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**Key Findings of Qualitative Research Conducted in five provinces in Iraq:**

Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil, and Nasiriyah

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This report was prepared by the National Democratic Institute. NDI would like to acknowledge the key contributions by its partners GQR and JPM in conducting this research. Ancuta Hansen, NDI-Iraq Senior Country Director, coordinated this research. The report was edited by Sarah Beckerman, NDI Senior Program Manager, and designed by Marc Rechdane. For more information about this project or other NDI public opinion research in Iraq please contact Zac Sideras at zsideras@ndi.org.

The National Democratic Institute is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that has supported democratic institutions and practices in every region of the world for more than three decades. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to establish and strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. NDI conducts public opinion research to identify issues of public concern, track shifts in public perceptions and opinions, and contribute to evidence-based dialogue on policy and development programs.

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# Executive Summary

A new round of qualitative public opinion research reveals widespread support for the causes of the mass protests that swept Baghdad and the southern provinces of Iraq in October 2019. Participants display a sense of hope that these protests are bringing Iraqis together across religion and sect, and are awakening a civic activism that will force an overhaul of the current political system, restore dignity and improve people's lives.

There is broad agreement among research participants on what these protests are about. They see the protests as an authentic, homegrown, and leaderless movement backed by all Iraqis to bring down a governing system that has failed them. Participants feel that their leaders are more beholden to political parties, foreign interests, and themselves than to Iraqi citizens. There is a sense that rampant corruption has squandered the country's wealth, while the Constitution and election system help incompetent and corrupt leaders to remain in office.

While broad support for public protests is found across the country, it is not universal. Participants in provinces consumed by the wave of protests that began in October 2019 worry that they have become too dangerous and disruptive by generating violence and shutting down schools, roads and hospitals. A lack of effective escalation tactics leads some to feel there is little reason to believe the government will make any more concessions. Others feel that protests have been co-opted by powerful political parties and foreigners and no longer represent Iraqi interests. And finally, some feel that the

protests only place additional stress on long-standing divisions: In provinces where protests are most active, some participants feel western Sunni governorates are not supportive, or that the Iraqi government's fragile agreement with the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) on oil revenue needs to be renegotiated.

Both supporters and critics of the protests do agree that the government is acting too slow to respond to public demands and with too much violent force against protesters. Participants feel that concessions from the government, including the removal of the Prime Minister (PM) and a new election law, are too little too late. Protesters mostly place the blame of violence against them on the government and the militias they view as controlled by political parties or Iran. This brutality makes most feel that the current government is no longer a viable negotiating partner.

Protester demands are seen as expansive and, at times, vague. Yet, across the country, several broad themes emerge. Many ask for intangibles, such as "dignity," "independence from foreign influence," a "better life," and a "homeland." Most research participants want more than a change in leadership, but a change in the governing system, which includes reducing the power of political parties and their militias and electing a stronger, independent national leader, potentially through a presidential system. To fight corruption, they want the removal of quotas that ensure leaders are more beholden to political parties and sects than citizens, demanding leaders that are qualified and educated for key positions. Many demand broad economic changes, including reconsideration of the distribution of oil wealth. And they want justice for those protesters killed by security forces.

Ultimately, the path forward should be decided by Iraqis. Based on this research of Iraqi sentiment, this report offers several recommendations to protesters, Iraqi leaders, and internationals. Some recommendations require urgency to stop the daily violence and stem the threat of more widespread violence seen in the region that can result from protests. Others require deep consideration for the country's long-term future.

Photo credit: Aeham Faris, Al Tahrir Square, Baghdad 2019 © NDI

# Recommendations

To inform the dialogue among the main stakeholders on a potential path forward, NDI is putting forward a few proposals:

## For protesters

Develop a Protesters' Code of Conduct with commitments to peacefully protest, allowing emergency vehicles to proceed through blocked areas, respect for women, etc., and develop a Petition for Change to codify protester demands, working with trusted professors or judges to codify a short list of demands that are considered actionable.

## For Iraqi political leadership and government

Establish an independent mediation board to act as a conduit between the protesters and the government, an independent committee to produce short- and long-term policy recommendations including pushing for electoral and political party reforms; placing armed groups under the control of the government; and amending the Constitution. Establish a committee to investigate violence against protesters.

## For the international community

Call for an end of violence against protesters and support democratic resilience. Support a free and fair electoral process.

Photo credit: Sami Abu Raya, Diyala 2019 © NDI

# Context and Methodology

A national public opinion survey[1] conducted by NDI in March–April 2019 showed that optimism about the direction of Iraq continued to deteriorate after the country's liberation from the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), as military gains were not met by economic and political reforms. Large majorities of survey respondents considered that access to jobs was worsening (86 percent), while 82 percent were concerned about corruption with senior government officials. Such sentiment led more than two out of three Iraqis to approve of public protests, including strong majorities in Baghdad, the South, and West regions.

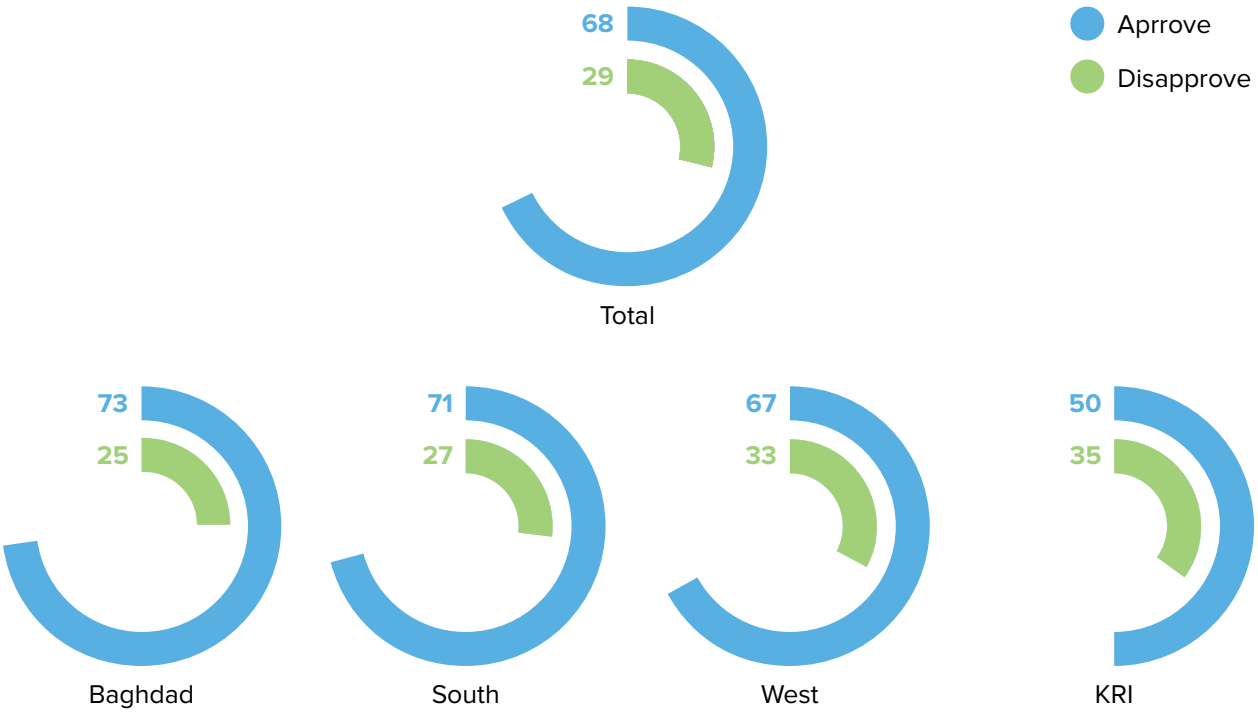
In October 2019, mass demonstrations ignited in Baghdad and the southern provinces of Iraq demanding job opportunities, an end to corruption, and better living conditions. These protests quickly escalated to demanding the resignation of the government and the overhaul of the country's current political system. Between October 2019 and March 2020 over 600 Iraqis, the majority of them protesters, lost their lives; thousands were injured or threatened.[2] During this time, many office buildings belonging to local branches of political parties, Popular Mobilization Units (PMUs), and government institutions were burned; public services were suspended, including schools and universities; and disruption affected all aspects of everyday life.

