

DEMOCRACY &amp; HUMAN RIGHTS

# Women In The Arab Spring Uprisings: Iraq

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This research series analyzes the role of women in the Arab Spring uprisings and how their participation in the protest movements of the last decade impacted their rights and status. We utilize case studies of Iraq, Tunisia, Algeria, Iran, Egypt, and Sudan. Through the case studies, we look at secondary sources on women's activism and the current debate on women's rights and status in the region. Iraq is the second case study of the research series.

This article explores Iraqi women's civic and political activism since 2011, with an emphasis on the women's movement in Iraq since the 2019 October Revolution. We also examine the use of women as ideological tools and fighters by ISIS during the terrorist group's insurgency in 2014. Our main argument is that even though women were largely absent during the 2011 uprisings due to decades of wars and entrenched social norms that restricted their movement, they were on the frontlines in the 2019 October Revolution. Iraqi women have been the drivers of progress in the country since then, despite the growing threat of a terrorist insurgency, political turmoil, and sectarian violence.

## Background

Unlike its neighboring countries, Iraq mostly escaped the first wave of the Arab Spring uprisings; therefore, it is important to look at the historical context that defined Iraqi politics in 2011. As Iraqis look back at the past decade, the Arab Spring is rarely the primary point of historic reference. From the invasion of Iran in the 1980s and Kuwait in the 1990s to the US occupation in 2003, the Iraqi people have long been the victims of wars. Many dimensions of the conflicts continued even after the wars ended because the democratic state that the US had established caused further turmoil in the country.

Efforts to establish a stable post-invasion regime were met with resistance, which initially came from the loyalists of the [Baath Party](#) that ruled Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Soon, religious radicals and armed militias joined the resistance, forming what is known as the Islamic State (ISIS). Iraqis, and especially Iraqi women, have suffered from insurgency terror on a vast scale since then. [Muhasasa](#), a quota-based political system introduced in the US-installed government, shaped the Iraqi political landscape and division of power. Building a government rooted in sectarian divisions further fueled sectarian politics, violence, corruption, and marginalization.

Women have suffered numerous cases of abuse under sectarian regime politics. Domestic violence has [surged](#), illiteracy has soared, and thousands of women have been left vulnerable. Growing conservatism also has diminished women's role in public life. Even so, women had a better position in society compared with most women in the region. While women's social activism was limited, they were able to push for more agency in the political sphere and occasionally [secure equal rights on several issues](#) including literacy, employment, and personal status. In the years after the US invasion of the country, Iraqi women successfully [lobbied for a quarter of the seats](#) in parliament. Although the quota did not lead to meaningful participation in government decision-making for women, it allowed them to widely participate in Iraqi politics and keep the discussion around women's issues alive. However, despite the deadly legacy of wars – Iraq was no less vulnerable to the Arab Spring uprisings than other countries were.

### **2011: Day of Rage**

When the Tunisian street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire, triggering the Arab Spring, Iraqis had recently settled their parliamentary election after a long period of internal wrangling. Soon afterward, Baghdad was drawn into the debate over the pending US departure from Iraq in compliance with the [“Withdrawal Agreement”](#) signed during the George W. Bush administration. Debates over the US withdrawal, coupled with the Iraqi Parliament being ill-suited for resolving the country's problems –such as economic insecurity, lack of an oil policy, and sectarian tensions– heightened the level of political tension and civil disobedience in the country.

Sporadic protests emerged as people took to the streets to express their dissatisfaction with the government and its unwillingness to provide essential services for the citizens. The largest mobilization took place on February 25, known as the “[Day of Rage](#),” after a group of young Iraqi intellectuals, feminists, journalists, and unemployed youth published online their plans to demonstrate against the government. The post drove Iraqis from all backgrounds to gather around Tahrir Square and chant anti-government slogans. However, unlike their counterparts in Tunisia, Iraqis were not calling for a regime change but for greater constitutional rights and access to necessary social services.

Women’s groups were inactive on the eve of the Arab Spring because of social norms that restricted their movement; however, dire economic conditions and barriers to women’s political participation soon drew several of them to participate in the protests. Along with thousands of demonstrators in major cities, Iraqi women rallied to call for government action to investigate federal corruption cases and provide better services. They worked to ensure that women’s issues were not ignored alongside other demands.

