

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

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## Freedom House

### Freedom in the World 2021 - Iraq

NOT FREE

29

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 16 / 40[Civil Liberties](#) 13 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE &amp; STATUS

31 / 100 Not Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

### Overview

Iraq holds regular, competitive elections, and the country's various partisan, religious, and ethnic groups generally enjoy representation in the political system. However, democratic governance is impeded in practice by corruption and security threats. In the Kurdistan region, democratic institutions lack the strength to contain the influence of long-standing power brokers. Increasingly, Iran has been able to influence politics in Baghdad. Civil liberties are generally respected in Iraqi law, but the state has limited capacity to prevent and punish violations.

### Key Developments in 2020

- The COVID-19 pandemic deeply impacted Iraq's already dilapidated health sector, which struggled to cope with the large number of people who contracted the virus. The lockdowns imposed by Iraqi and Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities exacerbated the financial hardships of low-wage workers and small business owners.
- In May, following aborted attempts by two other candidates for prime minister, Mustafa al-Kadhimi succeeded in forming a government that was approved by Parliament.
- In April and May, authorities in Iraq, particularly in the Kurdistan region, exploited the COVID-19 lockdowns to put down protests and severely curtail press freedom, assembly rights, and opposition activity.
- Reconstruction of areas liberated from the Islamic State (IS) militant group's control continued at a slow pace throughout the year. Almost 1.3 million Iraqis remained internally displaced as of December, and the threat of terrorism persisted.

### Political Rights

#### A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

**Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections?** 2 / 4

After national elections, the Council of Representatives (CoR) chooses the largely ceremonial president, who in turn appoints a prime minister nominated by the largest bloc in the parliament. The prime minister, who holds most executive power and forms the government, serves up to two four-year terms. The May 2018 national elections were generally viewed as credible by international observers, despite low turnout and allegations of fraud, which were particularly prevalent in the Kurdish provinces and neighboring Kirkuk. That October, after a five-month delay, the new CoR chose Kurdish politician Barham Salih as president, and Adel Abdul Mahdi, a Shiite independent, was appointed prime minister. Mahdi resigned in December 2019. In May 2020, the major blocs in parliament and their foreign backers agreed to name the independent Mustafa al-Kadhimi. The formation of the government was completed a month later.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), composed of Iraq’s northernmost provinces, is ostensibly led by a president with extensive executive powers. The draft Kurdish constitution requires presidential elections every four years and limits presidents to two terms. However, after eight years as president, Masoud Barzani of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) had his term extended in a 2013 political agreement with another party, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

After Barzani stepped down in 2017, the presidency remained vacant, and executive power was held by Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, his nephew. After the September 2018 Kurdish parliamentary elections, the KDP nominated Nechirvan Barzani to become president and Masrour Barzani—Masoud Barzani’s son—to serve as prime minister. In May 2019, Nechirvan Barzani was elected president by the Iraqi Kurdish parliament and sworn in a month later, after the position had been vacant for nearly two years. Masrour Barzani was appointed and sworn in as prime minister the same month. Both Barzanis, the president and prime minister, are from the KDP.

#### A2 0-4 pts

**Were the current national legislative representatives elected through free and fair elections? 3 / 4**

The 329 members of the CoR are elected every four years from multimember open lists in each province, though a December 2019 reform significantly changed the framework for future polls. The May 2018 elections, held under the party-list system, were generally viewed as credible by international observers, despite some allegations of fraud. The Sairoon alliance, led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, won the most seats with 54, followed by the Conquest coalition led by Hadi al-Amiri with 48, outgoing prime minister Haider al-Abadi’s Victory alliance with 42, and the State of Law coalition headed by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki with 25. The top four alliances were all led by Shiite parties, though they made varying efforts to reach across sectarian lines. Among the several Kurdish parties, the KDP won 25 seats and the PUK won 19. The remaining seats were divided among Sunni-led coalitions, smaller parties, and independents. After the resignation of former prime minister Mahdi in December 2019, a new government formed in June 2020 under Prime Minister al-Kadhimi.

Following repeated delays, provincial council elections originally scheduled for 2017 were postponed indefinitely by the CoR in November 2019. Kirkuk, the subject of a dispute between the KRG and the central government, has not held provincial council elections since 2005.

