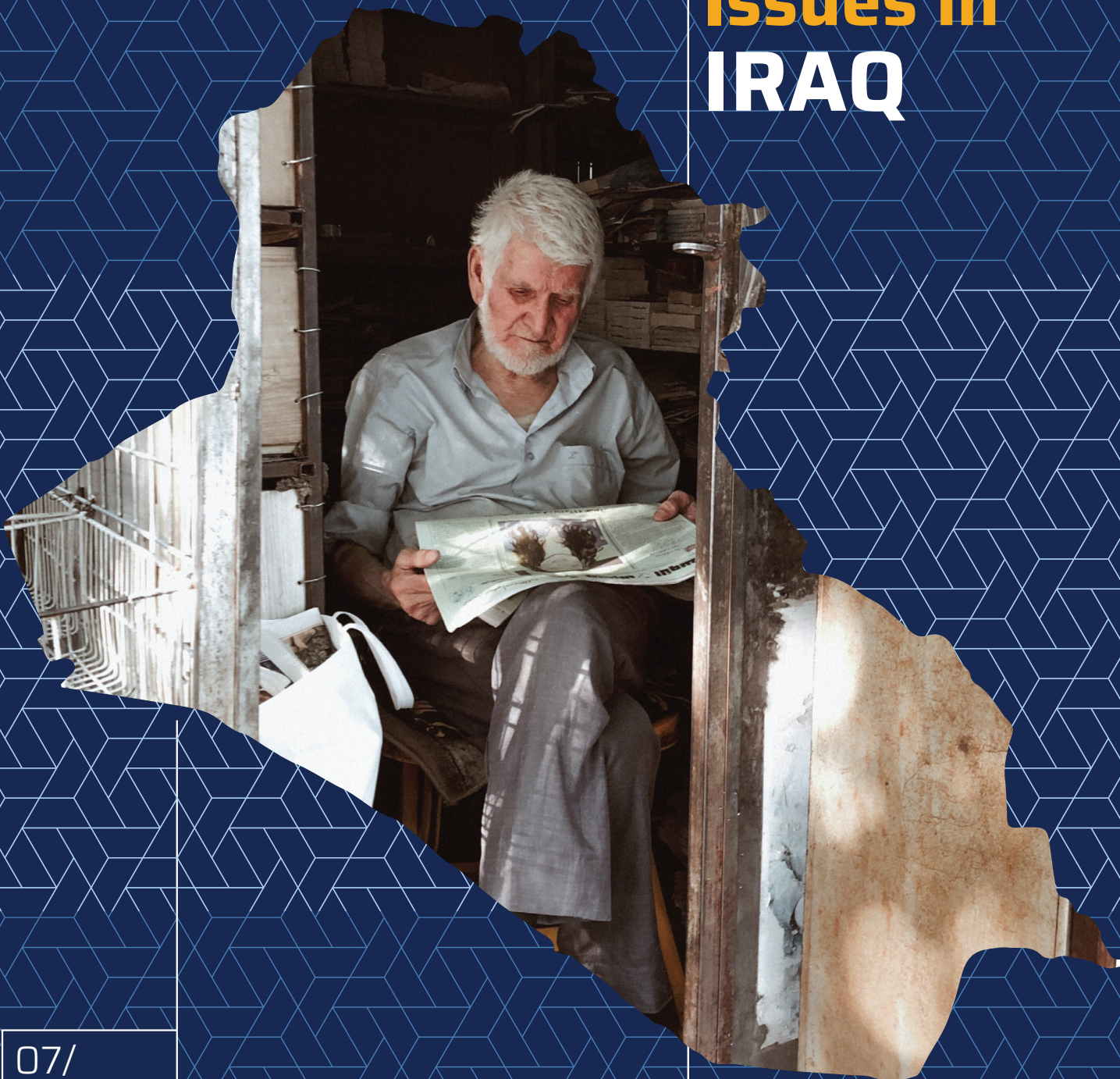


Critical Human Security Issues in **IRAQ**



07/
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2021

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IRAQ

CONTEXT

Iraq is a war-torn country which faces significant security and justice challenges, including a large number of internally displaced persons and concerns that small cells of defeated Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) remain in hiding in rural areas. Iraq's civil society, in particular youth, are protesting for a better future with less corruption, better governance and lower unemployment rates. State security institutions are accused of abusing the use of force and applying excessive use of force against civilians, whilst being themselves the target of non-state armed groups' attacks.

