April 2023

Climate, Peace and Security Fact Sheet

Iraq*

Photo: Mohammed Alsoufi/Flickr

Iraq is highly exposed to climate change-related extreme weather events. Droughts, floods, heatwaves and dust storms are negatively affecting the environment, agriculture, water availability, health and other aspects of the everyday lives of Iraq's population. These climate change impacts undermine development and exacerbate existing vulnerabilities, which, combined with other factors, increases the risk of instability and conflict.

- Droughts and water scarcity negatively affect agriculture and food availability and exacerbate livelihood insecurity. Women and girls are disproportionately affected due to pre-existing gender norms and persisting inequalities.
- Loss of livelihoods, resulting in part from climate change and environmental degradation, contribute to increased internal migration and displacement and may exacerbate existing tensions in resource-strained host communities.
- Armed groups and militias exploit economic hardships and grievances, which are exacerbated by the effects of climate change, to recruit and garner support. Violence and coercion by armed actors impede efforts to reduce climate vulnerability.
- Weak governance and political competition facilitate elite exploitation and corruption and undermine climate change adaptation and resilience building. This in turn accentuates the marginalization, exclusion and grievances of vulnerable groups.

Iraq has been affected by economic and political instability, coupled with persisting challenges such as poverty, high unemployment, inequality, poor public service delivery, water scarcity and environmental degradation. Efforts by successive governments to implement reforms and address the country's challenges have been impeded by corruption and political competition. Responses to climate change have also been affected by a lack of investment in adaptation and mitigation efforts. Iraq's new government has committed to implementing reforms and addressing underlying challenges, including the impacts of climate change. The international community and the United Nations are working to support the new government in its efforts to address these underlying issues, improve public service delivery and invest in climate change adaptation and resilience building. Nevertheless, more needs to be done to address climate, peace and security risks in relation to Iraq's adaptation, development and reconstruction efforts.

RECOMMENDED ACTIONS:

- **Noting the adverse effects of climate-related change on the security situation in Iraq, the United Nations Security Council should strengthen the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), to facilitate efforts towards a coordinated UN response to climate-related security risks and provide support to the Iraqi government for climate change mitigation and adaptation.**
- **The Iraqi government, its regional and international partners, and the UN should work closely with diverse local actors, including marginalized and excluded groups, women and girls, and ethnic and religious minorities to assess climate-related security risks. This assessment should strengthen early warning systems and inform integrated response plans that factor in the needs and priorities of these vulnerable groups, and contribute to the National Adaptation Plan currently under preparation.**
- **With support from its partners, the Iraqi government should work towards developing a diversified and inclusive economy that is better equipped to withstand increasing climate pressures and can support investments in climate adaption and resilience building. Increased investments, particularly around food and water security, coupled with effective and climate-resilient service delivery could ameliorate existing vulnerabilities and grievances. This in turn could contribute to strengthening the social contract between society and government.**
- **The international community should support the Iraqi government in strengthening its capacity to address and manage climate-induced mobility and displacement, including rural–urban migration. Mechanisms should be put in place to improve public service provision, especially in cities with large populations of displaced persons and migrants, while also building resilience in climate-affected rural communities and facilitating durable solutions for return, local integration or resettlement for displaced persons.**

* This is an updated version of the fact sheet on Iraq released in April 2022.

Figure 1. Key statistics

Mid-term projected temperature increase: 2.5°C (2050)

Increasing evapotranspiration, salinity, soil degradation, frequent dust storms and droughts

Flash floods, decreasing annual rainfall and increasing water stress

25% of households supported by agriculture (2017)

Climate-induced displacement: 68 670 (Dec. 2022)

Human Development Index: 0.68/1.0 (2021)

Population: 42.2 million (2022)

Estimated food insecure population: 2 million (Apr. 2023)

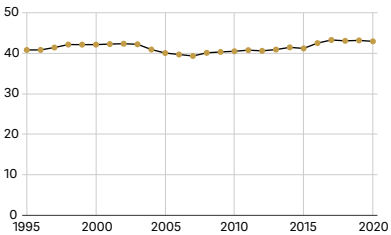
Global Peace Index: 3.1/5 (2022)

42.9 ND-GAIN Country Index: 42.9/100 (2020)

ND-GAIN Country Index

The ND-GAIN Country Index captures a country's vulnerability to climate change and other global challenges, and its readiness to improve resilience.