In the Kurdistan region, the 111-seat Kurdistan Parliament is elected through closed party-list proportional representation in a single district, with members serving four-year terms. The September 2018 elections, originally due in 2017, resulted in the governing KDP increasing its plurality to 45 seats. The PUK received 21 seats, Gorran took 12, and several smaller parties and minority representatives accounted for the remainder. The elections were plagued by fraud allegations and other irregularities, and Gorran and other smaller parties rejected the results.

#### A3 0-4 pts

**Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies? 3 / 4**

The Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC) is responsible for managing elections in Iraq. The IHEC generally enjoys the confidence of the international community and, according to some polls, the Iraqi public. It faced criticism in 2018 from opposition leaders and outgoing prime minister Haider al-Abadi over its handling of electronic voting challenges and the subsequent recount, but international organizations praised the body for its professionalism and impartiality.

Under electoral reforms approved in December 2019, each of the country’s 18 provinces would be divided into a number of new electoral districts, with one legislator elected for every 100,000 people. The reforms moreover abolished the existing party-list voting system and replaced it with one in which voters select individual candidates from the new districts, which at year’s end had yet to be delineated. It was unclear how that procedure would commence in the absence of recent census data, as a national census has not been conducted since 1987; this lack of current data had already resulted in skewed parliamentary seat allocations.

The Kurdistan Independent High Electoral and Referendum Commission (IHERC) administers elections in the Kurdistan region. In addition to the 2018 legislative balloting, the IHERC conducted the 2017 independence referendum, in which 93 percent of voters favored independence, though the exercise—which was not monitored by international observers—was allegedly marred by intimidation and fraud.

## B Political Pluralism and Participation

#### B1 0-4 pts

**Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 3 / 4**

The constitution guarantees the freedom to form and join political parties, with the exception of the pre-2003 dictatorship’s Baath Party, which is banned. A 2016 law strengthened the ban, criminalizing Baathist protests and the promotion of Baathist ideas. The measure applies to any group that supports racism, terrorism, sectarianism, sectarian cleansing, and other ideas contrary to democracy or the peaceful transfer of power. Individual Iraqis’ freedom to run for office is also limited by a vague “good conduct” requirement in the electoral law.

In practice, Iraqis can generally form parties and operate without government interference. Party membership and multiparty alliances shift frequently. The IHEC registered 205 parties for the 2018 elections, reflecting both a relatively open political environment and deep fragmentation.

The electoral reforms approved in late 2019 in response to protesters' demands are expected to make independent candidacies more viable.

#### **B2 0-4 pts**

**Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through 2 / elections?** **4**

Elections are competitive, but most parties are dominated by one sectarian or ethnic group, meaning large and established parties representing the Shiite majority have tended to govern. Minority groups have only gained power as part of a cross-sectarian party or bloc. A number of new parties that are more secular and national in orientation participated in the 2018 elections, but Shiite parties continued to play the leading role. The strong performance of the newly formed Conquest coalition, which finished second, raised some concerns due to its inclusion of members associated with the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF)—state-sponsored militia groups that fought against IS and have been accused of war crimes and ties with Iran. The former ruling party, Dawa, split into the State of Law coalition and the Victory coalition, led by former prime ministers al-Maliki and al-Abadi, respectively. The split created an opening for other lists, like Sairoon and Conquest, to gain seats and influence government formation. The 2018 transfer of power proceeded far more smoothly than in 2014, when former prime minister al-Maliki stepped down only after intense domestic and international pressure.

In the Kurdistan region, the traditional dominance of the KDP and the PUK was for a time challenged by the rise of the reformist group Gorran, but the repeated postponement of presidential and legislative elections before 2018 allowed entrenched interests to remain in power. Although the damaging crisis that followed the 2017 independence referendum appeared to threaten the KDP's electoral prospects, it ultimately retained its leading position in the 2018 legislative elections. The PUK replaced Gorran as the second-largest party in the Kurdish parliament after Gorran lost much of its reformist appeal for joining the KRG cabinet and being plagued by corruption scandals.

