Reimagining the Social Contract in Iraq

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FOREWORD

This is Iraq's watershed moment.

Following successful elections, the formation of the new Government is underway with national priorities to be presented soon thereafter. In their deliberations, Iraqi officials will need to significantly consider past developments, especially in the last 36 months, and the increasing expectations and demands of their constituents for a better, more equitable and accountable social contract. One that is based on trust and transparency. One that is fit for the realities of the next generation.

Capitalizing on this moment, we offer a conversation starter on how to catalyse a reimagined social contract. It reflects the voices of Iraqi women and men as they are best placed to articulate what is needed to achieve economic and social justice and empower them to take on their rightful roles and responsibilities as citizens.

We invite all who are invested in the future of Iraq and its people to drive this conversation so that we collectively can support a path to a better future for all Iraqis.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper investigates how Iraqis envision the social contract. It provides policy recommendations for the Government of Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government, international actors and civil society to help bridge the gap between the social contract as it stands and the way it is envisioned.

The paper is the culmination of a process launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Iraq in partnership with the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI). This exercise has sought to understand how Iraqi society wants to renegotiate the country's social contract. An exchange with research participants provides a unique opportunity to understand how different parts of the Iraqi population reimagine the social contract. Moreover, it offers an opportunity to bring these views together to encourage dialogue with the Government and other policy stakeholders on how to redefine State-society relations.

The paper examines how different segments of society view their relationship with the State and how their social position influences their representation and participation in the political process. It pays particular attention to marginalized communities—such as women, internally displaced persons (IDPs), minorities and youth—while recognizing that people can fall into multiple categories of exclusion. The paper uses desk-based research and primary data obtained through consultations with key Iraqi non-governmental stakeholders, focus group discussions and social media surveys. Three online consultations, each involving 15 to 20 participants, provided feedback on findings and conclusions. They acted as a sounding board and ensured wider community involvement.

Between April and June 2021, focus group discussions took place in each governorate of Iraq to understand people's issues with the social contract, the changes they would like to see and how they would prioritize these. Two discussions in each governorate, one with men and one with women, gauged their views separately. Each discussion had a cross-section of people based on age, educational level, ethnosectarian group and economic position. Selection criteria helped to provide a granular understanding of different segments of the population and ensured that both urban and rural voices would be heard.

In June and July 2021, three social media surveys were conducted through the Facebook pages of three Iraqi influencers and two media organizations chosen for the relevance of their audiences. The surveys validated the findings of the focus group discussions and provided a larger-scale sample of replies to important questions on the social contract. As such, the views and statements in the report do not represent those of UNDP, but key findings and data predominantly reflects those of the research participants.

Overall, the research findings highlight the main pillars of a reimagined social contract in Iraq: to tackle corruption, ensure access to livelihoods and essential services, address security, improve governance and ensure gender and social equality. At the same time, adjusted expectations of what the State can provide within the social contract, particularly through public sector employment, will be necessary.

Key findings

Research participants identified corruption as the main issue in Iraq and saw it as ingrained in the political system. Focus group participants and survey respondents thought that addressing corruption

should be the most important priority for the Government. They found that the most significant impediments to political participation was corruption and its deep links to the current governance system. Focus group participants also reported facing daily struggles to access services due to corruption as it is cutting across all layers of Iraq's social fabric. Addressing this would have a positive effect on the social contract and other key issues identified in this paper.

Research participants made it clear that they have lost faith in the political process. Elections were seen as potential drivers of change but voting was not viewed as influencing change. Both focus group and survey participants felt unrepresented by the *muhasasa* system and associated elections with fraud and corruption. Trust in politics and state institutions was low. Overall, there was a clear desire to move from identity-based to issue-based politics.

Gender plays a key role in shaping grievances and demands. Gender dimensions were prominent across all core grievances and issues identified in this paper. Men and women generally saw issues differently. Women offered very clear understandings of how tackling one issue would have positive repercussions for others—for example, by linking measures against corruption to better service provision, greater security and a fairer political process. They demonstrated a comprehensive understanding of what needs to change and how but feel societal and gender norms prevent their active participation in politics.

Personal security is in decline according to participants. Perceptions of security and core issues related to it varied depending on gender, community and location. Nevertheless, both focus group and survey participants saw their personal security as declining. The main issues were unregulated weapons, unfair representation in the security forces, the continued power of non-state actors, discrimination and harassment, and poor control over borders. People also felt threatened by the State and denounced restrictions on freedom of expression, especially those expressing dissent and/or participating in protests and demonstrations.

Expectations of the Government are very high. People highlighted that they expect the Government to provide subsidized services and a guaranteed welfare system as well as public sector employment and representation in the political system. Yet they also agreed that they lack civic education and a complete understanding of what their rights and duties are under the social contract.

Citizens are key agents of change. Both focus group and survey participants described themselves as agents of change. Most survey respondents agreed they should educate themselves on what they can do to initiate change, and indicated a lack of civic education and awareness of rights and responsibilities in terms of the State and fellow citizens. As one of the groups most affected by Iraq's current situation, youth were seen as major change agents. Yet there was also a widespread perception that they lack the skills and experience needed to effectively participate in political processes.

With the economic situation steadily worsening, creating employment needs to be part of a reimagined social contract. Grievances and discontent over Iraq's reliance on oil revenue are not new nor are demands to diversify the economy. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant negative additional impact. The lack of job opportunities, especially for youth, was a major concern and frustration driving the 2019 protests. Focus group and survey participants stressed that wealth and opportunities must be distributed more equally.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Short term (up to 12 months)

- Bringing back faith in the democratic process should be a government priority.
- Addressing corruption must go beyond rhetoric.
- The new Government should catalyse economic diversification.
- Reforms should be implemented to achieve more sustainable service provision.
- Bottom-up engagement should be encouraged and linked to top-down political processes.
- The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government need to back freedom of expression and free media to foster the social contract.

Medium to long term (12 to 36 months)

- Making inroads to better security and the rule of law will help ease perceptions of insecurity.
- Improving conditions that enable women's engagement in politics and public life is crucial.
- Engaging youth is needed now and is key to the future.
- The perception of youth as lacking experience and knowledge needs to shift.
- People's understanding of their rights and duties within the social contract needs to improve.
- The importance of voting needs to be reiterated to the population.
- Civil society has an important role in Iraq but should bolster its public perception.

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General Disclaimer:

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, a new wave of protests known as the Tishreen (October) Uprising hit Iraq. These pointed to a significant change. Instead of focusing on individual issues, the protesters called for a whole new social contract.[1] Many were so disillusioned with the political system that they saw protest as their only means of participation and the only way to articulate their demands.[2] The protesters were met with violence from security forces and armed groups with severe consequences.[3] Thousands were arrested and restrictions on freedom of speech and expression increased.[4]

Protests have become all too familiar in Iraq. Before COVID-19, they grew in support and size. This strongly underlines the need for Iraq to realign the relationship between the State and society—and the obligations each have to one another. Iraqis at large need to feel that the political system is inclusive and can address their grievances in an equitable way, without the need to protest. It is only under these circumstances that those connected to the protest movements will be willing to recognize the governing authority of the State. At the same time, when people choose to protest, they should feel safe doing so.

The Tishreen Uprising was driven by protests against corruption, unemployment and a lack of essential services as well as demands for changing the post-2003 system of governance. Although the system was first installed to ensure proper representation of the different ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq, 20 years later many protesters denounced this sectarian power-sharing system as failing to protect citizens' rights and ensure decent living conditions.[5] For many Iraqis, the current system facilitated the use of public resources to serve the private interests of political elites and increase their influence.[6] Popular demands also highlighted the imperative for a unified nation to push back against kleptocratic practices by ruling elites.[7]

The protests unfolded against years of conflict and violence that resulted in the reversal of development gains and increased poverty, and caused many deaths and the large-scale displacement of a number of communities.[8] The conflict with the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) between 2013 and 2017 left massive destruction, loss of lives and displacement, further undermining the Iraqi State. The crisis revealed challenges to the State in controlling territory and responding to the needs of local populations in areas taken over by ISIL, emphasizing the growing State-society divide.[9] It also showed the unevenness of the prevailing social contract, which failed to include and ensure equal representation across the entire country.[10]

Other sources of pressure include the economic strain resulting from the fight against ISIL and the fall in oil prices. Growing resentment of and discontent with ruling elites has inspired popular calls to move from identity-based politics to a system that tackles the most pressing issues facing the country. In many ways, the protests marked a shift in how people perceive their relationship with the State and the meaning of citizenship.[11]

This paper aims to understand how Iraqi society wants to change the social contract, how such a vision can connect to the political reality, who the agents of change are, and what can be done to facilitate a stronger social contract. The government formation process provides an opportunity to map a new pathway between the desires of the population and those with the power to reformulate State-society relations. The October 2021 elections were significant as they were the first since the Tishreen Uprising and the first under the new elections law demanded by protesters.

According to the new electoral law, Iraq is divided into 83 rather than 18 electoral units.[12] This is a step towards allowing the entrance of independents, small parties and newly established parties.[13] The elections also took place in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which worsened ongoing economic crisis and exacerbated grievances over the State's challenges in caring for its citizens.[14] The renegotiation of the social contract and the dismantling of the old status quo are, for many, central to expectations of the new Government.

This study of the evolution of the social contract in Iraq pays attention to the ways in which various segments of society experience their relationship with the State as well as how their position in society influences their expectations and visions for development. In particular, the paper sheds light on how women, young people, minorities, IDPs and marginalized groups are affected by state performance and highlights their specific grievances. It considers key grievances that protesters—and the Iraqi population as a whole—have repeatedly voiced related to corruption, services, the economy, security and governance. Analysis draws on desk-based research and primary data obtained through focus group discussions, social media surveys and consultations reflecting the views of different social groups.

The paper is the culmination of a process launched by UNDP in Iraq in partnership with SIPRI. The exercise has sought to understand how Iraqi society wants to renegotiate the social contract, towards providing recommendations for the Government of Iraq, the Kurdish Regional Government, civil society and international actors. The data will also guide deeper analysis into UNDP strategy. Dialogue with a cross section of the population offers a unique opportunity to understand diverse perspectives and bring these views together. It is hoped that this will encourage dialogue with the Government and other key policy stakeholders on how to redefine State-society relations and help bridge the current divide.

Section 2 presents the methodology used by the project. Section 3 provides the background for this paper by examining the social contract in Iraq more broadly. Section 4 examines the development of State-society relations since 2010, paying attention to demographic and geographic differences. Section 5 examines core grievances identified through the research and connects these to the social contract and limitations in its development. The section presents the main findings from the focus group discussions and surveys while highlighting the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion within the political process for different groups, including women, young people, minorities, IDPs and marginalized people. Section 6 looks at agents of change while Section 7 examines opportunities for change. The paper concludes with short- and medium-term recommendations for addressing grievances and improving State-society relations.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research for this paper comprised a desk review of literature, focus group discussions, social media surveys and consultations where key Iraqi non-governmental stakeholders discussed the project and its findings. These components shaped understanding of how Iraqis envision the social contract and its development. All aspects of the research were designed so that data could be disaggregated to understand how factors such as ethnosectarian identity, gender, age, economic position and education level influence perceptions. This helped the research consider the views of multiple groups, including those who are marginalized, and identify commonalities and variations in perspectives on the social contract across the population. It helped ensure that all voices would be heard and influence policy recommendations and subsequent actions, in line with the globally agreed principle of leaving no one behind.[15]

Two focus group discussions were conducted in each of Iraq's 19 governorates (Table 1).[16] One included men and the other women, to assess their views separately. Based on previous experience in Iraq, this gave women the space and liberty to participate and express their views freely. Each focus group also had a cross-section of people based on age, educational level, ethnosectarian group and economic position. Selection criteria ensured representation of various segments of the population in each governorate, with particular attention to the most marginalized people. Both urban and rural voices were included. The same set of questions was asked in each focus group discussion across the country, with discussions taking place between April and June 2021. All discussions respected local public health guidelines and took robust measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Table 1: Locations of the focus group discussions

South		Centre and conflict-affected		Kurdistan Region of Iraq	
Governorate	**Focus group location**	**Governorate**	**Focus group location**	**Governorate**	**Focus group location**
Basra	Basra	Nineveh	Mosul	Erbil	Erbil
Thi Qar	Nasiriyah	Kirkuk	Kirkuk	Sulaymaniyah	Said Sadiq
Babil	Hila	Anbar	Falluja	Duhok	Duhok
Maysan	Amarah	Salah al-Din	Samarra	Halabja	Halabja
Najaf	Najaf	Baghdad	Baghdad		
Muthanna	Samawah	Diyala	Baqubah		
Karbala	Karbala				
Diwaniyah	Diwaniyah				
Wasit	Kut				

Social media surveys validated findings from the focus groups, based on a larger sample of the population. Three short surveys of an average of eight multiple choice questions were designed to reach online audiences and manage short attention spans. The surveys were translated into Iraq's four main languages: Arabic, Assyrian, Kurdish and Turkmen. Google Forms was used to build the

surveys. Links to the surveys were shared across the Facebook pages of three Iraqi influencers and two media organizations chosen for the relevance of their audiences.[17] Comments were monitored on the Facebook pages throughout the process, and responses provided to ensure participants understood all the questions.