ND-GAIN Country Index score over time



Country comparison	ND-GAIN Country Index	Global Peace Index
Lebanon	43.5/100	2.6/5
Guatemala	43.4/100	2.1/5
Guyana	42.6/100	2.1/5
Djibouti	42.4/100	2.2/5

Sources: World Bank, *Iraq Country Climate and Development Report* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2022); Adamo, N. et al., 'Climate change: Consequences on Iraq's environment', *Journal of Earth Sciences and Geotechnical Engineering*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2018); United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 'Climate risk profile: Iraq', Fact sheet, Mar. 2017; International Organization for Migration (IOM) Displacement Tracking Matrix, 'Climate-induced displacement—Southern Iraq', Data collection period: 1–15 Dec. 2022; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2021/2022* (UNDP: New York, 2022); UN Population Fund, 'World Population Dashboard: Iraq', accessed 21 Mar. 2023; World Food Programme, Hunger Map Live, 'Iraq insight and key trends', Apr. 2023; Vision of Humanity, 'Global Peace Index 2022', accessed 11 Apr. 2023; and Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN), 'ND-GAIN Index country rankings 2020', accessed 21 Mar. 2023.

Climate exposure: Trends and projections

Iraq has three main climate zones, with varied temperature and precipitation patterns: an arid lowland desert in the west and south-west, a semi-arid steppe mostly covering the central region, and a moist Mediterranean climate in the north and north-east.[1]

Temperature: Temperatures in Iraq have been rising since the turn of the 21st century.[2] Today, Iraq can experience summer temperatures of above 50°C, with extreme heatwaves predicted to become more frequent in the future.[3] Mean annual temperature is likely to increase by 2.5°C by 2050.[4] These temperature increases will adversely affect water availability and exacerbate the risk of longer and more severe droughts, dust storms and soil degradation.[5]

Precipitation: Iraq's precipitation is characterized by high seasonal and regional variability. The north and north-east receive 400–1000 mm of rainfall annually, while the semi-arid steppe receives 200–400 mm.[6] In 2022, Iraq recorded low levels of rainfall across the country for a second consecutive year.[7] Projections indicate that mean annual rainfall will decrease by 9 per cent by 2050 and contribute to a 20 per cent reduction in available freshwater.[8] Declining rainfall is expected to prolong drought periods, with severe impacts on food and water security.

Socioecological vulnerabilities

Iraq's economy is dominated by oil, which provides more than 90 per cent of government revenue.[9] However, this heavy reliance on oil revenue contributes to economic instability, as economic growth is affected by the volatility of oil prices. Moreover, as global pressure to transition away from fossil fuels increases, Iraq's revenue base may be further weakened by low levels of demand and export, with ripple effects on the entire economy.[10] Despite the dependence on oil for revenue, the agricultural sector provides livelihoods for around 25 per cent of the population.[11] This sector, which is mainly dominated by small-scale, rainfed and irrigated farming, is critical for household incomes and food security.

