

Iraq

Last update:	8 april 2020
Population:	38,433,600 million (World Bank 2018 est.)
Prime minister:	Mustafa al-Kadhimi
President:	Barham Salih
Governemental type:	Islamic Democratic Federal Republic
Ruling coalition:	Foward, Fatah Alliance, KDP, National Coalition, Wisdom, Reform
Last election:	May 2018 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	2020 (governorates elections)
Sister parties:	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

From 1979 until 2003 Saddam Hussein and the Baath Party ruled the country. It was a secular, but Sunni-dominated regime. In 2003 Saddam Hussein was overthrown when the US-led coalition invaded the country. Hussein was executed in 2006. In April 2014 parliamentary elections were held in Iraq. Haydar al-Abadi became the new Prime Minister and formed a government in September that year. One of the new government's main aims was to re-establish security in the country. Subsequent governments were, however, unable to provide security in the country. In 2014 and 2015 Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took control over large parts of Iraq. In the aftermath of the ISIS conflict, parliamentary elections were surprisingly won by the Shia cleric Sadr and his reform coalition. In 2019, protest erupted in the capital and soon in more cities. The protest movement called for a complete overhaul of the Shiite-dominated regime and demanded sovereignty, independence and clean government. It was brutally repressed.

Political Situation

Iraq gained independence in 1932, after being a League of Nations mandate under British administration since 1920. The coup d'état in 1958 led to an end of the monarchy and a republic was established. From 1979 to 2003 the country was ruled by President Saddam Hussein. Until 2003 Iraq remained a de facto Arab nationalist and socialist one-party state. In 2003 the government of Saddam Hussein was overthrown by the US-led invasion. The United States claimed they invaded the country because of the presence of weapons of mass destruction, such as chemical and biological weapons, and secondly to introduce democracy. These weapons of destruction were never found, however. Saddam Hussein was captured by American forces in December 2003, and executed by an Iraqi military court in 2006. His party, the Baath Party, was dissolved. Many Baathists, such as the former army and intelligence officers, later joined IS and have reportedly played a significant part in its rise.

In 2013 the Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), a Sunni Arab rebellious group that was formed following a merger of different Iraqi insurgent groups, started expanding rapidly to parts outside Iraq. The group adopted the name of Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2013 and proclaimed itself an Islamic State (IS) in January 2014. The militant group has spread over central and northern Iraq and Syria, leaving a trail of death and destruction. In response to this threat, a US-led coalition of regional and Western powers started a campaign of airstrikes in 2014. ISIS was defeated over several years. Leaving a country devastated behind. Iraq is plagued by sectarian violence, corruption and political infight.

2019 protests

Mass demonstrations erupted in Baghdad on the 1st of October and rapidly spread to every major city in Southern Iraq. Dominated by young people (almost 3 in 5 Iraqi's are under 25) the protesters are overwhelmingly Shiites. But since the beginning, these protesters have called for a complete overhaul of the Shiite-dominated regime that has ruled the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein, charging it with being corrupt, incompetent, and fatally infected by sectarianism, Islamism and Iranian penetration. The demands of the protest movement were also clear: sovereignty, independence and clean government.

Instead of starting a conversation with the protest movement and initiate reform, the government almost immediately chose the path

of brutal repression. Since then, hundreds of people have been killed, abducted, tortured or disappeared. Around 20,000 have been injured. Iraq's political elite has been mostly silent about the suppression of the protesters. Few spoke out and joined.

Kurdistan

In 1974, the Kurdistan region in Northern Iraq was granted limited autonomy by the Iraqi government. However, Iraq continuously tried to get control of the area by military interventions up until 1991, after which a no-fly zone was established above the area in 1991. One year later, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was formed by the Kurdistan National Assembly. Iraqi Kurdistan consists of the governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, Duhok and Halabja.

A period of fragile peace started after the no-fly zone was introduced. The Kurdish people started to rebuild their society creating a parliamentary democracy. The main political parties – the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) worked together during the 1990s. However, power-sharing arrangements between the two failed, erupting into a civil war from 1994 to 1997. The election in 1996 resulted in the creation of two separate Kurdish states: one state-based in Sulaymaniyah controlled by the PUK, while the other state-based in Erbil and controlled by the KDP. In 2005, Iraq officially recognized the autonomous Kurdistan Region by a referendum. The two administrations were unified into one government and the Kurdish parliament established the Kurdistan Region Presidency (KRP) as an institution. Masoud Barzani was elected as the first President of Iraqi Kurdistan in January 2005 and was re-elected in 2009.