The surveys were available from the third week of June to the end of July 2021. Demographic data on respondents were monitored throughout the process. Targeted boosting of Facebook posts was used to generate more responses and balance demographics to ensure representation across gender, locality and age. The first survey was on governance and drew 8,786 respondents (60 percent male and 40 percent female). The second survey on bringing about change had 6,100 respondents (63.4 percent male and 36.6 percent female). The third survey on essential services attracted 8,467 respondents (87.1 percent male and 12.9 percent female).[18]

Three online consultations provided feedback on findings and conclusions. They offered an added check and ensured wider community involvement. Feedback contributed to the research and helped design questions for the focus group discussions. Each consultation had between 15 to 20 participants comprising women's rights advocates, youth and civil society activists, local peacebuilders, journalists and academics from across the country.

3. THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The social contract, broadly understood, is a covenant between the State and society that outlines their rights and obligations to each other.[19] 'State' indicates a government, regime or political elites, including the branches of power, institutions and norms that govern a given community. 'Society' encompasses various entities, such as the general population, organized societal interest groups and civil society actors.[20] While these terms and concepts are broad, they provide a useful framework for understanding the nature of State and society relations. This framework builds on the foundations of the State's authority, legitimacy and right to govern. It establishes the boundaries of state power, defines citizens' expectations and rights, outlines mutual rights and obligations, and regulates the exchange of public goods and services. It defines the nature of political organizations and the meaning of political actions and obligations. Social contracts are characterized by their content and reach and depend on their context, with rules and norms being both implicit and explicit, and formal and informal.[21]

The social contract is a useful tool for analysing the relationship between a State and its citizens, raising fundamental questions such as: Who exactly do citizens—particularly when engaging in popular protest—turn to when they wish to make claims on the State? What degree of representation do they have? Whose interests are represented? How do various actors affect the development of the social contract and its legitimacy? To what extent is a social contract contingent on external factors and dynamics? These are all important issues in understanding how citizens envisage their relationship with the State, and how the latter responds to their demands. Using the social contract as an analytical lens can capture useful insights into State-society dynamics at a given point and as they evolve over time, including gaps and discrepancies, and attempts to renegotiate the relationship.

A strong social contract is a key component of domestic and international efforts to support sustainable and inclusive development. In fragile and conflict-affected countries, where development challenges are greatest,[22] broken social contracts drive fragility. They are root causes of civil wars, inequality, forced migration and displacement. They intensify state repression, intercommunal conflicts and injustice.[23] The 2020 *State of Fragility Report* of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development finds: "In 2020, before the coronavirus (COVID-19), fragile contexts were home to 23 percent of the world's population and also to 76.5 percent of all those living in extreme poverty globally."[24]

Reimagining and re-establishing the terms of the social contract in fragile or post-conflict societies is fundamental to building long-lasting peace and legitimizing the new rules of a political settlement.[25] An inclusive and equitable social contract aimed at social cohesion is also central to attaining the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 16 on promoting peaceful and inclusive societies, Goal 10 on reducing inequality and Goal 5 on achieving gender equality.[26] UN Secretary-General António Guterres has called for a new social contract in line with the SDGs given how the pandemic has exposed and exacerbated various layers of inequality.[27]

3.1 The social contract in Iraq

In several Arab States, the social contract defining State-society relations is embedded in the colonial state-building project, which shaped state formation and national collective identities.[28] The establishment of States had to be negotiated alongside pre-existing social structures shaped by tribal and ethnosectarian affiliations, often resulting in social contracts resting on a network of patronage and kin relations.[29] Throughout the region, the social contract came to be characterized by the State's unequal redistributive role, mainly through welfare systems and guarantees of employment in the public

sector.[30] The State also played an extensive role in economic policy through market regulation, state planning, nationalization of private assets and the creation of import substitution industries.[31]

While the State's social and economic obligations were emphasized, political rights and the representation of citizens were often downplayed,[32] in a tacit exchange of welfare for loyalty.[33] Such conditions are partially responsible for the persistence of authoritarian governments across the region. Ruling elites maintain power through bypassing formal institutions and leveraging informal political and economic networks to build alliances, manage opposition and ensure continuous support. A pushback against such tendencies drove the Arab Spring uprisings in many countries.[34]

The precariousness of the social contract in Iraq can be partially attributed to these pre-existing regional dynamics. Fragility has been a defining characteristic of Iraq's social contract since the inception of the State in the 1920s. A considerable gap has widened between the State and society, with the former developing independently of the latter.[35] This led to a conception of the State as a prize to be won, further entrenching competition among groups that viewed the State as a tool to seize resources.[36] The State therefore rests on fragmentated authority, where sovereignty is always to a certain extent shared with self-governing clans and tribes.[37] Such divisions have long inhibited state delivery of basic components of the social contract, such as physical protection, to large parts of the population.[38] This tendency has been most apparent with regard to the Kurdish population before 2003. But protracted insecurity and political instability have manifested through recurrent violence against civilian populations, including specific sectarian groups and vulnerable people such as IDPs and women.[39]

Prior to 2003, these dynamics made Iraqi politics prone to the use of force to shape society, the use of state resources to build and strengthen patronage networks, the misuse of oil revenues and the exacerbation of communal and ethnic divisions.[40] An exclusionary rentier state model exchanged welfare and socioeconomic services for loyalty and political compliance. It relied heavily on tribal relations in constructing an Iraqi identity and consolidating the links between the State and society.[41]

The invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the removal of Saddam Hussein marked a watershed moment. Iraq went from being a rentier State to an extremely fragile State, with the following years marked by the complexity of state-building within a deeply fragmented society.[42] The centralized State was replaced with a loose federal system of ethnosectarian power-sharing known as muhasasa ta'ifia, which underscored the fault lines of Iraqi identity.[43] Under this system, the President comes from the Kurdish community, the Prime Minister is a Shi'a and the speaker of Parliament is a Sunni. This leaves government formation contingent on grand elite bargains and compromise, a process in which the broader interests of the population can, more often than not, become secondary to individual and political interests.[44] It also means that minority groups often lack meaningful political representation amid political rivalries among the dominant communities, despite legal mechanisms intended to protect minority rights.[45] Furthermore, although the political system meets the requirements of procedural democracy, the process is generally marred by corruption, regional interference and multiple non-state actors who undermine state authority.[46]

While competitive elections are regularly organized, the parties and coalitions that contest them have generally followed ethnosectarian lines.[47] Consequently, different communities have not come together under a comprehensive social contract. The national unity Government formed after the 2005 elections introduced a sectarian logic into government formation[48] that led some communities to continue harbouring grievances. Others saw an opportunity to monopolize power.[49] Because of this, Iraqis show little trust in state institutions and political processes, which they see as inherently corrupt and not open to dialogue and participation.

With the State not managing to articulate an overarching notion of Iraqi citizenship and sense of national belonging,[50] the rise of ISIL in 2014 marked a major setback. Aside from causing widespread violence

and humanitarian crisis, ISIL created a separate social contract, enforced through violence and brutality in the territories it occupied.[51]

Since the defeat of ISIL in 2017, the State has gradually regained control over these territories, but Iraq continues to grapple with numerous enduring problems, such as endemic corruption, a weak and undiversified economy, limited access to essential services and significant environmental challenges. These problems gradually eat away at the foundations of the social contract and hinder an updated and robust framework for State-society relations.[52] Along with the current power-sharing system, such concerns fuel widespread popular frustration among ordinary citizens, since the social contract should be based foremost on meeting their needs.[53] As mass protests in 2018 and 2019 illustrate, Iraqis want to shift from identity-based politics to issue-based politics.[54] Iraqis across all communities are asking the State to provide them with the services, employment and security necessary to lead a dignified life, which would allow them to regain long lost faith in the State.[55] The 2019 protests showed how much of the population has moved beyond sectarianism, while some members of the political elite still rely on it for power and wealth.[56] A clear separation persists in what the social contract should look like.[57]

COVID-19 further weakened State-society relations, exacerbating pre-existing political, economic, societal, environmental and security issues.[58] The pandemic hit at a time of decreasing public trust in state institutions, ongoing popular protests and growing economic crisis. Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi's efforts to implement reforms were overshadowed by the need to contain the pandemic, which disproportionately affected marginalized and vulnerable groups, including women, IDPs and young people.[59] Ongoing reconciliation activities have largely paused while mainly political community tensions have further aggravated pressure on services and the economy.[60] The threat posed by the pandemic has reinforced the need to renegotiate the social contract.

3.2 Iraq's gendered social contract

Women are among the most marginalized groups in Iraq. Their socioeconomic status, rights and living conditions deteriorated considerably after the invasion and regime change in 2003.[61] The current system has imposed further restrictions on women's rights and freedoms, after the Constitution "effectively bargained away their rights in the attempt to reach a compromise between the sectarian and ethnic political leaders."[62] Women are more exposed to various forms of violence, discrimination, and domination,[63] and the social contract often fails to protect them and safeguard their rights. It continues to perpetuate patriarchal norms and entrenches women's subordinate position in the relationship between the State and society.[64] When women were asked what prevented them from taking part in the political process, they cited stigma and societal and tribal norms even before discussing bureaucratic constraints.

Although Article 14 of the 2005 Constitution enshrines the principle of equality regardless of gender, Article 41 allows community-specific interpretations of matters related to family and personal status. Article 29 prohibits domestic abuse and violence, yet despite several attempts, the Iraqi Parliament has failed to adopt the draft Anti-Domestic Violence Law.[65] Iraq's Penal Code permits certain types of violence against women. Article 41.1 stipulates that "no crime is committed while exercising a legal right," including the "punishment of a wife by her husband." Article 398 stops criminal prosecution of individuals who commit rape and sexual assault against women if they marry their victim. Article 128 considers honour a mitigating factor to reduce punishment, allowing so-called honour crimes to persist. Article 409 specifies lenient sentences for killing, beating or causing permanent bodily harm to female relatives in cases of adultery. Legal discrimination against women is also seen in their limited access to the justice system, with women often discouraged from seeking justice or approaching courts due to social pressures.[66] In short, Iraq's laws and legal system contradict principles of non-discrimination in the name of tradition, religion and cultural specificity.[67]

According to UNDP's 2019 Gender Inequality Index, Iraq ranks 146 out of 162 countries. Its low ranking is based on several factors, such as the number of adult women with at least a secondary level of education, which is 39.5 percent compared to an Arab States average of 49.3 percent. The share is 56.5 percent for Iraqi men. The birth rate is 71.7 births per 1,000 women aged 15 to 19, compared to an Arab States average of 46.8. Women's participation in the labour market is only 11.6 compared to an average of 20.7 percent for the Arab States and 74.2 percent for Iraqi men.[68]

In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, women's rights are inextricably linked to Kurdish nationalism and state-building. Gender equality is often presented as a distinctive feature of Kurdish culture that supposedly sets it apart from the rest of Iraq.[69] Although the Kurdistan Regional Government has made efforts to advance greater gender equality by adopting many laws and regulations to conform with international standards, many policies are driven by the need to secure international support for independence from Iraq, thus limiting a real positive impact on the lives of women.[70]

Despite many gender barriers, women across Iraq presented comprehensive views on the structural problems affecting the country and reforms to renegotiate the social contract. Men and women generally highlighted different issues and needs. Men focused much more on security and diminishing the power of non-state actors. In general, they stressed single issues relevant to them as individuals rather than seeing structural problems as interrelated. Women had a more complete and intersectional understanding of what needs to change and of how tackling one issue could have positive repercussions for others. For example, when talking about endemic corruption, women did not limit their complaints to the political process but linked corruption to the provision of key services such as health care and education. They stated that corruption needs to be eradicated at all levels rather than just focusing on having free and fair elections.

3.3 What does it mean to reimagine the social contract in Iraq?

Recent developments once again affirm that the 2003 political settlement has failed to build trust among different communities. The settlement in fact has actively hindered an inclusive social contract and weakened the State's ability to project and uphold authority.[71] This has affected public goods, security and protection, and strongly diminished trust in state institutions and political processes.[72] The current social contract predominantly benefits elites,[73] with the COVID-19 crisis further aggravating ongoing social, security, economic, environmental and political shortfalls.[74]

A new, viable, inclusive social contract needs to be negotiated for Iraq to recover from the compound shocks it has endured and to move towards sustainable and equitable development. One major obstacle entails overcoming subnational group loyalties entrenched in the political system.[75] Reimagining a social contract will be a long-term process grounded in building trust and dialogue among all parties. Short-term responses need to create the basis for structural reforms that target socioeconomic development, inclusion and cohesion. There are promising signs of such developments. For example, youth activism in various governorates indicates that the new generation is increasingly seeking to break away from the sectarian political system. It is embracing a citizenship model that is more inclusive and allows greater rights and responsibilities for citizens.[76] For its part, the Government has launched several recent ambitious reforms. Concrete impacts have yet to materialize, however.

4. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE STATE AND SOCIETY SINCE 2010

The previous section gave a broad overview of the social contract in Iraq. This section provides a more detailed analysis of the period since 2010, which saw intensified political marginalization, the rise and territorial defeat of ISIL and the 2019 Tishreen protest movement.

