

Executive Summary: Opinion Poll on the Protest Movement in Iraq

The Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation's Syria/Iraq Office together with an international research company completed a survey that aims at understanding the attitude and perceptions of the Iraqi public towards the popular uprising that the country has been witnessing since October 2019. A nationwide study has been conducted in the major provinces targeting 1,000 Iraqis aged 18 years and above. The data collection was conducted via face-to-face interviews and took place during the months of September and October 2020.

The sample profile is as follows: CENTRAL IRAQ 44% (Baghdad, Babil, Diyala and Al Anbar provinces), NORTH IRAQ 24% (Kirkuk, Nineveh and Salah ad Din provinces), KURDISTAN REGION IRAQ (KRI) 14% (Erbil and Sulaymaniyah provinces), SOUTH IRAQ 13% (Basra and Dhi Qar provinces), AL-FURAT AL-AWSAT 5% (Najaf province). 52% of the participants were male and 48% female. The following age groups participated and were represented as follows: 18-24 = 27%, 25-30 = 19%, 31-45 = 29%, 46+ 25%.

In the poll **66%** of Iraqis expressed optimism about the future. The 31-45 age group are the most optimistic about the future (**71%**). Contrary to the other regions, the majority of Kurds in the KRI are pessimistic about the future (**37%**). In general, **60%** of Iraqis support "the events", i.e. the protests, that are happening since October 1st, 2019. More men (**63%**) tend to support "the events" than women (**57%**). Iraqis from the Central and Al-Furat Al-Awsat regions (both **67%**) support "the events" more than the other regions, especially Iraqis from Kurdistan (**53%**) and the Northern regions (**55%**). We asked the participants for the name they would ascribe to "the events": Most Iraqis call the current events a demonstration (**44%**) or a revolution (**31%**). Fewer call it an uprising (**17%**) or a movement (**7%**).

IRAQI'S VIEW OF "THE EVENTS"

For the Iraqis, "the events" are a clear result of the accumulated conditions it preceded. **89%** strongly or somewhat agree to that (*Top 2 Boxes = T2B*). For the vast majority "the events" erupted as a call against corruption (**93%** T2B). While the majority thinks that it all started with clear demands and it was later exploited and modified (**67%** T2B). Iraqis mostly disagree that the protests are not being manipulated by either local political parties (**56%** L2B = Lower two Boxes) or by external parties (**58%** L2B). In particular, Iraqis from the Northern regions are the least likely to think that "the events" are being manipulated by anyone (local political party (**28%** T2B), external parties (**30%** T2B)), contrary to the Kurds (local political party (**47%** T2B), external parties (**47%** T2B)). While the answers were not very specific as against whom the events are directed, some Iraqis were specific to name the Shi'a (**9%**), Iran (**3%**) or Islamic parties (**5%**). A majority however, believes that they are directed against the government and all political parties and corrupt political parties (**43%** in total).

IRAQI'S VIEW OF "THE EVENTS"; ACTIONS AND FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

Activities

Most Iraqis agree that it is true that "the events" have some deficits, but describe them as necessary (**89%** T2B). They support "the events", but do not support blocking roads (**80%** T2B).

The majority does not believe that “the events” will lead to a civil war (**71%** T2B). However older Iraqis are more afraid – than others – of the possibility that a civil war as a result of “the events” might erupt (**28%** of the 46+ population). This fear is especially prevalent in Kurdistan (**62%**) and the smallest in the Northern region (**9%**).

The financial situation

The majority of Iraqis believe (**63%** T2B) the financial collapse was inevitably coming, and “the events” came as a result. Some others opine that “the events” accelerated it (**57%** T2B) but few believe that it will lead to the financial collapse (**38%** T2B).

In fact, most Iraqis opine that the delay in forming a new government led to the financial collapse of the country (**75%** T2B).