Kurdistan suffered from the ISIS advancement in Northern Iraq from 2014 on. Barzani's term was prolonged during the war. The Peshmerga proved to be an effective force against the rapid advance of ISIS. The Kurdish government reconquered lost territory and even consolidated non-Kurdish territory in Iraq. In the political and military vacuum that existed in Northern Iraq in the aftermath of the ISIS conflict, Barzani called for an independence referendum. Although the central government in Baghdad didn't acknowledge the legitimacy of the referendum, the Kurdish government went ahead with a vote in September 2017. An overwhelming majority of 92.73% voted for independence. Barzani was however hesitant to declare Kurdistan independent. No country supported the referendum. In the meantime, Baghdad started a military offensive to reclaim the non-Kurdish territory in Northern Iraq. Barzani eventually resigned as president. Leaving the independence movement without a direction and the region without a president until regional elections in late 2018.

Elections

Electoral system

According to the constitution of 2005 Iraq is a parliamentary democracy with a multi-party system whereby the executive power is exercised by the prime minister, president and Council of Ministers. The president is elected by the Council of Representatives. He nominates the prime minister, who has to be approved by the Council of Representatives. The prime minister is the head of government and is the executive authority. The legislative power is vested in the Council of Representatives and the Federation Council. From the 328 seats in the Council of Representatives, 320 members are directly elected in multi-seat constituencies by proportional representation. The remaining eight seats are reserved for minorities. The Council of Representatives is elected for four years.

Electoral law

The Kurdistan Parliament has 111 seats and consists of one elected chamber. In 2009 amendments were made to the election law to increase the inclusiveness of all groups. The minimum age of parliamentary candidates was lowered from 30 to 25. The quota of female MPs was increased from 25 to 30 per cent of the legislature and seats reserved for minority Christian and Turkmen communities were increased to five seats each. Elections are held every four years. Every citizen of the Kurdistan Region with a minimum age of 18 years and on the electoral registering is eligible to vote in a direct, universal and secret ballot.

Parliamentary Elections

On May 12th 2018 Iraq went to the polls to vote for the first time since the defeat of ISIL and the Kurdish independence referendum in 2017. Originally the elections were scheduled to take place in September 2017 but were postponed because of the Iraqi Civil War. Voters could choose from a record number of 85 parties who organized themselves into larger alliances.

Results

Voter turnout was with 44.52% the lowest since the first democratic elections in 2005 after de the fall of Saddam Hussein. The vote was widely seen as a referendum on incumbent Prime Minister Haidar al-Abadi and his Nasr Coalition handling of the Iraqi Civil War. Although most analysts argued that al-Abadi had a good chance of winning the elections and securing a second term as prime minister, the Alliance of Revolutionaries for Reform of the Shia cleric Sadr won most seats. Sadr won the nationwide popular vote with more than 1.3 million votes and gained 54 seats. He was followed by Amiri's Conquest Alliance with more than 1.2 million votes, translating into 47 seats, and Abadi with more than 1 million votes and 42 seats.

Party	Seats in parliament
Sadr Coalition	54
Fatah Coalition	47
Nasr Coalition	42
State of Law Coalition	25
Wataniya Coalition	21
KDP	25
PUK	18

Observers and international reactions

The European Union Election Observation Mission in Iraq stated that the elections were a key step forward in the construction of Iraq's democracy and long-term stability. "Despite some regrettable isolated reports of violent incidents, the work of the Iraqi security forces and electoral authorities resulted in an orderly ballot, which allowed the Iraqi people to exercise their democratic rights in peace and security." There were reportedly several instances in which the electronic voting system did not function. Another problem was the lack of functioning infrastructure in the country. Especially in the northern part of Iraq that was destroyed by ISIL, people had difficulties in reaching polling stations. The security measures that were in place to protect voters also made voting hard. People couldn't enter large cities by car. Nonetheless was there one terror attack in Kirkuk, where two voters were killed.

Presidential Elections

The President is elected by a two-thirds majority of the Council of Representatives, Iraq's Parliament. The President is elected to serve a four-year term in office, after which he may be re-elected once. The President approves laws which have been passed by Parliament and is the ceremonial head of the Armed Forces. He also fulfils ceremonial duties for Iraq. The President is aided by two Vice-Presidents. Together they form the Presidency Council, which makes decisions by unanimous vote.

Social Democratic Parties

Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)

Party Leader: Mam Jalal Talabani

Number of seats: 18 (Iraqi parliament), 18 (Kurdistan parliament)

<http://www.pukmedia.com/>

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded on 1 June 1976. It was founded as a response to the end of the first Kurdish uprising that started throughout the 1960s and ended in March 1970 with an agreement between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish people. The PUK used to be a coalition of at least five separate political entities, of which the most significant was Mam Jalal Talabani.

