

## 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\* A significant research question in the immediate post-war (May 2003) environment of Iraq was: "How do 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. Religion, origin, and location alone had little direct bearing on respondents' attitudes towards outgroups or change in perceived threat in Iraq. However, certain sets of interacting elements did reflect significant differences in perceptions of 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 Iraq describes both behavior and social systems and provides a sociological framework from which to explain interactions in Iraq. Follow-up is warranted. We found, for example, that "moderate Arabs" in Iraq were 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 describes our research process in a post-regime-change environment. I would welcome comments onto the web page at <http://CivilSocietyIraq.seedwiki.com>. \_\_\_\_\_ \* Jon Gresham is a visiting scholar at the University of Utrecht, Netherlands. His work focuses on the Cyprus-Syria-Iraq-Iran area. Special thanks are given to Hub Ling, Professor at the University of Utrecht, with interest in cross-national comparative survey methodology.

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