



# CULTURAL ORIENTATION

# ARABIC-IRAQI



*Al Faw Palace or Water Palace, Baghdad  
Flickr / Jeremy Taylor*

Ti  
2017



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DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE  
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## CULTURAL ORIENTATION | ARABIC-IRAQI

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*Dura Europos, Euphrates  
Flickr / Arian Zwegers*

## Chapter 1 | Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Profile

## Introduction

Iraqi culture, one of the world's most ancient, is experiencing a tumultuous transition. Iraqis continue the struggle to determine their own political future. In December 2005, the Iraqi people voted in free elections, signaling Iraq's change from military dictatorship toward a parliamentary democracy. Parliament approved a new government under Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki in December 2010.<sup>1</sup> However, Al-Maliki's administration was plagued by rampant violence, and was responsible for a number of actions that alienated and angered Iraq's Sunni population.<sup>2</sup> Al-Maliki stepped down in June 2014, and in August 2014, Haider Al-Abadi was designated Prime Minister.<sup>3, 4</sup>

Iraqi power-sharing occurs along ethnic and religious lines, thus dividing the country.<sup>5</sup> Since the fall of Hussein's regime, Baathists and others have been marginalized by the ruling Shiites.<sup>6</sup> This has left deep political divisions between Sunnis and Shiites.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, Sunnis and other ethno-religious groups have maneuvered for power, in part, through violence against the government.<sup>8</sup>

## Geography

Iraq is located at the northern end of the Persian Gulf, and share borders with 6 countries.<sup>9</sup> To the east, Iraq shares a long border with Iran (1599 km/194 mi). Moving west, Iraq borders Syria (599 km/372 mi) and Jordan (179 km/111 mi). North of Syria, Iraq shares another border with Turkey (367 km/228 mi). Moving south, Iraq shares borders with Saudi Arabia (811 km/504 mi) and Kuwait(254 km/158 mi).<sup>10</sup> In addition, the country has a 58 km (36 mi) coastline on the Persian Gulf, its only access to the world's oceans.<sup>11</sup>



Map of Iraq  
CIA

## Geographic Divisions and Topographic Features

### Desert

Much of Iraq southwest of the Euphrates River consists of rocky desert lands.<sup>12</sup> The western portion of this region is an extension of the Syrian Desert.<sup>13</sup> To the southeast, along the Saudi Arabian border, lie two lower-elevation deserts. The al-Hajarah is the more western and consists of stony terrain marked by ridges, depressions, and wadis (dry riverbeds).<sup>14</sup> Southeast of it, the al-Dibdibah is a gravelly plain with scrub vegetation that extends eastward into Kuwait and southward into Saudi Arabia.<sup>15</sup>



Sand storm in desert  
Flickr / Team Frostick

## *Upper Tigris and Euphrates Upland*

A rolling upland spreads through northern Iraq between the upper Euphrates and Tigris Rivers.<sup>16</sup> It starts about 120 km (75 mi) north of Baghdad and extends to the Syrian border. This region is a mix of desert and deep river valleys. The Al-Jazirah Plateau is the cardinal feature in this region. It lies between the upper stretches of the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>17</sup> Although primarily flat, this arid region contains deep river valleys, the watershed of the two rivers, and some scattered highlands.<sup>18</sup> The most prominent of these are the Jabal Sinjar (Sinjar Mountains), from which emerges the region's most significant watercourse, the Wadi al-Tharthar.<sup>19</sup> Moving southwest from the mountainous areas are hill regions that gradually become plains. Habitable river basins are located here, which are populated mostly by ethnic Kurds and Turkmen.<sup>20</sup> Larger cities are found in this area of the northeast, such as Kirkuk and Erbil.<sup>21</sup>



*Mountainside, Jabal Sinjar*  
Wikimedia / Phillip Melton

## *Northeast Highlands*

Mountainous highlands in the north and northeast extend into Iran and Turkey.<sup>22</sup> This mountainous region in Iraq begins just southwest of Mosul and Kirkuk and extends to the borders of Iran and Turkey. Elevations range from 1,000 m-4,000 m (3,000 ft-12,000 ft).<sup>23</sup> The Zagros Mountains are the prominent feature of this region, while the Taurus Mountains predominate to the north along Iraq's border with Turkey.<sup>24</sup> These mountains are an extension of the Zagros Mountains in western Iran. Elevations range from 1,000 m-4,000 m (3,000 ft-12,000 ft). Mount Haji Ibrahim, or Gundah Zhur, used to be considered the highest peak in Iraq, reaching 3,607 m (11,837 ft).<sup>25</sup> However, the Unnamed Peak nearby is higher at 3,611 m (11,849 ft). The Jabal Hamrin marks the southwestern edge of the Northeast Highlands, a low-elevation ridge through which the Tigris River flows.<sup>26</sup>



*Jabal Sinjar*  
Wikimedia / Dr.\_91.41



## Alluvial Plains

An alluvial plain sweeps southward along the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers.<sup>27</sup> The central and southern parts of the Euphrates-Tigris drainage basin begin north of Baghdad in Balad on the Tigris, and extend westward towards Al-Ramadi on the Euphrates.<sup>28</sup> Moving south, towards the Persian Gulf, are low-elevation plains that are subject to poor drainage and seasonal floods. Iraq's two largest cities, Baghdad and Basrah, are in this region.<sup>29</sup> Numerous marshlands and lakes are found here. The largest is Hawr al-Hammar, south of the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates.<sup>30</sup> This marshy lake was once known as the home of many of Iraq's Madan (Marsh Arabs), but most moved out of the area when much of the lake was drained following the 1991 Gulf War.<sup>31</sup> The floodplain wetlands have enabled the cultivation of rice and other agricultural products in the area for millennia..<sup>32</sup>



*Saddam Hussein's former Summer palace*  
Wikimedia / Arlo K. Abrahamson

## Climate

Iraq has a mostly desert climate with hot, dry summers and mild winters. In the northeastern mountains, winters are cold and occasionally bring heavy snowfall.<sup>33</sup> Temperatures in the north and west range from 0 to 15°C (32 to 59°F) in winter and 22 to 38°C (71.6 to 100.4°F) in summer. In areas south of Baghdad, temperatures range from 4 to 17°C (39.2 to 62.6°F) in the winter and from 29 to 43°C (84.2 to 109.4°F) in summer.<sup>34</sup>



*Zab River, Erbil, Iraqi-Kurdistan*  
Wikimedia / jamesdale10

The country receives 90 percent of its rain between November and April. Average annual rainfall nationwide is 10-17 cm (4-7 in). The northern and northeastern uplands receive roughly three times that amount, and in the mountains rainfall may be as much as 100 cm (40 in). Rain in the uplands works its way slowly downriver to the Persian Gulf.<sup>35</sup>

Dust and sandstorms occur because of the sharqi winds.<sup>36</sup> These destructive storms carrying walls of debris, dust, and dirt can occur at any time of year, but the peak of the sandstorm season is July.<sup>37</sup> Iraq's sandstorms are strong enough to disable the engines of machinery and aircraft and reduce visibility to almost zero.<sup>38</sup>

## Rivers and Lakes

### *Tigris River*

The Tigris River, 1,840 km (1,143 mi), is the easternmost of Mesopotamia's two great rivers.<sup>39</sup> It originates in the Taurus Mountains of Turkey and forms part of the Turkish-Syrian border before flowing into Iraq. Two of modern Iraq's largest cities—Baghdad and Mosul—lie on the Tigris, as did several of the most famous cities of antiquity, including Nineveh, Calah, and Ashur, the three capitals of ancient Assyria.<sup>40</sup>



*Tigris River*  
Wikimedia / Zzztriple2000

Baghdad and its immediate outskirts are protected from flooding by a series of embankments.<sup>41</sup> Maximum flow periods for the Tigris are from March to May, with two-fifths of the annual flow occurring then.<sup>42</sup> Iraqis have built dams for flood control and for irrigation, and constructed canals to move water where it is most needed. One canal connects the Tigris near Samarra with Buhayrat al-Tharthar (Lake Tharthar). The flow of the Tigris increases substantially after the Nahr Diyala (Diyala River) joins it just south of Baghdad.<sup>43</sup>

### *Euphrates River*

The Euphrates begins in Turkey, and flows south through Syria and Iraq. In 1990, Syria and Iraq agreed to share the waters of the Euphrates equitably, and Turkey has promised an annual minimum flow where it shares a border with Syria. There is no three-party agreement.<sup>44</sup>



*Euphrates River, Anbar*  
Flickr / Jayel Aheram

The Euphrates is naturally a slow-flowing river that carries a lot of silt.<sup>45</sup> Spring flooding has deposited this silt over millennia, producing some of the most fertile land in the world.<sup>46</sup> The river frequently floods just south of Baghdad, and downstream to the city of Al-Kut.<sup>47</sup> Over time, this flooding has caused a build-up of high natural levees composed of silty deposits, making it difficult to tap the southern part of the river for irrigation.<sup>48</sup>

### *Shatt al-Arab*

Both the Tigris and Euphrates flow more than 2,500 km (1,553 mi) in a southward direction through Iraq, meeting just north of Basrah. Here they form the Shatt al-Arab waterway that flows into the Persian Gulf at Al-Faw on the Iranian border.<sup>49</sup> The Shatt al-Arab, or Arvand Rud, flows southeastward for 193 km (120 mi). This river constitutes the Iraq-Iran border as it flows to the Persian Gulf.<sup>50</sup> This tidal river is also a primary source of water for southern Iraq, as well as Kuwait. Before flowing into the Persian Gulf, the Shatt al-Arab becomes a swampy marshland that opens up enough to allow shallow-draft oceangoing vessels to travel to Basrah, Iraq's main river port.<sup>51</sup> This waterway requires frequent dredging to keep the channel navigable.<sup>52</sup>



*Boat on Shatt-al-Arab, Al Basrah  
Flickr / Christiaan Briggs*

The southern marshy area sustained Iraq's Madan (Marsh Arabs) for about 5,000 years.<sup>53</sup> This led to the extinction of various species of plants and animals, and displaced the Marsh Arabs.<sup>54</sup> The destruction of the largest wetland in the world, has adversely affected the entire surrounding ecosystem.<sup>55</sup>

Marsh restoration efforts have led to some rebirth of the old marshlands.<sup>57</sup> However, dam building, drought, and raw sewage continues to threaten restoration efforts. As a result, the future of Iraq's marshlands remains uncertain.<sup>58</sup>



## Major Cities

### *Baghdad*

The capital of Iraq, Baghdad, was founded by the Abbasids in 762 C.E. The city straddles the banks of the Tigris River, with 11 bridges connecting the 2 sides. With 6.2 million inhabitants, according to a 2007 census, it is the largest city in Iraq today and the center of industry, commerce, and culture.<sup>59</sup>



*The Republican Palace*  
Wikimedia / Bobsmith040689

### *Mosul*

With 1.4 million inhabitants (2009 estimate), Mosul is Iraq's second-largest city.<sup>60</sup> Early on, Mosul was a center of trade lying strategically along the caravan route between the Mediterranean, India, and Persia.<sup>61</sup> Today, Mosul is northern Iraq's industrial center as well as a major trade and communications center.<sup>62</sup> It's mostly Kurdish population lives together with the largest Christian community in Iraq, the Chaldeans.<sup>63</sup>

### *Basrah*

Basrah is Iraq's third-largest city, with a population of 1.2 million (2009 estimate).<sup>64</sup> It is also Iraq's main port. The city's rich history dates back to the Abbasids (750-1258 C.E.).<sup>65</sup>

### *Karbala*

The holy city of Karbala is the site of Husayn ibn Ali the martyr's tomb. He was killed there in 680 C.E. during a battle, which led to the formal split between Shiite and Sunni Muslims.<sup>66</sup> After Mecca, Karbala is the place most visited by Shiite pilgrims and has developed into a major center of Islamic religion.<sup>67</sup>



*Husayn Mosque, Karbala*  
Wikimedia / SFC Larry E. Johns



## Kirkuk

Kirkuk's ancient history dates back over 5,000 years.<sup>68</sup> Kurds and Turkmen make up most of its population. Kirkuk has been the center of the petroleum industry since the 1930s, producing one million barrels of oil daily. It is a major industrial and agricultural center.<sup>69</sup>



*Ancient Citadel in Kirkuk,  
Wikimedia / Chad.r.hill*

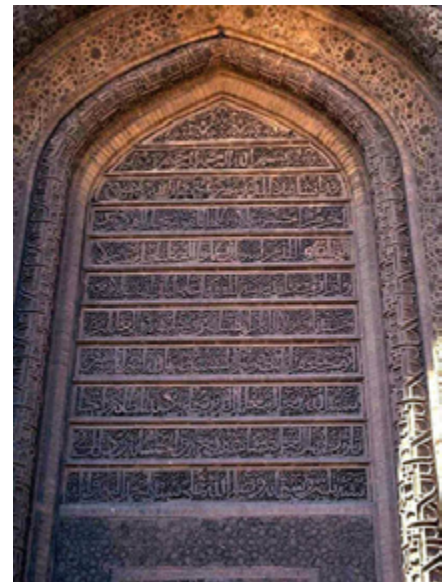
## Erbil

One of the world's longest continuously inhabited cities, Erbil's roots date back over 8,000 years.<sup>70</sup> Close to Turkey and Iran, it represents the center of the Kurdish independence movement.<sup>71</sup>

# History

## Ancient History

The rich floodplain between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers is part of the "Fertile Crescent."<sup>72</sup> More than 10,000 years ago, this was one of the world's central areas for agricultural production.<sup>73</sup> Sumerian civilization emerged around 3000 B.C.E. in what is called Mesopotamia, or the land "between two rivers."<sup>74</sup> The Sumerians created a civilization characterized by urban culture and highly developed religious and ethical views, architecture, and art. The cuneiform script (written on clay) evolved out of the Sumerian language and remained in use for thousands of years.<sup>75, 76</sup>