The protests in 2011 were met with violent crackdowns by security forces, which led to further violence against women. On April 13, Iraqi security forces [broke into](#) the adjacent offices of the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) and the Organization of Women’s Freedom in Iraq (OWFI), and arrested a member who had peacefully participated in several of the Tahrir Square demonstrations. Even though the protests waned quickly after clashes with the security forces, demonstrators were successful in calling attention to socio-economic issues. The momentum of the Arab Spring, however, largely bypassed Iraq, though women’s activism toward greater rights continued.

### **Terrorism Impedes Women’s Efforts**

ISIS, also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and Daesh, emerged from the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq. Founded by Abu Musab al Zarqawi in 2004, the Iraqi branch was a local offshoot of al Qaeda. The group faded into obscurity for several years after the surge of US troops in Iraq in 2007. However, [the group began to reemerge in 2011](#) and took advantage of the growing instability in Iraq and Syria to carry out attacks and increase its group size over the next few years.

ISIS [launched](#) its Mosul and Tikrit offensive in June 2014. That same month, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al Baghdadi announced the formation of a caliphate that stretched from Aleppo in Syria to Diyala in Iraq and largely changed the group's name to the Islamic State. However, the three names for the group -ISIL, ISIS, and Islamic State- are still used variously by think tanks, government agencies, education institutes, and the group itself.

The [US-led coalition began airstrikes against the Islamic State](#) in August 2014 and expanded into Syria the following month. The campaign was called 'Operation Inherent Resolve.' By the end of 2015, Iraqi forces had made progress in recapturing the city of Ramadi. By December 2017, the Islamic State caliphate [had lost 95% of its territory](#), including its two biggest properties, Mosul, Iraq, and the northern Syrian city of Raqqa. Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al Abadi declared victory over the Islamic State in Iraq on December 9, 2017. However, the group is still active in Iraq and conducts attacks globally.

During the group's reign of terror, ISIS militants were involved in crimes against women -including rape, forced marriage, and massacre. In 2014, [the Islamic State decimated Yazidi villages in Sinjar](#), just over the Syrian-Iraqi border, in what is known as the "Sinjar Massacre." Men were lined up and shot dead. Thousands of women and children were kidnapped to serve as slaves and were sexually and physically abused. These women were sold to men not only in Iraq but globally, and they were brutally raped and abused by the Islamic State members and the people they were sold to. After killing many women's fathers and brothers, the Islamic State forced them to convert to Islam and marry the group's jihadist members. As a result, [many became mothers raising children fathered by members of ISIS](#). These women choose to refer to themselves as *ISIS brides* because they feared if they revealed who they truly were, they would be separated from their children as well. Though many women were killed, there are survivors who continue to deal with trauma and fear. Some figures indicate an [increase in suicide among Yazidi survivors](#). The suicides are believed to be linked to the genocide; more specifically, the difficult living conditions inside the displacement camps, no prospect for a better future, and socioeconomic problems.

The Yazidi genocide caused mass displacement and a form of Stockholm syndrome among the kidnapped girls, who were rescued but [asked their rescuers to return them to the Islamic State](#).

Some survivors who returned home encountered situations such as finding no surviving family members, finding a family that they now saw as different, and finding relatives with whom they were not familiar after having spent a prolonged period in captivity. Some children who returned to their families yearned for the ISIS women who had cared for them.

After the genocide, Yazidi and Kurdish women began to form all-female-fighter forces to push back against the Islamic State. While these groups were already in formation, women were given a role in the *Peshmerga* (the military forces of the autonomous region of Iraqi Kurdistan), as the Islamic State made significant advances. In August of 2014, female fighters [took part in the operation to recapture the Mosul Dam](#). After the dam was recaptured, 10 female Peshmerga continued to guard it –a sign of the changing role of Kurdish and Yazidi women in combat. Participation in the fight against ISIS by joining the Peshmerga became both an [act of necessity and a point of pride for Yazidi women](#). In January 2015, former Yazidi singer Khatoon Khider, a survivor of the massacre, obtained formal permission from the Kurdistan Regional Government to establish an all-female Yazidi battalion and became the commander of the Force of the Sun Ladies Brigade. By early 2017, the Sun Brigade [consisted of nearly 200 Peshmerga-trained women](#) between the ages of 18 and 38. Moreover, in 2016, 127 Yazidi Kurdish women completed a 45-day intensive basic training course at a Peshmerga Tiger base in Peshkhabur in the Zakho district.

