

Foreign Occupation, Religious Parties, and Value Change: The Rise of National Identity and Secular Politics among Iraqis

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ABSTRACT

Although the escalating violence in Iraq gives a bleak impression of that country's future, it would be a mistake to think that this bloodlust represents widespread sentiment among Iraqis as a whole. While neither American nor Iraqi security officials have yet found a way to tame the militias, the Iraqi public is increasingly drawn toward a vision of a democratic, non-sectarian government for the country. Drawing from a large body of empirical studies from such diverse fields as comparative historical sociology and public opinion research, this paper argues that people's values orientation is shaped in oppositional relations to the regimes of signification that are dominant in the sociopolitical environment. Following the American-led invasion of Iraq, the country came under domination of a foreign occupying power, on the one hand, and religious parties, on the other. Since none of these domineering powers has been able to secure order, we propose that the Iraqis' political attitudes have changed in oppositional relation to these two ineffective powers:

- (a) In opposition to religious parties, Iraqi attitudes have changed in favor of secular politics—the separation of religion and the state.
- (b) In opposition to foreign domination, there has been a growing adherence to national identity among Iraqis.
- (c) There has been a decline in the popularity of the religious parties.

This paper uses four extensive data sets to test these hypotheses. All the data are based on nationally representative samples in face-to-face interviews. The December 2004 and April 2006 surveys were NSF-funded projects and supervised by Mansoor Moaddel (PI), Ronald Inglehart (co-PI), and Mark Tessler (co-PI). These data-sets contain 2,325 and 2,700 completed interviews, respectively. The other two surveys were supervised by Assessment Effects Group in April and October 2006, and contained 7,912 and 7,945 completed interviewed, respectively.