

The Politics of Reconstructing Iraq

- **Iraq History**
- **Session 5**
- **Course Number: 11.948**
- **Department of Urban Studies and Planning**
- **MIT**

Iraq History

First Civilization

Mesopotamia

- ❑ The name 'Mesopotamia' comes from Greek, and means 'between rivers': the land lying between the rivers Euphrates and Tigris in what is Iraq today.
- ❑ This region was the birthplace of the first civilizations, and among the leading regions in the world for about 3,000 years.
- ❑ A wider definition of Mesopotamia is the land that lies between the Zagros and Anti-Taurus mountains in the northern end, and the Arabian plateau and Persian Gulf to the south, corresponding to modern Iraq, eastern Syria and southeastern Turkey.

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Different Civilizations

- ❑ It was the two rivers that became the basis upon which the wealth of the region was based.
- ❑ Through relatively easy irrigation the agriculture could yield heavy crops. There were fish in the rivers, the area had a diversified agriculture and wildfowl was available out near the coast.
- ❑ There was never a regular supply of water in Mesopotamia, and therefore irrigation was central to controlling the crops in southern Mesopotamia.
- ❑ In northern Mesopotamia, agriculture proved successful at an earlier date, dating back to 10th millennium BCE.

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Babylonia

- ❑ Ancient kingdom in Mesopotamia, lasting from approximately 18th century till the 6th century.
- ❑ The Babylonian society was both an urban society and an agricultural one.
- ❑ The economy rested upon agriculture, but governance, industries and fine arts were performed in the cities.
- ❑ In the entire kingdom there were no more than about 10-15 cities with 10,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. Apart from that, people belonged to villages and hamlets.
- ❑ The Babylonian heartland was between the rivers of Euphrates and Tigris, but at its largest the kingdom extended to the entire populated Middle East.

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Assyria

- ❑ Ancient country in the Middle East, with centre in modern Iraq along the Tigris river. At its height in the 9th century BCE, Assyria covered areas of also modern eastern Turkey, Syria, .. Egypt.

Iraq

Physical Features



Iraq History

- ❑ **637: Muslim Arabs defeat the Sassanids, and Mesopotamia was overtaken after only one year.**
- ❑ **680: Battle at Karbala, where the Shi'i- leader Husayn was killed when claiming the leading position in the Caliphate. The battle was not military important, but had decisive political and religious importance, as this became the final schism between Sunnis and Shi'is.**
- ❑ **750: Abbasids overthrow the ruling Caliphate family, the Ummawiys.
762: A new capital for the Caliphate is founded, placed on the river Tigris, about 15 km north of Ctesiphon. The new city is called Baghdad, and grows quickly into a beautiful city.**
- ❑ **1533-34: Iraq is conquered by the Ottoman Empire. The peace this brought, represented a clear improvement to Iraqi economy, primarily in the agricultural sector.**
- ❑ **17th century: Increase of local power. British, Dutch and Portuguese interests get a foothold in trade in the region.**

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- ❑ **1914: As a part of World War 1, British forces invade southern Iraq.**
- ❑ **1917: British occupation of Baghdad begins.**
- ❑ **1920: Arabs of southern Iraq starts military actions towards the British, who did not fulfill their promises to leave the area to the locals after the Turks were defeated. The British responded military in the beginning, but soon realized that it would be impossible to control the area.**
- ❑ **1921: Prince Faisal of Hijaz (now: southwestern [Saudi Arabia](#)) wins a popular election, with 96% of the ballots, and is declared king of Iraq August 23.**
- ❑ **The new state did not get an easy birth, as the Shi'is in the south and the [Kurds](#) in the north fought for their independence. And outer forces, like Arabia in the south and Turkey in the north, tried to destabilize Iraq, and the cooperated with the Kurds to take control over the Mawsil area in the north. British forces stayed in the country, much because of a request from king Faisal.**

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- ❑ **1922 *October 10***: Alliance with Britain is signed.
- ❑ **1925**: Elections for a parliament is held. Concessions to search for oil are given to international companies.
- ❑ **1930**: A treaty declares that Iraq shall become independent from 1932.
- ❑ **1931**: Concessions in the north for oil winning is given to an international company. The Iraqi government is to receive fixed yearly royalties.
- ❑ **1932 *October 3***: Iraq is declared independent kingdom with king Faisal in power. Iraq is admitted to the League of Nations.
- ❑ **1933**: Faisal dies. His son, Ghazi, succeeds him.
1936: Pan-Arab attempts from Iraq, involving suggestions to merge Arab states.
- ❑ **1939**: King Ghazi dies.