Meanwhile, the US also was conducting operations against ISIS alongside the Yazidi women, Kurdish forces, and Iraqi forces. Operation *Inherent Resolve* was one of the primary missions, but raids and airstrikes have continued since then. While the US has been successful in helping Iraqis to recapture Mosul, there have been disproportionate impacts on women, as they often were collateral damages. In addition, as the insurgency heightened, ISIS continued to force women to partake in different terrorist operations and used women to carry weapons. Given the large US military presence in the country, a woman walking on the streets could more easily avoid detection than a man doing the same activity.

Part of the US fight against the Islamic State, by nature, focuses on women who have joined the Islamic State or other groups as members and become radicalized. The Islamic State sees what the US and Western allies do to protect women and how those protections prompt

women to cooperate with foreign entities. The Islamic State responds by promising the same incentives to recruit women to their side of the fight. Women who agree to join the group are expected to give birth to, raise, and indoctrinate future generations of jihadists and sacrifice themselves as suicide bombers. Women in the Islamic State also are expected to be religiously knowledgeable, be guardians of their home, facilitate their husband's work and raise his children, and be encouragers and nurturers. If a woman did venture into other activities aside from these, it usually was to educate herself and her children in jihadist ideology and perhaps to raise money for the cause. Over time, their involvement in ISIS's operations sparked and fueled nationalist sentiment among certain women's groups and created a hostile environment of opposition to the US and the West. Women's changing roles throughout the insurgency –and continuing today– has manifested in protests, some of which were against what the women saw as US interference in the country.

Even though the US counterterrorism mission in Iraq did not involve women extensively, they were a priority for certain parts of the mission. For example, women were used as human intelligence (HUMINT) sources because they were well-positioned to detect early signs of radicalization. Women were crucial antiterrorism messengers in schools, religious institutions, social environments, and even local governments. Despite their willingness to participate in these smaller counterterrorism measures, women's voices remain largely sidelined from mainstream counterterrorism debates. It is, therefore, important to note that if women are omitted from terrorism prevention efforts, their potential contributions as mitigators are also forfeited.

## **2019: October Revolution**

As October 2019 approached, the situation in Iraq was dismal: rampant government corruption, mass displacement of civilians during the 2014 ISIS insurgency, widespread unemployment, and continuous foreign meddling in the country. Many Iraqis felt that their government was responsible for the corruption and the dysfunctional government. Lack of faith in the Iraqi government, however, was apparent in 2018 when the turnout for parliamentary elections was only 44.52%. The election results showed that the [Sairoon alliance won 54 parliament seats](#), the Fatah Bloc won 47 seats, and the Nasr Coalition won 42 seats. A majority

of the 2 million internally displaced Sunni voters did not, or could not, participate in the elections. Displacement camp [voting officials](#) denied Sunni voters their right to vote, leaving them feeling disenfranchised. One of the main reasons they could not vote was the lack of electronic voting cards for displaced Iraqis. The resentment by Sunni leaders continued when the government refused to postpone the election to ensure that people could vote.

Angry and unhappy with their situation in the country, a group of university graduates protested in front of the prime minister's office on September 25, 2019, in what would later become the Tishreen movement. The protestors demanded jobs, an end to corruption, and improved public services. Two days later, Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mehdi fired Iraqi security leaders -including deputy commander Lieutenant General Abdul Wahhab al-Saadi, [who opposed Iranian influence in Iraq](#). On October 1, 2019, the October Revolution, or the Tishreen movement, began. The protests spread to 11 provinces, and the government attempted to curb the demonstrations by blocking access to the internet, imposing three-day curfews, and intimidating and attacking journalists who covered the developments on the ground. In Baghdad, unidentified snipers opened fire on protesters from the rooftops. Many of the critical components for social change came from women referred to as the "October ladies." The October ladies initially were criticized by the older generations, but the women emerged as a vital force for the Tishreen movement. They not only took part in the protests as vocal opponents of the government, but they also helped to provide medical and logistical support for their fellow protesters. Two wall murals in Tahrir Square depict two examples of Iraqi women's diverse activism. These paintings reflected women's vision for a brighter future and the expansion of women's rights (See Figure 1).