In 2019 and 2020, Kurdish Regional Government authorities continued to intensify their repression of the activities of the New Generation opposition party and its affiliated media outlet, Nalia Radio and Television (NRT), which is owned by the party leader Shaswar Abdul Wahid. In April 2019, security forces detained over 80 members of the New Generation party, allegedly for defamation and insulting a state employee. In August 2020, authorities unlawfully shut and raided two NRT offices for over a month. In December, they raided two other offices and suspended the outlet's broadcasting license. The Ministry of Culture and Youth, which issued the suspension, claimed that NRT had broken rules regulating broadcast media, though they did not specify which rules had been broken. NRT had covered violence during antigovernment protests throughout the year.

*Score Change: The score declined from 3 to 2 due to a multiyear crackdown by Kurdish regional authorities on a Kurdish opposition party's members and affiliated media outlet.*

#### **B3 0-4 pts**

**Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political 1 / sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means?** **4**

Iraq's political system remains distorted by interference from foreign powers, most notably Iran, which physically and politically threatens Iraqi policymakers who challenge its interests, while at other times, buys off their support. The PMF have strong links to Iran, and dozens of figures associated with these militias ran in the 2018 elections and won seats in the CoR.

The ability of IS to suppress normal political activity has waned significantly since 2017, when government forces successfully drove the group out of the territory it formerly controlled.

#### **B4 0-4 pts**

**Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other 1 / relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities?** **4**

Despite legal and constitutional measures designed to protect the political rights of various religious and ethnic groups, the dominant role of ethno-sectarian parties and the allocation of key offices according to informal religious or ethnic criteria reduce the likelihood that politicians will act in the interests of the whole population.

Sunni Arabs, the largest ethno-sectarian minority, are represented in the parliament but often argue that the Shiite majority excludes them from positions of real influence. The presidency and premiership are reserved in practice for a Kurd and a Shiite; the position of parliament speaker goes to a Sunni. Muhammad al-Halbusi was named speaker in September 2018.

A system of reserved seats ensures a minimum representation in the CoR for some of Iraq's smaller religious and ethnic minorities. There are five seats reserved for Christians and one each for Fayli Kurds (added in 2018), Yazidis, Sabean Mandaean, and Shabaks. The Kurdish parliament reserves five seats for Turkmen, five for Christians, and one for Armenians. The political rights of minorities have been severely impeded by widespread displacement from

formerly IS-occupied areas. Although polling stations were set up at encampments for the country's nearly two million internally displaced people (IDPs), in May 2018 the parliament voted to annul the votes of IDPs due to fraud claims.

The CoR and the Kurdish parliament reserve 25 percent and 30 percent of their seats for women, respectively, though such formal representation has had little obvious effect on state policies toward women, who are typically excluded from political debates and leadership positions. LGBT+ people are unable to enjoy equal political rights in practice due to harsh societal discrimination, and the main political parties do not advocate for the interests of LGBT+ people in their platforms.

## C Functioning of Government

### C1 0-4 pts

**Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government?** 1 / 4

Several factors, including low institutional capacity, widespread corruption and extensive Iranian influence, have hindered the ability of elected officials to independently set and implement laws and policies. The existence of the PMF, which is officially part of Iraqi state institutions but in reality, sets its own policies, undermines the ability of the government to set and implement its own domestic and foreign agendas, as can be seen in the repression of protests, kidnapping and assassinations of activists, and attacks on US targets in Iraq. The United States and its allies also exert some policy influence through their support for Iraqi security forces and other state institutions. Iraq's fragmented politics can lead to gridlock and dysfunction, as demonstrated by the protracted negotiations on government formation following the May 2018 elections.

In the Kurdistan region, Masoud Barzani effectively suspended the parliament in 2015 after the speaker and many members opposed his extended presidential mandate. The Kurdish legislature that was elected in September 2018 met and approved a new government in July 2019, but tension was still high between the KDP and PUK, due to the KDP's and Barzanis' dominance of KRG politics.

### C2 0-4 pts

**Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective?** 0 / 4

Corruption remains a major problem in Iraq, and was a key contributor to the protest movement in Baghdad and other cities that erupted in 2019. Political parties, which siphon funds from the ministries they control and take kickbacks for government contracts, resist anticorruption efforts, while whistleblowers and investigators are subject to intimidation and violence. The judicial system, itself hampered by politicization and corruption, takes action on only a fraction of the cases investigated by the Integrity Commission, one of three governmental anticorruption bodies. The KRG suffers from similar corruption problems.

