



الباروميتر العربي
ARAB BAROMETER

Arab Barometer VIII

Iraq Report



December 2024

Executive summary

If uncertainty was the key theme reverberating through Arab Barometer’s 2022 seventh wave findings in Iraq, emergent stability—however slight—is the main one echoing its eighth wave, at least with respect to domestic politics. To be sure, the country still faces many challenges, and protests over corruption, elections, women’s rights, climate change-induced power outages, among other issues have continued to episodically arise. But public sentiment appears to be responding to the efforts of Prime Minister Mohammed Shia’ Al-Sudani’s government, which has begun to tackle some of the country’s most pressing issues.

For Iraqi citizens, corruption remains the biggest challenge facing the country, though there is a considerable increase in the share of citizens who suggest that the government is tackling the issue. Economic grievances, chief among which are a lack of jobs, also continue to preoccupy citizens. More than half of all Iraqis are confronting food insecurity, and sizable numbers are adapting negative coping strategies to access food. Even more pressing than the affordability of food is the affordability and availability of housing. Still, a small but rising share of citizens positively assess the government’s efforts to create jobs and curb inflation. So, despite ongoing challenges, optimism about the future of the economy is on the rise, signifying the reversal of an otherwise downward trend that had been effect since 2013.

Where improvement is even more notable is in evaluation of public services, though this improvement is not to be overstated. Fewer than half of all citizens are satisfied with education, healthcare, trash collection, streets, and the like, but across many of these services, the percentages of Iraqis who are satisfied have seen double-digit increases from 2022. Confidence in Al-Sudani—while higher than that of his predecessor at the same point in his term—is lukewarm but has not spilled over into political institutions, which most Iraqis still distrust. Iraqi women continue to face barriers to entry into such institutions, though public opinion overwhelmingly favors gender quotas not only in parliament, but also for cabinet positions. Finally, as summer temperatures in the country continue to break records, Iraq is one of only three surveyed countries this wave where most citizens define climate change by extreme temperature changes. More importantly, the overwhelming majority believe that citizens are responsible for addressing climate change, even when they do not see themselves as contributing to the problem.

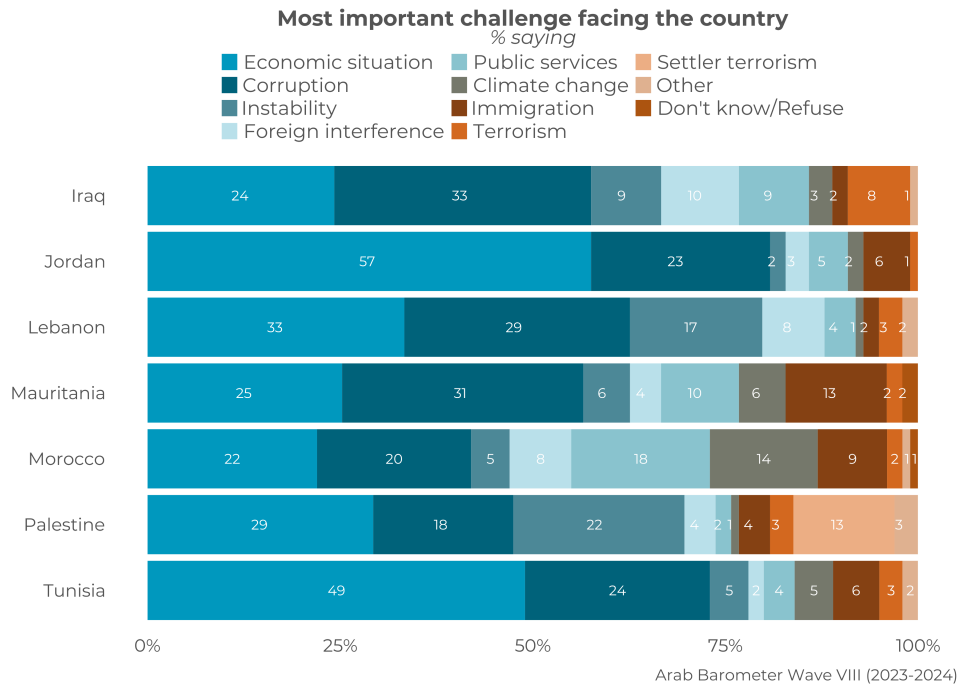
While domestic conditions have improved slightly or at least have not gotten worse in many instances, the ongoing crisis in Gaza increasingly threatens stability. Iraq sits at the geostrategic crossroads of numerous regional and international rivalries, and so it is increasingly at risk of becoming—if it is not indeed already—the next battleground for proxy wars. Compared with 2022, the United

States is clearly losing ground to China, whose economic policies are preferred by an increasing share of Iraqis. Even Iran, whose favorability had been waning, is using the current crisis in Gaza to garner favor with an increasingly diverse share of the Iraqi population.

These are among the key findings from Arab Barometer’s latest nationally representative face-to-face survey conducted in Iraq. Fielding began on 13 May and ended on 19 July 2024. Conducted in both Arabic and Kurdish, the multi-stage clustered sample included 2,408 randomly selected citizens from all governorates save Duhok (with households from Halabja selected as part of Sulaymaniyah). The margin of error for the reported results is 2 percentage points. Iraq is one of eight countries surveyed as part of Arab Barometer’s Wave VIII, which is the largest publicly available survey that captures the sentiments of citizens across the Middle East and North Africa amidst the current crisis taking place in the region. Additional information about the surveys can be found at www.arabbarometer.org.

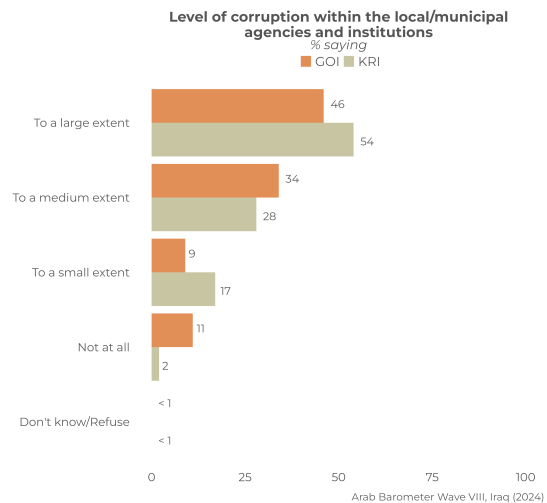
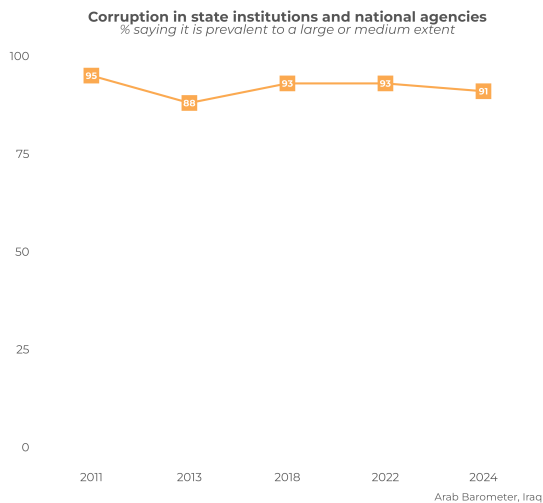
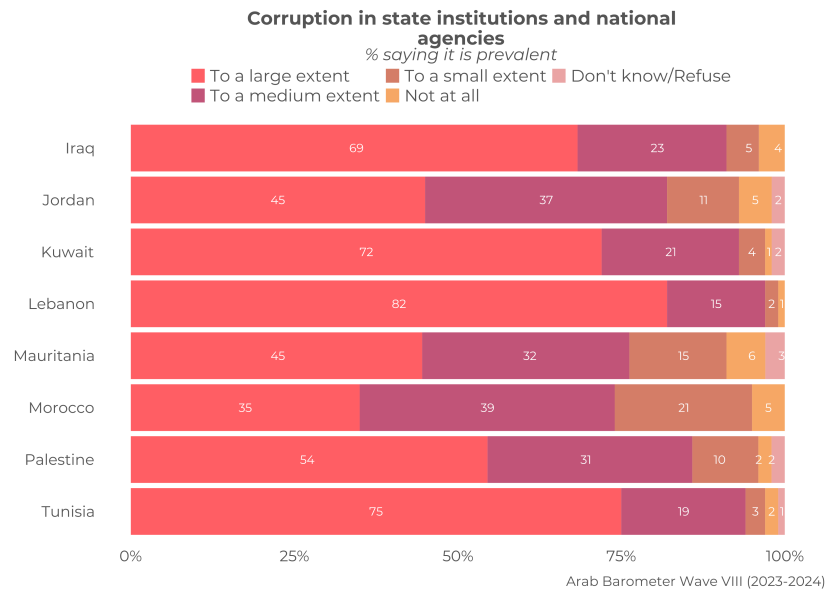
KEY CHALLENGE FACING THE COUNTRY: CORRUPTION

Since Arab Barometer’s fifth wave (2018-2019), financial and administrative corruption has topped Iraqi citizen’s list of the most pressing challenge facing the country. Iraq is one of only two countries in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave where the share of citizens bemoaning the economic situation is slightly smaller than the share bemoaning corruption.



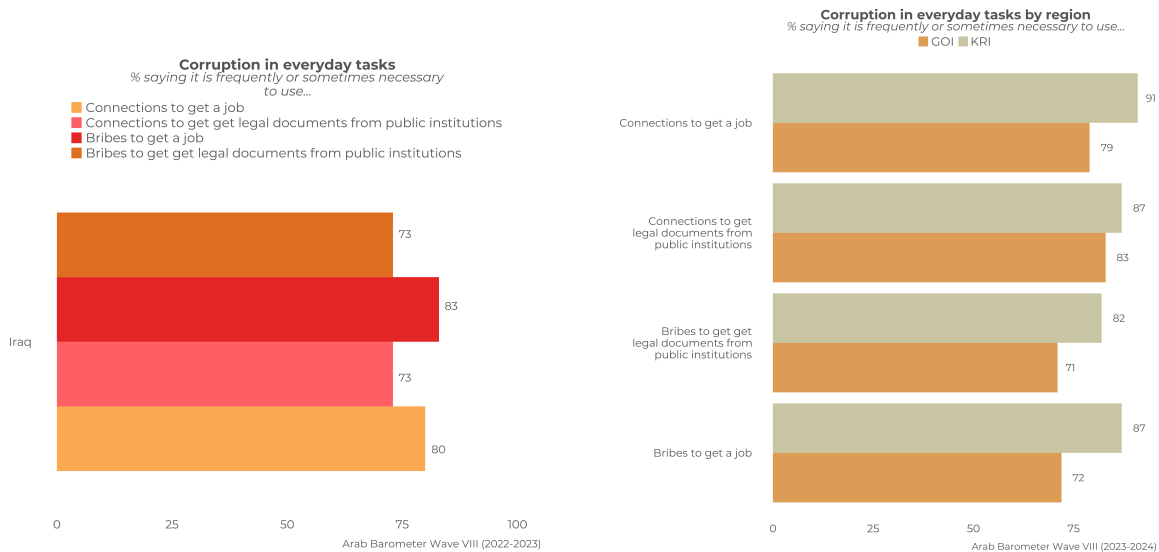
The overwhelming share of the 91 percent of citizens who believe that corruption is prevalent in national state institutions and agencies say it is present to a large extent (69 percent). This perception among public opinion mirrors other accounts of the prevalence of corruption, including Transparency International’s Corruption Perceptions Index, which ranks Iraq in the bottom quintile of countries (153 of 180) in terms of the prevalence of corruption in the public sector.

And while somewhat smaller, a nonetheless large majority of Iraqis (approximately 80 percent) believes that corruption pervades local and municipal agencies and institutions to a large or medium extent. Overall, this belief is held nearly equally by both those living in and outside of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), though notably those in the KRI are more likely than their counterparts to say that local corruption exists to a large rather than to a medium extent.



Corruption is felt in citizens' everyday lives. Asked about processes of getting a job and of getting legal documents from public institutions, nearly all Iraqis agree they must use extra-legal methods or circumvent official procedures to do so. Nearly four-in-five Iraqis believe it is necessary to frequently or sometimes use *wasta*—“connections”—(80 percent) or *rawsha*—“bribes”—(83 percent) to get a job, and equal shares (73 percent) report each of these methods is necessary to get legal documents. There are notable regional differences in the type of corruption necessary to procure services. Citizens living in the KRI are significantly more likely than their counterparts living elsewhere in Iraq to say

they require connections to each get a public job (91 percent versus 79 percent) and to get public documents (87 versus 83 percent). And while there is no significant difference on using bribes to get a job, those in the KRI are again more likely to report using them to get legal documents.

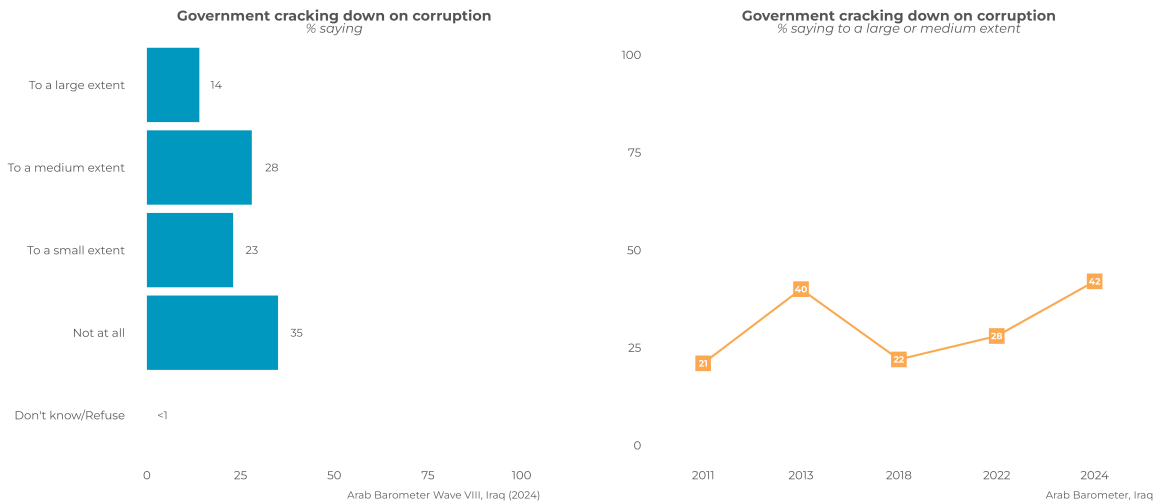


Over the past decade, the share of Iraqis bemoaning corruption in their national agencies has effectively remained constant and constantly high. By some accounts, one of the key problems is the muhasasa system, which has been described as,

the informal consociational system adopted in 2003 which prioritizes factional interest over technocratic competence. Muhasasa has enshrined a political culture that divides government power among party members who win elections and gives politicians the power to appoint hundreds of civil service personnel across ministries as part of cabinet formation negotiations. Ministries have been run as fiefdoms, staffed on the basis of political affiliation rather than aptitude. Patronage became especially pronounced with the surge of “special grade” positions for party loyalists: over 5,000 senior civil servant positions in government, 1,000 of which are party proxies whose function is to distribute public resources. As a result, ethno-sectarian political parties have infiltrated the state and coopted its bureaucracy.