*The Madrasa al-Mustansiriyya in Baghdad  
Flickr / MIT OpenCourseWare*

## Islamic Empires

In the mid-7th century C.E., Arab armies swept into Qadisiyya south of Baghdad bringing with them the religion of Islam. The first Arab-Muslim empire, the Umayyad Dynasty, emerged from Damascus. However, the second and longer lasting Abbasid Dynasty was centered in Baghdad from the middle of the 8th century until 1258 C.E.<sup>77, 78</sup> Abbasid Baghdad

developed into the world's second-largest city, surpassed in size only by Constantinople. It was also a center of culture, arts, and science.<sup>79</sup>

### *The Ottoman Empire and the British*

The Ottoman Empire struggled to rule Iraq for almost four centuries, from the 16th century until 1920.<sup>80</sup> In the mid-1800s, Britain became interested in Iraq for its value as a direct overland route to India. The British set up treaties with Arab tribal chieftains and gained the right to explore oil fields in nearby Iran, forming the Anglo-Persian Oil Company in 1909.<sup>81</sup>

Ottoman and British forces fought in Iraq during World War I and the British occupied most of the country in 1917.<sup>82</sup> The British had promised independence if the uprising against the Ottomans was successful, but instead Iraq became a British territory under the mandate of the League of Nations.<sup>83</sup> The Iraqi Arabs rebelled against the British, who fought back by bombing the country, killing around 9,000 people.<sup>84</sup> The British supported the ascension of Faisal ibn Hussein as Iraq's king. Faisal's family had long been the stewards of Mecca, but the Saud family displaced them following World War I. Once in Iraq, Faisal built a base of power by negotiating with the various tribal leaders.<sup>85</sup> Faisal's foreign origins, and ultimate loyalty to the British, undercut his legitimacy as a ruler.<sup>86</sup>



*Versailles Conference, Feisal Party*  
Wikimedia / Bloody-libu

Independence finally came to Iraq in 1932, but brought neither stability nor tranquility. Tribalism and arbitrary borders tended to fragment the country.<sup>87</sup> Since its beginnings as a sovereign republic, Iraq has been chronically plagued by coups and wars.<sup>88</sup>

## Recent History

In 1979, Saddam Hussein took power as head of the socialist Baath Party and became president of Iraq.<sup>89</sup> In 1980, with support from the United States and neighboring Arab states, Hussein launched a costly eight-year war with Iran, ending in a stalemate and with extensive loss to life and resources.<sup>90</sup> In 1990, Hussein attacked and occupied Kuwait and was forced out by a U.S.-led international coalition; however, he remained in power in Iraq.<sup>91</sup> Subsequently, Hussein refused to cooperate with U.N. inspectors investigating a possible program of weapons of mass destruction.<sup>92</sup> As a result, Iraq languished under U.N. sanctions throughout the 1990s. It was not until 2002 that Iraq finally agreed to unconditional arms inspections.<sup>93</sup>



*Saddam Hussein, Former Iraqi President*  
Wikimedia / INA

### *Operation Iraqi Freedom*

In March 2003, the U.S. led a second coalition of nations in “Operation Iraqi Freedom,” which toppled Hussein’s Baathist regime. The invasion was predicated on assertions that Iraq had supported the 2001 attacks against the United States and was concealing weapons of mass destruction, both allegations have since proven incorrect.<sup>94</sup> The U.S. long-term goal has been to build a “strategic partnership” with the Iraqi government that will lead to a “democratic Iraq that can govern, defend, and sustain itself,” and be an ally in the region.<sup>95</sup> Saddam Hussein was put on trial after his capture and convicted of crimes against humanity by the Iraqi High Tribunal for his role in the deaths of 148 Shi’ites in 1982.<sup>96</sup> He was sentenced to death by hanging and was executed in late December 2006.<sup>97</sup>



*U.S. Soldiers Assigned to 3rd Battalion, Mosul*  
Wikimedia / DVIDSHUB

## *Post-Saddam Iraq*

In January 2005, Iraq held a national election to choose members of an interim National Assembly charged with drafting a permanent constitution.<sup>98</sup> The draft constitution was approved in October 2005 by a slim margin of Iraqi voters. Two months later, voters elected a permanent parliament that finalized many of the remaining constitutional details.<sup>99</sup> Intense debate followed about how to distribute power fairly among the different political groups in Iraq, culminating in approval of a permanent government led by Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki.<sup>100</sup>



*Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki*  
*Wikimedia / U.S. Air Force/ Wilkes*

By 2007, a U.S.-led troop “surge,” together with Sunni tribal alliances in central Iraq (known as the “Sunni Awakening”), brought about a dramatic reduction in violence.<sup>101</sup>

During the provincial elections in the spring of 2009, Sunnis returned to the polls and, with fellow Iraqi voters, helped elect a more representative body politic. To promote security and stability in Iraq’s urban areas, a transfer of authority from United States and coalition forces to the Iraqi government followed the 2009 elections. On 7 March 2010, Iraqi national elections were held.<sup>102</sup>

The election results set the stage for the withdrawal of U.S. and coalition forces, and raise hopes that a democratic Iraq can evolve into a peaceful, multiethnic society. At the same time, the new Iraqi government needed votes of confidence from multiple coalitions and ethnic groups to gain a ruling majority in Parliament.<sup>103</sup> In 2010, the U.S. government began drawing down its troop presence in Iraq. By late August, all major combat units had been removed, leaving 50,000 U.S. troops to assist Iraqis for training purposes and as needed in other areas. In August 2010, Barack Obama announced the end of U.S. combat missions in Iraq, leaving the Iraqi government in primary control of its military security.<sup>104, 105</sup>



## Government

Iraq's full name is Republic of Iraq, or "Jumhuriyat al-Iraq/Komar-i Iraq," and is a federal parliamentary representative republic. Iraq's legal system is based on European civil law and Islamic law, as outlined in Iraq's constitution.<sup>106</sup> The country has a multi-party system with executive power shared between the prime minister, the president, and the legislature.<sup>107</sup> Most executive authority is vested in the prime minister, however, who appoints the Council of Ministers.<sup>108</sup>



*Baghdad Convention Center, Council of Rep.  
Wikimedia / James Gordon*

Nuri al-Maliki was selected as Iraq's prime minister in April 2006.<sup>109</sup> He served until stepping down in August 2014 due to pressure from the U.S. Al-Maliki's administration was plagued by rampant violence, and was responsible for a number of actions that alienated and angered Iraq's Sunni population.<sup>110</sup> In August 2014, Haider Al-Abadi was designated Prime Minister and was approved by the Iraq Parliament. A major focus of Al-Abadi's administration has been fighting corruption, revising divisive policies, and bringing Shia militias under state control.<sup>111</sup>

Iraq's legislature consists of a Council of Representatives (COR) and the Federation Council. The COR consists of 325 elected representatives, serving 4 year terms. Eight seats are reserved for minority groups (Christian: 5; Sabeen: 1; Shabak: 1; and Yizidi: 1).<sup>112</sup>

The Iraqi judicial branch is an independent authority that is comprised of Higher Judicial Council, the Supreme Court, the Court of Cassation, the Public Prosecution Department, the Judiciary Oversight Commission, and other regulated federal courts.<sup>113</sup> The Higher Judicial Council supervises Iraq's federal judiciary. Iraq's Supreme Court has limited jurisdiction related to constitutional issues, however, unlike the U.S.; instead, the appellate courts appeal to the Court of Cassation, Iraq's highest court of appeal.<sup>114</sup>

## Media

The media in Iraq face challenges in terms of both operations and security. Although freedom of opinion and freedom of the press are guaranteed by law, the government restricts media investigations of corruption and abuses of power.<sup>115</sup> Journalists are still being arrested and detained for their work by the Iraqi security and government officials.

Most media outlets are private and “are financially dependent on or affiliated with ethnic, sectarian, or partisan groups,” a situation made worse by the security threats prevalent in the country.<sup>116</sup>

With the rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Iraq was still the most dangerous place for the press in 2015, with at least 45 journalist fatalities in that year alone.<sup>117</sup> Between 2003 and 2015, 168 journalists and 58 media support workers were killed while working in Iraq.<sup>118, 119, 120</sup> They are targeted by ISIL, insurgent groups, and by Iraqi government officials who allegedly bribe journalists to report on their particular views. Attempts to undermine objective reporting have resulted in a media environment that offers differing viewpoints, but suffers from a lack of independent journalistic practices.<sup>121</sup>



*Campaigners in Iraq, national symposium  
Flickr / Cluster Munition Coalition*

## Economy

A continuing influx of oil revenues and foreign grants has kept Iraq’s economy afloat, despite the violent insurgency and the rise of ISIL that caused over 2 million Iraqis to flee to neighboring countries.<sup>122</sup> Approximately 1.5 million people remain internally displaced as a result of sectarian violence.<sup>123</sup> Officially, unemployment falls between 15.2 and 18 percent, depending on sources, and the unofficial rate of unemployment is as high as 46 percent.<sup>124, 125</sup>

Iraq’s sectarian conflict has further hindered development of oil production since oil deposits are distributed unevenly across ethno-religious demographic lines. The majority of the proven reserves are in the Shia-dominated south and the Kurdish north.<sup>126, 127</sup> The Kurdish region and Iraq’s central government finally completed an oil

export agreement in 2014 that ended years of fighting over oil revenues and control of Iraq's northern oil fields.<sup>128</sup> This broad deal unites Iraqis in their stand against ISIL militants, who have targeted and briefly controlled Iraq's northern oil fields.<sup>129</sup>

After oil, agriculture is the second-largest economic sector in Iraq and the second-largest source of jobs.<sup>130</sup> Much of Iraq's arable land lies in the northern and northeastern parts of the country where crops such as wheat and barley are rain-fed.<sup>131</sup> Other important agricultural crops are rice, cotton, dates, and vegetables, while sheep and cattle are the main livestock.<sup>132,</sup>

<sup>133</sup>



*Iraqi Al-Basra oil Terminal, Mobile Bay  
Wikimedia / U.S. Navy/ Shavers*

A substantial percentage of Iraqi service workers are employed by the government. One of the most prosperous sectors has been personal and institutional protection, surveillance, and other forms of security. Iraqi tourism became virtually nonexistent after 2003 because of lack of security in the country.<sup>134</sup> Most of Iraq's tourists are Iranians visiting Shiite religious sites, such as the shrine of Imam Ali in Najaf.<sup>135</sup>

About 25% of Iraq's population lives in poverty.<sup>136</sup> An estimated 80% of households do not have access to treated drinking water, and just 18% of wastewater is treated. Less than 8% of Iraqi homes outside of Baghdad were connected to a sewer system.<sup>137</sup>

## Ethnic and Other Minority Groups

In Iraq, individual identity tends to matter very little. For Iraqi Arabs, tribal identity and ethnicity have become the principal defining qualities.<sup>138</sup> Within the tribe, group loyalty is valued highly and responsibility circulates through the entire group, rather than concentrating in any one individual.<sup>139</sup>

### *Kurds*

The Kurds, a non-Arab people concentrated in the northeastern areas of the country, make up 15 to 20 percent of the Iraqi population.<sup>140</sup> The Kurdish people inhabit a contiguous mountainous area encompassing parts of Iraq, Turkey, Iran, Armenia, and Syria—an area the Kurds call Kurdistan. Their cultural identity stems from living at the intersection of Turkic, Persian, and Arab cultures.<sup>141, 142</sup>

The Kurds today, mostly Sunni Muslims, are a cohesive political group despite internal conflicts and years of suppression under Saddam Hussein.<sup>143</sup> Massoud Barzani's tribal-based organization called the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Jalal Talabani's socialistic Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) both struggled for dominance of the three Kurdish Provinces in Iraq: Dohuk, Arbil, and Sulaymaniyah.<sup>144</sup> After Saddam's downfall, the two parties put aside their differences.<sup>145</sup>



*Kurds on a Picnic*  
Wikimedia / U.S. Navy photo / PO1 Matthew Leistikow

### *Marsh Arabs (Madan)*

In southern Iraq, severe environmental damage has greatly reduced an original population of roughly 500,000 Madan, or Marsh Arabs.<sup>146</sup> For 5,000 years, dating back to Sumerian times, these people have lived on natural and man-made islands in southern Iraq.<sup>147</sup> They subsisted on fishing and raising water buffalo, lived in reed houses, and traveled in reed boats.<sup>148</sup> Their long-standing way of life first came under pressure from extensive damming of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, which reduced the flow of water to the marshes where the Madan lived, turning the area into dry salt flats.<sup>149</sup>



*Marsh Arabs, Southern Iraq*  
Wikimedia / U.S. Army / Hassan Janali

### *Turkmen and Other Minority Groups*

Turkmen, along with other minority ethnic groups such as the Armenians and Assyrians account for approximately 5 percent of Iraq's population.<sup>150</sup> All of these minority groups live in the northeast. As of 2005, the Turkmen were considered Iraq's third-largest ethnic group after the Arabs and the Kurds.<sup>151</sup> Turkmen are mostly Sunni Muslims who live in villages, and are the descendants of Ottoman Turks.<sup>152</sup> They live in border regions close to Kurdish and Arab areas.<sup>153</sup>



The Yazidis, another minority group, are Kurdish. They are distinguished by their unique religion, which combines Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Islam.<sup>154</sup> They live in small and isolated groups, mostly in the Sinjar Mountains west of Mosul.”<sup>155</sup> For the Yazidis, the war in Iraq has been a mixed blessing. It has brought greater opportunities than were available under Saddam Hussein, however, it has also made them the subject of insurgent attacks.<sup>156, 157</sup>

Minority groups often get caught in the deadly political crossfire raging in Iraq, and are sometimes directly targeted due to their religious and ethnic background. The struggle for control, land, and resources continues to threaten Iraq’s hope and prospects for unity among its disparate ethnic and religious factions.<sup>158, 159</sup>



*An Iraqi Turkmen girl*  
Wikimedia / Samaksasanian

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## Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Chapter 1 | Profile

