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R E P O R T

Assessing Living Conditions in Iraq's Anbar Province in 2009

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Prepared for the Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

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Summary

In Iraq's Anbar Province, the local population is the center of gravity, as is typical in any counterinsurgency campaign. Thus, in order for the forces of order to appeal to the people, security forces need to effectively engage not only in combat but also in efforts to understand the population and how they live: their concerns, their expectations, their grievances, and what drives those dispositions, as well as how they live and act on those concerns, expectations, and grievances. Also important is gauging changes in their assessments and attitudes over time with the aim of identifying the areas of greatest need. To acquire a better understanding of how Anbaris live and how conditions in al-Anbar may have changed, RAND conducted two surveys evaluating living conditions in the province. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a random sample of 1,200 heads of Anbari households (here, a *household* is defined as a family and other related individuals normally living in one housing unit) from May 28–June 10, 2008,² and from May 23–June 9, 2009. Interviews were conducted by local Anbaris, who were trained over four days by instructors who had attended a separate training course held outside Iraq and conducted by RAND and subcontractor staff. While one might expect respondents in a conflict zone to react with some hesitancy toward a survey asking questions about their daily lives, the average response rate between the two surveys is 67 percent, a figure on par with response rates for similar surveys in other Middle Eastern countries.

The surveys and data are available to researchers upon request from RAND. The main findings, summarized in the following sections, suggest that, essentially, Anbaris are better off (as of 2009) in terms of key measures than they were in 2008. Importantly, the population generally feels safer, as indicated in a sharp decline in external displacement and in the sense among the public that the convulsive violence that plagued the province is significantly reduced. In other encouraging results, the economic climate shows signs of improvement, with a sizeable percentage of respondents reporting an increase in wage income since 2008. Access to health care, though still in need of attention, has not worsened since 2009, and the percentage of the population with access to education has not declined. In a similar vein, there is still room for progress in the functioning of key utilities, such as electricity and water, which remain unstable; but, at the same time, these services seem not to have worsened since the 2008 survey. Summaries of findings from the 2009 survey are presented in the sections that follow.

² For 2008 findings and detailed discussion, see Crane et al., 2009.

Security and the Effects of War

In a significant shift since the 2008 survey, larger percentages of the public in al-Anbar now offer positive assessments of the security situation in Iraq. Equally important is the widening belief that U.S. and Iraqi government efforts to improve local enforcement capability may have contributed to similarly improved police-force effectiveness in addressing crime. For example, although respondents cite crime as the biggest threat to neighborhood security, most now say they would turn to their local police, rather than other community-level actors, such as tribes or local leaders, to deal with crime effectively.

Anbari opinion is consistent with nationwide trends in Iraq regarding attitudes toward the security situation. Most Iraqis believe that the overall security environment has improved since 2008 due to U.S. efforts to restore law and order to Iraq, and most conclude that the United States has made progress toward its goals for Iraq since 2008.

Public Infrastructure

The quality of water and electricity continues to be a major concern in al-Anbar, and conditions have improved little since 2008. Power supply remains erratic, with over half of all households experiencing daily outages. According to both the 2008 and 2009 surveys, the largest proportion of households still rely on a diesel-powered generator (shared with neighbors, operated by a neighborhood cooperative, or run by a local private company) for electricity when electricity is not available from the grid. Water supply is equally unreliable. Not surprisingly, dissatisfaction with the supply of water and electricity is fairly widespread in al-Anbar.

Although all urban homes are connected to public sewage lines, just 30 percent of rural households are connected. This portion has increased slightly, since 2008, however, when only 25 percent of rural homes reported having a public sewage connection.

As in 2008, access to places of worship is still better than access to police stations. Seventy percent of the Anbari population can get to a place of worship within 20 minutes, but only about 30 percent can get to a police station in the same amount of time. This lingering issue suggests an ongoing problem regarding the accessibility of security facilities. If violence, crime, and corruption are to be significantly reduced, populations must be able to report such instances, and law enforcement must be able to respond effectively to public need.

Employment

As in 2008, households have at least one income-earner: Every head of household earns some income from wages. However, whereas employment in Western societies tends to be defined as an individual working one job steadily, employment in al-Anbar is seen quite differently. The largest proportion (roughly 40 percent) of those who work would not describe themselves as formal “employees.”

A closer examination of employment patterns and demographic characteristics shows that the population on the whole is fully employed, but a substantial proportion (20 percent) is out of work. Unemployment is highest among Anbari youth. Also evident in both surveys is that there are critical differences between men and women in labor-force participation rates. First,

unemployment is somewhat higher among females (24 percent) than among males (16 percent). Second, motherhood usually removes women from the labor force. The violence that paralyzed al-Anbar's economy after the 2003 invasion continues to be an obstacle for women somewhat more so than for men.