War and political and economic instability have limited the investments in human, social and economic development in Iraq, resulting in reduced societal resilience to external shocks, including climate change.[12] In addition to several other drivers of insecurity in the country, the impacts of climate change affect development, impede social cohesion and exacerbate inequalities and grievances.[13] Droughts, floods, reduced water availability and high temperatures adversely affect agriculture, household incomes, food security, and migration and mobility.[14] Exposure to temperatures exceeding 50°C and frequent heatwaves also negatively impact work productivity and health.[15]

Iraq faces a severe water crisis due to reduced water availability and poor water quality in a context of increasing demand.[16] Among the drivers of this crisis are climate-related factors, unsustainable water use and poor water infrastructure.[17] More than 90 per cent of the country's water supply is dependent on the Tigris–Euphrates river basin, whose major tributaries originate in Türkiye and Iran. Developments in upstream countries, specifically in terms of installing irrigation facilities and building dams, have reduced the water supply to Iraq.[18] Research shows that a lack of effective water-sharing arrangements among all the riparian countries may increase tensions both between countries and within Iraq in the wake of increased water stress.[19]

Climate-related peace and security risks

Climate change can undermine development gains, affect the dynamics of conflict and disrupt fragile peace and reconstruction processes. Although there is no direct causal relationship between climate change and conflict, research has identified multiple pathways through which climate change interacts with political, social and environmental stresses to compound existing vulnerabilities and tensions.[20]

This fact sheet uses four interrelated pathways to navigate the complex relationship between climate change, peace and security: (*a*) livelihood deterioration, (*b*) migration and mobility, (*c*) tactics of military and armed actors, and (*d*) elite exploitation and mismanagement.[21]

Livelihood deterioration

Livelihood deterioration in Iraq has been exacerbated by climate change and environmental degradation. Iraq was affected by consecutive droughts in 2021 and 2022, mostly affecting the rain-fed northern parts of the country, but with the southern parts also experiencing reduced fresh water supply, resulting in increased crop failures nationwide.[22] This partly led to a reduction in the cereal harvest of around 40 per cent in 2022 compared to 2021, which in turn resulted in loss of income and food price increases, adversely affecting livelihoods more broadly and increasing food insecurity.[23] According to World Bank estimates, a 10–20 per cent increase in food prices in Iraq would increase poverty by 1.6–4.4 percentage points.[24] Currently, the northern part of Iraq, which produces the majority of the country's cereal, is experiencing increased agricultural stress and below average rainfall; this may add additional stress to livelihoods and food security in 2023.[25] Although agriculture is not a major driver of economic development in Iraq, its decline can have a wider impact on livelihoods and existing social and political issues that fuel grievances and conflict.[26]

Climate-related stresses increase the risk of resource competition, intercommunal tensions and violent conflict in Iraq.[27] Tribal groups already compete over scarce water and further intercommunal conflict

