



2.10 Persons involved in and affected by blood/land feuds in the context of tribal conflict

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For more information on Blood feuds (thar), see the EUAA COI report [Iraq: Arab tribes and customary law Report, April 2023](#).

Since 2003, the weakening of the state authority has led to a resurgence of tribal influence in law enforcement¹⁰²⁰ and state judiciary.¹⁰²¹ Tribalism remained deeply rooted in Iraq,¹⁰²² including in the KRI, where tribal structures often fill gaps left by the formal judicial system.¹⁰²³ Haley Bobseine described customary tribal law as ‘a defining characteristic of modern Iraqi society’, operating in parallel with state law due to a considerable overlap between state and tribal systems.¹⁰²⁴

Tribal customs and laws may vary across the tribes, as each has its own internal rules. However, broad similarities can be found in their foundational principles.¹⁰²⁵ A defining element of the tribal system is the strong sense of group identity, which often subordinates individual interests. Individuals are expected to conform for group survival, but also for their own protection, which is granted in return for their loyalty.¹⁰²⁶ As historian Mélisande Genat notes in her thesis, criminal liability in sharia is individual, while in tribal custom it is shared.¹⁰²⁷

Under tribal custom, male members of the extended family (*khamsa*) are duty-bound to avenge the harm or death of one of their own, either by retaliating against a member of the perpetrator’s *khamsa* or, more commonly, by agreeing to financial compensation (*fasl* or *diyya*) paid to the victim’s family.¹⁰²⁸ Tribal justice mechanisms, such as *solh al-ashai’iri* (‘tribal settlements’) held in *diwan al-Arab* (‘guesthouses’), are widely used particularly in central and southern governorates, where formal courts are seen as slow, corrupt, or inaccessible.¹⁰²⁹ Such mechanisms are generally used for property, accidents, and homicides disputes.¹⁰³⁰ Corruption in the police is also a factor pushing citizens to resolve grievances through tribal channels.¹⁰³¹

Fasl is a tribal custom that includes negotiations to settle a dispute,¹⁰³² involving financial or moral compensation (*diyya*).¹⁰³³ It is especially relied upon in cases where the state is absent or ineffective,¹⁰³⁴ including honour killings.¹⁰³⁵ In a 2025 academic study, Reem Zeyad Arif

examined the role of Iraqi tribes in the country. The research was based on interviews with 30 participants, including tribal leaders, affiliated members, and subject-matter experts.¹⁰³⁶ Some interviewees expressed concerns that *fasl*, particularly in domestic violence cases, may allow perpetrators to evade accountability and contribute to rising rates of domestic crime¹⁰³⁷ (See [section 2.6 on Women and girls](#)). Tribal conflicts may also be resolved through *fasliyah* – the practice of exchanging or trading women as compensation and as part of settlement of a dispute among tribes¹⁰³⁸ – despite its prohibition under State law.¹⁰³⁹ *Fasliyah* places women and girls at heightened risk of trafficking within the country.¹⁰⁴⁰

Blood feuds (*thar*) occur when disputes between tribes remain unresolved.¹⁰⁴¹ Although *thar* is a tribal practice, is not considered as part of ‘tribal codes’ nor a tribal conflict resolution mechanism. As Mélisande Genat¹⁰⁴² observed, ‘vendetta cycles happen precisely because no agreement could be found’.¹⁰⁴³ Acts of revenge are only permitted under specific conditions and must follow several prescribed steps, including repeated efforts to reach a settlement (*fasl*) before blood is shed.¹⁰⁴⁴

Such feuds are not an isolated phenomenon in Iraq.¹⁰⁴⁵ Tribal violence is often rooted in honour-based grievances¹⁰⁴⁶ and retaliation.¹⁰⁴⁷ Other triggering factors include longstanding land disputes,¹⁰⁴⁸ border crossings control,¹⁰⁴⁹ theft,¹⁰⁵⁰ unemployment, poverty and drug use.¹⁰⁵¹ Competition over access to water resources have exacerbated tensions¹⁰⁵² – especially in southern Iraq, where climate-related issues have been at the front line of the tribal conflict in the area, particularly during years of drought.¹⁰⁵³ Disputes may take months or years to resolve and often require significant intervention from local authorities to restore order.¹⁰⁵⁴

