



EASO

Iraq: The Protest movement and treatment of protesters and activists

Country of Origin Information Report

October 2020



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It must be noted that the review carried out by the mentioned departments, experts or organisations contributes to the overall quality of the report but does not necessarily imply their formal endorsement of the final report, which is the full responsibility of EASO.

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Disclaimer

This report was written according to the EASO COI Report Methodology (2012)¹. The report is based on carefully selected sources of information. All sources used are referenced.

The information contained in this report has been researched, evaluated and analysed with utmost care. However, this document does not claim to be exhaustive. If a particular event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist.

Furthermore, this report is not conclusive as to the determination or merit of any particular application for international protection. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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The drafting of this report ended on 8 August 2020. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this report. More information on the reference period for this report can be found in the methodology section of the [Introduction](#).

¹ The EASO COI Report Methodology can be downloaded from the EASO COI Portal
https://coi.easo.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2019_EASO_COI_Report_Methodology.pdf

Glossary and Abbreviations

Al-Hikma Movement	Known as Tayyar al-hikma al-watani, or the National Wisdom Movement, a political group/party led by Ammar al-Hakim
AAH, or Asa'ib ahl al-haqq PMF	Iran-aligned armed group with a prominent position within the PMF
IHCHR	Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights
Harakat hizballah al-nujaba	Iran-aligned armed group that take part in the PMF
Kata'ib hizballah	Iranian-backed armed group that has a dominant position within the PMF
KRI	Kurdistan Region of Iraq
<i>Muhasasa</i>	Arabic term used to describe Iraq's ethno-sectarian, proportional, quota system used to distribute political positions
OHCHR	UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
PM	Prime Minister
PMF	The Popular Mobilisation Forces, also known as the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) or al-Hashd al-Sha'abi
Saraya talia al-khurasani	Iran-aligned armed group that take part in the PMF
UNAMI	United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Introduction

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of political protests that have taken place in Iraq from 1 January 2019 until 31 July 2020, and the treatment by state agencies and other actors of those organising and/or taking part in such protests. The main focus of the report is on the protests that began in Baghdad and the southern provinces in October 2019, and which continued for several months, as these constitute the bulk of the protests that have taken place within the reference period. Protests taking place in other locations and/or concerning other issues will also be covered, although these were limited both in scope and frequency, as requested in the terms of reference.

Methodology

Research for the report was done in line with the EASO COI Report Methodology², and the report was written in accordance with the EASO Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports.³ Research for the report was conducted in June and July 2020. Additional information was added following peer review feedback, before the report was finalised on 25 August 2020.

Defining the terms of reference

The terms of reference were defined in consultation with COI and policy experts from EU+ countries, along with the drafter of this report, within the framework of developing the update for the EASO Country Guidance on Iraq. The reference period was January 2019 to 31 July 2020. Terms of Reference for this report can be found in the [Annex](#).

Quality control

In line with the EASO COI Report Methodology, peer review was performed by COI researchers from the departments listed as reviewers in the [Acknowledgements](#) section.

Sources and information collection

This report is based on a number of publicly available sources. These include but are not limited to reports and statements from United Nations agencies such as the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); Iraqi governmental and official sources such as the Prime Minister's office, committees of the Iraqi Parliament Council, and the semi-independent Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights (IHCHR); international rights groups such as Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International (AI), and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ); reports from governmental agencies of other countries, such as the US State Department; academic institutions and think tanks such as the Middle East Institute (MEI) and the Atlantic Council (AC); important sources of opinion and guidance such as the Friday sermons given on behalf of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani; and Iraqi and international media.

With regard to Iraqi media, the US State Department points out that it 'was active and expressed a variety of views, largely reflecting owners' political viewpoints (...) Political parties strongly influenced, or controlled outright, most of the several hundred daily and weekly print publications, as well as

² EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#)

³ EASO, Writing and Referencing Guide for EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Reports, June 2019, [url](#)

dozens of radio and television stations.⁴ Moreover, media also engaged in self-censorship in order to comply with government restrictions and due to fear of reprisals.⁵ As follows, media reports, like other sources, should be read and interpreted within their relevant contexts. In order to avoid bias and misinterpretations, and in line with EASO COI Report Methodology⁶, information has been compared, contrasted, and corroborated through different sources whenever possible and relevant, a process commonly referred to as cross-checking, or triangulation.⁷

Information has been gathered from various online platforms, including both websites and social media such as Twitter, Facebook and Telegram. Only information from official accounts on social media, such as the Twitter account of the Iraqi Prime Minister's office, has been used. All the material referred to has been downloaded and stored by the author. All sources referred to are listed in the bibliography.

This report has relied upon both English- and Arabic-language sources in order to provide a comprehensive picture of the protests and events covered. The expert from Landinfo who wrote this report in English frequently used Arabic sources. Most Arabic sources quoted, including all newspaper articles, social media posts and information from government websites, have been informally translated from Arabic into English by the expert. Due to the volume of Arabic sources used, for the citation of all these non-English sources, this report does not follow the EASO Writing and Referencing Guide signalling in the citation each time a source is translated. This is for maximal readability and efficiency.

Structure and use of the report

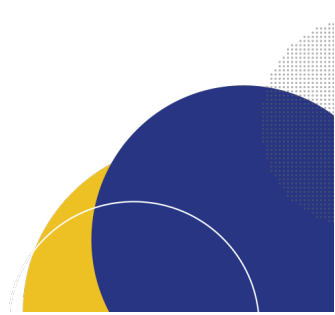
The report begins by briefly describing the background and the wider context of the protests that have taken place in Iraq over the past few years and the social and political grievances on which these were based, before it provides a short overview of protests prior to 1 October 2019. It then moves on to the protests from October and onwards, describing how they began, the demands raised, the extent and scope of the demonstrations, how they were organised, and the political response it drew from the authorities. The third chapter deals with the treatment of protesters by state agencies and other actors, including the use of violence against those taking part, the targeting of organisers and activists, arrests and detention of protesters, as well as attacks on the security services and public and private property. The final section deals with access to redress measures, as well as investigations into the use of violence and accountability on part of the actors involved. Throughout these sections, separate sub-chapters deal with protests in other parts of the country, and/or focusing on other issues. At the time of writing, it is unclear whether or not protests will resume on a large scale following the measures imposed in Iraq in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, as detailed below.

⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 26-27

⁶ EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information (COI) Report Methodology, June 2019, [url](#), pp. 14-15

⁷ Stake, R.E., Qualitative Case Studies, 2005.



Map



Map 1: UN, July 2014, Iraq⁸

⁸ UN, Map No. 3835 Rev. 6, July 2014, [url](#)

1. Background

Political protests have taken place regularly in Iraq over the past few years but have varied in scope and focus between different regions. In late 2012 and 2013, protests took place in Sunni-majority areas, including the provinces of Ninewa, Anbar, Diyala, Salah al-Din and Kirkuk⁹, that led to frequent clashes with security forces¹⁰, some of which were infiltrated by extremist groups.¹¹ The protestors accused PM al-Maliki of discriminating against and marginalising the Sunni population.¹² In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI)¹³, there have been recurring protests or attempted protests against austerity measures and unpaid wages following the cut in government funding transfers from Baghdad as well as the fall in oil prices in 2014.¹⁴ In Baghdad and the southern Shia-majority provinces, protests have taken place since 2011, often focusing on similar grievances related to corruption and a lack of opportunities and services.¹⁵

1.1 Socioeconomic and political grievances

Iraq has a young population, with 60 % being under the age of 25.¹⁶ Many young people, however, are excluded from the labour market, and as of 2016, youth unemployment stood at 36 %, compared to 16 % in the overall population.¹⁷ According to the World Bank (WB), poverty has ‘risen sharply’ over the past few years, with the poverty rate reaching 30 % in the south of the country.¹⁸ The state has proved unable to provide continuous electricity and sufficient amounts of safe drinking water, exacerbating the effects of high summer temperatures.¹⁹ At the same time, Iraq is ranked as one of the world’s most corrupt countries by Transparency International (TI).²⁰ The state is the largest employer in the country²¹, and the US State Department (USDOS) reported that nepotism and misappropriation of funds have been ‘common at all levels and across all branches of government’.²²

Protesters have seen these issues as connected, accusing the political elite of enriching themselves and their allies at the expense of opportunities and services for ordinary Iraqis, squandering the

⁹ New York Time (The), Dozens Killed in Battles Across Iraq as Sunnis Escalate Protests Against Government, 23 April 2013, [url](#); BBC, Iraqi Sunni protest clashes in Hawija leave many dead, 23 April 2013, [url](#); Guardian (The), Iraq protests signal growing tension between Sunni and Shia communities, 26 December 2012, [url](#)

¹⁰ See for instance: BBC, Iraqi Sunni protest clashes in Hawija leave many dead, 23 April 2013, [url](#)

¹¹ Badawi, T., Why Arab Sunnis are disengaged from Iraq’s protests, AC, 7 February 2020, [url](#); BBC, Iraqi Sunni protest clashes in Hawija leave many dead, 23 April 2013, [url](#)

¹² BBC, Iraqi Sunni protest clashes in Hawija leave many dead, 23 April 2013, [url](#); Guardian (The), Iraq protests signal growing tension between Sunni and Shia communities, 26 December 2012, [url](#)

¹³ The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is governed by the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) under the Iraqi Constitution, and responsible for the governorates of Erbil, Sulaymaniyah, and Dohuk.

¹⁴ Reuters, Protests intensify in Iraqi Kurdistan amid economic crisis, 9 February 2016, [url](#); NRT, Protesters briefly block major road in Sulaimani to demand KRG pay salaries, create job opportunities, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵ Hasan, H., Iraq Is Currently Being Shaken by Violent Protests, Carnegie, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what’s next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁶ WB, Iraq Economic Monitor : Toward Reconstruction, Economic Recovery and Fostering Social Cohesion, 2018, [url](#), p. 14

¹⁷ WB, Jobs in Iraq : A Primer on Job Creation in the Short-Term, 2018, [url](#), p. 6

¹⁸ WB, Iraq Economic Monitor : Toward Reconstruction, Economic Recovery and Fostering Social Cohesion, 2018, [url](#), p. 9

¹⁹ BBC, Iraq sweats in near-record heatwave, 22. July 2016, [url](#); Dourian, K., Iraq’s Electricity Challenges Mount as Oil Revenue Slows to a Trickle, AGSIW, 15 May 2020, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Electricity cuts across Iraq make life unbearable in summer heat, 31 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁰ TI, Country Data – Iraq, n.d., [url](#)

²¹ France24, Still in streets, Iraqis say problem is poverty, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

²² USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 42

country's oil wealth.²³ In the summer of 2018, the lack of adequate services became acute in the city of Basra, when contaminated drinking water hospitalised thousands of people.²⁴ This sparked three months of on and off protests, which at times were met by 'excessive use of force' on part of the authorities²⁵, leaving several people dead and injured.²⁶ Protesters in the city accused Iran-backed parties of interfering in Iraqi politics and sharing the responsibility for Iraq's many problems, and attacked the Iranian consulate and shouted anti-Iran slogans.²⁷ The protests spread to other parts of southern Iraq as well as Baghdad, with demands focused on jobs, better services, and an end to corruption.²⁸

The above-mentioned protests were not reported to have spread the Sunni-majority areas in western and northern Iraq, nor to the KRI. In the KRI, however, protests against austerity measures and unpaid wages have taken place regularly. For instance, in February 2016²⁹, and again in March and April 2018³⁰, public employees held protest and/or engaged in strikes in several cities. In the latter case, Human Rights Watch reports that both journalists and protesters were detained and subjected to beatings as the authorities sought to quell demonstrations.³¹

1.2 Protests in 2019 prior to October

On 22 March 2019, anti-government protests erupted in Mosul following a ferry accident the day before in which almost 100 people lost their lives.³² The protesters blamed corruption and negligence by the local government for the accident. The Iraqi parliament swiftly voted to investigate the accident as well as to fire the Governor of the Ninewa province³³, and a warrant was issued for his arrest.³⁴ On 15 May, four people were reportedly killed and 17 injured in Najaf in protests initiated by Muqtada al-Sadr.³⁵ A few days later, 'thousands of supporters' of al-Sadr took part in demonstrations demanding Iraq stay out of any conflict between the US and Iran.³⁶ In early August, protesters

²³ DW, Iraq protests: Demonstrators in Basra storm Iran's consulate, 7 September 2018, [url](#); DW, What's behind the protests in Iraq?, 5 October 2019, [url](#); Dodge, T., Corruption Continues to Destabilize Iraq, Chatham House, 1 October 2019, [url](#); Hasan, H., Iraq Is Currently Being Shaken by Violent Protests, Carnegie, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#);

²⁴ Human Rights Watch stated that 118 000 people were hospitalized with symptoms related to water quality, whereas NPR and Vox refer to 'thousands' of hospitalisations HRW, World Report 2020 – Iraq, 2020, [url](#); NPR, Months Of Protests Roil Iraq's Oil Capital Basra, 27 September 2018, [url](#); Vox, The violent protests in Iraq, explained, 8 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁵ HRW, World Report 2019 – Iraq, 2019, [url](#)