4.1 The development of the social contract between 2010 and August 2014

The centralization of power between 2010 and 2014 disrupted power-sharing principles that had underpinned the social contract since 2005 and allowed various communities to participate in political decision-making.[77] This prevented the consolidation of the transitional democratic system and weakened the executive, legislative and judicial branches.[78]

The political climate left Sunni and Kurdish constituencies feeling marginalized and unable to effectively take part in governance. While the Kurds could still exercise power in their autonomous region, the Sunnis were largely side-lined.[79] Instead of providing a foundation for relations between the State and society as a whole the social contract at that point alienated many groups and communities.[80] This led to greater fragmentation and the aggravation of community divisions.[81]

Large protests in 2012-2013 erupted in several Sunni majority governorates[82] as attempts to renegotiate the social contract. The Government responded forcefully, leading to further deterioration in the relationship with the Sunnis.[83] The period underlined the limited avenues to express demands or engage with or make claims on the State. Exclusion became the defining feature of the relationship with the Sunni community even as its political representation was also extremely divided.[84]

Against this backdrop and deteriorating socioeconomic conditions, with the poverty rate rising from 19 percent in 2013 to 22.5 percent in 2014,[85] ISIL rose and expanded. The terrorist organization successfully exploited and capitalized on local grievances and resentment.[86] In the vacuum left by the State, it threatened to establish its own separate 'social contract' with local populations, with its own system of governance and service delivery.[87]

With the collapse of the Iraqi security apparatus, dozens of non-state actors mobilized to take territory back from ISIL under the umbrella of the Popular Mobilization Forces. Although these groups were crucial in the fight against ISIL[88] they represented subnational identities and substate loyalties. This challenged the sovereignty of the State and jeopardized prospects for consolidating a national identity.[89] In 2016, the Popular Mobilization Forces was formally included in Iraq's Security Forces.[90]

4.2 The development of the social contract between September 2014 and 2020

After the April 2014 elections, a new Government was formed by Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi at a moment of dire economic circumstances, deep community tensions, widespread corruption and ongoing conflict with ISIL.[91] The period since then has been marked by repeated protests and unrest.[92] Amid the fight against ISIL and an exponentially growing number of IDPs, who numbered 3.2 million by 2015,[93] a wave of popular protests broke out in 2015 in Basra and then spread to other cities in southern

Iraq.[94] The protests were triggered by tensions embedded in the power-sharing social contract and by growing discontent with a system allowing political elites to mediate the relationship between citizens and the State.[95] This first wave of mobilization criticized the ruling class and asserted aspirations to go beyond politicized identities.[96]

The 2015 protests occurred in a tense context, with ISIL having gained a firm grip on a considerable part of the country and many other regions claiming neglect by the State.[97] The Prime Minister eventually endorsed the protests as a way to push forward plans to combat corruption and enhance public services.[98] These ambitions, unfortunately, did not materialize and resulted in increased distrust.[99] In a a context where identity shapes the social contract, catalysing change is immensely challenging even with a popular desire to move towards issue-based politics.[100]

Popular protests erupted again in 2017 and 2018 in southern and central Iraq as well as in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, centred around corruption, unemployment and longstanding demands for governance and economic reform.[101] Despite shared grievances and disenchantment with the prevailing system of governance, Iraqi protesters had not yet established nationwide connections and solidarities.[102] The protests were largely driven by youth, who make up the majority of the population and of the unemployed. They have grown up in the post-2003 era with a succession of political elites dividing power and resources while not delivering on popular demands.[103] The demonstrations were met with a mix of state repression and populist promises,[104] just as the earlier ones had been, yet their momentum continued and eventually culminated in the October 2019 protests. These generated unrest that lasted throughout 2020 and into 2021, although to a lesser extent.[105]

The wave of demonstrations posed a significant challenge to ruling elites as the protesters were, for the first time, explicitly voicing dissatisfaction with the *muhasasa* system and going beyond demands for socioeconomic and political reforms.[106] Protests called for reinventing the social contract to move away from identity-based politics, achieve public goods and foreground the interests of citizens.[107] This emphasis kept the protests alive despite high levels of state violence and the COVID-19 pandemic.[108] The 2019 protest movement received nationwide support.[109] While the protests remained largely unstructured, they created a space for Iraqis to feel that they can have a say on State-society relations.[110]

Following the protests and the formation of a new Government, Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi promised to respond to the demands of the protesters, vowed to bring individuals that attacked protesters to justice and committed to the early elections that concluded in October 2021.[111] An ambitious social and economic reform programme was launched[112] but implementation fell short amid the pandemic, the fall in oil prices and the brevity of Al-Kadhimi's term.[113]

In 2020, the twin shock of plummeting oil prices and the COVID-19 pandemic led to gross domestic product (GDP) contracting by 10.4 percent.[114] The poverty rate increased from 20 percent in 2017-2018 to 31.7 percent in 2020.[115] In the last quarter of 2020, the Government published a White Paper to revive the economy with an ambitious three-year plan to reverse Iraq's financial woes.[116] In December 2020, the Government decided on a 20 percent devaluation of the currency to respond to mounting economic pressure, but this increased the cost of living and further exacerbated the difficult circumstances of vulnerable groups.[117]

The unemployment rate has steadily increased, reaching over 13 percent in 2020,[118] with higher rates in Maysan, Muthanna, Thi Qar and Salah al-Din.[119] Young people are most affected, with 25.2 percent of those aged 15 to 24 being unemployed.[120] Women's unemployment rate reached 30.5 percent in 2020, three times as high as the rate among men.[121] The concentration of the vast majority of employed Iraqis in the bloated public sector[122] constitutes a considerable burden for a government budget dependent on oil revenues and vulnerable to price volatility. Growing deficits have resulted, along with persistent delays in the payment of salaries and pensions.[123]

Ongoing protests show that longstanding demands for reform and a renewed social contract will not go away until structural change is achieved. Yet cooperation across protest movements is limited, despite common grievances, while cooperation among elites to maintain the status quo is deeply engrained.[124] Protests tend to remain confined to specific geographic areas.[125] Even so, they are seen as the most viable way to articulate dissatisfaction[126] since Iraq lacks a framework to formulate a common vision for both the population and political institutions.[127]

Efforts to renegotiate the social contract will only succeed if key agents of change take part. Several have emerged during the popular protests. They are first and foremost the people themselves and youth in particular.[128] In the 2019 protest movement, women played central roles in planning, participation and support networks, and often acted as human shields against the security forces.[129] The waves of social mobilization have shown the importance of protesters negotiating with other actors and state institutions, and both political and religious elites.[130]

4.3 The development of the social contract in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

The Kurdistan Region of Iraq's historical experience differs from the rest of Iraq. The region has had a certain degree of self-rule since the 1991 Gulf War as a result of a UN-imposed no-fly zone, which granted the Kurds both protection and de facto semi-autonomy.[131] The 2005 Iraqi Constitution officially recognizes the region as autonomous in the new federal configuration. It allows extended privileges, the right to exercise executive, legislative and judiciary powers, and a share of national revenues proportionate to its population[132] along with the redistribution of national revenues through public employment, remuneration and provision of essential services and security.[133] The region is permitted to establish and run its own police, security forces and regional guards known as the Peshmerga.[134] These arrangements have led to the development of a parallel social contract between the Kurdistan Regional Government and those residing within the territory.

The region experienced minimal conflict in 2003 and has enjoyed more stability than the rest of the country in the following years.[135] A steady economy helped the ruling parties cement their legitimacy.[136] Revenues from the Iraqi Government and foreign investments backed infrastructure development and rising employment rates, albeit through a patronage system based on electoral support in local and national elections.[137] Rapid growth between 2003 and 2014 and an intense urbanization process improved working and living conditions, and fostered social and cultural change.[138]

Stability and high oil prices facilitated a social contract based on patronage in exchange for limited political representation. As a result, most of the working population is employed in the public sector.[139] Since the 2014 economic crisis, caused by the severe drop in oil prices and the costs of fighting ISIL, all public sector recruitment has been frozen.[140] This has had a greater impact on women, who are predominantly employed in the public sector and still face considerable barriers in the male-dominated private sector.[141]

In September 2017, a referendum clearly indicated that the Kurdish population saw their future through the prism of independence.[142] The Government of Iraq's response entailed taking back control of disputed territories, including Kirkuk, which further damaged the relationship with the region.[143] Other repercussions were the partial separation of the region from wider protest movements, with the streets of the region largely remaining calm until late 2020.[144] Where protesters and activists in the rest of Iraq reject the current system of power-sharing, the region relies on this arrangement to preserve its autonomy.[145] Like the rest of Iraq, it has yet to successfully diversify its economy and remains highly susceptible to oil price shocks given its heavy reliance on revenues from Baghdad.[146]

In recent years, plummeting oil prices and lingering budget disputes with Baghdad, despite improvements under the Al-Kadhimi Government, have laid bare the extent to which the Kurdistan Region of Iraq faces

the same governance and corruption issues that prevail in the rest of the country.[147] Employment in the already bloated public sector is the main source of family income and accounts for 53 percent of the total workforce.[148] The Kurdistan Regional Government has been in arrears and is often unable to pay the salaries of its 1.2 million employees due to oil-for-budget disputes with Baghdad.[149]

Small-scale protests, when allowed, over unemployment, unpaid salaries and austerity measures have been met by force and arrests and strained State-society relations.[150] Further pressures come from a soaring poverty rate, which climbed from 5.5 percent in 2017[151] to 12.5 percent in 2020.[152] Disillusionment with the political system and ruling elite has grown even as interest in politics has waned, especially among youth, who tend to attribute their economic hardship to systemic problems and political divisions.[153]

4.4 Factors influencing the breakdown of State-society relations

Several factors have influenced the breakdown in State-society relations overall: the fragile foundations of state institutions even before 2003, the lack of representation in decision-making and widespread corruption. A major factor has been the inability to establish a functioning federalist and power-sharing Government, leaving identity-based politics as the basis of governance.[154] Political parties focus on their own position within the system, and the Iraqi population has little faith in political institutions to achieve structural change or renegotiate the social contract.[155]

The centralization of power between 2010 and 2014 and ensuing exclusionary policies failed to promote representation in governance.[156] Under such conditions, state institutions grew weaker while limiting democratic practices.[157] This resulted in further social fragmentation and aggravated identity divisions.[158] Inequality has grown through the State's consistent failure to fairly distribute economic resources and social provisions.[159] The rise of ISIL in 2014, the mass displacement it caused and the Iraqi Army's challenges in immediately responding furthered the breakdown of the social contract.

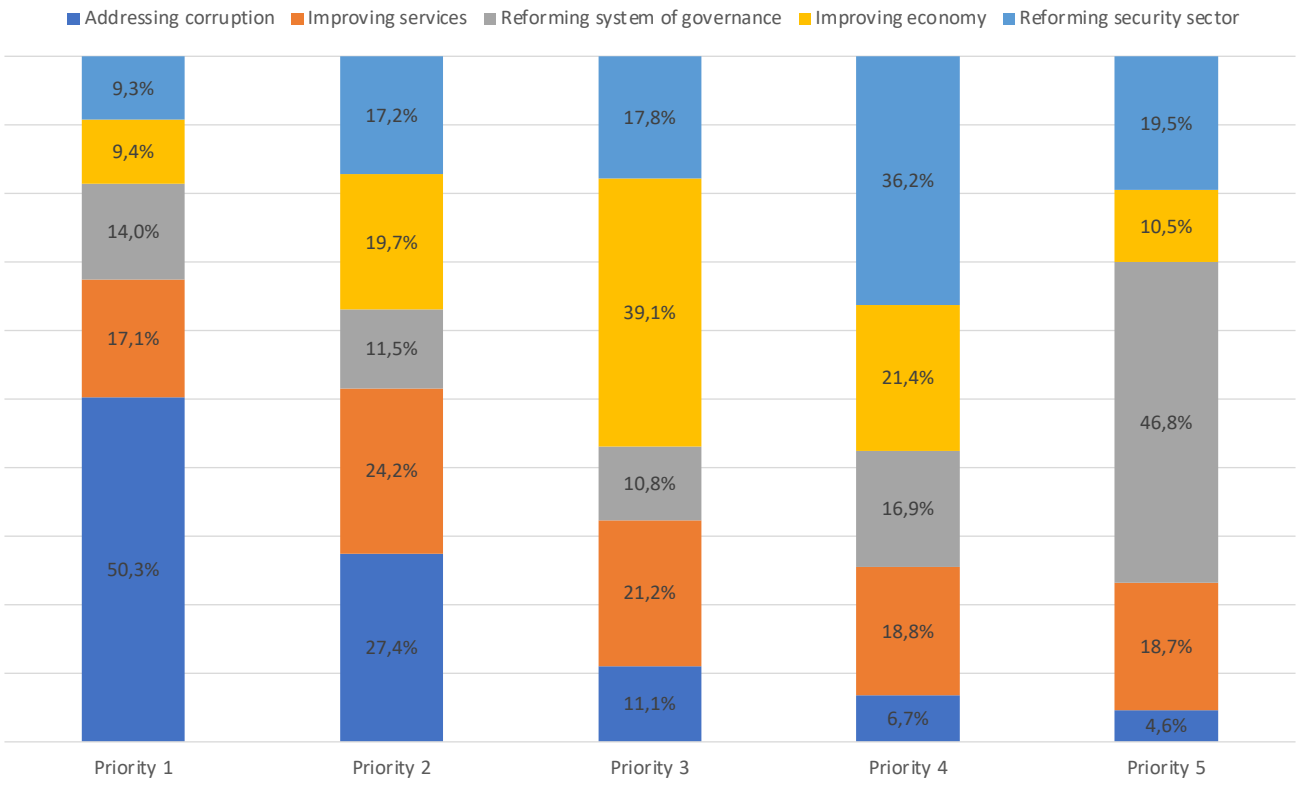
Another major factor is corruption, a grievance shared by all communities.[160] Despite the efforts of the current Government to address it, corruption is aggravated by ongoing economic crisis and continued dependence on oil revenues. It has been a significant trigger of protests.[161] A violent response against protesters since 2019 in turn had a radical impact,[162] resulting in increased demands to end the current power-sharing arrangements and to hold new elections under a reformed electoral law.[163]

A defining characteristic of the social contract in Iraq is that its terms differ widely by societal group.[164] The concentration of power among some groups excludes large parts of the population, deepening political and societal divisions and long-standing grievances.[165] Intra-group competition imposes other deadlocks.[166] Marginalized groups are disproportionately affected, including IDPs, minorities, disabled people, women and youth. Many contend with insufficient assistance and protection programmes.[167]

5. WHAT DO IRAQIs SAY?

This section analyses the core grievances of Iraqis, how these affect the social contract and what hinders change. Based on the first research survey, which asked respondents to rank five issues according to how important it is for the Government to act on them (Figure 1), addressing corruption is the most important issue. Among respondents, 50.3 percent ranked it as the first priority and 27.4 percent as the second priority. This was followed by improving services, improving the economy, reforming the security sector and reforming governance. With only slight variations, rankings were the same by governorate, age group, gender and employment status.

