



CRS Report for Congress

Iraqi Civilian Deaths Estimates

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Summary

This report presents various governmental and nongovernmental estimates of Iraqi civilian fatalities. The Department of Defense (DOD) regularly updates total U.S. military death and wounded statistics from Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), as reflected in CRS Report RS21578, *Iraq: Summary of U.S. Casualties*. However, no Iraqi or U.S. government office regularly releases statistics on Iraqi civilian deaths. Statistics on these topics are sometimes available through alternative sources, such as nonprofit organizations, or through statements made by officials to the press. No authoritative source has released either an estimate of Iraqi civilians who have been wounded or an estimate of total Iraqi casualties (dead and wounded). Because these estimates are based on varying time periods and have been created using differing methodologies, readers should exercise caution when using these statistics and should look on them as guideposts rather than as statements of historical fact. See also CRS Report RS22532, *Iraqi Police and Security Forces Casualty Estimates*. This report will be updated as needed.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the United States Department of Defense (DOD) have recently released reports that include sections on Iraqi civilian casualties. In the latest *Human Rights Report*, the UNAMI estimated that 3,462 Iraqi civilians were killed in November 2006 and 2,914 Iraqi civilians were killed in

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Iraq Body Count (IBC) March 19, 2003 - January 22, 2006	60,480 - 66,383
Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (ICCC) March 1, 2005 - January 22, 2006	27,136
United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) January 1, 2006 - December 31, 2006	34,452
Iraq Health Minister Ali al Shemari March 19, 2003 - November 10, 2006	150,000
Brookings Institution's Iraq Index Cumulative Estimate May 2003 - October 31, 2006	70,100
<i>The Lancet</i> , "Mortality after the 2003 Invasion of Iraq" March 19, 2003 - July 31, 2006	426,369 - 793,663
<i>Los Angeles Times</i> , cumulative estimate March 19, 2003 - June 25, 2006	50,000

December 2006.¹ These figures represent a tally of two civilian death counts: one from the Iraq Ministry of Health, which records deaths reported by hospitals; and one from the Medico-Legal Institute (MLI) in Baghdad, which reports the number of unidentified bodies it receives.² For 2006, the total number of civilians violently killed, as reported by UNAMI, is 34,452, with an average of 94 civilians killed every day. UNAMI also reports that 36,685 civilians were wounded in 2006, including 2,222 women and 777 children.³ The June 30, 2006 version of the UNAMI report estimated that the combined count of civilian casualties from January 2006 to June 2006 was 14,228 and commented that:

On 25 June, the [Iraqi] Ministry of Health publicly acknowledged information stating that since 2003 at least 50,000 persons have been killed violently. The Baghdad morgue reportedly received 30,204 bodies from 2003 to mid-2006. Deaths numbering 18,933 occurred from “military clashes” and “terrorist attacks” between 5 April 2004 and 1 June 2006. The Ministry further indicated that the number of deaths is probably underreported.⁴

UNAMI has also made estimates of civilian casualties in Baghdad, a topic that has drawn nearly as much attention as estimates of civilian casualties in the country as a whole. In a recent article in the *Washington Post*, Gianni Magazzeni, chief of UNAMI’s Human Rights Office, asserted that there had been 1,536 violent deaths in Baghdad in August 2006, as reported by the Baghdad morgue.⁵ The December 2006 report states, “The situation is notably grave in Baghdad where unidentified bodies killed execution style are found in large number daily.”⁶

DOD has not released a composite estimate of Iraqi civilian deaths during Operation Iraqi Freedom. However, it has released a bar chart of the average daily Iraqi casualties and average daily coalition casualties. The chart does not distinguish between deaths and wounded, nor does it distinguish between civilians and Iraq Security Forces (or ISF).⁷

¹ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 November - 31 December 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/2hlg7h>]. All U.N. figures exclude casualty estimates from the Region of Kurdistan.