²⁶ Reuters, Unrest intensifies in Iraq as Iranian consulate and oil facility stormed, 7 September 2018, [url](#); HRW, World Report 2019 – Iraq, 2019, [url](#); BBC, Basra protests: Rioters attack Iran consulate, 7 September 2018, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Security Forces Fire on Protesters, 24 July 2018, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Effective investigations needed into death of protesters in Basra, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁷ Guardian (The), Protesters set fire to Iranian consulate in Basra, 7 September 2018, [url](#)

²⁸ DW, Protests spread from oil-rich Basra across southern Iraq, 15 July 2018, [url](#)

²⁹ Reuters, Protests intensify in Iraqi Kurdistan amid economic crisis, 9 February 2016, [url](#)

³⁰ HRW, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Protesters Beaten, Journalists Detained, 15 April 2018, [url](#); Denmark, The Danish Immigration Service and Norway, Landinfo, Northern Iraq - Security situation and the situation for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the disputed areas, incl. possibility to enter and access the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), November 2018, [url](#), p. 25

³¹ HRW, Kurdistan Region of Iraq: Protesters Beaten, Journalists Detained, 15 April 2018, [url](#)

³² Reuters, Grief turns to anti-government anger after boat capsizes in Iraq's Mosul, 22 March 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: MARCH 15-21, 2019, 21 March 2019, [url](#)

³³ Iraqi Parliament Council, 2019 / آذار / 24 / الأحد (5) القرارات وتوصيات الجلسة [Decisions and recommendations from session 5, Sunday 24 March 2019], 24 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁴ Al-Mada Paper, القضاء يلاحق محافظ نينوى بعد 3 أيام من إقالته [The Judiciary is pursuing the Governor of Nineweh three days after his dismissal], 27 March 2019, [url](#)

³⁵ Kurdistan24, Deadly anti-corruption protests restart in Iraq's Najaf, 16 May 2019, [url](#)

³⁶ Middle East Eye, Thousands of Iraqis protest against potential war between US and Iran, 24 May 2019, [url](#)

reportedly blocked the Mosul-Erbil road in response to the Prime Minister's decision to withdraw PMF-forces from the area.³⁷

In May 2019, protesters once again took to the streets in Baghdad, Basra, and other parts of southern Iraq, demanding better services and opportunities, and an end to corruption.³⁸ In late June and early July, security forces cracked down on protests in Basra, arresting a number of demonstrators as well as journalists. Protesters also reported experiencing intimidation by security forces and 'armed groups'.³⁹ On 19 July, 'thousands' of supporters of the Hikma-movement⁴⁰ demonstrated in Baghdad and southern provinces, demanding better services and an end to corruption.⁴¹ Also in July, a 'general call to demonstrate' appeared on social media.⁴² In July, August, and September, university graduates held demonstrations and sit-ins outside government ministries in Baghdad, demanding jobs and opportunities.⁴³ By September, activists online were calling for people to take part in protests on 1 October.⁴⁴ On 27 September, the government of PM Adel Abdel Mahdi announced the decommissioning of Lieutenant General Abdel Wahhab al-Saadi, the widely respected deputy head of the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) seen as a hero of the fight against ISIS.⁴⁵ Al-Saadi was moved to a desk job in the Defence Ministry.⁴⁶ The move, criticised for yielding to the interests of Iran and their allies in the PMF, sparked anger online and is seen as an important contributing factor to the popular mobilisation that followed.⁴⁷

³⁷ Rudaw, Iraqi PM assures eventual Hashd al-Shaabi withdrawal from Nineveh Plains, 10 August 2019, [url](#). The Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), also known as the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMU) or al-Hashd al-Sha'bi, is an umbrella organization consisting of a number of militias, formed in the summer of 2014 with a stated aim of fighting the so-called Islamic State (IS). Since 2016, the PMF has formally and legally been part of the Iraqi state's security apparatus: Knights, M. et. al., Honored not contained. The Future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces, WINEP, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 3-9

³⁸ Sweden, Lifos, Lågesanalys: Demonstrationerna i Irak – evolution eller revolution? [Situation analysis: The demonstrations in Iraq – evolution or revolution?], 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

³⁹ Middle East Eye, Threats and arrests face Basra activists as they call for jobs, water and electricity, 6 July 2019, [url](#); National (The), Worries over warnings to Iraqi media covering Basra protests, 4 July 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁰ Political group/party led by Ammar al-Hakim, which on 16 June 2019 declared itself part of the parliamentary opposition, albeit a 'loyal' (to the government) opposition. See: Al-Rahim, R., A shift in Iraqi politics: An opposition emerges, AC, 16 July 2019, [url](#)

⁴¹ Rudaw, People protest lack of services, water across Iraq, 19 July 2019, [url](#)

⁴² UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁴³ Al-Jazeera, Iraq protests: Thousands of graduates demand jobs from government, 5 September 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁴ Sweden, Lifos, Lågesanalys: Demonstrationerna i Irak – evolution eller revolution? [Situation analysis: The demonstrations in Iraq – evolution or revolution?], 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁴⁵ VOA, Controversy Grips Iraq After Removal of Top Commander, 28 September 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Euronews, Is this Iraqi General behind Iraq's wave of protests?, 3 October 2019, [url](#)

⁴⁷ International Crisis Group, Widespread Protests Point to Iraq's Cycle of Social Crisis, 10 October 2019, [url](#); Sweden, Lifos, Lågesanalys: Demonstrationerna i Irak – evolution eller revolution? [Situation analysis: The demonstrations in Iraq – evolution or revolution?], 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 7; VOA, Controversy Grips Iraq After Removal of Top Commander, 28 September 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

2. Protests from 1 October 2019

2.1 The protest movement in Baghdad and the southern provinces

On 1 October, protests in Baghdad and several other provinces marked the beginning of ‘the largest mass protest movement in Iraq’s recent memory’⁴⁸, lasting for several months. The protests can be divided into three stages. First, protests took place from 1 until 9 October 2019, when they were paused due to the Shia holiday of Arbāeen and the violence experienced.⁴⁹ Calls quickly went out for new protests to begin on 25 October 2019⁵⁰, and these lasted until March/April 2020, when they largely ended due to the Covid-19 pandemic.⁵¹ It should be noted that a brief pause in the protests occurred following the killing of the commander of the Quds force of the IRGC, Qassim Sulaimani, and the deputy leader of the PMF, Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, in a US drone strike on 3 January 2020.⁵² Finally, new protests began in May and June 2020, albeit with markedly fewer participants.⁵³ The demonstrations have been seen as part of the same protest movement, albeit a loosely defined one without an organised leadership, but unified by similar demands, tactics, and in terms of the demographics of the participants.⁵⁴

2.1.1 The protesters’ demands

The protests did not have a leadership that could present demands on behalf of those taking part⁵⁵, but according to available sources, key demands uniting the movement can be identified. From the outset, the demands raised were recognisable from previous protests.⁵⁶ Protesters called for economic reforms, jobs and opportunities for young people, social justice, better services, better and impartial governance, increased accountability, and an end to corruption.⁵⁷ In addition, protesters

⁴⁸ UNAMI, For Iraq – The United Nations in Iraq 2019, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 5

⁴⁹ New York Times (The), ‘All of Them Are Thieves’: Iraqis Defy Security Forces to Protest Corruption, 25 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Alhassani, M., ECFR The Evolution of Iraq’s Protests: Excessive Force Pushes Protesters to Adapt, WINEP, 4 February 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Al-Mada Paper, 50 دعوى قضائية تلاحق رئيس الحكومة والجيش وفصائل الحشد بسبب قمع التظاهرات [50 Lawsuits against the PM, the army, and the PMF for suppressing the demonstrations], 14 October 2019, [url](#); VOA, Firebrand Cleric Green-Lights Fresh Protests in Iraq, 20 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 15; Asharq al-Awsat, Coronavirus Brings Abrupt End to Iraq Protest Movement, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵² Gulf News, After brief pause, Iraq anti-government protests resume, 20 January 2020, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Hashd deputy Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis: Iran’s man in Baghdad, 3 January 2020, [url](#); New York Times (The), U.S. Strike in Iraq Kills Qassim Suleimani, Commander of Iranian Forces, 2 January 2020, [url](#). The IRGC is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps.

⁵³ Al-Arabi al-Jadid, احتجاجات به محافظات عراقية: الكشف عن قتلة المتظاهرين وإقالة المحافظين [Protests in four Iraqi provinces: disclosure of the killers of protesters and the resignation of the governors], 7 June 2020, [url](#); National (The), Iraq’s new prime minister orders protesters released as rallies resume, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁴ Ali, Z. and Khalaf, S., In Iraq, demonstrators demand change — and the government fights back, 9 October 2019, [url](#); Hasan, H., Iraq Is Currently Being Shaken by Violent Protests, Carnegie, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what’s next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, تقرير لجنة حقوق الإنسان عن التظاهرات في العراق [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁵ BBC, The Iraq protests explained in 100 and 500 words, 2 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁵⁶ US, CRS, Iraq: Protests and the Future of U.S. Partnership, 12 November 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁷ UNAMI, UN Special Representative meets protesters, calls for calm and stresses the importance of a direct dialogue, 2 October 2019, [url](#); Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

expressed support for the decommissioned lieutenant general al-Saadi and anger at Iranian and other foreign interference in Iraq.⁵⁸ Some protesters also decried the government's recent removal of informal housing settlements.⁵⁹

As the protests developed, the demands raised developed with them. The initial demands for better and more accountable governance soon developed into demands for systemic change.⁶⁰ These demands entailed the resignation of the government and new elections based on a revised electoral law⁶¹, but also 'complete reform'⁶² including constitutional changes and an end to Iraq's post-2003 ethno-sectarian political system known as *muhasasa*.⁶³ Critics argued that the system, within which positions and resources are divided based on an ethno-sectarian quota system, enables the political elite to enrich themselves and their allies at the expense of the population.⁶⁴ Sources note that the protests were explicitly anti-sectarian, and that a popular slogan was 'we want a homeland.'⁶⁵

The protesters also responded to events as they progressed, adjusting or raising new demands. Following Prime Minister Abdel Mahdi's resignation, protesters in Baghdad issued a statement on 11 December with demands for a new prime minister, including, among other things, a commitment to 'substantial reforms'.⁶⁶ On 13 January, protesters in Nasiriyya, and according to Human Rights Watch also other provinces, responded to what they perceived as inaction and demanded the government enact reforms within seven days.⁶⁷ When Mohammed Tawfiq Allawi was named Prime Minister on 1 February, protesters immediately rejected the move.⁶⁸ Similarly, when Adnan al-Zurfi

Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, تقرير لجنة حقوق الانسان عن التظاهرات في العراق [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4; DW, What's behind the protests in Iraq?, 5 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Several killed as Iraq protests escalate, spread nationwide, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁸ Byman, D.I., Is change likely in Iraq?, Brookings, [url](#); Czulda, R., Protests challenge Iran's future position in Iraq, AC, 2 December 2019, [url](#); DW, What's behind the protests in Iraq?, 5 October 2019, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Hundreds wounded in Iraq as police fire tear gas, bullets at protesters, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

⁵⁹ Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1

⁶⁰ Washington Post (The), Iraqi protests broaden; violent crackdown spirals, 6 October 2019, [url](#); Alaaldin, R., The irresistible resiliency of Iraq's protesters, Brookings, 31 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶¹ Time, Over 300 Killed as Hundreds of Thousands Take Part in Iraqi Protests. What's Behind the Violent Demonstrations?, 13 November 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Iraq passes electoral reforms but deadlock remains, 24 December 2019, [url](#); CRS, Iraq: Protests and the Future of U.S. Partnership, 12 November 2019, [url](#); Haynes, C., Explainer: Iraq's autumn of discontent, AC, 18 November 2019, [url](#)

⁶² Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, تقرير لجنة حقوق الانسان عن التظاهرات في العراق [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁶³ Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2; Alshamary, M. and al-Amin, S., Iraqi protesters demand constitutional change. Can they make it happen?, Washington Post (The), 7 November 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁴ Dodge, T., Corruption Continues to Destabilize Iraq, Chatham House, 1 October 2019, [url](#); Hasan, H. Iraq Protests: A New Social Movement Is Challenging Sectarian Power, Carnegie, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Rubaie, A., Despite Political Turmoil and Coronavirus, Iraq's Protest Movement Continues, WINEP, 23 March 2020, [url](#); Boot, M., The Deadly Protests Shaking Iraq: What to Know, CFR, 30 October 2019, [url](#)

⁶⁵ Jiyad, S., Iraq's unsustainable status quo, ECFR, 27 February 2020, [url](#); Alhassani, M., The Evolution of Iraq's Protests: Excessive Force Pushes Protesters to Adapt, WINEP, 4 February 2020, [url](#); Salam, D., Will protests herald a new era in Iraqi politics?, AC, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, تقرير لجنة حقوق الانسان عن التظاهرات في العراق [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁶⁶ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 7

⁶⁷ HRW, Iraq: Authorities Violently Remove Protesters, 31 January 2020, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 9 – JANUARY 16, 2020, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

⁶⁸ Reuters, Iraqi cleric Sadr tells followers to clear sit-ins after PM appointed, 2 February 2020, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Mohammed Allawi appointed new Iraq PM, protesters reject him, 1 February 2020, [url](#)

was named Prime Minister on 17 March following Allawi's inability to form a cabinet, protesters in several cities rejected the appointment.⁶⁹ In June, protesters in several provinces focused their demands on the resignation of provincial Governors, as well as justice for those killed in previous protests.⁷⁰