### C3 0-4 pts

**Does the government operate with openness and transparency?** 1 / 4

A few policies that promote openness have been adopted, including rules requiring public officials to disclose their assets, but the government does not generally operate with transparency. The CoR debates the budget, and interest groups are often able to access draft legislation. However, security conditions make elected representatives, who usually live and work in a restricted part of the capital, relatively inaccessible to the public. The public procurement system is nontransparent and corrupt, with no legal recourse available for unsuccessful bidders. The oil and gas industry also lacks transparency, and the government has failed to make adequate progress in meeting its commitments to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. The government has not yet passed a comprehensive law on access to information.

### Add Q

**Is the government or occupying power deliberately changing the ethnic composition of a country or territory so as to destroy a culture or tip the political balance in favor of another group?** -1

IS's loss of territorial control in 2017 largely halted its campaign to alter religious demography. However, hundreds of thousands of Iraqis who were displaced by IS remain unable to return to their homes, for both security and economic reasons. Kurdish authorities encouraged local and sub-state forces to prevent thousands of Arab families displaced by the IS conflict from returning to villages near the Syria-Iraq border and in disputed areas under de facto KRG control, in an apparent attempt to change the region's demography. Displaced families with perceived links to IS who continue to reside in and outside of camps and are particularly vulnerable to assault and sexual abuse. Many cannot return to their homes because their original communities reject their return or Iraqi authorities prohibit it. As of December 2020, approximately 4.7 million Iraqis displaced by the 2014 IS offensive had returned to their home regions, while more than 1.2 million people remained internally displaced.

## Civil Liberties

## D Freedom of Expression and Belief

### D1 0-4 pts

**Are there free and independent media?** 1 / 4

The constitution allows limits on free expression to preserve “public order” and “morality.” Iraq’s media scene appears lively and diverse, but there are few politically independent news sources. Journalists who do not self-censor can face legal repercussions or violent retaliation. Media outlets face restrictions and obstruction in response to their coverage.

Journalists covering the antigovernment protests in Iraq and the Kurdistan region were obstructed, threatened, and endangered by authorities. On January 20, 2020, Iraqi security forces opened fire on protesters in Tahrir Square in Baghdad, killing photojournalist Youssef Sattar, and wounding others. On August 12, Huner Rasool, a journalist with Gali Kurdistan TV, died while attempting to escape clashes between Kurdish security forces and protesters in Ranya.

Militias have shot, arrested and kidnapped journalists for their work. Four journalists and one media executive were killed in 2020, according to Reporters without Borders (RSF). In early 2020, Ahmed Abdul Samad and Safaa Ghali, both working for local Iraqi station Dijlah TV, and executive director of al-Rasheed TV Nizar Thanoun in Baghdad, were gunned down. The three individuals were seemingly targeted by militias for their critical reporting on the militias’ repression of protesters.

In 2020, KRG authorities intensified the persecution and harassment of media outlets and journalists, particularly those covering anti-KRG protests relating to economic hardship and corruption.

#### D2 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or nonbelief in public and private? 1 / 4**

The constitution guarantees freedom of belief, but in practice many Iraqis have been subjected to violence and displacement due to their religious identity. Places of worship have often been targets for terrorist attacks. Blasphemy laws remain in the legal code, although enforcement is rare. A 2015 religious conversion law automatically designates the children of a parent who has converted to Islam as Muslim, even if the other parent is a non-Muslim. Restaurants serving alcohol and liquor stores have faced harassment and attacks, further eroding religious freedom.

Most political leaders expressed support for religious pluralism after IS’s defeat, and minorities living in liberated areas have largely been able to practice their religion freely since.

#### D3 0-4 pts

**Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 1 / 4**

Educators have long faced the threat of violence or other repercussions for teaching subjects or discussing topics that powerful state or nonstate actors find objectionable. The country’s official curriculum is often augmented in the classroom by religious or sectarian viewpoints.

Political activism by university students can result in harassment or intimidation.

#### D4 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of 1 / surveillance or retribution? 4**

Social media posts on controversial topics sometimes result in retribution. Certain topics, including corruption and, to a somewhat lesser extent, criticism of Iran, are considered to be off limits and at times prompted arrest, docking of salaries, torture, and criminal lawsuits. Social media users and bloggers have faced defamation lawsuits for criticizing local authorities’ poor response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Iranian-backed militias have threatened, kidnapped, tortured, and assassinated many perceived critics, including prominent Iraqi analyst, Hisham al-Hashimi, who was shot in July 2020. Over 30 private citizens involved in the 2019-2020 protests, including at least one minor, were abducted in 2019 and 2020; their whereabouts were unknown at year’s end. Many vocal activists have left the country or relocated to the Kurdistan region, fearing for their lives.