## Assessment

1. Much of Iraq southwest of the Euphrates River consists of lush river valleys.
2. Saddam Hussein's administration drained the southern marshlands, turning them into dry salt flats.
3. Although Baghdad is the nation's capital, it is only the second-largest city in Iraq.
4. Iraq's cold winds and snowstorms are strong enough to disable the engines of machinery and aircraft and reduce visibility to almost zero.
5. In 1980, Hussein launched a costly eight-year war with Iran.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True*





*Citadel Bath and Grand Mosque, Erbil  
Flickr / David Stanley*

## Chapter 2 | Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Religion

## Introduction

Of Iraq's estimated 29 million people, nearly 97% identify as Muslim. The rest identify as Christian (mostly Eastern Rite Catholic), Yazidi, and Mandaean.<sup>1</sup> Islam is a monotheistic religion, which means that Muslims believe in only one God (Allah). Iraq is home to some of the most important sites in Islamic history. Baghdad was the capital of the Abbasid Dynasty from 762 to 1258 C.E., and the center of Islamic learning. The famous Sunni scholar, Abu Hanifah, hailed from the city of Kufah. A large number of Sunnis worldwide follow his school of thought.<sup>2</sup> Iraq, along with Iran, is also the center of Shia learning and scholarship. In addition to Samarra, the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala

are revered Shia holy sites.<sup>3</sup> Najaf, located 190 km (120 mi) south of Baghdad, is the purported site of Imam Ali's tomb. Karbala 80 km (50 mi) south of Baghdad, is the site of Imam Husayn's tomb. The holy cities of Najaf, Karbala, Kufah, and Al-Kazhimiyah receive many Shiite pilgrims from Iran and from around the world.<sup>4</sup>

Iraqi adopted the constitution in 2005. It specifies that Islamic law is the source of civil law, and no law can be enacted that contradicts Islam.<sup>5</sup> Questions remain as to how this will play out in practice, since the Iraqi Constitution also provides for religious freedom. The government of Iraq remains in transition, and many of the current tensions relate to the question of the role of religion in government.<sup>6, 7</sup> The Iraqi Constitution gives a glimpse into this state of governmental and religious transition. According to a report examining the state of religious freedom in Iraq, the nation's 2005 Constitution guarantees religious reform, but "religious minorities, particularly non-Muslims, remain under serious threat of violence..." in Iraq.<sup>8, 9</sup>

## Major Religions in Iraq

Islam is a monotheistic religion and its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or umma, calls this deity Allah. The Arabic term islam means "to submit" or "to surrender." Thus, a Muslim is one who submits to the will of Allah.<sup>10</sup> Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 C.E. They consider Muhammad as the last in a long line of prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.<sup>11</sup> Allah's message, as relayed by Muhammad, is delivered in the Quran, the sacred text of Islam. Additional doctrinal guides include the hadith, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the sunna, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad's example.<sup>12</sup>



Bunnia Mosque  
Flickr / Al Jazeera English

### *Sunni Islam*

Sunni Islam emerged as the majority branch of Islam and currently represents 87-90% of the worldwide Muslim community.<sup>13</sup> Sunni Islam has a decentralized leadership and has had a great role in the development of the region's legal, political, and economic systems.<sup>14</sup>

Among Iraq's Arab Sunnis, ethnic identity has historically had a greater influence on social unity or discord than theological belief.<sup>15</sup> Many Arab Sunnis in Iraq feel a historical connection to the Golden Age of Islamic civilization, which occurred during the Abbasid caliphate in the 8th and 13th centuries.<sup>16</sup> Centered in Baghdad, this empire blended Persian, Arabic, Egyptian, Greek, Eastern Roman, and other cultural traditions.<sup>17</sup>

Iraqi Kurds, mostly Sunni, adopted Islam later than the Arabs, and approach it somewhat differently. Kurdish leaders have learned to leverage Islamic religious authority across divisions created by tribal loyalty.<sup>18, 19, 20, 21</sup>

## *Shia Islam*

Following the deaths of Ali and his sons, Shia Islam quickly emerged as a separate and distinct sect within Islam. Throughout its history, Shia Islam has given preference to hadith (saying of the Prophet) that have been passed on by members of the Prophet's family and his close associates (although not all).<sup>22</sup> Shia Islam has also elevated the spiritual authority of its founders, heroes, and leaders, causing it to develop a highly centralized hierarchy of authority.<sup>23</sup>



*Kerbela Hussein Mosque, Shia Muslims  
Wikimedia / Wikifreund*

The importance of the Imam in Shia Islam is considerably different from other Muslim sects. Whereas Sunnis consider an Imam to be a leader of prayers in the mosques, Shiites use the term to refer to a spiritual leader who is divinely appointed by the Prophet's family.<sup>24</sup> They believe that there are a fixed number of such individuals and that they are “endowed with the living spirit of the Prophet and, as such, [are] thought to possess a spiritual authority that sets [them] above any earthly ruler.”<sup>25</sup>

## *Sunni-Shia Divide*

The terms Sunni and Shia appear regularly in stories about Iraq, and understanding the difference between Sunni and Shia beliefs is important in understanding modern Iraq. The division between Sunnis and Shiites is one of Islam's oldest. Both agree on Islam's fundamental principles and share the same holy book (Quran).<sup>26</sup> Differences

between them arise, however, from different historical experiences and the question of who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad.<sup>27</sup>

Islam dates to the 6th century C.E., when the Prophet Muhammad began to preach the teachings he said were revealed to him by God, through the Angel Gabriel, in the Saudi Arabia. Muhammad died in 632 C.E. without a clear successor. Conflicting views among his followers about who should next lead Islam eventually led to a split between among the community of believers.<sup>28</sup>

As Muhammad lay on his deathbed, he asked his companion, Abu Baker, to lead congregational prayers. For some, this suggested that Muhammad had chosen Abu Baker as his successor.<sup>29</sup> Others believed that on his way back from his last hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), the Prophet stood in front of his companions and declared that Ali was the spiritual guide of all believers.<sup>30</sup>

Ali's first son, Hassan, ruled briefly as caliph before abdicating to Muawiya, his father's old nemesis.<sup>31</sup> In return for Hassan's loyalty, Muawiya agreed to return control of succession to the Muslim community upon his death. Instead, he named his son Yazid as heir to the title of Caliph, directly contradicting his agreement with Hassan. It also contradicted the Sunni principle that the position of Caliph should not be hereditary.<sup>32</sup> Ali's second son, Husayn, led the charge against members of Yazid's



*A painting depicting famous Battle of Karbala  
Flickr / harveypekar84*

army at the Battle of Karbala.<sup>10</sup> October 680 C.E. Yazid's larger force cut down Husayn and his followers. Husayn's martyrdom at Karbala solidified the ideological schism between Sunni Muslims (followers of the Prophet's words and deeds) and Shia Muslims (supporters of Ali). The battle of Karbala has become a focal point for modern Shiites, who see themselves as oppressed fighters against privilege and power. Those who recognize Ali as the first legitimate ruler after the Prophet became Shiite Muslims.<sup>33,</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Those who recognized Abu Baker as the first legitimate ruler became Sunni Muslims.



## Sufism

Sufism arose as Sunni Islam grew ever more legalistic. Sufis countered that trend by seeking direct communion with God through spiritual discipline.<sup>35</sup> Sufism is practiced by several groups that emphasize the different dimensions and rituals of their religion. Meditation, singing and dancing, and reciting prayers are expressions of Sufis worship.<sup>36, 37</sup>

Sufi Islam continues in Iraq, despite occasional periods of persecution. It has remained particularly popular among Sunni Kurds in northern Iraq.<sup>38</sup> A Sufi shrine in Baghdad attracts pilgrims from around the world.<sup>39</sup>



*Shrine of Abdul Qadir Jilani*  
Wikimedia / VrMUSLIM

Regardless of sect, all Muslims follow the five Pillars of Islam, which capture the essential beliefs and rites of the Muslim faith. The first of these is the shahada, the declaration of faith that “There is no god but God and Muhammad is God’s messenger.” The salat is the requirement to pray five times a day. Sawm is the required fast during the month of Ramadan. Zakat is the expectation that Muslims should be generous by sharing their wealth. The fifth pillar is the hajj, which requires all able Muslims to make the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives.<sup>40</sup>

## Care and Treatment of the Quran

Muslims regard the Quran as sacred. Treat Islam’s holy book with respect. Do not touch the Quran with dirty hands. Keep the Quran off the floor—if you are sitting on the floor, hold the Quran above your lap or waist. When not in use, protect the Quran with a dustcover and do not place anything on top of it. (Muslims will keep Quranic texts on the highest shelf of a bookcase.) Finally, keep Qurans out of latrines.<sup>41</sup> Old or damaged copies can be properly disposed of in one of two ways.



*Manuscript of the Qur'an*  
Wikimedia / Laurice M. Khouri

Burning is acceptable so long as the process is conducted with respect. Texts should not be burned with trash or other items. The second method of disposal is burial. Before burying the text, it should be wrapped in something pure and then buried where people do not walk.<sup>42, 43</sup>

## Minority Religions in Iraq

### *Christianity*

The Christian community in Iraq predates Islam in the region. Iraqi Christianity is perhaps more diverse than Christianity anywhere else in the world. Iraqi Christians represent all five of Christianity's major divisions: Assyrian, Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholic, and Protestant.<sup>44</sup> Thus, Christians in Iraq are not a monolithic group, and as such, suffer from a lack of group cohesion. Iraqi Christians are frequently victims of violence perpetuated by various Muslim sectarian groups.<sup>45</sup>



*A Christian Church, Erbil  
Flickr / Giorgio MonTERSINO*

### *Yazidi*

The Yazidis are a religious community found primarily in northern Iraq, among the Kurds. Their faith combines elements of the various Abrahamic religions, Zoroastrianism, and Manichaeism. They practice endogamy [marriage within a particular group] and do not proselytize.<sup>46</sup> The exact number of Yazidis in Iraq varies drastically, depending on the source, from tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands. Yazidis are frequent targets of sectarian violence.<sup>47</sup> Their main pilgrimage is to the tomb of Shaykh Adi ibn Musafir, whom the Yazidis believe to be an avatar of the angel Tawûsê Melek.<sup>48</sup> This tomb is located in the city of Lalîş.<sup>49</sup>



*Tomb of Shaykh Safi al-Din Ardabili  
Flickr / Terry Feuerborn*

## Mandaism



*Mandaean House of Worship, Nasiriyah  
Wikimedia / Aziz1005*

especially the Abrahamic faiths. Like other religious minorities, they have been persecuted.<sup>52</sup>

Determining the number of followers of Mandaism is difficult, given the persecution they have faced. Some are reluctant to self-identify, many have emigrated, and others have moved to the cities.<sup>50</sup> However, it has been estimated that the total number is between 100,000 and 140,000, with the vast majority of these living in Iraq.<sup>51</sup> Their faith is another of the various syncretic religions found throughout the Middle East, combining elements of the various traditions,

## Religion and Daily Life

In Islam, prayer is required five times daily—before dawn, mid-morning, mid-afternoon, at sundown, and after sundown.<sup>53</sup> One can pray at a mosque, at home, or in a private place in an office. Before prayer, there is a ritual cleansing of the face, hands, feet, and head, called wudu, which is performed as a fixed ritual.<sup>54</sup> Once wudu has been performed, no interruptions are permitted until after prayers are completed.<sup>55</sup> If there is an interruption, the one praying must begin the entire process again.<sup>56</sup>



*Iraqi prayers  
Flickr / Raymond Bucko, SJ*

In Iraq, religion plays a large and sometimes divisive role in daily life in many areas of the country. Formerly mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhoods in Baghdad are no longer mixed.<sup>57</sup> Many groups were purged, or driven out of neighborhoods by Shiite militias because they were on the wrong side of the divide at a given moment. Where the Shia Mahdi Army ruled, Sunnis were displaced or killed.<sup>58</sup> Shiite families who stayed in their neighborhoods had to depend on the Mahdi Army and its network

to procure living necessities. Iraqi civilians continue to fall prey to neighborhood



vigilantes or ongoing insurgent violence because of their religious affiliation.<sup>59, 60</sup>

## Religion and Gender

Iraqi governments have historically promoted secularization, yet religious traditions continued to play a role in gender specific roles and attitudes. An Islamic hadith (saying of the prophet) says, “Paradise is under the mother’s feet.” Thus, Iraqi Muslim mothers traditionally enjoy significant influence in the family, and they are often called upon to arrange marriages and mediate family disputes.<sup>61</sup> Some conservative Islamic customs continue to be practiced at home - to varying degrees - including Purdah (“screen” or “veil”). Purdah dictates that women stay “veiled” from non-related males in their home by using separate spaces, and by keeping their heads and bodies covered. Outside the home, Iraqi women generally enjoy equal status in education, and in their professional pursuits.<sup>62</sup>



*Veiled mother and daughter  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

Most Iraqi Muslim men go to the mosque at least twice a day to pray, to listen to sermons, and to discuss religious and social issues. Yet, most Iraqi women worship in private at home so they can care for their children. If a woman does choose to attend prayers in a mosque, she must worship in a separate section reserved for women.

## Religious Holidays and Celebrations

The Islamic calendar is based on phases of the moon, and the Western (Gregorian) calendar is based on solar cycles. Thus, the dates of Islamic holidays shift yearly. The Quran mentions only two celebrations: Eid-al-Fitr, or the festival on the last night of Ramadan, and Eid-al-Adha, the feast that celebrates Ibrahim’s obedience to God’s will. Both are celebrated throughout the Muslim world, often as public holidays.<sup>63</sup>



*Ashura celebrations in Baghdad  
Flickr / Salam Pax*



## Ramadan

One of the five pillars of Islam, purifying the body by fasting, *sawm*, occurs during Ramadan. This is a 30-day period of fasting from sunrise until sunset, breaking each day's fast with a large and festive family meal, called *iftar* in the evening.<sup>64</sup> Not everyone fasts. Children, the elderly, and the infirm are exempt. During Ramadan, Muslims can be more sensitive and irritable than at other times simply because of the exhausting nature of such a long fast. During daylight hours, they may not eat, drink, smoke, or engage in sexual activities. Nothing may be taken by mouth. Non-Muslims should avoid eating and drinking in public during fasting hours of the day, as such activities are seen as disrespectful and rude. They should be performed privately or in one of the few restaurants that would possibly be open for business (usually in the major hotels and cities).<sup>65</sup>



*Pre-Ramadan feast with U.S. soldiers and locals  
Flickr / The U.S. Army*

The end of Ramadan is celebrated with a huge feast called *Eid-al-Fitr*. *Eid* means “festival,” and the feast is joyously shared among family members and friends. The last ten days of Ramadan commemorate Muhammad’s first revelation from the Archangel Gabriel.<sup>66, 67</sup> After the fast is broken (normally following sunset), life goes back to normal and a person is free to eat and drink publicly.