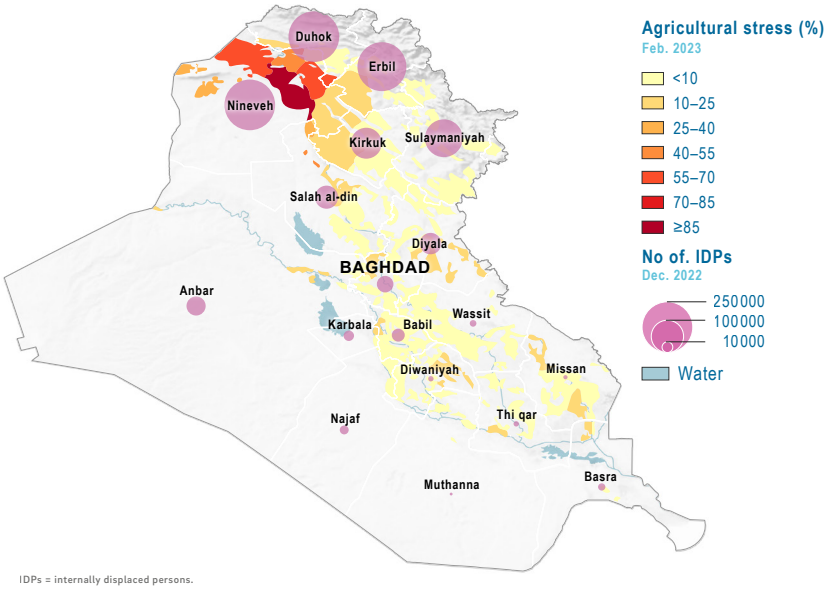
[1] United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 'Climate risk profile: Iraq', Fact sheet, Mar. 2017.
[2] World Bank, Climate Change Knowledge Portal, 'Country: Iraq—Current climate: Climatology', accessed Feb. 2023.
[3] BBC News, 'Workers in Iraq get day off as temperatures pass 50C', 4 Aug. 2022; and Zittis, G. et al., 'Business-as-usual will lead to super and ultra-extreme heatwaves in the Middle East and North Africa', *npj Climate Atmospheric Science*, vol. 4, no. 20 (2021).
[4] World Bank, *Iraq Country Climate and Development Report* (World Bank: Washington, DC, 2022).
[5] Adamo, N. et al., 'Climate change: Consequences on Iraq's environment', *Journal of Earth Sciences and Geotechnical Engineering*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2018); and World Bank (note 4).
[6] USAID (note 1).
[7] Norwegian Refugee Council, 'A dry horizon: Iraq's interlinked drought and climate crises', Oct. 2022.
[8] USAID (note 1); and World Bank (note 4).
[9] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Impact of the Oil Crisis and COVID-19 on Iraq's Fragility* (UNDP: 2020).
[10] World Bank (note 4).
[11] USAID (note 1)
[12] World Bank (note 4).
[13] O'Driscoll, D. and Fazil, S., 'Why climate change will exacerbate inequalities and grievances in Iraq', New Security Beat, 9 May 2022.
[14] World Bank (note 4); and Adamo (note 5).
[15] World Bank (note 4).
[16] Birkman, L., Kool, D. and Struyken, E. *Water Challenges and Conflict Dynamics in Southern Iraq: An In-depth Analysis of an Under-researched Crisis*, WPS Report (WPS: Feb. 2022); and International Organization for Migration (IOM), 'Water crisis in focus: Streams run dry in southern Iraq', The Storyteller, 17 Nov. 2022.
[17] von Lossow, T. et al., *Water Governance in Iraq Enabling a Gamechanger*, WPS Report (WPS/Clingendael: Sep. 2022); and World Bank (note 4).
[18] Mahmoud, S. and Tollast. R., 'Iraq faces harsh summer of water shortages as Turkey and Iran continue dam projects', The National, 26 May 2021; Solomon, E. and Pitel, L., 'Why water is a growing faultline between Turkey and Iraq', *Financial Times*, 4 July 2018; and O'Driscoll, D., 'Emerging trends of conflict and instability in Iraq', K4D Helpdesk, Institute of Development Studies, Nov. 2018.
[19] Rashid, H., Anuar, H. M. and Rahim, A. A., 'Water projects by Turkey and Iran: The impacts on the right of Iraq to access equitable share of water', Dec. 2022; Ismail, A. and El Dahan, M., 'Middle East's Fertile Crescent dries up as rains fail', Reuters, 14 Nov. 2022; and Zarei, M., 'The water–energy–food nexus: A holistic approach for resource security in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey,' *Water–Energy Nexus*, vol. 3 (2020).
[20] van Baalen, S. and Mobjörk, M., 'Climate change and violent conflict in East Africa: Integrating qualitative and quantitative research to probe the mechanisms', *International Studies Review*, vol. 20, no. 4 (Dec. 2018).
[21] Mobjörk, M., Krampe, F. and Tarif, K., 'Pathways of climate insecurity: Guidance for policymakers', SIPRI Policy Brief, Nov. 2020.
[22] Norwegian Refugee Council (note 7); and Norwegian Refugee Council, 'Iraq's drought crisis and the damaging effects on communities', Dec. 2021.
[23] Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO), 'GIEWS Country Brief: The Republic of Iraq', 3 Feb. 2023; and Norwegian Refugee Council (note 7).
[24] World Bank (note 4).
[25] FAO (note 23).
[26] Social Inquiry, 'Farmer, Where Art Thou? Exploring agricultural trends in Iraq amidst economic and environmental crises', Policy Brief, 7 Mar. 2023.
[27] Hassan, K., Born, C. and Nordqvist, P., *Iraq: Climate-related Security Risk Assessment*, Report from the Expert Working Group on Climate-related Security Risks, Aug. 2018; and Birkman, Kool and Struyken (note 16).

