

# Policy Brief: Public Perception Survey on Local Safety and Security in Iraq

April 2021



In January 2021, UNDP conducted a survey on public perceptions of safety and security in Iraq. The survey is intended to inform the Government of Iraq's Security Sector Reform Programme and is a follow-up from surveys undertaken in 2018 and 2016 to allow for comparison and assessment of changes on the ground. The 2021 survey was undertaken against a background of the COVID-19 health pandemic, the continuation of popular protest movements across Iraq, and ongoing counter insurgency operations against the Islamic State in the Levant. Despite these challenges, the survey was administered to a random sample of 1,200 respondents that was representative of community members across six governorates (Anbar, Baghdad, Basra, Karbala, Ninewa and Salah al-Din)<sup>1</sup>. The survey was structured around ten key questions, which sought to ascertain public perceptions of safety and security in the six governorates and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as popular protests, on feelings of security.

## Highlights

- Strong majority (90%) across the country felt safe in 2021.
- Main factors contributing to feelings of safety include people living peacefully, strong civilian/local police services, and no presence of ISIL.
- Respondents want the government to prioritize improving local police services, supporting community security interventions at the local level, and improving access to security and justice services for the local population.
- Local police are the most trusted security service provider in Anbar, Karbala, Salah al-Din, and Ninewa, whilst the ISF are the most trusted provider in Basra.
- Strong majority agree that the government should control and regulate all firearms and that immediate action to remove all armed manifestations in public spaces is a priority.

1 Of the 1,200 respondents in the 2021 survey, 70% (835) were male and 30% (365) were female. The 2018 survey was administered to 1,200 respondents (200 from each governorate) and covered the same six governorates. Of the 1,200 respondents in 2018, 59% (703) were male and 41% (497) were female. The 2016 survey was administered to 1,200 respondents but Diyala and Erbil were included instead of Ninewa and Basra. In 2016, 65% (784) respondents were male and 35% (416) were female.

# Key Findings

## General Perception of Safety and Security

- A strong majority (90%) across the country felt safe in 2021, compared to 89% in 2018 and 48% in 2016.
- Feelings of safety:
  - increased in Anbar (95% in 2018 to 99% in 2021), Salah al-Din (91% in 2018 to 100% in 2021) and Basra (81% in 2018 to 99% in 2021);
  - decreased in Baghdad (72% in 2018 to 63% in 2021), Karbala (98% in 2018 to 83% in 2021) and Ninewa (98% in 2018 to 95% in 2021).
- In 2021, the main factors contributing to feelings of safety were people living peacefully (32%), strong civilian/local police services (17%), and no presence of ISIL (14%).
  - These main factors were the same in 2018 and similar in 2016, with the exception of the fact that feelings of security were attributed to the strong presence of security forces, rather than local police services.
- In 2021, the main reasons people felt unsafe in their locality were because of the presence of armed groups (35%), absence of community cohesion (26%), and spread of armed factions and militias, gangs and tribal conflicts (14%).
- In 2021, 45% of respondents felt that having a safe and secure locality would increase their sense of well-being and quality of life to a very high degree, which is the same as in 2018 (45%), and compared to just 24% in 2016. In 2021, the highest impact was noted in Karbala (94% very high extent), while the lowest impact was noted in Ninewa (67% moderately).



## Improving Safety and Security at the Local Level

- In 2021, respondents want the government to prioritize the following areas to strengthen safety and security in their locality:
  - Improving local police services (38%), especially in Karbala (82%)
  - Supporting community security interventions at the local level (26%), especially in Ninewa (80%)
  - Improving access to security and justice services for the local population (17%)
- The same priority areas were identified in 2018 and similar areas in 2016, except that fighting ISIL away from the locality was also a top priority.
- There are differing opinions across governorates about what community members can do to improve security in their localities. Prominent responses include supporting government efforts to reform the security and justice sector (32%), advocating for social cohesion/conflict prevention at local level (29%), supporting local police to increase local safety and security (23%). The same contributions were identified in 2018.

