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Freedom in the World 2022 - Iraq

NOT FREE

29

/ 100

[Political Rights](#) 16 / 40

[Civil Liberties](#) 13 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

29 / 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, militias operating outside the bounds of the law, and the weakness of formal institutions. 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 in practice the state has limited capacity to prevent and punish violations, and authorities routinely infringe upon the rights of residents.

Key Developments in 2021

- Results for the October parliamentary elections, which observer missions deemed credible, were certified in November and upheld by the Supreme Court in December. Parties that largely represent Iran-backed militias challenged the results legally, but also attempted to storm government offices so as to force a recount. The Sairoon alliance, led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, won 73 seats, up from 54 in the last election, while the Fatah alliance, which generally represents the Iran-backed militias, won only 17 seats, down from 48.
- In November, Iran-backed militias launched a drone strike against the home of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in Baghdad's Green Zone, wounding him. Iraqi authorities appear to know the identity of the perpetrators but have neither revealed nor apprehended those responsible.
- Throughout the year, Iran-backed militias continued to assassinate, kidnap, and assault activists, journalists, and lawyers affiliated with the Tishreen protest movement that began in 2019. In March, Jaseb Hattab al-Heliji, a popular poet and the father of human rights lawyer Ali al-Heliji who was kidnapped in October 2019, was assassinated.
- In February, a court in Erbil sentenced three journalists and two activists to six years in prison for criticizing Kurdish authorities on social media. The detainees were denied access to lawyers until minutes before the trial, and the internal security force loyal to the ruling party in Kurdistan refused to provide the lawyers with the detainees' files to prepare their defense.

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. In 2018, the CoR chose Kurdish politician Barham Salih as president and, in 2020, the parliament and foreign backers agreed to name Mustafa al-Kadhimi as prime minister. By the end of 2021, no new president or prime minister had been appointed after the October parliamentary elections. In November, Iran-backed militias launched a drone strike against the home of Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi in Baghdad's Green Zone, wounding him. Iraqi authorities appear to know the identity of the perpetrators but have neither revealed nor apprehended those responsible.

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. In 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, Masoud Barzani's son, was appointed and sworn in as prime minister the same month. Both Barzanis, the current president and prime minister, are members of 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. The October 2021 elections were generally viewed as credible by international observers, despite documented cases of voter and candidate intimidation, bribing of voters, prevention of journalists from covering the voting, arrests of activists calling for an election boycott, and the lowest voter turnout since the end of the Saddam Hussein regime. In early November, supporters of Iran-backed militias challenged the election results in court and attempted to storm the Green Zone complex in Baghdad, which houses governmental institutions, to force a recount. The ensuing clashes with police resulted in the death of three people.

The Sairoon alliance, led by Shiite cleric Moqtada al-Sadr, won 73 seats, up from 54 in the last election. Muhammad al-Halbousi's Taqadum Party won 37 seats, and the State of Law coalition headed by former prime minister Nouri al-Maliki took 33 seats. The two Kurdish parties, the KDP and PUK, won 31 and 18 seats, respectively. The Fatah alliance, which represents Iran-backed militias, took only 17 seats, down from 48 in the previous elections. The opposition parties Imtidad and Ishraqat Kanoon, which are associated with the Tishreen protest movement, won 9 and 5 seats, respectively, and the opposition Kurdish party, New Generation, secured nine seats. The remaining seats were divided among smaller parties and independents.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, the 111-seat Kurdish parliament is elected through closed party-list proportional representation in a single district, with members serving four-year terms. The 2018 elections, originally due in 2017, resulted in the governing KDP increasing its plurality to 45 seats. The PUK received 21 seats, the Gorran movement 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. The IHEC generally enjoys the confidence of the international community and, according to some polls, the Iraqi public.

The October 2021 elections were the first held under a new system dividing Iraq into 83 multimember electoral districts. This system is the result of December 2019 electoral reforms ostensibly passed to appease Tishreen protesters. The new electoral law was intended to facilitate entry into Parliament for independent candidates who do not have the backing of large parties.

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, and parties explicitly opposing the current sectarian apportionment political system are allowed to operate. Party membership and multiparty alliances shift frequently.

B2 0-4 pts

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

Elections are competitive, but all major parties are dominated by one sectarian or ethnic group. Sectarian parties were expected to continue leading the formation of a new government following the October 2021 parliamentary elections.

