

Civil Society Iraq: Ethnic, Religious, and Location Influences on Outgroup Perception

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Abstract

Civil Society Iraq: Ethnic, Religious, and Location Influences on Outgroup Perception Jon Gresham* April 2004
A significant research question in the immediate post-war (May 2003) environment of Iraq was: "How do ethnicity, religious affiliation, and location affect expressed perceptions of threat from outgroups?" We collected Iraqi opinions, in five locations in Iraq, Jordan, and The Netherlands, with a single page instrument. Religious origin, and location alone had little direct bearing on respondents' attitudes towards outgroups or claimed threat. However, certain sets of interacting elements did reflect significant differences in perceived threat. For example, Shi'a Muslims of urban Basra had very different expressions towards return of expatriate Baghdad residents. A serendipitous innovation was that of publishing our research process onto a "wiki" where visitors could add to or change contents of the documents. The wiki live publishing helped fellow decision-makers, resource agencies, and Iraq fieldworkers participate in our project. Why Civil Society? This paper describes both behavior and social systems and provides a sociological framework from which to explore interactions in Iraq. Follow-up is warranted. We found, for example, that "moderate Arabs" in Iraq were more opposed to foreign involvement and were the most opposed to expatriate Iraqis returning to Iraq. This is relevant to decision-makers and field workers in relief, development, and reconstruction in Iraq. This paper reflects on our research process in a post-regime-change environment. I would welcome comments onto the web site <http://CivilSocietyIraq.seedwiki.com>. _____ * Jon Gresham is a visiting scholar at the University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. His work focuses on the Cyprus-Syria-Iraq-Iran area. Special thanks are given to Hub Linssen, Professor at the University of Utrecht, with interest in cross-national comparative survey methodology.

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