

2.3 Ethnic and religious minorities

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For background information on ethno-religious minorities in Iraq, see the EUAA Country Focus, May 2024, section 1.2. Ethnic and religious minorities.

Iraq is a diverse country with a range of ethnic and religious groups including Arabs, Kurds, Turkmens, Assyrians, Yazidis, and other minorities. This diversity is a social and cultural asset but has also been a source of political competition and inter-communal tensions.519 Following the fall of Saddam Hussein, Iraq adopted a sectarian power-sharing system to prevent large-scale violence, aimed at ensuring representation for all major communities. While effective in the short term, this system reinforced sectarian identities, weakening national unity.520 Ethnic and religious identities have been politically instrumentalised, contributing to divisions, violence, forced displacement521 and reduced social cohesion.522

According to NGO Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights (IOHR), ahead of the November 2025 parliamentary elections political candidates increasingly appeal to sectarian, ethnic, religious, and regional identities, exploiting historic grievances. This trend weakens democratic competition and exacerbates divisions.523 In parallel, journalist and researcher expert on Iraq, Winthrop Rodgers, affirmed that ‘in the KRI each party acts in self-interested ways that do not align clearly with ethno-sectarian cleavages. For example, the KDP has closer relationships with some Sunni factions and not others and can work with some Shia factions and not others; meanwhile, the PUK and opposition have their own relationships. These change over time based on circumstances’.524 In November 2024, Iraq conducted its first nationwide census since 1987. 525 The census has sparked controversy over the exclusion of sectarian and ethnic data, with critics accusing Iraq's political establishment of politicising the process526 and obscuring minority visibility, with potential impacts on resource allocation, electoral law, and federalism debates.527

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