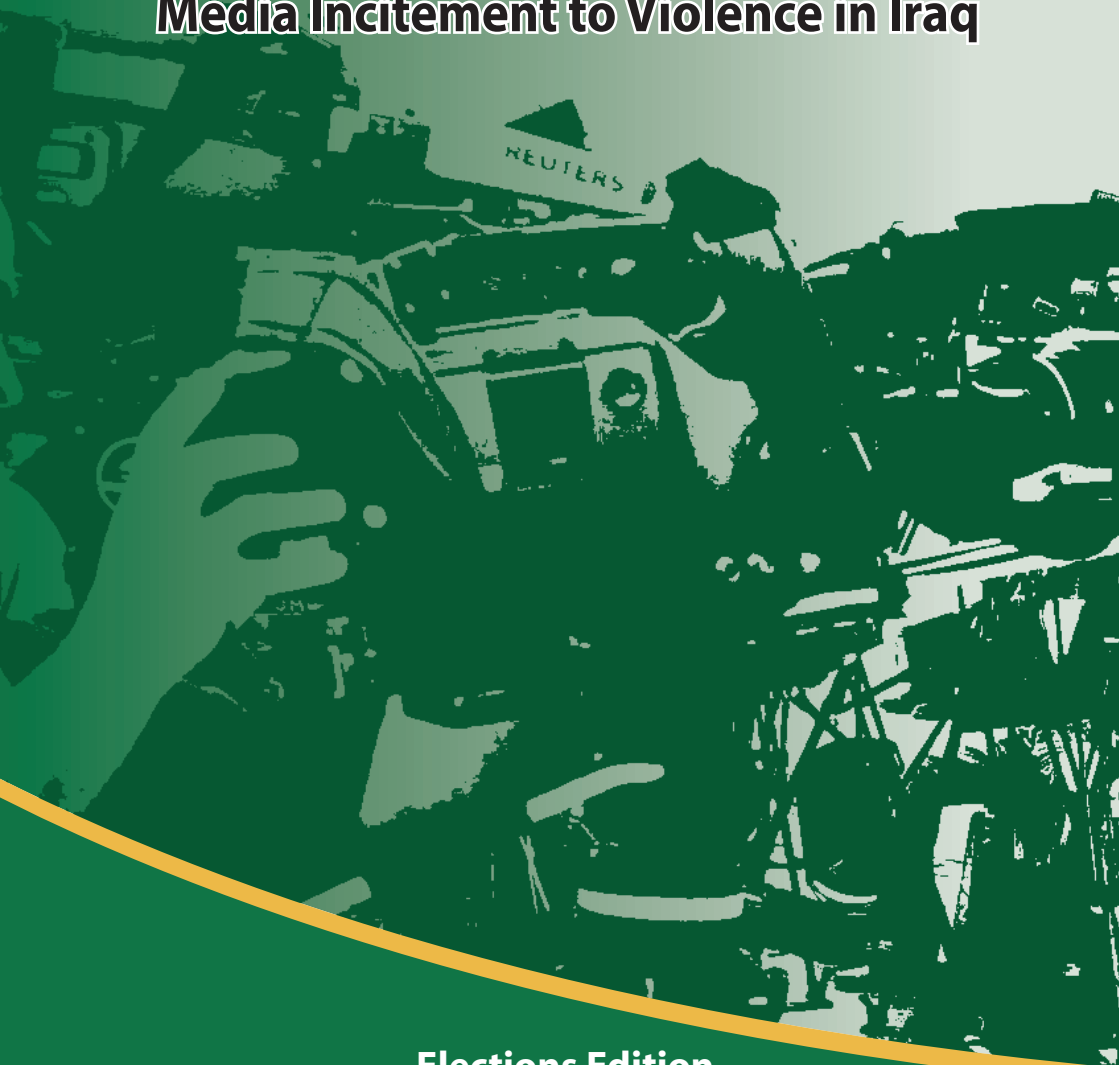


User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq



Elections Edition



UNITED STATES
INSTITUTE OF PEACE



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

منظمة الأمم المتحدة
للثقافة والعلم والتعليم

Introduction

The words used by media to convey news and information are powerful tools in shaping opinions and perspectives. Often the words chosen by journalists to tell a story can carry judgment, or even bias, beyond just presenting the facts. Words used in this manner have the potential to elicit a wide range of reactions from the public, including violence. As a practical example, violent extremists have noted in interviews that the influence of media inspired them to join groups that perpetrate violence. When media coverage does contribute to conflict, the results can be devastating, as seen in places like Rwanda, Bosnia, and Kosovo over the past two decades.