Figure 1: Ranking priorities for the Government to address

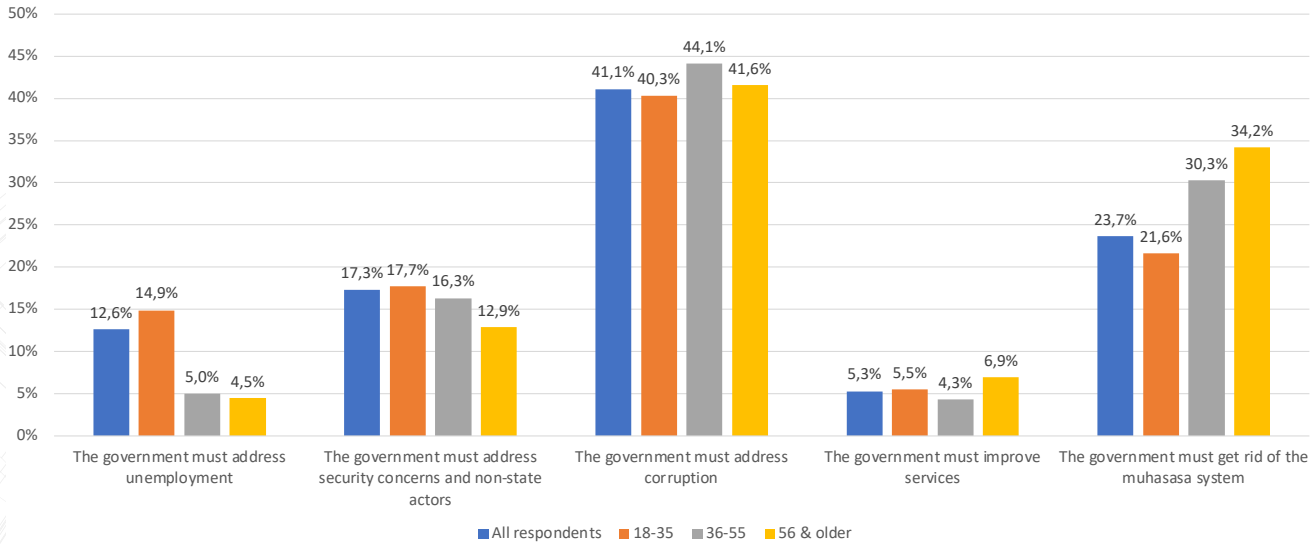


Source: The first survey, which had 8,786 respondents who were asked to rank five options in order of importance.

When asked what single action would be required to have or regain trust in the Government, respondents said addressing corruption was the most important factor (Figure 2). Significantly reformulating the governance system was seen as the second most important factor, which correlates strongly with findings from focus group discussions and consultations. Participants connected the current system to corruption and saw addressing corruption as essential for other issues to improve.

The results were largely the same when disaggregated by gender. Older respondents were more likely to select the option of getting rid of the *muhasasa* system (34.2 percent for ages 56 and older, 30.3 percent for ages 36-55 and 21.6 percent for ages 18-35). Younger respondents were more likely to select the option of addressing security concerns and non-state actors (17.7 percent for ages 18-35, 16.3 percent for ages 36-55, and 12.9 percent for ages 56 and older), which could be connected to young people being heavily involved in protests that were met by violence.

Figure 2: Requirements to have (or regain) trust in the Government

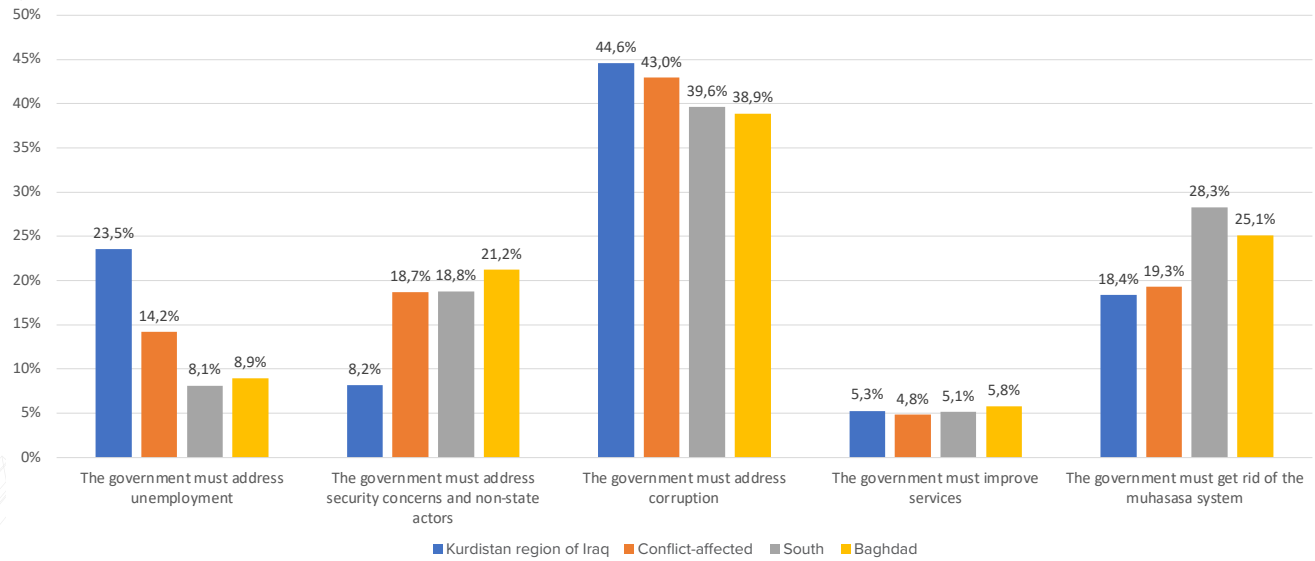


Source: The first survey.

On a regional level, there was slight variation. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, addressing unemployment was the second most important factor in trusting the Government (23.5 percent). It was in fourth place in all other regions (Figure 3). While a significant reformulating of the current governance system came in third in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (18.4 percent), it was second in all other regions. Additionally, addressing security concerns (8.2 percent) was less important in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq than in the rest of the country.

In the South,[168] which has experienced significant protests against the unequal distribution of resources,[169] the percentage prioritizing the significant reformulating of the current governance system was the highest in the country at 28.3 percent. Based on results disaggregated by employment status, for unemployed people, the Government addressing unemployment was seen as the second most important factor (23 percent), although almost the same percentage of unemployed people opted for a significant change in the governance system (22.9 percent).

Figure 3: Requirements to have (or regain) trust in the Government, by region

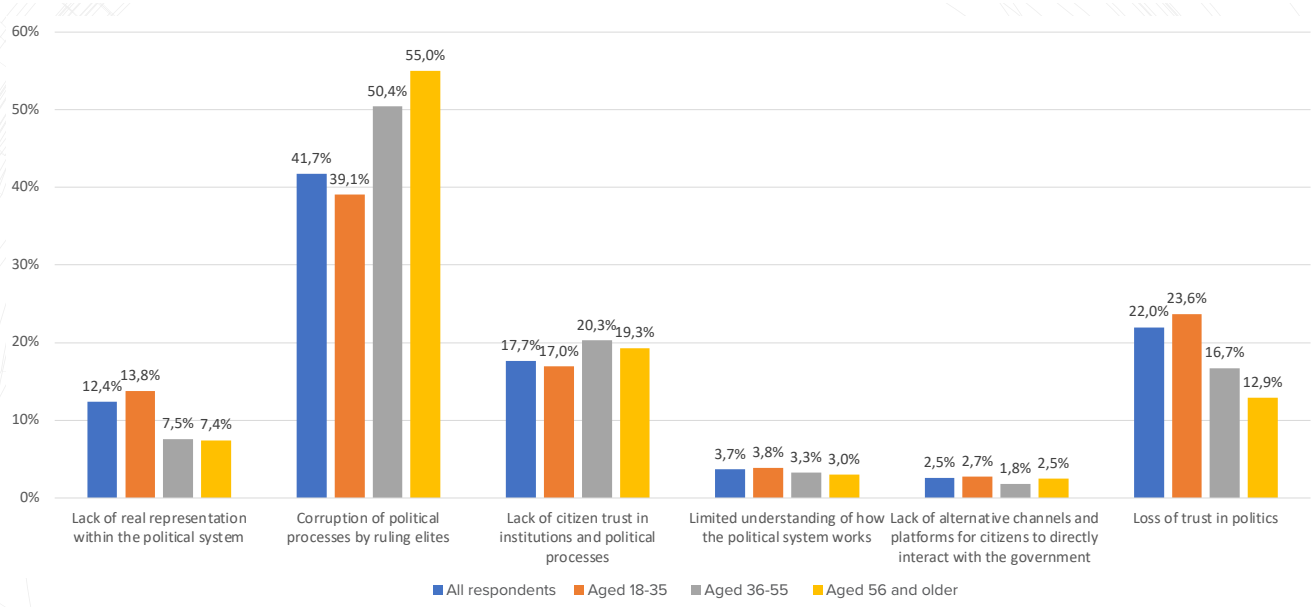


Source: The first survey.

The data clearly shows that a significant reformulating of the current governance system seems to be of great concern for a large section of the Iraqi population. Some may have seen the concept of 'reform' in the first question as representing insufficient change. Corruption emerged as the most important factor in both questions, which suggests that respondents directly connected it with the political process.

When asked a third question about the biggest obstacle to participating in politics, 41.7 percent of respondents chose 'corruption of political processes by ruling elites' (Figure 4). This point is reinforced by the fact that 'loss of trust in politics' (22 percent) and 'lack of citizen trust in institutions and political processes' (17.7 percent) were also chosen by high percentages. The overall results were the same when the data were disaggregated by governorate, age, gender and employment status, with only slight variations. Older respondents were more likely to select 'corruption of political processes by ruling elites'; younger people were more likely to select 'loss of trust in politics'.

Figure 4: Biggest obstacles to Iraqis participating in politics, by age group



Source: The first survey.

The following sections offer a more in-depth discussion of prevailing issues that negatively affect State-society relations, namely, corruption, services, the economy, security and governance.

5.1 Corruption

Focus group and survey participants defined addressing corruption[170] as the highest priority for the Government and the most important requirement to have or regain trust in the Government. While networks of clientelism and patronage have flourished for many decades, they have become more widespread since 2003.[171] The *muhasasa* system has worsened corruption as it enabled political leaders to use their positions to capture resources, increase their own influence and mobilize political support.[172] Several other factors that have facilitated corruption are, notably, the influx of capital for reconstruction, the limited enforcement of the rule of law, and weak mechanisms for oversight and accountability.[173] Limited anti-corruption measures put in place in the past two years include the Integrity and Anti-Corruption Strategy (2021-24), which defines broad areas for anti-corruption reform.[174] In August 2021, a high-level investigative committee was established under the Prime Minister's Office.[175] It is mandated to investigate major corruption offenses, the corruption of high-level public officials or corruption case with strong public interest.

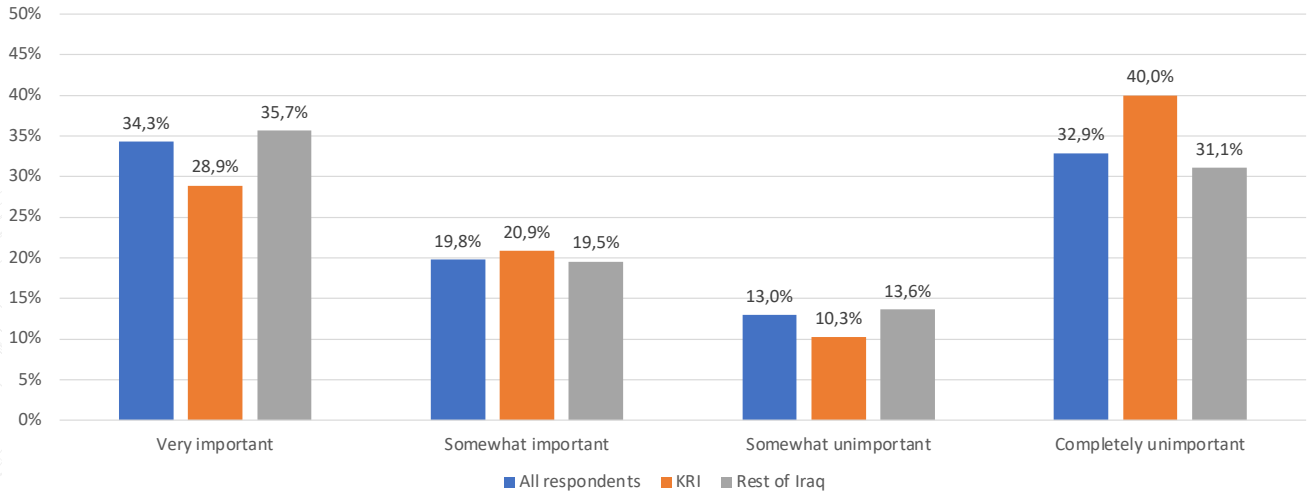
Overall, corruption is perceived as pervasive and deeply embedded in the political and social fabric. Further affirmation comes from Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, where Iraq ranked 160 out of 180 in 2020.[176] Broad agreement that corruption is one of the most urgent issues in rebuilding the social contract was accompanied by the perception that this would have positive effects on other structural issues. In one focus group participant's own words, "Administrative corruption is one of the most urgent issues that needs to be addressed, as it affects the entire community, including services, education, health, reconstruction, and so on." Tackling corruption is essential to a strong social contract that supports sustainable development, and to developing inclusive and representative political institutions and legislation.[177]

Participants overwhelmingly connected corruption with political processes and practices such as bribery, a lack of transparency in decision-making, voter suppression, a lack of commitment to constitutional provisions, manipulation of the media, electoral fraud and insufficient institutional governance.[178] Political processes are considered inherently compromised and unfair, which negatively affects trust in state institutions and democratic processes. Many focus group participants reported that they saw no point in engaging politically to foster structural change. One person said that "participation [in politics] is based on nepotism and political party affiliations. Ordinary people like us have a slim chance of participation. If I know a powerful character, I will be emboldened to do whatever I like in all sectors; if I do not have connections with any such characters, there is little I can do. Nepotism plays a big role today."