## Ashura

Ashura is a prominent Shia holiday that continues for several days during which many people mourn the martyrdom of Husayn, often with great passion.

▶ What is this procession all about?		
Visitor:	What is this procession all about?	shinu hal-mawkeb?
Local:	Today is Ashura, the day of Imam Husayn’s martyrdom.	El-yom ashura maqtel al ImamHusayn
Visitor:	Thank you.	shukran

*Exchange 1*

## Buildings of Worship

► Would you permit me to enter the mosque?

Visitor:	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?	tismaH-li afout bil-masjid?
Local:	No. It is only for Muslims.	la bas lil-muslimeen

Exchange 2

### Mosques

Mosques have an important, often multidimensional function. They provide Muslims a place where they can perform their daily individual prayers, as well as the weekly communal noon prayers each Friday.<sup>68</sup> Mosques can also function as religious community centers, youth centers, meeting halls, and training facilities. In addition to a main prayer hall, called a musalla, some mosques have courtyards, classrooms, offices, and special washrooms for the ritual cleansing before prayer.<sup>69</sup> The back wall of the musalla hall is called the qibla. Centered on this wall is a small niche called a mihrab that worshippers face when they pray. It marks the direction toward Mecca.<sup>70</sup> Off to one side of the mihrab there is usually a pulpit, called a minbar, for the prayer leader to use during the service. The musalla, which provides extra space for prayer, also usually has either a balcony or an adjoining prayer room where an overflow crowd can pray. Women may sometimes pray in one of its separate, partitioned areas.<sup>71, 72</sup>



Um Al-Tubol mosque, Baghdad  
Flickr / Jeff Werner

### Shrines

A shrine can be as simple as a small stone marker, or, it can be as elaborate as the golden-domed al-Askariya Shrine in Samarra. This historic structure contains the tombs of the 10th and 11th Shiite Imams and marks the location where the 12th Imam was last seen before he disappeared.<sup>73</sup> Most of this elaborate shrine



Entrance to Imam Ali Mosque in Najaf  
Flickr / PBS NewsHour

was destroyed in bombing incidents. Moving south, the Iraqi cities of Najaf and Karbala contain two of Shia Islam's most historically significant shrines.<sup>74</sup> Najaf, located 190 km (120 mi) south of Baghdad, is the site of Imam Ali's tomb. Karbala 80 km (50 mi) south of Baghdad, is the site of Imam Husayn's tomb. Sunni and Shiite Iraqis combined their efforts, providing both labor and police security for Iraq's shrines.<sup>75, 76, 77</sup>

## Churches

Church buildings in Iraq vary in size and architecture depending on when they were built and which branch of Christianity built them. Roman Catholic and Eastern Rite Catholic (Orthodox) church buildings tend to be the most ornate and complex.<sup>78, 79</sup>

Protestant churches in Iraq can either be large and ornate in appearance, or small and inconspicuous. In some cases, Protestant churches meet in functional multi-purpose buildings that do not always resemble churches.<sup>80</sup>



*Chaldean cathedral church of Mary Mother of Sorrows, Baghdad*  
Wikimedia / Aziz1005

## Behavior in Buildings of Worship

### Mosque Etiquette

The dress code for visiting a mosque requires modesty and dignity. Clothing should always be loose fitting. As a rule of thumb, the more rural the region, the more one should be covered. Females must cover their heads with a scarf, and wear a long-sleeved shirt or blouse, and a skirt long enough to cover the knees. While it is not necessary for males to cover their heads, it is a good idea to wear a long-sleeved shirt. Both men and women should remove their shoes and leave them in a storage area at the entrance.<sup>81, 82</sup>



*Inside the shrine in Najaf*  
Flickr / PBS NewsHour

Once inside the mosque, there are certain things that non-Muslims should not touch, including books or walls (especially the western corner where people direct their prayers). Some mosques also have a shrine that should not be touched. Do not speak unless you are spoken to, and even then, speak in a whisper. Do not interrupt or walk in front of anyone who is praying. This invalidates their prayer and it will upset the worshipper. These rules apply in all situations where someone is praying, whether inside or outside the mosque.<sup>83, 84</sup>

▶ Would you permit me to enter the mosque?		
Visitor:	Would you permit me to enter the mosque?	tismaH-li afout bil-masjid?
Local:	Yes, but you must remove your shoes.	eh, bas lazem tinza' Hida-ak
Visitor:	Thank you	shukran

*Exchange 3*

In a Shiite mosque, you will see large banners printed on a black or green background. These banners may have personal messages of mourning or lamentations for a recently departed person. Do not touch or remove these banners. You will also find flags that will probably be green, perhaps with an Arabic slogan. Leave these alone as well.<sup>85</sup>

As you enter one of the major Shiite mosques, a man may offer you a drink of water from a cup that many others have already used. On the one hand, you do not want to risk illness by putting your lips on this cup; on the other hand, you do not want to insult the man and this tradition of kindness.<sup>86</sup> Accept the cup of water without drinking it, say shukran (thank you), and return the cup to the man. This shows respect.<sup>87</sup>

▶ Remember Husayn		
Visitor:	Drink water and remember Husayn.	ishrab my wuDh-kur il-Husayn
Local:	Thank you.	shukran

*Exchange 4*



## Church Etiquette

The dress code for visiting an Eastern Orthodox Church (Eastern Rite Catholic Church) requires modesty and decorum.<sup>88</sup> Males should wear modest casual business attire and remove their hats before entering the church. Females should wear modest clothing that covers their arms and chest.<sup>89</sup> Although wearing a scarf is not required, it is a good idea and shows respect for Orthodox customs. In some cases, you will see local women wearing long flowing skirts and white or black headscarves, reminiscent of Muslim attire.<sup>90</sup> Depending on the denomination, women might also put on a veil before receiving communion.



*Assyrian children near statue of Holy Virgin Mary  
Flickr / Christiaan Triebert*

When entering an Orthodox church, you should enter quietly and respectfully. Try to arrive before Mass begins. If you arrive after services starts, you should enter quietly so you do not disturb others or interrupt the service.<sup>91</sup> Additionally, do not enter the main part of the Church (nave) during the reading of the Gospel, the sermon, the Creed, or the consecration prayers if you arrive late.<sup>92</sup>

Once inside, visitors are often confused to see worshippers venerating icons. It is important that visitors do not stand in front of icons or block them from people performing acts of veneration.<sup>93</sup> To do so is disrespectful and it will upset worshippers. Veneration (respectful adoration) is carried out by facing the icon, making the sign of the cross, prostrating, and then kissing the icon.<sup>94</sup> In traditional churches, the first icon to be venerated is located on a stand at the entrance to the nave (main part of the church), followed by an icon of Christ to the right of the iconostasis.<sup>95</sup> After that, any other icons accessible on the right side of the church are venerated in the same way. There are also a number of icons in the rear and to the left side of the church, which are recognized last.<sup>96</sup>

During Mass, visitors should refrain from crossing their legs. It is considered disrespectful and inappropriate during prayer and worship in the Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>97, 98</sup>



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# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 2 | Religion

### Assessment

1. Of Iraq's estimated 29 million people, nearly 97% identify as Muslim.
2. Iraq is home to some of the most important sites in Islamic history.
3. Sunni Islam has a highly centralized leadership and it has played only a limited role in the development of the region's legal, political, and economic systems.
4. Baathism is a syncretic religion found predominantly among the Kurds of northern Iraq.
5. Both Sunnis and Shiites agree on Islam's fundamental principles and share the same holy book (Quran).

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True*



*Passing Lion Babylon, Brick Panel  
Wikimedia / Jastrow*

## Chapter 3 | Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Traditions

## Introduction

The Iraqi people have a long history that is both Islamic and Arab. It possesses a rich cultural diversity that includes the nomadic tribes of the arid south and west, the peasant farmers of central Iraq, the Marsh Arabs of the south, the farmers of the northeast, and the Kurds in the north.<sup>1</sup> This diversity has created a mosaic of cultural features that are different from region to region. Such cultural differences are further reinforced by ethno-religious variations between Iraqi Kurds and Arabs, as well as the divisions between Sunnis and Shiites, and minority ethno-religious groups.<sup>2</sup> Although these divisions are less pronounced than in the early 20th century, they remain quite strong.<sup>3</sup>

## Honor and Values

Iraqis place great importance on family, and value hard work and a good education. Although Iraqis have suffered through economic sanctions and years of war, they remain friendly and hospitable.<sup>4</sup> Visitors often notice the complexity of an individual Iraqi's identity, which is based on affiliations with religious groups, ethnic groups, and tribe. Nevertheless, many Iraqis remain strongly invested in national honor, which stems from their unique Arab-Islamic and Mesopotamian histories.<sup>5</sup>



*Iraqi Family  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

The Iraqi extended family is the tribe, which is both a political and social institution.<sup>6</sup> Families have a very strong sense of maintaining their honor, and hold family members responsible of their behavior since even perceived wrongdoing brings shame on the entire family. In this context, loyalty to family and tribe come before all other relationships.<sup>7</sup> Iraqis consider it a violation of family or tribal honor to embarrass someone. There is a famous Arab saying, "It's me against my brother; it's me and my brother against my cousin; it's me, my brother, and my cousin against the world."<sup>8</sup> This illustrates the complexity of relationships in Iraq, and why serious cases of perceived dishonor, especially public shame, can result in murder.<sup>9</sup> Often, families and tribes will exert control over the behavior of others by threatening to shame them.<sup>10, 11 12</sup>

## Codes of Politeness

Iraqis typically greet foreigners with a smile and a firm handshake while making direct eye contact. Iraqis may consider it evasive or rude to break eye contact too soon.<sup>13</sup> Iraqis always use their right hand to shake hands, followed by touching their right hand to their heart. This indicates the handshake is from the heart and not a test of strength. When greeting women, Iraqi men will wait for a woman to extend



*Hand shake in Basra  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

her hand first. Religiously conservative Iraqis consider it taboo to have any contact with the opposite sex.<sup>14</sup>

Iraqis typically greet others in public places, even if they do not know them.<sup>15</sup> The typical Iraqi greeting is As-salamu alaykum (May peace be upon you). The proper answer to this greeting is wa alaykum as-salam, meaning “And upon you be peace.” Younger Iraqis might greet others with an informal Marhaba (Hi), and a wave.<sup>16</sup>

Iraqis consider it essential to address others formally when no prior introductions have taken place.<sup>17</sup> To communicate respect, Iraqis place abu (father of) before a man’s first name, followed by the name of his oldest son. Likewise, um (mother of) is placed before a woman’s first name, followed by the name of her oldest son.<sup>18</sup> If an Iraqi has no sons, he or she is addressed in the same way using the name of the oldest daughter.<sup>19</sup>

## Gestures

Iraqis readily use gestures to communicate. To signal “patience” and “slow down,” they will hold their right hand out with the palm up and with fingertips touching. They will then slightly move their hand up and down and slightly tilt their head down.<sup>20</sup>



*Interviewing a woman at the Shrine, Najaf  
Flickr / PBS NewsHour*

Iraqis signal “yes” in the same way Americans do, by nodding. However, Iraqis have different signals for “no” or “don’t.” For example, Iraqis will lift their chin up and head back while making a clicking sound with their tongue, as in “tsk, tsk”; sometimes they will wave the open palm of their right hand from right to left while facing the person; or, they will tilt their head slightly back and raise their eyebrows.<sup>21</sup>



## Male–Female Interaction

Following the 1958 revolution, Iraqis, the revolutionary government introduced the Personal Status Code (the Code), which gave women equal rights.<sup>22</sup> This code was mainly developed from Sunni and Shiite interpretations of both Sharia and Baathism. This ensured that women were granted greater rights in areas of inheritance and polygamy. Following the Baath party coup in 1963, however, the Code was amended and women's rights were once again under attack.<sup>23</sup> By the



*Iraqi women, market street, Eastern Baghdad*  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB

1970s, the Iraqi government passed a new constitution that formalized equality for women through the addition of a non-discrimination clause.<sup>24</sup> Yet, underlying this apparent equality were Iraq's strong patriarchal and conservative values, which are experiencing a revival. This is partly due to Iraq's a new constitution, which is based on both European Civil Law and Islamic Law. Accordingly, women are no longer guaranteed equality and non-discrimination, and Iraqi men are more likely to view women as wives and mothers, rather than as friends and equals.<sup>25, 26</sup>

These patriarchal values are conveyed in Iraq through Purdah (segregation and seclusion).<sup>27</sup> Interactions between unrelated men and women typically occur in universities and in the workplace only. Iraqi women continue to bear primary responsibility for care of the family and home, and women's opportunities tend to be extensions of family-care positions. In the areas of marriage and divorce, women are relegated to subordinate positions.<sup>28</sup> Iraqis do not date, and couples do not appear alone in public unless legally engaged or married.

Certain prohibitions further restrict interactions between men and women. Iraqi women of all faiths do not marry outside their religion, and rarely marry outside their extended family or tribe; they seldom marry foreigners.<sup>29</sup> A man will not approach or address a female he passes on the street unless the woman is a relative, or unless he was previously introduced to her.<sup>30</sup> To do so will often lead to speculation that the female has dishonored her family. The consequences can be fatal. Staring at a female in Iraq also carries serious consequences for all involved.<sup>31, 32</sup>

Generally, Iraqi men will not speak to a non-related woman unless a male family member accompanies her.<sup>33</sup>

Iraqi men do not ask another man direct questions about the females in his family. Instead, they will ask, “How is your family?” Only a female is free to ask about the females in a family.