Iraqis are in general optimistic and 6 in 10 Iraqis believe that the financial situation will improve as a result of “the events” (**66%** T2B) especially young Iraqis between 25-30 years (**73%**).

Corruption and accountability

The majority are hopeful that even if “the events” reach no result, at least it will make the authorities act more considerately, stop corruption and perform good governance (**88%** T2B). The majority also agrees that “the events” will lead to recuperating the stolen money – that disappeared due to misappropriation of funds and corruption – and holding the corrupt accountable (**78%** T2B), mainly the older Iraqis. They are hopeful that because of “the events” corruption will be better controlled and the situation in Iraq will improve (**75%** T2B).

Though the majority is optimistic, yet many are afraid that if “the events” reach no result, corruption will increase significantly (**78%** T2B). However, the Kurds do not agree as much with this (only **46%**).

SAFETY AND PEACE

When it comes to safety, one third of the population (**31%**) currently feels unsafe. However, more than half of Iraqis trust that the situation will remain peaceful (**55%**). On the other hand, the vast majority of the Kurds however thinks that the situation will not remain peaceful (**68%**).

While most Iraqis feel safe, the 25-30 years old are unsure how to feel about their safety (**40%**). It is in the Northern regions (KRI (**50%**) and North (**47%**)) where people feel the safest contrary to the South where almost half of the population feels unsafe (**43%**).

PARTICIPATION IN THE EVENTS

Though the support for the protests is high (**60%**), the actual participation among Iraqis was perhaps lower than expected: Almost the majority of Iraqis did not participate in “the events” (**75%**), whether it was for or against the government, because they could not participate (**14%**) or did not see a reason to take to the streets (**62%** in total).

PARTICIPATION IN THE EVENTS – DEMOGRAPHIC

There is a higher participation rate amongst men (**33%**) than women (**16%** of participants). Contrary to the younger and older age groups, the middle age groups (25-45) are the ones who participated the most (**29%** average). Kurdistan (**9%**) and the North (**7%**) are the least participating regions in “the events”. In contrast, **40%** of the southerners and **34%** of the people living in central Iraq participated in “the events”.

PARTICIPATION IN THE EVENTS – THOSE WHO DID NOT PARTICIPATE BECAUSE THEY WERE NOT CONVINCED

Of the **17%** that did not participate because they were not convinced **41%** stayed away from “the events” because they opine that the situation will not change anyhow. Another **36%** were scared to participate, for, they feared they will put themselves in danger after seeing the problems that occurred on the streets.

THOSE WHO PARTICIPATED

More than half of those who participated in the events (in total **25%** of Iraqis), participated in Baghdad (**53%**). The second largest share of participants was in Basra (**14%**).

The poll showed that the religious authorities (Arab. *marja'iyye*) have a bigger influence on whether or not someone will participate in "the events" than the political parties, with most participants not belonging to one (**45%**). Asked whether they would have participated even if the political party they support asked them not to participate, **15%** agreed, whereas **39%** stated that they would have stayed away from "the events" if the religious authority they support would have asked them to do so.

Most Iraqis participated because they were convinced by the general idea of "the events" (**26%**) and because they wanted to object to the performance of the state officials (**26%**). They further participated requesting that their rights be respected (**12%**) and asking for the improvement of living conditions (**7%** in total).

The survey shows that the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the demonstrations: **25%** stopped to participate due to Covid-19 and another **24%** stopped because there were no more calls for manifestations. Another **23%** stated that they do not have the time anymore.

Those who are still participating stated that they will not stop until they see a change in their country (**57%**). Many opine that it is the last chance to improve the country's situation (**35%**).

Nothing can stop them from participating other than an improvement of the situation in Iraq (**33%**) or their duty to go to work (**14%**) or the Covid-19 virus (**10%**).