In response to increased pressure from the street,

1 NDI, Iraqis welcome improved security and social cohesion, but discontent with government undermines stability, 2019

2 Amnesty International, Iraq: Protest death toll surges as security forces resume brutal repression, 2020

## Question wording: Generally speaking, do you approve or disapprove of the most recent public protests throughout Iraq?




the Iraqi Prime Minister Adil Abdul Mahdi presented his resignation on 1 December 2019. However, political agreements to form a new government were short-lived and prolonged the outgoing prime minister's time in office, fueling frustration among his opponents. Additionally, to address public concerns, the executive and parliament adopted a few policy and legislative measures including dissolving the Provincial Councils in October 2019, creating some jobs in the public sector, amending the pension law and the election law, as well as establishing a parliamentary committee to lead the process of amending the Iraqi Constitution. Although on 24 December 2019 the Council of Representatives (CoR) amended the election law, it had not been published at the time this report was drafted. The Constitutional Committee was established in October 2019[3] and was mandated to present its amendment proposals within four months. The parliamentary recess that started on 16 January 2020, followed by concerns about the coronavirus leading to Iraqi authorities imposing a curfew on 17 March 2020, will likely impact the committee's timeline. Finally, tensions between the United States of America and Iran escalated throughout the second half of 2019, culminating with an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad in which armed groups burned the reception area of the mission. In response, the U.S. military killed Iranian General Qassim Soleimani, the head of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps, in an airstrike on 3 January 2020, adding to the uncertainty about the direction of the country and to Iraqis' frustration about regional conflicts playing out on their land.

NDI conducted qualitative public opinion research to identify views on the ongoing public protests; the responses of various actors including the government, security forces and the international community; and how protests may impact social and political dynamics in Iraq. The research aims to identify key drivers

3 CoR, Constitutional Amending Committee, accessed at 25 March 2020

of conflict and shared areas of compromise, and to contribute to an evidence-based dialogue among Iraqi and international stakeholders.

This report is based on qualitative research conducted between December 2019 and February 2020. The research universe is limited to the following five provinces in Iraq: Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil, and Nasiriyah. Findings have been collected from ten in-depth interviews (IDIs) with thought leaders and a set of ten focus group discussions with Iraqi citizens.

This research was conducted in two phases. First, between 26 December 2019 and 8 January 2020, the research team conducted ten IDIs with demonstration leaders and activists, senior governmental and political leaders, and senior security officials. Interview subjects were selected to be based in protest-affected provinces and include a mix of those who support and those who oppose the ongoing demonstrations. To ensure a broad spectrum of perspectives and data saturation across interviews, NDI selected four demonstration leaders and activists; four ruling-class representatives with roles in the government and/political parties; and two security forces representatives.

The key findings of the IDIs were then used to inform the guidelines of ten focus groups that occurred between 25 January and 1 February 2020 and included 91 participants in total, recruited through purposive sampling. Among those groups, two occurred in each of the following cities: Baghdad, Basra, Diyala, Erbil, and Nasiriyah. Among the ten groups, five groups consisted of Shia participants, three of Arab Sunnis, and two of Kurds, to match known population estimates in Iraq. The purpose of this study was to collect insights on how those who live in the hotbeds of anti-government protests—Basra, Baghdad, and Nasiriyah, predominantly Shia—view the protests, and included Sunni (Baghdad and Diyala) and Kurdish (Erbil) participants to observe potential ethno-sectarian differences. Using past survey data on public sentiment about demonstrations, referenced above, and projecting an increasing trend based on the levels of street mobilization and online support in target provinces, NDI estimated that eight groups of pro-protests and two groups of anti-protests participants would match the views of the researched population.

To open conversation among like-minded individuals, each group was homogenous in terms of gender, age, education, sect, and urbanicity. By design, each group also held similar views toward the protests based on a short questionnaire administered during recruitment for this research. Socio-demographic characteristics, as well as holding socially desirable or undesirable views, influence to a high degree the desire to share information within the group discussion. Conducting focus groups in Iraq and in other multiethnic, multi-sectarian, countries in conflict or in transition to democracy shows that mixing genders, different education levels, ages or ethnicities may lead participants who are from larger sectarian groups, male, elderly, or those who hold a higher education degree to dominate the conversation; cultural norms and fear may also lead some participants such as younger or less educated women, or those who hold minority views—such as being anti-protests in this study—to feel inhibited and defer to those whom they perceive to be more experienced, knowledgeable or better educated. Due to cultural norms it is unwise to mix genders in focus groups, particularly if the topic of discussion is experienced differently by each gender, or women are expected to remain quiet about issues outside the home. Thus, heterogeneous focus groups are more likely to adversely affect a participant's willingness, confidence, or comfort to express their viewpoints. To ensure across-group data saturation, population estimates referring to urbanicity, age, education, and gender are used in purposeful sampling.[4] This study aimed at collecting and analyzing insights from demographics in line with known population estimates for the research universe, without targeting small minority groups.

4 Onwuegbuzie, Anthony J. et al., A Qualitative Framework for Collecting and Analyzing Data in Focus Group Research, 2009

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in the native language of participants. As the source for analysis, interview and discussion transcripts were used, as well as debriefing moderators and interviewers. The quotes included in the English version of this report are translated from Arabic or Kurdish. In the Arabic version of this report the original quotes from participants were used.

This research draws on findings from over 50 rounds of qualitative and quantitative research conducted by NDI in Iraq dating back to 2010.

Photo credit: Aeham Faris, Al Tahrir Square, Baghdad 2019 © NDI

# Key Findings

## Broad Support and Sympathy for the Protesters' Causes

The research reveals broad and passionate support for the protesters and their causes. In focus groups and interviews, most feel protesters have a right to go to the streets to pressure the government for better living conditions, new leaders, and a new governing system. There is a broad sense that these demonstrations are a necessary response to enduring corruption, incompetence, and lack of responsiveness toward the needs of the people. This support expands across age and education levels, across gender and sect, and from areas where the protests are most active—in Nasiriyah and Baghdad—to where they are mostly absent—in Erbil.

This broad base of support helps create a sense that these protests are national, and homegrown. Almost no participants feel that foreign powers were behind the launch of the protests in October 2019, as opponents have suggested. Instead, these are the actions of Iraqis fed up with their living conditions and lack of power, and for many, they are a source of national pride. A man in Diyala says, "We are protesting although we know that we will get killed, but we are doing so as to guarantee that our children will get their rights."