Corruption of the political process was seen as further marginalizing parts of the population that already face discrimination, such as women and minorities. Since their political participation is based on quotas, the view is that the system does not represent their needs but simply fulfils a legal obligation.[179]

Political alienation worsens through the daily experience of petty corruption in interacting with state institutions or accessing essential services, with minorities and IDPs seeing some of the worst impacts. Many participants reported paying bribes to obtain a service to which they are entitled, such as health care and school enrolment. Corruption was seen as the direct cause of poor infrastructure and services, in particular electricity and affordable housing.[180] It was linked to the lack of employment and the perception that jobs are allocated based on loyalties. In the public sector, employment is often based on political affiliation rather than merit, and 'ghost jobs' (where people are on the public payroll but not actual employees) and pensions in exchange for gifts and bribes are common.[181] Although opinions were divided, the majority of survey respondents indicated that political and ethnosectarian connections are important in accessing opportunities and services, with 34.3 percent seeing them as very important and 19.8 percent seeing them as somewhat important (Figure 5).

Figure 5: Importance of political and ethnosectarian connections in accessing opportunities and services



Source: The first survey.

Compared to the rest of Iraq, respondents in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq saw political and ethnosectarian connections as less important, with 40 percent viewing them as completely unimportant.

The economic costs of corruption have been immense, resulting in inefficient management of national resources and wealth, the loss of development and growth opportunities, and substandard public services. [182] Despite the efforts of the Government, Iraq's capacity to cope with and respond to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic has been severely undermined.[183] Corruption constitutes a major barrier to business and investment.[184]

Focus group discussion participants also referred to corruption as exacerbating divisions and inequality between the State and society and within society itself. Lack of accountability and low public trust in institutions have rendered democratic principles hollow and challenged the independence of government branches.[185] The State's accountability gap vis-à-vis its responsibility to citizens is even wider because its main revenues come from oil rather than taxpayers. In a system marked by ethnosectarian politics and the personalization of public office, leaders freely distribute or withhold public services and goods as they please.[186]

The Government took initial steps to address corruption but recurring promises to introduce reforms and eradicate corruption have yet to be fulfilled. Grand bargains have allowed ruling elites to circumvent popular demands.[187] While several bodies and institutional mechanisms exist to fight corruption, systematic impunity and a lack of accountability remain.[188]

5.2 Services

In conflict-affected societies, providing essential services[189] such as water, electricity, health care and so on constitutes an important way to build legitimacy and trust between the State and its citizens.[190] Effective service provision is necessary to tackle poverty and inequalities. Yet in Iraq, service allocation is often seen as being mainly about maintaining social control through networks of patronage.[191] Citizens are increasingly frustrated by subpar or absent services. Iraqis get roughly 5-8 hours of electricity per day from the national grid, for instance. Those who can afford it rely on private generators for their remaining electricity needs.[192] Iraq's national budget allocates less than 6 percent to education, the lowest share in the Arab States.[193] In conflict-affected governorates, such as Salah al-Din and Diyala, more than 90 percent of school-age children are out of school.[194] Extreme inequality in education means primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary completion rates of 54 percent, 23 percent and 13 percent, respectively, for the poorest communities, and

93 percent, 73 percent and 52 percent, respectively, for the richest.[195] The state health-care system is in crisis. In 2019, the Government allocated only 2.5 percent of its budget to the health ministry. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed an acute lack of doctors, medication and hospital beds.[196]

The 2021 budget indicates important cuts for health and education, at 35 percent and 40 percent, respectively, despite significantly increasing needs.[197] While the security sector has seen its already high budget increase,[198] other essential services are underfunded.

Wide gaps in service provision play out by governorate, district or subdistrict, and sometimes political affiliation. Gaps are often filled by non-state actors and civil society organizations, which while positive in many ways may further contribute to declining faith in the State as a service provider.[199] Disparities in services are particularly evident in rural areas, where quality has been steadily decreasing since 2003. A lack of drinking water has reportedly reached an all-time high, with "nearly 3 out of 5 children in Iraq hav(ing) no access to safely managed water services and less than half of all schools in the country hav(ing) access to basic water."[200] Water security, if not adequately addressed in the near term will continue to be impacted by climate change and inefficient water management as well as trans-boundary water governance, and present significant future challenge.[201] The poor quality of services results from the State's focus on urban areas, leaving rural communities with unsuccessful urban planning and inappropriate infrastructure, which constricts investment.[202] People in rural areas face long distances to schools, recurrent electricity outages, and scarce health centres and services specifically for women.

Focus group participants clearly agreed that the State needs to provide services as integral to the social contract, arguing this is enshrined in the Constitution. They also contended the State has so far failed to uphold the human dignity of its citizens. There was not unanimous agreement on what 'dignity' means (Box 1); examples included the State providing "the basic necessities and services to lead a decent or dignified life," "a decent life for each person—a life that does not make them need any help or assistance," and "a decent living for the citizen, by providing a decent income in which the citizen can live with honour and dignity, and not underestimating their dignity."

Box 1: Dignity was a widely used term

The word 'dignity' (or *al-karama* الكرامة in the Iraqi Arabic dialect) was widely used by many participants in different focus group discussions. In addition to its literal meaning as the quality or state of being worthy, honoured or esteemed, the word was used to refer to having the bare minimum of services and rights provided by the State. It was almost always synonymous with equal standing and mutual respect between the State and citizens. A 'dignified life' (or *al-'esh al-kareem* العيش الكريم in the Iraqi Arabic dialect), according to participants, is one where each person has their human integrity and rights respected, and has a decent livelihood and suitable living conditions. This explains why many participants focused on dignity as among the main responsibilities of the State.

The urgent need for safe and decent housing as well as the availability of education and health care were major concerns for IDPs. The situation is slightly different in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, where members of minority groups and IDPs stated they generally felt more secure when seeking essential services. Yet they also said that the region is far from ensuring that its people lead dignified lives, citing job opportunities and better services as the main factors that would improve the situation. A clear gender dimension was also evident, with men more focused on security, understood in a variety of

ways, while women emphasized adequate health care, education, access to public housing and reforms to tackle widespread poverty.

Corruption impedes the delivery of services, with water management, sanitation, electricity, health care and education particularly affected.[203] Ongoing deterioration of these services signals that the State is unable to uphold its end of the social contract.[204] Another central issue relates to varying access to services among different groups and minorities, which has developed along established patterns of social inequality and marginalization.[205] Women and IDPs reported that the number of services had significantly decreased over the past decade and that it was increasingly difficult to access legal and health-care services, especially in rural areas.

Protests in 2018 and 2019 were just the latest in a long series of clashes between the State and citizens over unsatisfactory service provision.[206] The state response to the protests and demands has been poor and mostly based on promises that do not tackle root causes.[207] This has further damaged trust and State-society relations.[208] The COVID-19 pandemic only increased obstacles to services, with over 30 percent of Iraqis requiring medical attention between August and October 2020 reporting difficulty in doing so.[209] Restrictions caused by the pandemic affected public education, with less than 23 percent of households reporting that their children received any catch-up or learning activities during school closures, which may have a long-term impact on child learning.[210] Because of this, international and, to a lesser extent, national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a considerable part in strengthening service provision, trying to fill some gaps especially for marginalized and vulnerable communities.[211] The international community is now seen as the most likely to address community grievances, but this also has a negative impact on State-society relations.

Provision of essential services needs to be urgently addressed to prevent further deterioration of trust in state institutions and people's sense of citizenship. The looming climate crisis imposes further pressures since Iraq is extremely vulnerable to climate impacts. Without government action, shortfalls in electricity and water will worsen.[212] Policies and strategies to address climate change and environmental degradation can protect essential services while generating employment, reviving growth and improving the potential for taxation and other economic revenues that can then be invested in services.

5.3 Economy

Outcomes from Iraq's economy[213] largely rest on the State's unequal redistributive role, which is rooted in the welfare system and public sector employment.[214] While Iraq has a lot of wealth, it is not distributed effectively or fairly. Popular discontent over economic grievances is growing, as underlined by the focus of the 2019 protests on a lack of employment opportunities.[215] The misuse of state resources[216] has created a climate of extreme social inequality and discontent, with marginalized and minority groups left behind.[217] Ensuring a stable economic situation is a key responsibility of the State, as it would allow citizens to reach their full potential and uphold their side of the social contract. One focus group participant said: "If the economic situation is good, there will also be stability in the security situation and in the psychological state of the citizen too."

Economic growth suffers from the current instability of the economy and its heavy reliance on oil revenue, which contribute 95 percent of total revenues.[218] The Kurdistan Region of Iraq also relies on oil exports; its economy has been stagnating since 2014 because of the drastic fall in oil prices. This has aggravated tensions with the Government of Iraq over budget payments.[219] Popular discontent in the region has increased,[220] with a perception that the Kurdistan Regional Government is not doing enough in generating job opportunities for youth.

Unmet expectations of economic benefits from Iraq's hydrocarbon resources, particularly in oil-rich governorates such as Basra, have further fuelled discontent,[221] with 95.5 percent of survey respondents

dissatisfied with how the Government manages these resources. With only minor variations, this sentiment was the same regardless of how data were disaggregated. Although economic diversification has routinely been encouraged, investments remain focused on the oil sector,[222] even though agriculture and the private sector are seen as having the potential to generate both employment and economic growth with the right investments. People are reviving agriculture in Iraq's southern governorates, with agriculture the only sector to grow in 2020.[223] But without state investment, ongoing desertification will have a negative impact on production in the next few years. Other pressures come from the urbanization of farmland and increasing imports of produce.[224]

A common grievance across the country, particularly among youth, is a widening gap between the number of graduates and the availability of jobs. This is producing a growing number of highly educated young people who cannot find jobs. The pre-pandemic youth unemployment rate was estimated to be 36 percent,[225] significantly higher than the Arab States average of 23 percent.[226] A focus on high unemployment and the need for jobs was also a recurring demand among IDPs. Focus group discussions and surveys highlighted that addressing unemployment would be key in regaining trust in the Government and reviving the economy.

The economy was on the rise before the COVID-19 pandemic, with key macroeconomic and fiscal conditions looking broadly positive between 2017 and 2019.[227] Yet the combined effects of the fall in oil prices in early 2020 and pandemic restrictions reversed this trend. GDP contracted by 10.4 percent in 2020,[228] negatively affecting already vulnerable social groups.

In conflict-affected governorates, the unemployment rate increased by 15 percentage points.[229] Across the country, people working in the informal private sector were disproportionately affected, with only 66-67 percent of pre-pandemic private sector workers able to keep their jobs. In comparison, 87 percent of pre-pandemic public sector workers are still in stable employment.[230] The pandemic has worsened poverty, pushing 4.5 million (11.7 percent) more Iraqis below the poverty line. Job losses and rising prices have caused the national poverty rate to climb from 20 percent in 2018 to 31.7 percent in 2020.[231]

Women have been more likely to face negative socioeconomic impacts from COVID-19 than men. Only 11.8 percent of working-age women were employed or seeking employment in 2020. Through social barriers and discriminatory gender norms, women face challenges in accessing employment that include insufficient education, inadequate skills, limited experience, and the unavailability of job opportunities that match their educational background and training.[232] Conflict and displacement have further hindered women's ability to participate in the workforce, due to insecurity, restrictions on their movement and concerns for their safety.[233] While many women have seen their role in the household transformed through the growing need to earn an income and provide for their families,[234] traditional gender norms still dictate which jobs they can perform, with opportunities in health, education and textiles being preferred.[235]

COVID-19 has stirred palpable social tensions through economic woes aggravated by widespread clientelism, illicit markets and growing socioeconomic inequality.[236] Protesters have continuously pointed to shortfalls caused by plunging markets.[237] Concerns about economic insecurity nurturing more corruption have increased as trust in financial and administrative state institutions declines.[238]

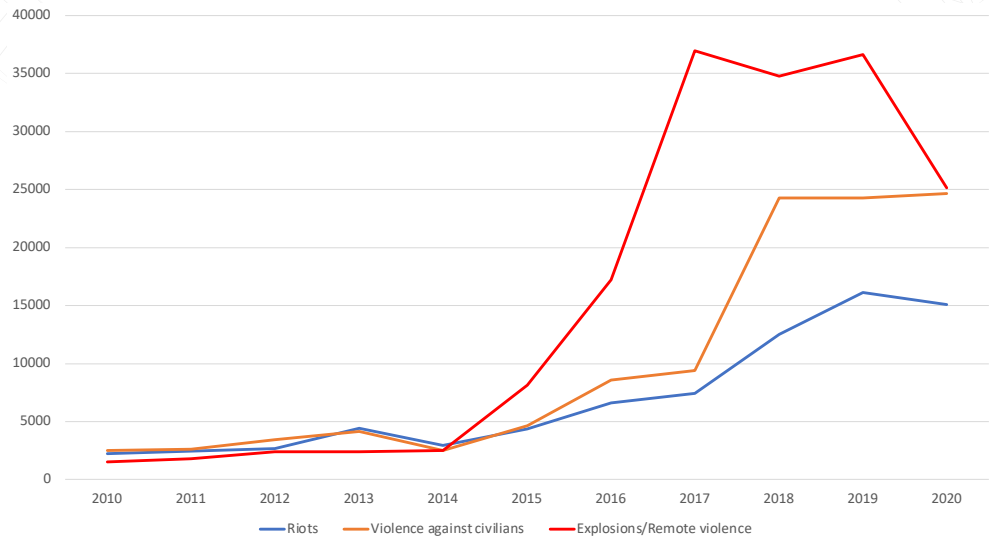
Survey respondents expressed a strong expectation that the State should increase public sector employment. There is a widespread perception that those employed by the public sector are in a better position than everyone else, as they have a steady income, less-demanding jobs, and benefits and privileges. Yet those who are part of the public sector stated that they also suffer from a lack of essential services.