This system, which to a great extent is seen as a legacy of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, is still very much in place. What has changed in the last wave, however,

is the degree to which Iraqis believe their government is tackling corruption. In 2024, the share of Iraqis who believe that the government is cracking down on corruption has risen to 42 percent, which, while still a minority of the population, signifies a 14-point increase since 2022.



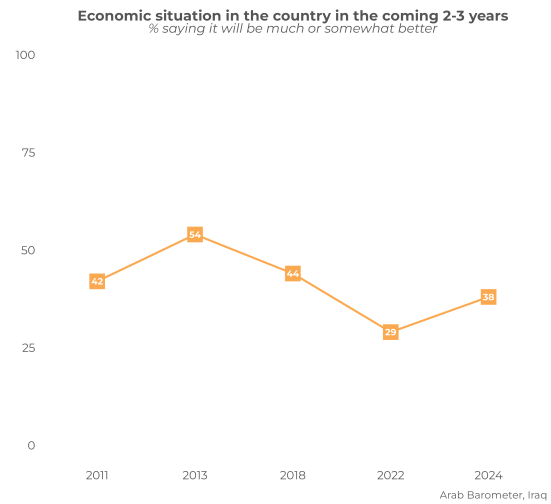
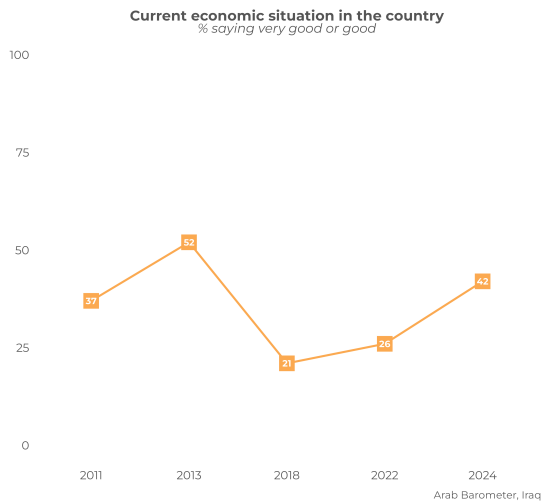
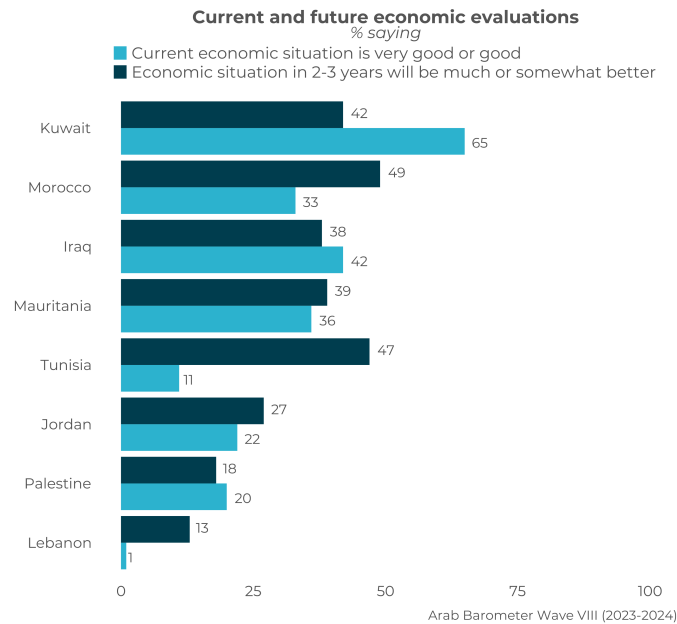
This uptick in confidence might relate to Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al-Sudani's efforts to tackle the issue, including establishing a Supreme Commission for Combatting Corruption, but the efficacy of such efforts has yet to be fully determined. Al-Sudani, who is aligned with the Iran-backed Shia Coordination Framework, is not the first prime minister who has tried to tackle the country's long standing corruption problem, and succeeding where others have failed may prove difficult as the elites who perpetrate the corruption are the same keeping prime ministers in power. As recently as August 2024, protests in the Muthanna governorate organized to express six specific demands to address corruption, the majority of which involve removing or curbing resource allocation decision power from the local council to committees overseen by the prime minister's office and that include representatives from the demonstrations.

The Economy

The share of Iraqis noting that the economy is the chief challenge facing the country (24 percent) slightly trails those pointing to corruption, but it is nonetheless the second largest concern. The economic situation in the country is still bleak in the eyes of most citizens: under half of all Iraqis (42 percent) say it is currently very good or good, and a similar share (38 percent) believe that it will get better in the next two to three years. While those who are able to cover their

expenses are more optimistic about the future, current evaluations notably do not vary as much by this socioeconomic measure.

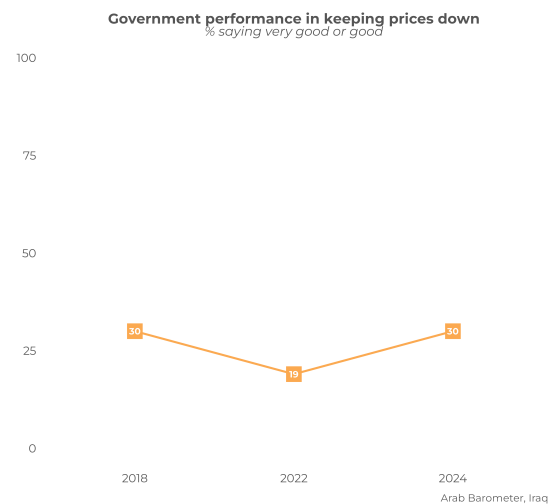
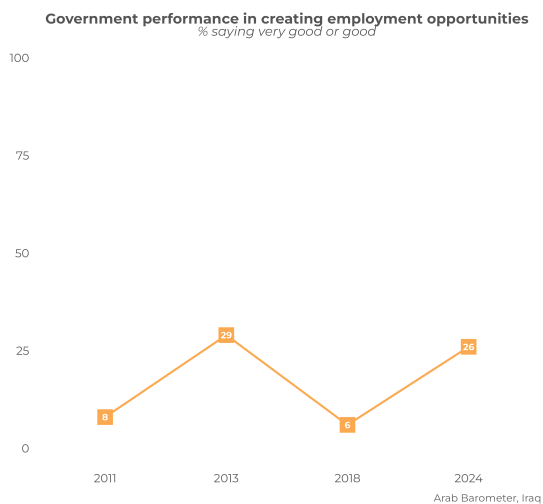
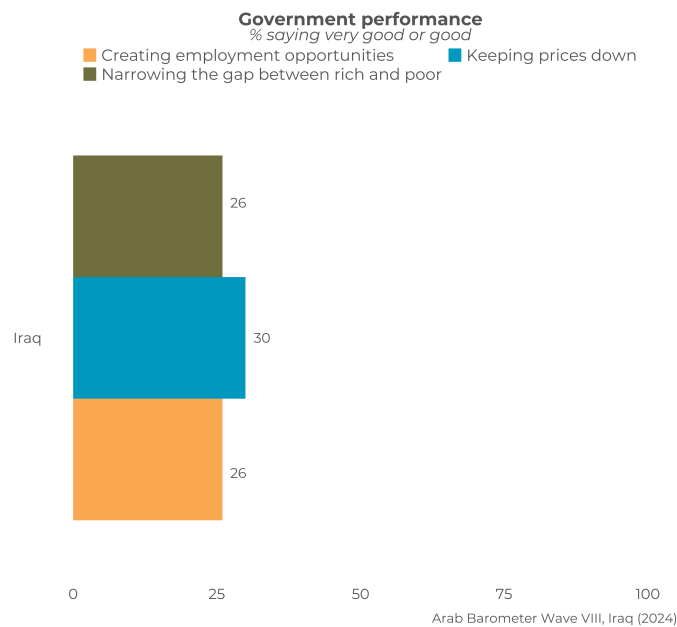
Despite these most recent figures, there has been a significant improvement - specifically a 16-point increase - in evaluations of the economy since just two years ago, when just 26 percent of Iraqis said the economy was doing well. Furthermore, when considered in regional perspective with all countries included in Arab Barometer's eighth wave, the share of Iraqis assessing their economy as good or very good is second only to Kuwait. Future optimism about the economy has also risen nine points since 2022 (when it was at 29 percent), and for the first time since 2013 represents the reversal of an otherwise downward trend.



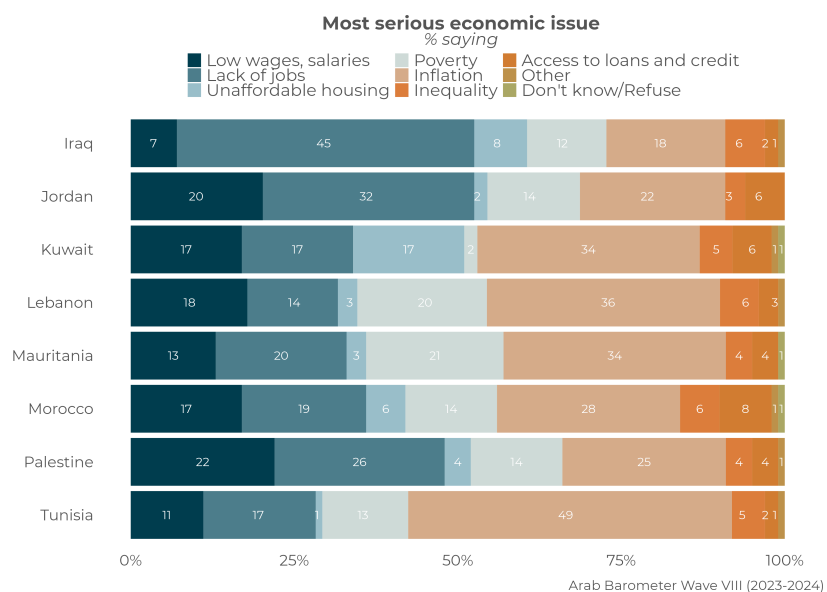
It is perhaps too soon to tell whether this increase in evaluations of the economy is related to Iraq's most recent \$153 billion budget passed in the summer of 2023, which, over the span of three years, earmarked money specifically for infrastructure development and the creation of new jobs, both of which have been key points of concern for Iraqis over the past several years. The IMF assess that improvements to domestic stability facilitated the passage of this bill, alongside a four-point decrease in inflation and a recovery of the oil sector. The country's fiscal imbalances, however, have worsened, and the budget is highly

contingent on the bets that the oil market will remain unaffected to fund domestic spending.

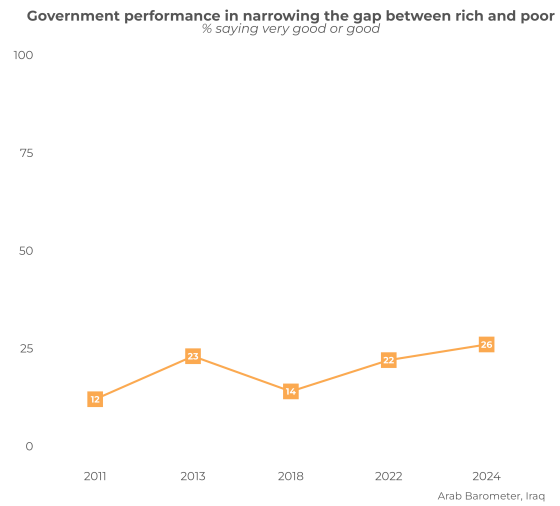
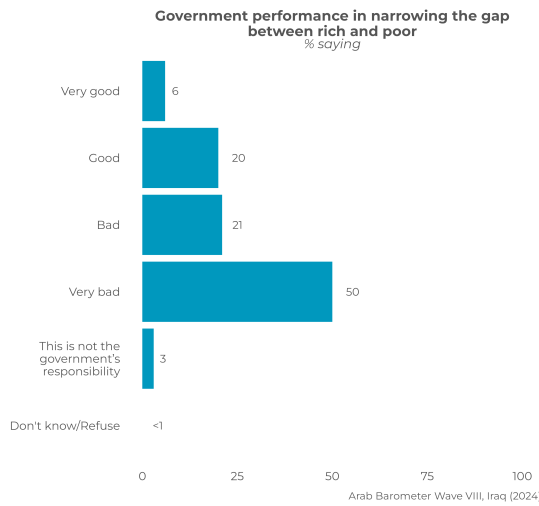
The effects of the bill on job creation have yet to fully reverberate in public opinion, though there is some evidence it is beginning to do so. The four-percentage point decrease in deflation has been accompanied by an 11-point increase in the share of Iraqis saying the government is doing a very good or good job at keeping prices down (19 percent in 2022 to 30 percent in 2024). And one year after the passage of the spending bill, the share of Iraqis saying the government is doing a good job in creating employment opportunities jumped from 6 percent in 2018 (several years prior to the spending bill) to 26 percent in 2024.



There is still considerable work to be done on this latter front. Asked about the most pressing economic issue, a plurality of Iraqi citizens (45 percent) note it is the lack of jobs. Commensurately, just over half of citizens (53 percent) believes that that job creation should be the government’s priority in addressing the economic situation, representing a slight five-point decrease from the share who said the same in 2022 (58 percent). On both measures of the pressing economic concern and government intervention, Iraq again stands out regionally: it is one of only two countries (alongside Jordan) where lack of jobs rather than inflation is the key challenge, and it is the only country where an outright majority deems job creation rather than other measures such as increasing subsidies or raising wages the key desired point for government intervention.

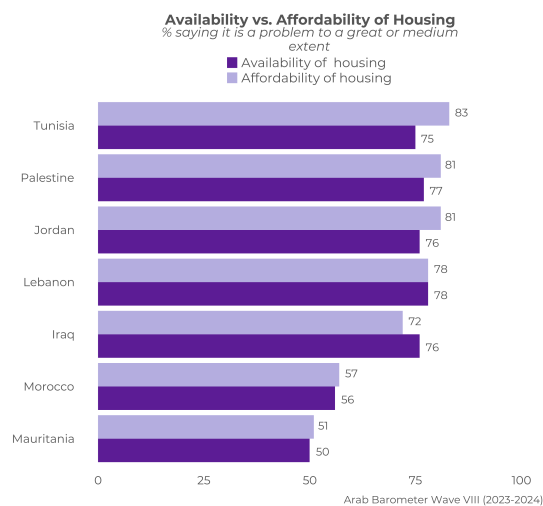
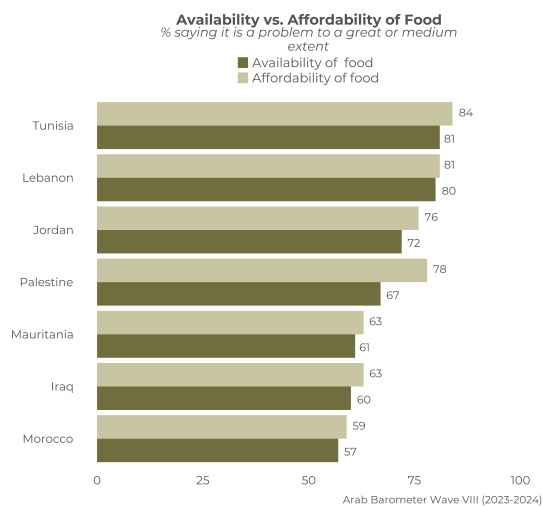


One key issue related to both to jobs and wages is inequality: 41 percent of Iraqis suggest that the wealth gap has grown larger in the past year, though this represents a sizeable, 11-point decrease from 2022 when 52 percent said the same. Few Iraqis, however, appear to credit the government with this success, as the share of those saying the government is doing a very good or good job at narrowing the wealth gap remained mostly stable between 2022 (22 percent) and 2024 (26 percent).