The protests hold a strong grip on the country's consciousness. In all five cities where the research took place, protests are the top-of-mind issue raised in an open-ended discussion of the country's situation and all current events are judged through their impact on,

or resulting from, the protests. Whether these participants attend the protests, follow the news, or feel the disruptions that they cause, they recognize that these demonstrations are consequential and impact their lives every day. Even if there is disagreement about their effectiveness, there is little sense that these demonstrations do not matter or that they are just like other protests over the past decade.

## An Emerging Awareness, Empowerment, and Unity

Participants hold different opinions about the tactics and demands of the protests, but they mostly hold similar views on at least one positive change that is occurring as a result of these protests: a more aware, civic-oriented mentality. They note an awakened sense of activism and responsibility, especially among youth. A Basra government official is so inspired by Iraqi youth that he says, "I am thankful to [the protesters], they are the generation of change that will change the political system that has oppressed the Iraqi people for years."

Participants feel that before October 2019 they begrudgingly accepted their living conditions and felt that little would change. These protests are creating a sense that people can truly bring about change, providing some hope. According to one activist in Baghdad, "Of course I approve of [the protests] because they represent the desire of the people, and we cannot stand against their desires, because all people have realized that what was happening was a political game that resulted in having corruption, wars, and struggle of influence among the regional powers over Iraq; people are trying to save their country from the wrong path and open a new path for Iraq through their protests as represented by their slogan 'We Want a Homeland.'"

Most also share a related belief that these protests are succeeding in putting significant pressure on the government, which many believe will also impact the responsiveness of future governments. They are making clear that the status quo will no longer be tolerated, and that the government is realizing that people can and will rise up to get rid of failing leadership. A man in Erbil says, "[The protests] have proven to the politicians and the government that people can be strong together, stand against corruption and kick out whoever they want. I believe that the next government will be automatically better, fearing the people. People are now proving to the world that they do not just accept whatever governing system they get. They are there to make changes."

Most also note that the protests are not sectarian, and that Iraqis across the country are supportive regardless of the faith and ethnicity of demonstrators to stand up for their rights and against government neglect. This sense of bringing people together is not shared by all, but those who support the protests do believe the country is unifying and that these protests will make the entirety of Iraq better, not just one part of it. A man in Baghdad says, "We all saw that woman who appealed to the people of Anbar. She is a Shia woman from southern Iraq. In my opinion, this is a very beautiful thing… [The Sunnis] responded, and we saw cars loaded with aid from Anbar coming to Baghdad and Nasiriyah to help the demonstrators."

Several participants note that the protests may also have a positive impact on the way Iraqis view women. They note that women are standing with men in protest squares, while male protesters are seeing brave women demand their rights at their own risk. A woman in Nasiriyah says, "The demonstrations developed people's mentalities and made them become more open… The demonstrations have changed the way people think in terms of males mingling with females. There is no problem now in men and women being with each other in the squares." Some participants acknowledge that the protests empower women by encouraging their attendance and providing a safe space, free from harassment—an indicator of the integrity, respect, and more progressive views of protesters.

Finally, some also note that these demonstrations are bringing together Iraqis from different classes. A few think wealthy people with jobs are likely to be against the protests, but others reject this and feel that those with good jobs still have much to gain from protesting, and are just as tired of corruption as everybody else. A woman in Diyala notes, "[Protesters are not] necessarily simple people. My friends protested despite having jobs and are financially stable and their son was martyred in the protests."

## Agreement on Systemic and Immediate Origins of Protests

There is also little disagreement on why these protests are happening—high unemployment, lack of services, rampant corruption, and a self-interested political class. Some participants note that the dismissal of the military leader Abdul Wahid Al Saedi from his role in the Iraqi Counter-Terrorism Service, an action suspected to be pushed by Iran, may have been the proximate cause for these protests. Others mention the government shutting down informal shops, an outlet of the subsistence economy allowing some of the poorest Iraqis to survive. These actions only ignited a much deeper frustration that has persisted throughout Iraq's political transition. Participants list many causes of these protests, but they mostly fall within four overlapping and interrelated categories:

1. Corruption, government incompetence, and inequality. Iraqis see their country as rich in resources and believe that their poor living conditions are a direct result of staggering levels of corruption and government inability or unwillingness to do something to make their lives better. They associate poor services, a lack of jobs, and high prices with a ruling class that has let them down. Inequality between the political elite and average Iraqis is a key driver of conflict. Many participants view Iraq's society through the prism of access to public revenue—on one hand the political elite and those connected to them are prospering from the government and oil resources, and on the other hand the vast majority of Iraqis are struggling to find work, a good education for their children, health care, and basic services. The lack of a notable middle class has many participants feeling hopeless about their ability to rise up in Iraq's social structure, which is exasperated by the action of Iraq's political elites. A Nasiriyah man says, "There is no hierarchy of classes in Iraqi society, the people are either poor or rich." Many participants also aspire to a level of prosperity seen in some neighboring countries, but feel hopeless about their ability to achieve that.

2. Self-serving political parties. As in much of our past research, these participants place a large amount of blame specifically on the political parties. They feel parties only look out for their own interests—exploiting the current power-sharing system to drain public revenues, increasing sectarianism across the country, and using their powerful militias to maintain their influence and control over government ministries. A man in Nasiriyah says plainly, "The parties killed the protesters."

3. The system of government. A large number of these Iraqis are more likely to blame the political system put in place than name individuals. They feel that this system generated a weak prime minister beholden to party interests and instituted a quota system that incentivizes sectarianism over a merit-based system that would allocate government positions based on qualifications.

In fact, almost no participants say today's major issues in Iraq began with the last election, or the formation of the government. Nor do they feel these issues began with the rise and fall of ISIS, or the increased sectarian tensions that preceded them. Instead, participants who identify a turning point in Iraq mostly agree it dates back to the governmental system put in place after 2003 and the Constitution drafted soon thereafter. While this opinion may be more prevalent in Sunni ar-

eas, Shias in Nasiriyah and Basra also feel the system established then set Iraq in the wrong direction, from which it is not recovering. A man in Basra says, "We used to suffer from one authoritarian party, but now we suffer from a group of parties that control Iraq, which stripped our patriotism from us and made us belong to them and their leaders."

4. Foreign interference. External influence in Iraq is seen as pervasive and leads to frustration about the country's lack of sovereignty. While they mention Gulf countries and Israel, participants largely point the finger at the U.S. and Iran. They express frustration that the two countries are fighting a proxy war on their land.

Even if less antagonistic than views towards Iran, views of the U.S. continue to be negative, as it is considered responsible for backing ethno-sectarian components of the quota system. The United States is largely seen as a powerful and self-interested actor, whose main interest is to exploit Iraq's natural resources, not to build the country's stability and development.

The US-Iranian tensions that dominated global news during the course of this research is viewed by many of these Iraqis as a distraction and a threat to achieving their demands to improve lives. A man in Basra says, "The U.S. has made Iraq a battleground to settle its problems. The Americans are living their life normally and enjoying it while the Iraqis are enduring the rockets. The protesters need to realize that we no longer want anyone to interfere in our country, by anyone I mean Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the U.S., we need to build ourselves before we build our country."