The defeat of ISIL could improve Iraq's capability to better focus on community reconciliation, conflict recovery and reform of the security and justice sector. Security sector reform and governance is pivotal for long term stability and peace in the country. The official launch of the SSR process in Iraq was in 2015, but major challenges persist for security and justice sector governance.

This short knowledge product aims to address emerging concerns for human security in a country of high interest to ISSAT Members. It builds on DCAF's operational programming, open-source documents, as well as the learning ISSAT captures from its Governing Board Members engagement in the country and maps out the top challenges and actors impacting the hybrid security landscape in the country. This note also aims to be a conversation starter and ISSAT welcomes comments and contributions from its members and Community of Practice.

INTERNAL POPULATION DISPLACEMENT



The humanitarian and displacement situation in Iraq is one of the world's most volatile and acute. Large waves of displacement have been tracked in Iraq for more than 50 years. Most of those were driven by a combination of factors, such as internal armed conflict, external intervention and political, ethnic and religious oppression, in addition to natural disasters including floods and earthquakes. The latest wave of displacement began in late 2013, when ISIL began to take over large swaths of territory. In 2013, 2.1 million people were already living in internal displacement due to previous conflicts. According to UNHCR, the number of IDPs reached 4.1 million in 2016.

A decrease in scale and intensity of armed violence in 2018 allowed for around 900,000 displaced Iraqis to return to their hometowns. Since 2014, IOM estimated that around 4.6 million (February 2020) IDPs returned to their hometowns, amidst concerns about forced IDP returns and IDP vulnerability. According to IOM, around 1.4 million Iraqis remain internally displaced (February 2020), with over seventy percent of those originating from the Northern Ninewa and Salah al-Din governorates, which were most affected by ISIL's domination and rule.

Around

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According to IOM,
February 2020

IDPs face challenges in access to safety and security, fair standard of living, employment, land and property, documentation, family separation and/or reunification, participation in public affairs, and justice services. Furthermore, inter-communal divisions between host communities and IDPs are also representing a challenge for future reconciliation and reintegration. The question still remains on the possible outlets for IDPs and how to ensure their safety and security as well as sustainable solutions going forward.



ARMED GROUPS & INSURGENCY



Insurgent attacks by ISIL fighters and Sunni militias in western and central-northern Iraq, as well as, terrorist attacks across the country, continue to threaten the safety and security of Iraqis. Citizens still feel threatened by ISIL and other non-state armed groups and competing militias (NDI, 2019).

Insecurity in the south revolves around violent confrontations between rival tribal and religious armed groups that seek to control neighbourhoods in the capital, Baghdad. The neighbouring ongoing conflict in Syria fuels arms, drugs, refugee flow and people trafficking amidst armed groups operations.

Despite its territorial losses, ISIL is still far from being totally eradicated from Iraq. Reliable estimations point to the existence of some 10 to 20 thousand active ISIL fighters in the region, mostly between Iraq and Syria, who remain a serious threat to peace, safety and stability. Even with reduced operational capacity and numbers, they indiscriminately target Iraqi civilians and commit human rights abuses. The United States-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL continues its military operations in Iraq while Turkey focuses its operations in northern Iraq. The unstable and fragile security landscape in Iraq is jeopardizing the building of a legitimate and efficient national security sector and creating conducive conditions for non-state and other armed groups to flourish and operate with impunity. It further demonstrates different interests and visions among the population based on sectarian, ethnic or regional ties.

CIVIL ACTION & YOUTH DISCONTENT



Since the Fall of 2019, Iraq and especially Baghdad, has experienced civil protests, as thousands of mostly young people have been demonstrating in different parts of the country against corruption, unemployment and poor public services. The protests, which started off in a non-violent and peaceful manner, have become more violent as time has passed. Security forces have responded using water cannons, tear gas, live rounds and rubber bullets. Several hundreds of protesters have been killed and thousands injured. Tens of thousands of residents in the southern governorate of Basra were reported to have been poisoned and hospitalized by polluted drinking water, fuelling ongoing protests against the government's mismanagement of the neglected south.



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Nearly 60% of Iraq's population is under 25 years of age, which is impacting the society and the country's development. Lack of proper education, gender inequalities and high unemployment rates are issues that greatly impact the governance, security and justice needs of the population and require increased capacities to articulate and implement asserted solutions.