However, several new more secular and nationalist parties participated in the 2021 elections, and two parties linked to the 2019 Tishreen protest movement won 14 seats, even as its candidates and activists faced threats. The Kurdish opposition party, the New Generation movement, also won nine seats. Despite its military force and loyal personnel, the Fatah alliance lost significant representation, demonstrating the ability of Iraqi voters to affect Parliament's makeup, even if they cannot shift the balance of armed power in the country.

In 2021, KRG authorities continued their repression of the activities of the New Generation party and its affiliated media outlet, Nalia Radio and Television (NRT), owned by party leader Shaswar Abdulwahid. In 2019, security forces detained over 80 party members, allegedly for defamation and insulting a state employee. In August and December 2020, authorities unlawfully shut and raided four NRT offices and suspended the outlet's broadcasting license. In May 2021, KDP-affiliated police in Erbil requested that the Sulaimaniya police arrest Abdulwahid, but he has remained out of prison.

B3 0-4 pts

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

Iraq's political system remains distorted by interference from foreign powers, most notably Iran; Iranian authorities physically and politically threaten or buy the support of Iraqi policymakers who challenge Iranian interests. The Fatah alliance, which represents Iran-backed militias that do not follow the official command structure of Iraq's armed forces, has a persistent, albeit diminished presence in the parliament. However, the violent efforts of these militias to undermine the 2021 elections failed, as did their assassination attempt against Prime Minister al-Kadhimi.

In 2021, the Islamic State (IS) did not suppress or affect normal political activity, as they have done in previous years.

B4 0-4 pts

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

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, Sabeen Mandaeans, and Shabaks. The Kurdish parliament reserves five seats for Turkmen, five for Christians, and one for Armenians. The political rights of minority groups have been severely impeded by widespread displacement from formerly IS-occupied areas.

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. Iran-backed militias, incorporated under the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), are officially part of Iraqi state institutions but in practice set their own policies. They planned the assassination attempt of Prime Minister al-Kadhimi in November 2021, repressed political protests, kidnapped and assassinated activists, and attacked US targets in Iraq. Their actions gravely undermine the government's ability to set and implement its own domestic and foreign agendas. 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.

In the Kurdistan region, new representatives to the KRG were elected in 2018 and approved a new government in 2019, after a multi-year suspension of Parliament. Although representatives in the KRG have jurisdiction over the entire Kurdistan region, in practice, the region is split between the Erbil and Dohuk governorates, under KDP control, and Sulaimaniya, controlled by the PUK. Each region has its own politically affiliated internal security (Asayish) and military forces (Peshmerga).

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 Tishreen protest movement that erupted in 2019. Political parties siphon funds from the ministries they control, take kickbacks for government contracts, and resist anticorruption efforts. Prime Minister al-Kadhimi claimed in May 2021 that over \$150 billion of public funds had been lost to corruption since 2003. The judicial system, itself hampered by politicization and corruption, acts on only a fraction of the cases investigated by the Integrity Commission, one of three anticorruption bodies. The KRG suffers from similar corruption problems. Under both the federal government and the KRG, whistleblowers, investigators, journalists, and private individuals raising corruption concerns have faced arrests, charges of defamation, violence, and intimidation.

C3 0-4 pts

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

The government does not operate with transparency, despite a few official policies promoting openness, including an asset disclosure requirement. The CoR debates the budget, and interest groups are often able to access draft legislation. Government spending, in both Baghdad and the KRG, is not transparent. The PMF's large budget is particularly opaque. The number of fighters drawing salaries is unknown and likely significantly larger than the actual number of active soldiers. The public procurement system is not transparent 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. There is no comprehensive law on public 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, over a million Iraqis who were displaced by IS remain unable to return to their homes, for both security and economic reasons. Kurdish authorities encouraged local and substate forces to prevent 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 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 2021, approximately 4.8 million Iraqis displaced by the 2014 IS offensive had returned to their home regions, while almost 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

Iraq's media environment appears lively and diverse, but there are few politically independent news sources. In recent years, social media, which was once dominated by alternative and independent voices, has been utilized by progovernment forces, and particularly, Iran-backed militias, to spread incitement, fake news, and explicit threats against activists. Journalists who do not self-censor can also face legal repercussions. Media outlets face restrictions and obstruction in response to their coverage.