² Nick Wadhams, “Iraq civilian toll spikes to nearly 6,000,” *Associated Press*, July 19, 2006.

³ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 November - 31 December 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/2hlg7h>], pp.4-5.

⁴ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 May - 30 June 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/ml6c8>], p. 3.

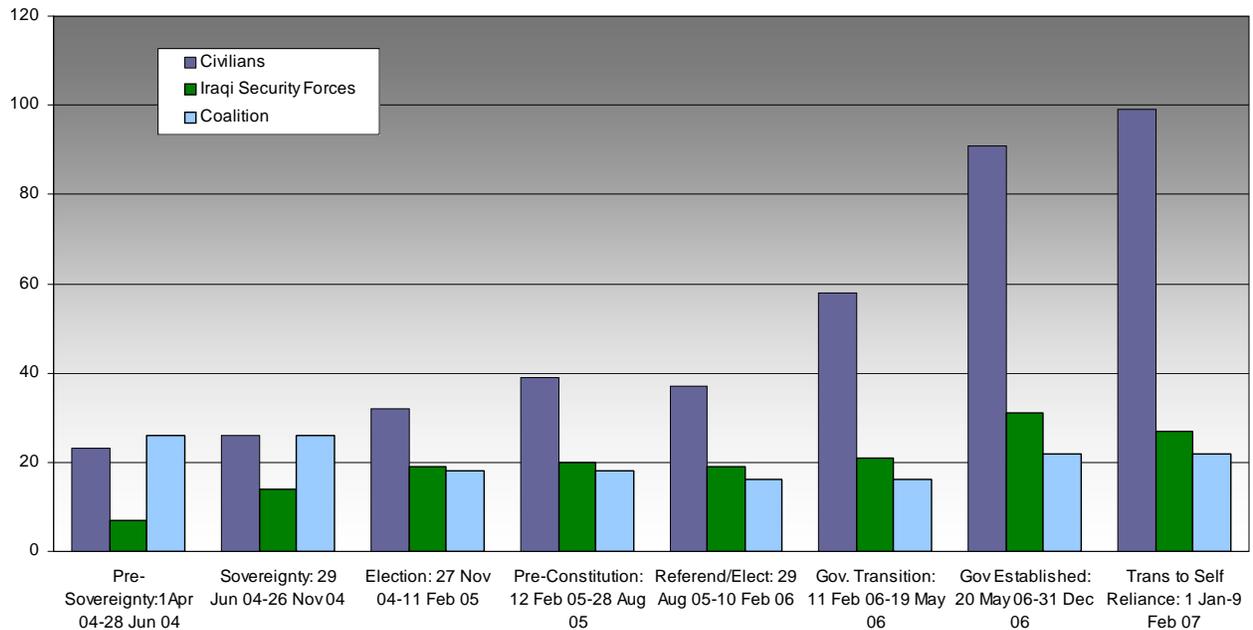
⁵ Ellen Knickmeyer, “Body Count in Baghdad Nearly Triples,” *Washington Post*, Sept. 8, 2006, p. A12.

⁶ United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, *Human Rights Report: 1 November - 31 December 2006*, at [<http://tinyurl.com/2hlg7h>], p. 6.

⁷ U.S. Department of Defense, Multi-National Corps-Iraq, *Measuring Stability and Security in Iraq: November 2006 Report to Congress in Accordance with the Department of Defense Appropriations Act 2006 (Section 9010)*, Nov. 2006, at [<http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/9010Quarterly-Report-20061216.pdf>], p. 22.

Average Daily Casualties

April 1, 2004 - February 9, 2007



Source: CRS rendition of DOD graph, as derived from the Multi-National Corps - Iraq, [http://www.defenselink.mil/home/pdf/9010_March_2007_Final_Signed.pdf].

Notes: Casualty data reflect updated data for each period and are derived from unverified initial reports submitted by Coalition elements responding to an incident; the inconclusivity of these numbers constrains them to be used only for comparative purposes.