Figure 1. The message next to the woman’s arm on the right says: “Our women are like this.” The words under the face of the man on the left say: “Son of Thanwa.” This phrase refers to Safaa al-Saray, an influential October Revolution protestor who was killed by a gas canister shot by the security forces. Women were crucial to efforts aimed at defying the social norm of attaching the name of the father to the name of an offspring. Safaa al-Saray’s friends, however, defied the norm and referred to him as Ibn Thanwa (Tanwa’s son), after his mother. Photograph: Ahmed Jalil/EPA. [Source](#): Guardian.

Women challenged traditions also by participating in protests and making it acceptable behavior in Iraqi society. Their dedication even led men to encourage women to spearhead the demonstrations. To counter those who attempted to silence women by using words such as *flaw* or *قروع* (*awrah*, which translates to “nakedness”), slogans such as “Your voice is not a flaw; it is a revolution” became popular among Iraqi women. In Arab cultures across the Middle East and North Africa region, the word *awrah* is used to shame or disparage others.

Within a month after the onset of the revolution, security forces had killed hundreds of protesters. That outcome led Iraq’s Shi’a religious authority to condemn the killings and then-Prime Minister Mehdi to resign. The increasing violence encouraged the Iraqi government and Iranian security groups to kidnap, torture, and assassinate protesters. Furthermore, the Iranian

militias [stormed the US Embassy](#) in Baghdad on December 30, 2019, which prompted the US to kill Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mehdi al-Muhandis. The Iranian-backed militias and the US airstrike on Iranian leadership in Baghdad infuriated the population further, as they had long faced foreign interference in their nation (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. A protestor rests in front of a political mural titled “The new generation.” Photograph: Ahmad Al-Rubaye/AFP [Source](#): Guardian.

Iran’s influence in Iraq dates to 2003. Since then, Iran has ramped up its efforts to install a friendly government and sway the Iraqi people toward Iran. Iran’s Ayatollah also had a say in Iraqi politics. [In 2017, Khomeini](#) told then-Prime Minister Haidar al Abadi not to disband the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) despite US pressure to do so. In 2018, Abadi issued a decree entitling members of the PMF to benefits and pay equivalent to that of the military members in the Minister of Defense. The PMF had an estimated 100,000 to 150,000 members, most of whom were Shi’a. Abadi also issued Executive Order 91, which stated that PMF members cannot participate in politics. It has been estimated, however, that more than [500 members](#)

[with Iranian connections](#) registered to run for the office in the 2018 Iraqi parliamentary elections.

The government's lack of power over the Iranian militias revealed itself on July 1, 2019, when then-Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi issued a decree directing the PMF to become an official part of the government. The order was ultimately unsuccessful as the militias continued to operate under the command of Iran. Over time, members of Iran's intelligence community were appointed to leadership positions in the Iraqi military and to cabinet positions in the Iraqi government to control internal policy and security.

The aftermath of the Tishreen movement/October Revolution was a surge in violence, with Iranian PMF groups attacking the US Embassy in Iraq and the US forces responding in retaliation. In the political arena, however, the pro-Iranian Fatah alliance lost many seats in the parliament. In the 2021 elections, the alliance [won only 17 seats](#), 31 fewer than in the 2018 elections. But the Iranian influence remains -within the PMF militias, within Iraqi intelligence operations, and within the Iraqi government itself in the form of pro-Iranian elected officials.

