



WORLD AFFAIRS COUNCIL
of Philadelphia

Iraq

Republic of Iraq



Key Facts



World Freedom Press Global Index Ranking (Overall): Ranked 156 (52.60)

Head of State / Head of Government: President Barham SALIH (since 2 October 2018) & Prime Minister Adil ABD AL-MAHDI (since 24 October 2018)

Capital city: Bagdad

Population: 40,194,216 (July 2018 est.)

Official Language(s): Arabic & Kurdish

Ethnic Groups: Arab 75-80%, Kurdish 15-20%, other 5% (includes Turkmen, Yezidi, Shabak, Kaka'i, Bedouin, Romani, Assyrian, Circassian, Sabaeen-Mandaean, Persian)

Currency:

Gross domestic product (PPP):

Internet penetration: 36.2 %

Most trusted medium of information: N/A

Legal System:

Political system: federal parliamentary republic

Journalists Killed/Imprisoned:

Media Environment: the number of private radio and TV stations has increased rapidly since 2003; government-owned TV and radio stations are operated by the publicly funded Iraqi Media Network; private broadcast media are mostly linked to political, ethnic, or religious groups; satellite TV is available to an estimated 70% of viewers and many of the broadcasters are based abroad; transmissions of multiple international radio broadcasters are accessible as of 2019. Religious, social and political factors play a major role in the forms of communication among the Iraqi people. Media and social networking sites represent the main means of communication. These factors constitute the Iraqi public opinion and move it negatively or positively.

Media Issues: Journalists are often the victims of armed attacks, arrests or intimidation by pro-government and even government militias in all parts of the country. Murders of journalists go unpunished and, if investigations are opened, they produce no result, according to the families of the victims. Iraq still has no law on access to state-held information. Investigative reporting on corruption or embezzlement exposes journalists to serious threats. Internet access was cut during a wave of protests in July 2018 that were violently suppressed. Journalists have to work in a more politicized environment in which the media are regarded above all as political tools. In November 2018, the newly elected authorities warned the media against showing disrespect for “national or religious symbols.” Journalists were also worried by a proposed cyber-crime law providing for prison sentences (including life imprisonment) for online posts that endanger “the independence, unity or integrity of the country, or its economic, political, military or security interests.” The vagueness of this wording was alarming and liable to discourage the emergence of a really free and independent press.

Popular Forms of Media Consumption

Radio: Under the mission of creating a Western-styled public service, there is a great number of foreign radio and TV broadcasters targeting Iraqi audiences (BBC, Paris-based Monte Carlo Doualiya radio, US-backed Al-Hurra TV and Radio Free Iraq among others). Many of them can be listened via local relays. Today, in the context of visual media, radio has clearly lost its pivotal role: 35.1 percent of Iraqi households possess a radio, lagging consistently behind satellite TV (97.3 percent) and Internet (50.4 percent), according to the Gallup-BBG 2014 report; 19.7 percent of the Iraqi respondents reported using the radio for news weekly, in comparison with 92.1 percent using the television for the same purpose. The importance of radio in delivering news is still significant, but its use is most common among men, better-educated Iraqis and Kurds, turning it into a sort of niche media.

Television: Similarly, to the press, the TV landscape reflects the political and sectarian division of the Iraqi society. In order to produce entertainment shows, more formats are imported from abroad, including foreign TV series. The other main category of non-breaking news programs featured on independent channels can be best described as public service.

Digital Media: Iraq's Internet development lags way behind that of other Arab states with the exception of war-torn Yemen and Syria. In 2011, the Dubai Press Club-Deloitte Arab Media Outlook estimated that broadband penetration reached as little as 0.1 percent of the Iraqi population. Yet, according to BBC Monitoring, Internet penetration has grown significantly quickly between 2014 and 2016. In 2016, Internetlivestats.com has detected 4.9 million Iraqi Internet users, around 13 percent of the population. The BBG-Gallup 2016 joint research has also found that the number of Iraqi Internet users is on a rise due to better mobile network coverage. Mobile penetration was already assessed to cover 87 percent of the population in 2011, according to the Arab Media Outlook.

Social Networks: Similarly, to the rest of the Middle East, Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular social media in Iraq; Facebook statistics show that the number of users in Iraq has increased by 35 percent

in the last six months of 2012, reaching around 2.7 million in early 2013. According to the BBG-Gallup 2016 survey, 46 percent of Iraqi Kurds turn to Facebook at least once a week to read the news, making of Zuckerberg's social network one of the top five news sources in the autonomous region.