The constitution allows limits on free expression to preserve "public order" and "morality." Iraqi government authorities have arrested journalists for conducting their work, at times charging them with defamation and insulting public institutions. In July 2021, the Iraqi Security Forces raided the Al-Baghdadiya TV office in Baghdad, suspended the channel's broadcast, arrested the news director and a news anchor, and confiscated equipment. No charges were presented to the detainees, who were released after one day.

Militias frequently shoot, kidnap, torture, and assassinate journalists for their work. Ahmed Hassan, a journalist working for Al-Forat TV in al-Diwaniya, survived an assassination attempt by masked gunmen in May 2021. Journalists Abbas al-Rifi'i and Ali al-Mikdam were kidnapped, tortured, threatened, and then released by militiamen in May and July 2021, respectively.

In Iraqi Kurdistan, authorities intensified their persecution of journalists who reported on government mismanagement, corruption, and antiregime protests in the region in 2021. The Metro Center for Defending the Rights of Journalists claimed that, by April, they had recorded 49 violations against 36 journalists in the region, including physical attacks against journalists covering antiregime protests. Authorities routinely illegally arrest and detain journalists, prevent them from speaking to a lawyer, and convict them on spurious charges without a legitimate trial. In February 2021, a court in KDP-controlled Erbil sentenced three journalists and two activists to six years in prison for criticizing authorities on social media. KRG Prime Minister Barzani (a KDP leader) claimed without evidence in a news conference that the detainees were not journalists but spies, which may have influenced the judge's decision to convict them of "destabilizing the security" in the region.

While the KDP engaged in the most egregious violations of press freedom in 2021, their rival party, the PUK, also persecuted journalists in regions they control. Despite their rivalry, the PUK arrested Hemin Baqer, a journalist who published about KDP corruption, after he fled Erbil to Sulaimaniya. The internal security service loyal to the PUK also arrested a journalist working for the Kurdistan Workers' Union (PKK)-affiliated Firat News Agency while covering an anti-Turkish protest in Sulaimaniya.

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 experience 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. Most political leaders expressed support for religious pluralism after IS's defeat, and minority religious groups 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 surveillance or retribution? 1 / 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 prompt arrest, docking of salaries, torture, and criminal lawsuits. Social media users and bloggers have faced defamation suits for criticizing corruption and misgovernance. Authorities have nonconsensually released video footage of detainees to humiliate and intimidate them.

Activists describe a climate of fear that has led them to self-censor what they post on social media or say in discussions on the mobile phone app, Clubhouse. Over 30 private citizens involved in the 2019 Tishreen protest movement, including at least one minor, were abducted between 2019 to 2021; their whereabouts remain unknown as of December 2021. Many vocal activists have fled the country or relocated to the Kurdistan region, fearing for their lives. Political speech in the Kurdistan region against local authorities can also prompt arbitrary detentions or other reprisals from government forces affiliated with the two ruling parties.

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. These dangers have become acute during the ongoing Tishreen protest movement against corruption, poor infrastructure and government services, and high unemployment that began in October 2019. Security forces have used curfews, tear gas, and live ammunition to suppress demonstrations in Baghdad and other southern cities. By mid-December 2021, hundreds of people had been killed due to protest activities; of them, dozens were killed in targeted assassinations outside of protest squares. Iraqi Security Forces routinely shot at, arrested, and tortured protesters. While the majority of those arrested are released after a few days due to public pressure, some have been sentenced to years in prison.

Iraqi officials and journalists reported that snipers under the command of Iran-backed militia units use live ammunition to shoot at protesters from rooftops and carry out a wave of assaults and assassinations against protest organizers and activists. Militiamen routinely kidnap activists, torture them for several days, and then release them, so as to coerce them to cease their antiregime activity. Iranian media and media outlets linked to Iran-backed militias spread false reports about activists to justify their targeting and issued explicit threats to activists and critics set to be targeted next.

In 2021, the number of protests in the Kurdistan region dropped significantly, which local activists claim was the result of security forces' use of unprecedented levels of violence against protesters in 2020. In 2021, Kurdish authorities linked both to the KDP and the PUK continued to attack and arrest peaceful protesters and journalists covering the protests.

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 Kurdistan, NGOs must renew their registration annually.

Iran-backed militias have threatened, assaulted, kidnapped, tortured, raped in captivity, assassinated, and planted explosive devices at the homes of multiple critics and activists (and their family members) involved in the Tishreen protest movement. In March 2021, Jaseb Hattab al-Heliji, a popular poet and the father of human rights lawyer Ali al-Heliji, was assassinated. Ali himself was kidnapped in October 2019 and has not been heard from since. In July, gunmen assassinated Ali Karim, the son of prominent human rights defender Fatima al-Bahadli, who is the founder of the Al-Firdaws Association, which advocates for the protection of women and girls in Basra.