Furthermore, the U.S.-Iran tensions are a polarizing factor, forcing Iraq's main ethno-sectarian components to pick sides in the conflict. Participants, particularly in Basra, express criticism toward a Shia elite that is perceived as pressuring the Shia community to support Iran against the U.S., and participants consider a more pragmatic approach to relations with the U.S., Saudi Arabia, and other Gulf States that may be more conducive to a peaceful and prosperous future, built on economic and security cooperation. Additionally, many participants are highly critical about the lack of condemnation of violence against protesters by the international community. Some participants note international organizations, such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, raise awareness about the government's aggressive response, but feel that the United Nations and other governments have not put sufficient pressure on the Iraqi government to change its behavior.

## Tactically Leaderless and Preferably Peaceful

Many of these participants feel that protests are truly leaderless. In the beginning, protests spread through word of mouth and social media. This lack of leadership gives a sense that the protests formed almost spontaneously as a result of long-standing frustration. Instead, some supporters of the protests say, "every protester is a leader."

Some see the lack of leadership making the protests more effective. They feel leaders are too easily targeted for violence and kidnapping. Others say named leaders are easily bought off by opponents of the protests looking to bring a quick end to the disruption. A man in Nasiriyah says, "We cannot know whether a leader belongs to a party secretly or not. Who guarantees that he will deliver people's demands?"

Those who back the leaderless approach feel that protester demands are clear and do not require leaders to present and negotiate these demands. However, when pushed on listing those "clear" demands, some protesters name large and somewhat undefined major economic or social change. A man in Nasiriyah, says, "the demands are clear such as amending the Constitution, the law, appointing a Prime Minister, et cetera, and these demands do not require a leader." Another man in Diyala says, "The

demands of the protesters are simple. They want a decent life, jobs, and good streets." And an Erbil man says, "I think they only want a country! This is very emotional! You see a young guy standing there asking for a country, not money or a job or a good life! They feel they do not have a homeland!"

When pushed, some can name people that they see as leaders of the groups, whether they are youth who have come to prominence through their actions at protests or more established leaders. In Nasiriyah, both the men and women name two people they see as protest leaders, one an unemployed young boy and another a pharmacist. A woman in Nasiriyah describes the role of the young boy, "My daughter got sick once and I had to take her to the hospital but the protesters prevented us from crossing the bridge… The protesters called him for approval as to let us pass, he came, looked through my daughter's medical report, and approved that we pass."

Nor does leaderless mean without structure. Some of the activists in the demonstrations describe internal structures that speak for groups and help deliver services. One activist provides insight into a system of internal governance: "[The five committees are:] *Sawt min Al-Tahrir*,[5] the Iraqi Revolutionary Movement, the 25th October Movement led by Muntathar Al-Zaidi, Coming to Grab My Rights, and I Want a Homeland. We rejected the idea of having more than five coordination committees and we decided that each committee will represent around 70-100 tents."

Yet, those who are frustrated by the ongoing nature of the protests and the disruption they cause see the lack of leadership as an indicator that the protests will last longer than they should. Others associate the lack of leadership with the bad behavior of the protesters, feeling that a noble leader would give the protesters some direction and stop them from taking the most destructive actions. A woman in Baghdad who opposes the protests says, "There should be a leader leading the protests in order to ensure that they move on the right track. Because the absence of leaders leads the protesters to vandalism and doing whatever they want."

An overwhelming number of participants want protests to remain peaceful. They believe the Constitution gives them the right to protest peacefully and use civil disobedience when their government fails them. This means occupying squares, blocking roads, painting on city walls, and protesting outside government buildings to call for change. It also means providing services that the government is not providing. One activist in Baghdad says, "What is more, we have drawn on the walls, cleaned the streets, built stereographs, opened the closed shops and the tunnel, we started buying and selling, and we have a small Ministry of Finance that is concerned with collecting money to buy food for the protesters, we have a security force to inspect whoever tries to access the sit-in."

Many feel that only peaceful action will work in the end, while committing violence and damage will only harm their cause. A high-level government official in Baghdad urges protesters to remain peaceful: "If they [use violence] they will be considered wrong just like the violent forces; however, being peaceful makes them higher than the laws, Constitution, the Parliament, and the government."

There is disagreement about destruction of property and the disruptions that impact people's lives. These participants debate the effectiveness of burning tires, blocking bridges, and forcing schools to close. Even among supporters of the protests there is disagreement on if these tactics work, with some saying that only serious disruptions will get the government's attention. A male in Baghdad says, "Blocking the roads has advantages and disadvantages. One of the disadvantages is cutting off people's livelihoods, but on the other hand, the advantage of blocking the roads is to create civil disobedience which is a legislated right in order to make the protests succeed."

5 Arabic, *A Voice from Al Tahrir*

A smaller group of participants, mainly men, say the protests need to go further and that destruction of property is necessary to show the government how serious the protests are and is the only way the government will listen. One man in Nasiriyah says, "Yes, [burning down the party headquarters] is more effective because it is like we are telling them that we reject them, and we don't want them to return again." However, another man disagrees: "Burning governmental buildings will give the right to the government to call the protesters out of control, infiltrators who have agendas."

## Guarding Against Infiltration, Co-option, and Distraction

More than three months after these protests began, almost all participants feel that the protesters' tactics and demands are changing. Even if most of these Iraqis agreed with the protests at the beginning, their views toward the protests and their future are more complicated as they worry protests are being infiltrated and co-opted by powerful forces that do not have Iraqi people's interests in mind.

Most participants note that the protests intensified beginning with the widespread violence between protesters and security forces on 25 October 2019. According to protests, what began as peaceful and mostly student-led protests, became larger, more national, and more disruptive as a response to violent government action that killed hundreds and hurt thousands. This is also the point that some say the protests were no longer innocent. A man in Basra says, "In the beginning, October protests were contributed to by the people and they were real protests, but their course changed on the 25th of October as [outsiders] succeeded in benefiting from them and used them to their advantage."

Potentially due to the sense that university students played a major role at the beginning of protests, some of these participants feel that the most educated abandoned the protests, leaving behind a more raucous, "uneducated" crowd that is more prone to destruction and violence. These views are more common among those who also feel the protests have gone on too long or are becoming a major disruption for education, health services, and work. One woman in Nasiriyah says, "The protests drifted from their right path, which made the educated class withdraw, leaving the protests to the simple people."

Most participants think that the protests are now being infiltrated by those interested in ruining the reputation of the protesters. This belief is so widespread that protesters demonstrate a shared vernacular to define these infiltrators, calling them "tails" or "the third party." A man in Basra says, "The third party was also involved to end the protests, and they attacked and burned the tents of the protesters at night." Despite this shared vernacular, there is disagreement on exactly who is behind the "third party." Participants name Iran, political parties, and the government, while others blame other countries or say they do not know.

While some participants think the more unruly behavior is due to less educated and lower class Iraqis attending the protests, more do not think Iraqi protesters themselves are violent. They place most of the blame for violence on infiltrators and opponents of the protests, whether they are political parties, Iran or their militias. A Baghdad woman says, "Some infiltrators mixed with the protesters and assaulted the security forces and this made the security forces respond with violence in self defense, and they started suppressing the peaceful protesters with live bullets and tear gas which are forbidden internationally."

## A More Critical View of the Protests

Support for the protesters is not shared by everyone. Virtually none of these participants say they are against the protesters' causes, but those who op-

pose the protests mostly feel they were initially positive, necessary, or well-intentioned, but have soured over the past few months partially as a result of infiltration and co-option by political parties. One man in Basra says, "In the beginning, October protests were contributed to by the people and they were real protests, but their course changed." Criticism of the protests takes several different forms:

**Intensifying divides.** Supporters of the protests may assert that they represent the will of all Iraqis, but not everyone in these groups agrees. While many of the Arab Sunni and Kurd participants do show support for the protests, some of these participants do not feel that the demonstrations are unifying Iraqis, but instead feel they are creating new divisions. These comments suggest that Iraq's long-held sectarian views may outlast the protests and that protester claims of a united Iraq may be optimistic.