may emerge.[28] In recent years, protests have emerged as one of the primary forms of contention linked to livelihood deterioration and related grievances, which are exacerbated by climate change.[29]

Women in Iraq are disproportionately affected by climate change and often lack the livelihood options and resources of men. When livelihoods deteriorate, women shoulder an extra burden of responsibility to provide for their families and livestock, as men migrate to cities in search of jobs.[30] In the Hawizeh marshes, for example, women who are adversely affected by water shortages and drought conditions must search for other water sources in distant areas.[31] The 2021 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Iraq as one of the least gender equal countries (154 out of 156 countries), with women having lower levels of economic participation and opportunity, education and political empowerment.[32]

The Iraqi government, its regional and international partners, and the UN should work closely with diverse local actors, including marginalized and excluded groups, women and girls, and ethnic and religious minorities, to assess climate-related security risks. The assessment should be used to strengthen early warning systems and inform integrated responses that factor in the needs and priorities of these vulnerable groups and contribute to the National Adaptation Plan currently under preparation.

Figure 2. Agricultural stress and displacement in Iraq



IDPs = internally displaced persons.
Sources: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, 'Agricultural Stress Index, Iraq', Feb. 2023; UN International Organization for Migration, 'Displacement Matrix Index: Iraq', Dec. 2022; and Natural Earth Data.

Migration and mobility

Climate change, environmental degradation and water scarcity strongly affect migration and displacement in Iraq. In December 2022, 68 670 people were displaced due to drought conditions in central and southern Iraq, and this number is expected to increase in the future.[33] Climate-related mobility and displacement can increase tensions in host communities, reduce the resilience of displaced populations and accentuate fragilities in the country.[34]

Iraq has seen significant rural–urban migration due to crop failures, environmental degradation and loss of rural livelihoods.[35] In Basra, for example, migration from rural areas has been mainly driven by a lack of economic opportunities, water scarcity and severe environmental degradation.[36] Large-scale migration adds to existing urban challenges and increases tensions between residents and migrants in host cities, with sources of insecurity centred around tribal conflicts, unemployment, lack of services, and drug and alcohol trafficking.[37] Urban migration patterns in Iraq have shown that most migrants settle in slums or live in poor and unsafe urban areas already prone to social problems. A lack of alternative livelihoods for migrants and limited social services in host communities can lead some to join criminal networks and armed groups for income opportunities.[38]

As of 31 December 2022, over 1.1 million people were identified as internally displaced in Iraq.[39] Displacement has negative effects on individual and household resilience, and even returnees may be more vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. Climate change and environmental degradation can affect returnees by causing re-displacement and undermining durable solutions.[40]

The international community should support the Iraqi government in strengthening its capacity to address and manage climate-induced mobility and displacement, including rural–urban migration. Mechanisms should be put in place to improve public service provision, especially in cities with large populations of displaced persons and migrants, while also building resilience in climate-affected rural communities and facilitating durable solutions for return, local integration or resettlement for displaced persons.

Tactics of military and armed actors

The effects of climate change and environmental stress can contribute to the tactical choices of armed groups, influencing their strategic operations, recruitment and gains. The Islamic State, for example, has used livelihood insecurities linked to food and water shortages to gain support in Iraq, by providing services and exploiting people's grievances against the state authorities.[41] In parts of the country, especially the south, households that are negatively affected by environmental degradation and lack other economic opportunities may view recruitment into militias as a viable alternative source of income.[42]

