



Iraq — Va-PoReg Country Report

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[Mesopotamia historically occupied modern Iraq]

12/25/1638 Start Part of Other Country [of Ottoman Empire]: The area which now forms the state of Iraq was divided into the three provinces of Basra, Baghdad and Mosul (Sluglett 2007). Starting in 1533, most of the territory of present-day Iraq came under the control of Ottoman Empire as the pashalik of Baghdad. Baghdad was officially captured in December 1534.¹ On 12/25/1638, Baghdad fell back under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, after being under Iranian rule between 1623 and 1638.² Ottoman rule over Iraq lasted until the end of World War in 1918.³

11/06/1914 End Part of Other Country [of Ottoman Empire, Autocratic Monarchy]/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [United Kingdom, Electoral Oligarchy]: After the Ottoman Empire entered World War I, Britain occupied the territory of later Iraq (Yaphe 2003, Wilks 2016, Sluglett 2007). Both LIED and V-Dem do not provide data for Iraq before 1920.

11/21/1920 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [United Kingdom, Electoral Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [United Kingdom, Electoral Democracy]: In October 1920, Sir Percy Cox, High Commissioner and Commander in Chief in Iraq, ended military rule and set up a new constitution with local elites (Yaphe 2003, Wilks 2016). He set up a provisional government lead by an Arab President and council (Yaphe 2003). A referendum was held in Mandatory Iraq between 06/16 and 08/11/1921 to determine the form of government and head of state.⁴ The result of the popular vote was 96 percent for Emir Faysal from the Hashemite family of the sharifs of Mecca (Yaphe 2003, Nissen/Heine 2009). Although Iraq established formal internal governance structures after the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty, key areas of domestic policy remained under effective British control. Major decisions regarding security, finance, and institutional development required British approval or alignment with British interests. Therefore, despite the appearance of self-rule, Iraq's domestic sovereignty was fundamentally constrained, and the regime should be classified as an indirect rule colonial regime. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. Political liberties are coded as absent by LIED and can be interpreted as ambiguous by V-Dem's PCLI. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are robust. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. During this period, Iraq conducted its first Constituent Assembly elections (1922–1924), leading to the establishment of a constitutional framework. While local authorities retained influence in their regions, the central government, under British oversight, sought to consolidate power, aiming for a unified administrative structure. On 10/10/1922 the Anglo-Iraqi Treaty of October 1922 was an agreement unilaterally signed by Percy Cox in 1922 and ratified by the Iraqi government only in 1924. The treaty allowed Iraqi self-government while the British retained control of Iraq's foreign policy (Wilks 2016).⁵ Male suffrage was introduced in 1924 (LIED). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1922 and 1923, from 1924 onward only multiparty legislative elections were held. Since 1924, according to Polity5, during this period, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Until 1924, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are robust. At the same time, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with

appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For the rest of the regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate.

10/03/1932 End Indirect Rule Colonial Regime [of United Kingdom, Electoral Democracy]/Start Autocratic Monarchy [as independent country]: Iraq gained formal independence in 1932 and became a full member of the League of Nations (Nissen/Heine 2009). The crown was given to King Faisal with no previous ties to Iraq by the British as a reward for his military support against Turkey. He was a Sunni (Haddad 1971: 55-57, Lewis 1990, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 69). On 10/30/1936 Bakr Sidqi and Hikmat Sulayman organized a coup d'état in which prime minister Yasin al-Hashimi was deposed.⁶ Until 08/17/1937 Sulayman ruled as prime minister. In the Golden Square Coup on 04/01/1941 prime minister Nuri al-Said was deposed and Rashid Ali al-Gaylani became prime minister.⁷ In 1948 female suffrage was introduced.⁸ According to LIED only multiparty legislative elections were held until 1935, in 1936 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held, from 1937 to 1942 only multiparty legislative elections were held, from 1943 to 1946 no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held, from 1947 onward only multiparty legislative elections were held. From 1932 to 1935, according to Polity5, the executive encountered slight limitations on decision-making power imposed by other institutions. Between 1936 and 1940, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. Since 1941, as per Polity5's classification, the executive's authority was subject to minor institutional constraints during this time. Until 1957, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were robust, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 1958, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. LIED still codes political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI indicates an ambiguous level until 1940 and from 1946 to 1953 and a not real presence between 1941 and 1945 and from 1954 onwards.