2.1.2 Main protests and locations

Sources state that the protests predominantly took place in Baghdad and central and southern Shia-majority provinces.⁷¹ More specifically, protests during the first week of October and again on 25 October are reported to have taken place in the provinces of Karbala, Babil, Wasit, Najaf, Qadisiyya, Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan, and Basra, in addition to Baghdad.⁷² In Baghdad, protests were centred in Tahrir and Khilani square, with frequent clashes between protestors and security forces occurring on or near al-Jumhuriyya and other nearby bridges.⁷³ In other provinces, some of the largest protests as well as most violent clashes between protestors and security forces and/or other armed groups seem to have taken place in the cities of Nasiriyah, Basra, Karbala, and Najaf.⁷⁴

The number of protesters taking part seem to have varied throughout the autumn and winter of 2019 and 2020, with most sources referring to 'thousands'⁷⁵ or in some cases 'tens of thousands'⁷⁶ taking part in the larger demonstrations. UNAMI reports that 3 000 people took part in Baghdad on 1 October⁷⁷, and that 'between 29 October and 4 November, the number of protestors in Baghdad reached an estimated one million.'⁷⁸ The numbers seem to have decreased in February/March, with reports referring to 'hundreds' taking part.⁷⁹ On 17 March 2020, the government announced a

⁶⁹ EPIC, ISHM: MARCH 12 – MARCH 19, 2020, March 19 2020, [url](#)

⁷⁰ Al-Mada Paper, متظاهرون يحاصرون مكاتب المحافظين لإجبارهم على الاستقالة [Protesters surround the offices of Governors to force their resignation], 7 June 2020, [url](#); Al-Arabi al-Jadid, إقالة المحافظين وإقالة المتظاهرين والكشف عن قتل المتظاهرين وإقالة المحافظين [Protests in four Iraqi provinces: disclosure of the killers of protesters and the resignation of the governors], 7 June 2020, [url](#)

⁷¹ Hasan, H. Iraq Protests: A New Social Movement Is Challenging Sectarian Power, Carnegie, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Knights, M., Exposing and Sanctioning Human Rights Violations by Iraqi Militias, WINEP, 22 October 2019, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 2, 11

⁷² Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 3

⁷³ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 4, 5; Al-Jazeera, Baghdad's commercial hub feels pinch as Iraq protests continue, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Protesters burn down Iranian consulate in southern Iraq, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Iranian tear gas grenades among those causing gruesome protester deaths, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁴ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Guardian (The), Protesters burn down Iranian consulate in southern Iraq, 27 November 2019, [url](#); AP, Iraqi protesters attack Iran consulate in Karbala, 3 November 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Teargas Cartridges Killing Protesters, 8 November 2019, [url](#); AP, 27 Iraqi protesters shot dead in 24 hours, violence spirals, 28 November 2019, [url](#); Wing, J., One Of The Deadliest Days Of Protests At Least 25 Killed In Nasiriya, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 29 November 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁵ Al-Jazeera, Several killed as Iraq protests escalate, spread nationwide, 2 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Sumaria, ساحة التحرير، تحضن الآلاف المتظاهرين... صور [Thousands of demonstrators in Tahrir Square ... Pictures], 10 January 2020, [url](#); Al-Mada Paper, المتظاهرون يعودون إلى جسر الأحرار و9 محافظات تغلق المدارس والدوائر [Demonstrators return to al-Ahrar bridge and 9 provinces close schools and offices], 17 November 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁶ Reuters, Iraqi protesters pack Baghdad square, anti-government movement gains momentum, 29 October 2019, [url](#); AP (Associated Press), Iraqi protesters attack Iran consulate in Karbala, 3 November 2019, [url](#)

⁷⁷ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁸ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

⁷⁹ Al-Mada Paper, ساحات الاحتجاج تحضر لمفاجأة الأحزاب لو تكرر سيناريو تكليف علاوي [The Protest Sites prepare to surprise the parties if they repeat the scenario of Allawi's designation], 10 March 2020, [url](#); Sky News Arabia, القبعات الزرقاء تطورات متسارعة بجنوب العراق... ودعوة لمواجهة 'Blue Hats', 4 February 2020,

national curfew in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and protesters reportedly announced a partial suspension of demonstrations due to the crisis⁸⁰, although some sources report that sit-ins continued in some places, including in Tahrir Square in Baghdad.⁸¹ New protests took place in early May and again in early June, with hundreds of people reportedly taking part.⁸² In addition to demonstrations and sit-ins, protesters in some areas blocked roads and bridges to disrupt economic activity, targeting, among other things, the port of Basra and facilities related to oil production.⁸³ It should also be noted that numerous attacks on public and private properties were reported during the protests, including on the Iranian consulates in Najaf and Karbala.⁸⁴

ACLED data on protests and riots in Iraq (not including KRI)

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) collects real-time data on aspects of political violence globally⁸⁵, including 'demonstration events' such as protests and riots. EASO used the publicly available ACLED Power BI Report dataset for Iraq (1 January 2019 to 31 July 2020) for ACLED data on demonstration events such as protests and riots for this report.⁸⁶ ACLED recorded a total of 1 558 demonstration events coded as 'protests'⁸⁷ in Iraq (not including KRI) through the reference period. Basra was the governorate where most protests took place (329), followed by Muthanna (226) and Thi-Qar (217). Baghdad, the capital of Iraq, experienced 130 protests.⁸⁸

In large cities, the figures for protests recorded by ACLED were as follows: Basra city, capital of Basra governorate, experienced the largest number of protests (199). It was followed by Diwaniyah (capital of Qadissiyah governorate – 168), and Nassiriyah (capital of Thi-Qar governorate – 167). Baghdad city, the capital of Iraq and of Baghdad governorate, counted 62 protests in the reference period.⁸⁹

The table shows the occurrence of protest events by governorate and by district.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 6 May 2020, [url](#), para. 15; Asharq al-Awsat, Coronavirus Brings Abrupt End to Iraq Protest Movement, 22 March 2020, [url](#)

⁸¹ New Arab (The), Protesters face live fire after Iraq partially lifts coronavirus lockdown, 22 April 2020, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Coronavirus curfew fails to clear Iraqi protest squares, 6 April 2020, [url](#)

⁸² Al-Arabi al-Jadid, احتجاجات في محافظات عراقية: الكشف عن قتلة المتظاهرين وإقالة المحافظين [Protests in four Iraqi provinces: disclosure of the killers of protesters and the resignation of the governors], 7 June 2020, [url](#); National (The), Iraq's new prime minister orders protesters released as rallies resume, 10 May 2020, [url](#); Wing, J., Protests Return To Iraq Can New Govt Respond To Their Demands?, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 14 May 2020, [url](#)

⁸³ AP, Anti-government protests cripple major Iraqi port, oil field, 18 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Baghdad's commercial hub feels pinch as Iraq protests continue, 27 November 2019, [url](#); Rudaw, Protesters being killed by 'third party', not Iraq's security forces: defense minister, 16 November 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 23 – JANUARY 30, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

⁸⁴ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 2; IHCHR, [Facebook], posted on: 27 October 2019, [url](#); Guardian (The), Protesters burn down Iranian consulate in southern Iraq, 27 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 4; BBC, Iraq unrest: Protesters attack Iranian consulate in Karbala, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

⁸⁵ ACLED, About ACLED, n.d., [url](#)

⁸⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁷ ACLED's codebook defines protests as 'a public demonstration in which participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. Events include individuals and groups who peacefully demonstrate against a political entity, government institution, policy, group, tradition, business or other private institution.' For more detailed information on the definition and sub-events captured within 'protests', see: ACLED, ACLED Codebook – 2019, 2019, [url](#), pp. 12-13

⁸⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

⁸⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁰ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

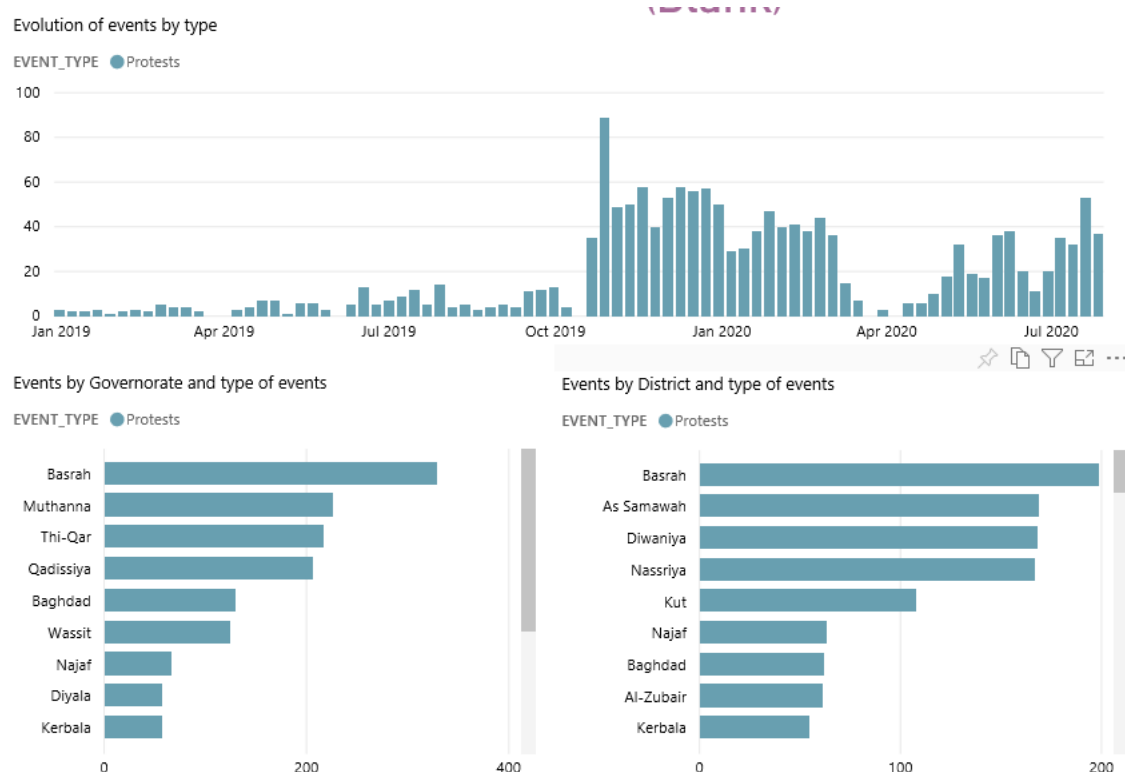


Figure 1: ACLED data on protests from 1 January 2019 to 31 July 2020

For data on demonstration events that ACLED coded as ‘riots’ which includes violent demonstrations⁹¹, ACLED recorded that there were 539 such events in Iraq (without KRI) during the reference period, and the three worst affected governorates were: Thi-Qar (150), Baghdad (107), Basra (74).⁹²

In large cities, the figures for riots recorded by ACLED were as follows: Nassiriyah, capital of Thi-Qar governorate experienced the largest number of riots (87). It was followed by Baghdad city (capital of Iraq and of Baghdad governorate - 75), and Basra (capital of Basra governorate – 44).⁹³

The table shows the occurrence of protest events by governorate and by district.⁹⁴

⁹¹ ACLED’s codebook defines ‘riots’ as ‘violent events where demonstrators or mobs engage in disruptive acts, including but not limited to rock throwing, property destruction, etc. They may target other individuals, property, businesses, other rioting groups or armed actors’ including sub-events that involve violence, destructive behaviour, mob violence, etc. For more detailed information on the definition and sub-events captured within ‘riots’, see: ACLED, ACLED Codebook – 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14