The PUK is a social democratic party and its principal values are democracy, human rights, and the right to self-determination. The

party strives to provide equality in job opportunities, to promote the independence of individuals, to prevent oppression and to eradicate racial and gender-based discrimination. In the years after its founding PUK ruled together with the KDP until disagreements drove the parties apart, and a civil war followed from 1994-1998.

Other Parties

State of Law Alliance

Party Leader: Nouri al-Maliki

Number of seats: 25

In October 2009 former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki announced the formation of the Shiite State of Law alliance (SLA), distancing himself from the Iraqi National Alliance (INA). The alliance was announced as a nationalist, non-sectarian political list, but this failed after not attracting significant Sunni or other minority participation. The alliance comprises 34 parties of which the most prominent are:

- Islamic Dawa Movement (Da'wa - PM Maliki)
- Independents bloc (Minister of Oil Hussein al-Shahristani)
- Da'wa Tantheem (Tantheem - Hashim Nasr Mahmoud)
- Islamic Union of Turkomans of Iraq (Abbas al-Bayati)
- The National List (former INA chairman Hachim al-Hassani)
- National Emergence Movement (Khalid Sadi Yawar Awad al-Dulaimi)
- National Council for Iraqi Sheikhs (Abd al Hussein abd al Atheem Nour)
- Assembly of Competent People for the Future of Iraq (GOI spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh)
- Alliance of Iraqi Banners (Anbar Sheikh Ali Hatem Abd al-Razzaq)

Al Wataniyah, Al Arabiya & other Sunni Parties

Party Leader:

Number of seats: 44 (in total)

Al Wataniyah and Al Arabiya were founded after the Sunnis had largely supported the Iraqiya Party in the 2010 elections (92 seats). However, its leader Ayad Allawi was not able to create a majority coalition. Therefore the Sunni Arabs split their votes among three major parties: Al Wataniyah, Al- Muttahadun and al-Arabiya. Leader Muqtada Al-Sadr.

Al-Sadr movement

Party Leader: Muqtada Al-Sadr

Number of seats: 54

The Al-Sadr (Sadrist) movement was first announced as the Al-Mahdi army, established by Muqtada Al-Sadr to “liberate Iraq”. Muqtada called for political resistance against the “occupation”, but that turned into intense military confrontations with the Multi National Forces and other Shia parties. Between 2003 and 2008 it promoted a strong anti-Western discourse until the army got uprooted by the US. The Al-Sadr movement nevertheless continued to play an active role in Iraqi politics.

Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI)

Party Leader: Sayyid Ammar al-Hakim

Number of seats: 29

The ISCI is a Shiite party in the government of Iraq. The ISCI was formed in 1982 under the name of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) to provide an opposition to Iraqi aggression towards Iran. The SCIRI was founded by Ayatollah Sayyed Mohammed Baqir al-Hakim. After the war ended, the party continued to oppose the regime of Saddam Hussein. They advocated theocratic rule for Iraq and conducted a low-level, cross-border guerrilla war. In opposing the regime, SCIRI has signed multiple agreements with The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP). In addition to their main office in Teheran, the SCIRI has had offices in London, Syria, and Vienna. They are also represented by accredited agents in Canada, Australia and other countries.

Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP)

Party Leader: Masoud Barzani

Number of seats: 25 (Iraqi parliament), 38 (Kurdistan parliament)

<http://www.kdp.info/>

The KDP is a Kurdish party based in the northern governorates of Dohuk and Erbil and was founded in 1946. KDP is one of the oldest parties in Iraqi Kurdistan. It strives for independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. The party is regarded as being populist and nationalist. The current leader of the KDP is Masoud Barzani, who was elected in 1979 and has been re-elected ever since. In June 2005 he was elected as the President of Iraqi Kurdistan.

Mutahidun (The Uniters for Reform Coalition)

Party Leader: Osama Al-Nujaifi

Number of seats: 23

<http://www.muttahidoon.org/>

Mutahidun is a Sunni coalition made out of ten groups. It encompasses the major Iraq Sunni blocs, such as the bloc of former Awakening Movement leader Ahmet Abu Risha, the Ninewa-based Hadba list, the Future Bloc of former Finance Minister Rafia Al-Issawi, the Iraqi Islamic Party, and the Iraqi Turkmen Front. More information, see Al Watinayah.

Movement for Change (Gorran)

Party Leader: Nawshirwan Mustafa

Number of seats: 9 (Iraqi parliament), 24 (Kurdistan parliament)

<http://gorran.net/>

Gorran aims to take a totally different approach and to teach people there are other ways of politics away from the Stalinist style. The party thinks that the only achievable way to do this is to declare themselves a movement rather than a party.