The civil protests in Iraq are one in a series of similar global mass demonstrations that have occurred over the past years. They have had significant repercussions on the security situation in the country, as they reveal shortcomings of state institutions, civilian lack of oversight and the low levels of accountability of security providers towards civilians. Strong national consensus has been formed around the need for the government to be responsible for all firearms control and regulation and removal of all armed manifestations in public spaces. These protests are an important issue for donors to watch, as this not only demonstrate citizen's dissatisfaction but also reveals the widening gaps and disconnect between citizens and government, and between youth and government. Increased trainings on human rights and non-violent crowd control are areas that are in need of support.

WEAK GOVERNANCE & STATE INSTITUTIONS



Iraq's public sector institutions have not been successful in equitably allocating resources across the country and its population and extend basic public services, including access to security and justice in an effective manner. In a poll by NDI 2019, most citizens see the government from federal to local level as ineffective, and a vast majority (74%) acknowledge that they are not aware of the government priorities. For decades state institutions have been driven by sectarian interests and decimated by corruption. The politicization of state institutions and control over state resources have undermined the effective and equitable delivery of services, thus exacerbating the crisis of legitimacy, the challenges to state authority, and, ultimately, the spiral of violence that we see in Iraq today. As noted in the 2011 World Development Report, weak institutions and a lack of legitimacy undermine states' ability to provide basic security, justice, and economic opportunities for their citizens and can therefore be a key cause of conflict. This holds true in Iraq, where the fragility of key public institutions and processes is reflected most starkly in the chronic weakness of its civil service, public financial management, state-owned enterprises, public investment management, and judicial system.

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LACK OF PUBLIC TRUST



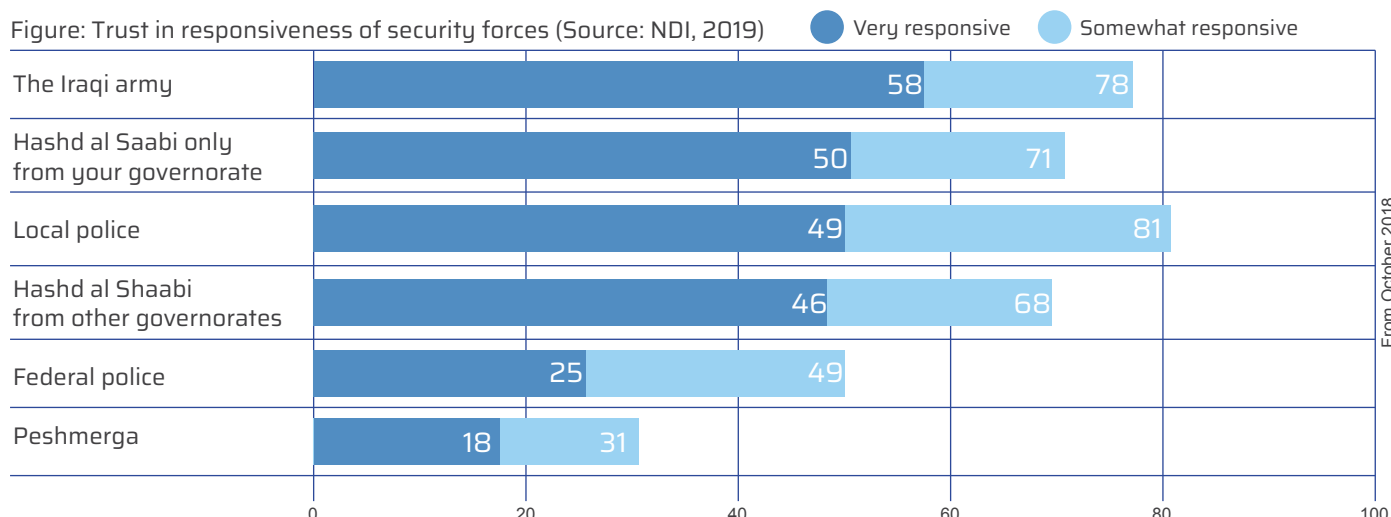
Weak governance and accountability, inefficient institutions and insufficient access to security and justice services across the country result in lack of public trust in public services. A recent survey from NDI revealed that lack of public trust and low confidence in national elections, drive perceptions that Iraq remains a divided country and increases support for protests. This further strengthens divisions according to sectarian lines in society. According to the Head of UNAMI, increased public trust in governmental institutions is key for development in Iraq, particularly after the fight against ISIL. Lack of public trust is also driven by the view of an ineffective and unaccountable governmental apparatus.