In Iraq, media stakeholders have acknowledged the dangers of inflammatory language in media coverage, particularly during election cycles. Yet there is little consensus among media professionals on what specifically constitutes media incitement to violence. The Iraqi Communications and Media Commission defines media incitement as:

"Broadcasting that 1) incites imminent (meaning close in time, immediate or impending) violence, ethnic or religious hatred, civil disorder, or rioting among the people of Iraq and 2) carries the clear and immediate risk of causing such incitement."

Inflammatory language, however, does not always take on the form of a direct call to violence. In fact, terms that have the potential to incite violence can be subtle, yet still dangerous, according to the context in which the terms are presented.

Goal and Methodology

The goal of the "User Guidelines for Preventing Media Incitement to Violence in Iraq" Elections Edition is to provide practical guidance for Iraqi media professionals reporting on elections, as well as for government officials and organizations involved in media monitoring during election periods. The guidelines consist of the following elements:

- 1 Definitions of potentially inflammatory words or terms used in the Iraqi media
- 2 Contextual examples of how the words or terms can be used to incite violence through the media
- 3 Recommended professional uses of the words or terms, or alternative words or terms in specific cases

To create these guidelines, over 50 Iraqi media professionals (representing print and broadcast media from across the country) were asked through a survey to identify their choices of the most potentially inflammatory terms used in the media during election periods. They were also asked to provide contextual examples of how these terms can incite violence via the media, in contrast with how the terms can be used to present information professionally. Based on the survey results, a panel of Iraqi media advisors created the consolidated guidelines, with editorial support from Iraqi and international media experts. In short, this is a resource created by Iraqis, for use by Iraqis.

The guidelines are not intended to encompass all potentially inflammatory language represented in Iraqi media; instead, this resource presents the thirteen terms most often cited by the survey respondents as being likely to incite violence during election cycles. While acknowledging that one way to mitigate inflammatory media coverage is to avoid the use of such terms, the reality is that words that could incite violence are part of the common lexicon of Iraqi media coverage. Therefore, by presenting a clear definition of the potentially inflammatory terms, as well as contextual examples of how such terms can be used professionally, these guidelines offer a framework for more conflict-sensitive coverage of the Iraqi elections. It is then up to each journalist, editor, manager, and media monitor to apply these guidelines consistently, with the goal of limiting inflammatory language and its potential for inciting violence through the media.

Practical Uses of the Guidelines

These guidelines have been developed by Iraqi media professionals for use by their peers – Iraqi journalists, news editors and media monitors. The following are suggested ways for each group to use these guidelines.

Journalists:

Working under pressure, especially during election periods, journalists may inadvertently use inflammatory words or terms. Professional journalists can guard themselves against such uses by following three steps:

- Developing an ability to identify inflammatory words. These guidelines offer an easily accessible list of commonly used inflammatory words.
- Guarding against expressing opinions in news stories. As journalists, we need to keep in mind that judgmental words reflect opinions that slant our reporting or make us appear to be taking sides. Media consumers often understand these judgmental words as inflammatory terms.
- Aiming for accuracy in reporting news. Inflammatory words are part of the political discourse, and journalists need to deal responsibly with the sources of such words. Ensure that the source reporting the inflammatory comments is generally reliable and credible. If in doubt, make sure these words are properly attributed and confer with your news editor.

News editors:

News editors can use these guidelines to train journalists and to identify and monitor the use of potentially inflammatory words or terms.

- As the last line of defense against inflammatory speech, news editors are encouraged to use these guidelines as an editorial aid that provides an easily accessible reference for them and their staff. News editors are free to build their own lists and suggest alternative terms based on this resource.
- When training new or volunteer reporters, these guidelines provide a quick reference with suggestions on how to avoid the use of inflammatory words.

Media monitors:

Government agencies and non-governmental organizations engaged in media monitoring can implement these guidelines in order to track more effectively the fairness and objectivity of media coverage during elections.

- Monitoring organizations can use these guidelines to enhance monitoring methodologies, train media monitors to identify inflammatory words, and assist data analysts in assessing election-related news and information.
- Monitoring bodies can utilize these guidelines to inform the public more effectively regarding the use of inflammatory words or terms in the media.