⁹² EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

⁹³ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

⁹⁴ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

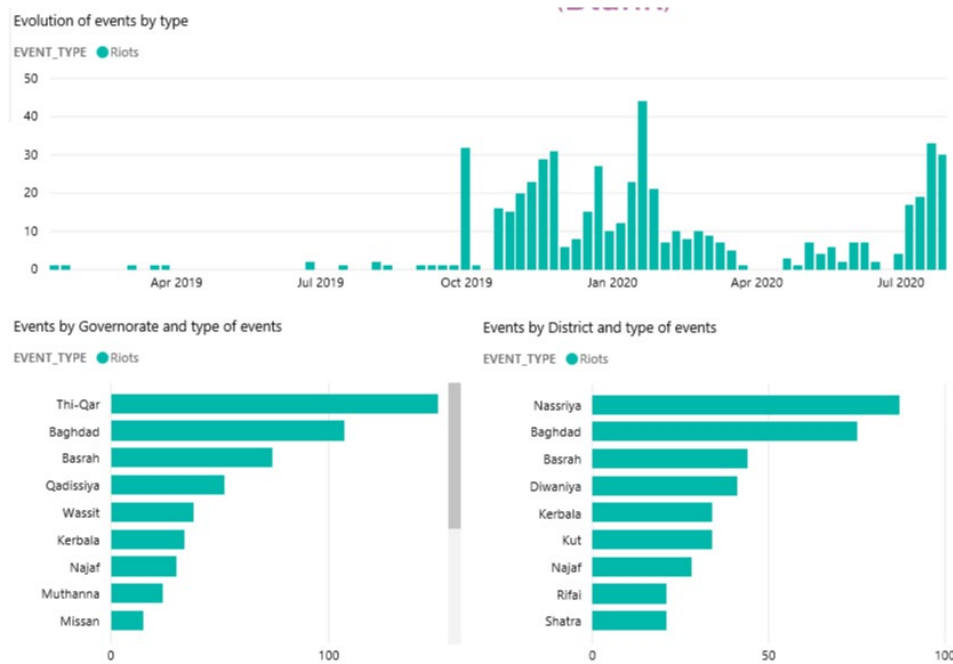


Figure 2: ACLED data on riots for 1 January 2019 to 31 July 2020

2.1.3 Who takes part in the protests?

Sources show that the demonstrations that were part of the protest movement described so far most of all took place in Baghdad and the Shia-majority provinces of the south.⁹⁵ While Sunni inhabitants in Baghdad and other areas that saw protests took part, and while some reportedly travelled from other parts of the country to join in⁹⁶, this meant that the protesters predominantly belonged to the Shia part of the population.⁹⁷ Sources note, however, that the protesters' demands were 'not religiously-specific'⁹⁸, and that the protests were 'not a Shia revolt'.⁹⁹ During the first period of protests from 1 – 9 October, most sources identify the protesters as 'young men', often marginalised and un- or underemployed, as well as civil society activists.¹⁰⁰ There are, however, also reports of women taking part during this first phase.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Sweden, Lifos, Lägesanalys: Demonstrationarna i Irak – evolution eller revolution? [Situation analysis: The demonstrations in Iraq – evolution or revolution?], 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 8; UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 11; UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1; Badawi, T., Why Arab Sunnis are disengaged from Iraq's protests, AC, 7 February 2020, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁶ Badawi, T., Why Arab Sunnis are disengaged from Iraq's protests, AC, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

⁹⁷ Hasan, H. Iraq Protests: A New Social Movement Is Challenging Sectarian Power, Carnegie, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁸ Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

⁹⁹ Hasan, H. Iraq Protests: A New Social Movement Is Challenging Sectarian Power, Carnegie, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁰ Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, العراق لجنة حقوق الانسان عن التظاهرات في العراق, 17 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰¹ Al-Jazeera, *مظاهرات العراق.. نساء على خط المواجهة* [The protests in Iraq.. Women at the line of confrontation], 5 October 2019, [url](#)

Many sources report that the composition of the protesters changed when the second round of demonstrations began on 25 October. From that point, 'demonstrators from demographically diverse groups'¹⁰² took part, as more women, older people, school children, students, and professionals joined in.¹⁰³ In several places, teachers, students and other professional groups declared open-ended strikes in support of the protests.¹⁰⁴ The UN stated that women played an unprecedented part within the protest movement.¹⁰⁵ Former members of the PMF reportedly also took part in demonstrations.¹⁰⁶

Sources report that most of the protesters did not belong to any particular political party or group, that they were not led by any religious or political leader, that they did not subscribe to any particular view or ideology, and that they did not have any unified or formal leadership.¹⁰⁷ At the same time, however, sources report that supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr took part in the protests from 25 October until late January, following al-Sadr's call for them to do so.¹⁰⁸ Thus, it appears that some newspapers and other sources make a distinction between 'protesters', with no given political affiliation, and supporters of al-Sadr, all taking part in the same protests. Information on the relative sizes of the two groups could not be found.

2.1.4 How are the protests organised?

Sources are somewhat conflicted as to how the protests began. Whereas some refer to the initial demonstrations as 'spontaneous'¹⁰⁹, other sources note that calls for protests on 1 October began circulating in September 2019.¹¹⁰ Still, numerous sources report that no particular party or organisation initiated the demonstrations, and that they were spontaneous in the sense that people took part due to anger over particular issues as well as at the violent response with which the initial protests were met.¹¹¹

¹⁰² UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰³ UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; New York Times (The), 'All of Them Are Thieves': Iraqis Defy Security Forces to Protest Corruption, 25 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁰⁴ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2; Wing, J., Iraq Protests Get Huge Boost As Students And Professional Groups Join In, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 29 October 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Iraqi protesters pack Baghdad square, anti-government movement gains momentum, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁵ UNAMI, For Iraq – The United Nations in Iraq 2019, 31 March 2020, [url](#), p. 8; UNAMI, Briefing to the Security Council by Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert 3 March 2020 (as delivered), 3 March 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁶ New York Times (The), 'All of Them Are Thieves': Iraqis Defy Security Forces to Protest Corruption, 25 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁷ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, تقرير لجنة حقوق الانسان عن التظاهرات في العراق [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Salam, D., Will protests herald a new era in Iraqi politics?, AC, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, أسباب التصعيد وسبيل الحل [The protests in Iraq.. The reasons behind the expansion and the path to a solution], 10 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁰⁸ VOA, Firebrand Cleric Green-Lights Fresh Protests in Iraq, 20 October 2019, [url](#); New Arab (The), 'We want dignity': Two killed as massive anti-government protests rock Iraq, 25 October 2019, [url](#); Slim, R., Iraq: Sadr withdraws support for protests in a political power play, MEI, 27 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰⁹ Ali, Z. and Khalaf, S., In Iraq, demonstrators demand change — and the government fights back, 9 October 2019, [url](#); Salam, D., Will protests herald a new era in Iraqi politics?, AC, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Iraqi protests broaden; violent crackdown spirals, 6 October 2019, [url](#); Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁰ Sweden, Lifos, Lägesanalys: Demonstrationarna i Irak – evolution eller revolution? [Situation analysis: The demonstrations in Iraq – evolution or revolution?], 2 December 2019, [url](#), p. 7; Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹¹ Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#); UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Al-Jazeera, أسباب التصعيد وسبيل الحل [The protests in Iraq. The reasons behind the expansion and the path to a solution], 10 October 2019, [url](#); BBC, Iraq protests: Shots fired as demonstrators defy Baghdad curfew, 3 October 2019, [url](#)

Mobilisation for the protests, both earlier calls for demonstrations as well as mobilisation in response to particular issues, reportedly took place online¹¹², with one source pointing to Facebook as a particularly important platform.¹¹³ Iraqi authorities, however, blocked internet access on 2 October for more than 24 hours, and again for varying periods of time as the protests progressed.¹¹⁴ In addition, the authorities blocked access to social media from 2 October until 21 November.¹¹⁵ While social media could be accessed using VPNs when internet was available, this could suggest that other channels of communication were important as well. For instance, the Iraqi High Commission for Human Rights reportedly resorted to using SMS when internet was unavailable.¹¹⁶ Few details are available concerning those calling for and mobilising for protests online (and possibly elsewhere), but they are described as civil society activists¹¹⁷, citizens¹¹⁸, or social media influencers.¹¹⁹

Some services were organised and provided for those taking part in protests. For instance, tents were set up at the sit-in in Tahrir Square in Baghdad providing food, legal advice, and other services.¹²⁰ Sources refer to this being done by 'volunteers' or simply 'protesters'¹²¹, and it is unclear how these efforts were funded. Similarly, health care volunteers reportedly provided medical aid for protesters at the square¹²², while Tuk-Tuk vehicles functioned as make-shift ambulances.¹²³

Supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr, however, seem to have been organised through his movement. While some reportedly initially joined the protests spontaneously¹²⁴, they followed his orders when such were given.¹²⁵ For instance, when al-Sadr gave the order to end roadblocks¹²⁶, his followers attacked their former co-protesters.¹²⁷ While taking part in demonstrations, his movement reportedly provided logistical support for the protests.¹²⁸

¹¹² UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹³ International Crisis Group, Widespread Protests Point to Iraq's Cycle of Social Crisis, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁴ Netblocks, Iraq blocks Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram, then shuts down internet amid civil unrest, 2 October 2019, [url](#); Netblocks, Iraq shuts down internet again as protests intensify, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Knights, M., Exposing and Sanctioning Human Rights Violations by Iraqi Militias, WINEP, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁵ Netblocks, Social media partially unblocked in Iraq after 50 days, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁶ Yahoo News, In Iraq protests, counting the dead is a dangerous job, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

¹¹⁷ Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what's next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2;

¹¹⁸ Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1

¹¹⁹ International Crisis Group, Widespread Protests Point to Iraq's Cycle of Social Crisis, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

¹²⁰ France24, Iraq protesters set up free public services in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, 3 November 2019, [url](#)

¹²¹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2; France24, Iraq protesters set up free public services in Baghdad's Tahrir Square, 3 November 2019, [url](#)

¹²² Al-Jazeera, Despite threats, Iraq's medical volunteers keep protests alive, 23 November 2019, [url](#)

¹²³ MSF, Tuk-tuks, the ambulances of the nation, 14 January 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁴ Washington Post (The), How powerful cleric Moqtada al-Sadr could snuff out Iraq's mass street protests, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁵ Reuters, Iraqi security forces raid protest camps after Sadr supporters withdraw, 25 January, [url](#); Washington Post (The), How powerful cleric Moqtada al-Sadr could snuff out Iraq's mass street protests, 4 March 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁶ Mu_AlSadr, [Twitter], posted on: 2 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁷ Reuters, Iraqi cleric Sadr tells followers to clear sit-ins after PM appointed, 2 February 2020, [url](#)

¹²⁸ Jiyad, S., Iraq's unsustainable status quo, ECFR, 27 February 2020, [url](#)

2.1.5 Political initiatives in response to the protests

Several sources report that the demonstrations on 1 October took the government by surprise¹²⁹, although UNAMI notes that the government was aware of the protests in advance and deployed large numbers of security forces.¹³⁰ While the authorities responded to the protest using extensive violence, as detailed below, the government also launched a number of initiatives meant to comply with the protesters' demands. On 2 October, the PM, the President, and the Speaker of Parliament promised an investigation into violence and killings.¹³¹ This promise was repeated by the PM several times.¹³² On 4 October, the PM promised the release of peaceful protesters, and announced a number of measures promising to tackle corruption and provide jobs and opportunities.¹³³ The government followed up with new measures announced on 6 and 9 October that included the designation of those killed in the protests as martyrs¹³⁴, which in turn might entitle their families to compensation.¹³⁵

On 8 October, Parliament formed a committee tasked with supervising the implementation of the protesters' demands.¹³⁶ On 28 October, Parliament voted to dissolve the provincial councils and transfer their powers to the governors, and to form a committee tasked with reviewing and suggesting changes to the constitution by the end of February.¹³⁷ This committee, however, had yet to publish any decisions as of 1 July 2020.¹³⁸ It is unclear whether other measures concerning jobs and opportunities have been implemented.

Prime Minister Mahdi announced his resignation on 29 November, and this was approved by Parliament on 1 December.¹³⁹ Mustafa al-Kadhimi was approved by parliament as Prime Minister at the head of a new government on 7 May.¹⁴⁰ Al-Kadhimi promised to amend the electoral law and hold early elections, to investigate violence, killings and kidnappings and release all protesters except those involved in violent crimes, to compensate the families of martyrs, to fight against corruption, and to improve the economy and opportunities for young people.¹⁴¹ On 9 May, al-Saadi was reinstated and

¹²⁹ Abdulhadi, R., Iraqi protestors unite behind demands, not sectarian identities, 31 October 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Iraqi police fire on protesters in new unrest, death toll passes 100, 6 October 2019, [url](#); CNN, Iraqi protesters say they have videos of government atrocities. An internet blackout is stopping the world from seeing them, 9 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁰ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

¹³¹ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 3

¹³² Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 4 October 2019, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 4, 8

¹³³ Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 4 October 2019, [url](#);

¹³⁴ Reuters, Iraqi PM announces cabinet reshuffle after week of bloody protests, 9 October 2019, [url](#); Iraq, IraqiPMO, [Twitter], posted on: 6 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 9; Iraq, IraqiPMO, [Twitter], posted on: 6 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁶ Iraqi Parliament Council, 2019 / تشرين الاول / 8 الثلاثاء / (8) الفلألاء [Decisions and recommendations from session 8, Tuesday 8 October 2019], 8 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 9

¹³⁷ Iraqi Parliament Council, 2019 / تشرين الاول / 28 الاثنين / (10) الفلألاء [Decisions and recommendations from session 10, Tuesday 28 October 2019], 28 October 2019, [url](#)

¹³⁸ Iraqi Parliament Council, لجنة التعديلات الدستورية [The Committee for constitutional review], undated, [url](#)

¹³⁹ Washington Post (The), Iraqi prime minister says he will submit resignation to head off further bloodshed, 29 November 2019, [url](#); UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 21 February 2020, [url](#), para. 4

¹⁴⁰ Iraq, Iraqi Parliamentary Council, مجلس النواب يمنح الثقة لحكومة رئيس مجلس الوزراء الكاظمي و15 وزيرا [The Parliament confers its trust to the government of prime minister al-Kadhimi and 15 ministers], 7 May 2020, [url](#); France24, Iraq parliament approves PM Kadhimi's new cabinet after months of deadlock, 7 May 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴¹ Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 10 May 2020, [url](#); Iraq, مجلس النواب يقر برنامج الحكومة العراقية الجديدة [The Parliament approves the program of the new Iraqi government], 7 May 2020, [url](#)

promoted to head of the CTS¹⁴², and on 10 May, the judiciary ordered the release of protesters in line with the PM's promise.¹⁴³ On 6 June, the PM announced the formation of a committee to review the governors and the lack of proper services in the provinces.¹⁴⁴