Participants in Basra and Nasiriyah disagree on whether their Sunni countrymen in western provinces support them. While some relay news stories they have seen of support from the West, others feel Sunnis are going about their daily lives just as before, by sending their kids to school and going to work, while Shia in southern provinces are able to do neither. They feel this lack of concern runs in contrast to the outsized role Shia, or at least Shia militias, played in fighting ISIS in Sunni areas.

Others note that Sunnis are coming off of years of violent conflict and protest and likely have good reason not to join the protests. A man in Nasiriyah says, "I think that if people in [those] governorates protested, all of them will be killed because they will be accused [by the government] of belonging to ISIS and this will give the government the right to exterminate them. Look at us, we are Shias holding our Iraqi flags while protesting, yet they still killed our sons. So how do you expect the Sunnis to protest?" One Baghdad political leader says the lack of Sunni interest is because "The protesters are only addressing the Shia parties and their demands and they neglect the Sunni and Kurd parties."

A more demonstrable tension to social cohesion within Iraq is between Arabs and Kurds, largely due to the perceived unfairness in oil revenue distribution. Budget sharing between federal Iraq and the Kurdistan Region has been a contentious issue[6] for years, with frequent flare-ups and reciprocal accusations of both sides falling short of respecting the deal that KRI would send the oil extracted in the Region to Baghdad, in exchange for receiving an agreed upon percentage of the federal budget. A significant number of non-Kurd participants see the KRI as receiving an unfair percent of the oil revenue, which generates animosity that could intensify with protests. A man in Basra says, "The Kurds are not our brothers. Let's be frank here, and they are not our brothers because they take their own oil share in addition to 27% of Basra's oil share." Participants outside of the KRI feel oil revenue should be based on population distribution, or should favor the oil-producing governorates since they pay the higher environmental and health costs associated with oil extraction. At the same time, some Kurdish participants express concerns that the political conflict might further expose Iraq to security risks and economic instability, as one woman in Erbil explained, "I think what was really too bad about the protests was that the prime minister has resigned as a result. This makes Iraq politically weak so that other countries like Iran use the opportunity to invade Iraq more and more. I believe that Shias and the Iranian army will create big troubles in Iraq due to not having a prime minister."

**More violence and insecurity.** For some, more notably among the women participants, worsening violence and insecurity are a major issue with the protests affecting their ability to leave their homes both at night and during the day. They feel the government is guilty of violence, but that protesters have also committed violence and vandalism and sometimes harass women. A woman in Nasiriyah says, "We haven't gained anything but destruction."

6 Tabaqchali, Ahmed, The debate over Iraqi Kurdistan's share of the federal budget, Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, 2019

Photo credit: Sami Abu Raya, Buhruz downtown souq, Diyala 2019 © NDI

They describe protests in violent terms: "a whirlpool," and "disturbances" leaving them "terrified in our own homes."

Many respect the peaceful protesters, but think they have been overrun by violent "jokers" (a reference originating from the 2019 Hollywood movie about the supervillain who revels in creating chaos). According to a man in Baghdad, "the joker represents a rebel and a saboteur who incites people to vandalism," while others embrace the association and say that similarly to the movie character they have endured marginalization and humiliation, being pushed to the limits of coping. Many participants are resentful of protesters damaging personal and public property and stealing from local businesses. A man in Basra laments the damage done, saying: "We are demanding our rights, but meanwhile, we have destroyed a whole city." Some note that Iraqis suffer more every day for the loss of public property than the government does.

These participants also worry about further violent crackdowns by the government. They see the loss of life and kidnappings that have already occurred, and worry that the situation will continue to get worse if the protests continue. A high level security official in Baghdad is sure that "the political parties are against the protests and they will suppress them by force." Some worry that violence by the government will feed the protesters' anger and vice versa in a never-ending spiral.

**Disruptions to everyday life.** Many participants who are more critical of the protests note strong concerns about disruptions to their daily life. These participants complain that the protests prevent them from working, studying, or leaving their homes and note the economic strain caused by the protesters. Several note they hinder access to critical services such as hospitals. One woman in Baghdad describes being stopped on the highway by protesters who began to hit her car and frighten her daughter. Some participants say (including both men and women) that they

have been unable to work for months, or are afraid to leave their homes, particularly at night. Several especially in Baghdad note that protests are also directly leading to higher prices, as road blockages are making it harder for markets to get supplies.

Disruptions to education are particularly frustrating for many participants. They criticize the protesters for closing schools. Many say that closing schools hurts the people more than the government, and they should be focusing on more high-value economic targets—like ports and highways to oil fields—instead. However, some cynically say that the school closures are not a great loss since the quality of education is poor, or that education means little since no jobs are waiting after graduation. A woman in Nasiriyah says, "Students are not able to go to schools, but what kind of education are our students getting? They are reaching intermediate schools, yet they don't know how to spell words."

**No signs of bringing change.** For some participants, the protests are simply not achieving anything, with little evidence that they ever will bring about a significant change in their lives. This raises doubts about whether the loss of life is worth the protesting. As a woman in Nasiriyah says, "We sacrificed a lot, yet we haven't achieved anything, then for what are they protesting now?" Some of these participants may cheer Mahdi's resignation, but do not see any additional achievements coming and believe that the protesters ought to "go home and let the government do its job." For these participants, the protests' lack of coherent leadership means they are set up to fail. A woman in Baghdad asks, "If there are no leaders, who should the government negotiate with then?" Additionally, an absence of leadership means that the protesters are free to commit acts of violence and vandalism without anyone to hold accountable.

This sense of endless protesting without change is amplified by a feeling that the protesters' demands are not clear and are changing. The demands that are clear—creating jobs, fighting corruption, eliminating parties, and amending the constitution—are seen by anti-protest participants as unrealistic, or they worry it could take years. A woman from Baghdad says, "There are a lot of solutions. For example, in the beginning the government announced opening job vacancies in its ministries as to hire people in them, yet the protesters did not accept that and they kept on protesting. Then the government announced providing salaries to the unemployed but that did not work with the protesters either."

Change, to some participants, seems an unattainable goal. Ultimately, even among participants supportive of the protests, questions arise about whether the protests will bring any real change, and they wonder whether the goal to push for an overhaul of the political system is worth the effort, destruction, and loss of life for both protesters and security forces. They assume that little will actually change and the government and political parties will outlast the protests.

**Immorality and immodesty.** Some participants express concerns about the moral irresponsibility of the protests. They believe that some are protesting as an excuse to drink and party, or that some women among the demonstrators may use the protests as an outlet to dance or dress immodestly. Others note that the tents set up are only there to give the homeless a place to sleep, and suggest they are incentivized to keep the protests going for as long as possible. As one Baghdad woman puts it, "They think that they are allowed to do whatever they want just because they are protesters, even if they are drunk."

In a similar vein, some participants find it inappropriate or disrespectful that protesters are dancing and having a good time when there has already been so much death and violence. A woman in Nasiriyah says, "While families of martyrs are mourning and crying, the protesters are singing and dancing." While perceptions of Western influence on protester behavior is not widespread, it does demonstrate this existing tension between conservative and progressive views in Iraqi society.