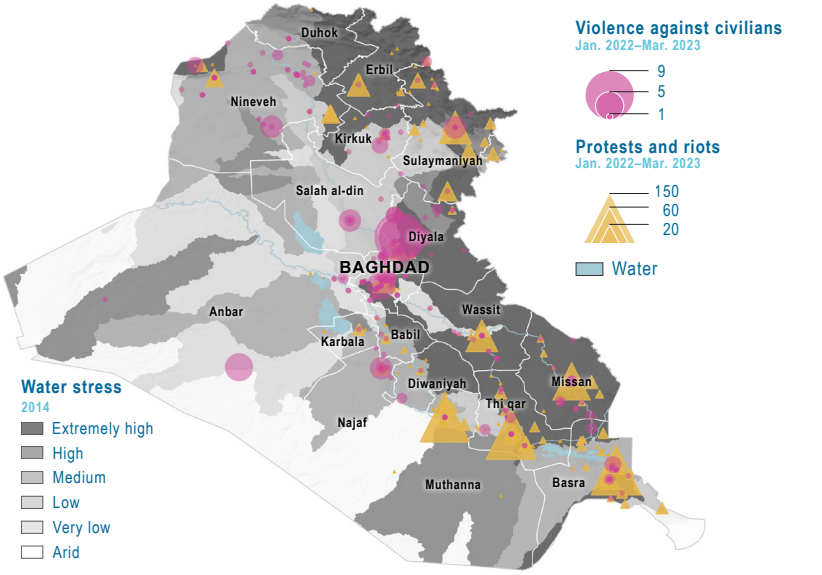
Armed groups can also undermine efforts to reduce climate vulnerability by capturing or destroying agricultural land and water infrastructure, such as dams, pipelines and wastewater plants, for their strategic operations. During the Islamic State occupation of territory in Iraq between 2013 and 2017, the group targeted important water sources such as the Mosul and Falluja dams and destroyed irrigation infrastructure.[43] Arable lands have also been affected by conflict and intentional destruction, including burning, by the Islamic State. In addition, some well-connected militias have deployed violence and coercion to extort resources from climate change adaptation interventions, including water infrastructure rehabilitation projects in southern Iraq.[44]

[28] Birkman, Kool and Struyken (note 16); Al Hasan, S., 'Drought ignites tribal conflicts in southern Iraq', Planetary Security Initiative, 17 Aug. 2020; and Abdul-Ahad, G., 'Death in the marshes: Environmental calamity hits Iraq's unique wetlands', *The Guardian*, 29 Jan. 2023.
[29] O'Driscoll, D. et al., *Reimagining the Social Contract in Iraq* (UNDP: May 2022).
[30] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 'Ahwari women: The beating heart of the Iraqi marshes', 8 Mar. 2021.
[31] UNDP (note 31).
[32] World Economic Forum, *Global Gender Gap Report 2021*, Insight Report (World Economic Forum: Geneva, Mar. 2021).
[33] IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, 'Climate-induced displacement—Southern Iraq', Data collection period: 1–15 Dec. 2022; and Social Inquiry (note 26).
[34] IOM, *Migration, Environment, and Climate Change in Iraq* (IOM: Baghdad, 2022).
[35] IOM (note 34).
[36] IOM, *Migration into a Fragile Setting: Responding to Climate-induced Informal Urbanization and Inequality in Basra, Iraq* (IOM: Baghdad, 2021).
[37] IOM (note 33)
[38] IOM (note 34); and IOM (note 36).
[39] IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, 'Iraq Master List Report 128', Data collection period: Oct.–Dec. 2022, Feb 2023.
[40] IOM (note 34).
[41] Hassan, Born and Nordqvist (note 21); and O'Driscoll (note 15).
[42] IOM (note 36).
[43] Lossow, T., 'Water as weapon: IS on the Euphrates and Tigris', SWP Comments no. 3, Jan. 2016; King, M. D., 'The weaponization of water in Syria and Iraq', *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 4 (2015); and Sowers, J. L. et al., 'Targeting environmental infrastructures, international law, and civilians in the new Middle Eastern wars', *Security Dialogue*, vol. 48, no. 5 (2017).
[44] Mason, M., 'Infrastructure under pressure: Water management and state-making in southern Iraq', *Geoforum*, vol. 132 (June 2022).