5.4 Security

Focus group participants highlighted security[239] as one of the key responsibilities of the State. One said: "I think the first responsibility of the State is ensuring security for everyone, because it is the most important thing. If the State cannot do it, who can have this role?" Another commented, "Providing the rights to a [dignified] life and security are the duties of the State, because we gave them the authority, and the State should use that authority to provide the people's rights. If there is a lack of security in the country, it will have an impact on all other sectors such as the economy, politics... without security, there are no life, services and rights, so the State should provide security first."

Personal security is perceived as declining against a steady increase in violence against civilians since 2017 (Figure 6). Affecting all aspects of daily life, insecurity undercuts trust in public institutions. As a core component of state sovereignty, security is essential for stability and dignity, and key to achieving the SDGs and human rights.

Figure 6: Security-related events are increasing in Iraq, 2010-2020



Source: The ACLED Dashboard at https://acleddata.com/dashboard.

Several factors could explain the current disconnection between the social contract and security provision. The first is the fragmentation of the country's security apparatus, which undermines the State's ability to provide comprehensive security.[240] Other significant factors are the lack of community representation and gender diversity within the Iraqi Security Forces, the existence of different standards for security provision in different governorates and the influence of non-state actors.[241] Complex regional dynamics have also contributed to insecurity, which is why the 2019 protests called for an end to all foreign interference in Iraqi affairs.[242] Unregulated weapons are seen as the most significant threat to security across the country (Figure 7), followed by the influence of non-state actors both inside and outside the state system.[243]

Focus group participants stressed limiting unregulated weapons, reducing the number of non-state actors and the border crossings they control, and addressing disputed territories between Baghdad and Erbil. People in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq saw security as a less crucial grievance than citizens in the rest of the country (Figure 3), listing it after corruption and addressing unemployment. Challenges with security nonetheless exist in the region, where political influence over security forces has led to quelling dissent and opposition, and representation in the forces is subject to political loyalties.[244]

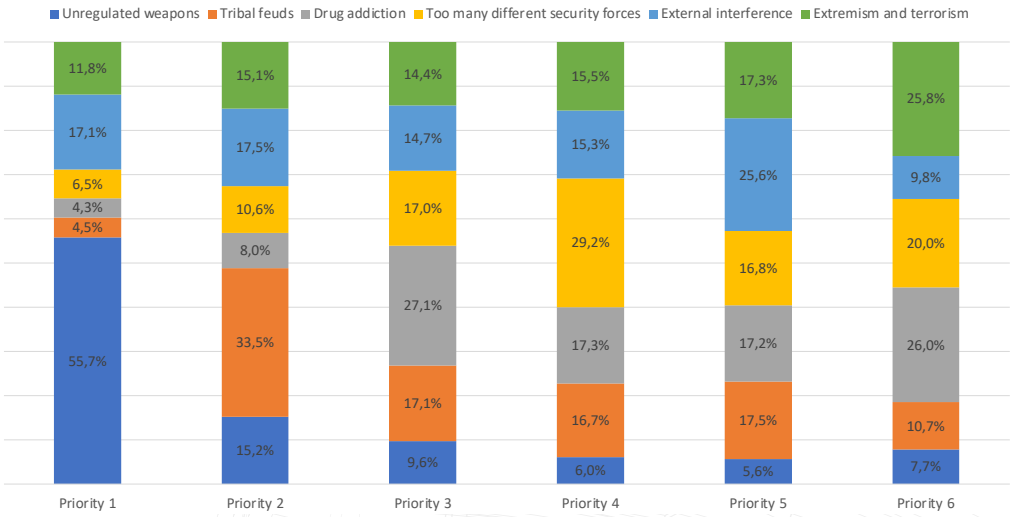
Research participants' perceptions of security varied based on locality, gender, community and vulnerability. Men mainly associated security with border protection, control over non-state actors, limiting interference from regional and external actors and regulating the growing spread of weapons. Women generally spoke about security in terms of gaps and violations related to discrimination, domestic and gender-based violence, harassment, the control of societal norms by clans and tribes, the prevalence of ethnosectarian identities, and discrimination against vulnerable and minority groups (including women, IDPs, youth and those living in poverty). Although acknowledging the power of non-state actors and the spread of unregulated weapons as serious concerns, women tended to emphasize discrimination and harassment as a daily occurrence.

Hypermasculinity and fears for women's safety have confined many women to the private space, restricted their mobility, and forced them into more traditional gender roles. Many do not feel safe leaving the house unaccompanied because of high levels of harassment.[245] The lack of representation of women within the police has been connected to women being less likely to report crimes, demonstrating the interconnectedness of representation and security.[246] Focus group participants highlighted this on many occasions, with one stating: "As a girl, I feel that I am restricted, due to traditions and tribal customs, I cannot go to the police station." Another noted, "This is a tribal society in which there are customs and values, but so far the woman has not risen to deal with a violent situation without resorting to the man. (This is) because of customs and traditions that prevent women from resorting to security centres alone. We need more awareness, to integrate women more."

As women's experiences of security and insecurity differ from men's, their needs and expectations from the social contract are also different, particularly relating to the State's responsibility to deliver protection, ensure physical safety, prevent community tension and stop harmful cultural traditions. Women stressed that beyond security alone, tribal customs and societal beliefs limit their participation and freedom. They agreed that security provision and societal stigma need to be tackled together to fight harassment and discrimination.

In the surveys, most men saw national security as the main area needing improvement. Women viewed local security as the main area for improvement.[247] Most survey respondents (55.7 percent), no matter how data were disaggregated, saw unregulated weapons as the main challenge to security, with tribal feuds the second biggest challenge (33.5 percent).

Figure 7: Ranking of the main challenges to security in Iraq



Source: This question was in the third survey, which had 8,467 respondents. Respondents were asked to rank options from one to six.

Young focus group participants focused on threats from non-state actors but also feared threats and violence from the State. They particularly referred to the heavy policing of freedom of expression, suggesting that they feared retaliation from the Government for voicing their opinions or demanding changes to the social contract. Such perceptions could be connected to young people participating in street protests and demonstrations in great numbers, where they were disproportionately exposed to harsh crackdowns, especially in 2019.[248] Highlighting the range of issues they face, from unemployment to a lack of housing, IDPs stressed the expectation that the Government at a minimum provide security, which they felt was lacking.

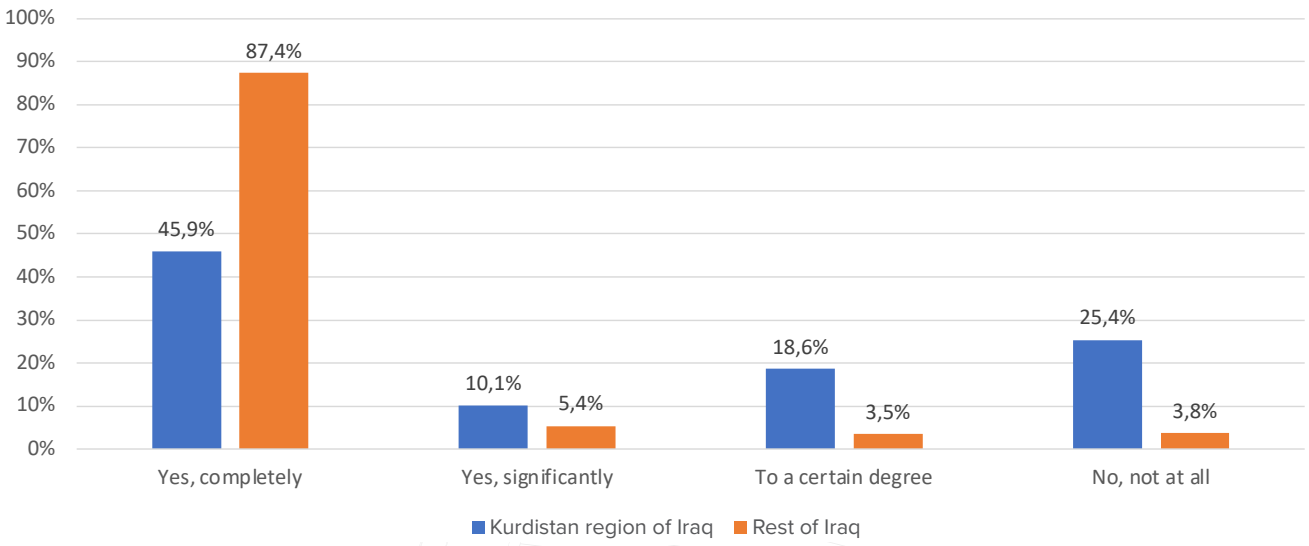
5.5 Governance

Tackling grievances connected to governance[249] is key to renegotiating a social contract grounded in inclusive institutions and legislation, human rights and sustainable development. But research participants indicate very little faith in political and democratic processes. Ongoing corruption, poor governance, unsatisfactory service provision, decreasing security levels and economic inequality undercut trust in state institutions, resulting in scepticism about governance and opportunities for change.

Many current governance challenges stem from the *muhasasa* system.[250] As much of the population has begun to move beyond sectarianism,[251] the system no longer seems to represent them. Among survey respondents, 73.2 percent felt that the political system does not ensure equal representation of all societal groups. Most thought there needs to be a full separation between ethnosectarian identity and politics.

This finding varies regionally, as in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, only 45.9 percent of survey respondents agreed with this statement, compared to 87.4 percent in the rest of Iraq. Similarly, 25.4 percent of respondents in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq thought that ethnosectarian identity and politics should not be separated at all, compared to 3.8 percent in the rest of Iraq (Figure 8). This may relate to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq's ethnosectarian identity and strong independence ambitions.[252]

Figure 8: Should ethnosectarian identity and politics be kept separate?



Source: The first survey.

The desire to move away from an ethnosectarian and tribal system of governance is particularly evident in conflict-affected governorates such as Anbar, Diyala, Kirkuk, Nineveh and Salah al-Din. People there stressed the need to move towards a secular governance system that can ensure equal representation

for all. Research participants in general claimed that discrimination pervades, arguing that a significant reformulation of the governance system would help to address structural issues and establish a more transparent and inclusive political system.

Tensions between the central Government and the Kurdistan Regional Government represent another key governance issue as intercommunity animosities worsen marginalization and preclude decentralization.[253] Fractures within communities have emerged over the past decade as sociopolitical inequalities have grown.[254] Recently, however, outside the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, there has been a growing feeling that the Iraqi identity is strengthening and that community tensions are decreasing. People are more likely to identify as Iraqi than as a member of a particular religion, tribe, ethnicity or governorate.[255]

Youth, women, IDPs and other minority groups still highlighted, however, that they felt particularly alienated from the system of governance in place. One participant said, "It's really all about them [the political parties]. The citizen does not have a chance to participate, if they are not in a party, they will not achieve anything." Another person noted, "There are no opportunities for change as long as the parties themselves exist. The political blocs have been stable since 2003 until now, and nothing will change."

In 2005, Iraq adopted a gender quota that allocates 25 percent of parliamentary seats to women in federal Iraq and 30 percent in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The threshold in the former was exceeded in the 2018 elections, as women took 87 of 329 seats (26 percent).[256] Iraqi women can also be elected directly outside the quota system. Yet while the quota has increased women's representation in elected bodies, they are often excluded from decision-making.[257] Women continuously highlighted that conservative traditions and gender social norms constitute a major obstacle by constructing politics and the public space as domains of men.

Women who do enter politics often face widespread sexism and hate speech designed to silence them and compel them to withdraw from public life.[258] They face difficulties in mobilizing support to run for office since political parties are dominated by tribal and ethnosectarian affiliations that favour male leadership.[259] Women from minority groups and women IDPs feel particularly marginalized. Some IDPs, regardless of gender, reported that even when opportunities to participate in public life do exist, they are often ineffective. Elected officials may abandon their constituencies once elected, for example.

Several issues need to be prioritized to make governance systems more inclusive. These include enhancing relations between the central Government and peripheral authorities, transitioning from identity-based politics to issue-based politics, tackling endemic corruption, supporting bottom-up rather than top-down processes in selecting leaders, taking power away from non-state actors, and prioritizing good governance as essential to state-building.