These guidelines represent the inflammatory words and terms that are most widespread during election periods. Based on a survey of over 50 Iraqi media professionals representing the various types of media, an Iraqi media committee put together a list of these words and terms. Each word or term is accompanied by a definition, and examples of both inflammatory usage and professional alternatives.

Ijtithath (Uprooting)

Definition:

Ijtithath literally means to uproot something. In the Iraqi political context, it refers to voter or candidate disenfranchisement. Ijtithath alone does not appear in the Iraqi constitution, which uses the word "ban" as in "banning Saddam's Baath from the political process," or "...de-Baathification (ijtithath al-ba'th) according to the constitution and depriving its members of participation in the political process." There is also a governmental organization called the "Supreme National Commission for de-Baathification." Using this term is a clear indication that Baathist ideology in general, and especially that of Saddam's Baath Party, will not be tolerated in the Iraqi political process. Ijtithath has been used heavily in the press, and in government interviews, statements, and decisions. Some have also suggested that the word "Baathists" actually alludes to Sunnis, implying that there is Shiite dominance of Iraqi politics. The widespread use of this word in the government, parliament, and in public discourse has sown the seeds for future cycles of violence.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "But the act of de-Baathification is an act which deserves the appreciation of every citizen, regardless of his religion or ethnicity."

It would be preferable to replace de-Baathification here with one of the following words: "the Accountability and Justice Commission," "banning Baathists from political action," or "holding baathists accountable."

Thus, the sentence would be as follows:

- "But the act of banning the Baath Party and its members is an act which deserves the appreciation of every citizen, regardless of his religion or ethnicity."

The Iranian or Foreign Agenda

Definition:

The term "agenda" (ajinda) is often tied, in an inflammatory manner, to the concept of loyalty to Iran, Saudi Arabia, or other foreign countries. It can imply, for example, that the government, and (Shiite) religious parties in particular, are loyal to Iran rather than Iraq. All of those described as such are seen as serving Iran's, not Iraq's, interests. The term suggests that each sect is implementing what a certain foreign country – whether Iran or another country – desires, in accordance with sectarian identity and the relationship with its members. However, the accusation is most commonly leveled at the Shiite-dominated government of Iraq for its alleged loyalty to Iran.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "The party revealed its ultimate strategy through loyalty to Iran and implementing the Iranian agenda."

This would be better if the word "interests" were to be substituted, since it is less inflammatory and more objective and since interests are what connect countries and dominate the world of politics.

Thus, the sentence would be:

- "The party revealed its ultimate strategy through loyalty to Iran and serving Iranian interests."

Sectarian Quotas

Definition:

This term means "sectarian quotas" (al-muhasasaat al-taifiyya) and strikes at the heart of sectarianism and the notion of individual sectarian affiliation. More specifically, it stands as a symbol for the Iraqi political institutions dominated by Shiites. The term itself is a misnomer, and is more accurately described using "political participation" for all different sub-groups within the Iraqi people in

forming the government or parliament. Before 2003, there was a single subgroup controlling political decision-making, while those from other communities were appointed to give the superficial appearance of diversity. When describing a political leader, the media may not just give his name (Representative X), but will also indicate his religious/ethnic affiliation. This or mentioning the politician's home district (leaving the reader to infer his religious/ethnic identity) is clearly inflammatory. The same applies to the political parties, which are referred to by their sect or ethnicity.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "Under the rule of sectarian and ethnic quotas, Iraq and its people have undergone insurmountable political crises, in which the threat of terrorism and political and security instability have grown."

It is better if the word "sectarian quotas" is replaced by "political participation," because the goal is to include all subsets of the Iraqi people.

Thus, the sentence would be:

- "Under the system of sectarian and ethnic participation, Iraq and its people have undergone insurmountable political crises, in which the threat of terrorism and political and security instability have grown."

Conspiracy

Definition:

The term "conspiracy" (mu'amara) is often used by politicians across the political spectrum to express their concerns. For instance, there have recently been rumors of the military conspiring to wage a coup. Iraqi politicians are ever wary of conspiracies, and accuse each other day and night of plots. This is not limited to accusing other sects or parties, but can sometimes even refer to internal rivalries. The "conspiracy mentality" is widely prevalent among Iraqi politicians, who see backroom deals and foreign agendas behind nearly every random event. All in all, this translates into a mutual loss of trust.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "The threads of the great international conspiracy against the oppressed people of Iraq have been exposed, and one of the most important foundations of this conspiracy is the consideration of Iraq's Shiites as part of Iran."
- "The Saudi-Jordanian-Emirati conspiracy is part of Shiite rhetoric in accusing the Sunni lists of being supported by these countries in order to undermine the democratic experiment. This [rhetoric] creates hostility and hatred towards neighboring countries."