07/14/1958 End Autocratic Monarchy/Start Military Autocracy: A military coup led by General Abdul-Karim Qasim led to the murder of the prime minister and the royal family. The Iraqi Republic was proclaimed and the monarchy ended with a junta, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) taking over (Nissen/Heine 2009, Dann 1969: 19-33, Dawisha 2009: 172, Wolfe-Hunnicut 2015, Haddad 1971: 86, 91-92, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 69-70).⁹ According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. LIED continued to code political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI states them as not really present.

02/08/1963 End Military Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: Ba'athists and Arab nationalists, which included significant participation from military officers, overthrew the Qasim government because of its relationship with Iraqi communists and external forces. A National Council of the Revolutionary Command (NCRC) was set up by the Ba'th party replacing the RCC. The NRC included military leaders who held substantial power. The most powerful figure in the new government was the secretary general of the Ba'th Party, Ali Salih al-Sa'di¹⁰ (Haddad 1971: 115-129, Be'eri 1982: 80, Sorby 2009, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 70). The new regime introduced a different ideological focus, emphasizing Arab nationalism and socialism, contrasting with Qassem's more Iraqi-centric approach. The Ba'ath Party's rise to power represented a new political force dominating Iraqi politics. The Ba'ath Party sought to monopolize political power by controlling state institutions and eliminating political opposition. The new regime actively suppressed other political parties, especially the Communist Party and groups loyal to the previous government. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. LIED identifies political liberties as absent and V-Dem's PCLI is likewise classified by us as showing that political liberties are absent.

11/13[-18]/1963 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Military Autocracy: Al-Sadi and 18 of his Ba'ath Party colleagues were seized at gunpoint. The Ba'ath Party was overthrown, and Abdul Salam Arif established a new regime dominated by military leadership. Arif reconstituted the RCC served as the ruling junta, composed primarily of military personnel. In addition, Arif leveraged his military position and influence to carry out this coup, indicating his active role in the military. After the coup, he consolidated power and continued to lead Iraq as both the head of state and an active military leader. Upon becoming president, Arif promoted himself to the rank of Field Marshal, the highest rank in the Iraqi military. No elections were held during his presidency. According to our classification this is a clear case of a military autocracy. Political parties were suppressed, and the regime focused on consolidating power. After Abdul Salam Arif's death in a helicopter crash on 04/13/1966, his brother Abdul Rahman Arif became president on 04/16/1966. The military autocracy continued, maintaining tight control over political activities. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1964 to 1967, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1968, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For this time political liberties are still coded as absent per LIED and can be interpreted as not really present per V-Dem's PCLI.

07/17/1968 End Military Autocracy/Start One-Party Autocracy: A military coup led by ex-Major General al-Bakr seeking to avenge the previous coup and purge by the years ago ousted Arif. Bakr became president. The regime was dominated by Ba'athist military officers and ruled through the Revolutionary Command Council of the Ba'athist party's military section (Haddad 1971: 138-40, 143-44, 157-64, Farouk-Sluglett/Sluglett 1987: 115-17, 120, Brooker 1997: 115, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 70). On 07/31/1968 Bakr purged the military branch of the Ba'athist party which brought him to power by removing an-Naif from the position of prime minister position. While it is possible to argue that the regime established from 07/17/1968 on was a one-party autocracy it is coded as military autocracy because it came to power through a military coup and was led by a non-electoral military junta. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1969 to 1978, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. For 1979, V-Dem's JCE is classified as limited, indicating weak judicial oversight. Concurrently, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which can be cautiously interpreted as indicating an absence of legislative constraints on the executive. As classified by FH (since 1972), the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. Besides, both LIED and V-Dem's PCLI indicate that political liberties were absent in this period.