General public's trust in the army and police institutions tend to have increased over time. However, judicial institutions and provincial councils seem to be less credible in the eyes of the population. Despite perceptions of citizens' trust in the Popular Mobilization Units¹, these non-state actors are becoming a source of concern for the government in relation to its monopoly over use of force.

Today, Iraq needs robust and functional accountability mechanisms and community reconciliation to recover from conflict and its associated societal traumas. For this aim, restoring public trust in the judiciary and the justice system to hold perpetrators accountable is of key importance.

¹ Popular Mobilization Units (also known as Hashd al Shaabi) are an umbrella organization consisting of more than 50 different militias with ties to the government, performing along the lines of national security forces.

Figure: Trust in responsiveness of security forces (Source: NDI, 2019)



From October 2018



Image: Samawah, 2020 © MH Rezaa, Unsplash.

CORRUPTION



Endemic corruption is one of the main threats to Iraq's stability, alienating the population from its ruling elite and driving young people into a protest movement that demands radical change. In a recent poll, more than 80% of Iraqis were concerned or very concerned about corruption at the highest levels of government and the population perceives it to be getting worse. In Kurdistan, over 90% say that corruption is getting worse. Corruption among senior politicians and civil servants is systematically undermining trust in the government and destroys the legitimacy of institutions.

Transparency International (TI) ranked Iraq in the 162nd place out of 180 in 2019. This was a rise of six ranks compared to 2018. Further, Iraq was ranked by TI as the fourth most corrupt country in the Middle East, better off than Syria, Yemen and Libya. For comparison, the three countries better than Iraq were Iran (146), Lebanon (137) and Egypt (106).

However, until now, political corruption has been primarily treated as an individual crime. Little recognition is given to corruption as primarily driven by the structure of the political system and the role that Iraq's political parties play in it.

PUBLIC FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT



A recent survey from NDI reveals that the lack of national financial stability is a key concern for the Iraqi population. It fuels frustration and might lead to instability or conflict. Enhancing public financial management is crucial for improving the efficiency and effectiveness of state services and this could bring added value to the public sector in Iraq. Gaps in public financial management frameworks and processes could create opportunities for abuse and corruption. Reforms in this area could increase transparency and strengthen oversight and accountability over public resources. Currently, public resources are managed through channels which could benefit from improved transparency, alienating the risk of fuelling corruption and nepotism and help in boosting the State's credibility, legitimacy and the perceptions of the community.

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HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS



Human rights violations allegations are common in Iraq. Security forces are accused of detaining suspects without court order, arrest warrant, or any other justification of arrest. Authorities are accused of violating the process for detainees to see a judge within 24 hours, to have access to a lawyer throughout interrogations and to have families notified of their detention. Detainees express having undergone torture in prisons, which in some cases have led to death. Courts sentence individuals convicted of terrorism-related offences to death, frequently after questionable trials that reportedly rely on torture-tainted evidence.

Iraqi families with perceived ISIL affiliation because of their family name, tribal affiliation, or area of origin, have been denied security clearances required to obtain identity documentation or other civil documentation. This has impacted their freedom of movement, right to education, right to work, and right to apply for welfare benefits and obtain birth and death certificates. Although numerous ethnic and religious minority groups live in Iraq, the government does not guarantee equal treatment and access to public services.



Image: DCAF-ISSAT, 2017.

GENDER INEQUALITY



Over recent decades, the role of Iraqi women have been significantly weakened, and their parity with men in the public space has suffered setbacks in a number of areas. However, demands for gender equality are increasing. While the legal position of women was relatively strong compared with other countries in the region and Iraqi women have traditionally taken part in society through education, labour and politics, this reality has now receded. Women empowerment's main constraints in Iraq are largely economic, social, and cultural, driven by sectarian, ethnic and family-related boundaries. Acts such as harassment, domestic and sexual violence occur in Iraq and the national legal frameworks provide a certain level of protection for women but still lag behind on several issues. Iraq's criminal code criminalises physical assault but lacks any explicit mention of domestic violence, and even when sexual assault can be criminalized, it does not apply in a marriage. Gender equality cannot only be achieved through women empowerment, examining gendered male roles and unpacking the expectations the Iraqi society puts on men and women is of equal importance and deserves higher attention by the donor community ■



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