Several political and religious forces expressed support for the protests. On 2 October, Muqtada al-Sadr called for peaceful protests¹⁴⁵, later encouraging his own supporters to take part from 25 October.¹⁴⁶ Al-Sadr withdrew his support on 24 January.¹⁴⁷ According to the UN security council, 'the leaders of political parties and blocs' condemned violence towards protesters on 4 October.¹⁴⁸ Importantly, on numerous occasions Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani expressed support for peaceful protests and the demands raised, expressed his disapproval of the government the day PM Mahdi announced his resignation, and condemned the violence and demanded true and impartial investigations into it.¹⁴⁹

2.2 Other protests and protests in the KRI

On 12 and 13 January 2020, people gathered outside the Kurdistan Parliament building in Erbil to protest the passing of a new pension reform bill, which was seen as perpetuating disparities.¹⁵⁰ On 27 January, security forces wounded two persons taking part in a protest east of Sulaimaniyya demanding better basic services.¹⁵¹ On 16 May, 167 persons, including 8 journalists, were arrested in Duhok, as teachers attempted to protest in response to unpaid wages.¹⁵² On 15 June, health care personnel went on strike to protest unpaid wages in Sulaimaniyya¹⁵³, and on 21 June, protesters briefly blocked roads in the city, again protesting unpaid wages and demanding better job opportunities.¹⁵⁴ In late May and early June, several protests, including in Erbil and Sulaimaniyya, took place in response to lockdowns imposed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In response to the protests,

¹⁴² France24, Iraq's new govt reaches out to October protesters, 9 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴³ Al-Jazeera, New Iraq PM releases protesters; promotes respected general, 10 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁴ Iraq, IraqiPMO, [Twitter], posted on: 6 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁴⁵ Al-Jazeera, Several killed as Iraq protests escalate, spread nationwide, 2 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁶ Bobseine, H., Iraqis plan to continue protests Friday. Here's what might happen, Washington Post (The), 24 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁴⁷ Reuters, Iraqi security forces raid protest camps after Sadr supporters withdraw, 25 January, [url](#)

¹⁴⁸ UN Security Council, Implementation of resolution 2470 (2019) - Report of the Secretary-General, 22 November 2019, [url](#), para. 3

¹⁴⁹ New Arab (The), Listen to protesters 'before it's too late,' Shia cleric Sistani tells Iraq government, 4 October 2019, [url](#); Wing, J., Najaf and Tehran Pick Sides In Protests, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 2 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Safi, A., الخطبة الثانية لصلاة الجمعة بإمامة السيد أحمد الصافي في 2/ ربيع الآخر/1441هـ، الموافق 29/ 11/ 2019م [The second sermon of the Friday prayer given by al-Sayyid [honorific religious title] Ahmad al-Safi 29 November 2019], [url](#); Al-Karbalai, A., الخطبة الثانية لصلاة الجمعة بإمامة الشيخ عبد المهدي الكربلائي في 9/ ربيع الآخر/1441هـ، الموافق 6/ 12/ 2019م [The second sermon of the Friday prayer given by al-Sheikh [honorific religious title] Abdel Mahdi al-Karbalai 6 December 2019], [url](#); Al-Karbalai, A., الخطبة الثانية لصلاة الجمعة بإمامة الشيخ عبد المهدي الكربلائي في 12/ صفر/1441هـ الموافق 11/ 10/ 2019م [The second sermon of the Friday prayer given by al-Sheikh [honorific religious title] Abdel Mahdi al-Karbalai 11 October 2019], [url](#)

¹⁵⁰ EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 9 – JANUARY 16, 2020, 16 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵¹ EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 23 – JANUARY 30, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵² EPIC, ISHM: MAY 14 – MAY 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#); CPJ, Security forces in Iraqi Kurdistan detain 8 journalists in Duhok covering protest; charge 4, 18 May 2020, [url](#); Al, Urgent actions: Police arrest teacher and protest organizer, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵³ EPIC, ISHM: JUNE 11 – JUNE 18, 2020, 18 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁴ NRT, Protesters briefly block major road in Sulaimani to demand KRG pay salaries, create job opportunities, 21 June 2020, [url](#)

authorities eased some of the newly imposed restrictions on 2 June.¹⁵⁵ On 6 July, new protests against unpaid wages took place in Sulaimaniyya.¹⁵⁶

One source reported that ‘symbolic acts of protest’ took place in Ninewa, Anbar and Salah al-Din provinces, to commemorate those killed in the protests in Baghdad and the central and southern provinces.¹⁵⁷ In general, however, sources indicate that the protest movement did not reach the Sunni-majority areas¹⁵⁸, although on 14 January, a protest took place in Mosul in support for the protest-movement’s demands for a new government.¹⁵⁹ On 6 February, protests took place in the Ninewa plains, demanding that PMF forces withdraw from the area.¹⁶⁰

In the middle of July, and again on 26 and 27 July, protesters took to the streets demanding more electricity¹⁶¹, amid soaring temperatures reaching almost 52 degrees Celsius in Baghdad.¹⁶² Protests took place in Baghdad, Najaf, Babil, Dhi Qar, Karbala, Wasit, Basra, and Qadisiyya¹⁶³, with sources referring to ‘dozens,’ or in one case ‘hundreds,’ taking part.¹⁶⁴

A graph of main protests and locations in Iraq (not including KRI) and more data and information can be found in [Section 2.1.2](#)

ACLED data on protests and riots in KRI governorates

The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) collects real-time data on aspects of political violence globally¹⁶⁵, including ‘demonstration events’ such as protests and riots. EASO used the publicly available ACLED Power BI Report dataset for Iraq (1 January 2019 to 31 July 2020) for ACLED data on demonstration events such as protests and riots for this report.¹⁶⁶ For data on protests,

¹⁵⁵ NRT, New generation movement leader Abdulwahid joins protests in Sulaimani, reaffirms support for their demands, 2 June 2020, [url](#); NRT, All shops, businesses to reopen in Sulaimani and Erbil after KRG backtracks on curfew, 2 June 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁶ Nas News, مشاهد جديدة من اقتحام المتظاهرين مبنى برلمان كردستان في السليمانية [New scenes of protesters storming a building of the KRI parliament in Sulaimaniyya], 6 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁷ Badawi, T., Why Arab Sunnis are disengaged from Iraq’s protests, AC, 7 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁵⁸ Badawi, T., Why Arab Sunnis are disengaged from Iraq’s protests, AC, 7 February 2020, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what’s next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁵⁹ Al-Sumaria, بالفديو اهالي الموصل يطالبون بالاسراع في تشكيل حكومة [On video the people of Mosul demand swiftness in efforts to form new government], 14 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁰ Bas News, تظاهرة لنازحي وسكان سهل نينوى للمطالبة بإخراج ميليشيات الحشد من مناطقهم [Protest for displaced and inhabitants of Ninewa demanding that the militias of the PMF leave their area], 6 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶¹ EPIC, ISHM: JULY 9 – JULY 16, 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#); Al-Mada Paper, تظاهرات في وسط العراق وجنوبه احتجاجاً على انقطاع الكهرباء [Protests in central and south Iraq against blackouts], 26 July 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Two protesters die after clashes with police in Baghdad, medics and security sources say, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶² AFP, Temperature soars to record-breaking 125 in ancient desert city, 28 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: JULY 9 – JULY 16, 2020, 16 July 2020, [url](#); Al-Mada Paper, تظاهرات في وسط العراق وجنوبه احتجاجاً على انقطاع الكهرباء [Protests in central and south Iraq against blackouts], 26 July 2020, [url](#); Reuters, Two protesters die after clashes with police in Baghdad, medics and security sources say, 27 July 2020, [url](#); Al-Mada Paper, متظاهرو ذي قار يعلنون تضامنهم مع متظاهري [The protestors of Dhi Qar declare their solidarity with the protestors of Tahrir square and accuse the corrupt parties of pushing towards chaos], 27 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁴ Al-Sumaria, بسبب الكهرباء... تظاهرات في كربلاء [Because of electricity... protests in Karbala], 27 July 2020, [url](#); Al-Mada Paper, متظاهرو ذي قار يعلنون تضامنهم مع متظاهري ساحة التحرير ويتهمون الأحزاب الفاسدة بالدفع باتجاه الفوضى [The protestors of Dhi Qar declare their solidarity with the protestors of Tahrir square and accuse the corrupt parties of pushing towards chaos], 27 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶⁵ ACLED, About ACLED, n.d., [url](#)

¹⁶⁶ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

ACLED recorded a total of 539 demonstration events that it coded as ‘protests’¹⁶⁷ in KRI through the reference period.¹⁶⁸

In the KRI, protests events counted by ACLED totalled 178 mostly in Sulaymaniyah and Erbil:

- Sulaymaniyah governorate counted 114, of which 64 were in the capital, Sulaymaniyah city;
- Erbil governorate counted 56, of which 48 were in Erbil city;
- Dohuk governorate counted 8, out of which 2 took place in Dohuk city, the capital, and 2 took place in Zahko district.¹⁶⁹

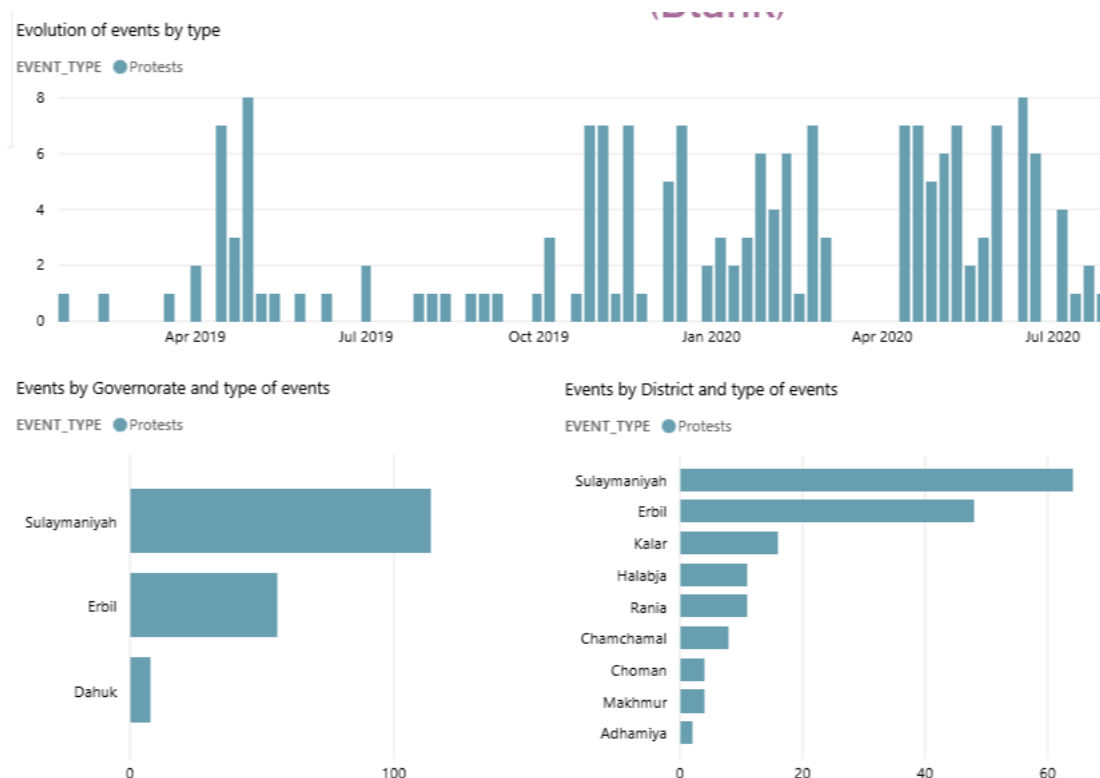


Figure 3: ACLED data on protests in KRI for 1 January 2019 to 31 July 2020

For data on demonstration events that ACLED coded as ‘riots’ which includes violent demonstrations¹⁷⁰, ACLED recorded 8 such events in the KRI.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ ACLED’s codebook defines protests as ‘a public demonstration in which participants do not engage in violence, though violence may be used against them. Events include individuals and groups who peacefully demonstrate against a political entity, government institution, policy, group, tradition, business or other private institution.’ For more detailed information on the definition and sub-events captured within ‘protests’, see: ACLED, ACLED Codebook – 2019, 2019, [url](#), pp. 12-13

¹⁶⁸ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

¹⁶⁹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

¹⁷⁰ ACLED’s codebook defines ‘riots’ as ‘violent events where demonstrators or mobs engage in disruptive acts, including but not limited to rock throwing, property destruction, etc. They may target other individuals, property, businesses, other rioting groups or armed actors’ including sub-events that involve violence, destructive behaviour, mob violence, etc. For more detailed information on the definition and sub-events captured within ‘riots’, see: ACLED, ACLED Codebook – 2019, 2019, [url](#), pp. 13-14

¹⁷¹ EASO analysis based on publicly available ACLED data. ACLED, Curated Data Files, Middle East (1 August 2020), [url](#)

