

Shiites protest provincial elections

by UPI

BAGHDAD - Hundreds of Iraqi Shiites protested in Diyala province, alleging fraud in recent elections deprived Shiites of seats on the provincial council.

The protest Sunday was the first major demonstration by Shiites against the election results, and brings to the surface simmering tensions in Diyala, where Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds struggle for control, The Washington Post (NYSE:WPO) reported Monday.

Shiite politicians won five seats on the council, while Sunnis won 14, Kurds, six, and a secular party, three. Before the Jan. 31 election, Shiites held 20 seats on the legislative body.

While some protesters said the demonstration was against "unsatisfactory results" in the election, others were more blunt in their descriptions to the Post.

"The results were tampered with 100 percent by Kurds and the Iraqi Islamic Party," said Mohammed Mahdi, a politician from the Shiite Fadhila Party, referring to the country's largest Sunni political bloc.

Kurdish and Sunni groups denied accusations of electoral fraud.

Protesters demanded the electoral commission be replaced, saying it was influenced by Sunni officials, the Post reported. Shiite politicians said many Shiite voters in Diyala province said they could not find their names on voter lists, while many people displaced by violence could not return to their home areas to cast ballots.

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