 6 percent, of women in the leadership of the voter registration centers.
- Only 10 percent of voter registration centers were properly equipped to accommodate persons with disabilities
- Total absence of political party agents and civil society organizations in the voter registration centers visited by NUF's observers.

Methodology:

During the period covered by this report, Al-Noor Universal Foundation observed 64 voter registration centers, representing 37 percent of the registration centers in the eight target provinces. To do so, Al-Noor deployed a long-term observation mission of 42 monitors, including supervisors and long-term observers (LTOs). During this monitoring phase, Al-Noor deployed the LTOs based on strategic deployment methodology where LTOs targeted voter registration centers in areas where there was likelihood of election related problems (based on the most recent parliamentary elections), voter registration centers in areas with concentrated populations, and voter registration centers easily accessed by the LTOs. To ensure comparability of data, the Foundation used standardized methodology, including data-collection forms, analysis, and training of observers. Al-Noor collected 430 monitoring forms with data from 242 voter registration centers.

Observation Findings

List of Voter Registration Centers: The Foundation noted a lack of transparency in the process of identifying, opening, canceling or replacing the voter registration centers that were publicly listed on the IHEC's website. This is a violation of the international standards for transparent elections, in which the electoral management bodies must clearly announce the places of voter registration and announce in particular any changes to these centers in terms of location, number, and hours of work.

Administrative and logistical preparations: The long term observation mission recorded a delay in the actual opening of voter registration centers in the target provinces, where 62 out of the 242 voter registration centers visited by the observers opened after the official start date for voter registration (March 25). In particular, all voter registration centers visited by NUF's observers in Anbar, and most in Kirkuk, opened several days or even weeks after the official opening date.

Voter registration centers: NUF's observers found that 10 percent of the centers visited were not suitable for persons with disabilities, special needs, and the elderly, which limits the principle of universal suffrage and the right of all citizens to fully and effectively participate in all aspects of the electoral process, including the registration period. In general, the registration centers were properly equipped with basic materials for the registration process, but observers noted that some voter registration centers were not properly equipped to accommodate citizens, as these buildings were narrow in space and lacked basic services.

Monitoring the voter registration process: Despite the issuance of IHEC regulation no.3/2019, the Foundation noted the observer accreditation mechanism differed from one province to another. The absence of a unified accreditation mechanism at the provincial level is due to a lack of clear procedural guidelines from the central IHEC office, as some IHEC provincial office agents acknowledged.

Registration center agents (mobile registration teams): The Foundation values the efforts of the voter registration centers agents, in particular the mobile registration teams who were the champions of the voter registration and voter registry update process. The mobile teams played a major role in increasing the participation rates in the voter registration process, and a number of mobile teams were witnessed working late at night and outside the official working hours. Unfortunately, some mobile teams were verbally harassed and intimidated by the public, and in some cases a lack of cooperation from local government agencies was reported to NUF's observers.

The Foundation notes that a woman was the president of the center in only 5 percent of the voter registration centers visited. This is not in line with the principle of promoting the political participation of women, particularly, in this case, in the management of elections.

Voter registration procedures: The registration center agents followed the procedures correctly in all the centers visited by the observers, indicating the quality of the training and the clarity of the procedures put forth by the IHEC. When electoral equipment failed during the registration process, witnessed in 4 percent of the centers visited by the observers, the registration centers agents quickly responded through repair or replacement and the technical failures did not affect the process of registration. In all the voter registration centers visited by the monitors, no voter registration complaints were submitted to the voter registration agents. It is not clear whether the absence of complaints is due to the failure to inform the voters and party agents about the complaints procedures or the actual absence of problems that may have affected the integrity of the voter registration process. Al-Noor also recorded no presence of political party agents or domestic monitoring groups in all the voter registration centers visited by Al-Noor's observers.

IHEC website: Al-Noor appreciates that the IHEC has re-launched its website in a new format including additional useful information about the electoral process, which increases the transparency of the elections. Moreover, all voter registration centers also launched social media pages to disseminate their activities and encourage citizens to update their biometric information or register. However, Al-Noor noted that the information provided on the website has not been regularly updated and that the IHEC has not been publishing all its decisions on the site periodically and in a timely manner.

Transparency of the IHEC: IHEC continues to suffer from a lack of transparency in terms of disseminating and publicly sharing information relating to the voter registration process, daily registration results, statistics by ethnicity and gender, number of registration centers, and numbers of staff, especially regarding the work of mobile registration centers. The Foundation also noted that the figures issued by IHEC on the number of political entities and observers who monitored the voter registration process are inaccurate.

Turnout: The foundation recorded a low participation rate in the voter registration process, as well as the biometric information update and the biometric cards retrieval processes, which is in large part due to a lack of citizen trust in the electoral and political process broadly. However, extending the update period from April 20, 2019 to May 11, 2019 was positive and increased the opportunity for citizens to participate in the voter registration and update processes.

Recommendations

After analyzing the voter registration process monitoring findings recorded during the period covered by this report, Al-Noor Foundation makes a number of recommendations:

- We call on the Council of Representatives, and all relevant key stakeholders, to adopt and approve any amendments to the Provincial Elections Law no. 12/2018 in a timely manner, which would encourage a clear and stable environment ahead of the elections, in accordance with international principles and good practices, in particular the principle of legal certainty and predictability.
- We remind the IHEC that it should comply with its obligations and international standards for transparent elections, in particular the right to access to information. To do so, the IHEC should publish detailed reports and statistics on the results of the voter registration process so monitoring institutions and the public can track these results.
- We stress that the provincial IHEC offices should comply with all procedures and decisions of the National Office of the IHEC, especially with regard to the registration and accreditation of civil society observers.
- We encourage the IHEC to search for and adopt mechanisms aimed at enhancing the participation and leadership of women in the administration of the elections, conforming to the principle of equality stipulated in the Constitution and international obligations.

- We call on all actors in the electoral process, including political entities, civil society organizations, and media, to reinvigorate civic and voter education efforts to ensure that all Iraqis understand how elections relate to citizen rights and responsibilities and how they can make informed choices.
- We remind civil society organizations and political entities of the need to uphold the principle of comprehensive election monitoring, which is concerned with all aspects and stages of the electoral process, including pre-election and post-election day activities, and is not simply restricted to the monitoring of Election Day.
- We encourage the IHEC to adopt measures that take into account the participation of persons with disabilities, the elderly, and pregnant women in all election related activities by removing barriers which prohibit their full and direct participation in the electoral process.

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