## **2020: The Pink and Purple Protest and the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic began in 2020, women actively protested conservative Iraqi politicians and demanded more rights. As protests continued from 2019 into 2020, the influential Iraqi Islamist cleric Muqtada al-Sadr [tweeted](#) on February 8, "There should not be a mix between genders inside the protests' tents" and accused the women participating in the protests of "promiscuity." In response, women's rights activists turned to social media to tweet messages of support for women's rights and call for a women's march. This activism led to the protests on February 13, 2020, when women came into the streets throughout the country [wearing](#) pink and purple clothing to reflect their right to be respected in Iraq's political system. Many women also carried signs [stating](#), "Your voice is a revolution, not an indecent act." This protest brought women's rights to the forefront of the political conversation in Iraq, as it demonstrated that women were challenging the conservative political agenda. Women were successfully able to rally large numbers to demonstrate across the country for their rights, bringing national attention to their cause.

After this protest, however, the COVID-19 pandemic struck Iraq and significantly affected demonstrations. While women continued to protest publicly during the Pandemic, the size of these demonstrations was smaller. In 2020, the Gender-Based Violence Information Management System (GBVIMS) showed a [rise](#) in the number of domestic abuse cases against women. More than three-quarters were domestic violence incidents; however, given that many domestic abuse cases go unreported and that women are unlikely to seek support, the actual number of such incidents likely is higher than what the GBVIMS has documented. While women in Iraq gained national attention for their protests and demands for an increase in women's rights with a barrage of tweets on February 13, their efforts to draw attention to the domestic abuse of women mostly failed.

Iraqi women also witnessed a [tragedy](#) in 2020 when Reham Yacoub, a doctor and women's rights activist, was killed by a gunman on August 19, 2020. Yacoub was one of the many women protestors who were often threatened and sometimes killed for their activism. After her murder, women activists [created](#) the hashtag [#بوقع\\_م\\_اهي\\_ر](#) (#Rehab\_Yacoub) on Twitter to bring awareness to the challenges maybe? that women protestors face in Iraq. While women's rights demonstrations slowed down during the COVID-19 pandemic, Yacoub's murder inspired a conversation on social media. In addition, the exchange encouraged women to continue protesting for greater rights, arguing that lessening their activity and hiding would only weaken their cause. As a result of these events, the General Secretariat of The Council of Ministers [created](#) the Department of Women Empowerment (DWE) in 2020. The creation of this department reflects Iraqi woman's success in generating change through continued protests and continued activism on social media. The women were successful in their endeavors to demand change from the Iraqi government.

### **The Iraqi Elections of 2021**

The year 2021 was pivotal for women's political activism in Iraq. Parliamentary elections originally scheduled for May 2021 were [rescheduled](#) for October 2021 as the government grappled with the demands of the Tishreen movement. Iraqi women were encouraged to participate in the elections even though historically they often faced unprecedented risks in the political arena compared with their male counterparts. Female candidates running for

office in the October [elections](#) totaled 951, far fewer than the 2,600 who did so in the 2018 parliamentary elections (see Figure 3). Despite the decrease in the number of female candidates, women’s representation in parliament [increased](#) to 97 for a gain of five seats (see Figure 3). The decrease in the number of female candidates in the 2021 elections likely resulted from women’s [fears](#) that they would be kidnapped or killed for their political activism. Undeterred, the Iraqi women have continued their efforts through street protests and online tweets to raise awareness about the risks they still face for being politically active and the challenges ahead in securing the greater representation of women in the Iraqi parliament. For example, women continue to [advocate](#) for the 25% parliament quota to apply to other sections of the Iraqi government. These efforts, however, have failed as the male-dominated political society continues to prevail to a large extent.