Political speech in the Kurdistan region can also prompt arbitrary detentions or other reprisals from government or partisan forces. Kurdish authorities arrested protesters and organizers, as well as bloggers, for criticizing COVID-19 lockdown measures, corruption, and the non-payment of state salaries. In December 2020, Kurdish authorities also arrested dozens of young men for calling for protests in their social media posts.

*Score Change: The score declined from 2 to 1 due to a pattern of arrests, abductions, and disappearances of individuals who expressed opposition to Iranian-backed militias through protests or social media posts.*

## E Associational and Organizational Rights

#### E1 0-4 pts

**Is there freedom of assembly? 0 / 4**

The constitution guarantees freedom of assembly, but protesters are frequently at risk of violence or arrest, and these dangers became acute during the 2019–20 protest movement. Security forces used curfews, tear gas, and live ammunition to suppress demonstrations in Baghdad and other southern cities that began in October 2019 against corruption, poor infrastructure and government services, and high unemployment. By mid-December, some 25,000 people had been injured during the protests, and at least 700 were killed. Iraqi security forces and pro-Iranian

militias routinely opened live fire at protesters. Iraqi officials and journalists reported that snipers under the command of Iranian-backed militia units used live ammunition to shoot at protesters from rooftops and carried out a wave of kidnappings of protest organizers and activists. Iranian media and media outlets linked to Iranian-backed militias spread false reports about activists to justify their targeting.

Authorities in Iraq, particularly in Kurdistan, exploited COVID-19 lockdowns to ban protests and restrict the ability of individuals to reach protest sites. In May 2020, KRG security forces in Dohuk opened fire and arrested protesters who were demanding improvement in living conditions, an end to corruption, and payment of unpaid state salaries.

#### **E2 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?** 2 / 4

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) enjoy societal support and a relatively hospitable regulatory environment, though they must register with the government and obtain approval from the commission responsible for suppressing Baathism. For international NGOs registration is cumbersome and often requires payment of bribes. In the Kurdistan region, NGOs must renew their registration annually.

In 2020, a number of antigovernment activists were kidnapped as the protest movement continued. In August, gunmen killed Reham Yacoub and Tahseen Osama and attempted to assassinate Lodya Remon Albarty, three prominent civil society activists in Basra. In October and December, activists were arrested in the Kurdistan region for calling and engaging in protests against the region's ruling parties.

#### **E3 0-4 pts**

**Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations?** 2 / 4

Labor laws allow for collective bargaining (even by nonunionized workers), protect the rights of subcontractors and migrant workers, and permit workers to strike, among other rights. However, public-sector workers are not allowed to unionize, there is no legal prohibition against antiunion discrimination, and workers do not have access to legal remedies if fired for union activity. Some state officials and private employers discourage union activity with threats, demotions, and other deterrents.

## **F Rule of Law**

#### **F1 0-4 pts**

**Is there an independent judiciary?** 0 / 4

The judiciary is influenced by corruption, political pressure, tribal forces, and religious interests. The lines between the executive, legislative, and judicial branches are frequently blurred, and executive interference in the judiciary is widespread. Due to distrust of or lack of access to the courts, many Iraqis have turned to tribal bodies to settle disputes, even those involving major crimes.

#### **F2 0-4 pts**

**Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?** 0 / 4

Criminal proceedings in Iraq are deeply flawed. Arbitrary arrests, including arrests without a warrant, are common. Terrorism cases in particular have been prone to fundamental violations of due process, with human rights groups describing systematic denial of access to counsel and short, summary trials with little evidence that the defendants committed specific crimes other than association with IS. In 2018, some trials of suspected IS members that resulted in death sentences lasted as little as 20 minutes, and hundreds of family members of suspected IS fighters have been arbitrarily detained.

Several senior military commanders were removed from their posts in October 2019 following a violent crackdown on protesters. The actions were rejected by many Iraqis as inadequate and had little deterrent effect on members of the security forces who fatally injured many demonstrators throughout the year. Despite a public vow by Prime Minister al-Kadhimi in August 2020 to investigate and punish those responsible for the disappearances and assassinations, the perpetrators continued to roam free. A new mechanism to locate victims has not successfully obtained the release of those who disappeared.