▶ How are you, how’s the family?		
Visitor:	How are you, how’s the family?	shlonak, shlon al-ahel?
Local:	Thanks be to God, they are fine, thank you.	al-Hamdu lillah, zayneen, shukran
Visitor:	Thanks be to God.	al-Hamdu lillah

*Exchange 5*

It is also customary for Iraqi men to sit in the front seat of a taxi or other vehicle. Generally, the backseat of a vehicle is reserved for women and children.

▶ Please climb aboard.		
Visitor:	Please climb aboard.	tfaDhal iSad
Local:	No, please, after you.	la, tfaDhal inta al-awwal

*Exchange 6*

## Hospitality and Gift Giving

### *Table Manners*

Iraqi’s are gracious and generous hosts who generally offer an abundance of food and hot beverages. Guests should always leave something on their plates as an indication they have eaten well.<sup>34</sup> If guests clean their plates, it may signify to the host that they did not get enough to eat. All meals end with the host serving dark sweet tea. Guests should signal that they do not want a second cup by putting their right hand, palm down, over the top of the cup.<sup>35</sup>

▶ Please, do drink tea.		
Visitor:	Please, do drink tea.	tfaDhal ishrab chay
Local:	Thank you.	Shukran

*Exchange 7*

## Gift-Giving

Visitors to Iraqi homes should bring a fruit basket or a box of cookies, pastries, or chocolates. Flowers are another option, but are only given to the hostess. In such cases, a male visitor should say that it is from his wife, mother, sister, or other female relative.<sup>36</sup> Do not give any gift that contains alcohol, in any form.



*Dade cookies, Baghdad  
Flickr / ainudil*

Admiring or complimenting an Iraqi's possessions means that he or she will insist the admirer take it.<sup>37</sup> However, it is expected that the admirer will ultimately refuse. This can go back and forth for some time, with each party claiming the more virtuous position. Yet in the end, the item is not taken.<sup>38</sup> This type of behavior is common through Iraqi culture, and is a way to demonstrate that one is generous beyond one's means.<sup>39</sup>

Your shirt is nice.		
Visitor:	Your shirt is nice.	gameesak Helu
Local:	Please accept it, it's yours.	iqbal, bil-urDha
Visitor:	No, thank you, it's yours.	la, shukran, mabrouk 'alayk

*Exchange 8*

## Exchanging Gifts

Iraqis will use two hands to give someone a gift, and never hand something to someone with the left hand only. The recipient will generally not open their gift in front of the giver.<sup>40</sup>

▶ This is for you.		
Local:	This is for you.	tfaDhal
Visitor:	You shouldn't have!	shinu ha alzzaH-ma
Local:	It's just a little thing.	fad shee baSeet
Visitor:	Thank you.	shukran

*Exchange 9*

## Sharing

Offering to share is standard in Iraqi culture.<sup>41</sup> Iraqis are very generous, and they will typically offer to share their food with others. Such offers are refused at first, but after several rounds of refusal, the person will often smile and accept.<sup>42</sup>

Please have some.		
Visitor:	Please have some.	tfaDhal!
Local:	No thanks.	la, shukran
Visitor:	Please have some, you have to eat some!	tfaDhal, lazem ta-kul!
Local:	Thank you very much.	zayn shukran

*Exchange 10*

## Eating Customs and Types of Food

### *Eating Customs and Etiquette*

Iraqis eat three meals a day. Breakfast (riyuq) is usually eaten between 6:00 and 7:30 a.m. It always includes tea and bread, which is enjoyed with butter, jam, honey, cheeses, lebbna (yogurt with olive oil), date molasses, and tahini (sesame paste).<sup>43</sup> Other breakfast favorites include pastries filled with dates, omelets and other egg dishes, candied oranges, chicken, kebab (grilled ground lamb meat), tikka (skewered pieces of lamb), leban arbil (yogurt drink), various soups, bananas, and melons.<sup>44</sup> Many Iraqis eat a snack later in the morning.<sup>45</sup> Lunch (ghada) is served in the afternoon around 2 p.m. Traditionally, it is considered the most important meal of the day. The evening meal (asha), is served around 7 or 8 pm.<sup>46</sup> The first course of the main meal may be appetizers and salads (mezza), which includes zalata (salad made from tomatoes, cucumbers, mint, vinegar, olive oil and seasonings), turshi (pickled vegetables). The main course generally includes lamb, goat, or chicken. Many people are fond of the well-known masgouf, a traditional dish of seasoned grilled carp that is sprinkled with lemon, covered with a layer of diced ripe tomatoes, salt, and pepper, and finished off under a broiler until the tomatoes are hot. Masgouf is considered Iraq's national dish.<sup>47, 48</sup>



*Slicing Shawarma in a restaurant  
Flickr / Marco Gomes*



## Meals and Food

Being invited into an Iraqi home is a great honor, and no invitation should be turned down for food, tea, coffee, or socializing in an Iraqi home. Guests should acknowledge this by being on time and displaying good manners. Dress should be conservative and somewhat formal in order to show respect for the host.<sup>49</sup> Guests should remove their shoes before entering the home. Hosts are required by custom to cook a meal for visitors. Thus, visiting usually takes place after mealtime, unless a meal has been prearranged.<sup>50</sup>



*Family dinner table in Erbil  
Flickr / Robin Jakobsson*

Iraqis often sit cross-legged on the floor around a communal platter, or kneel on one knee, never letting their feet touch the food mat. Some Iraqis have adopted the use of dining tables, individual plates, and utensils.<sup>51</sup> Males are typically served first when visitors are present during mealtime. In such cases, females eat afterwards in a separate room.<sup>52</sup> At the end of the meal, guests should always leave something on their plates as an indication they have eaten well. If guests clean their plates, it may signify to the host that they did not get enough to eat.<sup>53</sup>

## Dress Code

Urban Iraqis wear contemporary European clothing and appear neat and well dressed in public. For some Iraqi women, wearing the latest fashions is important.<sup>54</sup> Iraqi dress is normally conservative.<sup>55, 56, 57</sup> Appropriate business attire includes suits for men and women. Women's blouses worn under suits should have a high neckline, and jewelry should be modest. Dress shoes should be well polished. In urban areas, formal business attire is worn for meetings and official events. For casual wear, urban men will often wear anything from shirts and slacks to t-shirts and jeans.<sup>58</sup>



*An Iraqi man wearing Kaffiyeh  
Flickr / Global Panorama*

In rural areas, men will often wear a kaffiyeh (checkered headscarf) and a thobe (an ankle length garment). The kaffiyeh covers the head and is a square piece of cloth, folded diagonally. It is usually made of cotton and is held around the head with an agal (braided headband). Summer thobes are typically white and are made of cotton, while winter thobes are brightly colored and made of wool.<sup>59</sup>

Iraqi Shiite women traditionally wear an abaya (black cloak), while Sunni women wear loose fitting garments and a headscarf (hijab).<sup>60</sup>

## Non-Religious Celebrations

Several celebrations and holidays take place throughout Iraq. New Year's Day (1 January) and Labor Day (1 May) are national holidays. Army Day is 6 January, but is not celebrated as a public holiday. Republic Day is 14 July, and marks the date in 1958 when Iraq's King Faisal II was overthrown and killed in an Army coup d'état.<sup>61, 62</sup>



*Newroz Celebrations, Northern Iraq  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

On the first day of spring (usually 21 March) the Kurds and many Iraqis celebrate Nowruz (also Noruz), which is also celebrated in Iran and countries throughout Central Asia and the Caucasus. It represents rebirth at the beginning of a new year, and is celebrated with singing and dancing, parades, picnics, and poetry recitals. People express their wishes to each other for good health, prosperity, and happiness in the year ahead. Nowruz marks the beginning of the Kurdish calendar year.<sup>63, 64</sup>

Iraqis often celebrate a wide variety of events and occasions by firing rifles in the air. These events and occasions include returning from hajj (pilgrimage to Mecca), funerals, weddings, the birth of a baby, or the arrival of a family member after a long absence.<sup>65, 66</sup>

### ▶ What is all this firing about?

Visitor:	What is all this firing about?	shinu hal-Talqaat?
Local:	We have a wedding going on.	'eedna zaffa

*Exchange 11*

## Do's and Don'ts

### *Do's*

- Do remove your shoes before you enter a private home, temple, or mosque.
- Do wear a headscarf (women) before entering a Mosque or an Orthodox Church.
- Do use your entire right hand only to summon a person. Keep your palm down and wave downward.
- Do show respect in appearance, demeanor, and behavior when visiting a mosque or other place of worship.
- Do bring an appropriate gift to your host.
- Do leave some food on your plate when you are a guest and you are done eating.

### *Don'ts*

- Don't show the soles of your shoes in public.
- Don't stare at or engage in overt expressions of affection with the opposite sex.
- Don't use the Western way of beckoning with one finger. It is very offensive.
- Don't point to anyone with a finger; use the whole right hand instead.
- Don't make the American OK sign; it is considered highly offensive.
- Don't talk with an Iraqi with your hands in your pockets, not even one hand.
- Don't cross your legs when sitting in a chair or show the bottom of your feet to anyone.

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# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 3 | Traditions

### Assessment

1. Iraqis have suffered through economic sanctions and years of war, so they remain cautious and guarded around visitors.
2. Iraqis typically greet others in public places, even if they do not know one another.
3. Iraqis do not date, and couples do not appear together in public unless legally engaged or married.
4. So long as Iraqi men don't talk to women, they may ask other men direct questions about the females in their families.
5. Invitation to an Iraqi home is a rarity.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False*



*Children Crossing a Flooded Road  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

## Chapter 4 | Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Urban Life

## Introduction

In 2015, 69.5% of Iraq's population was urban, reflecting the trend toward urbanization over several decades.<sup>1</sup> During the oil boom of the 1970s, unemployment in rural areas impelled people to move to the cities. Significant migration also occurred during and after the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988.<sup>2, 3</sup> When rural tribal families of peasants, shopkeepers, small traders, and artisans migrated to Iraqi cities, they tended to congregate with others from their own villages or tribes. Many sold handicrafts from single-proprietor stores. The majority worked for wages in the service industry or as unskilled laborers or construction workers. This migration created urban areas loyal to a particular tribe or village.<sup>4</sup>



The post-Saddam Hussein insurgency further divided Iraqis along sectarian and ethnic lines. Daily life in Iraq today is precarious as locals deal with violence, particularly in northern and central Iraq. Iraqis who once enjoyed one of the highest standards of living in the Middle East, and then suffered the humanitarian crisis that followed the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, are now making modest progress toward rebuilding their lives.<sup>5</sup> However, millions of Iraqis still have no access to clean water and healthcare and are dependent on food assistance. Children and the displaced, who make up nearly half of the population, are particularly at risk.<sup>6</sup> Many displaced Iraqis have taken shelter in places with no jobs and limited public services.<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere, corruption and inefficiency have left millions of Iraqis with no access to electricity.<sup>8</sup> Violence, inefficiency, and corruption hamper humanitarian aid and create obstacles to ongoing reconstruction projects.<sup>9, 10</sup>

## Urban Issues

Unemployment remains high in Iraq, varying by region and age. The most recent official figures indicate a 12-18% unemployment rate, but unofficial sources estimate a rate as high as 30%.<sup>11, 12</sup> Unemployment and underemployment is greater in urban centers than in rural areas, and much higher among youths than it is among the population as a whole.<sup>13</sup> In 2005, unemployment estimates were much higher, at 30-60%, owing in part to the security situation and the number of returning Iraqis who were also seeking jobs.<sup>14</sup> In 2005, public sector job cuts reduced the number of jobs in Iraq by half, but U.S. and Iraqi government authorities opened new training centers within the same year to alleviate unemployment. The figure has since fluctuated.<sup>15, 16</sup>



*Application Day for Iraqi Police  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

Iraq's economy has been damaged in numerous ways, resulting in high unemployment and underemployment. The reasons include the Iran-Iraq War of the 1980s; the long-term international sanctions that followed Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1991; and the subsequent Persian Gulf War, in which nearly 90% of Iraq's power-generating capacity and systems of distribution were destroyed.<sup>17</sup> Aside from the wars, Iraq's development was impeded by U.N. sanctions after the Persian Gulf War. The result was an economy characterized by illegal activity in the public sector, and manufacturing that was neither diversified nor modernized.<sup>18, 19</sup>

## Reconstruction Efforts

Following the 2003 invasion of Iraq by U.S.-led coalition forces, a special International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) was created to support the country's reconstruction and development.<sup>20</sup> IRFFI funded increasing oil production as well as security and training programs. This shift of funds to non-infrastructure projects was a response to changing circumstances on the ground, seen in the development of an insurgent movement.<sup>21</sup>



*Town leader and U.S. Army  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

As a result of high unemployment in Iraq during reconstruction efforts, insurgents began offering employment to people with no income.<sup>22</sup> This served to strengthen the insurgency. To halt this practice, the U.S. military developed stronger working ties with tribal sheiks.<sup>23</sup> Iraq's tribal sheiks, have led the people in the region for centuries, have strong influence with locals, and have an interest in bolstering their own business interests by achieving a stable economy.<sup>24</sup> Working through them helped to stabilize the population, led to more jobs, and enhanced security.<sup>25</sup>

## Healthcare

### Pre-2003

Once considered the best medical facilities in the region, Iraqi hospitals and clinics are now unable to provide quality medical care.<sup>26, 27</sup> After 1991, Saddam Hussein reduced expenditures for healthcare services by 90%.<sup>28</sup> The U.S. invasion of 2003, and its aftermath, destroyed approximately 12% of Iraq's hospitals and both of the country's major medical laboratories.<sup>29</sup>