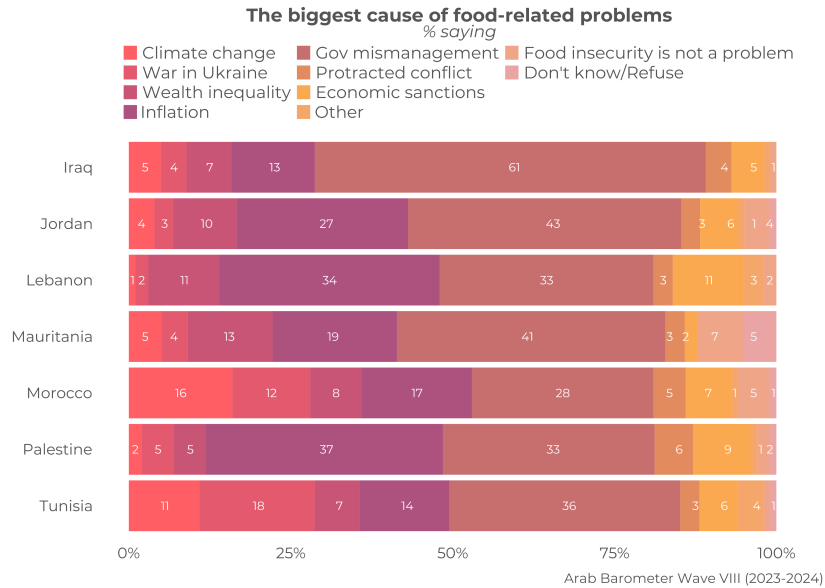
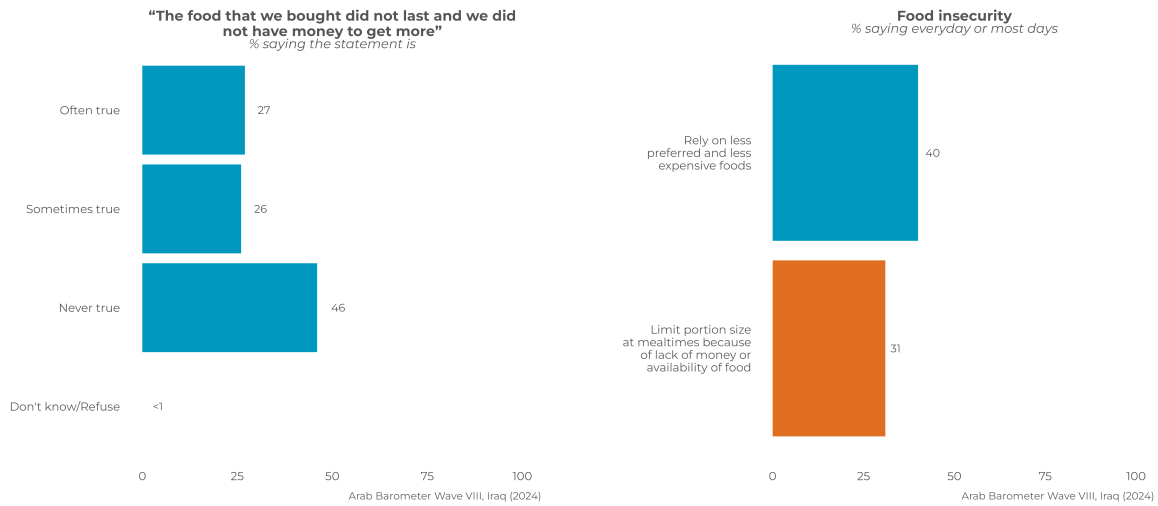
While socioeconomic inequality is often linked to affordability, rather than the availability, of food, housing, and other basic goods, this difference does not appear to resonate significantly in public opinion: 63 percent of Iraqis say that the affordability of food is a problem to a great or medium extent, while a similar 60 percent say the same of food availability. There are similarly small differences on assessments of housing affordability versus availability: 72 percent versus 76 percent respectively say housing affordability versus availability represents a problem to a great or medium extent.

Though the perceptions on affordability versus availability of each food and housing effectively do not differ, it is notable that on both measures, housing represents the bigger problem for Iraqis. Arab Barometer’s public opinion on housing reflects what other reports have deemed a housing crisis in Iraq, with Baghdad particularly affected. A report published by the Iraqi Strategic Center for Human Rights in July 2024 suggests that the nationwide housing shortage in Iraq stands at 26 percent, affecting 26 million Iraqis.



Housing affordability is inextricably linked to financial health, as the more families need to spend on housing affects their abilities to spend on basic services, savings, and education and ultimately impacts economic mobility, childhood poverty, and life expectancy. The housing market is also intimately related to the job market, as many move in search of jobs to city centers, particularly Baghdad, where per the report above the housing shortage stands higher than the national average at 31 percent. The government has put forth efforts to build affordable housing units to alleviate the pressure in the capital, but the efforts still fall short of what is needed to fully address the crisis.

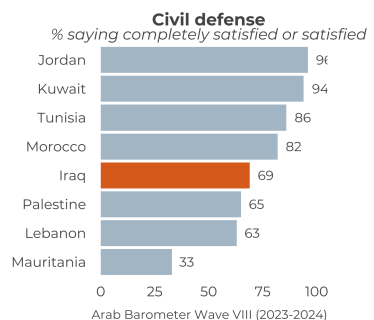
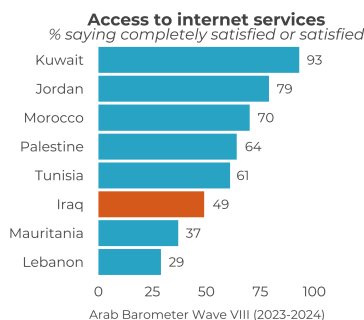
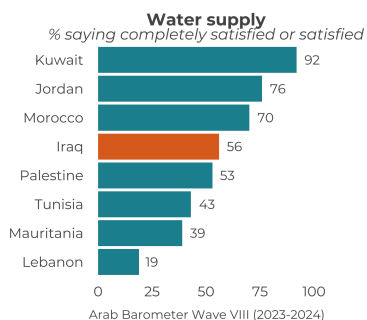
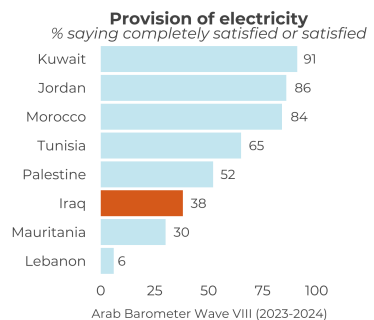
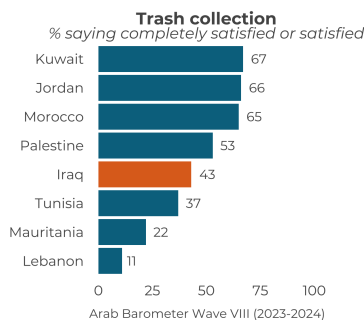
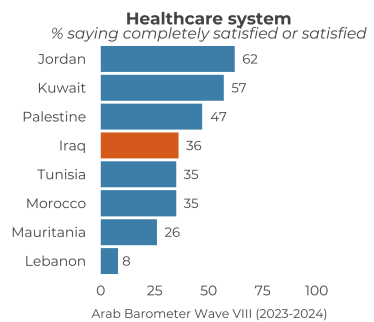
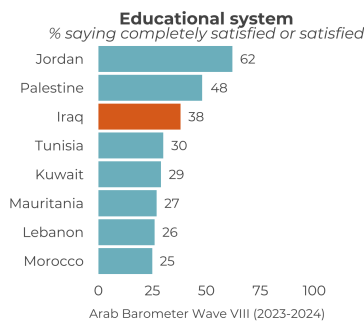
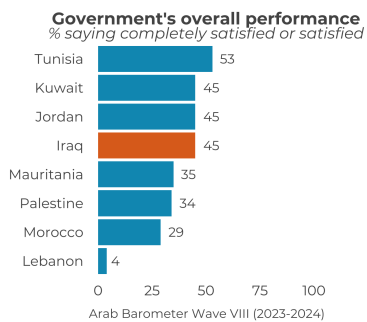
And while less perceived as a problem than housing, food insecurity nonetheless itself remains a problem. Despite the 4-point dip in the share of Iraqis saying they often or sometimes ran out of food before they had money to buy more, half of the population of a high-income country (53 percent in 2024) reports being food insecure. Just under two-thirds of Iraqis (61 percent)—the highest share of any country surveyed in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave—perceive that the main cause of food-related problems in their country is government mismanagement. To access food, sizeable minorities of the population adapt negative coping strategies: 4 or more days per week, 40 percent of Iraqis report relying on less preferred and less expensive foods and 31 percent limit portion size at mealtimes for financial reasons. Additionally, 39 percent buy food on credit and 21 percent borrow money to purchase food.



PUBLIC SERVICES

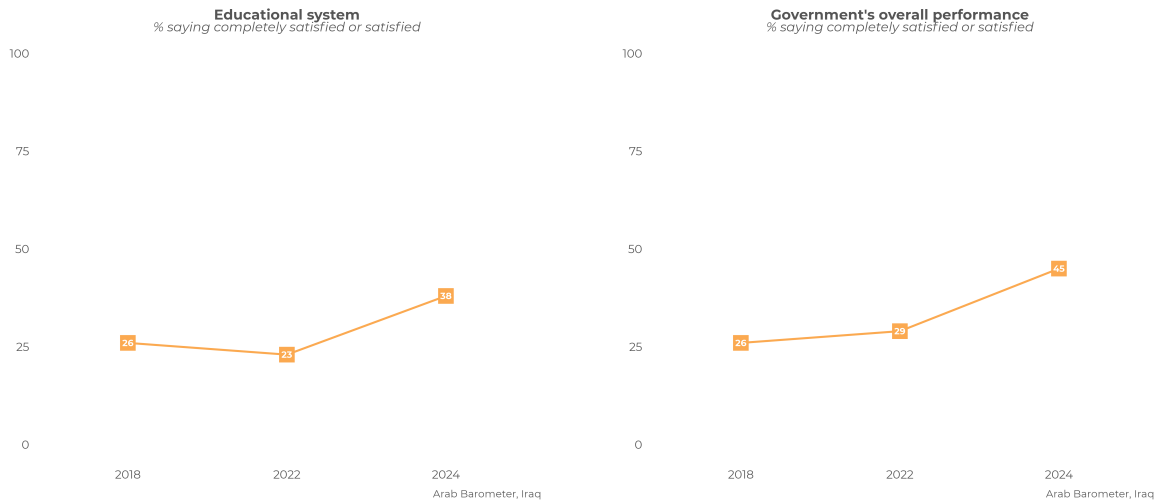
Despite these economic challenges, Iraqis still prefer that the top priority for government spending in the coming fiscal year to be on services, and public opinion is mostly divided between spending on education (24 percent) and healthcare (21 percent). While the effect of the latest spending bill is modest in its efforts to address job creation, it is perhaps clearer in Iraqi's evaluations of public services.

To be sure, these evaluations are still overwhelmingly low: with the exception of evaluations of the civil defense (69 percent) and the water supply (56 percent), fewer than half of all citizens say they are completely satisfied or satisfied with access to internet services (49 percent), the quality of the streets (45 percent), trash collection (43 percent), the provision of electricity (38 percent), the educational system (38 percent), and the healthcare system (36 percent). That education and healthcare are at the bottom of the list of satisfaction with services corresponds to citizens' desire that the government focus its spending on these two sectors.

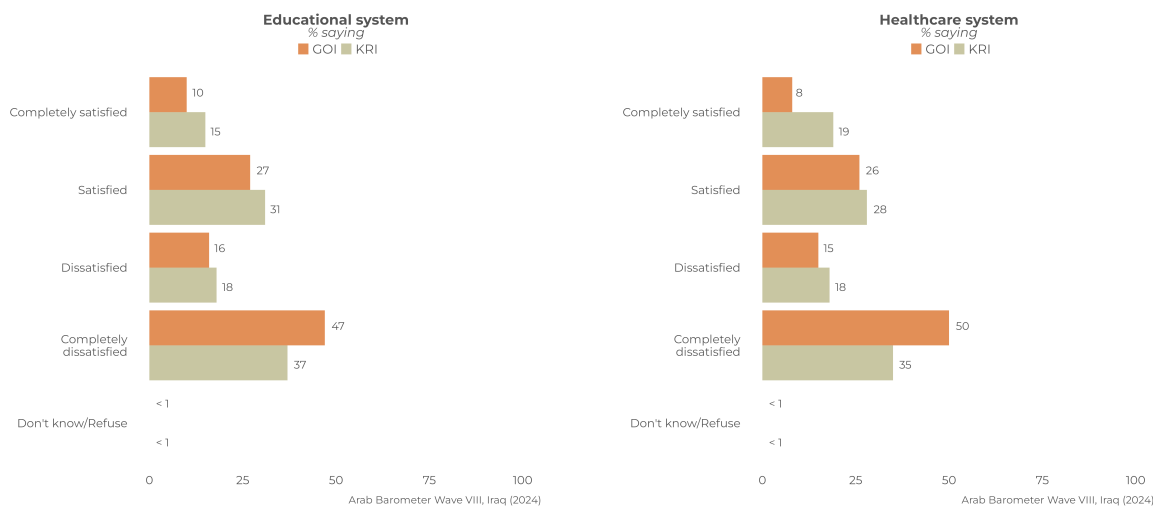


But while low, evaluations of services asked over the two-year period are trend-

ing upward at the national level and all represent large increases, mostly over 10 percent. Satisfaction with trash collection has increased from 31 to 43 percent; with streets, from 22 to 45 percent; with healthcare, from 29 to 36 percent, and with education, from 23 to 38 percent. Commensurately, evaluations of the government’s overall performance have improved from 29 to 45 percent.



There is some regional variation in assessment of these services: generally, Iraqis in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) have more positive assessments of services overall. The gaps in satisfaction are particularly wide in assessments of education (45 percent KRI versus 37 percent GOI), healthcare (47 percent KRI versus 34 percent GOI), and trash collection (66 KRI percent versus 41 percent GOI). The trend is reversed on civil defense, where those in the GOI are more satisfied than their compatriots in the KRI. The overall assessment of government performance, however, is similar in the two regions (45 percent KRI versus 42 percent GOI).