#### **F3 0-4 pts**

**Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?** 1 / 4

The end of large-scale combat with IS significantly improved the security environment. Though the organization remained active as a clandestine terrorist group in 2020, it no longer controlled Iraqi territory or civilian populations, and its ability to operate was diminished.

Tensions between Iran and the United States continued to play out on Iraqi soil, as Iranian-backed militias used small-scale rockets and improvised explosive device (IED) towards American forces and personnel, endangering Iraqi residents. In January 2020, the United States assassinated Iranian General Qassim Suleimani at the Baghdad airport, as well as several prominent Iraqi militia members.

In 2020, Turkish military forces launched operations into Kurdish territory and in June began to set up multiple military bases in Iraq, ostensibly to increase their own border security.

The use of torture to obtain confessions is widespread, including in death penalty cases. Detainees are often held in

harsh, overcrowded conditions, and forced disappearances, particularly of suspected IS fighters, have been reported.

#### F4 0-4 pts

**Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of various segments of the population? 0 / 4**

Women face widespread societal bias and discriminatory treatment under laws on a number of topics. Sexual harassment in the workplace is prohibited, but it is reportedly rare for victims to pursue formal complaints.

Members of a given ethnic or religious group tend to suffer discrimination or persecution in areas where they represent a minority, leading many to seek safety in other neighborhoods or provinces. Same-sex relations are not explicitly prohibited, but LGBT+ people risk violence if they are open about their identity. People of African descent suffer from high rates of extreme poverty and discrimination.

## G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

#### G1 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to change their place of residence, 1 / employment, or education? 4**

Freedom of movement improved somewhat as areas formerly controlled by IS were brought back under government control. However, large-scale destruction of housing and infrastructure, the presence of sectarian or partisan militias, and the ongoing threat of violence made it difficult for many displaced people to return home. Almost 1.3 million Iraqis remained internally displaced as of December 2020.

The movement of women is limited by legal restrictions. Women require the consent of a male guardian to obtain a passport and the Civil Status Identification Document, which is needed to access employment, education, and a number of social services.

In March and April 2020, both the Baghdad government and the KRG imposed lockdowns due to COVID-19, severely restricting movement between provinces and closing international borders. The KRG imposed particularly harsh and prolonged lockdowns throughout the year: the first from March through mid-May, another in early June, and another in early July.

#### G2 0-4 pts

**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and establish private businesses without 1 / undue interference from state or nonstate actors? 4**

Iraqis are legally free to own property and establish businesses, but observance of property rights has been limited by corruption and conflict. Business owners face demands for bribes, threats, and violent attempts to seize their enterprises. Contracts are difficult to enforce. Women are legally disadvantaged with respect to inheritance rights and may face pressure to yield their rights to male relatives.

#### G3 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of marriage partner and size of family, 1 / protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance? 4**

Forced and early marriages are common, especially in the context of displacement and poverty. Nearly one in four Iraqi women aged 20 to 24 were married by age 18, and marriage between 15 and 18 is legal with parental approval. Laws on marriage and divorce favor men over women. In 2020, Iraq witnessed a spike in domestic violence cases. Renewed efforts by Iraqi women's rights organizations to compel the parliament to pass a law banning gender-based violence have been unsuccessful. Rapists can avoid prosecution if they marry their victims; spousal rape is not prohibited. The law also allows reduced sentences for those convicted of so-called honor killings, which are seldom punished in practice.

Both men and women face pressure to conform to conservative standards on personal appearance. A number of high-profile women associated with the beauty and fashion industries were murdered in 2018. The assailants remain unknown, but the government blamed extremist groups for the murders.

#### G4 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation? 1 / 4**

After the military defeat of IS, many Yazidi women who had been forced into sex slavery remained missing. Exploitation of children, including through forced begging and the recruitment of child soldiers by some militias, is a chronic problem. Foreign migrant workers frequently work long hours for low pay, and they are vulnerable to forced labor. Human trafficking is also a problem, and internally displace people are particularly vulnerable. Government efforts to enforce trafficking laws have been inadequate.

ecoi.net summary:

Annual report on political  
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