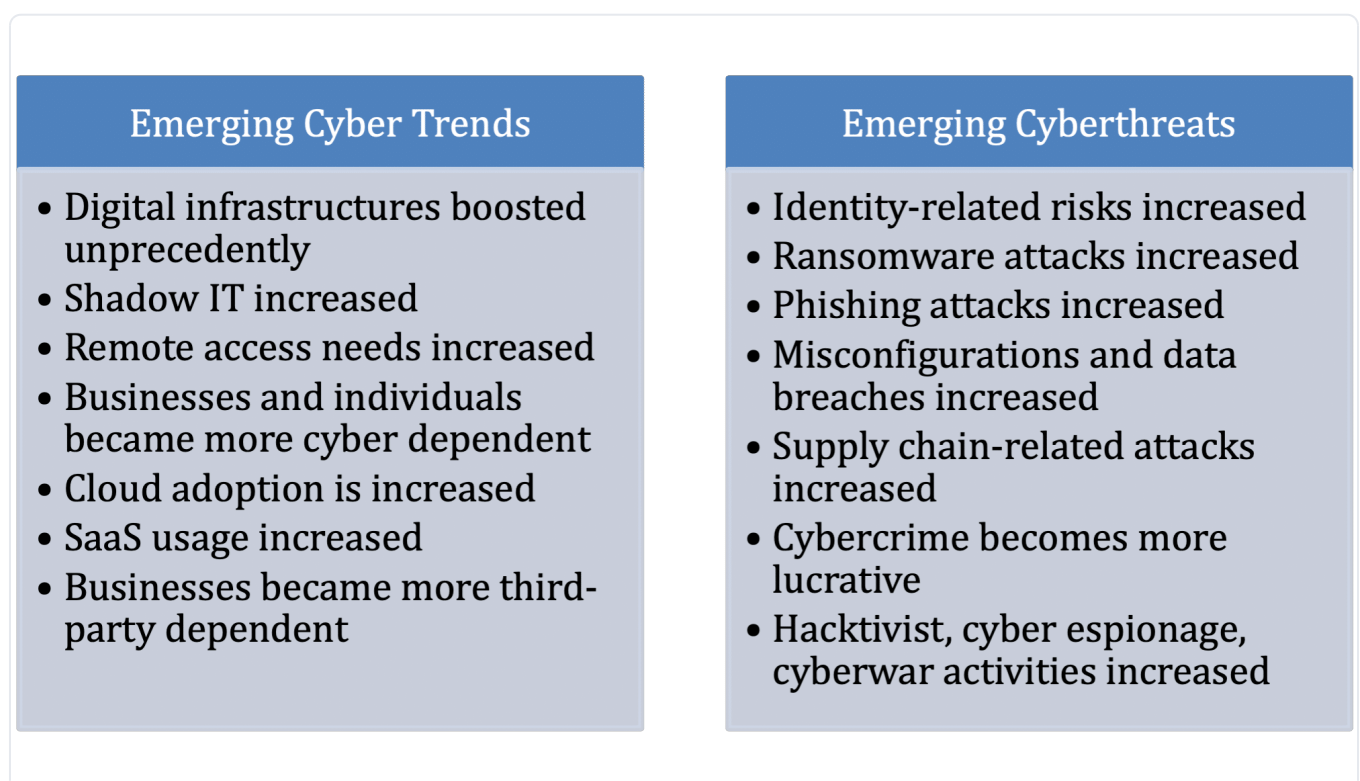


Figure 3. Number of female candidates for the Iraqi parliament, number of female members of parliament, and proportion of female candidates and representatives in 2014, 2018, and 2021 election cycles. [Source](#): The Independent High Electoral Commission (Arabic: [هيئة مفوضية الانتخابات](#); IHEC).

On an international scale, Iraqi women's increased influence in the political arena helped to persuade the General Secretariat of the Iraq Council of Ministers' Women Empowerment Directorate and the United Nations Development Programme to sign a 2021 memorandum of understanding in support of gender equality and the empowerment of women in Iraq. Hamid al-Ghazi, the Secretary-General of the Council of Ministers, voiced his support for the agreement, [stating](#), "Iraqi women have played a strong role in addressing the crises and challenges that Iraq has experienced and have had an effective role and contribution in establishing [an] inclusive society." Al-Ghazi's acknowledgment of women's political participation in Iraq reflects government officials' recognition of the demands of women and that women could be a positive force for change.