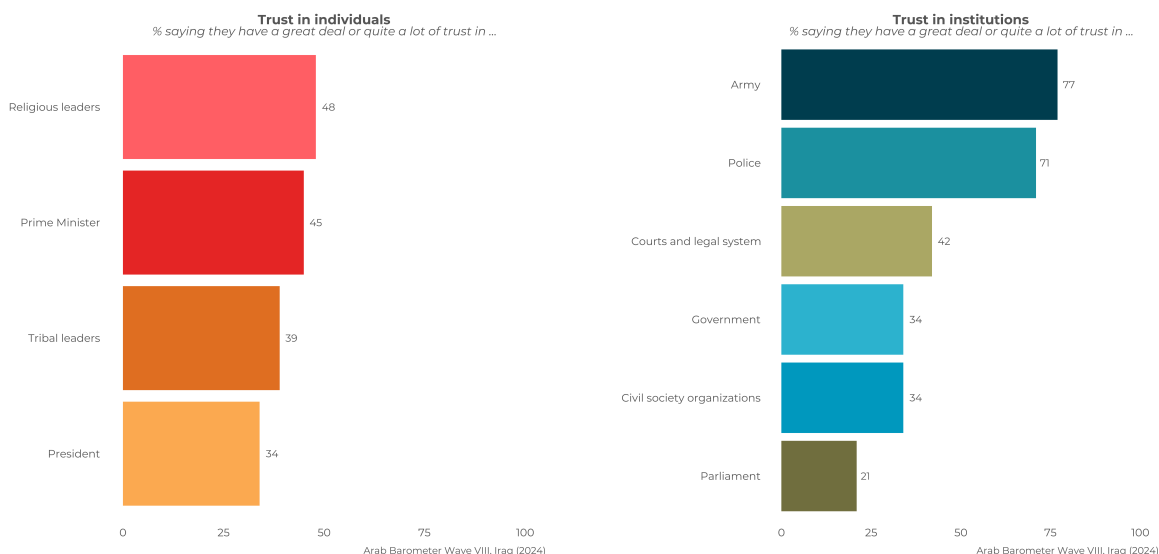
Government performance in maintaining security and order follows national, though not regional, patterns. After falling 11 points between 2018 and 2022, the share of those saying the government is doing a very good or good job at providing security and order has risen again to 65 percent, slightly surpassing 2018 levels. This share is similarly high in the KRI (63 percent) as it is to the GOI (65 percent). But when assessed by individual governorate, there is significant variation. While upwards of 74 percent of citizens in the capital, Baghdad, and southern governorates of Basra and Muthana praise the government’s efforts in maintaining order, in Nineveh and Kirkuk, fewer than half of all citizens say the government is maintaining order. These two governorates have been sites of continued conflict over the past decades, with Nineveh hosting the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country and Kirkuk a governorate wherein control is contested between the Government of Iraq and the Kurdistan Regional Government.

INSTITUTIONAL TRUST, ELECTIONS, & REFORM

Many of the improvements in perceptions of the economy and of service provision have come in the wake of the appointment of Mohammed Shia Al-Sudani as prime minister. Al-Sudani assumed office on 27 October 2022, having held numerous ministerial level offices including those in the Ministries of Finance, Agriculture, and Human Rights, among others. Completed in February 2022, Arab Barometer Wave VII data suggested that 21 months into his term, the trustworthiness of Mustafa Al-Kadhimi, Al-Sudani’s predecessor, stood at 35 percent nationwide. In Arab Barometer Wave VIII, completed 21 months af-

ter Al-Sudani assumed office, the share of Iraqi citizens who have a great deal or quite a lot of trust in the current prime minister stands at 45 percent nationwide.

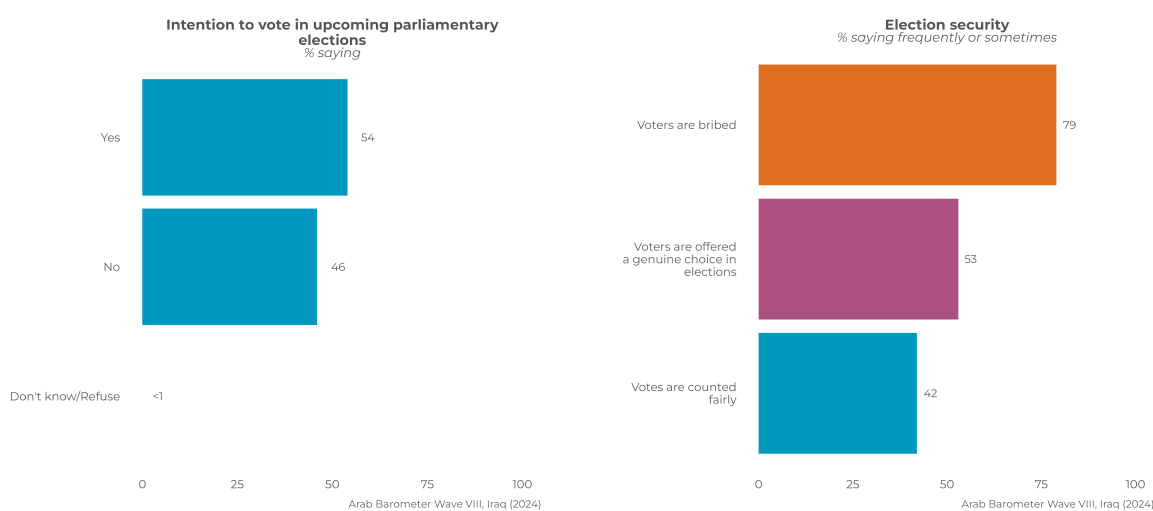
Some assessments suggest that Al-Sudani has billed himself as someone who is, “serious, pragmatic and willing to work with all sides,” a welcomed relief after years of political gridlock brought Iraqi governing institutions to a halt. The confidence the prime minister instills surpasses most of Iraq’s other leaders, including the president (34 percent) and tribal leaders (39 percent), though he slightly trails trust in religious leaders (48 percent).



Yet, Al-Sudani’s popularity has not entirely translated into confidence in formal institutions. At the national level, about a third or fewer of Iraqis have trust in each the government (34 percent), civil society organizations (34 percent), and the parliament (21 percent). Notably, trust in government has risen 8 percentage points since 2022 (26 percent). But trust in parliament has remained mostly unchanged (19 percent in 2022), and trust in civil society organizations has decreased 7 points from 41 percent in 2022. Trust in the legal system (42 percent) has remained at this level since 2018. The only institutions in which a majority of Iraqis have confidence are the armed forces (77 percent) and the police (71 percent).

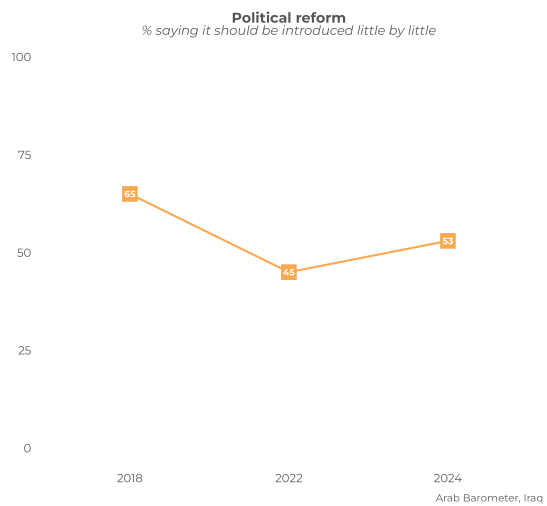
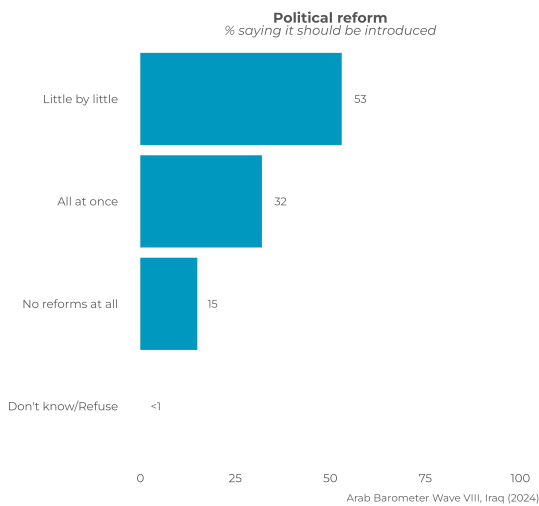
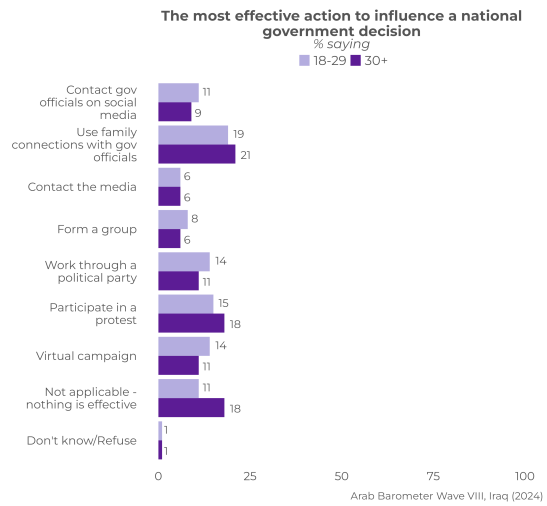
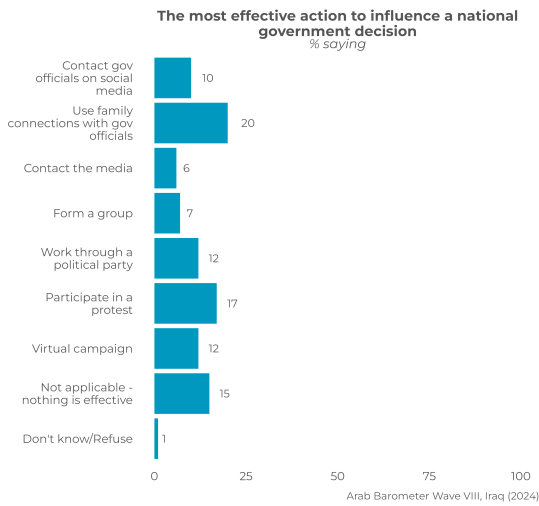
Iraqis’ mistrust in formal institutions also extends to elections. Iraq’s next parliamentary elections are slated for October 2025, and Arab Barometer data suggests that just over half of citizens (54 percent) suggest they intend to vote. The

share of citizens who intend to vote is slightly higher in the KRI (61 percent) than in the GOI (53 percent). Regardless of region, trust in the electoral system may prove to be an impediment and may lead to a repeat of the parliamentary elections of 2023, which, since 2003, saw a record low 41-percent voter turnout. Asked about election integrity, Arab Barometer data suggests that nearly four-in-five Iraqis (79 percent) say that voters are frequently or sometimes bribed, while just 42 percent believe that votes are counted fairly. Just over half (53 percent) believe that voters are offered a genuine choice in elections. Asked about the last parliamentary elections in 2021, just 18 percent perceive them to be free and fair, with an additional 28 percent suggesting they were free and fair with minor problems.



It follows that few Iraqis view formal avenues and institutions as the optimal methods through which they can affect change in their country. In Arab Barometer Wave VIII, just 12 percent believe that working through a political party might engender results, and an additional 10 say contacting government officials on social media would do the same. Instead, the plurality of Iraqis (20 percent) believes that using their *wasta*, or connections, with government officials is the most effective action to influence a national government decision, followed by 17 percent who say the same of participating in a protest.

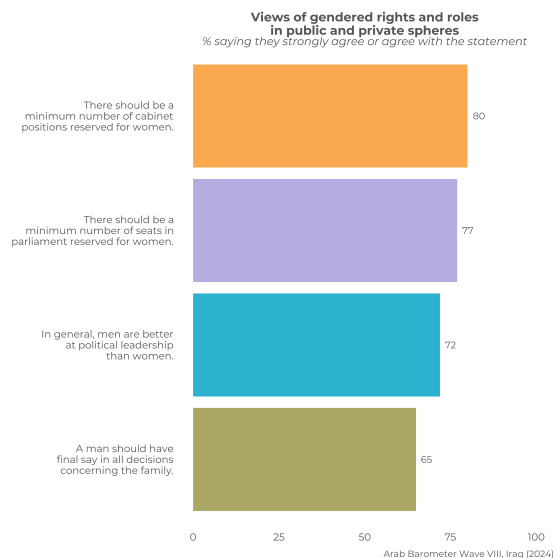
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Notably, there are no significant differences between younger (18-29 year olds) and older (30+ year olds) generations in the expressed methods of affecting change, though the older cohort is slightly likelier to suggest there are no effective methods of affecting change. Still, perhaps weary of the political instability that has gripped the country over the past decade or more, just over half of Iraqis (53 percent) think political reform should be introduced little by little, a slight, 8-point increase from 2022 but falling considerable short of the 65 percent of the country that said the same in 2018.

GENDER

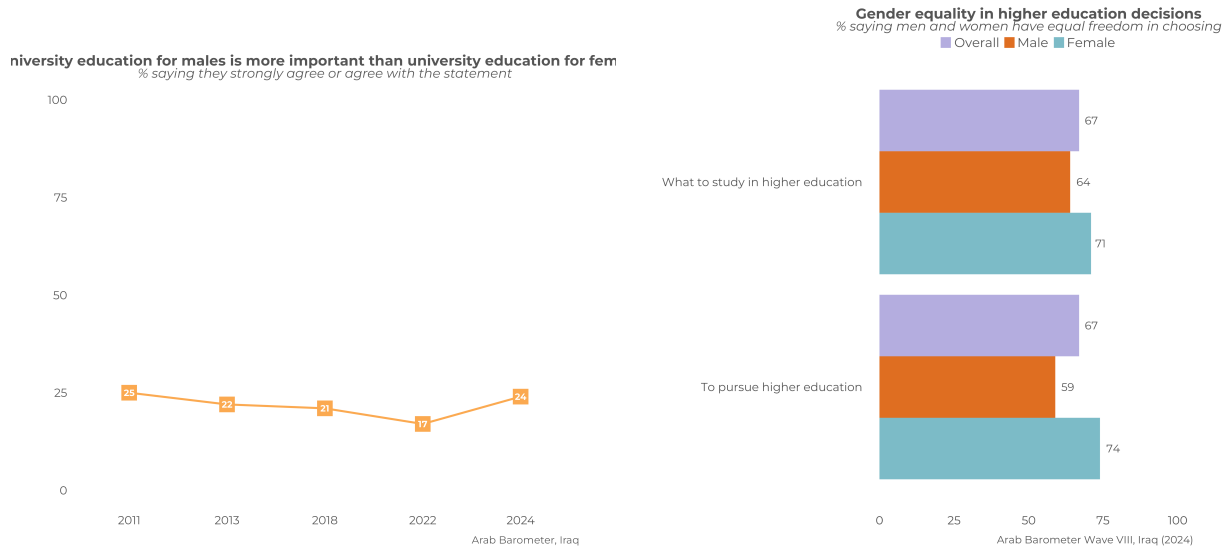
While over the past two waves Arab Barometer data has captured improvements in public evaluations of service provision, there has been less movement on gendered views of the rights and roles of women versus men. Specifically, 72 percent still believe that men are better at political leadership than women, which is on par with the share of Iraqis who have said the same over the past ten years. Additionally, 65 percent strongly agree or agree that men should have final say in decisions concerning the family, a share that also has remained largely unchanged since 2018.



