LOCAL POLICING IN IRAQ POST-ISIL

CARVING OUT AN ARENA FOR COMMUNITY SERVICE?

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Abstract

Since 2003, frequent outbreaks of violence in Iraq have led to a heavily militarised local police force. In the post-ISIL period, there have been renewed efforts to develop the community-oriented dimensions of the force, including dedicated community police units. Yet, against a backdrop of systemic corruption, the success of such efforts is by no means guaranteed. Our study uses 82 qualitative interviews conducted with respect to four distinct case study areas of Anbar and Ninewa provinces. We assess how various societal stakeholders relate to the police and what they perceive to be prerequisites for increasing public confidence in police services. Our findings suggest significant regional and demographic variations, but broadly indicate that notwithstanding widespread public recognition of the presence of political agendas and corruption within the security forces, there is considerable demand for a police cadre that is trained to deal humanely with the population. Adopting certain police assistance practices could help achieve this goal without exacerbating predatory behaviour within the local police.

About the Conflict Research Programme

The Conflict Research Programme (CRP) is a three-year programme designed to address the drivers and dynamics of violent conflict in the Middle East and Africa, and to inform the measures being used to tackle armed conflict and its impacts. The programme focuses on Iraq, Syria, DRC, Somalia and South Sudan, as well as the wider Horn of Africa/Red Sea and Middle East regions.

The Middle East Centre is leading the research on drivers of conflict in Iraq and the wider Middle East. Our partners in Iraq are the Institute of Regional and International Studies at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, as well as Al-Bayan Center for Planning and Studies, Al-Amal Association, Public Aid Organisation and the Iraqi Women Network in Baghdad.

For more information about the Centre's work on the CRP, please contact Taif Alkhudary (t.alkhudary@lse.ac.uk).

Key Findings and Recommendations

To All Stakeholders:

- Local police reform in Iraq is possible, and necessary, even amidst ongoing insurgent threats, and institutional politicisation. Participants across our research sites stressed the importance of cultivating an Iraqi Police Service (IPS) that treats citizens respectfully and agreed that police misconduct pre-2014 was an enabling factor in ISIL's seizure of control. They noted improvements post-ISIL in police representativeness and in police-public relations. Despite identifying police shortcomings and/or acknowledging that they would only seek out the police in extreme circumstances, they broadly agreed that the IPS, rather than any other state agency, should bear primary responsibility for ensuring citizens' day-to-day security.

- The police must be more accessible to women. There is growing recognition of this, even amongst traditionally conservative parts of Iraqi society (see pp. 20–21). Stigma and fear of harassment still dissuade women from reporting crimes to the police or considering policing as a career. Still, our interviews indicated that some women are keen to volunteer, and that their presence in the IPS would enhance women's and girls' confidence in the agency. A clear area for future development is to support pathways for women to work alongside the police, if not as officers, then as case experts and social workers. Although this development would face pushback from some parts of society, it does not fundamentally encroach on political power structures, and is therefore unlikely to provoke extreme resistance.

To the Iraqi Government:

- To achieve a genuine shift 'from green to blue', the primary security authority in urban centres must be de-militarised local police: other forces must be withdrawn to outside urban areas. At present, the IPS carry heavy weapons in the streets of 'liberated' urban areas, even where the latter are relatively stable. Conversely, in areas where there is a diversity of security forces, especially those where popular mobilisation forces (PMF) are present, the local police are often weakest. As a result, citizens often resort to forces that are more coercive than the IPS (pp. 16–20).

- There remains a need for representative recruitment of a younger generation of men and women into the IPS, and for the referral to retirement of the injured and less capable who were recruited in 2004, 2008 and 2011 (p. 18–20). While the IPS, like most of the Iraqi public sector, is bloated, at a time when loyalties are heavily divided amongst competing security actors, it is important to recognise that the IPS functions to secure the loyalty of recruits (and their respective social blocs) to the idea of the institutionalised state.

To International Security and Development Actors:

- Tens of thousands of Iraqi police lack basic skills in dealing humanely with the public. International police advisors should continue to support them through training in human rights, conflict resolution and crowd management (pp. 10–12, 14, 18–20). Such externally-sponsored police trainings are often dismissed as superficial or counterproductive. Yet, even where political prerogatives interfere with police work, having police forces that exercise restraint can serve to de-escalate public tensions.

- Police command positions are often tied to elite political bargains, which external actors may be unable to influence. Donors should nonetheless use awareness of varied political dynamics across the country as a basis for adopting a case-by-case approach to supporting local police assistance (pp. 24–25), even where they are committed to working primarily through the central government, as opposed to directly with provincial or sub-provincial ones.

- The community policing initiative offers donors a promising avenue to support a project promoting civic engagement, gender justice and minority rights at its heart. While the initiative is currently very small in scale (pp. 14, 16), the way in which it is developed and 'marketed' could be highly consequential for the image of the IPS more generally. Nonetheless, the goal of developing a community-oriented civil police service must not be restricted to these units. Doing so could create a two-tier police system in which the vulnerable seek assistance from the community police while the majority of the local police continue to be militarised as before (pp. 24–25).