**The Mahdi government deserved more time.** A few do feel like these protests were premature. They say that Iraqis were just given a chance to elect their leaders less than two years ago and that the government needed more time. They feel that Mahdi, a former economist, was the kind of technocrat that protesters now say they are looking for. Others in northern and western Iraq feel that Mahdi was performing well, working for all components, while the Kurds in particular credit him for solving the long-standing budget crisis. One government official in Anbar says, "The prime minister does not own a magical wand that makes everything perfect immediately... The protesters should have given some time to the government to prove itself."

## Government Response Seen as Meager and Violent

Participants are highly dissatisfied with how the government has responded to public demonstrations. They feel as though the government's response can be summarized by inaction, half-measures, and in some cases, unprovoked brutal violence. Many participants also accuse the government of disparaging the protesters to ruin their reputation and weaken overall support for the protests. A man from Baghdad says, "The government ignored the protests in the beginning, then it accused them of being traitors. By referring to them as the jokers and sons of the U.S. Embassy, it also accused them of taking financial support from other countries."

Beyond inaction, there is strong consensus that the government is at least partially responsible for cracking down on protesters with violence. An anti-protest man from Basra says, "The government has killed more than 750 Iraqis so far, do you accept such an act? What do you expect the protesters to do? What do you want them to do? The protesters announced their demands, yet the government hasn't responded to them."

Unlike the strong negative views toward government, when it comes to security forces, more participants largely view the army and federal police positively and note that they do not use weapons and often provide assistance to protesters. A man in Diyala says, "The security forces handled the protests in a good way but the problem lies in their leaders." Participants differentiate between the army, the counter-terrorism services, and federal police, on one hand, who they feel mostly help and protect the protesters, and Iran, party-backed militias, and the riot police, on the other hand, seen as killing innocent protesters in Baghdad and the southern provinces. A man in Baghdad commented that, "they have done worse than ISIS," comparing the actions of the pro-Iran forces with those of the Islamic State to emphasize the perceived level of violence.

Some participants who do accuse security forces of committing violence say they were just following orders, pointing the finger more squarely at leadership decisions. A Basra woman says, "The government does not consider protesting a legitimate right; therefore, it ordered the security forces to use violence with the protesters. I assure you that those security forces were obliged to join the military because they are in need of money, therefore, they have to obey the orders." A number of the participants believe that covert "third party" security forces are at work here, and that it is really Iranian or political party militias that are being allowed to commit violence with government acquiescence.

Participants share stories of how some individuals belonging to armed groups have been found with Iranian identification cards, or that the Prime Minister has given them Iraqi police uniforms to look more legitimate and let them act as proxies for the government. A woman in Diyala lays out her suspicions explicitly, saying "I believe that the government cooperated with the third party to kill the protesters." Although most participants feel that the Iraqi national army and federal police are attempting to protect and support protesters, some participants denounce blurred

boundaries between some armed groups affiliated to political parties and the security forces, suggesting that the two sides coordinated their repressive tactics, including by allowing non-state actors to take a leading role in the violent crackdown against protesters.

The violence and lack of responsive action causes many to feel that the government is no longer a viable partner for dialogue. A man from Diyala says, "The government proved it is not patriotic, and the protests revealed its true colors. For example, members of parliament condemned the attack against [General] Soleimani, while they did not have the guts to condemn the killing of the protesters, although each parliament member represents 100,000 Iraqi voices."

**Government Concessions Viewed as Too Little Too Late.** The strongly negative views toward the government reaction to the protests curb any initial steps the government took to appease protesters. Participants note some concessions the protesters have extracted from the government, but largely feel changes have only been announced or passed, while implementation is lagging or will never actually be fulfilled. As one participant says, "It is just ink on paper." For example, protesters who see the removal of Prime Minister Mahdi as the most significant achievement are quick to note he still remained in office at the time the research was conducted. Some are aware of the new election law passed in December 2019 and feel that it is mostly positive, but many others do not believe the bill will be implemented or will end up not working as intended. They like district-level constituencies, lowering the age for running for office, and new rules to make it easier for independent candidates to participate in elections, but there is little discussion or awareness of how some of the more complicated components of the bill would be implemented.

Several note what seem to be more substantial efforts to address protester demands, such as hiring university lecturers or providing unemployment benefits. Yet even these tend to be met with criticism, with some saying benefits are distributed entirely through nepotism or patronage networks, or that the wages are too low. A woman in Erbil says, "People got employed… but the question is how are they going to refill those positions? We have a lot of unemployed university graduates who deserve to get those positions, but I think that at the end people who refill these positions will be those who are picked by the tribes or political parties."

In the end, many participants see the government as only trying to buy time until the protests die down or placate their demands to weaken their resolve. An interviewee member of the security forces says, "But in fact, all what is happening is pressuring the government without any results, and the government is just trying to cool the protesters down and are bluffing them where it is pretending to be meeting their demands but actually it isn't."

## Cataloguing Protester Demands: The Urgent and The Complicated

A majority of participants believe the protests should continue, with many saying they should only come to an end "when all of the demands are met." Yet, enumerating those demands is no easy task, made more difficult by a lack of clear leaders to state and negotiate demands. In this research alone, demands range from the specific (early elections) to general social economic improvement (more jobs) to the more intangible (returning dignity).

Indeed, some of the demands enumerated in this research are more a compilation of values or long-term objectives that are likely either too ambiguous or too colossal for any Iraqi government—whether it be the current government or a new one—to fully implement. A Diyala man says, "The people have reached a level where they no longer can keep quiet about their lost rights, therefore, they are protesting in order to bring back their rights and achieve a decent life that is the basis of every country." Iraqis certainly

deserve more dignity, but this is something that is not easily defined or actionable.

Demands are also both urgent and complicated. With protesters in the streets injured daily and violence occurring regularly, protesters are anxious to see more change occur immediately. However, protests are also demanding some changes that any government would be challenged to implement quickly. One good example of this pull between urgency and complexity is the new election law's stipulation for new electoral districts, which would likely require a new census, something Iraq officials have not been able to complete since 1997, and even then it excluded the KRI.

Yet, a list of tangible demands does emerge from this research. These calls for action help give some sense of what steps could reduce tension and move beyond the current protests. In this section, we catalogue the most common demands, before providing some recommendations to produce a path forward for protesters, the government of Iraq, and the international community.

**New leadership and planning for new elections.** First, there is little evidence in this research that would appease these protesters. These participants do provide some sense of the type of prime minister they want. They like the idea of someone highly educated with a proven record of being independent from political parties and foreign countries. Some say a professor or a trusted judge could fit the profile. A smaller group thinks it needs to be someone in the military until new elections could be held as only they would be strong enough to fend off Iranian or other foreign influence, and political parties.

**Desire for a better, fair electoral system.** Participants largely believe that new elections need to be called, and done so soon, to give the people a chance to pick their new leaders. While participants desire early elections within six months, they also want to see wholesale changes to an electoral system perceived to be dominated by self-interested political parties and leaders. Participants want to diminish the influence of political parties and desire more independent candidates, something several participants note would happen with the new election law. While some have heard that new electoral districts will be created, there is no discussion about gerrymandering risks with drawing new electoral district boundaries or the implementation of women's quotas.