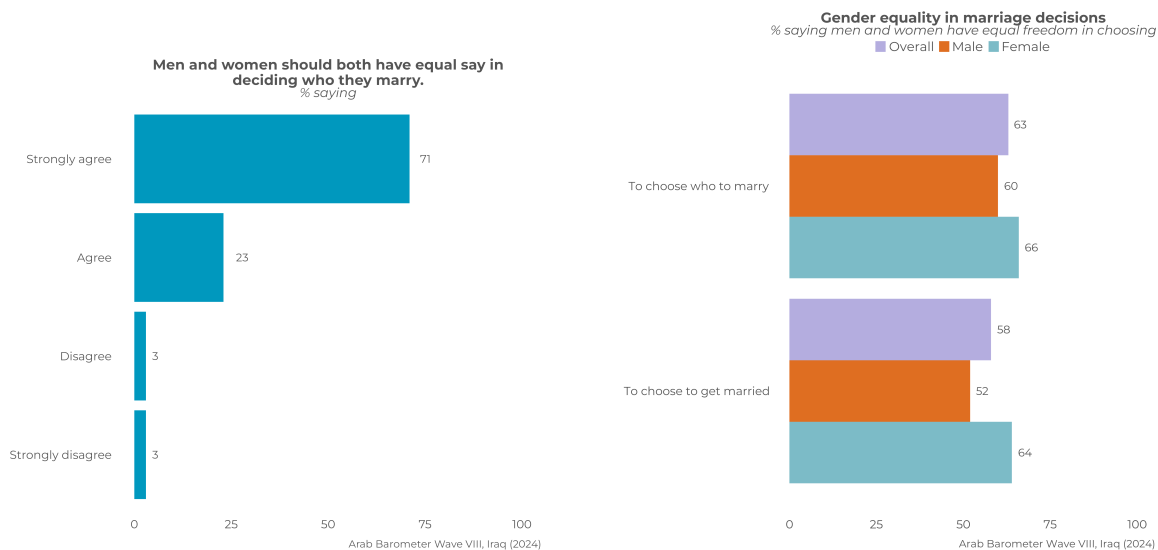
That said, the majority of Iraqis—77 percent—support imposing gender quotas in not only in parliament (which Iraq already legally mandates), but also in reserving cabinet level positions for women (80 percent). While these two statements measured over time suggest a reified view of roles in public versus private life writ large, a deeper investigation suggests more nuance in perceptions of gender equality across three spheres: education, family, and employment. In the former two, Iraqis—and particularly Iraqi women—perceive equality of rights between genders. When it comes to labor market participation, however, views are more mixed.

Just 24 percent of Iraqis believe that university education is more important for males than for females, signifying a slight uptick since 2022 when it reached a ten-year low of 17 percent. Women appear to be driving this finding: just 15 percent of them hold this view, in comparison to 32 percent of their male

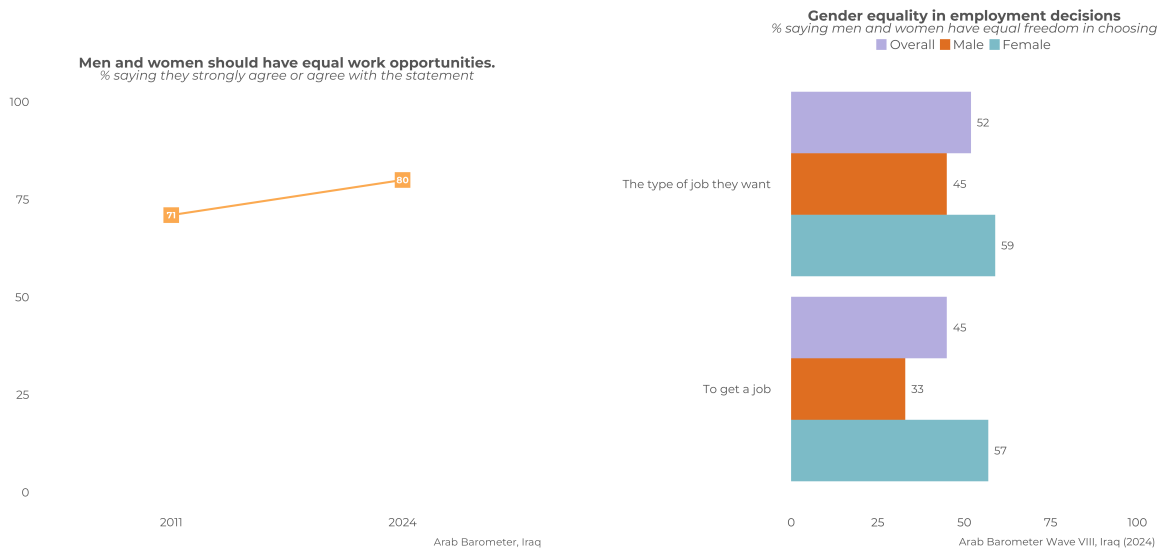
counterparts. Still, two thirds of citizens believe men and women have equal freedom both in choosing whether to pursue higher education (67 percent) and to choose what to study once there (67 percent). On both measures, Iraqi women are more likely than men to suggest this equality exists.



Results follow similar patterns on family-related decisions. Nearly all Iraqis—94 percent—believe that men and women should have equal say in who to marry. Unlike findings on education, men and women in Iraq equally hold this view. Meanwhile, smaller majorities of citizens believe that men and women have equal freedom both in choosing to get married (58 percent) and in choosing who to marry (63 percent). And again, on both measures, women are more likely to say both genders are equally free, though the gender gap is wider on the freedom to choose to get married (12 percentage points) than on the freedom to choose who to marry (6 percentage points). Notably, however, this equality of decision-making has recently come under threat and sent many Iraqi women and women’s rights groups to the street in protest of the August 2024 draft law proposing changes to personal status laws included measures would effectually legalize child marriage as well as threaten women’s divorce- and inheritance-related rights.

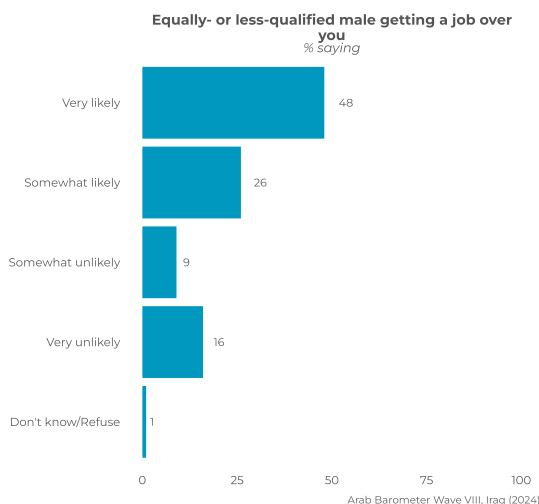
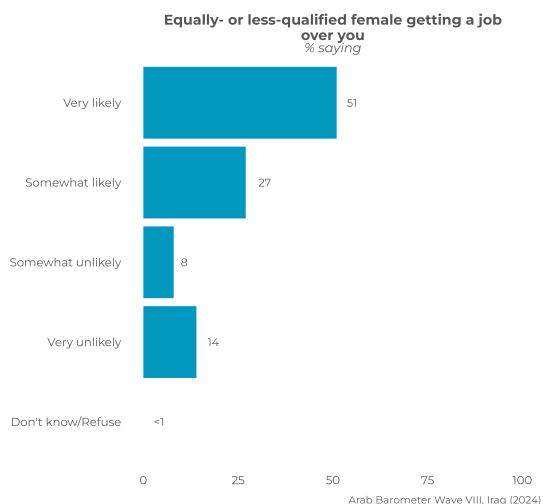
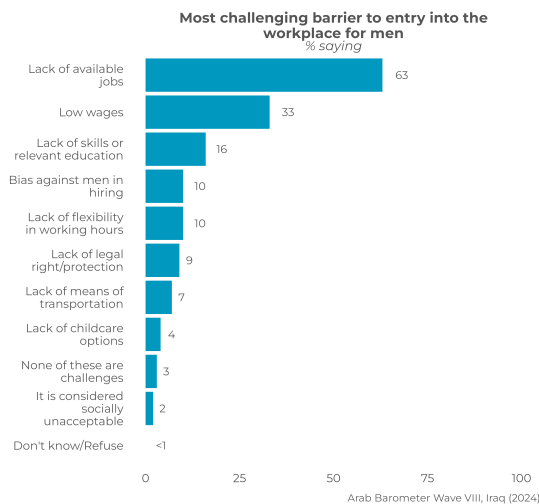
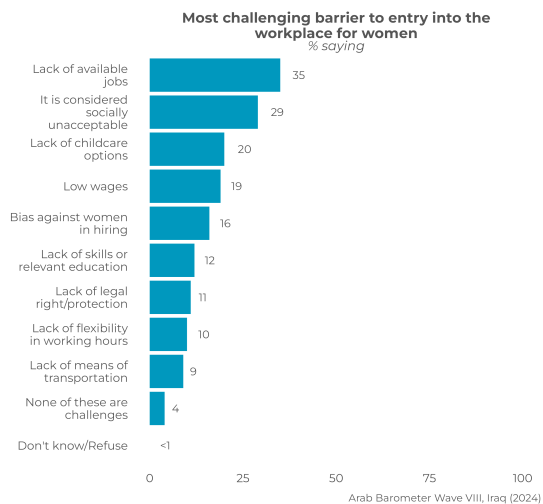


While there appears to be some consensus among the Iraqi public on gender equality relating to education - and family-related decisions, there is considerably more disagreement when it comes to participation in the Iraqi labor force. While the MENA region as a whole has the lowest female labor force participation rate globally, Iraq's female labor force participation rate is among the lowest in the region at just 11 percent. On the one hand, the Iraqi public overwhelmingly does not agree that this should be the case: 80 percent of citizens strongly agree or agree that men and women should have equal work opportunities. Majorities of both men (74 percent) and women (86 percent) hold this opinion, but there is nonetheless a 12-point gender gap, with women more likely to agree with the statement. But on the other hand, while half of all Iraqis believe that men and women have equal freedom in choosing what type of job they want to get (52 percent), less than half (45 percent) believe that men and women have equal freedom to choose to get a job in the first place. Instead, 48 percent believe that men enjoy greater freedom than women in this regard. Again, though, on both measures, it is women more than men who perceive they have equal ability: 57 percent of women versus 33 percent of men say women are free to get a job, while 59 percent of women versus 45 percent of men say the two genders enjoy equal freedom in choosing what type of job they want.



Alongside disagreement over the degree of freedom each gender has in pursuing employment opportunities, public opinion is divided on the nature of the constraints precluding individuals from entering the workforce. Arab Barometer Wave VIII data suggests there is much more consensus surrounding what keeps men out of work than what does the same for women. Asked about the biggest barriers to entry in the workforce, lack of available jobs tops the list for both genders; however, an outright majority—63 percent—believe this to be the biggest barrier for men, while a much smaller though plurality share—35 percent—believe this to be the biggest barrier for women. Moreover, Iraq stands apart from other countries surveyed in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave in that lack of childcare options is not in fact one of the top two reasons cited for why women are not in the labor force. Instead, second to lack of opportunities, 29 percent of Iraqis say that social acceptability stands as a main barrier, with lack of childcare options coming in third on the list.

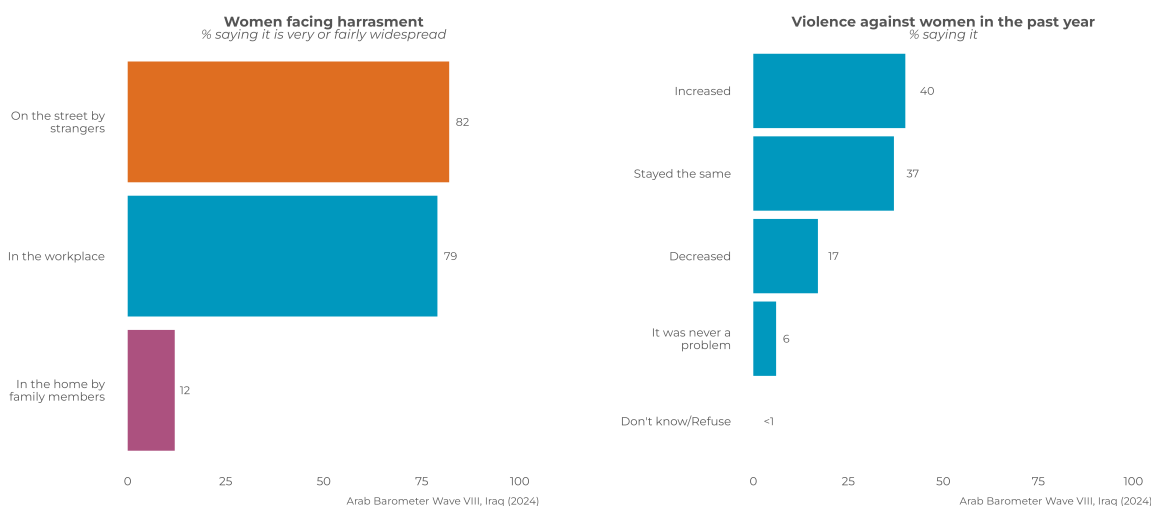
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And while social acceptability is recognized as a barrier, it is perhaps not specifically thought of as a form of gender discrimination. Instead, Arab Barometer data suggests that Iraqis do not perceive that gender is a basis of discrimination in acquiring gainful employment. Asked whether an equally or less qualified male would be given preference over the respondents themselves for a job, 75 percent of Iraqis believe this scenario would be very or somewhat likely. But then asked the reverse—that is, if an equally or less qualified female would be given preference for a job—78 percent also say it would be very or somewhat likely. Notably, these findings do not vary by gender: that is, Iraqi women (75 percent) are no more or less likely than men (75 percent) to say that males would be given preference for a job. And Iraqi men (76 percent) are (statistically) equally as likely as women (79 percent) to say that females would be

given preference.

Though not presented as an item on the list of barriers to entry into the workforce, there is another factor that might be contributing to depressed female labor force participation: perceptions of harassment in the workplace. Nearly four-in-five Iraqis (79 percent) believe that harassment of women is very or fairly widespread in this sphere, a share nearly equal to those who say that women systematically face harassment on the streets by strangers (82 percent). On both measures, Iraqi men and women are almost in complete agreement.



Meanwhile, a much smaller share (12 percent) say that women face harassment from family members in the home, again with no significant gender divide. This small share notwithstanding, 40 percent of Iraqis say that abuse of or violence against women has increased in the past year, while 37 percent say it has stayed the same. Only 6 percent say it was never a problem. Taken together, these findings provide an avenue for future investigation. The World Health Organization suggests that globally, intimate partner violence constitutes the greater part of violence against women. In Iraq, it could be that “harassment” is seen as a problem separate from abuse or violence, or that individuals perceive that the source of violence against is one other than family members—including intimate partners—in the home. The latter may underscore majority-held perceptions (52 percent) that when a woman does face abuse, a male family member can be a source of assistance. Sizeable shares of Iraqis also suggest that the local police (41 percent) or a female family member (34 percent) can be of assistance.