The militarisation of tribal groups has further challenged state authority.¹⁰⁵⁵ Many tribes have access to a large arsenal,¹⁰⁵⁶ including weapons left over from Saddam Hussein regime and from paramilitary groups.¹⁰⁵⁷ Tribal weaponry is not limited to light firearms, but includes rockets, machine guns, armoured vehicles and other heavy weapons.¹⁰⁵⁸ Despite state efforts to control arms through disarmament programmes,¹⁰⁵⁹ enforcement has been hindered by collusion between security forces and tribal or political actors.¹⁰⁶⁰ In a May 2025 interview with The New Region, a news outlet covering Iraq and the Middle East, the Sheikh Nafi' al-Shami of the al-Bu Shama tribe stated that weapons are part of tribal identity and cannot be fully confiscated, noting that while the law allows only one licensed weapon per citizen, in reality tribes hold ‘unlimited arsenals.’¹⁰⁶¹

An Iraqi parliamentary committee has been reviewing legislation aimed at regulating the practice of blood money (compensation via tribal mediation). Concerns include excessive compensation demands, reportedly up to 1 billion IQD [approximately EUR 656 000], and the involvement of self-proclaimed ‘Facebook sheikhs’ who reportedly exploit the system for profit. Some settlements have reportedly involved coercive practices such as forced marriage or deterring medical assistance for fear of retaliation. Reform efforts have faced resistance and legal changes are constrained by Article 45 of the Iraqi Constitution, which protects tribal customs unless they conflict with human rights.¹⁰⁶² Based on the opinion of most Iraqi tribesmen interviewed by Mélisande Genat, distortion of tribal justice is the so-called ‘*fasl* inflation’, particularly in southern Iraq where, *diyas* for homicides and injuries are viewed as

‘wildly unreasonably’.[1063](#)

During the reference period, a ‘rising tide of tribal violence’ was reported, especially in southern governorates,[1064](#) including Baghdad,[1065](#) posing a security concern for the government.[1066](#) In the KRI, due to proliferation of arms, conflicts between families frequently turn violent, resulting in casualties.[1067](#) In Basrah, the police play a marginal role in managing tribal conflicts.[1068](#) The overlapping interests of tribal leaders, public officials, and political networks has also had negative implications for public security, [1069](#) particularly due to tribal loyalties within the security apparatus.[1070](#) Despite this, some areas have seen a decline in tribal disputes. In May 2025, The New Region reported a ‘sharp drop’ in such incidents in Thi-Qar governorate, attributed to greater state presence and law enforcement. Sheikh Nafi' al-Shami told The New Region that this drop was due to growing awareness among tribes that ‘bloodshed and property attacks solve nothing’, along with the establishment of a government committee to address conflicts.[1071](#)

In August 2024, a violent tribal conflict erupted in Nasiriyah (Thi-Qar governorate) resulting in four individuals being injured and a tribal sheikh’s home being burned down. Security forces reportedly faced restrictions accessing the scene.[1072](#) In the same month, a person was killed in Najaf governorate as a result of a suspect tribal conflict. A total of 70 people were arrested with numerous weapons and ammunition confiscated.[1073](#) In April 2025, a middle school student was killed in Basrah in a tribal vengeance clash.[1074](#) In June 2025, in Dohuk, as a result of a family feud, two children of eight and ten years old with no connection to the dispute have been killed .[1075](#) In July 2025, clashes between the Harki and Goran tribes in western Erbil (KRI) over land disputes tied to the KRG oil pipeline highlighted how tribal loyalties often override formal governance structures,[1076](#) and reflect tribal dynamics within KDP rule.[1077](#) In August 2024, the Sudani administration introduced a ‘tribal covenant’ aimed at reducing tribal clashes.[1078](#)

For information on honour killings, See also [section 2.9 Individuals perceived as transgressing moral and Islamic norms](#) and [section 2.6 Women and girls](#)).

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