Nonetheless, wage income represents a significant source of employment in al-Anbar, although other forms of self-generating income activity, such as household production, are very important as well.

Income and Standards of Living

Income earnings continue to rise in the province, which suggests that the abatement of violence is likely contributing to continued revitalization of the economy. A closer look at demographic differences shows no significant difference in urban versus rural earnings. Comparing wages at the individual level, we see that women's wages initially rise at the same rate as men's. However, by their mid-30s, women's earnings rise much more slowly than men's do. For all Anbaris surveyed, wage earnings are indeed the most important source of income, but revenue from agriculture and gardening is vital.

Fewer respondents (83 percent) report receiving food rations from the Iraqi government, compared with 2008 (92 percent). According to RAND findings, however, respondents say they also turn to other sources to acquire rations, including secular and religious nongovernmental organizations. Rations are critical to locals' survival, with 40 percent of respondents asserting that, without rations, they would be eating less.

With the great exception of food rations, which almost everyone receives, respondents report deriving only a small percentage of their income from transfers. Additional money is raised from rentals and property sales, but the percentage of income arising from the sale of large assets (e.g., houses) has declined sharply since 2007—a sign that economic distress is dissipating. Higher levels of education are not correlated with higher incomes, but they *are* associated with a greater likelihood of holding a salaried job.

Respondents generally do not report much in the way of savings. Just over 30 percent of households have a bank account, an increase over 2008's 20 percent. Households are more inclined to maintain their wealth in gold or other precious metals (44 percent do so).

Against the backdrop of optimistic assessments of their households' economic situation, respondents expressed pragmatic views about the prospects for continued economic improvement in the province. Few believe that recovery will occur in a matter of a few weeks or months. Most estimate that it will take many years for their province to recover. No one, however, thinks that economic revitalization will be forever elusive.

Despite widespread unemployment, the public is finally achieving a higher material standard of living. Most can afford some of the accoutrements of middle-class life, such as the ability to eat meat or keep their homes adequately heated and cooled. Every household has access to a cell phone, and most households have some other electronic goods. Half own a vehicle of some sort. However, formal saving and banking institutions are underdeveloped, which may explain why a number of households keep their wealth in gold. Still, if pressed to obtain cash speedily, most respondents say they could access 200,000 dinars (roughly \$200) if they had to.

Education

Without question, education is very important to Anbaris. The population is widely literate, and there are few differences between the urban and rural sectors and between the sexes. Not surprisingly, these characteristics have not changed since 2008. Schooling is almost completely universal for Anbaris between roughly the ages of 7 and 22.

Those in al-Anbar who are not enrolled in school have different reasons for not attending. When males were asked why they were not currently enrolled in school, the largest proportion reported having received an adequate amount of education. Somewhat smaller proportions mentioned poverty, lack of interest, the need to find work, and difficulty getting into school. Females respondents who are not enrolled tended to report that school is not appropriate for them as females, that they lack interest, or that they are too poor. Such responses were common among women over 50. Younger females reported repeated failure in school as a reason for not attending.

Health

Asked to list the three biggest problems facing health care, respondents most often cited a lack of health care professionals (due to the large number of skilled laborers that departed Iraq as a result of the war), the paucity of supplies and equipment in facilities, and a lack of proximate facilities that are easily accessible. These findings are consistent with those from 2008, when respondents pointed to similar deficiencies in health care services.

Possibly due to the continued departure of skilled doctors through 2008, respondents have increasingly begun to consult nurses for health care services.

Nongovernmental organizations and international organizations provide a large part of the population with the kind of services they used to get from government health care centers. Health care remains relatively inexpensive: Depending on services sought, affordability is a problem for only 20–40 percent of all households. Yet, just as in 2008, respondents find it difficult to get appointments with health care professionals, in large part because so many professionals have fled the province.

Displacement

In a dramatic shift since 2008, respondents now report being far more likely to relocate within Iraq rather than to neighboring Syria or Jordan. In 2008, Anbaris who were reported displaced were most likely to have traveled to Syria or Jordan, the largest and second-largest recipients of Iraqi refugees, respectively. The main destinations now, however, are within Iraq (particularly Baghdad). Improved conditions in the capital (specifically, better job prospects and security), combined with an increase in immigration restrictions in Syria and Jordan, have likely influenced Anbaris' calculations.