07/16/1979 End One-Party Autocracy/Start Personalist (One-Party) Autocracy: It is disputed if the formal transfer of power from Field Marshal al-Bakr to Saddam Hussein on 07/16/1979 marked a shift from a military to a personalist regime (this is the coding of GWF). Before and after the Ba'ath party remained the ruling party.¹¹ However, since the formal rules were altered fundamentally from a non-electoral military regime reigned by a junta to a one-party regime it makes sense to identify a regime change on 07/16/1979 (Bengio 1998). The 1979 Ba'ath Party Purge, also known as the Comrades Massacre, was a significant event that marked Saddam Hussein's consolidation of power into a personalist autocracy in Iraq. Orchestrated by Saddam Hussein, on 07/22/1979, six days after becoming president, this purge occurred and involved the execution of many Ba'ath Party members who were labeled as traitors in a dramatic and public display of power. The leading party members who were spared "were given weapons and directed to execute their comrades".¹² The executed leading members of the party were accused of taking part in a pro-Syrian plot to

overthrow Hussein. Iraq subsequently cut off relations with its fellow Ba'athist regime in Syria, accusing Hafiz al-Assad of organizing the plot.¹³ This event was a crucial moment in solidifying Saddam's personal control over Iraq. It served to eliminate potential rivals and instill fear among party members and the population, ensuring that loyalty to Saddam was paramount and unchallenged. From this point on, Saddam's word was effectively law, and his personal authority was the primary force in Iraqi governance, characterizing his rule as a personalist autocracy. The ruling ideology since is described as Saddamist Ba'athism, a distinct form of Ba'athism.¹⁴ Starting from 1980, the party came under the control of the military and security services (Farouk-Sluglett/Sluglett 1987: 208-13, Brooker 1997: 115-118, Kamrava 1998: 73, Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 70-71). The events of July 1979 signify a regime change rather than a mere continuation of the existing regime. The transition involved a fundamental alteration of power structures, marked by a shift from collective leadership to personal dictatorship and the dismantling of previous checks on executive power. There was a purging of the Ba'ath Party, involving the elimination of influential party members who could challenge Saddam Hussein and transforming the party into a vehicle for his personal rule. The establishment of a personalist autocracy became evident through the creation of a cult of personality and the centralization of military and security forces under Saddam's direct control. Additionally, an ideological shift occurred, moving from traditional Ba'athist ideology to Saddamist Ba'athism, with an emphasis on loyalty to Saddam over the party or state. According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative elections were held in 1979, 1980 to 1994 only legislative elections, which weren't multiparty, were held, from 1995 onward only multiparty executive elections were held. According to Polity5, during this period, the executive held unlimited authority with no institutionalized constraints on decision-making power. From 1980 to 2001, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were absent. For the year 2002, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For 2003, V-Dem's JCE and LCE are both interpreted by us as indicating moderate constraints on the executive. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country not free, which we also place in the not free category. Moreover, the state of political liberties is indicated as absent according to LIED and V-Dem's PCLI.

04/07/2003 End Personalist (One-Party) Autocracy/Start Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by USA, Liberal Democracy]: A US invasion force ousted Saddam Hussein because of fears of WMD proliferation. On 04/07/2003 the U.S. forces took control of presidential palace (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 71).¹⁵ A new Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) was established on 07/13/2003. The 25 members were carefully divided across religious and ethnic lines (13 Shiites, 5 Sunnis, 5 Kurds, 1 Assyrian Christian, and 1 Turkman). A system of rotating presidency was established for the IGC, overseeing preparations for transitional government elections (Lansford 2021: 779). During this period no legislative elections were held (LIED). A draft interim constitution was presented on 03/01/2004, which was approved by the United States (confirming the regime was still an occupational regime) and the IGC on 03/08/2004. On 06/28/2004 the IGC was dissolved in favor of the new Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) (Lansford 2021: 780). According to LIED no multiparty executive and legislative election were held. As classified by FH for this regime period, the country is scored from 11 to 14 as not free, which corresponds to our interpretation of not free. LIED still codes political liberties as absent. V-Dem's PCLI increased into a range which we interpret as not really present in 2003 and as somewhat since 2004. For the relevant period, V-Dem's JCE indicates that judicial constraints on the executive are moderate. Simultaneously, V-Dem's LCE shows no value, which, with appropriate caution, can be interpreted as an absence of legislative constraints on the executive.

