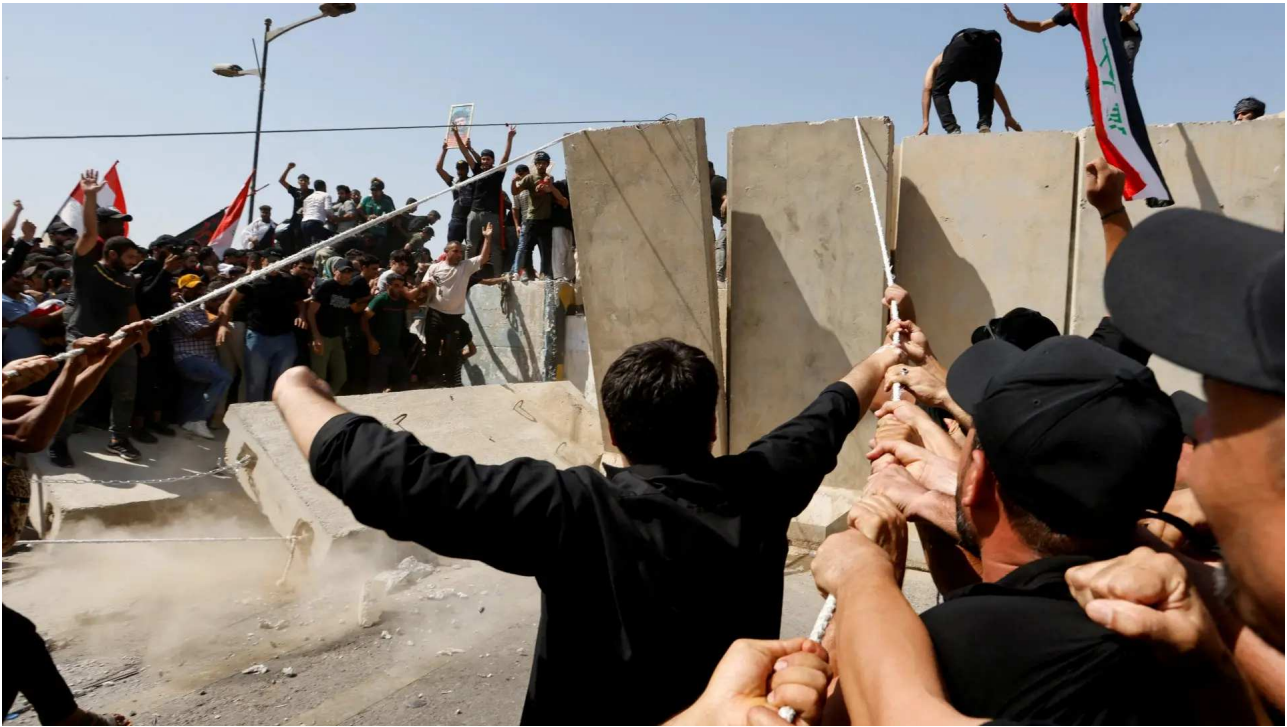


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World Report 2024



Iraq

Events of 2023

Supporters of Iraqi Sadrist Movement leader Moqtada al-Sadr pull down a concrete barrier during a protest against corruption, in Baghdad, Iraq, July 30, 2022.

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- [English](#)
- [العربية](#)
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Following decades of armed conflict, Iraq enjoyed its most stable period since before the US-led invasion of 2003. However, the country remained [fragile and deeply divided](#), and grievances driving the [2019 mass protests](#) remained unresolved, including discontent with the current political system, failing public services, deteriorating infrastructure, and rampant corruption. Violent [repression](#) of protesters and [arrests](#) of journalists covering protests continued in 2023.

In October 2022, just over a year after the 2021 federal elections, political elites finally agreed on the [appointment](#) of Mohammed Shia al-Sudani as prime minister. Since Prime Minister al-Sudani took office, he attempted to capitalize on the period of relative calm and stability, centering his [agenda](#) around five key issues: combatting corruption, addressing unemployment, reducing poverty, reforming the economy and finances, and improving government services. In June 2023, Iraq's

parliament [approved](#) an annual budget of 198.9 trillion Iraqi dinars (US\$153 billion) for three years (2023 to 2025), the largest in the country's history and the first multiyear budget to be approved.

Iraq made several positive strides in respecting and upholding human rights, such as taking further steps toward implementing the [Yazidi Survivors Law](#) and enacting a Civilian Protection Policy. In June 2023, Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) authorities published an [update](#) highlighting positive achievements it had made under its [five-year plan](#) to address human rights issues in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), published in May 2022.