Some worry that another election without first making fundamental changes to the electoral system would only help bring a similar leader and legitimacy to the system that protesters want to remove. A man from Diyala says, "If a new prime minister was appointed after the elections and appeared to be the same as the previous ones, I think that new protests will arise and they will be more aggressive than the current ones." Ultimately, participants need more reassurance that elections will be fair. Many want the United Nations to supervise the next elections, and international organizations to support the process.

**Transparency and fair distribution of the country's wealth.** While new leaders that fit protesters' interest and a new governing system would fulfill a large part of protesters' demands, many of these participants also say there needs to be new rules in place to reduce corruption and for average Iraqis to benefit from the country's wealth. Among eight potential government reforms, these participants are most likely to say that a distribution of oil wealth based on population size is most important.

Participants hold passionate views about the distribution of oil wealth, but views often clash. While many Basra participants feel they do not get their fair share, participants in Erbil say the recent agreement on oil revenue to the North is a key part of their acceptance of any government in Baghdad.

**Justice for the violence against protesters.** Finally, these participants make clear that gaining justice for those murdered by security forces is now integrated with the rest of their demands. This suggests that ongoing protests and additional violence may only make it harder to bring the protests to an end.

Photo credit: Aeham Faris, Al Tahrir Square, Baghdad 2019 © NDI

# A Path Forward

Drawing on the key findings of this qualitative research, NDI is pleased to present a few strategic and policy options for the protesters, Iraqi political leadership and government, and the international community, in the hope that they will contribute to an inclusive evidence-based dialogue to identify shared areas of compromise.

**Protesters.** While most participants support the protests, many question the tactics and are unsure what the specific demands of the protests are.

**Develop a Protesters' Code of Conduct.** To counter some of the negative attitudes Iraqis have toward the protests' tactics, protesters could post online and in protest areas a "Code of Conduct" that participants can acknowledge in some form, realizing most would not want to sign their own name. The code of conduct could include items like a commitment to peacefully protest, allowing emergency vehicles to proceed through blocked areas, respect for women, etc.

**Develop the Petition for Change.** The petition could codify the protesters' main demands and allow protesters (and the public) to sign or acknowledge the main demands of the protests, which will bring greater awareness of those demands. If needed, protester committees could work with professors or judges to codify a short list of demands that are considered actionable. Protesters could place a long list of demands online to crowdsource opinions on which are most important to include in a final shorter list.

**Iraqi political leadership and government.** Participants want leaders who are decisive and free from foreign or partisan interests to guide the country forward. Academics, technocrats, and retired judges are the most favorably looked upon. Fast-acting committees or boards of experts can help provide policy roadmaps to the next government to address citizens' concerns. The government, including the Prime Minister and ministries, parliament, and political parties need to regain the trust of the people by showing urgency and taking actions that address the public's concerns.

**Establish a resolution committee.** An independent committee that looks into addressing and providing public recommendations to the government on how to address the most urgent and systemic issues, such as militias, corruption, jobs, etc.

**Establish an independent mediation board.** This mediating board would act as a conduit between the protesters and the government, allowing the protesters to continue being viewed as an independent movement not influenced by the government, political parties, or foreign entities.

**Launch a '2030' committee.** An independent committee composed of academics, retired judges, and experts from all components can design a long-term plan that leads to a 2030 vision of Iraq. The committee needs to be transparent, including in how it is formed, and have specific milestones that occur at frequent and regular times.

**Conduct an independent investigation of the incidents related to protests.** Establishing an independent body to investigate the circumstances in which more than 500 Iraqis have been killed since October 2019, thousands have been wounded, and many kidnapped or threatened—largely among the protesters—would demonstrate the government's commitment to the rule of law, truth, and accountability.

**Elevate army and police; place armed groups under the control of the government or dismantle them.** The government should regain full control of the response to protests, by excluding any non-state actors from keeping public order or engaging in any confrontation with protesters. Army and federal police, which retain high levels of public trust, should lead security for protesters, while the government needs a new plan to demilitarize parties and militias. The government should also set out a clear policy of engagement that highlights what it will do to protect protestors and property, and what measures will be taken for specific situations (i.e. if security forces are attacked or a government building burned).

**New Prime Minister needs to show independence.** There is broad demand to have a prime minister who is strong and not influenced by the interest of political parties or other countries. The new PM needs to begin to demonstrate this independence particularly when his decisions are on the side of the public versus the political parties.

**Release a youth engagement plan.** Develop a plan to directly engage Iraqi youth. The plan should be designed with a focus on youth employment that provides private sector incentives to employ more Iraqi youth, as well as incentives for young entrepreneurs. The plan should also include measures to improve the quality and access to grade school and university education that will help train Iraqi youth for jobs in the private sector.

**Political parties must begin reforming themselves.** Political parties are viewed with heavy disdain for their perceived self-interested actions. Most participants want leaders that are not affiliated with any political party. To maintain relevance on Iraq's political scene, parties need to demonstrate that they "care about the people" and are willing to work on the people's behalf. This can include retiring unpopular leaders, holding internal primaries to identify candidates for the next elections, drafting election platforms that respond to protest demands, publicly disbanding militias and economic committees, being more transparent about campaign finance, and in-

stilling a culture of ethical behavior in the party and public offices.

**Comprehensive public consultation on amending the Constitution.** Participants want deep reforms to the political system, beyond the amendments to the election law, including revisiting the quota system, criteria for oil revenue distribution, the number of MPs, and direct election of the country's president to allow that leader to have more power and be less influenced by political parties and other countries. A referendum on the issues can demonstrate the government is serious about systemic change and allowing the people to decide.

**Finalize and publish the election law**. The Council of Representatives has to finalize and publish the new election law. Consult with the Ministry of Planning, independent and external experts, and build political buy-in to impartially draw new election districts, set the number of MPs, women's quotas, and a realistic timeline for early parliamentary elections.

**Build election credibility.** Participants have very little faith that the current government can organize fair elections. They do see the new election law as a step in the right direction and want to make sure the election process is free and fair, that independent candidates have a strong chance of success. International organizations should intensify their efforts to build the capacity of the new election commission and consolidate the capability of independent citizen observation groups to effectively monitor the entire electoral process.

**Create the conditions for a level playing field for independent candidates.** Participants want to see more independent candidates for parliament, however running as an independent candidate against the resources of established political parties can be quite challenging. A clear and straightforward process to register candidacies, fair campaign finance rules, and campaign training—especially for women and young candidates—would contribute to more inclusive election participation, a premise for fair political representation.

**International community.** Mistrust of foreign countries is extremely high; therefore, foreign initiatives will be met with skepticism. Yet, Iraqis are looking for foreign countries to condemn violence and show support for protesters, while there is openness to international organizations playing a role in supporting elections, fighting corruption, and providing aid.

**Support a free and fair electoral process.** Many participants think an external organization is needed to create change, and show openness for the UN as a neutral actor. The UN and international organizations should support creating a free and fair electoral process.

**Call for an end to violence against protesters and support democratic resilience.** Conspiracy theories against foreigners are rampant, but clear support for human rights and democratic values could build additional goodwill and could help clarify the contrast with Iran. Keep assistance and calls of support public to avoid a sense of hidden meddling. Support programs that aim to strengthen civic education and develop critical thinking so that activists and the public can articulate their demands more effectively and increase their resilience against anti-democratic rhetoric; encourage social cohesion initiatives to prevent Iraq sliding back into sectarianism; and enable citizen groups and civil society organizations to monitor the performance of the next government and hold officials accountable.