*An Iraqi doctor examining three year old girl  
Wikimedia / Debbie Morello*

## Post-2003

Seven years after the U.S. invasion, Iraq's healthcare system is still recovering from the damage. There have been improvements in certain areas and, overall, Iraqis can move about more safely and access healthcare more easily.<sup>30</sup> However, Iraq still faces a number of medical challenges, among which are a shortage of qualified personnel, dilapidated facilities, lack of proper equipment, and shortages of potable water and supplies of electricity. According to the International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC), in 2008 there were 16,000 doctors and 17,000 nurses in Iraq. By contrast, during the 1990s there were 34,000 physicians in Iraq.<sup>31</sup> As a consequence of the physician shortage, many Iraqis rely on nurses for most of their medical care.<sup>32</sup>



*An Iraqi nurse checking chart for pre-mature baby  
Flickr / James*

In general, healthcare services and access to them are better in urban areas than in the countryside. Most services provided by clinics and hospitals are free, except for afternoon consultations at low-cost, semi-public health clinics. Some Iraqis pay out-of-pocket expenses for private medical care.<sup>33</sup> The state-owned pharmaceutical and medical appliance companies provide government-subsidized products, which are helpful as there is no public or private health insurance. Only a few small health insurance programs exist for employees of specific companies.<sup>34</sup> Generally, the pharmaceutical industry has been in decline for two decades due to government policies, international sanctions, and wars.<sup>35</sup> The focus of U.S. and international aid agencies, together with the Iraqi Ministry of Health, has been on improving and rebuilding healthcare facilities. This includes addressing shortages of medical supplies, drugs, and equipment. One notable success has been the immunization program.<sup>36</sup> In the first year after the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom, 30 million doses of children's vaccinations were reportedly distributed.<sup>37</sup> By 2008, approximately 98% of all Iraqi children under the age of five had been immunized against polio, and more than 90% of one-year olds immunized against tuberculosis.<sup>38</sup> However, these numbers have fallen in recent years because of the country's ongoing insurgency and security issues. As of 2012, the last year these numbers were tracked, only 70% of one-year olds had been immunized against polio.<sup>39</sup>

## Drinking Water



*Tigris River*  
Flickr / Mike Reeder

The Tigris and the Euphrates were once the main sources of water in Iraq. However, the water levels have been falling and they are no longer reliable sources of safe drinking water.<sup>40</sup> Population growth and displacement have also strained this scarce resource. Presently, about half of Iraqis lack safe drinking water.<sup>41</sup> Underpowered water and sewage pumping facilities and inadequate water distribution systems lead to contamination. Lack of access to safe water sources can lead to diseases.<sup>42</sup>

Between 2006 and 2007, the United Nations reported a 70% increase in the number of cases of diarrhea among children and a 50% increase among adults.<sup>43</sup> In June 2015, the World Health Organization estimated that millions of internally displaced people in Iraq are at risk of contracting waterborne and other communicable diseases.<sup>44</sup>

## Education

Iraq's educational system, once the pride of the Middle East, has deteriorated. In prior decades, schools were mainly secular.<sup>45</sup> The country's major assets were its well-educated populace and a high literacy rate for women. In 1982, UNESCO presented Iraq with an award for eliminating illiteracy.<sup>46</sup> Over the past 20 years, however, economic sanctions, wars, and misdirected funds have affected the country's educational system.<sup>47, 48</sup> By 2003, it was estimated that 80 percent of Iraq's 15,000 school buildings lacked basic sanitary facilities, and most did not have libraries or laboratories.<sup>49</sup> Because of unstable conditions, the present curriculum does not prepare students well for the labor market and is in need of modernization.<sup>50</sup>



*Huda girls waiting for reopening of school*  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB

A lack of security from violence is another obstacle to education. According to the Ministry of Education, 259 academics have been assassinated, 72 abducted and 174 detained between 2003 and 2008.<sup>51</sup> Between 2005-2007, the Ministry of Human Rights



reported that hundreds of students had been targeted and killed by militants.<sup>52</sup> In 2015, close to 2 million Iraqi children were estimated to have dropped out of school because of the ongoing conflict with insurgents.<sup>53</sup> This has put the country at risk of losing an entire generation of children to violence and conflict.

## Restaurants and the Marketplace

### Restaurants

Dining out is an Iraqi tradition that is at once enjoyable and daunting due to the frequency with which bombers target restaurants.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, Iraq's restaurants feature a range of offerings, including international cuisines and eating styles. Local restaurants usually offer traditional food such as kebabs (ground meat, skewered and grilled). Typical drinks include sweet tea (shay), and qahwa Arabiya (Arab coffee), as well as fruit juices and soft drinks.<sup>55</sup>



*Kebabs at the restaurant in Baghdad  
Flickr / ainudil*

▶ Please, have some.		
Iraqi:	Please, have some.	tfaDhal
Visitor:	Thank you.	shukran

*Exchange 12*

Iraq has a variety of eating establishments. The cafe (kahwa) generally has cheaper fare that sometimes includes pastries, although light meals are occasionally available. Finding a good bar is surprisingly easy in the Kurdistan region. Baghdad used to have a robust nightlife, which included clubs and bars. Yet in recent years, owners and patrons alike have faced violence at the hands of government forces “cleaning up” Iraq’s neighborhoods.<sup>56</sup> This has driven Baghdad’s bars and nightclubs underground.<sup>57</sup>

Iraqi’s are very generous, and they do not request separate checks when paying restaurant bills; rather, the one who invites others to dinner pays for everything, even if it is a financial hardship.<sup>58</sup> The general rate for tipping is between 10 and 15 percent.

## Marketplace

Iraq has a wide variety of shops and stores, ranging from large 24-hour shopping malls offering Western goods and brands, to smaller traditional Iraq-style shops that operate with smaller inventories.<sup>59</sup> Kiosks also operate and sell a limited selection of goods of variable quality. Souks (markets) in Iraq are specialized markets. Thus, there are gold souks, book souks, rug souks, produce souks, meat souks, and others that sell only one kind of product.<sup>60</sup> For the most part, prices in Iraq's markets are not fixed, and bargaining is expected.<sup>61</sup>



*Bookseller market on Mutanabi Street  
Flickr / PBS NewsHour*

### ► Buy some baklava?

Iraqi:	Buy some baklava? It's very delicious!	tishtari baqlawa? kulish Tayeba!
Visitor:	Thank you, it sure looks great, but I am on duty and am not allowed to eat.	shukran, akeed Tayeba, bas ani bil-wajeb, mamnu' akul

*Exchange 13*

Iraqis receive a monthly food ration that does not include meat or vegetables. Thus, many Iraqis buy meat and vegetables from a produce or meat souk. Yet, as of 2015, a lack of funds has forced the World Food Programme (WFP) to cut food parcels in half for almost one million displaced Iraqi families, and food vouchers from USD 26 to US 16.<sup>62</sup>

Unfortunately, souks have become frequent targets of bombings, placing a serious economic strain on small shop owners.<sup>63</sup> Goods have become more difficult to acquire in cities like Baghdad. In addition, increasing security costs and wholesale price inflation have forced vendors to pass these costs along to shoppers, or to absorb costs and reduce profit margins.<sup>64</sup>

## Money and ATMs

The Iraqi Dinar (IQD) became legal tender in January 2004 after a three-month exchange period.<sup>65</sup> In contrast to the cheaply printed Saddam dinars, the NID are made of higher-quality paper and are more difficult to counterfeit.<sup>66</sup> In 2014, the IQD had an average conversion rate of USD 1160 to IQD 1.<sup>67</sup> ATMs are few and existing ATMs

are not dependable, so it is advisable to use banks when exchanging money.<sup>68</sup>

## Transportation and Traffic

Iraq's diverse transportation system includes railroads, an extensive road network, and airports.<sup>69</sup> In rural, mountainous and desert regions, populations still depend on camels, donkeys and horses.<sup>70</sup>

### Cars

Privately owned cars in Iraq are rare. Nevertheless, it is possible to rent a car in Baghdad, and they are generally found at airports.<sup>71</sup> Still, driving in Iraq is dangerous because of serious security threats, especially at night. Daytime travel is somewhat safer, but only when travelling in convoys. It is best to avoid travelling alone at any time of the day.<sup>72</sup>



*Traffic checkpoint  
Flickr / michael loadenthal*

Military checkpoints also abound, and if stopped it is best to follow all instructions given by the authorities. For these reasons, most Iraqis travel by bus or taxi and avoid travelling by night. Railways connect Baghdad to other major cities, but their rolling stock is old and unreliable.<sup>73</sup>

▶ Please give way.		
Visitor:	Please give way.	raja-an inTee Tareeq
Local:	Please pull over.	raja-an waKher sayyartak
Visitor:	Please let the military vehicle pass.	raja-an Khalee al-sayyarat al-skariya tfout

*Exchange 14*

### Taxis

Shared taxis are the safest and most common form of public transportation in Iraq, especially in large cities like Baghdad.<sup>74</sup> Shared taxi service within city limits is cheap and easy to find, but traveling between cities can be expensive. Shared taxis do not have set rates or meters, so it is best to negotiate price before getting into the cab.<sup>75</sup> Fares

usually depend on the distance covered, but the cost is negotiable. Some shared taxi companies hire English-speaking drivers and mainly service the airport-downtown route. It is possible to hire a private taxi in some of the larger cities, but this can be dangerous because of the ongoing threat of kidnapping and violence.<sup>76</sup>

### *Buses and Trains*

Bus transportation is available between Baghdad and its suburbs. City buses run irregularly and frequently change routes. Long-distance buses are available between Baghdad and other cities, but they are poorly maintained and they often drive at unsafe speeds.<sup>77</sup> In Iraq's northern Kurdistan region, bus service is also available between cities, but it is irregular.

Train service across the nation continues to be unreliable due to aging infrastructure.<sup>78</sup> As of 2013, plans had been drawn up to modernize the railways and stations. Iraq's Ministry of Transportation has continued work on the railways through 2015, despite ongoing threats posed by insurgents and recent spending reductions.<sup>79, 80</sup>

## Street Crimes and Solicitations

### *Urban Crime*

In Iraqi cities, crime—often linked to poverty—is widespread. Westerners are frequent victims of theft, physical assault, kidnapping and violence.<sup>81</sup> Pickpocketing, often perpetrated by young children, is a commonly reported crime.<sup>82</sup> It may occur in crowded areas such as train and bus stations, and markets. Criminals and insurgents may impersonate police officers, uniformed military personnel or taxi drivers to deceive their prey.<sup>83</sup>



*Taxis, Erbil Citadel  
Flickr / David Stanley*



*Iraqi police officers in training  
Flickr / The U.S. Army*



## *Beggars*

Begging is legal in Iraq as long as its practitioners do not harass anyone. Many beggars live and work in Iraq's cities. They may be people from poor, rural areas who have moved to the cities in search of jobs; many have not found work and have resorted to begging.<sup>84, 85</sup> In some cases, beggars are “professionals” or members of organized crime gangs. Beggars often include among their ranks women and children. It is illegal in Iraq to involve minors in begging.<sup>86</sup>



*Poor family, Arbil  
Flickr / Anne Dirkse*

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# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 4 | Urban Life

### Assessment

1. In 2015, 69.5% of Iraq's total population was rural, reflecting the decades old trend of moving out of cities.
2. Iraq's economy has been damaged in numerous ways, resulting in high unemployment and underemployment.
3. Seven years after the U.S. invasion, Iraq's health care system has been completely updated and it delivers quality care to people across the country.
4. The Tigris and the Euphrates are the main sources of water in Iraq.
5. Iraq's educational system, once the pride of the Middle East, has deteriorated.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True*





*Boy riding a donkey in Mosul  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

## Chapter 5 | Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Rural Life

## Introduction

Iraq has experienced a dramatic shift from a predominately rural country to an urban one. Thousands of small villages have disappeared in areas infiltrated by ISIL. Almost 75% of Iraq's population is ethnic Arabs.<sup>1</sup> Since the rise of ISIL in 2014, migration and deaths have decimated rural areas across northern Iraq.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the collapse of the Hussein regime has made rural healthcare delivery and school systems frayed, if not corrupt.<sup>3</sup> The standard of living in the countryside has fallen, and an estimated 80% of households lack access to treated drinking water. Just 18% of wastewater is treated, and less than 8% of Iraqi homes outside of Baghdad are connected to a sewer

system.<sup>4</sup> Rural incomes are far lower than those of their urban counterparts and the general living conditions are worse.<sup>5</sup>

## Tribal Affiliation



*A young girl from the Al Shakarma tribe, Marsh Arabst  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

Iraq's tribal bonds became much more conspicuous after the British imperial authorities united three Ottoman provinces, Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, into the loosely organized state of Iraq. The British ruled each of these provinces through tribal sheiks, and therefore, tribal structure remained dominant, even in the new Iraq state. Even citizens who had no tribal affiliation came to rely on sheiks for resources, resolution of conflicts, and assistance with government matters.<sup>6</sup>

Ethnic, religious, tribal, and linguistic divisions remained strong.