It would be better if the expression "conspiracy" were replaced by one of these phrases, because they are less inflammatory and less likely to incite violence: "regional plans" or "desires."

Then the sentences would be as follows:

- "The great international plan against the oppressed people of Iraq has been exposed, and one of the most important foundations of this tendency is the consideration of Iraq's Shiites as part of Iran."
- "The Saudi-Jordanian-Emirati desires are part of Shiite rhetoric in accusing the Sunni lists of being supported by these countries in order to undermine the democratic experiment. This [rhetoric] creates hostility and hatred towards neighboring countries."

Vote or Don't Vote

Definition:

This imperative means that you, the citizen, must vote, or else the consequences will be dire. Here the word "vote" (intakhib) does not directly incite people to violence, but it sows fear and suspicion in them, and leaves no middle ground. This phrase means that voting in the elections (and choosing the right candidate) will clear the way for a bright future, while low turnout means Iraq will continue to live in the shadow of ignorance and not take a single step forward.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "Don't elect a despot, lest you be an accomplice in his wrongdoing."

It would be better if the imperatives "vote" or "don't vote" were replaced by something less inflammatory, such as: "It's your choice" or "You can decide who represents you."

- "If you choose a despot, you will be an accomplice in his wrongdoing."

Exclusion, Deprivation, and Marginalization

These terms began appearing after the fall of the regime in 2003. They are used in reference to the Baathists and the Sunnis, and to a lesser degree regarding the other minorities.

Exclusion

Definition:

In the Iraqi context, "expulsion" or "removal" (iqsa') refers to the exclusion of a crucial segment of Iraqi society, the Sunnis, from the political process. This strikes fear into hearts of Sunnis, and incites them to resort to violence in order to get a chance to participate in the political process. This also leads to intervention by other Sunni Arabs in support of Sunni Iraqis against Shiite oppression, in turn threatening civil war and chaos.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "A political crisis sparked by the exclusion of Sunni candidates from the elections."
- "The exclusion of Sunni Arab candidates from taking part in the elections."

It would be better if the expression "exclusion" were replaced by something which does not incite voters' emotions, such as "forbidding" or "removal."

Thus, the sentences would be as follows:

- "A political crisis sparked by the removal of Sunni candidates from the elections."
- "Forbidding Sunni Arab candidates from taking part in the elections."

Deprivation

Definition:

"Deprivation" (harmaan) refers to depriving a person from having something. For example, "the child was deprived of a natural, happy childhood" or "the wife was deprived of inheriting from her father, her husband, and others." At its core, the term indicates preventing something by force. In the Iraqi context, its use in the media indicates that someone has been deprived from participating in the elections; even though he has the right to be a candidate, he is not allowed to be nominated or to win the elections.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "The Iraqi elections commission announced that it has received the deprivation lists."

Because the constitution does not stipulate the word "deprivation," but rather calls for the banning of political activity for some groups, it is preferable that "deprivation" be replaced with "banning" or "exceptions."

Thus the sentence would be:

- "The Iraqi elections commission announced that it has received the lists of banned persons."

Marginalization

Definition:

"Marginalization" (tahmesh) refers to the marginalization of the other. Ruling parties deliberately marginalize the nationalist forces and parties from the political decision-making process; while Iraqi political and religious forces unanimously

agreed to call citizens to vote so that their role in decision-making would not be marginalized.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "Did the election results in effect marginalize the Sunni Arabs who ruled modern Iraq?"

The expression "marginalization" should be replaced by a term which does not increase minorities' fears, such as "making absent," "not looking after," or "diminishing the role."

Thus, the sentence becomes:

- "Did the election results in effect diminish the role of the Sunni Arabs in politics?"