IRAQ'S MAIN PROBLEMS

Government

Corruption is for the majority of Iraqis the most important problem facing the country (**59%**), to the exception of people living in Al-Furat Al-Awsat where less than half think so (**37%**). The lack of primary services was mentioned by many Iraqis (**48%** (includes the lack of electricity, water, education, general services)) especially those living in the South. The electricity problem is essentially felt by the younger generation (**23%**) of the 18-24 year old and less felt by the people living in the KRI (**7%**) and the South (**8%**). This might be due to Erbil having several power grids and Basra being an economic hub. On top of having electricity problems, the people living in the Al-Furat Al-Awsat regions mentioned water problems (**14%**). Education is also an issue especially for the people living in the North and the Al-Furat Al-Awsat region (both **14%**). Although it was not mentioned by everyone, the lack of security is essentially felt by the Iraqis in the South (**13%**) and in the Al-Furat Al-Awsat (**16%**) region. Political parties are mainly a problem for men (**11%**) as well as the ones aged between 25 and 45 years (**10,5%** average).

Outside influences and terrorism

Not many Iraqis consider terrorism as one of the main problems facing the country right now (**9%**). Nevertheless, women (**11%**) and people living in the North (**14%**) see it more as a problem than others do. Iraqis living in Central Iraq perceive the influence of armed militias as a bigger problem (**11%**) compared to other regions (in general **7%**). The influence of foreign actors (**7%** in general) is mostly perceived as a problem by the Kurds (**11%**).

The socioeconomic situation

One in two Iraqis (**52%**) consider unemployment as one of the biggest problems facing Iraq. The most fearful are the ones that have not yet entered the professional world (18-24 years old) (**57%**) and the Iraqis between 25-30 (**56%**). On a regional level, Iraqis living in the Northern regions (KRI (**61%**) and North (**58%**)) consider unemployment as one of the biggest problems for Iraq. Unemployment and a fragile economy can quickly lead to a rise in poverty, at least one in three Iraqis (**31%**) see this as a major problem. Similarly, to unemployment, especially the young generation (**33%**) and the northerners (KRI **42%**, North **36%**) point this out the most.

Health

One in four Iraqis fear the Covid-19 virus (**25%**), women (**29%**) and the younger generation (18-24 years old) the most (**32%**). When it comes to regions, the fear is more pronounced in the North (**37%**) and the South (**32%**) than in the other regions. Health problems have been mentioned mostly by the people living in the KRI (**19%**).

WHOM AND WHAT DO YOU SUPPORT AT THE MOMENT?

All Iraqis support the recuperation of the stolen money (**95%** T2B), the toppling of the ethno-sectarian system (**95%** T2B) and fighting corruption (**90%** T2B). The vast majority across all regions support the decrease of Iranian influence in Iraq (**90%** T2B), especially the age group 25-30 (**94%**). However, people in Kurdistan especially Erbil are slightly less supportive of that (**86%**). On the other hand, **72%** T2B support a decrease of US influence in Iraq (women **74%** and 31-45 year old **78%**). Again, the tally is lower in the KRI (**46%**). A majority of **70%** T2B support the expulsion of all foreign troops from Iraq, particularly women (**74%**) and Iraqis between 25 and 45 (**73%** average), contrary to Iraqis in Kurdistan who oppose this decision (**39%**).

While most Iraqis are for the control of weapons that are outside state control (**90%** T2B), people in the North are also slightly less supportive of it (**83%**) compared to other regions. A majority supports the approval of a new electoral law (**85%** T2B) and holding early parliamentary elections (**85%** T2B). However, although the majority of Iraqis approve both, the opinion in the KRI is different and most Kurds seem to oppose this (**47%** and **50%**).

The government in its current form has its highest supporter rate coming from the 31-45 age group (**70%**). On the average, the majority of **64%** T2B are supportive of it.

