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# Iraqis: Civilians Killed in U.S. Bombing

**AP** Associated Press



By THOMAS WAGNER, Associated Press Writer

29 minutes ago

BAGHDAD, Iraq - U.S. warplanes and helicopters bombed two western villages, killing an estimated 70 militants near a site where five American soldiers died in a weekend roadside blast, the military said Monday. Residents said at least 39 of the dead were civilians.

Sunday's violence near the insurgent stronghold of Ramadi came a day after [Iraq](#) voted on a landmark constitution that many Sunnis opposed. As officials continued counting millions of paper ballots Monday, the charter seemed assured of passage.

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A foreign election observer with access to information on nationwide election returns confirmed that apparent outcome in an interview with The Associated Press on Monday. He spoke on condition of anonymity, saying the Iraqi Independent Electoral Commission would announce the official results, which could be released Wednesday.

A sandstorm Monday could delay the counting — and the final results — into later in the week. Elections officials resumed work in Baghdad, but were still only counting ballots from the capital area. Ballots from the provinces still have to be flown in, but the sandstorm grounded air traffic into Baghdad.

The acceptance of the constitution would be a major step in setting up a democratic government that could lead to the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq. But Secretary of State [Condoleezza Rice](#) warned Sunday that violence will continue, even if the constitution is adopted. She said support for the insurgency would eventually wane as the country moves toward democracy.

On Saturday, a roadside bomb killed five U.S. soldiers in a vehicle in the Al-Bu Ubaid village on the eastern outskirts of Ramadi. On Sunday, a group of about two dozen Iraqis gathered around the wreckage; they were hit by U.S. airstrikes, the military and witnesses said.

AP Photo: Iraqis lower the body of a US airstrikes victim into the grave in Ramadi, Iraq,...

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The military said the crowd was setting another roadside bomb when F-15 warplanes hit them, killing about 20 people it described as "terrorists."

But several residents and one local leader said they were civilians gathering to gawk at and take pieces of the wreckage, as often occurs after an American vehicle is hit.

Tribal leader Chiad Saad said the airstrike killed 25 civilians, and several others said the same thing, although they refused to give their names out of fear for their safety.

The other deaths occurred in the nearby village of Al-Bu Faraj.

The military said a group of gunmen opened fire on a Cobra attack helicopter that spotted their position. The Cobra returned fire, killing about 10. The men ran into a nearby house, where gunmen were seen unloading weapons before an F/A-18 warplane bombed the building, killing 40 insurgents, the military said.

Witnesses said at least 14 of the dead were civilians. After a man was wounded in an airstrike, he was brought into a nearby building that was struck by warplanes, said the witnesses, who refused to give their names out of fear for their safety.

An Iraqi journalist reporting for The Associated Press said he later saw the 14 bodies and the damaged building.

Associated Press Television News video from the scene showed the victims included at least two children and one woman. Witnesses said seven other children were among the dead. APTN also showed two children among the wounded at Ramadi General Hospital.

Few voted in Ramadi, 70 miles west of Baghdad, during Saturday's referendum — either out of fear of militants' reprisals or out of rejection of the new constitution.

A U.S. Marine was also killed by a bomb Saturday in Saqlawiyah, 40 miles west of Baghdad, the military said. The weekend's U.S. military fatalities brought to at least 1,976 the number of U.S. service members who have died since the war began in 2003, according to an AP count.

On Monday, a drive-by shooting killed two policemen in Kirkuk, 180 miles north of Baghdad, and a suicide bomber attacked a funeral for a sheik in Samarra, 60 miles north of Baghdad, killing two civilians and wounding one, police said.

The violence raised to 535 the number of people who died in insurgent attacks across Iraq in the last three weeks.

The constitution seemed assured of passage after initial results showed minority Sunnis had fallen short in an effort to veto it at the polls.

Many Sunnis fear the new decentralized government will deprive them of their fair share of the country's vast oil wealth by creating virtually independent mini-states of Kurds in the north and Shiites in the south, while leaving Sunnis isolated in central and western Iraq.

Opponents failed to secure the necessary two-thirds "no" vote in any three of Iraq's 18 provinces, according to counts that local officials provided to the AP. In the crucial central provinces with mixed ethnic and religious populations, enough Shiites and Kurds voted to stymie the Sunni bid to reject the constitution.

The Sunni "no" campaign appeared to have made the two-thirds threshold in Anbar province, the vast western Sunni heartland where Ramadi is the capital, and in Salahuddin, where Sunnis hold a large majority and as many as 90 percent of voters cast ballots. But in two other provinces where Sunni Arabs have only slim majorities — Ninevah and Diyala — the "yes" vote apparently won out.

Sunni leaders responded angrily, some of them saying they suspected fraud and accusing American officials and the Shiite parties that dominate the government. While a strong Sunni turnout suggested a desire among many to participate in Iraq's new political system, there were fears that anger at being ruled under a constitution they oppose could push some into supporting the Sunni-led insurgency.

If the constitution indeed passed, the first full-term parliament since [Saddam Hussein](#)'s fall in 2003 will install a new government by Dec. 31 following Dec. 15 elections. If the charter failed, the parliament will be temporary, tasked with drawing up a new draft constitution.

"If the constitution was passed, the attacks will definitely rise against the occupation forces, and the security situation is going to be worse," said Sheik Abdul-Salam al-Kubaisi, a prominent cleric with the influential Sunni Association of Muslim Scholars, which government officials accuse of links to the insurgency.

Washington was hoping it would pass so Iraqis can form a legitimate, representative government, tame the insurgency, and enable the 150,000 U.S. troops to begin withdrawing.

Provinces in the south, where most of Iraq's Shiite majority are concentrated, racked up big "yes" votes — more than 90 percent in most places. Results were not yet available from Kurdistan, but the Kurdish community strongly supports the charter.

Still, despite a call by their top cleric, Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, to support the charter, Shiite participation in the south was far lower than in January's parliamentary elections, when more than 80 percent of Shiite voters celebrated as they went to the polls to mark their new dominance of the country.

Between 54 percent and 58 percent of voters showed up Saturday in most of the south, according to U.N. elections chief Carina Perelli. The drop could reflect a belief that the constitution's victory was assured, or be a sign of discontent.

The Sunni turnout stood in contrast to January's elections, which they boycotted because they believed the political process was unfair. That move left them with a minuscule presence in parliament.

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