

**"The Race to Iraq's Election"
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Given the level of violence in Iraq, it's hard to dismiss UN Secretary General Kofi Annan's recent observation that it will be impossible to hold credible elections there "if the security conditions continue as they now are." And the administration doesn't expect a mere continuation of the status quo. Rather, as Secretary of State Colin Powell stated over the weekend, the violence is likely to worsen as insurgents seek to derail the elections, scheduled for January.

But too much is at stake to entertain the idea of a postponement—yet.

Imagine if the insurgents were to succeed in dissuading Iraq from holding its first election of a representative government in modern history. They would be emboldened by their victory, and redouble their efforts to scuttle the rescheduled vote. A delay would lengthen the American presence in Iraq, further the humiliation of occupation for Iraqis, and, most important, perpetuate an Iraqi government lacking moral and popular authority.

Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the powerful cleric of Iraq's Shiite majority, rightfully warns against putting off the election, which will start the ball rolling on the democratization of Iraq. In going to the polls, Iraqis will select a national assembly, which will choose a government to replace today's appointed interim leadership. The assembly will draw up a constitution to be put to popular vote, and prepare for direct elections of the next government.

And yet, the credibility issue raised by Mr. Annan is no small consideration. Would it really be acceptable, as Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld suggested last week, if violence prevented a quarter or fifth of the country from voting? Such a hole would swallow the election itself.

But it's premature to assess the hole's size now. More urgent is the race to secure the country and ensure fairness of the elections (Ayatollah Sistani complains that Shiites are underrepresented in the process).

In recent days, news has dribbled out about steps being taken in this direction: a planned military offensive to oust the insurgents controlling some cities; US military protection for UN personnel, who are to oversee the election but who have been held back by the security threat; and voter registration to take place at food distribution points. The theory behind the latter move is that insurgents might hesitate to target food outlets.

The race to hold a legitimate election could be lost, especially given the shortage of properly trained Iraqi troops. But now is not the time to speculate the outcome. It's time to start the sprint to January.

This is a good article for students to study because it presents both reasons and objections. These reasons and objections are fairly clear, but they are spread out throughout the article