About three-quarters of Iraqis claim membership in one of the nation's 150 tribes, which includes around 2,000 clans.<sup>7</sup> Tribes are socially divided into sub-tribes, which are then organized into clans composed of extended families. The strongest social bonds in Iraqi society are based on tribal affiliation, rather than ethnicity or religion.<sup>8</sup> Iraqi tribes continue to play a major role in daily rural life.<sup>9</sup>

## Land Distribution

Tribal, ethnic, and sectarian groups dynamically intersect in the eastern half of the country, where the majority of Iraq's population is located. Kurds are mostly found in the north, mixed with Sunni Arabs and Turkmen around Erbil and Kirkuk.<sup>10</sup> Sunnis mostly live in the area from Mosul towards the south along the Tigris River, and along the Euphrates entering from Syria to as far south as Baghdad and Fallujah. Here, the population is a mix of both Shi'ite and Sunni. Shi'ites dominate



*Kurdistan landscape, Nineveh  
Flickr / jan Sefti*

in the region just north of Karbala, towards the east to the Iranian border, and south to the Persian Gulf.<sup>11, 12</sup>

The typical structure of an Iraqi tribe is in a bayt (“house”), which is shared by the khams (extended family). The khams is structured around male children descended from the same great-great grandfather. The most basic level of organization is the single family, which may be part of a khams, which potentially includes hundreds of members. Households organize into a clan, or fakhdh, and clans form ashira, or tribal organizations.<sup>13</sup>

Sometimes tribes will organize around a town like Fallujah. Based on 1980s genealogical charts, the Fallujiyyin (named after the town) is composed of 16 clans. Other tribes may range from a few thousand to over 1 million members. Several tribes can form a confederation (qabila), such as Saddam Hussein’s al-Bu Nasir tribe, which was part of a tribal confederation around Tikrit, named al-Tikrita.<sup>14</sup>

## Rural Economy



*Iraqi Kurdish women making bread  
Flickr / jan Sefti*

The economy of most rural areas in Iraq is based almost entirely on agriculture and living off the land. Approximately 50-60% of arable land in Iraq has been cultivated throughout the region’s known history.<sup>15</sup> Agriculture’s contribution to GDP has shrunk considerably in recent years. Lack of investment and maintenance of irrigation infrastructure or sanitation, physical destruction, and the policies of a centralized command economy caused Iraq’s rural economy to disintegrate.”<sup>16</sup>

Since the late 1980s, wars, sanctions, drought, and mismanagement of soil and water resources have kept agricultural production far below levels necessary to feed the population. The international Oil-for-Food program that ended in 2003 further depressed the rural economy by encouraging the import of low-cost foreign foods, leaving farmers little incentive to plant.<sup>17</sup>

River fishing as a livelihood has also declined since 2003, due to increasing pollution from dumping industrial waste, bodies, and sewage into the Tigris River. Pollution reached such high levels that local imams declared fatwas (religious ruling) against

river fishing.<sup>18</sup> The U.S. Department of Agriculture has been working with the Iraqi government to build fisheries in some areas of the country, resulting in an increase in fish production .<sup>19</sup>

## Rural Transportation

Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Hussein government built roughly 38,000 km (20,000 mi) of highway throughout the country, mostly for military and commercial use.<sup>20</sup> Around 85% was paved.<sup>21</sup> The 1991 Persian Gulf War targeted that transportation infrastructure of roads and bridges. Much of the damage has been repaired, but main roads and bridges have been subject to repeated damage by saboteurs.



*A man travelling on donkey pulled by cart, Basra  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

In remote villages, roads are unpaved and in poor condition. Upkeep of roads in rural areas is minimal or nonexistent, and road signs are missing. Where small roads connect to larger ones, the interchanges are not well designed or constructed. The Iraqi government is encouraging investment in the country's entire transportation infrastructure, including highways, ports, civil aviation, and railways.<sup>22</sup>

There have been attacks against military and civilian vehicles in rural and urban settings. These attacks include the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Such devices are frequently placed on roads. They are often concealed in plastic bags, boxes, soda cans, and dead animals so they will be inconspicuous.<sup>23</sup> Insurgents are known to use rural roads as a means of avoiding checkpoints on the more frequently travelled roadways.<sup>24</sup>

## Rural Health

The rural healthcare system is in a state of disorder, with understaffed hospitals that experience a constant lack of medicine and medical supplies.<sup>25</sup> Since the U.S. led invasion of Iraq, a number of medical specialists have been targets of political intimidation and assassination, which has resulted in a severe shortage of physicians and an overall deterioration of medical care. Furthermore, contaminated drinking water is huge problem, causing frequent outbreaks of cholera and typhoid fever.



In most rural areas, sewage treatment plants are rare and electrical power shortages remain common, leading to a reliance on back-up generators. Household plumbing in Iraq is mostly substandard and illegal connections weaken the existing water distribution systems. An estimated 80% of households do not have access to treated drinking water, and just 18% of wastewater is treated. Less than 8% of Iraqi homes outside of Baghdad are connected to a sewer system.<sup>26</sup>

## Rural Education

As with most other services in Iraq, rural schools suffer from understaffing and a lack of resources. In addition, rates of nonattendance are especially high in rural areas, and males outnumber females at both primary and secondary levels.<sup>27</sup> Ongoing security concerns, poverty, a lack of nearby schools, and traditional attitudes all contribute to the problem of low school attendance.<sup>28</sup> A UN survey shows that girls in rural areas often do not attend school because their families are concerned for their safety.<sup>29</sup> Deteriorating classroom infrastructure has also been a problem. Projects to construct new schools and rehabilitate old ones are ongoing, but are hindered by ongoing security issues.<sup>30</sup>

Retaining teachers has been a problem, especially in rural areas. Many teachers have fled the country.<sup>31</sup> The shortage of teachers will likely continue to be an issue until the overall security situation and widespread dislocation in the country improve.<sup>32, 33</sup>

In response to problems with schools, infrastructure, and attendance, the government has made education one of its top priorities. Foreign non-governmental organizations and the United Nations are working closely with the Iraqi government to improve educational opportunities.<sup>34, 35, 36</sup>



*A doctor examining young girl, Haditha  
Flickr / djv2130*



*Children, first day of school  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*



## Who's in Charge

Following Iraq's December 2005 elections, an alliance of Shiite parties held the highest percentage of seats in the new Iraqi assembly (largely because of a Sunni boycott of the elections).<sup>37</sup> However, they were still well short of the two-thirds majority needed to unilaterally form a government. Nuri al-Maliki was selected as Iraq's prime minister in April 2006, after several months of negotiations between the Shiite alliance and Kurdish, Sunni, secular, and Shiite splinter parties.<sup>38</sup> He served until stepping down in August 2014. Haider Al-Abadi was then designated Prime Minister and was approved by the Iraq Parliament. A major focus of Al-Abadi's administration is fighting corruption, revising divisive policies, and bringing Shia militias under state control.<sup>39</sup>



*Head of the village  
Flickr / Robin Jakobsson*

In 2015, there were 19 governorates (muhafazah) in Iraq, also known as provinces. Provinces are subdivided into 120 districts (kuza). The name of a district is usually the same as the district capital. Provinces have broad autonomy and authority to guide internal security processes, including police, security forces, and guard undertakings.<sup>40</sup>

## Checkpoints

Iraqis took over control of checkpoints in the 10-square-km (4-square-mi) Green Zone along the Tigris River in central Baghdad beginning in January 1, 2009, and began taking over remaining ones from U.S. forces in June 2010.<sup>41, 42</sup> The handover was part of the phased withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq beginning 31 August 2010.<sup>43</sup>



*Security checkpoint in southern Baghdad  
Flickr / The U.S. Army*

In 2015, most checkpoints in Iraq were located in the capital city of Baghdad, where there were about 250 fixed checkpoints and 250 mobile checkpoints.<sup>44</sup> These numbers easily reach 1,000 during periods of increased security or during religious

holidays. Conversely, provinces reduced the number of checkpoints, and there were almost none in the Kurdistan region.<sup>45</sup>

Most checkpoints are located on main roads, where security forces face would-be attackers and booby-trapped cars. Yet, criminals can easily infiltrate the city using secondary roads that lead through Baghdad's neighborhoods into the city.<sup>46</sup>

► Ma'am, your ID please.		
Visitor:	Ma'am, your ID please.	uKhtee, haweetich bala zaH-ma
Local:	I do not have an ID.	ma 'andi haweeya

*Exchange 15*

Most people at checkpoints are cooperative; yet, crowds can form near checkpoints, which presents additional security issues.<sup>47</sup>

► May I trouble you for your IDs please?		
Visitor:	May I trouble you for your IDs, please?	bela zaH-ma huweeyatkum
Local:	Here, take it.	tfaDhal

*Exchange 16*

Some illegal checkpoints have been set up by militants, such as ISIL, causing additional traffic jams, confusion, and fear among drivers.<sup>48</sup>

## Landmines

Iraq has a severe problem with landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and abandoned ordnance (AXO) from conflicts that date back to World War II. Many of the legacy landmines are along Iraq's border with Iran, left behind from the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s. Minefields were also laid on the Saudi Arabia border and around military positions prior to the 2003 invasion.<sup>49, 50</sup>



*Disposing of landmines  
Flickr / The JIDA*

Additionally after several decades of conflict and war, Iraq is contaminated with millions of explosive remnants of war (ERW). These threaten the safety of people who live and work in the country, hamper humanitarian efforts, and impede the nation's

economic recovery and development. These remnants include both unexploded and abandoned ordnance such as cluster bombs and landmines,<sup>51</sup> as well as landmines laid by ISIL militants.<sup>52</sup>

The Iraqi government planned to rid the country of all victim-activated landmines by February 2018 as part of the Mine Ban Treaty to which it agreed in 2008. In 2009, the Iraqi Ministry of Environment reported that it would be unable to meet its obligation given its current resources and capacities. National and international demining teams cleared only a small area of land in Iraq between 2008 and 2009. In 2015, the clearance area continued to be limited due to poor security across the country, one of the main obstacles affecting demining operations.<sup>53</sup> There are also mines associated with the ongoing insurgency. There are also mines associated with the ongoing insurgency. There are also mines associated with the ongoing insurgency. There are also mines associated with the ongoing insurgency.

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# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 5 | Rural Life

### Assessment

1. Tribal affiliation is a central component of Iraqi society.
2. Tribal, ethnic, and sectarian groups dynamically intersect in the southern part of the country, where the majority of Iraq's population is located.
3. The economy of most rural areas in Iraq is based almost entirely on oil.
4. Through the 1970s and 1980s, the Hussein government built roughly 38,000 km (20,000 mi) of highway.
5. Iraqi medical specialists have been targets of political intimidation and assassination.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True*



*Local Iraqi Children, Eastern Baghdad  
Flickr / Robin Jakobsson*

## Chapter 6 | Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

# Family Life

## Introduction

Family is central to the thoughts and actions of individual Iraqis.<sup>1</sup> People in Iraq are known more for their family and their position within their family, rather than for personal or professional achievements.<sup>2</sup> In traditional families, the mother typically selects her son's marriage partner, while the father selects his son and/or daughter's career.<sup>3, 4</sup> Any Iraqi business owner would prefer to hire members of his or her own family, or choose a close relative as a partner because it increases trust. Loyalty to one's family, clan, or tribe is absolute.<sup>5</sup>

Traditional Iraqi family relationships have remained strong and fundamentally unchanged. The immediate family, the extended family, and the tribe remain the prime focus of social relationships, especially in rural areas. In urban areas, however, these relationships have come under pressure due to rapid urban growth and a population that has been exposed to Western lifestyles.<sup>6</sup>

## Typical Household and Family Structure

Iraqi families are patriarchal, with the senior male acting as head of the household. An individual's status is traditionally determined by his or her position within the family network. The family hierarchy consists of the senior husband, his wife, their sons, the sons' wives and their children, and unmarried daughters. The senior male in the family manages family property and decides the final outcome for all decisions.<sup>7</sup>

In rural areas, his mother, wife, sons, their wives and children, and any unmarried daughters or sisters generally live in the same house, thus incorporating three generations into a joint household.<sup>8</sup> The senior male also takes care of the family's estate, and his decisions are final. In public situations, males will speak for female family members. This absolute authority has been moderated slightly in Baghdad and other large cities, but it remains deeply embedded in Iraqi society.<sup>9</sup>



*Father and son in al-Wahida  
Flickr / The U.S. Army*

In rural areas, a wife will typically move in with her husband's parents. When the father dies, the brothers will often create a joint household. Authority in the family is determined by seniority and gender. Thus older males in the family possess the greatest authority, with the father exercising absolute authority over his family.<sup>10</sup> He will decide the type of education his children will receive, and he will have the final say as to whom his children will marry. Economic motivation, prestige, and family strength all contribute to decisions about marriage partners.<sup>11</sup>

An Iraqi Muslim man may have more than one wife; however, the Personal Status Code of 1978 states that he needs a court order to do so.<sup>12</sup> This gives him legal permission to take another wife, but only if he treats each wife equally. While the number of polygamous marriages did increase in the wake of the Iran-Iraq War, much of this was due to men taking the widows of their deceased brothers as their second wife.

This was done to provide for the extended family.<sup>13</sup> Overall, polygamy remains very uncommon because it requires enough wealth to support more than one wife, and it requires judicial permission.

Iraqi houses traditionally center on a courtyard, with a windowless wall to the outside. This helps protect the family's privacy. Most homes are built to allow men to visit without accidentally running into the women of the house. This is also true in apartments, where family privacy is closely protected.<sup>14</sup> With less space to build, or fewer resources, an urban family will typically live near relatives, rather than living together in one house. Families frequently visit in-laws, cousins, aunts, and uncles.

## Status of Women, Children, and the Elderly

### *Women*

Between 1968 and 2003, women in Iraq gained greater equality under the Baathists.<sup>15</sup> This was especially true in the 1970s and 1980s, when Iraqi oil was used to support massive social reforms, enabling the government to build a strong public service sector, which included healthcare and education.<sup>16</sup> In 1976, the Compulsory Education Law came into effect, and education became mandatory for all children, girls as well as boys, up to the age of 16. In addition, the Baathist regime put forth a constitution in 1970 that promised equal rights to all Iraqis, including women.<sup>17</sup> Women benefitted from this more open environment, which reached its highest point around 1984. After the 1991 Gulf War and the imposition of UN economic sanctions (1990-2003), the position of women deteriorated. Public education and literacy rates fell. Within this environment, many women took on more traditional roles as wives and mothers.<sup>18</sup>



*Iraqi women outdoor  
Flickr / Global Panorama*

Women today are protected by the Iraqi constitution, and yet, society has become more conservative since the fall of the Baathist regime.<sup>19</sup> The net effect has been profound in many cases. However, conservative ideals continue to make it difficult for women to exercise their full constitutional rights.<sup>20</sup> For example, they have been targeted by extremists for driving cars or wearing clothes that do not reflect conservative practices.<sup>21</sup>

## Family Honor

The concept of family honor is deeply connected to women. Iraqi women are sheltered and act as the bearers of culture and family values, and most of the customs related to this practice are influenced by the family's ethno-religious affiliation.<sup>22</sup> Traditionally, Iraqi women have significant social influence within their families, but limited influence in decisions. The role of women and honor in Arab culture is deeply complex, and cannot be realistically evaluated or judged by Western standards.