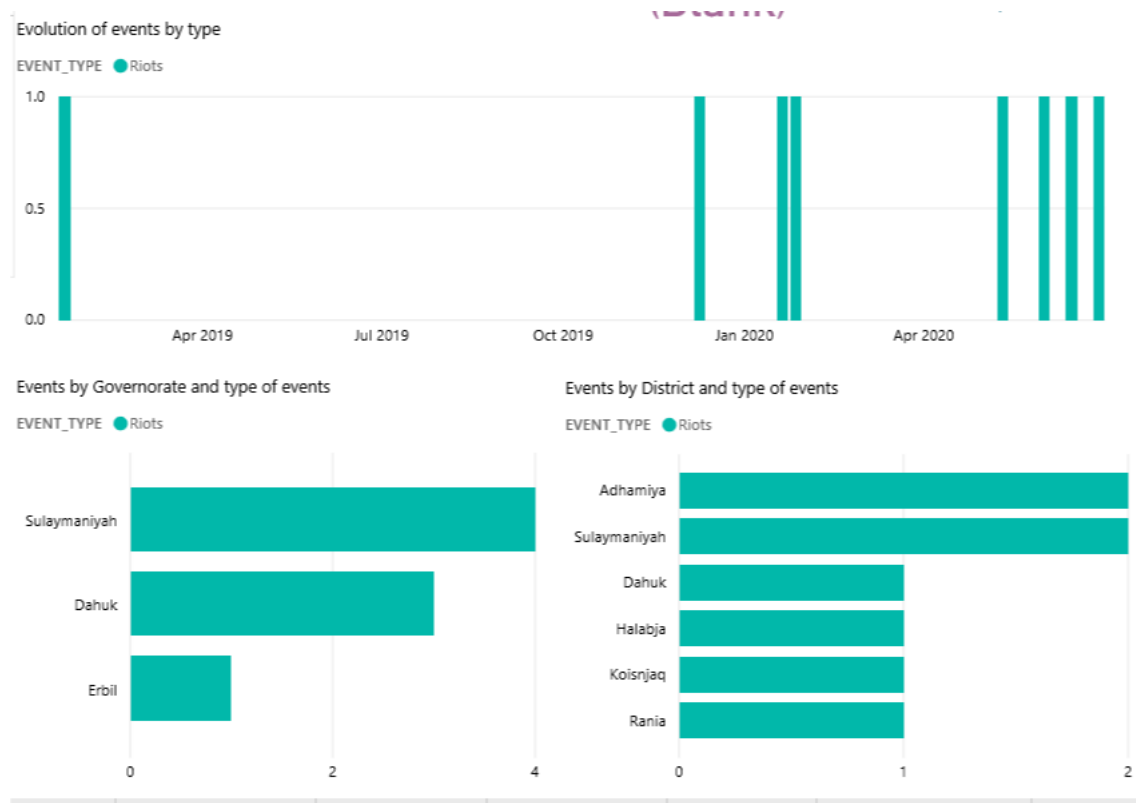


Figure 4: ACLED data on riots in KRI for 1 January 2019 to 31 July 2020

3. Treatment of protesters

3.1 Responses to the protest movement in Baghdad and the southern provinces

3.1.1 Freedom of assembly and the right to protest

Freedom of expression as well as of assembly and peaceful protest is enshrined in Article 38 of the Iraqi constitution.¹⁷² UNAMI further states that the ‘international and domestic legal framework applicable in Iraq guarantees’ the right to peaceful assembly and expression, as well as the right to life, liberty, and security.¹⁷³ A draft law on freedom of expression, assembly and peaceful protest that had been criticised by rights groups was reintroduced in parliament in 2019¹⁷⁴, but no reference is made to it in the sources covering the protests surveyed.

Sources report that in most of the cases where arrested protesters were charged, this was done with reference to Article 355 of the Iraqi Penal code, as well as Articles 222, 226, 230, 240, 342 and 345.¹⁷⁵ Among other things, these concern insulting public authorities, endangering public security, contravening an order given by a public official, and causing damage to public and private property.¹⁷⁶ While the High Judicial Council on 25 October 2019 stated that acts of violence and damage to public property could be prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws, UNAMI reported in December 2019 that this had not been done and that the statement was overturned.¹⁷⁷ Numerous sources stated that Iraqi authorities are obligated to respect the right to life, and that security forces can only use force proportionally as required by a given situation.¹⁷⁸

3.1.2 Responses during protests

The protests were met with violence on the part of both security forces and other forces more difficult to identify, causing a high number of casualties. Sources refer to quite similar figures concerning the number of people killed: approximately 150 killed between 1 and 9 October 2019¹⁷⁹; approximately 100 killed between 25 October and 4 November¹⁸⁰, and approximately 170 killed between 5 November and 8 December.¹⁸¹ Some sources refer to further approximately 175 killed after

¹⁷² Iraq, Iraq’s Constitution of 2005, undated, [url](#), p. 15

¹⁷³ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁷⁴ MENA Rights Group, Iraq must halt reintroduction of controversial draft laws harmful to fundamental freedoms, 15 July 2019, [url](#)

¹⁷⁵ HRW (Human Rights Watch), Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, 10 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 5-6

¹⁷⁶ Iraq, Penal Code Law No (111) of 1969, July 1969 (Amended 14 March 2010), [url](#)

¹⁷⁷ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5

¹⁷⁸ Al, Iraq: Rein in security forces to prevent a bloodbath, 9. November 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Protesters Killed by Teargas Canisters, 27 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁷⁹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Reuters, Iraqi security forces killed 149 protesters, most by shots to head, chest: government inquiry, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁰ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 2; Washington Post (The), An uprising in Iraq is the broadest in decades. It’s posing an alarming threat to Baghdad and Tehran, 7 November 2019, [url](#); Wing, J., New Confrontations Between Protesters And Iraqi Security Forces, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 5 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸¹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2; Euro-Med, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, 22 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 19-21

10 December, reaching 600 protesters killed in total.¹⁸² IHCHR refers to 528 protesters killed in total by 20 February.¹⁸³ UNAMI refers to 490 protesters killed, but stresses that this does not include all, and that the real number is higher.¹⁸⁴ Figures on the number of injured varies more, with sources referring to between 9 000 and 25 000 in total.¹⁸⁵ The limited protests that have taken place since March 2020 appear to have faced less violence, with reports suggesting less than ten people killed and tens of people injured.¹⁸⁶

The official government report into the killing of protesters from 1 to 9 October states that 70 % of those killed died due to shots to the head or chest.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, OHCHR and UNAMI states that most deaths occurred due to the use of live ammunition.¹⁸⁸ Moreover, several sources state that more than 10 people were killed by military grade teargas cannisters fired directly at the head and upper body of protesters.¹⁸⁹ UNAMI also noted that 19 persons were killed after being trapped within buildings set on fire.¹⁹⁰ Several sources stated that government forces of various kinds, including different police forces, army forces, and intelligence officers, were involved in the violent response to the protests.¹⁹¹ This was confirmed in the official inquiry.¹⁹² Sources noted that on numerous occasions security forces used live ammunition to attack protesters and disperse sit-ins and roadblocks. For instance, security forces are reported to have shot and killed 15 people in Baghdad on 6 October¹⁹³, 18 people in Karbala on 28 October¹⁹⁴, and more than 20 people in Nasiriyya on 28 November.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸² AI, Iraq: Protest death toll surges as security forces resume brutal repression, 23 January, [url](#); NPR, Iraq's Protests Shook The Government. Now The Movement Is Nearly Crushed, 21 February 2020, [url](#); USDOS, On Attacks Against Protesters in Iraq, Press Statement Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, 6 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸³ Rudaw, Iraq protester death toll climbs to 528: IHCHR, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁴ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁸⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2; Rudaw, Iraq protester death toll climbs to 528: IHCHR, 20 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMI, Amid ongoing protests and violence, UN urges stepped up efforts to break political deadlock, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁶ IHCHR, [Facebook], Posted on: 10 March 2020, [url](#); National (The), Iraq police raid office of pro-Iran militia accused of shooting protesters, 11 May 2020, [url](#); Nas News, مسلحون مجهولون يقتحمون ساحة التحرير وسط بغداد (فيديو), [url](#); Shafaaq News, إصابة متظاهرين برصاص حي خلال اشعال النار بمبنى حكومي في النجف [Protesters injured by live bullets while setting fire to a government building in Najaf], [url](#); Reuters, Two protesters die after clashes with police in Baghdad, medics and security sources say, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

¹⁸⁷ INA, INA publishes the final report on the investigation of what happened during the demonstrations, [url](#); Reuters, Iraqi security forces killed 149 protesters, most by shots to head, chest: government inquiry, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁸⁸ UN OHCHR, Press briefing note on Iraq, 8 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 3

¹⁸⁹ HRW, Iraq: Teargas Cartridges Killing Protesters, 8 November 2019, [url](#); AI, Iraq: Iranian tear gas grenades among those causing gruesome protester deaths, 31 October 2019, [url](#); AI, Iraq: Rein in security forces to prevent a bloodbath, 9 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4; Washington Post (The), Fear spreads among Iraqi protesters as government cracks down, keeps death toll secret, 11 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁰ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

¹⁹¹ UNAMI provides more details on the agencies involved in their first report on the protests: UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 2; HRW, Iraq: New Protester Deaths Despite Order Not to Fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#); AI, Iraq: Rein in security forces to prevent a bloodbath, 9 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹² Reuters, Iraqi security forces killed 149 protesters, most by shots to head, chest: government inquiry, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹³ HRW, Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, 10 October 2019, [url](#); Washington Post (The), Iraqi military admits to 'excessive force' in crackdown against protesters, 7 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁴ BBC, Iraq protests: Upsurge in violence despite Baghdad curfew, 30 October 2019, [url](#); Reuters, Iraqi protesters pack Baghdad square, anti-government movement gains momentum, 29 October 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁵ IHCHR, مفوضية حقوق الانسان تؤثر ارتفاع معدلات العنف في تظاهرات بغداد وعدد من المحافظات [IHCHR register an increase in the level of violence in the protests in Baghdad and several provinces], 4 December 2019, [url](#); AP, Iraqi prime minister to resign in wake of deadly protests, 29 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 3, 7

The sources stated that other forces were involved as well, although it is not always clear what kind of forces these are. Sources frequently refer to ‘militias’ being involved¹⁹⁶, and several sources state that forces that are part of the PMF are responsible for many of the lethal attacks, including employing snipers against protesters.¹⁹⁷ Several sources refer to ‘Iran-backed militias’¹⁹⁸, while some sources, including the US government, identify Asa’ib ahl al-Haq¹⁹⁹ as being responsible for the killing of protesters.²⁰⁰ Sources also indicate that such forces at times seemed to act in coordination with security forces, for instance in an attack on Tahrir square in December 2019 which left tens of protesters dead.²⁰¹

It should also be noted that several members of security forces appear to have been killed and hundreds injured through the course of the protests: The official investigation released by the government on 22 October 2019 states that 8 members of security forces have been killed and 1 287 injured.²⁰² As of 9 December 2019, UNAMI reports that 424 people have been killed and 8 758 injured, and that these figures include ‘members of the Iraqi security forces’.²⁰³ UNAMI also notes that these figures are incomplete.²⁰⁴ UNAMI further reports that demonstrators killed a leader in a PMF-affiliated group and his brother in al-Amara on 25 October.²⁰⁵ Moreover, on 12 December, protesters reportedly killed a 15-year-old boy in Baghdad.²⁰⁶

3.1.3 Arrests, kidnappings, and forced disappearances

Large numbers of people have been arrested throughout the protests. UNAMI, referring to the IHCHR, reports ‘1 055 demonstration-linked arrests’ between 1 and 9 October.²⁰⁷ Within a week, all but 21 of these were reportedly released.²⁰⁸ On 9 December, UNAMI reports of ‘thousands’ of demonstrators arrested since 1 October, typically without a warrant, and confirm that ‘most demonstrators have

¹⁹⁶ UN OHCHR, Press briefing note on Iraq, 8 November 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁷ New York Times (The), Iraq Will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, 22 October 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, 10 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

¹⁹⁸ Knights, M., Exposing and Sanctioning Human Rights Violations by Iraqi Militias, WINEP, 22 October 2019, [url](#); Mansour, R. et al, These Iraqi militias are attacking protesters and getting away with it. Here’s why, Washington Post (The), 18 November 2019, [url](#)

¹⁹⁹ Asa’ib ahl al-Haq, The League of the Righteous, is a powerful Iran-aligned Shia militia that plays a highly influential part in the PMF, which also has been deployed in Syria, and which has been accused of numerous attacks (including killings and kidnappings) on civilians: EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Iraq Targeting of Individuals, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 187, 190; Knights, M. et. al., Honored not contained. The Future of Iraq’s popular mobilization forces, WINEP, March 2020, [url](#)

²⁰⁰ USDOT, Treasury Sanctions Iran-Backed Militia Leaders Who Killed Innocent Demonstrators in Iraq, 6 December 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Lethal Force Used Against Protesters, 10 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁰¹ HRW, Iraq: State Appears Complicit in Massacre of Protesters, 16 December 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 4; AI, Iraq: Testimonies emerge of coordinated attacks which killed at least 20 protesters, 7 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰² New York Times (The), Iraq Will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, 22 October 2019, [url](#); INA, [وإذ تنشر التقرير النهائي للجنة التحقيق بأحداث التظاهرات](#) [INA publishes the final report on the investigation of what happened during the demonstrations], [url](#)