01/30/2005 End Direct Rule Occupation Regime [by USA, Liberal Democracy]/Start Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by USA, Liberal Democracy]: On 01/20/2005 parliamentary elections under universal suffrage were held (LIED). According to LIED multiparty executive and legislative elections were held. According to FH's classification for the assessed regime period, a score between 11 and 14 makes the country

not free, which we also place in the not free category. Moreover, political liberties are coded as absent per LIED and can be interpreted as somewhat present per V-Dem's PCLI. From 2006 to 2009, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were moderate, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust. For 2010, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

03/07/2010 End Indirect Rule Occupation Regime [by USA, Liberal Democracy]/Start Electoral Hybrid Regime: On this date parliamentary elections were held. The elections are not considered free and fair because, among other things, nearly 500 candidates were prevented from running (Geddes/Wright/Frantz 2014b: 71).¹⁶ The inability to establish a new government also delayed the election of a new president (Lansford 2021: 780). The following elections in 2014, 2018 and 2021 were also plagued by fraud allegations and other irregularities, and Gorran and other smaller parties rejected the results.¹⁷ Based on our observations, multiparty executive and legislative elections were held during this period, which aligns with the observations of LIED. LIED categorizes elections as competitive. V-Dem's EF&FI scores electoral freedom and fairness as ambiguous. Their CEI scores the elections as not really clean.

Per FH, for this regime period, the country scores between 11 and 14 as not free, which we also interpret as not free. Additionally, political liberties are considered absent by LIED. V-Dem's PCLI scores them as ambiguous. FH classified Iraq as partly free until 2017 and as not free from 2018 onwards. Until 2013, as per Polity5's classification, the executive experienced moderate limitations on authority, placing it in the second intermediate category. Since 2014, according to Polity5, the executive's constraints fell into Intermediate Category 3, between substantial limitations and executive parity or subordination. According to our classification the regime was an electoral autocracy from the start. For 2022, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were moderate. For the rest of the assessed regime period, V-Dem's JCE is interpreted by us as indicating that judicial constraints on the executive were limited, while V-Dem's LCE is classified by us as indicating that legislative constraints on the executive were robust.

Electoral Hybrid Regime as of 07/01/2025 continued.

Additional Sources (Abdullah 2006, Arjomand 2008, Enterline/Greig 2008, Shields/Koestler-Grack 2005)

Notes

¹ [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Baghdad_\(1534\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Baghdad_(1534))

² <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baghdad>; [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Baghdad_\(1638\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Baghdad_(1638))

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Iraq

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1921_Iraqi_monarchy_referendum

⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglo-Iraqi_Treaty_of_1922

⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yasin_al-Hashimi

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1941_Iraqi_coup_d%27%C3%A9tat

⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women%27s_suffrage

⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abdul-Karim_Qasim

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ramadan_Revolution

¹¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Baath-Party>

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Ba%27ath_Party_Purge#:~:text=The%201979%20Ba%27ath%20Party%20Purge,Republic%20on%2016%20July%201979

¹³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1979_Ba%27ath_Party_Purge#:~:text=The%201979%20Ba%27ath%20Party%20Purge,Republic%20on%2016%20July%201979

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ba%27athist_Iraq#State_ideology

¹⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/apr/07/iraq.politics>

¹⁶ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Iraqi_parliamentary_election

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2010_Iraqi_parliamentary_election; <https://freedomhouse.org/country/iraq/freedom-world/2022>

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