

Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

STORY

Provincial Elections Test Iraq's Move Towards Democracy, 2/03/2009

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/world/jan-june09/iraq.html>

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

PROCEDURE

1. WARM UP

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

2. MAIN ACTIVITY

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

3. DISCUSSION

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

INITIATING QUESTIONS

1. What is a democracy?

2. Name at least 3 functioning democracies. Where are they?

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

1. When was the last national election in Iraq?

ANSWER

Iraq held its last nationwide elections in 2005.

2. What added security was prepared for the election?

ANSWER

The government instituted curfews, banned traffic on the streets of major cities, and set up a large Iraqi police and U.S. military presence at polling locations.

3. How many provinces voted? How many seats were available in the vote?

ANSWER

All 18 provinces voted on governing bodies called provincial councils that oversee the budget and infrastructure projects. In Saturday's elections, more than 14,000 candidates ran for only 440 empty seats on the councils.

4. How many parties were on the ballots in total?

ANSWER

About 400 different parties make up the councils, but three parties have thus far dominated the political landscape based around traditional religious and ethnic divisions.

5. Why was there a widespread low voter turn out among Sunnis in 2005?

ANSWER

Protesting what they believed to be oppression by Iraq's majority Muslim Shiite sect, many of the minority Sunnis boycotted the elections in 2005.

6. What does the early polling say about the outcome of the election?

ANSWER

Early poll results show an increasing interest in more independent and secular political parties, an indication that Iraqis are searching for alternatives to the religious extremism and divisiveness of previous years.

7. What was the Obama Administration's response to the elections?

ANSWER

President Barack Obama congratulated the Iraqi people in a statement calling the elections an "important step forward" to establishing a self-sufficient Iraq.

When pressed about a campaign promise to withdraw soldiers from Iraq in 16 months, President Obama predicted that a significant number of troops would return home in the coming year.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

1. Iraq has over 400 political parties, can you imagine the United States having so many parties? What kind of differences do you think that would mean?

2. In 2005 and the most recent elections in Iraq some violence was anticipated. Do you think you would vote if there was the possibility of violence at the polling station? Why do you think there was violence?

3. This year's election was the first time that Iraq used a voter registration process modeled after the one used in the United States: people had to register in their neighborhood showing a proof of residency. Do you think this is a good idea? Why or why not?

4. Many parties in Iraq are affiliated with a specific religious or ethnic group. How does that compare with political parties in the United States? What does this say about Iraq?

5. What is the most important issue for you when voting? What do you think it would be if you lived in Iraq?

Extension Activity

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra (extra@newshour.org). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.