Iraq History

- ❑ **1958 February 12:** Federation between [Jordan](#) and Iraq, called Arab Union of Jordan and Iraq, with a common premier minister.
- ❑ **1958 July 14:** Military coup, led by the general Karim Kassem, where the king, the crown prince and the prime minister were killed.
- ❑ **July 15:** A new government is proclaimed, and the Arab Union with Jordan is declared dissolved, and Iraq is to work for close relations with the United Arab Republic, which was established by Egypt and Syria earlier this year. Kassem acts to keep up Western confidence by not interfering with the oil production.
- ❑ **1959:** Iraq withdraws from the Baghdad Pact.
- ❑ **1960:** Iraq makes claims on [Kuwait](#), which receives its independence this year.
- ❑ **1963 February 8:** Kassem is overthrown by a group of officers, mainly from the [Ba'th Party](#). Abdul Salam Arif becomes the new president.
- ❑ **1966 April 13:** President Arif dies, and is followed by his brother Abdul Rahman Arif.
- ❑ **1968 July 17:** Arif is overthrown, and Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr becomes the new president. Iraq follows a politics of orientation away from the West, with improved relations with the Soviet Union.
- ❑ **1970:** After years of unrest, the Iraqi governments agrees to form an autonomous Kurdish region, and [Kurds](#) are let into the cabinet.
- ❑ **1972:** Nationalization of the oil industry starts.
- ❑ **1974 March:** Fights between government forces and Kurdish groups. The Kurds received aid from Iran. Kurdish cities like Zakho and Qalaat Diza are razed to the ground, and hundreds of thousands of Kurds flee the cities.
- ❑ **1975:** Settlement of border disputes with Iran, makes Iran stop aid to the Kurds, and the revolt is crushed.
- ❑ **1979 June:** President Bakr is stripped of all positions and put in house arrest. [Saddam Hussayn](#) becomes new president.

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- **1980 *September 17***: The agreement on Iraqi/Iranian borders from 1975 is declared null and void by Saddam, who claims the whole Shatt el-Arab, a small, but important and rich landscape.
September 22: Iraq invades Iran, and gets quickly control over Iranian land.

- **1990 *August 2***: Invasion and occupation of Kuwait. UN demands a withdrawal by January 15, 1991.
2003— ***March 20***: USA and Britain starts the war against Iraq (see article on US/British-Iraq War)