5.6 What hinders change in the social contract in Iraq?

Wide-ranging grievances are symptomatic of the state of the social contract in Iraq. Fair and inclusive institutions, quality service provision, a stable economy with a heavy focus on employment, security and good governance are at the core of state responsibilities for citizens. Yet many people see these not being realized, with a negative impact on fragile State-society relations.

Factors preventing change start with the *muhasasa* system, which leaves a growing number of citizens excluded from governance.[260] Little to no space for constructive political participation and dialogue at national or local levels prevents people from wanting to engage in the political process. This has opened the door to non-state and tribal actors, which have assumed growing power and legitimacy, sometimes surpassing those held by the State.[261] Corruption clearly prevents the evolution of the social contract and was the grievance most often identified by focus group and survey participants. With corruption

deeply entrenched in social and political life, citizens are increasingly sceptical about prospects for structural changes through political institutions. Many are also unaware of their rights and duties when it comes to political participation. Protests have become the only avenue through which they can voice their discontent.

An overarching perception that peoples' needs are not being met fuels a loss of trust in the State, while the rapid proliferation of arms and non-state actors raises crucial questions on sovereignty. The constant struggle with a lack of public services weakens citizenship as people become concerned with their own survival, leading to a deterioration of national and social unity.

Another factor hindering change is the gap between citizens' expectations of the State and what the State can actually provide. People expect subsidized services and a guaranteed welfare system with 73.9 percent of survey respondents (83.7 percent of women)[262] maintaining that the Government is obliged to provide public sector employment. This is concerning because it is impossible to meet this requirement along with all other needs for services and security.

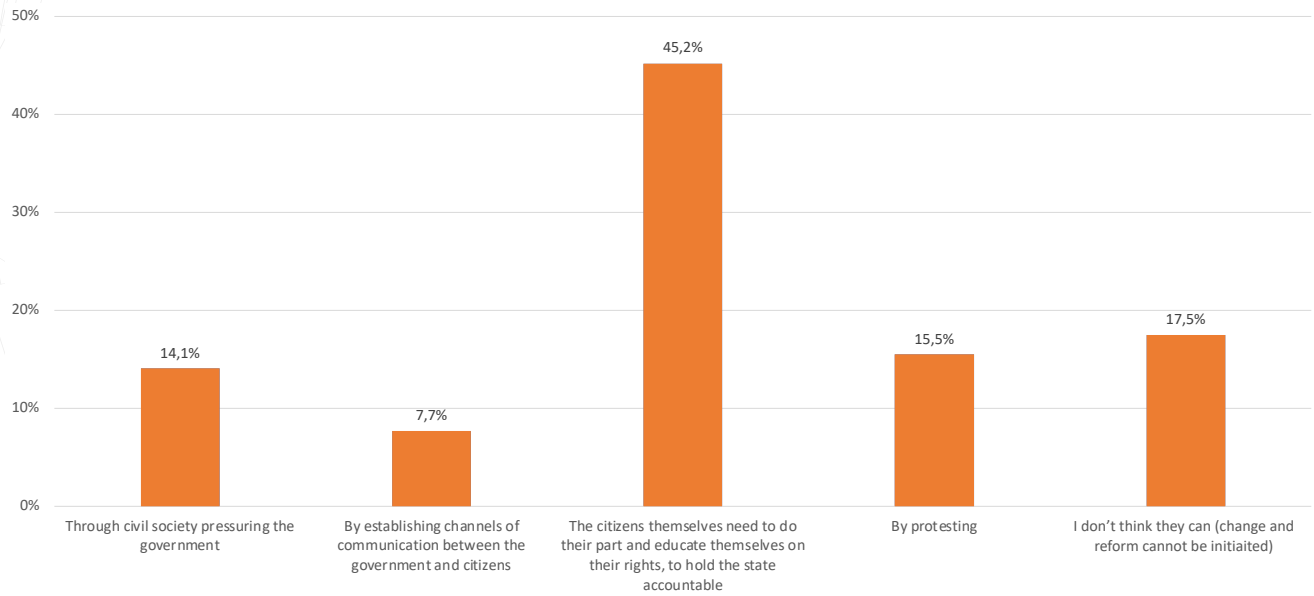
The exclusion of women, youth and other groups based on discriminatory societal norms poses further obstacles to change, as discussed in the next section.

6. FOUNDATIONS OF A REIMAGINED SOCIAL CONTRACT: AGENTS OF CHANGE

There is no overarching agreement on the main agents of change in Iraq but some trends are worth highlighting. Citizens, youth, women, free and fair elections, protests and civil society organizations are essential in pressing for structural change, together with international actors.

Citizens: Among survey respondents, 45.2 percent indicated that people need to educate themselves on their rights to hold the State accountable (Figure 9). The share was higher among women (52 percent) and among respondents in Baghdad (51.1 percent) and the South (51.7 percent). It was lowest in the Kurdistan Republic of Iraq (31.3 percent) but was still the most frequently chosen option. Such efforts begin with civic education at the personal and family levels; 85.8 percent of respondents thought that it was their responsibility to educate themselves on their rights and what they could do to initiate change. While focus group participants and survey respondents reported a lack of awareness about rights and ways to engage in the political process, they also identified addressing this gap as key to successfully renegotiating the social contract.

Figure 9: How can change and political reforms be initiated?



Source: This question was in the second survey, which had 6,100 respondents.

Youth: Youth are primary agents of change through civic engagement, participation in elections or the workforce if opportunities open through economic diversification. In discovering and reaching their potential, they can contribute to running the Iraqi State. Yet they face a barrier from the widespread perception that they lack skills and experience and will not be effective players within the political system.

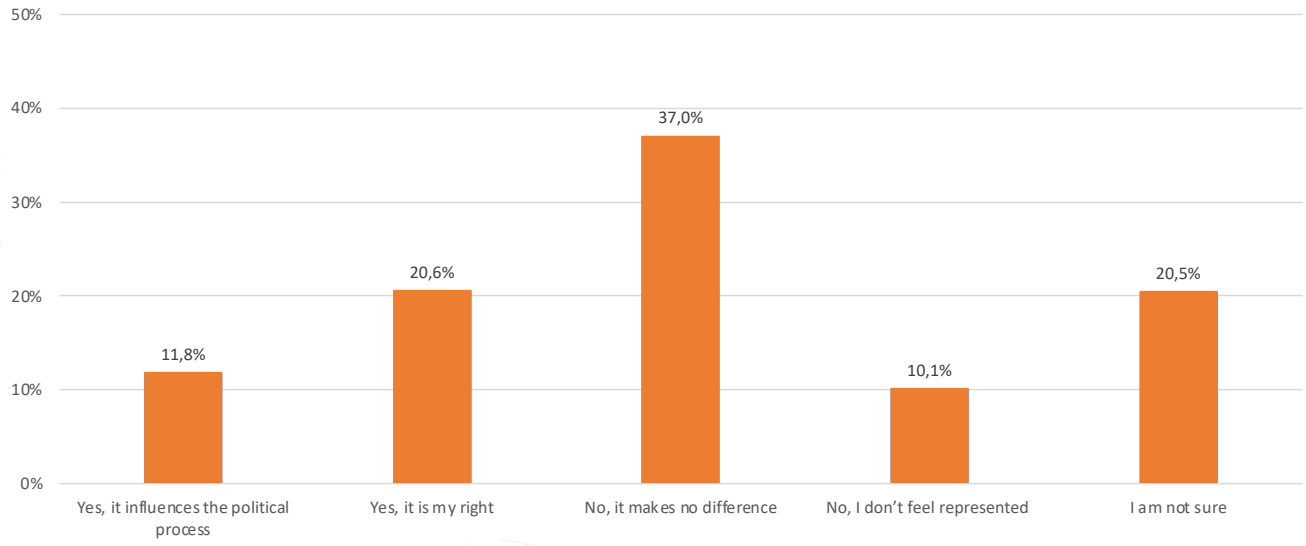
Women: Women have a highly intersectional understanding of the structural issues affecting Iraqi society and the political system. Compared with men, they generally demonstrated a more developed vision of what

reforms are needed to renegotiate the social contract. Women's inclusion in the political process is imperative but conservative traditions and gender norms constitute major obstacles to roles beyond the household.

Free and fair elections: Despite a general lack of trust in the democratic processes, focus group participants claimed that truly free and fair elections would be the most effective way to implement structural change. Few went into detail when asked how elections could become free and fair. The overwhelming majority did not believe that recent changes to electoral laws would generate the changes sought. Some mentioned that one way to minimize vote-rigging and irregularities would be to involve international and external actors such as the United Nations as observers. This was the case in the 2021 elections, which the United Nations and European Union both monitored. The desire for international actors to monitor the process highlights the lack of faith participants have in national political actors.

Negative perceptions of elections were more prevalent in survey results, where 37 percent of respondents indicated that they would not vote in the 2021 elections as they did not believe that it would make a difference. A further 10.1 percent said that they would not vote as they did not feel represented within the system. Only 11.8 percent saw their vote as influencing the political process (Figure 10).[263] With only slight variations in the percentages, the results were the same when the data were disaggregated by governorate, age, gender and employment status. Among women, 40.7 percent believed that their vote would make no difference. Among those from Baghdad, 43.5 percent highlighted that their vote would make no difference; they were more pessimistic about elections. The belief that voting makes no difference may stem from the notion that elections would not produce a strong and stable Government. This negative perception translates into reality, with 2018 elections seeing a record low in voter turnout.[264] There is a widespread sense that the Government is not elected by the people but created based on negotiations among elites. Only elections that are truly free and fair could affect change.

Figure 10: Will you vote in the next election?



Source: The second survey

Protests: Among survey respondents, 22.4 percent identified protests as a means to engender change, making it the most popular option. But opinions were polarized when it came to the effectiveness of protests. One view is that they bring about change, with an example being the reforms that followed the Tishreen Uprising. An opposing notion is that protests just end up causing more harm. There was strong agreement that using social media to spread information about protests and discontent can 'break the barrier of fear'.

Civil society: Opinions were split on civil society organizations. Focus group participants mentioned them as key agents of change while others saw them as corrupt and associated with specific political parties or coalitions. Surveys highlighted a lack of faith in civil society's ability to improve the relationship between the State and society, with only 27.4 percent of respondents thinking civil society can make a positive contribution. Nonetheless, many avenues identified to bring about change need civil society to play a role.

7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

As UN Secretary-General António Guterres has highlighted, building a new social contract is crucial to achieving the SDGs.[265] This policy paper demonstrates that many Iraqis see the social contract as centring on issues reflected in the global goals. Participants want to reduce inequalities and poverty; increase gender equality; improve services such as health care, education, water and electricity; gain decent work and economic growth; and enjoy peace, stability, human rights and effective governance. These desires are seen as fundamental to a dignified life, which in turn closely connects to realizing many of the SDGs. This section examines potential opportunities for change and provides recommendations for the Government of Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government, civil society and NGOs. These proposals are aimed at providing citizens with a dignified life and building a social contract linked to the SDGs.

7.1 Opportunities for change

Elections are seen as potential drivers of change. Free and fair elections are key to achieving structural change and renegotiating the social contract. But people have lost faith in the political process. A strong social contract requires restoring this faith, which calls for actions by political parties, the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government. Civil society, the media and NGOs can conduct voter education and awareness raising. A failure to restore faith in democratic processes after the recent elections could result in more people turning to non-political ways of influencing the political system.

Corruption is perceived to be the most important issue for the Government to address. It permeates all parts and sectors of Iraqi life. While Iraq has made marginal improvements on the transparency ratings, with an increase from a rank of 175 to 160 over the last decade, and although corruption has been a central issue for various Governments since 2014, addressing corruption remains the most significant opportunity for reimagining the social contract and restoring trust in state institutions and the political process. If corruption is not tackled, a great number of Iraqis may refuse to deliver on their end of the social contract.

The Iraqi population is a key driver of change. There is a clear willingness to contribute to rebuilding the social contract, but gaps in knowledge about rights and responsibilities need to be rectified. More civic education is needed to learn how to engage in the political process. Youth are heavily involved in the protest movement and at the forefront of calling for change. Yet there is a perception that many lack experience as effective players in the political system. This notion needs to be dismantled as it is a barrier for youth in developing their potential.

Women largely have a good understanding of the complex structural problems affecting Iraq and necessary reforms. Women demonstrated a comprehensive and intersectional understanding of the structural problems affecting Iraqi society and the political system. They also saw different issues as important, compared with men. Their involvement in the political process is essential but depends on changing conservative traditions and gender norms at the legislative and societal levels.

Civil society can foster trust and engagement in reimagining the social contract. Opinions are polarized about civil society. Some see it as a crucial social and political actor filling gaps left by the State and looking after neglected communities. Others have little or no faith in it because they see civil society as part of the political system, associated with specific ruling parties or sources of funding.

Civil society needs to build back its relationship with disenfranchised parts of the population, aiming to restore trust and effectively participate in reimagining the social contract.

Managing citizens' expectations of the social contract is key. Citizens must look at their own demands. An opportunity for change lies in shifting perceptions of the State as the provider of everything, including employment. It should be seen as a protector and regulator, performing functions such as providing social protection, ensuring standards, and creating opportunities and conditions for youth to seek employment in the private sector. Managing citizens' high expectations could lead to a more balanced and sustainable social contract.