Other Iraqi or U.S. government officials have also made estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties, often in conversations with the media. In a question and answer period after a December 2005 speech, President George W. Bush gave an estimate of civilian deaths, stating “30,000 [Iraqi civilians], more or less, have died as a result of the initial incursion and the ongoing violence against Iraqis [during Operation Iraqi Freedom].”⁸ After the speech, however, aides said that Bush’s statement was not an official government estimate but a reflection of figures in news media reports.⁹ In a news conference on October 16, 2006, however, President Bush said that he stands by the figure.¹⁰

Iraqi government officials have also released their own death toll estimates to the press. In November 2006, Iraq’s Health Minister Ali al Shemari told reporters in Vienna that there had been 150,000 civilian deaths during the war so far. He later explained to the *Associated Press* that he based the figure on an estimate of 100 bodies per day brought

⁸ White House News release, “President Discusses War on Terror and Upcoming Iraqi Elections,” Dec. 12, 2005, at [<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2005/12/20051212-4.html>].

⁹ Adam Harvey, “Bush says civilian toll in Iraq 30,000,” *The Advertiser*, Dec. 14, 2005, p. 42.

¹⁰ President George W. Bush, *The President’s News Conference*, Public Papers of the Presidents, Oct. 16, 2006.

to morgues and hospitals. However, one observer noted that such a calculation would yield a result closer to 130,000 deaths.¹¹ More recently, an anonymous Iraqi Health Ministry official released data indicating that more than 17,000 Iraqi civilians and police officers died violently in the latter half of 2006.¹² The same official added that the numbers he released remained incomplete, suggesting that the final tally of violent deaths could be higher. Over the full year for 2006, however, the Iraqi Health Ministry has a reported death toll of 22,950 civilians.¹³

In addition to using government sources, some media have cited a number of not-for-profit or scholarly sources that attempt to track civilian deaths, while others have attempted to compile their own numbers. The *Los Angeles Times* used statistics from the Baghdad morgue, the Iraqi Health Ministry, and “other agencies” to estimate that at least 50,000 Iraqis died between May 1, 2003, and June 25, 2006.¹⁴

The British medical journal, *The Lancet*, has published two articles by researchers looking into civilian casualties. The first, “Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey,” used a cluster sample survey of households in Iraq to develop an estimate ranging from 8,000 to 194,000 civilian casualties due to violent deaths since the start of the war.¹⁵ This report has come under some criticism for its methodology, with an argument that some of the casualties could have resulted from the long-term negative health effects of the Saddam Hussein era. British Foreign Minister Jack Straw has written a formal Ministerial Response rejecting the findings of the *Lancet* report on the grounds that the data analyzed were inaccurate.¹⁶

The second article, “Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey,”¹⁷ increased the number of clusters surveyed from 33 to 47 clusters and reported an estimate of between 426,369 and 793,663 Iraqi civilian deaths from violent causes since the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. This article, too, has sparked some controversy.¹⁸ Stephen Moore, a consultant for Gorton Moore International,

¹¹ Steven R. Hurst, “Iraqi Official: 150,000 Civilians Dead,” *Associated Press*, Nov. 10, 2006.

¹² Sudarsan Raghavan, “War’s Toll on Iraqis Put at 22,950 in ‘06; Statistics From Health Ministry Official Show Tripling of Civilian, Police Deaths,” *Post-Newsweek Media, Inc.*, Jan. 8, 2007, p. A1.

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Louise Roug and Doug Smith, “The Conflict in Iraq: War’s Iraqi Death Toll Tops 50,000; Higher than the U.S. estimate but thought to be undercounted, the tally is equivalent to 570,000 Americans killed in three years,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 2006, p. A1.

¹⁵ Les Roberts, Ridyah Lafta, Richard Garfield et al., “Mortality Before and After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: Cluster Sample Survey,” *The Lancet*, Oct. 29, 2004, 364 (9448): 1857-64.