## Public Perception of Security Service Providers

- Similar to 2018, in 2021, the Local Police were the most trusted security service provider in Anbar (73%), Karbala (94%), Salah al-Din (55%), and Ninewa (85%).
- The Iraqi Security Forces were the most trusted provider in Basra (60%), while in Baghdad, the highest percentage of respondents (33%) trusted no one.
- Similar to in 2018, there is a strong sentiment that public trust in security sector service providers can be increased through the eradication of corruption in the sector (38%), the provision of more training on democratic governance and accountability (20%), and by ensuring that selections in the sector are made strictly on a merit basis (17%).

# Key Findings

## Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

- The COVID-19 health pandemic did not negatively impact the feelings of security of the majority (85%) of respondents and their families, with the exception of Ninewa where 75% of respondents were negatively impacted.
- The highest percentage of respondents were impacted by non-criminal incidents due to COVID-19.
  - In Salah al-Din (40%) and Ninewa (56%), the highest percentage of respondents were impacted by non-criminal incidents.
  - In Basra (67%) and Salah al-Din (40%) the highest percentage of respondents (51%), were impacted because a family member or friend was held in remand custody.
  - In Karbala, the highest percentage of respondents (44%) were impacted by criminal incidents.
  - Respondents in Anbar and Baghdad reported that their security was not negatively impacted by COVID-19.
- The majority of respondents were satisfied with services received in relation to non-criminal incidents.
- The majority of respondents (76%) did not seek services from the courts/justice sector during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - In Anbar (46%), Baghdad (66%), Salah al-Din (61%) and Ninewa (52%), the highest percentage of respondents sought court/justice sector services for birth/marriage registration cases.
  - In Basra (50%) and Karbala (42%), the highest percentage of respondents sought court/justice sector services in relation to commercial cases.



## Firearms control

- In 2021, across all governorates, 95% of respondents agree that the government should control and regulate all firearms and that immediate action to remove all armed manifestations in public spaces is a priority, with the main reasons as to why being to:
  - impose law and security (27%)
  - eliminate illegal use of firearms as it constitutes a danger to society (15%)
  - eliminate the spread of militias and armed groups (11%).
- In Baghdad, the highest percentage of respondents disagreed (26%) that the government should control firearms, with the primary reason for disagreement being to prevent the deterioration of the current security situation.
- In 2021, 70% of respondents want their locality to be free from firearms, compared to 75% in 2018.
- In 2021, respondents were asked in what way can local communities contribute to their locality being free from firearms. The top responses were:
  - Spreading awareness among members of society (19%)
  - Reporting any manifestations of armament (18%)
  - Cooperating with security services (15%)

## Impact of popular protests

- The majority of respondents (73%) reported that their locality was not affected by the recent wave of popular protests.
- According to respondents, Basra (100%) and Karbala (63%) were the most affected localities, while Salah al-Din and Ninewa were not affected.
- Most localities affected by popular protests reported a negative impact on the service delivery of Local Police.
  - The majority of respondents in Anbar (100%), Baghdad (100%), Karbala (50%), and Basra (55%) reported that Local Police service delivery was negatively affected (i.e. poor, somewhat poor or very poor) as a result of the recent wave of popular protests.
  - Service delivery was reportedly the poorest in Basra.
- Most respondents (42%) reported that service delivery by courts/justice sector was not impacted by the recent wave of popular protests.
  - In Karbala, 67% of respondents reported no impact on the courts/justice sector, while 33% reported that service delivery by the courts/justice sector was negatively affected (i.e. poor, somewhat poor or very poor) as a result of the recent wave of popular protests.
  - In Basra, most respondents (48%) said that they did not know the impact of the recent wave of popular protests on the courts/justice sector, while 26% reported no impact at all and 25% reported negative effects.