Diversifying the economy and activating the private sector can advance structural change. Grievances and discontent over Iraq's reliance on oil revenues are not new, nor are demands to diversify the economy and increase access to employment and livelihood opportunities. Plans to tackle economic stagnation have been at the centre of white papers and manifestos by several Iraqi Governments.[266] Yet the fragility of the economy was demonstrated once again during the pandemic and the decline in oil revenues, with poverty and unemployment rates significantly increasing.[267] A continued failure to address economic shortfalls will further alienate people, especially marginalized communities. Strengthening the private sector and investing in agriculture are means to stimulate employment. Diversifying and building a green economy would free finances currently focused on public sector employment, enabling the Government to deliver on other needs.[268]

The Government and political actors are in the best position to generate and catalyse change. Although expectations about what the State can or should provide need to be managed, the State and the actors that make it up can powerfully accelerate changes in the social contract, such as by addressing corruption, improving services and security, and ensuring free and fair elections. They need to act.

7.2 Policy recommendations

Short term (up to 12 months)

- **Bringing back faith in the democratic process should be a government priority.** It is important that elections are perceived as fair and transparent. For election results to be seen as legitimate and impactful, the Government should be formed in a timely manner based on the results. Not all actors have to join the Government. Performing as the opposition within Parliament should be seen as a legitimate option.

- **Addressing corruption must go beyond rhetoric.** The new Government should make addressing corruption a high priority. Many Iraqis are nearing a tipping point, as shown by decreasing trust in the Government, state institutions and political processes. If this is not systematically addressed, dire consequences will ensue. Political actors need to act in the short term while having a longer-term plan. This must begin with the government formation process, where a clear anti-corruption strategy should be formulated, based on those put forward by previous Governments, along with an action plan that includes public reporting on progress. All action should be subject to scrutiny by the public, civil society and the media. The Government needs to clearly demonstrate the steps it takes to *achieve* policies even as legislation is strengthened and followed.

- **The new Government should catalyse economic diversification.** The social contract will not have a firm footing if employment in the public sector is the only secure employment option. The public sector should have a focus on representation and improved services, security and human rights. Diversification from a carbon-centric economy must move beyond rhetoric through the Government activating existing reforms. Iraq needs to significantly invest in the private sector to build a diversified

and inclusive economy that is more equipped to withstand oil price shocks and ready for increasing climate pressures. It needs to invest in digital technologies, green power generation and agriculture, particularly water management, to both revive the economy and create jobs. At the same time, economic transition needs to be just and equitable with opportunities open to all.

- **Reforms should be implemented to achieve more sustainable service provision.** While Iraq does not lack resources, infrastructure and the management of sectors such as water, electricity and health need significant investment and reform to meet people's needs. Reform of the electricity and water sectors should be connected to climate adaptation, where massive investment is imperative, and to equitable and sustainable development. This would maximize financial redistribution and ensure that investment considers the increasing impacts of climate change. Electricity provision should be aligned with building a green economy, preparing for reduced hydrocarbon use and developing sustainable employment.

- **Bottom-up engagement should be encouraged and linked to top-down political processes.** With people lacking knowledge and appropriate means to communicate their desires to the Government, they see no clearly identified path to influence the social contract. As a result, some identify protests as the only means to express dissent and initiate structural change. The new Government needs to clearly demonstrate that bottom-up dialogue can facilitate change. It should work with civil society and the media to create ways for people to articulate and discuss their visions of the social contract. Members of Parliament could use recent changes to the electoral law to become a bridge to the Government for their constituents.

- **The Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government need to back freedom of expression and free media to foster the social contract.** Civil society and the media can promote a reinvigorated social contract by educating the population on political actors, citizens' rights, elections and so on. But they need to feel free and safe to do so. The Government of Iraq and Kurdistan Regional Government need to commit to freedom of expression and freedom of media and update legislation accordingly, with support from the international community.

Medium to long term (12 to 36 months)

- **Making inroads to better security and the rule of law will help ease perceptions of insecurity.** Addressing security concerns is a complex issue that involves multiple actors and is likely to be a lengthy process. The Government needs to demonstrate that action is being taken, however. Improving personal and local security by stemming the proliferation of unregulated weapons, responding to and preventing domestic violence and violence against women, and actively prosecuting *all* those involved in assassinations would demonstrate that security is a priority. Existing legislation on prosecution procedures needs to be strengthened and enforced.

- **Improving conditions that enable women's engagement in politics and public life is crucial.** Diminishing discriminatory views that hinder women in employment and politics will determine if they can play a larger role in society. In collaboration with civil society, particularly women's organizations and NGOs, the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government should develop campaigns to tackle perceptions of women's roles. Educating men is key; studies show it is effective.[269] Strategies and legislative frameworks should ensure that women are represented and valued within key sectors, such as the security forces and the judicial system. A critical mass of women can accelerate a process of dismantling established structures of alienation and discrimination.

- **Engaging youth is needed now and is key to the future.** The consistent disenfranchisement of youth demands urgent action, including the government creation of more opportunities for their

political representation and participation, professional development and training, with the last implying improvements in education. While Iraq has a high number of graduates, the Government needs to ensure that they have necessary employment opportunities and skills to take part in diversifying the economy as well as knowledge of how to engage in political change.

- **The perception of youth as lacking experience and knowledge needs to shift.** Civil society should focus on improving skills among youth as part of dismantling this widespread notion. Communications around these initiatives should focus on Iraqis and not external audiences as is currently the case. People need to be aware of and involved in such initiatives to effectively counter prejudice against youth as too inexperienced to get involved in political processes.

- **People's understanding of their rights and duties within the social contract needs to improve.** The fact that people recognize a gap in their knowledge indicates a desire to reduce it. At the same time, expectations of the social contract need to be managed in line with rights and duties as part of the move away from a rentier social contract. Civil society and NGOs have key roles in facilitating this understanding, including through providing education. The Government also has a responsibility to educate people on their rights as citizens, beginning in the school system.

- **The importance of voting needs to be reiterated to the population.** While it is people's right not to vote, low turnout in elections is concerning. Historically, boycotting elections does not work and only results in the same candidates with strong election bases being elected. Civil society and the media should provide voter education with a focus on ensuring people properly understand the election process, what their vote (or lack thereof) means in terms of government formation, and the platforms of various candidates.

- **Civil society has an important role in Iraq but should bolster its public perception.** A lack of trust in civil society is evident among large sections of the population. Civil society needs to builds its relationship with the broader society, supported by NGOs. Crucial ways forward include being transparent about funding and objectives and acting neutrally.

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4 Ibid.
5 International Crisis Group 2021.
6 Frantappie 2019.
7 Ibid.
8 International Crisis Group 2021.
9 Costantini 2020.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Although focus group discussions too place in 19 governorates, for electoral purposes there are still officially 18 governorates.
13 Al-Jaffal 2021.
14 Welham 2020.
15 See: https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/leave-no-one-behind.
16 Halabja is considered a governorate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq but has yet to be formally accepted as such in Iraq. It was included as it offers an important variation from Sulaymaniyah.
17 Facebook is the leading social media platform. As of 31 March 2021, there were 25.5 million active Facebook subscribers in Iraq. See: https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats5.htm.
18 Issues with boosting not being accepted by Facebook meant that the gender proportion of the final survey was far from the targeted 50:50, or the 70 (men) to 30 (women) gender split of Iraqi Facebook users. However, 1,095 women did complete the survey, which does allow for some analysis based on gender.
19 El-Haddad 2020; Loewe, Trautner and Zintl 2019.
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52 O'Driscoll, Bourhrous, Maddah et al. 2020.
53 This is based on both the demands of the protestors and the findings from the focus group discussions
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116 Government of Iraq 2020.
117 WFP 2021.
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132 Government of Iraq, Ministry of Interior 2005.
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134 Ibid.
135 Costantini and O'Driscoll 2020.
136 Hassan 2015.
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138 KRSO, UNFPA and IOM 2018.
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140 World Bank 2016.
141 World Bank 2016, 2021.
142 O'Driscoll and Baser 2019.

143 Ibid.
144 Petkova 2019.
145 Ibid.
146 World Bank 2016.
147 World Bank 2016, 2021.
148 World Bank 2016.
149 Ibid.
150 Bogos 2019; International Crisis Group 2019; United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights 2021.
151 Government of Iraq, Ministry of Planning, UNICEF, World Bank et al. 2020.
152 Bertelsmann Stiftung 2020.
153 Bogos 2019; International Crisis Group 2019.
154 Dodge 2020.
155 National Democratic Institute 2020.
156 Dodge 2013; O'Driscoll 2017; Romano 2014.
157 Dodge 2013.
158 Dodge 2013; O'Driscoll 2017; Romano 2014.
159 Beblawi and Luciani 2016; Hertog 2010.
160 Dodge and Mansour 2021.
161 Tabaqchali, al-Shadeedi and al-Saffar 2021.
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163 Al-Shadeedi, Skelton and Saleem 2020.
164 Furness and Trautner 2020.
165 Dodge and Mansour 2021.
166 IOM 2020.
167 Human Rights Watch 2011; IOM 2020.
168 Namely: Babil, Basra, Diwaniya, Karbala, Maysan, Muthanna, Najaf, Thi Qar and Wasit.
169 Robin-D'Cruz 2021.
170 In this paper, 'corruption' refers to the privileged allocation of resources, positions and opportunities as well as illicit activities by political elites and their networks, for exclusive group gains.
171 Abdullah, Gray and Clough 2018.
172 Dodge and Mansour 2021; Abdullah, Gray and Clough 2018; Abbas and Ismail 2017.
173 Dodge and Mansour 2021; Sassoon 2016.
174 Middle East Monitor 2021.
175 Al-Taie 2020.
176 Transparency International 2020b.
177 UNDP 2020a.
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179 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2020.
180 National Democratic Institute 2019.
181 Abdullah, Gray and Clough 2018; Sabir 2017; Dodge and Mansour 2021.
182 Sassoon 2016; Pfaff 2021; Welham 2020; GAN Integrity 2020; World Bank 2020a.
183 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Abdullah, Gray and Clough 2018; National Democratic Institute 2019b; Abbas and Ismail 2017.
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187 Byman 2019.
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189 In this paper, 'services' refers to the provision of essential services such as water, electricity, sanitation, education and health care.
190 National Democratic Institute 2019a.
191 Brinkerhoff, Wetterberg and Dunn 2012.
192 Mills and Salman 2020.
193 UNICEF 2021a.
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196 Aboulenein and Levinson 2020.
197 As per UNDP analysis of the 2021 budget.
198 Alshamary 2021.
199 UNDP 2020c.
200 UNICEF 2021b.
201 UNDP 2021c; Government of the Netherlands 2018.
202 World Bank 2021a.
203 Dodge 2014.
204 Transparency International 2020a.
205 Minority Rights Group International 2016.
206 Robin-D'Cruz 2018.
207 Haddad 2019.
208 Robin-D'Cruz 2018.
209 World Bank 2021b.
210 Ibid.
211 UNDP 2020c.
212 World Bank 2020c.
213 In this paper, 'economy' refers to the population's perception of the economic situation, with a particular focus on the availability of employment opportunities for all segments.
214 World Bank 2004.
215 O'Driscoll, Bourhrous, Maddah et al. 2020.
216 Dodge 2003, 2013.

217 UNDP 2020c.
218 World Bank 2021b.
219 Toptancı 2021.
220 Jasim and Rodgers 2021.
221 Robin-D'Cruz 2021.
222 Matsunaga 2019.
223 See also: World Bank 2021b.
224 Ibid.
225 World Bank 2020b.
226 ILO 2020a.
227 UNDP 2021c.
228 World Bank 2021c.
229 World Bank 2021b.
230 Ibid.
231 Government of Iraq, Ministry of Planning; UNICEF, World Bank et al. 2020.
232 REACH 2019.
233 IOM 2016.
234 Kaya and Luchtenberg 2018.
235 REACH 2019.
236 UNDP 2020c.
237 Costantini 2020.
238 Alshamary 2021.
239 In this paper, 'security' refers to the population's physical security, the representation of the various segments that make up the population within the security apparatus, and the perceptions of what aspects of security the State most urgently needs to address. Research participants spoke broadly of the security forces but security in Iraq is a complex system made up of a myriad of actors with varying duties.
240 Costantini 2021.
241 Ibid.
242 Alkhudary 2020.
243 Alaaldin 2021.
244 Hama, 2019.
245 Ibid.
246 Revkin and Aymerich 2020.
247 This question was in the third survey where gender representation was not equal. But the survey drew responses from 1,095 women.
248 See, for example: United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq 2020; Amnesty International 2020; Human Rights Watch 2021.
249 In this paper, 'governance' refers to the population feeling rightfully represented within the political system, and whether or not the system is fit for purpose.
250 Pfaff 2021; Dodge 2020.
251 O'Driscoll, Bourhrous, Maddah et al. 2020.
252 O'Driscoll and Baser 2019.
253 Fleet 2019.
254 Slim 2019
255 National Democratic Institute 2019b.
256 International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2020.
257 United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Iraq Foundation 2020.
258 Chirillo and Roddey 2019.
259 United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and Iraq Foundation 2020.
260 Dodge 2020.
261 Mansou 2021.
262 It is harder for women to gain employment in the private sector. This question was in the third survey where gender representation was not equal. But the survey drew responses from 1,095 women.
263 Note: This survey was conducted in July 2021, before the October 2021 election.
264 Mansour 2019.
265 For the speech, see: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/a-new-social-contract-for-a-new-era/.
266 The most recent government white paper was released in October 2020. See: https://gds.gov.iq/ar/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Iraq-white-paper-in-arabic-october-2020.pdf.
267 World Bank 2021b.
268 Government of Iraq 2020.
269 Farré 2012.

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