²⁰³ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁴ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 2

²⁰⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 3; Smyth, P. Iran Is Losing Iraq’s Tribes, WINEP, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁶ Washington Post (The), Iraq’s Sistani condemns protesters’ lynching of teenage boy in Baghdad, 13 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁰⁷ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 63

²⁰⁸ HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 6

been released and those remaining in detention have been charged pursuant to the Iraqi Criminal Code.²⁰⁹ By 18 December 2019, 2 700 people had been released from detention, according to judicial sources quoted by USDOS.²¹⁰ By mid-February 2020, 2 800 people had been arrested, of which all but 38 had been released, according to IHCHR.²¹¹ As noted above, PM al-Kadhimi promised on 10 May to release peaceful protesters, indicating that some were still held in detention.²¹²

Sources report that tens of people were kidnapped in connection with the protests. On 28 December 2019, IHCHR stated that 68 people had been kidnapped or disappeared²¹³, and on 21 May 2020, one of its members stated that 75 persons had been kidnapped since 1 October, of which 25 had been released.²¹⁴ On 23 May 2020, UNAMI stated that it had confirmed 99 cases of missing protesters involving 123 people, of which 25 remained missing.²¹⁵ Several sources state that the kidnappings appear to target known activists, people who take part in and/or play a significant role in the protests, and people who are critical of the authorities and armed groups on social media.²¹⁶ The Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) also reported that journalists have been kidnapped.²¹⁷ UNAMI reported that groups described as ‘militias’ were referred to as responsible for the kidnappings.²¹⁸ Several sources stated that forces belonging to the PMF were responsible for cases of kidnappings²¹⁹, with one indicating that, with reference to a specific case, Kata’ib Hizballah²²⁰ was one of the units involved.²²¹ UNAMI noted that ‘the involvement of “ordinary” criminal gangs is also unlikely, as no requests for ransom or other criminal motives were reported.’²²²

3.1.4 Detention and ill treatment

Referring to the general situation of detention, sources state that ill treatment and torture take place in Iraqi prisons and detention facilities. Human Rights Watch reports that the group ‘received reports of widespread use of torture, including of children, by Iraqi and KRG forces to extract confessions’ throughout 2019.²²³ Similarly, USDOS reports that torture and ill treatment take place in government-run facilities in KRI and the rest of Iraq, with Sunni-Arab detainees being particularly exposed.²²⁴

²⁰⁹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5

²¹⁰ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6

²¹¹ Rudaw, Iraq protester death toll climbs to 528: IHCHR, 20 February 2020, [url](#)

²¹² Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 10 May 2020, [url](#); Iraq, مجلس النواب يقر برنامج الحكومة العراقية الجديدة [The Parliament approves the program of the new Iraqi government], 7 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹³ IHCHR, [Telegram], posted on: 28 December 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁴ EPIC, ISHM: MAY 14 – MAY 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

²¹⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²¹⁶ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; Al, Iraq: End ‘campaign of terror’ targeting protesters, 13 December 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 26

²¹⁷ CPJ, One journalist killed, another missing amid protests in Iraq, 9 December 2019, [url](#)

²¹⁸ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Wing, J., Iraqi Forces Kidnapping Protesters In Intimidation Campaign, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 20 November 2019, [url](#); Euro-Med, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, 22 December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

²¹⁹ Knights, M., Exposing and Sanctioning Human Rights Violations by Iraqi Militias, WINEP, 22 October 2019, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

²²⁰ Kata’ib Hizballah is an Iran-aligned Shia militia that is part of and has a dominant position within the PMF: Knights, M. et. al., Honored not contained. The Future of Iraq’s popular mobilization forces, WINEP, March 2020, [url](#)

²²¹ Wing, J., Iraqi Forces Kidnapping Protesters As Part Of Intimidation Campaign, Musings on Iraq [Blog], 9 December 2019, [url](#)

²²² UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²²³ HRW, World Report 2020 – Iraq, 2020, [url](#)

²²⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 6-7

USDOS further reports of 'harsh' and 'life-threatening' detention conditions, but notes that the situation is generally better in KRI.²²⁵

UNAMI reported that protesters arrested and detained by security forces appear to have been subjected to beatings and ill treatment, and that they were not allowed to contact their families or the outside world.²²⁶ Reuters refers to 'two Iraqi security officials' who claim that beatings and electrocution of those detained is 'not uncommon,' and that detainees are forced to sign a pledge not to take part in further protests before being released.²²⁷ Other sources also report of such forced pledges as well as beatings.²²⁸

Moreover, sources report of ill treatment and torture including severe beatings and electrocution of protesters who have been kidnapped.²²⁹ This is reported to often take place during 'interrogations,' in which the kidnappers seek information on their participation in protests and their political affiliation, and force them to sign pledges not to partake in further protests.²³⁰ One source also reports that interrogators sought information about other protesters.²³¹ It is not always clear who is responsible for these kidnappings and interrogations, but UNAMI notes that none of the survivors they interviewed 'believed "official" Iraqi Security Forces to be directly responsible for their abduction'.²³² Sources pointed to 'militias'²³³, as well as forces that are part of the PMF or Iran-aligned forces²³⁴, as the responsible parties.

3.1.5 Targeting of individuals

Sources report that well-known activists, organisers and people who play central roles in the protests, people who are critical of the authorities or forces belonging to the PMF, as well as journalists, have been targeted and subjected to threats, intimidation, kidnappings, arrests, ill treatment, and assassinations and killings.²³⁵ Some sources refer to systematic and organised efforts, or even an organised 'campaign' intended to deter people from taking part in and/or organising protests and voicing criticism.²³⁶ Sources also refer to medical personnel being targeted during and after

²²⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), pp. 8-11

²²⁶ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 5, 6

²²⁷ Reuters, Threats, arrests, targeted killings silence Iraqi dissidents, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

²²⁸ Euro-Med, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, 22 December 2019, [url](#), p. 13; AI, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6; Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²²⁹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Euro-Med, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, 22 December 2019, [url](#), p. 13

²³⁰ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; AI, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

²³¹ Reuters, Threats, arrests, targeted killings silence Iraqi dissidents, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

²³² UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), pp. 4-5

²³³ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Euro-Med, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, 22 December 2019, [url](#), p. 8

²³⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6; AI, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#); Al-Rubaie, A., Despite Political Turmoil and Coronavirus, Iraq's Protest Movement Continues, WINEP, 23 March 2020, [url](#)

²³⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 8; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 3; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 26; UN OHCHR, Press briefing on Iraq, 20 December 2019, [url](#); EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 23 – JANUARY 30, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

²³⁶ AI, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#); AI, Iraq: End 'campaign of terror' targeting protesters, 13 December 2019, [url](#); Al-Rubaie, A., Despite Political Turmoil and

demonstrations.²³⁷ Sources refer to numerous examples of targeted attacks, such as the killing of a well-known activist couple on 2 October in Basra²³⁸; a medical volunteer receiving a threatening letter at her house²³⁹; the assassination of the director of a TV network with ties to the opposition²⁴⁰; and a drive-by shooting targeting a well-known activist in Basra on 17 July 2020.²⁴¹ While no figures were found concerning the total number of activists that have been killed, Reuters quotes sources stating that at least six activists had been killed over the past year as of late November 2019.²⁴² The OHCHR refers to three activists being killed between 8 and 14 December 2019.²⁴³

Sources report that the attacks and kidnappings seem to have been pre-planned and well organised. Some sources refer to reports that people believed to be intelligence officers as well as unknown men showed up at protests and took photographs of people taking part.²⁴⁴ Sources further refer to rumours of a government-compiled 'blacklist' of wanted protesters.²⁴⁵ UNAMI reports 'most abductees described those questioning them as knowing significant amounts of information about their identities and demonstration-linked activities.'²⁴⁶ Sources indicate that kidnappings happened in a similar manner, with people being abducted near or on their way to protest sites, close to their homes, or during regular and fixed commutes, often by masked and/or armed men forcing them into vehicles.²⁴⁷ While sources stated that it often is unclear who the perpetrators are, they point to both Iraqi security forces and armed groups including forces that are part of the PMF as responsible for targeting individuals.²⁴⁸

3.1.6 Media and access to information

Sources report of at least five journalists having been killed in connection to protests, and that several have been wounded, arrested, threatened, harassed, kidnapped and in other ways prevented from doing their work.²⁴⁹ Both governmental agencies and security forces as well as forces that are part of

Coronavirus, Iraq's Protest Movement Continues, WINEP, 23 March 2020, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²³⁷ HRW, Iraq: Security Forces Attack Medics Treating Protesters, 14 November 2019, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Rein in security forces to prevent a bloodbath, 9. November 2019, [url](#)

²³⁸ Washington Post (The), Iraq is under curfew and Internet blackout as government tries to curb protests, 3 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 8

²³⁹ Al-Jazeera, Despite threats, Iraq's medical volunteers keep protests alive, 23 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁰ CPJ, Al-Rasheed TV CEO Nizar Thanoun shot and killed in Baghdad, 12 February 2020, [url](#)

²⁴¹ NINA, إصابة ناشط مدني بنيران مسلحين وسط البصرة [Civil society activist shot and injured by gunmen in central Basra], 17 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁴² Reuters, Threats, arrests, targeted killings silence Iraqi dissidents, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁴³ UN OHCHR, Press briefing on Iraq, 20 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁴ Washington Post (The), Fear spreads among Iraqi protesters as government cracks down, keeps death toll secret, 11 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Jazeera, Despite threats, Iraq's medical volunteers keep protests alive, 23 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁵ Al, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁶ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4

²⁴⁷ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 4; Euro-Med, Iraqi Protests: An Audacity to Kill and Absent Justice - A report documenting violations against peaceful protesters in Iraq, 22 December 2019, [url](#), pp. 8-9; Al, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁸ HRW, Iraq: Abductions Linked to Baghdad Protests, 2 December 2019, [url](#); Al, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#); Al, Iraq: End 'campaign of terror' targeting protesters, 13 December 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 6; UN OHCHR, Press briefing on Iraq, 20 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁴⁹ CPJ, Hisham Fares al-Adhami killed, 4 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Amid ongoing protests and violence, UN urges stepped up efforts to break political deadlock, 30 January 2020, [url](#); CPJ, One journalist killed, another missing amid protests in Iraq, 9 December 2019, [url](#); CPJ, Al-Rasheed TV CEO Nizar Thanoun shot and killed in Baghdad, 12 February 2020, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 7

the PMF were responsible.²⁵⁰ On 5 October 2019, armed forces raided several television stations, stole equipment and mistreated employees.²⁵¹ The US State Department identify the forces involved as Saraya talia al-khurasani²⁵² and Harakat hizballah al-nujaba²⁵³, and identify Asa'ib ahl al-haqq as responsible for an attack on a TV station the following day.²⁵⁴ All are part of the PMF.²⁵⁵ On 24 October, authorities reportedly prohibited live coverage from Tahrir Square.²⁵⁶ On 12 November, Iraqi authorities ordered eight TV stations, four of which were targeted on 5 October, as well as four radio stations, to shut down, and asked five other stations to alter their coverage.²⁵⁷ Security forces raided the offices of one of those TV stations on 26 November.²⁵⁸ On 28 January 2020, security forces raided the offices of Dijla TV, one of the stations closed in November.²⁵⁹

As mentioned above, Iraqi authorities cut internet access on several occasions, and sought to block access to social media for more than 50 days, making it difficult for protesters and others to share and access information.²⁶⁰

3.2 Responses to other protests and protests in the KRI

Sources report that authorities restricted the opportunity to hold protests in Sunni-majority areas.²⁶¹ According to Human Rights Watch, people were arrested not only for calling for protests, but also for merely expressing support on social media for protests taking place elsewhere.²⁶²

In KRI, authorities seemingly both sought to prevent protests from taking place and broke up demonstrations taking place, as noted above. On 16 May 2020, authorities pre-emptively arrested a large number of activists and journalists.²⁶³ USDOS states that 'central government and KRG forces arrested and detained protesters and activists critical of the central government and of the KRG,

²⁵⁰ UNAMI, Amid ongoing protests and violence, UN urges stepped up efforts to break political deadlock, 30 January 2020, [url](#); CPJ, One journalist killed, another missing amid protests in Iraq, 9 December 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 7

²⁵¹ CPJ, Unidentified assailants raid 4 broadcasters in Baghdad, assault staffers, 7 October 2019, [url](#); UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 7; USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁵² Saraya talia al-Khurasani is an Iran-aligned Shia militia that is part of the PMF, which also has been deployed in Syria: Knights, M. et. al., Honored not contained. The Future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces, WINEP, March 2020, [url](#), p. 205

²⁵³ Harakat hizballah al-Nujaba is an Iran-aligned Shia militia that is part of the PMF, and which also has been deployed in Syria: Knights, M. et. al., Honored not contained. The Future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces, WINEP, March 2020, [url](#), p. 204; EASO, EASO Country of Origin Information Report - Iraq Targeting of Individuals, March 2019, [url](#), pp. 195-196

²⁵⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 27

²⁵⁵ Knights, M. et. al., Honored not contained. The Future of Iraq's popular mobilization forces, WINEP, March 2020, [url](#), pp. 204-209