Iraq Geo-Ethnic and Ethno-Religious Structure

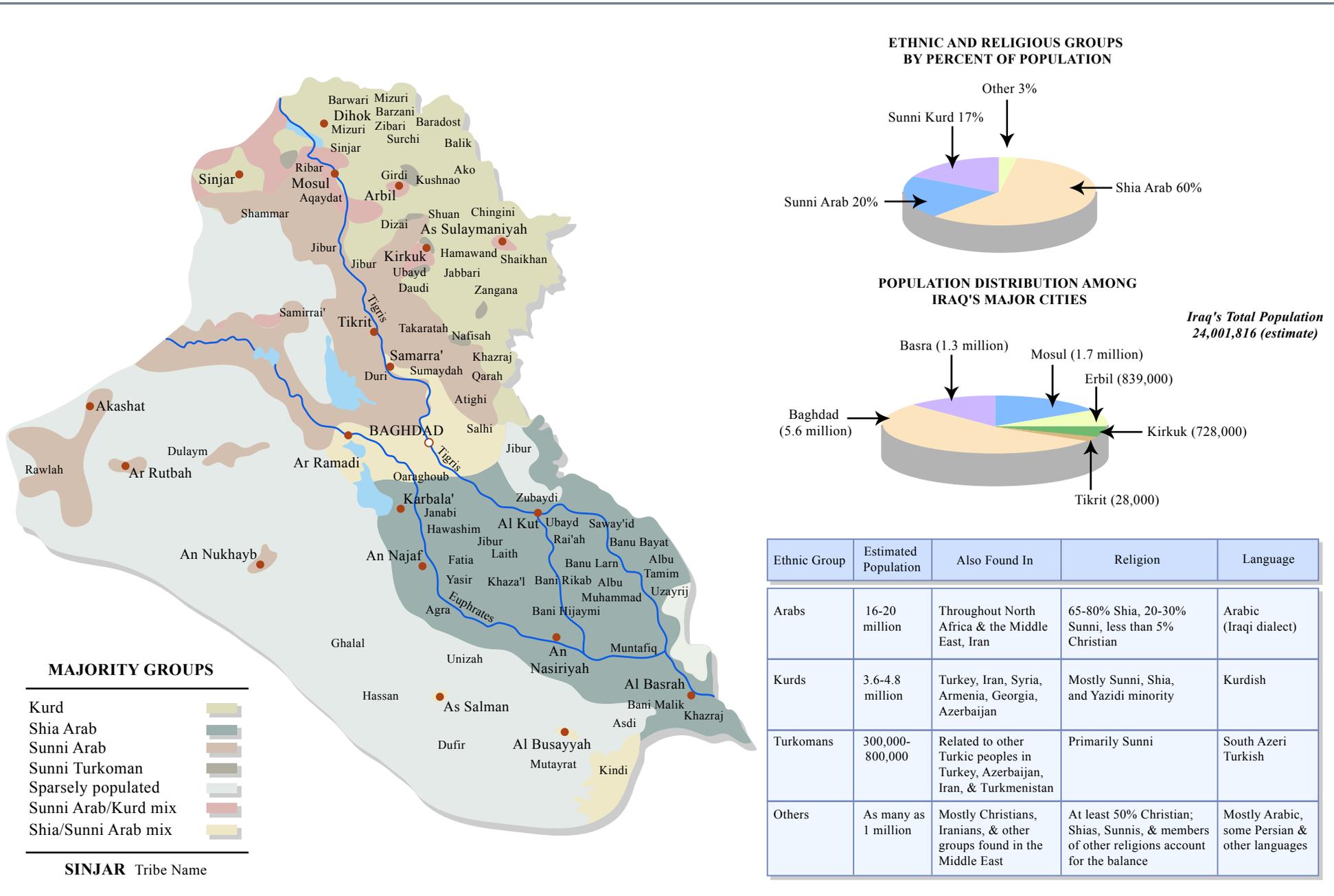


Figure by MIT OCW.

Leading Parties in Iraq

Results of the Iraqi Election, January 2004

	Party		Votes	%	Seats
1	The United Iraqi Alliance	Shiite alliance backed by Shiite clergy	4,075,295	48	140
2	The Kurdistan Alliance	Coalition of two main Kurdish parties	2,175,551	26	75
3	The Iraqi List	Headed by interim prime Minister Ayad Allawi	1,168,943	14	40
4	Iraqis	headed by interim Iraqi President Ghazi al-Yawer	150,680		5
5	The Turkomen Iraqi Front	represents the countries ethnic Turks	93,480		3
6	National Independent Elites and Cadres Party		69,938		3
7	The Communist Party		69,920		2
8	The Islamic Kurdish Society		60,592		2
9	The Islamic Labor Movement in Iraq		43,205		2
10	The National Democratic Alliance		36,795		1
11	National Rafidain List	Assyrian Christians	36,255		1
12	The Reconciliation and Liberation Entity		30,796		1
13	Iraqi Islamic Party	main Sunni group headed by Mohsen Abdel-Hamid	21,342		
14	Assembly of Independent Democrats	headed by Sunni elder statesman Adnan Pachachi	12,728		
15	National Democratic Party	headed by Naseer Kamel al-Chaderchi, Sunni lawyer and member of the former Iraqi Governing Council	1,603		
	Others		503,448		
	Total votes		8,550,571		275

Iraq History

Sanction Times

A government-organized baby-funeral procession in Baghdad, 1998.
[Faleh Kheiber/Reuters]

[Image removed for copyright purposes.]