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, violent intimidation, 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. Detainees are frequently denied access to lawyers, who when available are often prevented access to crucial public documents.

The three journalists and two activists who were sentenced in February 2021 by an Erbil court to six years in prison for criticizing authorities on social media were denied access to lawyers until minutes before the trial. The internal security force loyal to the ruling party in KDP-controlled Erbil refused to provide the lawyers with the detainees' files to prepare their clients' defense.

Terrorism cases 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, who are often allegedly associated with IS, have committed specific crimes. 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 Tishreen movement protesters. Their removals were rejected by many Iraqis as inadequate and proved an ineffective deterrent on members of security forces, who since then have continued to fatally wound demonstrators at protests.

Prime Minister al-Kadhimi has repeatedly promised to investigate and prosecute members of Iran-backed militias responsible for a wave of assassinations, assassination attempts, and kidnappings of activists across southern Iraq. While some suspects were arrested in 2021, the political and militia leaders who ordered the killings were not held responsible. Several named suspects are protected by political parties, and the overwhelming majority of cases remain unsolved. Protesters demanding accountability have themselves been killed, kidnapped, arrested, and threatened. Efforts to locate victims of kidnappings have not successfully obtained the release of those who have 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 in Iraq. 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. Throughout 2021, IS waged an insurgency in rural areas of western and northern Iraq, targeting both civilians and military personnel. The insurgency and the collective punishment policies adopted by the Iraqi Security Forces in response have threatened the physical safety of residents.

Militias have recaptured large swaths of Iraqi territory from IS, but they have also engaged in war crimes such as pillaging, forcible displacement of Sunnis, kidnappings, and torture. Over 600 Sunni men and boys who were kidnapped by the PMF during the recapture of western provinces of Iraq in 2016 have not been heard from since.

Tensions between Iran and the United States continued to play out on Iraqi soil in 2021, as Iran-backed militias used small-scale rockets and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) toward American forces and personnel, endangering Iraqi residents.

Starting in 2020, Turkish military forces launched operations into Kurdish territory to combat the Kurdistan Workers' Union (PKK) guerilla group. The operation resulted in civilian casualties and mass displacement from the Turkey-Kurdistan border region.

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 legal treatment under the law. Sexual harassment in the workplace is prohibited, but victims rarely 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, employment, or education? 1 / 4

Freedom of movement has 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 has made it difficult for many displaced people to return home. The renewed IS insurgency and the Iraqi Security Forces' corresponding response in 2021 has constrained the freedom of movement of residents in rural western and northern Iraq.

The KRG also continues to prevent Arab families from returning to villages on the border with Syria, from which they fled during fighting between the Peshmerga and IS in 2014.

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 many social services.

G2 0-4 pts

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

Iraqis are legally free to own property and establish businesses, but observance of property rights has been limited by corruption and conflict. Families perceived to be affiliated with IS living in displacement are particularly vulnerable to confiscation or takeover of their property. Business owners face demands for bribes, threats, and violent attempts to seize their enterprises. In Iraqi Kurdistan, where there is a construction boom, this has sometimes come at the expense of local landowners and farmers whose fields are confiscated without notice or compensation. 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.

The renewed IS insurgency and the collective punishment policies adopted by the Iraqi Security Forces has caused material damage to the property of civilians in rural western and northern Iraq.

G3 0-4 pts

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

Forced and early marriages are common, especially in the context of displacement and poverty. Over one in four Iraqi women aged 20 to 24 were married by age 18, and marriage for those aged 15 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 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.

G4 0-4 pts

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

As of 2021, over 2,700 Yazidi women and children who had been kidnapped by IS during the 2014 genocide of the Yazidi community remain missing. Many of them were likely forced into sexual slavery or forced labor. Exploitation of children, including through forced begging and the recruitment of child soldiers by militias, is an ongoing problem. Foreign migrant workers frequently work long hours

for low pay and are vulnerable to forced labor. According to the US State Department's 2021 *Trafficking in Persons* report, the Iraqi government and the KRG have stepped up enforcement efforts to prevent human trafficking, but it continues unabated—at times with the protection of corrupt officials—and internally displaced persons are particularly vulnerable.

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