A majority of Iraqis (**59%** T2B) agrees that Iraq should be neutral with regard to regional conflicts, while only **40%** of the people living in the North support this. The vast majority of Iraqis (**83%** L2B) opposes dividing the country to the exception of the people living in the KRI (**59%** T2B). It came as no surprise that after the results of the 2017 referendum where almost 93% of the Kurds wanted a split from Baghdad, a majority supports dividing the country.

WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE EVENTS?

Although all Iraqis agreed that all citizens had a role in "the events" (**83%** T2B), pupils and students dominated it opine **80%** of Iraqis. This is especially thought by the people of Al -Furat Al -Awsat (**94%**).

The majority thinks that the civil society had a big role in the events (**65%** T2B). Also **65%** T2B of Iraqis stated that women played a big role in "the events". However, men (**60%**), the 31-45 year old (**59%**) and the people living in the Central regions (**56%**) tend to give a lesser role to women than others.

The role of religious authorities is the most controversial; while in the KRI only a minority thinks they had a big role (**14%**), in the Al-Furat Al-Awsat region a majority thinks otherwise (**80%**). The 31-45 years old give to the religious authorities a bigger role in "the events" (**42%**) than the other age groups (**34%** average).

The least to be thought to have had a role in "the events" are political parties (**18%** T2B). However, people in the North see it differently: **30%** give political parties an important role in "the events".

IRAQI'S SUPPORT OR OPPOSITION TO DIFFERENT FORMS OF PROTEST

Most participants agree to the objectives of "the events" (**85%** T2B) as well as to holding the people responsible for Iraq's socioeconomic crisis accountable (**91%**). When it comes to the forms of protest and its location however, some support protesting in front of the homes of the officials (**61%** T2B) and others in front of the electricity departments (**51%**). The people aged between 31 and 45 are less supportive of protest in front of any home/institution belonging to officials (**56%**) contrary to the younger Iraqis (**67%**).

The majority opposes any closure (**84%** average), whether it is the closure of official institutions, banks or roads. It is noteworthy that the younger Iraqis are more in favor of any type of closure than the older ones. Furthermore, people in the Al-Furat Al-Awsat regions support protesting in front of the electricity department (**78%**) and closing official institutions (**28%**) more than others.

Generally, all Iraqis are against the closure of schools (**88%**), universities (**87%**), banks (**91%**), or electricity departments and power stations (**90%**).

-We asked the participants for how long “the events” will last: The majority of **81%** stated that they do not know when the current crisis might end.

- We asked the participants what a civil state is: 6 in 10 Iraqis answered that they do not know what a civil state stands for (**62%**).

- We asked the participants about the socioeconomic crisis in Iraq: For many, the main reasons for the socioeconomic crisis are government related. The participants mentioned mainly corruption (**44%**) and government maladministration (**15%**). In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic added to the crisis (**14%**).

ATTITUDES TOWARDS STATE INSTITUTIONS

The majority of Iraqis have a positive attitude towards the armed forces (**79%** T2B) with the exception of the Kurds (**14%**). **50%** T2B of Iraqis see the Popular Mobilization Forces positive, especially people aged between 31 and 45 years old have a positive attitude toward them (**61%**). The other age groups perceive them slightly less positively (**46%** average). This difference in perception can also be noticed when it comes to the regions where the North (**18%**) and the KRI (**0%**) have an extremely negative attitude toward the Popular Mobilization Forces contrary to other regions (**74%** average).

In general, Iraqis have a slightly more negative attitude towards religious authorities – **44%** L2B perceive them as negative –, particularly in the KRI (**68%** L2B) and the North (**80%** L2B) they are not seen positively.

Apart from the Prime Minister (**50%** T2B have a positive attitude towards him), all Iraqis have a negative attitude towards the whole government and its representatives (includes political parties (**5%** T2B), government (**26%** T2B), speaker of parliament (**23%** T2B) and the president (**30%** T2B)). The North and the Central region got a slightly more positive attitude towards the president (**35%** and **33%**) compared to other regions (**22%** average). The speaker of the parliament got slightly more sympathy from the Iraqis in the Central region (**29%**) than in the other regions (**18%** average).