Photo credit: Aeham Faris, Al Tahrir Square, Baghdad 2019 © NDI

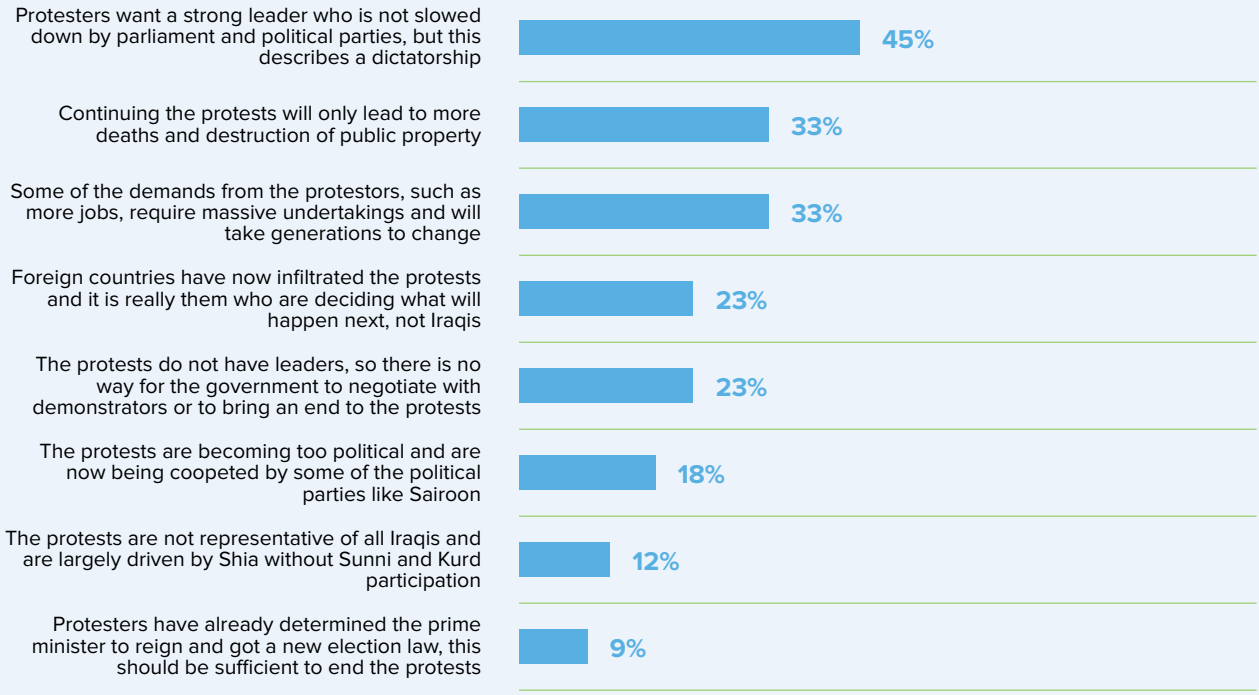
# Appendix A: Participants Specifications

| Date | Location | Urban/ Rural | Gender | Age | Ethno Religion | Education | View about Protests |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 01/02/20 | Erbil | Urban | Female | 25-35 | Kurd | Diploma/ University | pro-protest |
| 01/02/20 | Erbil | Rural | Male | 30-45 | Kurd | Intermediate/ Secondary | pro-protest |
| 30/01/20 | Diyala | Rural | Female | 35-50 | Sunni | Primary/ Intermediate | pro-protest |
| 30/01/20 | Diyala | Urban | Male | 20-35 | Sunni | Secondary/ Diploma | pro-protest |
| 27/01/20 | Baghdad | Urban | Female | 25-40 | Sunni | Secondary/ Diploma | anti-protest |
| 27/01/20 | Baghdad | Urban | Male | 18-25 | Shia | Diploma/ University | pro-protest |
| 25/01/20 | Nassiriya | Urban | Female | 25-35 | Shia | Intermediate/ Secondary | pro-protest |
| 25/01/20 | Nassiriya | Urban | Male | 35-50 | Shia | Primary/ Intermediate | pro-protest |
| 25/01/20 | Basra | Urban | Female | 30-45 | Shia | Diploma/ University | pro-protest |
| 25/01/20 | Basra | Rural | Male | 45-65 | Shia | Intermediate/ Secondary | anti-protest |

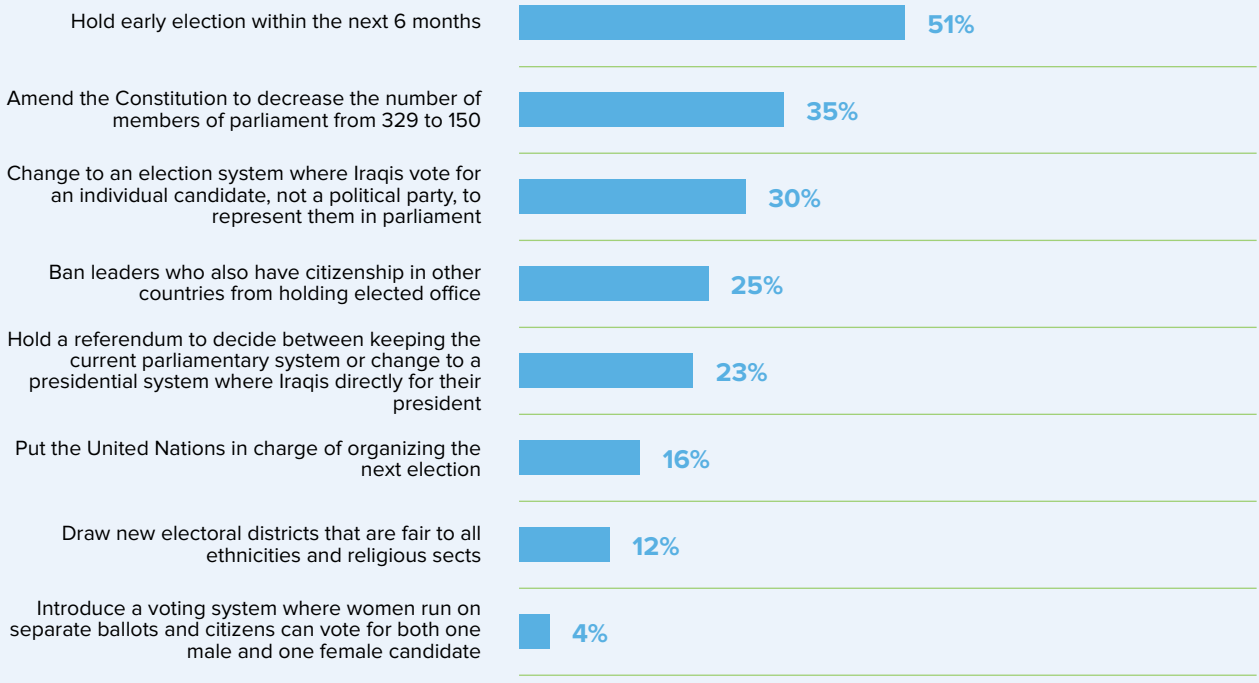
Photo credit: Muataz Qussay, Anbar 2018 © NDI

# Appendix B: Focus group discussions scoresheets results

## Focus Groups Scoresheet: Views on Protests




## Focus Groups Scoresheet: Views on Elections



# Focus Groups Scoresheet: Views on Governance