However, political infighting blocked the passage of key legislation that could protect Iraqis' rights, such as draft laws on child protection and [domestic violence](#). Enacting structural reforms that address the grievances of Iraqi citizens became even more urgent in the context of a worsening climate crisis, stressing the need for Iraq to transition its economy and primary source of government revenue away from fossil fuels.

Women's and Girls' Rights

After playing a [central role](#) in the 2019-2020 protest movement, women continued to struggle against [patriarchal norms](#) embedded in Iraq's legal system. Iraq's [penal code](#) enables [impunity](#) for male violence against women, including provisions that allow the husband to punish his wife, parents to discipline their children, and mitigated sentences for violent acts including murder for so-called "honorable motives." The penal code also allows perpetrators of rape or sexual assault to escape prosecution or have their sentences quashed if they [marry their victim](#).

Women's rights groups continued to advocate for an [anti-domestic violence law](#), but efforts in parliament stalled. Survivors of [gender-based violence](#) had [limited access to shelter or justice](#), and some survivors of [human trafficking](#) were tried and convicted for prostitution. The few government shelters in the KRI only allowed women to enter or leave with [court orders](#). While there were a small number of [underground shelters](#) for women in federal Iraq, run by local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), they were not widely supported, but often criticized, and sometimes attacked by families and raided by authorities.

Women in [unregistered marriages](#) (marriages conducted by religious leaders but not registered with the Personal Status Court) faced severe challenges in accessing government services and social protection if their marriage was not [legalized](#). Unregistered marriages are often done as a way to [circumvent legal restrictions](#) on child marriage, polygamy, and forced marriage and to evade having to pay spousal maintenance in case of divorce. Without a civil marriage certificate, women are unable to give birth in government hospitals, access [social protection schemes](#) contingent on one's marital status, [obtain birth certificates](#) for their children, or have legal recourse to claim spousal maintenance or child support in the event of divorce.

Civil Documentation

In September 2022, seven aid groups [found](#) that nearly five years after the government [declared victory](#) over Islamic State (ISIS), up to 1 million Iraqis, displaced by the armed group's seizure of swaths of Iraqi territory and the battle to recapture them, remained unable to obtain basic civil documentation. The documents they cannot obtain include certificates of birth, marriage, and death as well as Iraq's relatively new [unified national identification card](#). Such documents are essential for accessing vital public services, including monthly food disbursements [and children's access to education](#).

Women who [fled abusive families](#) without their legal identification documents struggled to have them replaced. Without a civil ID, women also face challenges [freely moving](#) around and registering for their residence card, which is required to rent housing or secure employment.

Children born of [unregistered marriages](#) or born out of wedlock, including those born of rape, may be unable to obtain birth certificates and thus other key civil documents, limiting their access to government services and social protection. If the paperwork is left [unresolved](#), those affected cannot enroll in school, access employment opportunities, and may be forced to enter into unregistered marriages later in life.

Children's Rights

In June 2023, the Iraqi parliament introduced a draft child protection law, the first of its kind for the country and a vital step in safeguarding children's rights in Iraq. If passed, the law would address crucial issues like child labor, exploitation, and abuse. It would also explicitly enshrine children's fundamental rights into law, including the rights to life, health, education, and citizenship.

Over the last 20 years, rates of child marriage in Iraq have been steadily increasing. A [study](#) conducted in 2021 by the Ministry of Planning and the Central Statistical Organization found that 25.5 percent of married women in Iraq were married before they were 18, and 5.2 percent of women were married before 15. [Poverty](#), [insecurity](#), and [lower educational outcomes](#) for girls have all been associated with increased child marriage rates in Iraq. [Child marriage](#) and adolescent pregnancy can have serious adverse health impacts, limit access to education and employment, and exacerbate risks of sexual and domestic violence.

Freedom of Expression

In January 2023, the Iraqi government launched a [campaign](#) to target “indecent content” online. The same month, the Ministry of Interior launched a [platform](#) that allows Iraqis to denounce or report any social media content that “violates public morals, contains negative and indecent messages, and undermines social stability.” Over [96,000 complaints](#) were received in a month. As a result, six people were [sentenced to prison terms](#) but have since been [released](#).

The campaign uses article 403 of the [Iraqi penal code](#), which criminalizes published material that “violates public integrity or decency.” While Iraq's [constitution](#) provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, it also includes restrictions on expression assessed by authorities to violate public order and morality.

Vaguely worded laws have been used to [target and silence](#) journalists, activists, and rival politicians, including in the KRI. In many cases, spurious anti-defamation lawsuits are less about proving the individual committed a crime, but rather about [using the legal proceedings](#) themselves as a punishment or way to control the activities of the person being charged.