## **2022: Iraq's Political Turmoil**

Iraq is now experiencing significant turmoil after Shia Muslim cleric Moqtada al-Sadr [announced](#) on August 29 that a political impasse over his desire for early elections and the dissolution of parliament has prompted him to quit politics and close all Sadrist Movement institutions. Sadr's supporters staged sit-ins in Baghdad's Green Zone before the announcement and [stormed](#) the cabinet headquarters afterward. By August 30, [at least 21](#) people had been killed, and more than 250 had been injured in clashes between Sadr's supporters and Iraqi security forces. Currently, Sadr's true motives behind his decision to withdraw from politics are not entirely known, but he may be attempting to "[delegitimize](#)" the Iraqi government and garner support for an Iraqi government "[under his leadership](#)." During the sit-ins leading up to Sadr's decision, most demonstrators were men. Only a small number of women [actively](#) participated in the demonstration. While it is currently unknown how long Iraq's political turmoil will continue, it is possible that more women will join the demonstrations as the protests continue. For now, though, the protests that erupted in the wake of Sadr's decision continue to be dominated by males.

## **Conclusion**

Historically, Iraqi women have enjoyed a higher status than their counterparts in the region. Since the adoption of Iraq's Provisional Constitution in 1970, women were [granted equal rights](#) to vote, attend school, run for political office, and own property. The future seemed brighter

for Iraqi women; however, women's status gradually deteriorated amid the country's internal and regional armed conflicts, and economic sanctions disproportionately affected their access to healthcare and education. The Iraqi government's increasingly Shia character and growing sectarian divisions alienated much of the population and made women the principal victims of violence. Years of repression and the erosion of women's rights further shifted gender norms toward a more conservative life and society. These factors exhausted women for decades and led to little mobilization during the initial wave of the Arab Spring. By late 2018, however, Iraqi women revolted in defense of equal rights and drove the October Revolution. Their activism improved women's political status in the country, though women still have a long way to go to achieve full and meaningful citizenship in Iraq.

The pioneering of women in the Iraqi uprisings challenged exclusionary political institutions in Iraq. Today, the *October ladies* are very much alive and out on the streets despite detentions, forced disappearances, and killings by government forces. Their perseverance and resilience have not faded away. The women's movement has been campaigning for legal rights –particularly regarding the unresolved dispute over the [Personal Status Code](#), Article 39, a set of laws governing marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance in Iraq –while also undertaking efforts to eliminate gender stereotypes, emphasize their role in decision-making processes, encourage support for the creation of women's organizations in formal politics.

Three roadblocks, however, stand in the way of additional progress toward gender equality for women in Iraq: the country's political blocs; Sadr, the Shia Muslim cleric who recently quit politics; and violence against women. The political blocs are yet to form a new government and they are a hindrance to progress because they have no desire to make women's rights and status a part of their agenda. Sadr, instead, is disingenuous. He has taken part in the theatrics of [occupying the cabinet headquarters](#) and calling for mass anti-government protests but has shown no real signs that he wants to start a revolution or overturn the political system. Sadr is more interested in usurping power from his political opponents and restoring his legitimacy as a government leader. Women's groups, it appears, have been able to see through the façade and have defied the cleric's call for street protests and denounced his ethno-sectarian system of government. Only a small number of female supporters of Sadr, however, have joined the cleric in street protests. For as long as the political stalemate and power struggle continues,

Sadr is likely to remain a key player in Iraqi politics, thereby making women's efforts for gender equality more challenging than ever.

Violence against women is another hurdle that Iraqi women continue to face. Counterterrorism efforts and debates on tactics mostly lack women's distinctive perspectives, though most victims of terrorism are women. The Iraqi government and the US and its partners therefore should incorporate a woman's perspective in their efforts against insurgencies and acts of terrorism in the country. Allowing women to participate in the decision-making processes regarding efforts to fight terrorism and prevent the radicalization of Iraqi citizens can lead to better intelligence gathering and more targeted responses to potential security threats. Women-led civil society groups are particularly critical partners for mitigating violence at both the local and the national levels. Female security officials can provide distinct insights and information that can be mission-critical because they often have ties to remote communities and are able to conduct searches of female fighters in ways that men cannot. The underrepresentation of women in security positions, however, creates a vulnerability that terrorist groups continue to exploit.

Iraqi women face an ongoing struggle for equal rights and status with their male counterparts. It likely will be a difficult path forward, Iraqi women have proved again and again that they will resist, assume leadership roles, and fight for their rightful place in society whenever and wherever patriarchal oppression is found. They will, therefore, remain vital actors in bringing peace, justice, and strong institutions to Iraq.

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