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## ***New National Survey and Report on How Iraqi Youth See Religion, Politics, and the State***

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Enabling Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC) publicly released its new report: **Charting a Nationalist and Secular Iraq: The Road Ahead?**

The report is a collaboration between EPIC and **Geneive Abdo**, a fellow at the Wilson Center's Middle East Program, and was made possible with the generous support of the **Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS)** and **Dijlah Consulting Engineers**. The findings are based on a nationally-representative public opinion survey of young eligible voters ages 18-40. Among the report's key findings:

- ❖ An overwhelming majority of young voters oppose religious parties' involvement in politics. Eighty-eight percent say they want either a secular democracy with separation between religion and state, or a civic democracy in which religion is a source of legislation but bars religious parties from holding office.
- ❖ Most respondents opposed giving clerics the power to override laws made by elected representatives. Only 10% say they want clerics to issue binding orders or veto laws, and 73% say clerics should either have no role in Iraq's top court, or that their role should be advisory.
- ❖ More than two-thirds of respondents believe that separating politics from religion will help fight *muhasasa*, the system of ethno-sectarian power-sharing Iraqis blame for the country's corruption and political dysfunction.

Backed by these and other salient findings, the report sheds new light on the evolution of competing identities in Iraq and the rising demands for secular governance. The report explores the evolving role of clerics in the state, especially the senior clergy since 2003, looks at trends in the state's use of Islam in governance, such as the debate over clerics' role in the Supreme Court, and visits recent attempts to undo the *muhasasa* system.

*"In social media, youth-led protests, and other venues, Iraqis who were born or came of age after 2003 are expressing identities, views, and attitudes markedly different from their parents' and grandparents' generations,"* remarked EPIC's Executive Director, **Erik Gustafson**. *"As more and more of these young people reach voting age, their views and turnout in elections will increasingly determine Iraq's political future."*

This morning, the EPIC research team presented some of the report's key findings at a launch event hosted by the Wilson Center and moderated by **Omar Al-Nidawi**, EPIC's Director of Programs. The presentation of key findings by author **Geneive Abdo** was followed by a panel discussion with Iraqi analysts **Sajad Jiyad** and **Hanzeh Hadad**. A recording of the panel discussion can be viewed at: [wilsoncenter.org/event/religion-and-aspirations-secular-state-iraq-views-ground](http://wilsoncenter.org/event/religion-and-aspirations-secular-state-iraq-views-ground)

The full report is available at: [enablingpeace.org/youth-views](http://enablingpeace.org/youth-views)

*Founded in 1998 with offices in Washington DC and Erbil, the **Enabling Peace in Iraq Center (EPIC)** is an independent 501(c)3 organization working directly with Iraqi civil society to improve governance and human rights, promote peace and recovery in conflict affected areas, and combat climate change while mitigating its impact on vulnerable populations.*

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