Iraq

Ethno-religious

□ **The Iraqi Arabs**

- The Iraqi Arabs share most of the values and practices of other Arabs, which is to say that their life is greatly dominated by religion, but is also affected by the same secular pressures and benefits that affect the other oil-producing Arab countries. Most Iraqi Arabs were traditionally farmers, but these days an Iraqi is as likely to be a city-dweller. The proud Bedouin nomads, with their unsurpassed knowledge of the desert, have been lured away from their difficult traditional life by government policy and by the opportunity of more lucrative employment. There are very few Bedouins left in the country.

□ **The Ma'dan**

- There is a distinct sub-group of Iraqi Arabs, called the Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs, who for the last 5000 years have inhabited the marshy area just above the point at which the Tigris and Euphrates flow together. The people live on islands and travel using ancient dugout canoes. Many of their villages are actually man-made floating islands. This area is truly marshland, and during high water times much of the land is submerged.
- The Ma'dan have a very different life from other Iraqis. They do very little farming, depending instead on fishing and the raising of water buffalo. Their hut houses, built of reeds resting on piles to keep them above water, are architecturally unique. The Ma'dan get around in canoe-like boats when the water levels are high and in other ways have a unique lifestyle in the area.
- This lifestyle is in grave danger, if it has not already disappeared, as a result of actions on the part of Saddam's Iraqi government. Following the Gulf War, a number of Shi'ite rebels in the south fled to the marsh areas and from there harassed the Iraqi army. The regime responded by building dams, draining the marshes, and pouring poison into the rivers in an effort to simply eliminate every living thing in the marshes.

□ **The Kurds**

- More than three and a half million Kurds, about 19% of Iraq's population, live in northeast Iraq. Mosul, Irbil, and As-Sulaymaniyah, the third, fourth, and fifth largest cities in Iraq, are all Kurdish towns. The most valuable oil fields in Iraq are in the areas where the Kurds live.
- The Kurds are an Iranian ethnic group who for centuries inhabited an area that stretches from Syria and Turkey through Iraq and Iran into Azerbaijan. The Kurds have their own language, an Indo-European language most closely related to Pashto and Baluchi, spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan. These days many if not most of the Iraqi Kurds also speak Arabic.
- Probably because of the inaccessibility of the area, Kurdish society has remained basically tribal or local, despite the fact that the area has been controlled by larger political entities for centuries. Since the 17th century at least, a Kurdish educated elite has existed that has been as susceptible to the concept of nationalism as were the Turks and Arabs and Persians in the 19th century. The conversion of the Kurds to Islam, which had the ultimate effect of uniting the Arabs beyond their tribal affiliations, did not noticeably weaken the tribal nature of Kurdish society. Rather, Kurds are widely considered to hold their local political concerns above their religion and will be Muslim only insofar as the religion does not counter the interests of the tribe.

□ **The Assyrians**

- The Assyrians have a long history dating back to biblical times. The rise of Assyria, a kingdom in northern Mesopotamia (modern Iraq) began around 1350 BC. At its height (730-650 BC), the Assyrian empire controlled the Middle East from the Gulf to Egypt, but it collapsed in 612 BC.
- Today, there are about two million Assyrians living in Iraq. They are often referred to as the "the first Iraqis" because their presence in the area predates the Muslim Arabs. The Assyrians have a long history of persecution, resulting in only a few left (<3% of the population of the country). There are old communities around the oil fields of Iraq, and the Assyrians constitute a disproportionate percentage of the Iraqi refugees. Some Assyrians still speak Syriac, and most use it as a liturgical language.