Majority and Majority Rule

Definition:

"Majority" (aghlabiyya or hukm al-aghlabiyya) is not a word that directly incites violence. In every country, there is a population census that determines the population of its religious and ethnic groups. Consequently, the group whose population is largest is the majority or plurality. For example, the Shiites are the majority in Iraq compared to the Sunnis, while northern Iraq is inhabited by a Kurdish majority, and so on. However, in the Iraqi context, "majority" refers to those who rule the country through the ballot box, while also representing the largest portion of the population (the Shiite). Moreover, the term carries sectarian overtones, and consequently pushes the other side – the Sunnis and possibly the Kurds or the Christians – to take a hostile stance towards that government, even though it has Kurdish, Sunni, and Christian members within it.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "The simple understanding of democracy as only the rule of the majority will have disastrous results, such as those we see in Iraq today."

The term "majority" feeds feelings of resentment, so it is better to use the term "the electoral majority."

The sentence becomes the following:

- "The simple understanding of democracy as only the rule of the electoral majority will have disastrous results, such as those we see in Iraq today."

Authoritative Parties

Definition:

"Authoritative parties" (ahzab mutasallata) refers to parties that employ power to serve their narrow factional parties' goals, while failing to serve the greater interest of the nation and its citizens. It often implicitly refers to the four major parties (Dawa, the Supreme Council, the PKU, and the KDP). This term gives the false, misleading impression to voters that there is a sectarian majority which deserves to win, and is most fit to rule.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "After April 9, 2003, our fellow politicians from the authoritative parties found within the state a way for themselves, and themselves alone, to benefit."

The term "authoritative parties" should be replaced by "influential," "major," or "ruling" parties.

The sentence becomes the following:

- "After April 9, 2003, our fellow politicians from the influential parties found within the state a way for themselves, and themselves alone, to benefit."

The National Resistance

Definition:

"National resistance" (al-muqawama al-wataniyya) refers to the resistance against the occupiers and invaders. Some parties in Iraq - both Shiite and Sunni - employ this

term to justify their military operations against Americans, including kidnappings, killings, bombings, etc. There are others who believe that this means non-violent resistance, and some who believe that it means armed resistance. The sheer number of acts of violence and bombings claimed by parties and organizations, mostly of an Islamic stripe, has deprived this word of its real meaning. Currently there are few in Iraq who see "the national resistance" in Iraq as being truly national, given the acts of violence carried out by the Mehdi Army militias and other Shiite factions, as well as those by Al-Qaeda or the other armed Sunni factions.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "However, the national resistance was not alone in the country, which after the invasion was open with no restrictions."

Because of the disagreement over defining the national resistance, it is preferred to replace it with "opponents of the American presence" or "the opposition forces."

The sentence becomes the following:

- "However, the opposition forces were not alone in the country, which after the invasion was open with no restrictions."

Federalism

Definition:

"Federalism" (al-fidiraliya) refers to a system of governance by which the regions rule themselves, deferring to the central government in situations where the greater national interest is involved. However, due to the failure of the media and politicians to educate the public about the concept behind this system, the idea that has become fixed in the mind of the public is that federalism entails dividing Iraq into small countries, each of which is more subservient to neighboring countries than the central government. The issue is particularly sensitive because of the uneven distribution of oil reserves in Iraq. This matter was rarely discussed, especially in the early years after 2003, because the debate was not centered on federalism as a concept, but rather which system best suited Iraq.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "The agreement on the option of Iraqi federalism was based on a number of premises, among them that this option be the right of all of Iraq's provinces."

Because the federal system is linked to theories about the division of Iraq, it would be preferable to replace federalism (al-fidiraliya) with "the federal (ittihadi) system of governing."

Thus, the sentence becomes:

- "The agreement on the option of the federal system of governing in Iraq was based on a number of premises, including that this option be the right of all of Iraq's provinces."

The Kurdish-Shiite Alliance

Definition:

"Kurdish-Shiite Alliance" (al-tahalluf al-kurdy al-shi'i) refers to the feeling of unity between the Kurds and Shiite due to their common experience of oppression under Saddam. Consequently, it is understood that there is a de facto standing alliance between the two groups as they work together to deal with emergencies. Such talk makes the Sunnis feel suspicious and marginalized, as the Kurds and Shiites together would represent a powerful alliance.

Examples and Proposed Alternatives:

- "In Iraq the formation of a Shiite-Kurdish alliance was announced in an attempt to overcome the crisis."

Since the alliance is between two ethnic groups, it would be better to use the term "dispute" or "alliance between Arab and Kurdish political powers."

Thus, the sentence becomes:

- "In Iraq the formation of an Arab-Kurdish alliance was announced in an attempt to overcome the crisis."