¹⁶ Jack Straw, Written U.K. Ministerial Statement Responding to a Lancet Study on Iraqi Casualty Numbers, Nov. 16, 2004, at [<http://tinyurl.com/3hv8j>].

¹⁷ Gilbert Burnham, Riyadh Lafta, Shannon Doocy et al., “Mortality After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq: A Cross-Sectional Cluster Sample Survey,” *The Lancet*, Oct. 21, 2006, 368(9545):1421-1429.

¹⁸ Sabrina Tavernise and Donald G. McNeil, Jr., “Iraqi Dead May Total 600,000, Study Says,” (continued...)

objected more strongly to the methods used by the researchers, commenting in the *Wall Street Journal* that the *Lancet* article lacked some of the hallmarks of good research: a small margin of error, a record of the demographics of respondents (so that one can be sure one has captured a fair representation of an entire population), and a large number of cluster points.¹⁹ However, documents written by the UK Ministry of Defence's chief scientific advisor have recently come to light, which called the survey's methods "close to best practice" and "robust."²⁰

A number of nonprofit groups have also released unofficial estimates of Iraqi civilian casualties. The Iraq Body Count (IBC) is one source often cited by the media; it bases its online casualty estimates on media reports of casualties, some of which may involve security forces as well as civilians. As of April 5, 2007, the IBC estimated that between 60,480 and 66,383 civilians had died as a result of military action.²¹ Because the IBC documents each of the casualties it records with a media source and provides a minimum and a maximum estimate, some regard its numbers as fairly authoritative.

The Brookings Institution has used modified numbers from the UN *Human Rights Report* and the Iraq Body Count to develop its own estimate for Iraqi civilians who have died by violence. It estimates that 90% of the deaths reported in the UN *Human Rights Report* happened as a result of violence, and they use this number as an estimate of January 2006 to October 2006 Iraqi civilian deaths due to violence. To expand their dates to include May 2003 to December 2005, they include 1.75 times the Iraq Body Count total (they do not specify the minimum or maximum total) to reflect "the fact that estimates for civilian casualties from the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior were 75 percent higher than those of our Iraq Body Count-based estimate over the aggregate December 2003 - May 2005 period."²² By using this method, the Brookings Institution estimates that between May 2003 and October 31, 2006, 70,100 Iraqi civilians have died due to violence.

Finally, the Iraq Coalition Casualty Count (ICCC) has been tracking U.S. and coalition casualties since the beginning of the war and has recently begun tracking civilian casualties as well using an IBC-like method of posting media reports of deaths. ICCC, like IBC, is prone to the kind of errors likely when using media reports for data: some deaths may not be reported in the media, while other deaths may be reported more than once. Nonetheless, both sources may be useful for different kinds of inquiries. The ICCC separates police and soldier deaths from civilian deaths and thus may be useful in tracking the two populations separately. The ICCC estimates that there were 27,136 civilian

¹⁸ (...continued)

New York Times, Oct. 11, 2006, p. A16.

¹⁹ Steven E. Moore, "655,000 War Dead?", *Wall Street Journal*, Oct. 18, 2006, p. A.20.

²⁰ *Newsday*, "High Death Toll Backed," Mar. 27, 2007, p. A25.

²¹ Iraq Body Count at [<http://www.iraqbodycount.net>]. IBC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.

²² Brookings Institution, *Iraq Index: Tracking Reconstruction and Security in Post-Saddam Iraq*, Apr. 5, 2007, at [<http://www.brookings.edu/fp/saban/iraq/index.pdf>], p. 10.

deaths from March 2005 through April 5, 2007, and 6,401 police and security force deaths from June 2003 through April 5, 2007.²³

²³ Iraq Coalition Casualty Count at [<http://icasualties.org/oif/IraqiDeaths.aspx>]. ICCC is a nongovernmental organization managed by researchers and volunteers.