Due to the increasing impacts of climate change and water stress, strategic water infrastructure may play a significant role in future armed conflicts in the country. Without adequate responses, livelihood insecurity exacerbated by climate change will lower the opportunity costs of negative coping mechanisms such as illicit activities and armed group recruitment, and may further reduce social cohesion, drive instability and increase the risk of conflict in Iraq.

Noting the adverse effects of climate-related change on the security situation in Iraq, the UN Security Council should strengthen the mandate of the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) to facilitate efforts towards a coordinated UN response to climate-related security risks and provide support to the Iraqi government for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Figure 3. Water stress and conflict in Iraq



Notes: Violence against civilians refers to the number of fatalities from violence against civilians. Protests and riots refers to the number of such incidents recorded.
Sources: Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 'Data export tool', 12 Apr. 2023; Natural Earth Data; and World Resources Institute, 'Aqueduct 3.0', 12 Apr. 2023.

Elite exploitation and mismanagement

The combined effects of weak governance, elite exploitation and marginalization in Iraq mean that climate change impacts some groups more than others, in turn feeding the grievances that drive instability.[45] Political competition, corruption, patronage networks and the politicization of state institutions limit the government's capacity to implement policies and contribute to the unequal distribution of resources, furthering vulnerability and instability in the country.

Political competition has impeded government action despite pledges from successive governments to address the impacts of climate change and the underlying issues such as poverty, unemployment and corruption that exacerbate vulnerability.[46] Following the 2021 national elections it took a year for Iraq to form a government, which once again lacks the support necessary to implement reforms.[47] Although there has been some recent commitment by the new government to prioritize reforms and address climate change issues, actualizing and implementing these commitments remains a challenge.[48]

Government inaction adds to the Iraqi population's frustrations with the governing elite and political systems, and increases the risks of vulnerability and grievances in the country.[49] Iraq has already witnessed protests over the lack of, or poor quality, water, electricity and other services, as well as the lack of employment opportunities. These protests have been met with violence from security actors, compounding instability.[50]

With support from its partners, the Iraqi government should work towards developing a diversified and inclusive economy that is better equipped to withstand increasing climate pressures and can support investments in climate adaption and resilience building. Increased investments, particularly around food and water security, coupled with effective and climate-resilient service delivery could ameliorate existing vulnerabilities and grievances. This in turn could contribute to strengthening the social contract between society and government.

[45] O'Driscoll (note 29); and O'Driscoll and Fazil (note 13).
[46] Bourhrous, A. et al., *Reform within the System: Governance in Iraq and Lebanon*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 61 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Dec. 2021); and Mansour, R. and al-Shakeri, H., 'Can Iraq's new government reform the corrupt system?', Chatham House Expert Comment, 30 Nov. 2022.
[47] Mansour and al-Shakeri (note 46).
[48] Fazil, S. and Tartir, A., 'Iraq in 2023: Challenges and prospects for peace and human security', SIPRI Topical Backgrounder, 17 Mar. 2023; and UN Security Council, 'Following year of political discord, Iraq's new government tackles pressing challenges, institutes reforms, senior official tells Security Council', 2 Feb. 2023.
[49] Fazil and Tartir (note 48); and Bourhrous et al. (note 46).
[50] Associated Press, 'Iraqi city of Basra seethes over water crisis, unemployment', VOA, 10 Sep. 2018; Lahn, G. and Shamout, N., 'Basra's poisonous water demands international action', Chatham House Expert Comment, 14 Nov. 2018; Reuters, 'Scores of Iraqis injured in anti-government protests in Baghdad', *The Guardian*, 1 Oct. 2022 ; and O'Driscoll, D. et al., *Protest and State–Society Relations in the Middle East and North Africa*, SIPRI Policy Paper no. 56 (SIPRI: Stockholm, Oct. 2020).

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