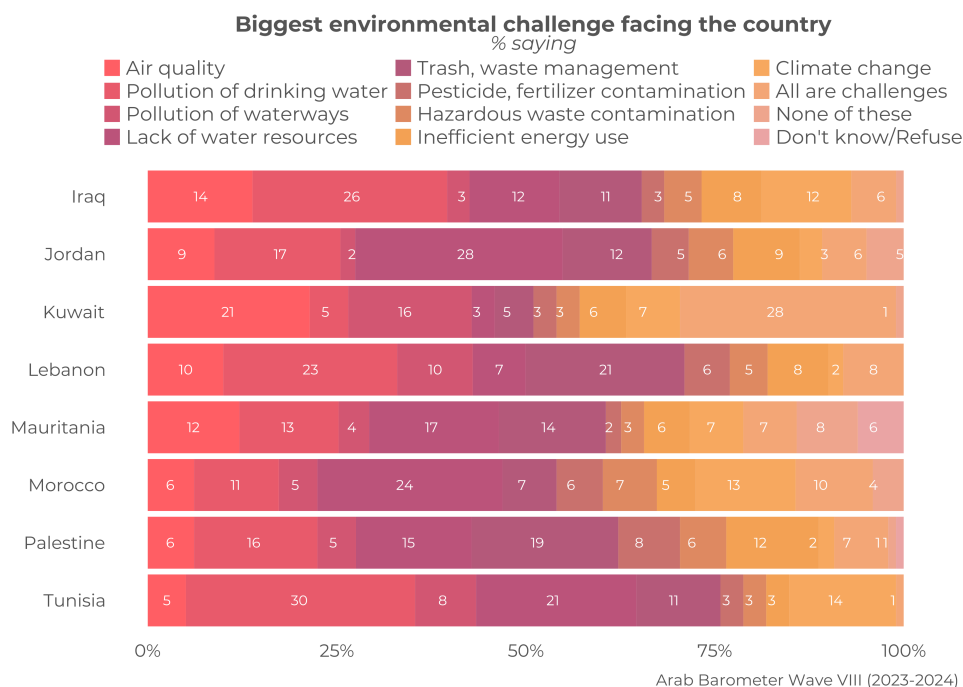
For the past several years, addressing the issue of domestic violence against

women has been one that is at the forefront of a legislative debate. Since at least 2018, Iraq was potentially the next country in the MENA region to join Morocco and Egypt as one that repealed so-called “marry your rapist” laws that allow rapists to marry their rape victims to avoid punishment. Overall, just over half of all Iraqis (55 percent) strongly or somewhat support the repeal of the law. Notably, moreover, females (58 percent) are only slightly likelier than males (52 percent) to hold this view.

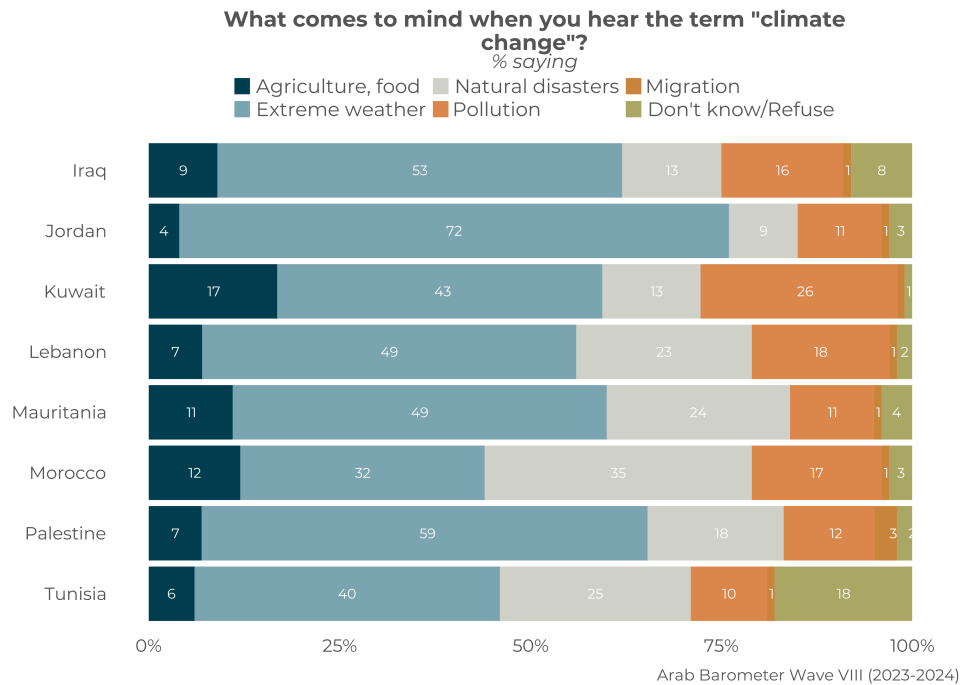
CLIMATE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Recorded temperatures in the summer of 2024 in Iraq might not have shattered previous records, but recorded highs in the country nonetheless surpassed 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit), leading the government to cut working hours. Extreme temperatures have gone hand-in-hand with dire water shortages, not only making Iraq the fifth-most vulnerable country in the world to climate change, but also, displacing tens of thousands of citizens.

These problems are clearly refracted in Iraqi public opinion over the growing problem of climate and environment-related challenges. Overall, 41 percent of Iraqis say that the biggest environmental challenge facing the country is water-related, be it in the pollution of drinking water (26 percent), the pollution of waterways (3 percent), lack of water resources (12 percent). Meanwhile, only 12 percent mention that climate change is the greatest environmental problem.

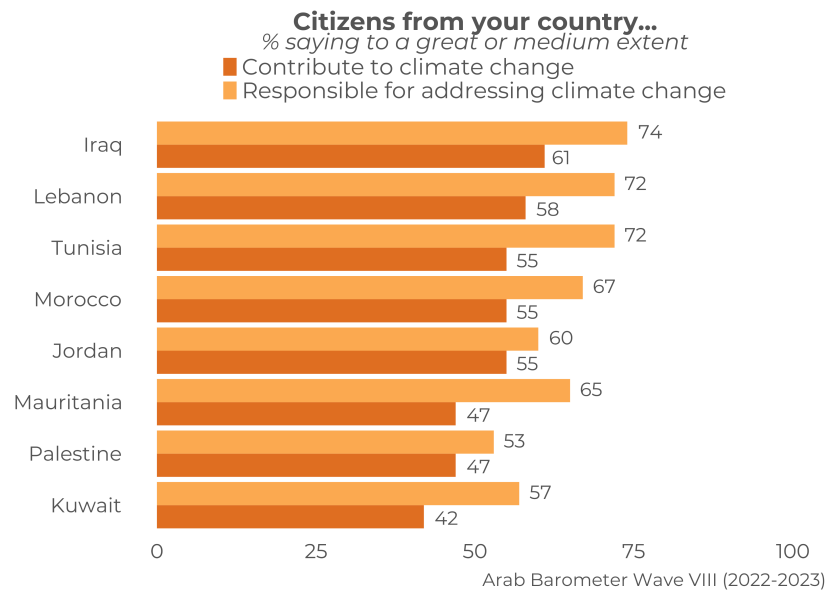


In this regard, Iraq follows regional patterns, where popular understandings of climate change have yet to align with official definition. Whereas the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change defines the phenomenon as, “a change in climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to the natural climate variability observed over comparable periods of time,” Iraq is one of only three countries surveyed in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave where half or more of the population thinks of “extreme temperatures” when hearing the term “climate change.” But, this doesn’t necessarily mean they attribute these changes to human activity.



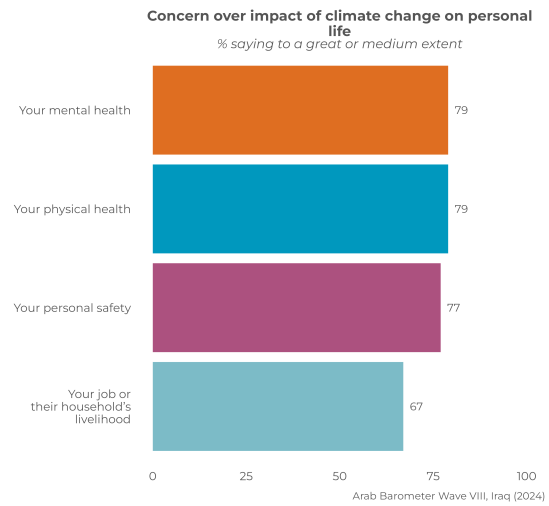
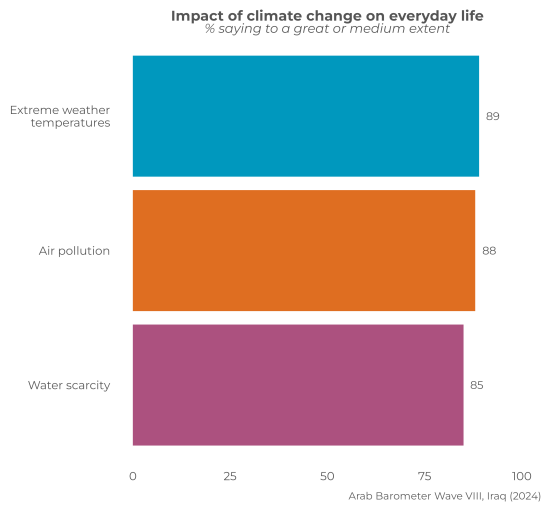
Notably, however, when asked specifically about the role of humans in causing climate change, 61 percent of Iraqis—the highest share of any country surveyed in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave—suggest that citizens from their own country contribute to climate change to a great or medium extent. An even greater share of Iraqis—74 percent—believe that Iraqi citizens are responsible for addressing climate change. These findings suggest that in Iraq, as in several other countries in the region, citizens are willing to be part of the solution to climate

change, even if and when they do not see themselves as contributing to the problem of climate change.

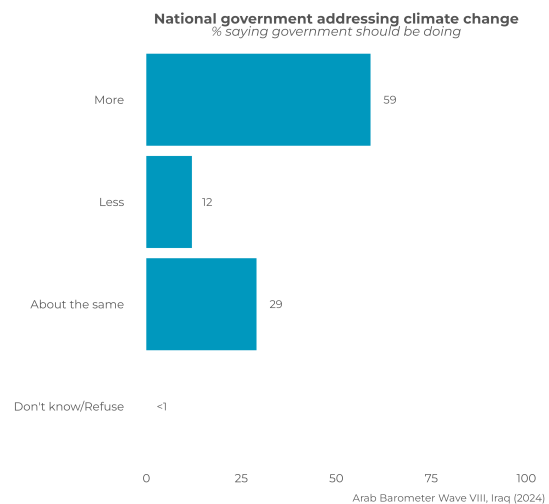
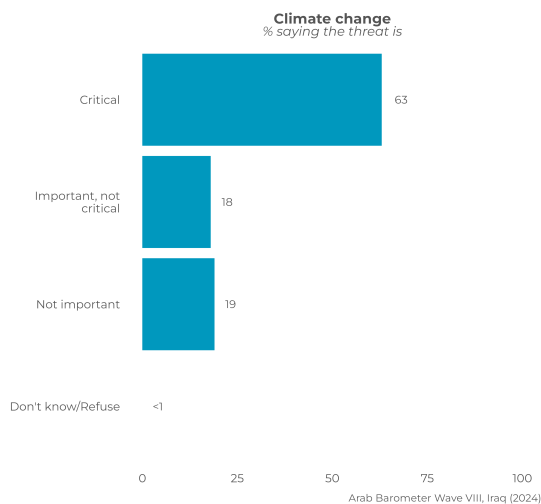


This may be linked to the fact that the Iraqi public, like those in neighboring countries, overwhelmingly perceives that climate change has an impact on daily life. In Iraq, the vast majority of citizens report that they are affected to a great or medium extent by extreme weather temperatures (89 percent), air pollution (88 percent), and water scarcity (85 percent). While just over half of all citizens (55 percent) report experiencing water outages on a daily or weekly basis, three quarters of the population (75 percent) report the same of electricity cuts. In June and July of 2024, the scorching heat left a record-high gap between the demand and supply of electricity, leaving many who were left without power across the country to take to the street in protest.

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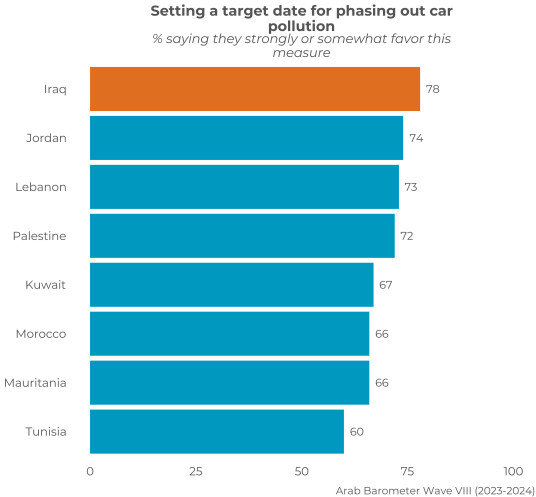
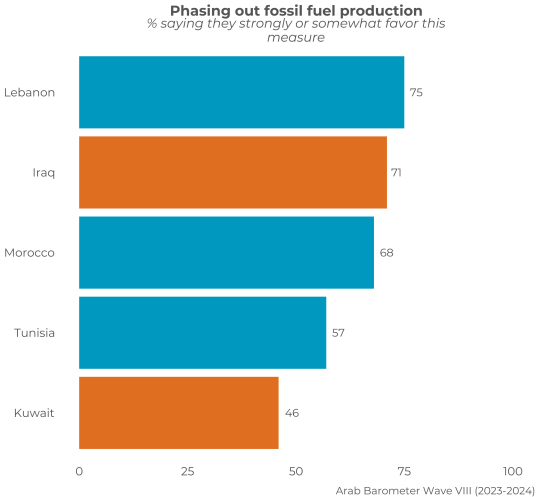
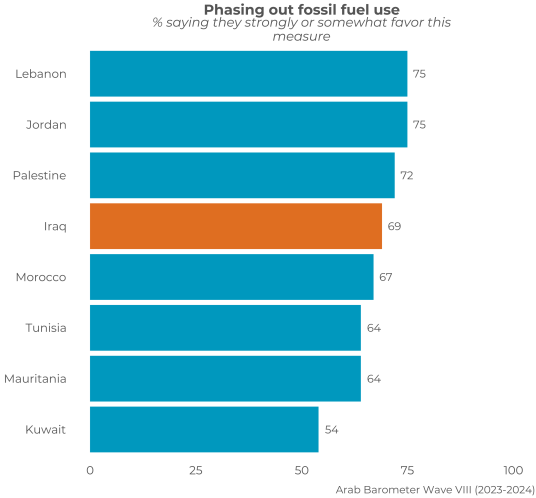
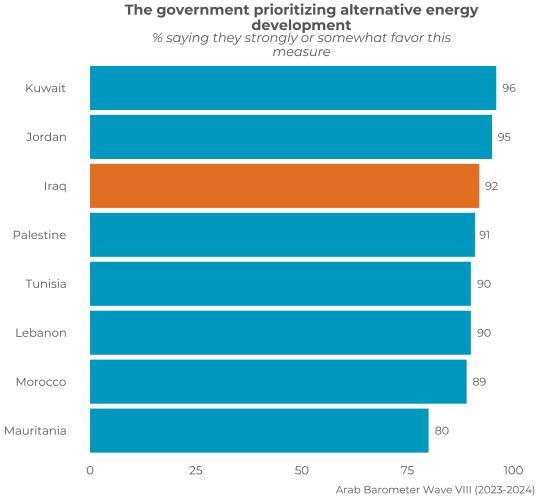


Commensurately, most Iraqis also express concern over the impact of climate change on each their physical health (79 percent) and their mental health (79 percent). Iraq is one of the few countries in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave where the majority of citizens (67 percent) are very or somewhat concerned about the impact of climate change on their livelihood. But like in other countries, more than three quarters of the population (77 percent) are concerned about the impact of climate change on their personal safety. This follows one report’s findings that Iraq in recent years has had the highest number of heatwave-related deaths in the region.