While most have a negative attitude toward the Central Bank of Iraq (**50%** L2B), people from the Al-Furat Al-Awsat regions have a more positive attitude (**43%** T2B) towards it than the other regions (**34%** average T2B).

VOTING CHOICE – 2018 VS TODAY

If an election were to be held today, most Iraqis would change their vote compared to how they voted in the last elections (**68%**). Merely **10%** stated that they would vote for the same party, **19%** said that they had abstained from voting in 2018. When looking at the demographics, one third of the Kurds (**29%**) would vote for the same party as before. At the same time, **12%** of Kurds still do not know for whom they would vote. It is in the North that people are the most likely to change their vote, compared to 2018 (**85%**).

The majority of those who did not vote in the last elections (**19%** of the participants) said that they will also not participate in the upcoming elections (**52%**), **45%** however, plan on voting in the upcoming elections.

When being asked, which politician or leader represents their opinion, almost half of the Iraqis (**49%**) expressed that they do not have any politician/leader representing their opinion. The ones who do, chose the current prime minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi (**50%**) or General Abdel-Wahab Al-Saadi (**17%**), who is possibly appreciated by many for his fight against the so called “Islamic State” (IS) and against corruption. The general is especially popular in the North (**39%**). Only **5%** of the participants chose Muqtada Al-Sadr as a political leader representing their opinion.

Besides that, **9%** of the Kurds mentioned Masrour Barzani as the leader who represents their opinion (compared to **2%** of all participants).

When being asked for a religious figure who represents their opinion, almost all of those who have a religious figure (**39%** compared to **61%** who do not) representing their opinion mentioned Ali Al-Sistani (**80%**), Muqtada Al-Sadr received **10%**.

When being asked for the political party that represents their opinion the most, only **10%** stated that they have a party representing their opinion. **43%** do not have a party and **47%** preferred not to say which party represents their opinion. Out of the **10%** who have a party representing their opinion **22%** named the Kurdistan

Democratic Party. In general, Kurdish parties excel: Among the first five parties, four are Kurdish parties. The Sadrist movement ranks 3rd with **8%**.

With the exception of the KRI where more than one third (**38%**) expressed that a political party represents them, in the South (**78%**) and in Al-Furat Al-Awsat (**78%**) the vast majority said that no political party represents them. Whereas in the North (**68%**) and the Center (**59%**) the majority prefers not to say whether they have a political party that represents them.

We asked the participants that have a political party representing their opinion (**57%**) whether "the events" have changed their political orientation: "The events" did change the political orientation of **40%** of participants. However, the majority (**59%**) still cannot find a party that represents them.

We asked the participants whether they would prefer to have a leader to "the events": While some like the fact that "the events" do not have a leader (**37%**), the majority would have preferred if it did (**61%**).

We asked the participants for their Iraqi role model: The Iraqis are divided when expressing whether they have a political figure as a role model. Those who have one (**50%**), mentioned Mustafa Al-Kadhimi (**25%**), Abdel-Wahab Al-Saadi (**21%**), and Ali Al-Sistani (**12%**). When it comes to demographics, men (**26%**), people aged between 18 and 24 years old (**30%**) and the northerners (**46%**) tend to favor General Al-Saadi, while women (**32%**) and all other age groups (**25%** average) prefer the current PM. Ayatollah Ali Al-Sistani is mostly the role model of the people living in the South (**35%**) and in the Al-Furat Al-Awsat (**27%**) regions.

IMMIGRATION

We asked the participants whether they consider migrating: While most Iraqis are not considering migration (**69%**), the majority of those who do (**30%**), are considering permanent immigration (**56%**).

Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung e. V.

Gregor Jaecke
Head of Office Syria/Iraq
European and International Cooperation
www.kas.de

gregor.jaecke@kas.de



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