*Walking to the market, Wahida  
Flickr / Austin King*

Iraqi women are cherished and respected within this system of protection and family structure. It reflects their distinctive ethno-religious cultural values.<sup>23</sup> However, protection of personal and family honor can sometimes lead to brutality and honor killings. For women, dishonorable behavior includes talking with an unrelated male, consensual sexual relations outside marriage, being a victim of rape, seeking a divorce, or refusing to marry the man chosen by one's family.<sup>24</sup>

Gender-based violence based on this system is both prevalent and underreported, mainly because these matters are deemed private and part of the family's affairs. In addition, the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) notes that "many victims do not report incidents, out of fear of reprisals, or insensitive treatment of victims by the authorities, and are discouraged from reporting due to the lack of effective redress for gender-based violence."<sup>25</sup> As of the December 2009 human rights report, UNAMI was still receiving reports of honor killings throughout Iraq, despite Western denouncement of these human rights violations.<sup>26, 27</sup> Although honor killings are legally equivalent to murder, authorities often encounter difficulty in finding enough evidence to prosecute cases.<sup>28</sup>

▶ Allow us to inspect your house.		
Visitor:	Please allow us to inspect your house.	ismaHelna nfattesh baytkum
Local:	Sure, but just a minute while I get the family and the kids outside.	ma yKhallef, bas daqeeqa aTalli' al-ahel wa-jehal barra
Visitor:	Take your time.	khoDh raH-ta

*Exchange 17*



## Children

Children are obligated to give their elderly parents the same care their parents gave them. Most Iraqi families have several children, who are adored and indulged.<sup>29</sup> Boys absorb the attitudes of males by being included early in all-male gatherings. The males thoroughly protect girls from the very beginning. The girls learn domestic skills by participating in traditional female activities with their mothers, sisters, and other female relatives.<sup>30</sup>



*Children of Baghdad  
Flickr / Al Jazeera English*

Children who are Iraqi citizens enjoy many legal protections, but in practice their rights may be violated, sometimes due to family insecurities.<sup>31</sup> For instance, Iraqi children are protected by child labor laws, yet many are employed illegally, trying to help their families survive. Recruitment of children by insurgent groups has also been a widespread problem. Such groups often use financial incentives to lure the children to join and carry out attacks.<sup>32</sup>

## Elderly

The elderly in Iraq are at the top of the family hierarchy in the extended, interdependent household. Grandparents typically live with their children and grandchildren for the rest of their lives, and are very close to members of the family.<sup>33</sup> The Iraqi grandfather will continue to manage all family affairs, and his decisions are final. Furthermore, the influence of the Iraqi grandmother extends to all family members.<sup>34</sup> Families are traditionally responsible for eldercare, and many Iraqis associate going to an old-age facility with a sense of shame and humiliation.<sup>35</sup>



*Elderly woman, Asmai Market, Basra  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

# Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

## Marriage

Dating, courtship, engagement, and marriage in Iraq are different than in the West. Iraqi couples can only meet through their families, through family acquaintances, or at work. This is done to preserve an unmarried woman's reputation.<sup>36</sup> Traditionally, the man's mother, or the man himself, will identify a potential wife. The man's mother will then visit the woman's family to get a sense of her character and the reputation of her family.<sup>37</sup> Likewise, the woman's mother also investigates the man and his family. If both parties are satisfied with their findings, the man's father will announce the engagement. Once the man and woman are engaged, they are free to meet openly and make arrangements for their marriage. Although arranged marriages are becoming less common, mothers continue to have exceptional influence in the selection of a child's spouse.<sup>38</sup>



*Husband, wife and child  
Flickr / Adam Jones*

The Iraqi Social Status Law forbids Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims. However, an Iraqi Muslim man can marry a woman of any faith.<sup>39</sup> The law also states that a woman can only inherit half of the amount that a man can receive. These provisions contradict Article 14 of the constitution, which guarantees that everyone is entitled to equal protection under the law.<sup>40</sup> A 2010 law allows women to transfer their status as Iraqi citizens to their foreign-born husband and any children they have together.<sup>41</sup>

## Divorce

Divorce, called talaq, is as emotionally difficult in Iraq as in any society. Although traditionally frowned upon, the divorce rate began to increase after the passage of the Personal Status Code of 1978. Recent figures indicate that the figure continues to rise, likely influenced by the instability and violence prevalent in Iraq.<sup>42, 43</sup> Recent changes allow divorce to be initiated by either a husband or a wife, and on several different grounds. An Iraqi woman retains a strong connection to her birth family throughout her married life. Thus, a divorced woman's family may intercede on her behalf. Custody of young children is usually granted to the father.<sup>44</sup> In some cases,



*A sad woman  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

custody may be awarded on the basis of what best benefits children up to the age of 10. In some cases, this applies to children up to the age of 15. At this age, children may choose with which parent they will live. Both parties have separate and distinct financial rights under the law.<sup>45, 46</sup> The new constitution allows these laws to be defined differently, depending on the parents ethnic and religious affiliation.<sup>47</sup>

## *Birth*

Traditionally, Muslim fathers whisper the shahada (Muslim declaration of faith) into the baby's right ear. This is to ensure that these are the first words the newborn will hear. Additionally, the parents might rub a small piece of a date on the baby's gums so the first flavor the child tastes is sweet.<sup>48</sup>

After the seventh day, the baby's head is shaved to show the child is the servant of Allah. The hair is weighed and its equivalent in silver is given to charity.<sup>49, 50</sup>

Additionally, a sheep is slaughtered and the meat is distributed to relatives, neighbors, and the poor. Subsequent birthdays are often celebrated with cakes, candles, gifts, and singing and dancing.<sup>51</sup>

The Muslim rite of passage for male children is circumcision. It occurs at any time from birth to puberty.<sup>52, 53</sup> Whether it is celebrated elaborately, or simply, it marks the beginning of a boy's life as an adult.<sup>54</sup>



*A doctor at Fallujah Hospital  
Flickr / PBS NewsHour*

## Superstitions

A common belief in the Middle East is that you should not admire or compliment someone's children, unless you use the expression *masha allah* ("what God has willed"). This is used to express joy, appreciation, praise, and thankfulness to God. Many believe that invoking thankfulness to God, when giving a compliment, provides protection. Conversely, calling attention to someone without using this expression alerts the Evil Eye, causing harm to befall the person.



*Iraqi local villager and his grandson  
Flickr / The U.S. Army*

▶ Masha Allah		
Visitor:	This is my son Ah-mad.	haDha ibnee aHmad
Local:	He looks so smart. What God has willed.	mbayyen alayh shaTer, masha allah

*Exchange 18*

## Family Social Events

### *Engagements and Weddings*

Iraqi weddings are a social contract between families, rather than a religious ceremony. In rural areas, early marriages are encouraged and it is common for first cousins to wed. A marriage between first cousins is regarded favorably because it reinforces family and tribal bonds.<sup>55</sup>

To become engaged, couples are required to appear before a judge of the Social Status Court and submit an application of marriage.<sup>56</sup> After submitting their application, both parties must follow the instructions from the court clerk to obtain evidence of a medical examination. Once they have obtained their medical certificates, the couple returns to the court with two witnesses and the court issues a marriage contract and the engagement becomes official.<sup>57</sup>

The marriage contract signals to parents, relatives, and the groom that they can start contributing money towards the wedding celebration. At this time, the groom will pay *mahr* (the bride-price) to his bride, and sometimes the bride's mother.<sup>58</sup> The *mahr*



can be a gift of gold, jewelry, clothing, or a large sum of money. The wedding party after the ceremony is often elaborate, with many guests. The hosts provide the best food and entertainment they can afford.<sup>59</sup> The groom must also find and secure living accommodations to begin his marriage.<sup>60</sup>

### *Funerals and Processions*

Muslim custom requires the body of the dead to be ritually washed, wrapped in a plain white shroud, and buried within 24 hours. Prayers for the dead, *januzah*, are said over the body, either at the home, funeral parlor, or mosque. This is followed by a procession to the gravesite and burial. Muslims do not allow cremation. Typically, there is a mourning period of 40 days.<sup>61, 62</sup>



*Kurdish women and children visiting grave site  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*

## **Naming Conventions**

A complete Iraqi name has a minimum of three components and often four, five, or more. In both the Western and Iraqi naming systems, the parents give the newborn child a “given” name, which appears first in the order of names. In the West, that name might be “John” or “Mary,” and in Iraq it might be “Muhammad” or “Alia.”<sup>63</sup> The concept of a middle name does not exist in Iraq. Instead, every child takes his or her father’s first name as his or her second name.<sup>64</sup>

For example, a male’s given name is Nouri. His father’s given name is Kamil. Mohammed Hasan is his grandfather’s given name. Thus, his full name is Nouri Kamil Mohammed Hasan al-Maliki. Similarly, a woman is known by her given name, followed by her father’s given name. She will retain her own name upon marriage. Thus, Nouri al-Maliki’s wife’s name is Fareeha Khalil. Children take their father’s surname.<sup>65</sup>



*Iraqi school girl writing at school  
Flickr / DVIDSHUB*



Additionally, certain given names reveal a person's religious or ethnic background. Christians prefer to give Biblical names to their children, while Muslims prefer to give their children Islamic names. Shi'ites avoid giving their children the names of Sunni historical figures.<sup>66</sup> Sunnis, Shi'ites, Christians, and Kurds also share thousands of non-Islamic Arabic names.<sup>67</sup>

Another common naming convention is the kunya. Typically, this is used to recognize a first-born child. Iraqis often adopt their kunya as their preferred name. The kunya is comprised of abu ("father of") or umm ("mother of"), followed by the first-born child's name.<sup>68</sup> Thus, Nouri al-Maliki is also known as abu Esraa, in recognition of his oldest daughter Esraa, and his wife is known as umm Esraa. Oftentimes, someone is only known by his or her kunya, and not by his or her given and family names.<sup>69</sup>

▶ We are looking for Muhammad Husayn AdDalaymee.		
Visitor:	Please, we are looking for Muhammad Husayn Ad-Dalaymee.	raja-an dendawwer ala muHammad Husayn ad-dalaymee
Local 1:	I have not heard such a name.	ma sama' heechee ism
Local 2:	I know, you mean Abu Ali. You might find him in the market.	a'ruf, tuqsud abu ali. yimkin telgah bissoog
Visitor:	Thank you.	shukran

*Exchange 19*

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# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 6 | Family Life

### Assessment

1. Traditionally, Iraqi women have significant social influence within their families, but limited influence in decisions.
2. Traditional Iraqi family relationships have weakened in recent years.
3. Iraqi Muslim men frequently have multiple wives.
4. Between 1968 and 2003, women in Iraq gained greater equality under the Baathists.
5. Children are obligated to care for their elderly parents.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True*

# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

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## Further Readings and Resources

### *Articles and Websites*

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# Arabic-Iraqi Cultural Orientation

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## Final Assessment

1. The draft 2005 Iraqi constitution was approved in October 2005 by a wide margin of Iraqi voters.
2. The media in Iraq face challenges in terms of both operations and security.
3. After oil, agriculture is the second-largest economic sector in Iraq and the second-largest source of jobs.
4. All U.S. troops had withdrawn from Iraq by the end of 2009.
5. The country has a single-party system with executive power held exclusively by the prime minister.
6. The Iraqi government is less involved in religious affairs than the governments of other nearby countries.
7. Islam is a monotheistic religion and its followers believe in a single deity. The Muslim community, or umma, calls this deity Allah.
8. Sufism is practiced by several Shiite groups that emphasize the different dimensions and rituals of their religion.
9. Members of some religious minority communities hold senior government positions,

10. Purdah dictates that women stay “veiled” from non-related males in their home by using separate spaces, and by keeping their heads and bodies covered.
11. Iraqi women wear contemporary European clothing in public.
12. Iraqis often celebrate a wide variety of events and occasions by firing rifles into the air.
13. It is not unusual for males to be served first, with females eating afterwards in a separate room.
14. Guests should always clean their plates as an indication they have eaten well.
15. Iraqis readily use gestures to communicate.
16. ATMs are found throughout the country and ATMs are quite dependable, so there is no real need to use banks when exchanging money.
17. Iraq has a wide variety of shops and stores, ranging from large 24-hour shopping malls loaded with Western goods and brands, to smaller traditional Iraq-style shops with smaller selections.
18. Driving a private car in Iraq is not the preferred means of travel, and few people own a car.
19. Iraqi cities are full of security forces and are now quite safe for Westerners to visit.



20. Iraq's transportation system is limited to cars in urban areas, and buses in rural areas.
21. Updates to rural schools and infrastructure, as well as high rates of attendance have made Iraq's educational system one of the best in the Middle East.
22. Following Iraq's December 2005 elections, an alliance of Shiite parties held the highest percentage of seats in the new Iraqi assembly because they won a clear majority.
23. In 2015, most checkpoints in Iraq were located in the capital city of Baghdad.
24. Iraq has a severe problem with landmines, unexploded ordnance (UXO), and abandoned ordnance (AXO) from conflicts that date back to World War II.
25. Iraq's tribal bonds were weakened after the British imperial authorities united three Ottoman provinces, Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, into the loosely organized state of Iraq.
26. Dating, courtship, engagement, and marriage in Iraq are similar to the West.
27. Iraqi Social Status Law forbids Muslim women from marrying non-Muslims.
28. Recent changes allow divorce to be initiated by the husband only.
29. The Muslim rite of passage for male children is circumcision, and occurs about 1 week after birth.

30. A common Iraqi naming convention is the kunya, which is used to recognize a first-born child.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False; 6. True; 7. True; 8. False; 9. False; 10. True; 11. False; 12. True; 13. True; 14. False; 15. True; 16. False; 17. True; 18. True; 19. False; 20. False; 21. False; 22. False; 23. True; 24. True; 25. False; 26. False; 27. True; 28. False; 29. False; 30. True