²⁵⁶ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

²⁵⁷ CPJ, Iraq media regulator orders closure of 12 broadcast news outlets, 25 November 2019, [url](#); Al-Monitor, Iraq clamps down on media and broadcast networks covering protests, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁸ AP, 27 Iraqi protesters shot dead in 24 hours, violence spirals, 28 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁵⁹ EPIC, ISHM: JANUARY 23 – JANUARY 30, 2020, 30 January 2020, [url](#)

²⁶⁰ Netblocks, Iraq blocks Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp and Instagram, then shuts down internet amid civil unrest, 2 October 2019, [url](#); Netblocks, Iraq shuts down internet again as protests intensify, 4 November 2019, [url](#); Netblocks, Social media partially unblocked in Iraq after 50 days, 21 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶¹ Badawi, T., Why Arab Sunnis are disengaged from Iraq's protests, AC, 7 February 2020, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: Arrests for Voicing Protest Solidarity, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶² HRW, Iraq: Arrests for Voicing Protest Solidarity, 4 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁶³ EPIC, ISHM: MAY 14 – MAY 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#); CPJ, Security forces in Iraqi Kurdistan detain 8 journalists in Duhok covering protest; charge 4, 18 May 2020, [url](#); Al, Urgent actions: Police arrest teacher and protest organizer, 26 May 2020, [url](#)

respectively, according to statements by government officials, NGO representatives, and press reports.²⁶⁴

4. Accountability and access to redress measures

4.1 Investigations into the excessive use of force

UNAMI stated that the Iraqi government has a responsibility to not only allow peaceful protest, but to take 'adequate preventive measures' to protect demonstrators from attacks perpetrated by, for instance, armed groups.²⁶⁵ The state is further required to investigate and prosecute unlawful actions.²⁶⁶

On 12 October 2019, the government announced the formation of an investigative committee tasked with identifying perpetrators of violence and bring them to justice²⁶⁷, and the report of the committee was made public on 22 October 2019.²⁶⁸ The report acknowledged excessive use of force on part of security forces²⁶⁹, and identified 'a dozen' senior military and police commanders to face prosecution.²⁷⁰ Human Rights Watch criticised the report, however, for not addressing serious abuses and the role of the PMF.²⁷¹ Similarly, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani criticised the report and demanded an independent investigation.²⁷² Sources also state that many protesters viewed the report as inadequate, or were frustrated with the impunity for the deaths and injuries caused by the excessive use of force, which in turn contributed to the new protests of 25 October.²⁷³

Moreover, sources report that Iraqi authorities at times were unwilling to admit responsibility or share information: On 16 November, the defence minister stated that 'third parties' rather than security forces were responsible for killing protesters.²⁷⁴ In its report on the protests, the standing committee on human rights in the Iraqi parliament noted that relevant ministries and security agencies did not cooperate fully with the committee.²⁷⁵ Sources also report that Iraqi authorities forced hospitals and

²⁶⁴ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 26

²⁶⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), pp. 2, 14

²⁶⁶ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 14

²⁶⁷ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 9; Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 13 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁶⁸ Reuters, Iraqi security forces killed 149 protesters, most by shots to head, chest: government inquiry, 22 October 2019, [url](#); New York Times (The), Iraq Will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, 22 October 2019, [url](#); INA, واع تنشر التقرير النهائي للجنة التحقيق بأحداث التظاهرات, [INA publishes the final report on the investigation of what happened during the demonstrations], [url](#)

²⁶⁹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq 1- 9 October 2019, 22 October 2019, [url](#), p. 9; Reuters, Iraqi security forces killed 149 protesters, most by shots to head, chest: government inquiry, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁰ New York Times (The), Iraq Will Prosecute Military and Police Leaders Over Protest Shootings, 22 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷¹ HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷² Al-Karbalai, A., الخطبة الثانية لصلاة الجمعة بإمامة الشيخ عبد المهدي الكربلائي في 26 / صفر / 1441 هـ، الموافق 25 / 10 / 2019م, [The second sermon of the Friday prayer given by al-Sheikh [honorific religious title] Abdel Mahdi al-Karbalai 25 October 2019], [url](#)

²⁷³ Al-Amal, and Al-Namaa, Preliminary Report on the Violation Against the Iraq Protest of October 2019, 10 November 2019, [url](#), p. 1; UNOCHA, Iraq: Humanitarian Bulletin, October 2019, [url](#), p. 3

²⁷⁴ Rudaw, Protesters being killed by 'third party', not Iraq's security forces: defense minister, 16 November 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁵ Iraq, Standing Committee on Human Rights – Iraqi Parliamentary Council, تقرير لجنة حقوق الإنسان عن التظاهرات في العراق [The Report of the Standing Committee on Human Rights on the Demonstrations in Iraq], 17 November 2019, [url](#), p. 4

morgues to withhold figures concerning the number of killed and injured during protests.²⁷⁶ Similarly, USDOS reported that the IHCHR at one point ‘briefly discontinued publishing the number of protest-related deaths’ due to pressure from the PM’s office.²⁷⁷ USDOS further noted that ‘efforts to achieve accountability were limited.’²⁷⁸ On 10 May 2020, PM al-Kadhimi announced the formation of a new investigative committee, promising justice and to ‘hold accountable those involved in killing Iraqis’.²⁷⁹ On 27 July 2020, following the death of two protestors in Baghdad²⁸⁰, PM al-Kadhimi promised a swift investigation, the results of which should be presented to him within 72 hours.²⁸¹

4.2 Accountability initiatives and implementation in practice

Sources report of some instances in which members of security forces have been removed from their positions, or have been arrested, charged, or sentenced, or in which arrest orders have been issued, on the basis of violence perpetrated against protesters: On 1 December 2019, the criminal court in Wasit sentenced one police officer to death and another to seven years in prison for ‘involvement in the killing of protesters’.²⁸² On the same day, an arrest warrant and a travel ban was reportedly issued for the recently dismissed head of the crisis cell of the security forces in Dhi Qar.²⁸³ On 4 December, Human Rights Watch stated that they were not aware of any other security officers who have been prosecuted.²⁸⁴ On 17 December, USDOS noted that ‘one general and several officers were under investigation.’²⁸⁵ On 9 June 2020, authorities in Dhi Qar reportedly stated that arrest warrants had been issued for 17 officers and officials involved in violence against protesters, including a former chief of police.²⁸⁶ On 30 July, the Minister of Interior announced that three members of the security forces had been arrested in connection with the killing of two protesters in Baghdad, in line with PM al-Kadhimi’s promise referred to above.²⁸⁷ It is unclear which steps, if any, have been taken with regards to those named in the official inquiry of 22 October.

Little information is found concerning actions taken against other armed forces involved in violence against protesters. On 11 May 2020, Prime Minister al-Kadhimi announced that security forces had detained ‘those behind assaulting protesters in Basra’.²⁸⁸ This refers to members of an Iran-backed militia, Thar Allah, which killed one protester on 10 May.²⁸⁹ On 11 June, Iraqi authorities announced that one person had been arrested for, among other things, ‘stabbing and killing peaceful protesters’.²⁹⁰

²⁷⁶ Washington Post (The), Fear spreads among Iraqi protesters as government cracks down, keeps death toll secret, 11 November 2019, [url](#); AFP, In Iraq protests, counting the dead is a dangerous job, 31 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁷⁷ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 46

²⁷⁸ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁷⁹ Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 10 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁰ Reuters, Two protesters die after clashes with police in Baghdad, medics and security sources say, 27 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸¹ Iraq, PMO (Prime Minister’s Office), نص كلمة رئيس مجلس الوزراء السيد مصطفى الكاظمي [The text of the speech of the Prime Minister Mr. Mustafa al-Kadhimi], 27 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸² UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 5; HRW, Iraq: New Protester Deaths Despite Order Not to Fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#); HRW, Iraq: State Appears Complicit in Massacre of Protesters, 16 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁸³ HRW, Iraq: New Protester Deaths Despite Order Not to Fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁴ HRW, Iraq: New Protester Deaths Despite Order Not to Fire, 4 December 2019, [url](#)

²⁸⁵ USDOS, Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Iraq, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 2

²⁸⁶ EPIC, ISHM: JUNE 4 – JUNE 11, 2020, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁷ Washington Post (The), Iraq’s prime minister announces early elections, which will be held next year, 1 August 2020, [url](#); Iraq, IraqiGovt, [Twitter], posted on: 30 July 2020, [url](#); MAKadhimi, [Twitter] posted on: 30 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁸ MAKadhimi, [Twitter], posted on: 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁸⁹ National (The), Iraq police raid office of pro-Iran militia accused of shooting protesters, 11 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁰ National (The), Iraq makes arrest over attacks on anti-government protesters, 11 June 2020, [url](#)

Information suggests that security forces made changes in their behaviour during the protests: On 4 November, UNAMI notes that ‘particularly in Baghdad, security forces displayed more restraint and organisation in their general policing of demonstrations from 25 October to 4 November.’²⁹¹ On 9 December, however, UNAMI noted that ‘in contrast to the period from 25 October to 4 November, deaths and injuries from so-called less-lethal weapons substantially decreased on Jumphuriyah bridge, with reports of two deaths attributed to severe impact trauma from tear gas canisters.’²⁹²

4.3 Access to redress measures

4.3.1 Access to effective redress measures

Very little information has been found concerning access to effective redress measures. On 23 May, UNAMI noted that ‘while the Government has made some efforts to locate those reported missing (...), UNAMI is not aware of any official investigations conducted by law enforcement authorities to locate the missing or to identify and prosecute those responsible.’²⁹³ Similarly, Human Rights Watch reports of several cases in which family members reported people missing to the police without receiving any help.²⁹⁴ Amnesty International and UNAMI report of cases where family members or a victim have reported kidnappings to the police, which in turn lead to the family being threatened and the victim being kidnapped by the same group again, respectively.²⁹⁵ On 17 May, PM al-Kadhimi reportedly instructed ‘the Ministry of Interior to “use all available resources” to uncover the fate of kidnapped and forcibly disappeared Iraqis’.²⁹⁶

On 13 October, Human Rights Watch referred to a news report according to which the government has begun to pay compensations to those injured and the families of those killed.²⁹⁷ On 30 July 2020, The Washington Post reported that each family of a killed protestor would receive approximately \$ 8 400 in compensation.²⁹⁸

4.3.2 Relocation and the ability to avoid being targeted

Several sources refer to activists and protesters who relocated to other parts of Iraq or went into hiding to avoid being targeted.²⁹⁹ In at least one case, activists who had fled the country were targeted upon their return: an activist couple who had been in self-imposed exile in Turkey and who changed their address upon returning to Iraq and ceased participation in protests, were later shot dead in their home by unidentified gunmen believed by activists to work for an Iran-backed militia.³⁰⁰ Furthermore, Human Rights Watch refers to one case in which the brother of a man who had fled his home city was

²⁹¹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: update, 5 November 2019, [url](#), p. 6

²⁹² UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 4

²⁹³ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq: 3rd update, 23 May 2020, [url](#), p. 5

²⁹⁴ HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁵ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; AI, Iraq: Stop security forces from threatening, forcibly disappearing and abusing activists, 18 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁶ EPIC, ISHM: MAY 14 – MAY 21, 2020, 21 May 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁷ HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

²⁹⁸ Washington Post (The), Iraq’s prime minister announces early elections, which will be held next year, 1 August 2020, [url](#)

²⁹⁹ UNAMI, Demonstrations in Iraq – 2nd update, 11 December 2019, [url](#), p. 6; HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#); Bobseine, H., Iraqi youth protesters: Who they are, what they want, and what’s next, MEI, 14 October 2019, [url](#)

³⁰⁰ Reuters, Threats, arrests, targeted killings silence Iraqi dissidents, 29 November 2019, [url](#)

apprehended and interrogated by an unknown armed group when they were unable to locate the man they originally sought.³⁰¹

³⁰¹ HRW, Iraq: Government Promises Action On Security Force Abuse, 24 October 2019, [url](#)

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Annex 2: Terms of Reference

The protest movements and the treatment of protesters/activists in Iraq

The reference period is January 2019 to 31 July 2020.

The report should aim to cover the protest movements and the treatment of protesters in general, as well as those more actively involved in the organisation of protests. It should cover all of Iraq, including the KRI where appropriate. Including, aiming to cover the following **research topics**:

☐ Background / context

- Political background and reasons for protest development
- Main protests that have occurred in the period and main locations/hotspots
- Who is taking part in protests (those more actively involved in the organisation of protests)?
- How are the protests organised and by whom (e.g. individuals, groups, NGOs, certain sectors?)
- Political response: initiatives and implementation in practice

☐ Treatment of protesters

This section should address how the government/other relevant actors have responded to the protests, and mention relevant legislation concerning protests (freedom of assembly, relevant provisions of the criminal law).

It should also address the treatment of participants in protests/demonstrations during and after events:

- Response during protests (e.g. violence, arrests, killings) and who is targeted
- Treatment at later stage because of participation/organisation of protests (e.g. surveillance, arrest, ill treatment/discrimination, disappearances, killings)
- Who is targeted?
- Detention conditions, prosecution, convictions and implementation of punishment for protesters or organisers of protests

Finally, it should address the possibilities for protesters to avoid ill treatment, and to seek redress:

- Access to effective redress measures, including whether protesters or activists harmed due to protests/political activities lodge police or judicial complaints; effectiveness of lodging a complaint
- Whether a person can relocate to another area to avoid/escape targeting