These challenges combined may underpin the fact that 81 percent of Iraqis believe that climate change poses a critical or important threat to national security. While just 3 percent of Iraqis believe that climate change is the most important problem facing the country (given the prevalence and primacy of other problems like corruption and the economy), 59 percent of the public nonetheless expresses a preference for the national government to be doing more to address the problem of climate change. In this regard, Iraq trails several other countries surveyed in Arab Barometer’s eighth wave.

Yet, there is stated appetite among the Iraqi public to adopt many of the measures specifically recommended at the conclusion of the 2023 UN Climate Change Conference (COP 27) in Egypt. In Iraq, 71 percent of citizens strongly or somewhat favor phasing out fossil fuel production, while a similar 69 percent feel the same about phasing out fossil fuel use. Instead, nearly all Iraqis—92 percent—favor the government prioritizing alternative energy development, while 78 percent—the highest share of any country surveyed in Arab Barometer Wave VIII—say they strongly or somewhat favor setting a target date for phasing out car pollution. Moves to alternative energy production are not seen as a zero-sum game with decreasing—but not all out discontinuing—use of fossil fuel. The high appetite for diversifying energy sources is nonetheless notable in a country like Iraq, which remains dependent on oil rents and therefore susceptible to exogenous shocks to the oil market.

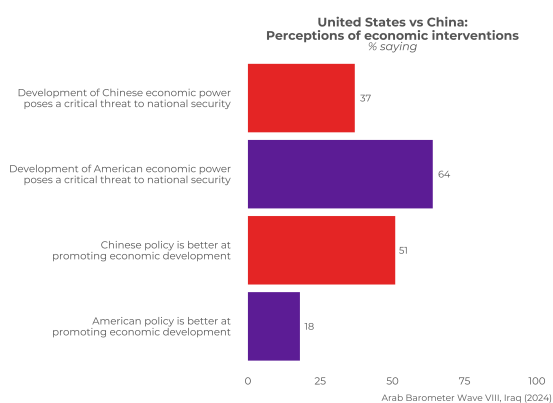


INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Iraq’s dependency on oil rents that underpins its public spending bill allocated over three years (2023-2025) seems in great part built on a hedged bet involving Chinese demand. One of the biggest recipients of funds for China’s Belt and Road initiative in 2021, Iraq’s diplomatic relations with China have only tightened over the past three years with oil exports being a central tenet of the bilateral relationship. In May of 2024, Chinese companies outbid competitors to win licenses to explore five Iraqi oil and gas fields, while major American companies were conspicuously absent from the bidding process. Now China’s third

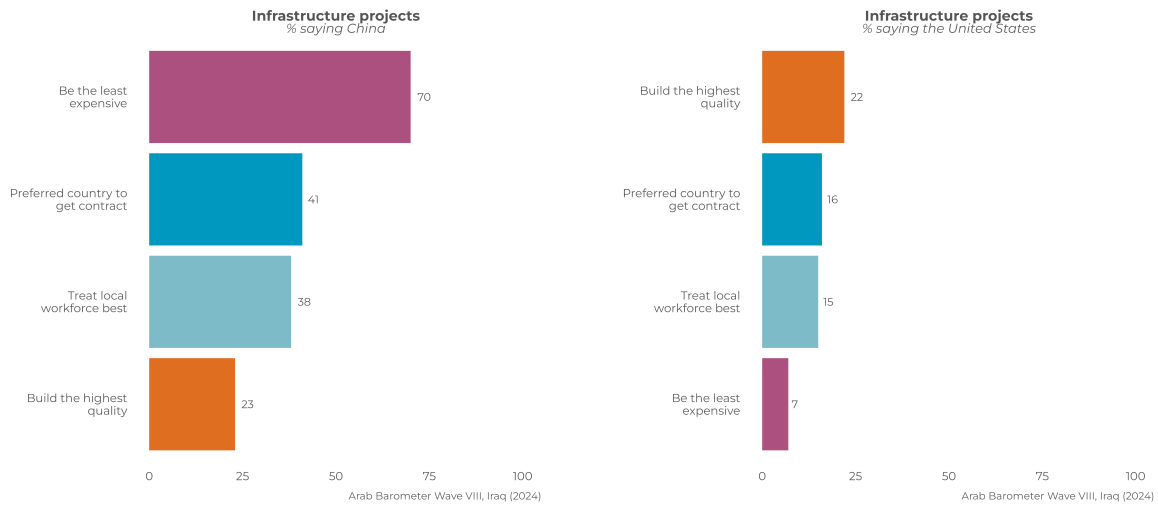
largest source of oil, Iraq exports 35 percent of its oil—or 1.2 million barrels a day—to China, making China Iraq’s largest trading partner.

Deepening economic ties between the two countries is cause for alarm among a sizeable share of the Iraqi public, but a share that is nonetheless smaller than the one concerned about ties with the United States. Just over a third (37 percent) of Iraqis perceive the development of Chinese economic power to be a critical threat to national security, while just under two thirds (64 percent) say the same of the development of American economic power. Asked to compare Chinese and American policies, 51 percent of Iraqis say China’s policy is better in promoting economic development versus 18 percent who say the US’s policy is better.

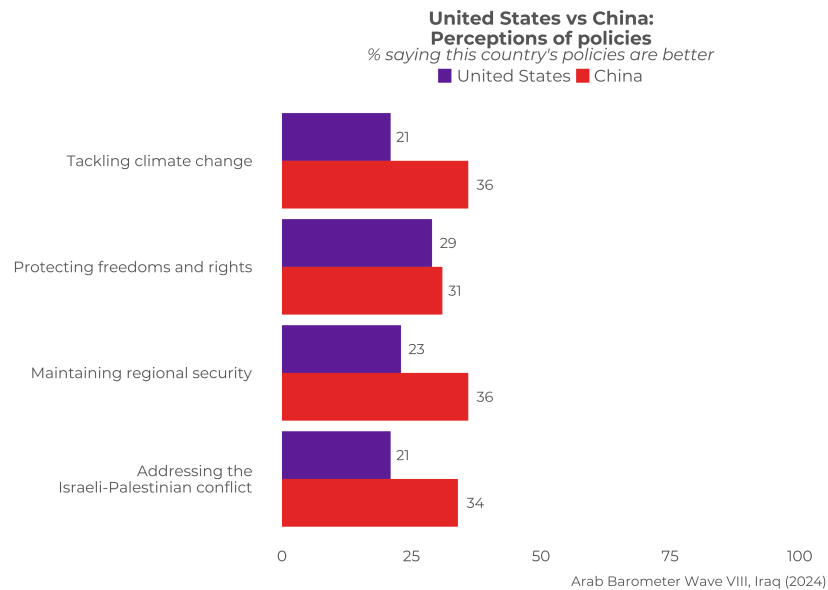


And given a hypothetical scenario about foreign countries vying for a domestic infrastructure contract, most Iraqis believe China would build the least expensive one, but a much smaller share (23 percent) say it would build the highest quality. That said, this latter share is no different from the one suggesting that the United States would build the highest quality project (22 percent), and Iraqis are likelier to say China (38 percent) rather than the US (15 percent) would best treat the local workforce. All told, 41 percent of citizens would prefer China over the US (16 percent) to get the contract, signifying a 16-point jump from 2022.

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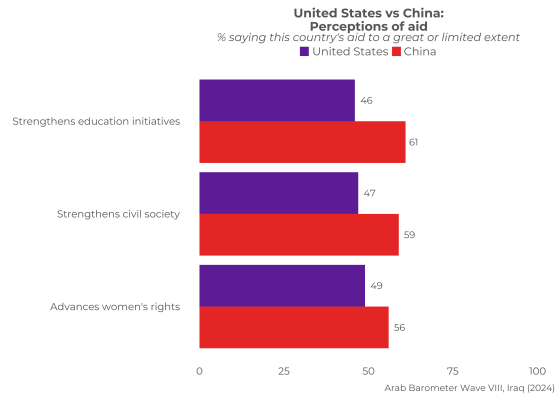


The increasingly strong ties between Iraq and China appear to have strongly reverberated in public opinion on a myriad of issues other than the economy. While China’s approach has been dubbed a form of economic diplomacy, in contrast to the US’s more security-based approach, more Iraqis (36 percent)—though notably not a majority of them—nonetheless see Chinese policies as better at maintaining regional security and order than American policies (23 percent). While the Iraqi public deems China’s policies as on par with US’s at protecting human rights (31 percent say China’s policies are better versus 29 percent who say the US’s policies are better in this regard), more Iraqis say China’s policies on tackling climate change (36 percent) are better than the US’s policies than the reverse (21 percent).

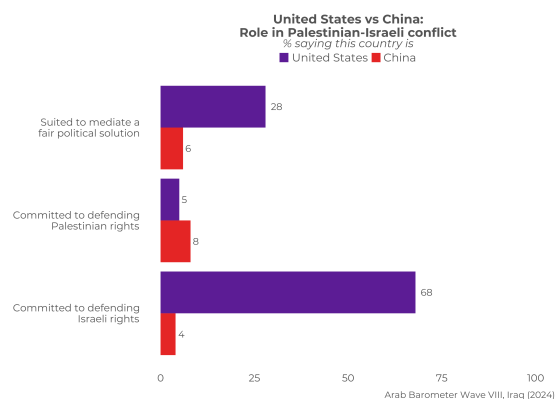


Furthermore, Chinese foreign aid is seen as more impactful than assistance coming from the United States. This is particularly the case in aid earmarked for education, a sector in which China is heavily investing in Iraq with its most recent promise of opening 1,000 new schools. It follows that 61 percent of Iraqis say Chinese aid strengthens education initiatives to a great or limited extent, in comparison to only 46 percent who say the same about American aid. There is also a sizable gap in assessments of the extent to which aid strengthens civil society, with 59 percent of Iraqis saying Chinese aid does so in comparison to 47 percent who say American aid does the same. Finally, and in continuing the pattern, fewer Iraqis say American aid advances women’s rights (49 percent) than Chinese aid to the same cause (56 percent).

Part of what may be contributing to more positive assessments of Chinese policies than American policies are perceived motivations. While 61 percent of Iraqis believe that gaining influence is the main motivation of American foreign aid, opinions are more split on the motivation underpinning Chinese aid: 36 percent believe it is to gain influence and 37 percent believe it is economic development.

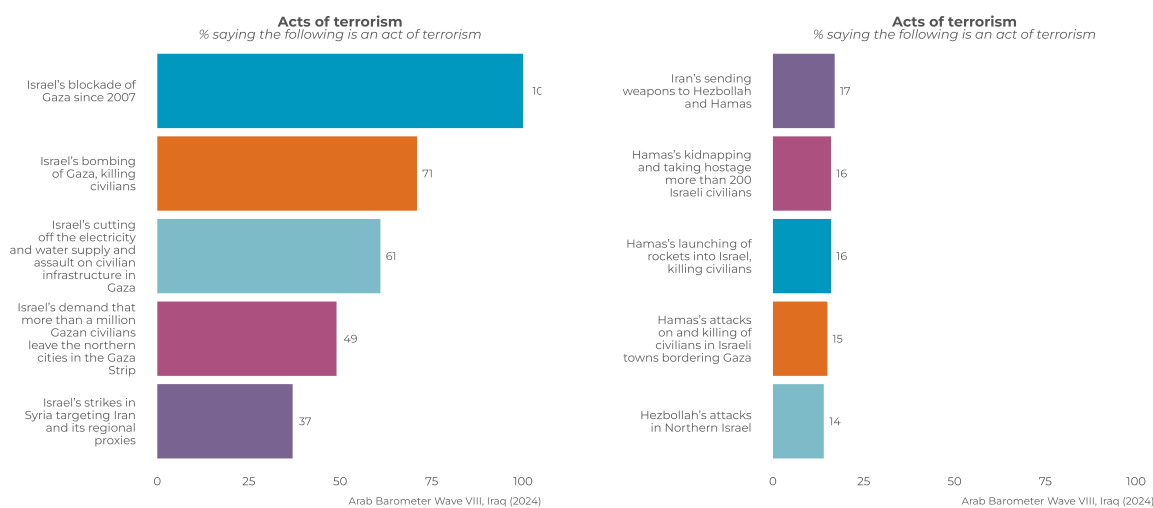


Another potential contributor to the increasing favorability of Chinese policies among Iraqi citizens is not so much how China’s policy is perceived but rather how the United States’s policy is not perceived. Most Iraqis do not find US policies just or equitable towards the most recent crisis in Gaza. Only five percent of Iraqi citizens say the United States is committed to defending the rights of Palestinians, whereas 68 percent say it is committed to defending the rights of Israelis. In contrast, Iraqis at best seem unsure on what China’s stance is: very few citizens see China as committed to the defense of Palestinian rights (8 percent) or to Israeli rights (4 percent).



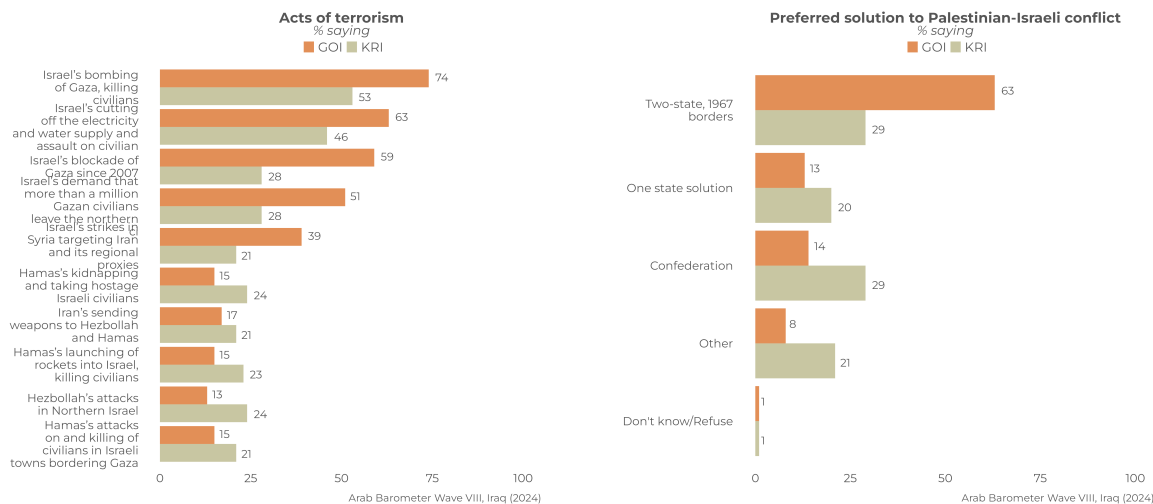
The United States’s perceived impartiality taints it, though perhaps less so in Iraq than in other countries in the region. Still, Iraqi citizens, like many other citizens in the MENA region, overwhelmingly denounce Israel’s actions in Gaza.