Islamic Union of Kurdistan

Party Leader: Salaheddine Bahaaeddin

Number of seats: 10 (Kurdistan parliament)

<http://www.kurdiu.org/index.php/ku/>

Established in 1994 the Islamic Union of Kurdistan, also known as Yekgirtu, is considered to be a party with close links to the Muslim Brotherhood. However, in 2014 party officials distanced themselves from the Muslim Brotherhood, shortly after the movement was listed as a terrorist organization by the Egyptian government.

Kurdistan Islamic Group

Party Leader: Ali Bapir

Number of seats: 6 (Kurdistan parliament)

<http://kiknews.org/>

The Kurdistan Islamic Group is an Islamist movement established by Ali Bapir in 2001. The group has been linked to the terrorist group Ansar al-Islam, but in a statement in 2004 denied the existence of such links.

Biographies

Barham Salih

President

Barham Salih (1960) is currently the president of Iraq. He was elected by a big parliamentary majority as the 8th President of Iraq on 2 October 2018. Salih has been a leading figure in Iraqi politics for quite many years. Before he was Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region and a former deputy prime minister of the Iraqi federal government. He holds a bachelor's degree in Civil Engineering and Construction from Cardiff University and a doctorate degree in Statistics and Computer Applications in Engineering from the University of Liverpool.

For most of his political career, Salih has been a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Though in September 2017, he left the PUK and formed a new opposition party, the Coalition for Democracy and Justice. His aim was to challenge the governing KDP-PUK alliance. In 2018 Salih re-joined the PUK, which was greeted with anger by many on social media. The move was seen as opportunistic since he had recently been campaigning against the PUK and KDP corruption. Others expressed hope that his international and experience would bring stability to the country.

Mustafa al-Kadhimi

Prime Minister

Mustafa al-Kadhimi has been appointed beginning of April 2020 as Iraq's new prime minister-designate. This is the third attempt of President Barham Salih to install a new prime minister after months of political deadlock.

Kadhimi, the head of Iraq's National Intelligence Service, is the third Iraqi prime minister asked to form a cabinet after Adel Abdul Mahdi resigned in December due to anti-government protests. The previous candidate, Adnan al-Zurfi, withdrew after failing to create a cabinet, citing "domestic and foreign issues."

Nechirvan Barzani

President Kurdistan Region

Nechirvan Idris Barzani (1966) is the President of the Kurdistan Region. He was elected into office by the regional parliament in June 2019. Throughout his political career, he has served twice as Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Regional Government and as Vice President of the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

His father, Idris Mustafa Barzani, was also a prominent and senior KDP political figure. Barzani has a degree in Politics and International Relations of the University of Tehran.

Masrour Barzani

Prime Minister Kurdistan Region

Masrour Barzani (1969) is currently the Prime Minister of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq. He assumed office in 2019. He is also the chancellor of the Kurdistan Region Security Council and a prominent member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party.

At a young age he joined the Peshmerga, the Kurdish resistance fighters, in the battle against Saddam Hussein's army. Later, he went to London for a year-long course in English after which he continued with a bachelor's degree in International Studies at the American University in Washington D.C. He also completed a master's degree in Conflict Resolutions.

Masoud Barzani

Party Leader KDP

Masoud Barzani (1946) is the leader of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. He has served as the President of the Kurdistan Region from 2005 to 2017, when he resigned in the aftermath of the failed independence referendum.

He assumed the position of KDP party leader in 1979 when he succeeded his father, the Kurdish nationalist leader Mustafa Barzani.

Kosrat Rasul Ali

Party leader PUK

Kosrat Rasul Ali (1952) is the leader of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). He is a veteran Peshmerga military leader, former Prime Minister and former Vice President of the Kurdistan Region.

Kosrat was elected as Leader of the Supreme Political Council of the PUK at the 4th congress of the party in December 2019. He has a long political career, having served as Prime Minister of the Kurdish Regional Government for three times in the period of 1993 to 2001.

Source

[U.S. Relations with Iraq](#)

[The World Fact Book](#)

[Global edge: Iraq Government](#)

[Kurdistan Region Presidency](#)

[Kurdistan Parliament](#)

[Irfad](#)

[Patriotic Union of Kurdistan](#)

[Election Guide: Iraq](#)

[Kurdistan Regional Government](#)

[National Democratic Institute: Iraq election watch](#)

[Aljazeera](#)

[State of Law Coalition](#)

[BBC](#)

[Reuters](#) [CNBC](#) [Euronews](#) [Reuters](#) [Metro](#) [AlAribiya](#) [BBC](#)