Climate Change and Environmental Degradation

The UN ranked Iraq as the fifth [most vulnerable](#) country to global warming and climate change, and the environmental crisis in Iraq was steadily increasing in scope and severity. [Droughts](#), [desertification](#), increased frequency and severity of [sandstorms](#), [pollution](#), and [rising temperatures](#) are symptomatic of this crisis. Large swaths of Iraq are expected to become [uninhabitable](#) in the coming years or decades. Weak environmental protection legislation and dirty industrial practices such as [gas flaring](#) have contributed to rising [cancer rates](#) among local populations.

A growing [environmental movement](#) in Iraq seeks to address the environmental degradation caused by conflict and resource mismanagement, prepare Iraq to adapt to the new realities of climate change, and promote Iraq's transition away from a fossil fuels-based economy. Like activists across the civil society space, their efforts have been met with [harassment](#), [intimidation](#), and [threats](#). In February 2023, a prominent environmental [activist](#) was abducted, tortured, and held for two weeks by an unidentified armed group. In March 2023, Prime Minister al-Sudani [promised](#) sweeping

measures to tackle climate change, including plans to meet one-third of its electricity demands using renewable energy.

Returns of Displaced People

Six years after the last territory controlled by ISIS was retaken by forces from Iraq and a United States-led international military coalition, about [1.16 million](#) Iraqis remain internally displaced, [mostly](#) across the KRI. In April 2023, the Ministry of Migration and Displacement hastily [closed Jeddah 5](#), the last official camp for internally displaced people in federal Iraq, with little advance notice and despite [concerns](#) about camp residents' safety in their areas of origin.

Since January 2021, Iraqi authorities have [repatriated](#) about 10,000 Iraqis unlawfully detained as ISIS suspects and family members in northeast Syria – nearly 7,000 from al-Hol camp, mostly women and children, and about 3,000 men held in prisons whom Iraq said it was prosecuting. Most returnees are sent to Jeddah 1, a temporary “[rehabilitation camp](#)” near Mosul, before returning to their places of origin. United Nations Secretary General Antonio Guterres and US officials have [lauded](#) the returns, though some NGOs and UN staff have [questioned](#) whether the repatriations met UN principles for safe and voluntary returns and expressed [concerns](#) about families leaving the camp without essential documentation, which may limit their ability to access government services in their places of origin.

[Sixty percent](#) of the population of Sinjar remain displaced in camps and homes since 2014, when they fled ISIS attacks and Iraqi counterattacks. Continued [insecurity](#) in Sinjar resulting from Turkish airstrikes and competition between armed groups for control of the area, lagging [reconstruction](#) of essential services and infrastructure, and the Iraqi government's failure to provide [compensation](#) for homes and businesses lost during military operations were the main barriers to their return.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

In 2023, the political climate toward lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people in Iraq became markedly more hostile. On August 15, Raad Al-Maliki, an independent member of parliament, introduced a [bill](#) that would impose the death penalty or life in prison for same-sex conduct and imprisonment for transgender expression. Earlier that month, the Iraqi Communications and Media Commission issued a directive [ordering](#) all media outlets to replace the term “homosexuality” with “sexual deviance” in their published and broadcasted language and banning use of the term “gender.”

In the KRI, on May 31, a court [ordered the closure](#) of Rasan Organization, a human rights organization, over “its activities in the field of homosexuality.” In September 2022, members of the Kurdistan regional parliament [introduced](#) a bill that would punish any individual or group that advocates for the rights of LGBT people.

The [targeting of LGBT people online](#) and [violence against LGBT people](#), including killings, abductions, torture, and sexual violence by armed groups in Iraq continued to be met with impunity. Iraqi authorities have also targeted LGBT people using a [range of vague provisions](#) in Iraq's penal code aimed at policing morals and public indecency and limiting freedom of expression.

Key International Actors

Twenty years after the US-led invasion of Iraq, the US government has [failed to provide compensation](#) or other redress to Iraqis who suffered torture and other abuses at US-run prisons in the country. Survivors still have no clear path to [raise a claim](#) with the US government or apply for

compensation or recognition, even though the effects of torture are a daily reality for many Iraqi survivors and their families.

Türkiye continues regularly conducting [airstrikes](#) and [targeted assassinations](#) in northern Iraq, primarily targeting the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and Sinjar Resistance Units (YBS), sometimes killing [civilians](#). In July 2023, four claimants who survived or witnessed a Turkish airstrike that allegedly targeted a civilian hospital in Sinjar, killing eight people, issued a [formal complaint](#) to the UN Human Rights Council. Iraq has repeatedly [condemned](#) the attacks as a violation of its sovereignty but has largely [refrained](#) from investigating the attacks or providing compensation to victims.