Among Iraqis, 32 percent describe the latest events a “genocide” and 26 percent call them a “massacre.” Around half or more of all citizens label Israel’s actions forms of “terrorism,” including Israel’s bombing and killing of Gazan civilians (71 percent), its assault on civilian infrastructure (61 percent), its blockade of Gaza since 2007 (55 percent), and its forcibly displacing Gazan civilians (49 percent). Meanwhile significantly smaller proportions place Hamas’s actions and those of its proxies under the same banner: just 16 percent call each Hamas’s kidnapping of Israeli hostages and Hamas’s launching of rockets killing Israeli civilians “terrorism,” while equally small shares say the same of Hamas’s lethal attacks on border towns (15 percent) or Hizballah’s attacks on Northern Israel (14 percent).



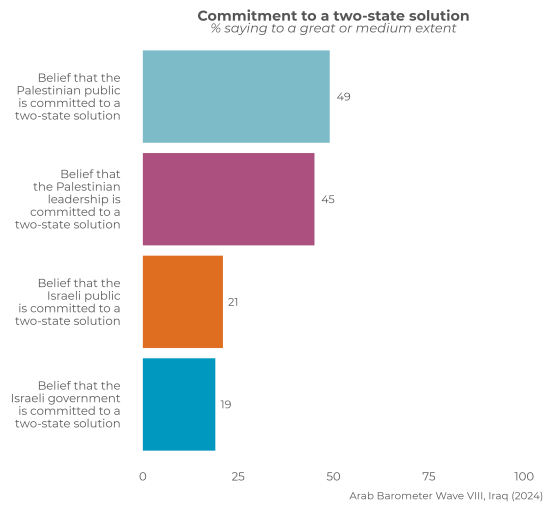
Notably, perceptions of each Israel’s and Hamas’s actions vary considerably in Iraq between areas that are part of the Kurdistan Regional of Iraq (KRI and those governed by the Government of Iraq (GOI). On all assessments of whether Israel’s actions constitute acts of terrorism, there are double-digit differences between the two regions, with those living under the GOI being much likelier than those living under the KRG to label Israel’s actions as forms of terrorism. This gap is as high as 31 percentage points on assessments that Israel’s blockade of Gaza constitutes an act of terrorism; 23 points on the forcible displacement of Gazan civilians; and 21 points on the bombing of Gaza. In contrast, more citizens living under the KRG than under the GOI label the actions of Hamas and its allies as “terrorism,” though the gaps are considerably smaller. In the KRI, citizens are 11 points likelier to see Hizballah’s attacks on Northern Israel as terrorism and 9 points likelier to say the same of Hamas’s kidnapping of hostages than their counterparts living under the GOI.

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This regional disparity in opinions persists when asked about a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Nationally, 59 percent of Iraqis suggest that the “two-state solution” drawn on 1967 borders is their preferred one to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, a share that has not significantly decreased since 2022 (63 percent). Yet, this majority share is again being driven by those living under the GOI, where 63 percent favor a two-state solution compared to just 29 percent living in the KRI. Instead, those living in the KRI are equally split between favoring a two-state solution and favoring a Palestinian-Israeli confederation.

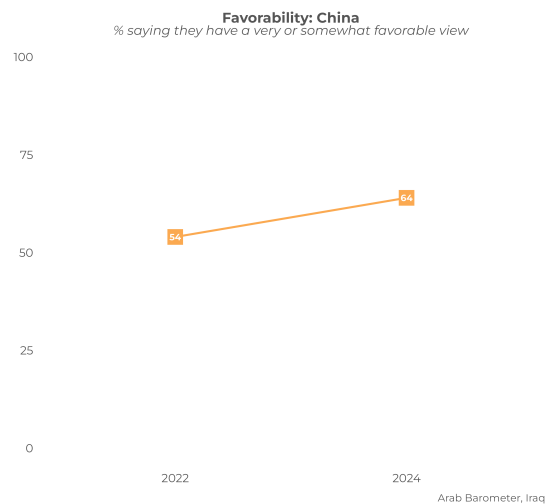
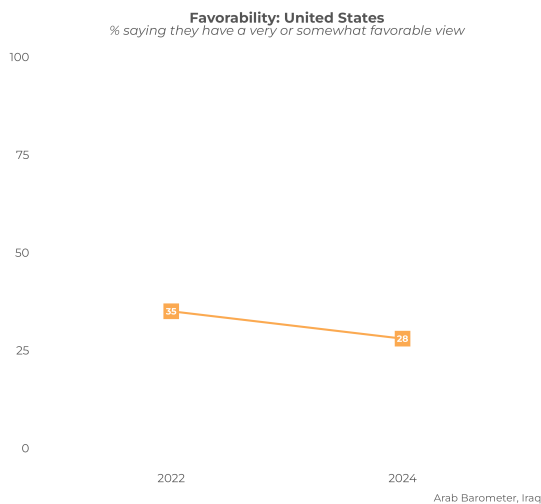
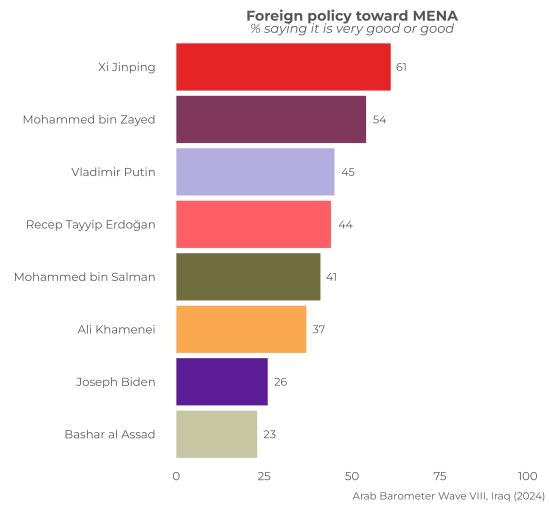
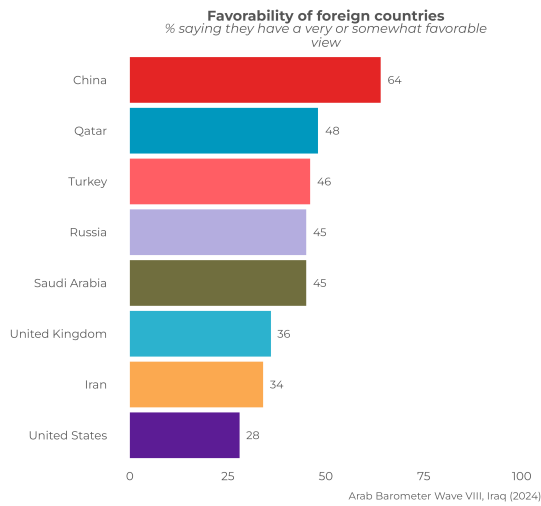
Regional variation is also apparent in evaluations of the extent to which the Palestinian and Israeli publics and leaderships are committed to a two-state solution. Overall, Iraqis are twice as likely to say that each the Palestinian people and leadership are committed to a two-state solution than the Israeli people and leadership. Just under half of all Iraqis (49 percent) believe that Palestinian public is committed to the solution, which is nearly double the share that say the same about the Israeli public (21 percent). Meanwhile, 45 percent of Iraqis believe Palestinian leadership is committed compared to just 19 percent who say the same of the Israeli government. On these measures, those in the KRI are likelier to say that both the Palestinian leadership (54 percent) and public (68 percent) are committed to a two-state solution (versus 44 and 46 percent, respectively, for those living under the GOI). At the same time, citizens in Iraqi Kurdistan region are less likely to perceive commitments to peace from both the Israeli government (14 percent versus 19 percent in the GOI) and the Israeli public (15 percent versus 22 percent).



These regional disparities in evaluations of the current crisis in Gaza not only spill over into overall assessments of the United States, but also likely underpin why its overall favorability has not fallen as much as it has in other countries in the region. At 28 percent in Iraq, the favorability of the United States is the lowest among all countries about which citizens were asked on Arab Barometer’s eighth wave surveys. In contrast, China is the only country that garners the favorability of the majority (64 percent), and positive views of the country have risen 10 points since 2022. Evaluations of Joseph Biden and Xi Jinping follow similar patterns. But while the United States’s favorability in Iraq has declined 7 points between 2022 and 2024, this change is significantly less drastic than the decline in other countries in the region, as in Jordan, where favorability of the United States has fallen by 23 points, or in Lebanon, where it fell by 15 points in the same time span.

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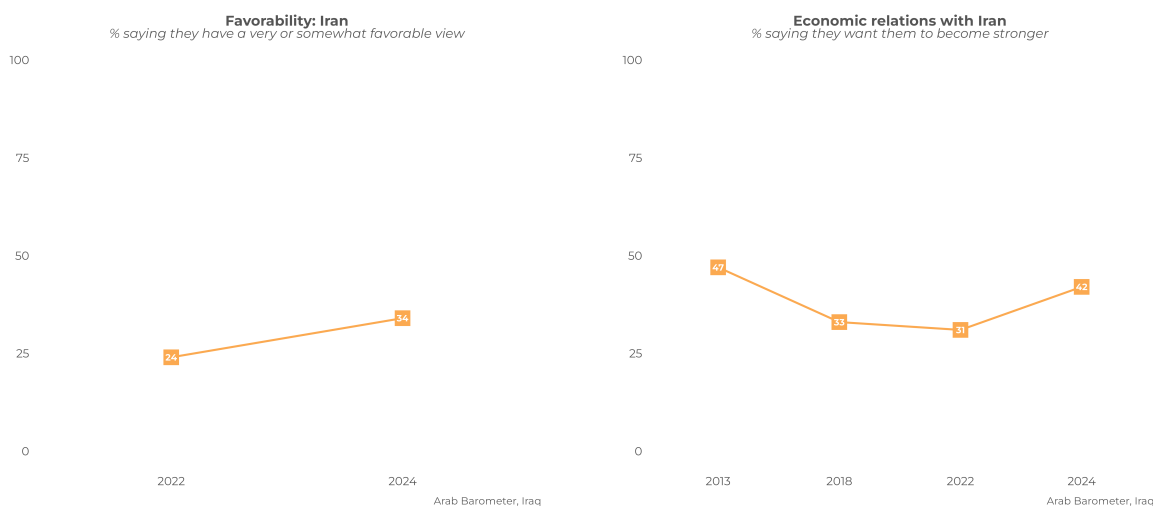


This relative stability in views of the United States in Iraq is bolstered by the continued support it enjoys in the KRI, where 60 percent hold a very or somewhat favorable view, in comparison to just 23 percent of citizens living under the GOI. What is notable, however, is that while this regional discrepancy exists, it has remained relatively constant over time: the favorability of the US among citizens in the KRI dropped 9 points from 69 percent in 2022, but it also only dropped 8 points from 31 percent in 2022 among citizens living under the GOI. At the same time, the favorability of China has increased by 10 points in both regions, up from 53 percent in 2022 to 63 percent in 2024 percent among those living in the GOI, and up from 58 to 68 percent among those living under the KRI.

As such, Iraq potentially presents a case where two things simultaneously are

affecting how the rivalry between the United States and China is playing out in public opinion: on the one hand, Iraqis are penalizing the United States for its stance on the war in Gaza, but on the other, they are rewarding China’s increasingly ubiquitous presence. Other than the previously mentioned school building initiatives and oil and gas exploration contracts, China is also building housing units and cities, an airport outside the Thi Qar governorate, and 200 other projects that would simultaneously create jobs and build infrastructure.

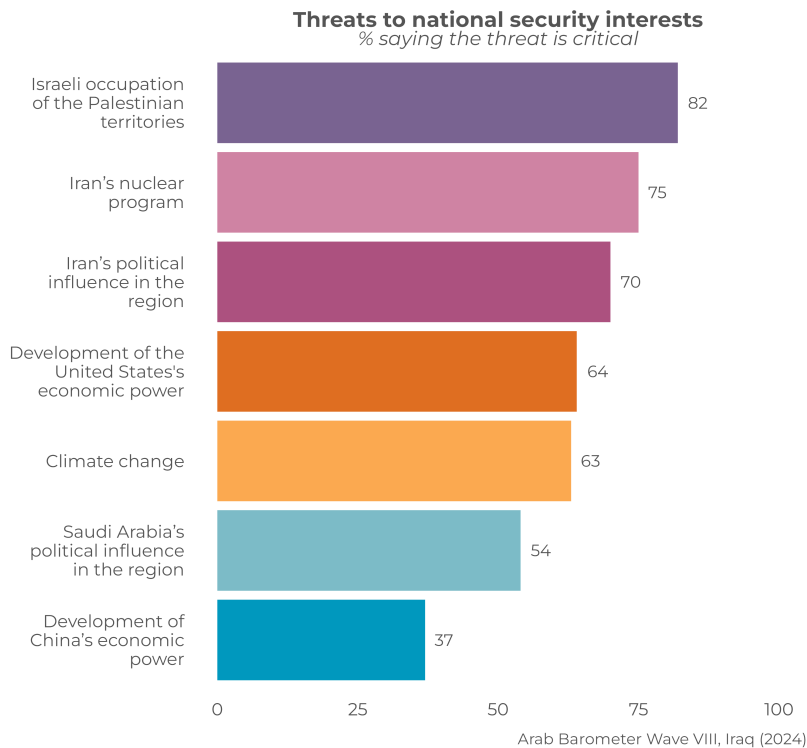
Yet, there is more evidence from Iraq that suggests how public opinion is penalizing or rewarding external powers based on their positions on the war in Gaza. This is perhaps most apparent in views of Iran. Increasingly mired in Iraq’s domestic policies through its ties to political parties and currently enforcing its influence through its paramilitary groups, Iran’s interventions in Iraq have been met by fluctuating approval among the Iraqi public over the years. At its height in 2013, the share of Iraqis who wanted economic relations with Iran to become stronger—the Arab Barometer’s favorability question at the time—stood at just under half (47 percent). That share dipped significantly to 31 percent 2022, when relations between Tehran and the Sadrist Movement—rebranded as the Shia National Movement in 2024—significantly soured and led to a rift.



But Iran is now leveraging the most recent war in Gaza and expanding its influence in Iraq, not only economically through electricity and gas exports, but also through political ties forged outside the historical confessional (Shia) lines. While Iraq’s current prime minister enjoys the support of the Iran-backed Shia Coordination Framework, Iran has expanded its backers in Iraq to now include Sunni politicians and Kurdish leaders, including those in the Patriotic Union of

Kurdistan party, the rival of the US-aligned Kurdish Democratic Party.

Amidst this backdrop, the share of Iraqis who want economic relations with Iran to become stronger has risen by 11 points to 42 percent in 2024. And between 2022 and 2024, the share of Iraqis who hold a very or somewhat favorable view of Iran also has risen from 24 to 34 percent. Yet, Iran’s nuclear program and its influence in the region is still seen by an overwhelming share of Iraqis (75 and 70 percent, respectively) as a critical threat to national security interests. These threats posed by Iran are second only to that posed by the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.





About Arab Barometer

Arab Barometer is the leading and most influential research network on public opinion in the Middle East and North Africa. We are nonprofit and nonpartisan, hosted at Princeton University and the University of Michigan.

Founded in 2006, we are the longest-standing research network that conducts rigorous and nationally representative public opinion surveys in the Arab world. We disseminate the findings through analyses and reports to deepen public conversations and facilitate data-driven solutions to the pressing problems facing ordinary citizens across MENA.

Our public opinion surveys give ordinary citizens a stronger voice, and our analysis, highlighting key demographic differences and changing trends, help comprehend MENA citizens' shifting views, attitudes, and behaviors.



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