- Local Iraqi authorities and community representatives, not just the police, are responsible for improving relations between the police and the public. With targeted research, both local and international civil society organisations can play an important role in holding the IPS to account and in raising public awareness about police services (pp. 21–22).

Introduction

In the period post-2003, Iraq's security sector reform (SSR) record has been patchy at best. After years of pursuing predominantly technical solutions for institutional failures, international security and development actors have more recently come around to the idea that endemic corruption and seemingly intractable domestic political failures underlie weaknesses in the security apparatus. As a consequence, fervour for promoting long-term SSR has dwindled. Additionally, where the latter remains on the table, it is still undermined by the international prioritisation of short-term and pressing security issues, which in turn side-lines local policing concerns in favour of the higher profile Counter-Terrorist Forces (CTF), the Federal Police Service (FPS), and the army.[1]

This paper is concerned with the agency that Iraqis overwhelmingly want to see responsible for their day-to-day security: the Iraqi Police Service (IPS), commonly known as the local police.[2] Using four individual case studies within two 'liberated' Iraqi governorates, the paper focusses on efforts to enhance police community service in the period since ISIL's defeat in 2017, focusing on requirements that local stakeholders believe to be fundamental for improving public trust in the police.

As authors, we are wary of the pitfalls of promoting liberal-institutionalist reform without regard for the underlying political settlement. However, we question the increasingly prevalent scholarly view that in post-conflict settings where the political base is dysfunctional, attempts to transform the behaviour of security agencies are invariably pointless or counter-productive. Here, we recognise that the local Iraqi police are embedded into the state's broader post-2003 network of clientelist structures, and that this has obvious implications for how efficient, and how publicly trustworthy, the institution can be. Moreover, we recognise that external actors cannot rewrite Iraq's political settlement. The international appetite for wholesale 'state-building' initiatives is vastly reduced, as is the overall commitment to development aid. Nonetheless, our interviews indicate that certain steps can be taken to strengthen cooperation between the police and the people. Ultimately, while nepotism and corruption undermine public faith in the police, the excessive use of force eliminates it completely. International development and security sectors, as well as local civil society organisations, can help to alleviate longstanding cultures of violence. These contributions may not overtly challenge the political problems that are reflected within the IPS, but they can be safeguarded against the most pernicious forms of political predation.

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[1] NATO is expected to resume and expand its advisory capacities to Iraqi security agencies in late 2021, but there are currently no plans for it to be involved with the local police. See Paolo Napolitano, 'What to Expect When You're Expecting NATO in Iraq', *War on the Rocks*, 29 March 2020, available at: https://bit.ly/3hCjsAA (accessed 7 July 2021).

[2] See UNDP poll of 6000 Iraqis in Anbar, Ninewa, Baghdad, Basra, Karbala and Salah al-Din, conducted in August–September 2020; 'Public Perception Survey on Security and Justice Service Delivery in Iraq', UNDP Iraq, 31 December 2020, available at: https://bit.ly/3qRcSup (accessed 7 July 2021), pp. 1–31.

Research Methods and Paper Design

The findings for this paper are based on 82 semi-structured interviews conducted in person or remotely between December 2020 and February 2021. The vast majority of the participants (76) are from our four case study sites: Ramadi city centre and ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah in the governorate of Anbar, Hay al-Tanak in Mosul city and Qaraqosh, and the Hamdaniya district in the governorate of Ninewa. The case study approach was premised on the assumption that given the demographic diversity in communities across Iraq, the effects of police initiatives taken at the national level may differ significantly between settings.

We spoke to local and community police officers, community forum members, tribal shaikhs, officers in the army and tribal mobilisation forces, civil society and women's rights activists, local headmen (*mokhatir*),[3] local government representatives, legal experts, and religious figures from different denominations. We also spoke to several current and former international security advisors for the United Nations (UN), International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the British government. Of our participants, 14 were women.

Our research team comprised a UK-based academic from the London School of Economics and Political Science (who attended around two thirds of all the interviews) and six Iraqi researchers from Anbar University's Centre for Strategic Studies, as well as from the Mosul-based non-governmental organisation (NGO), al-Tahreer Association for Development. One of the researchers, a former police officer, also teaches at Mosul University. If the embedded nature of the Iraqi researchers within the case study areas detracted from the advantage of an outsider's objectivity, this was immeasurably outweighed by the researchers' intimate knowledge of the case study areas and the prominent stakeholder figures within them, yet also by their genuine motivation to promote the community-oriented role of the local police.

The paper is structured as follows: the first part outlines the position of the local police within the state's arena of security actors and the nature of externally-sponsored initiatives to promote local policing, particularly in liberated areas, post-ISIL. Part two provides a brief contextual background on our four focus areas. Part three conveys the core interview findings, which are framed around three interrelated questions relating to the local police (including the recently-created Community Police Units):

- What are the key requirements to improving public trust in the police?
- How do women in the study sites relate to, and have recourse to police services?
- How do the police and other community stakeholders understand the societal role of the police?

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[3] The *mokhtar* mediates between the authorities and the community. The *mokhtar* must hold a middle school certificate, be nominated by at least 200 neighbourhood residents, and be approved by the Ministry of Interior.

Our respondents were identified as being capable of offering informed views on the police. They do not therefore necessarily reflect the majority view within the community, but as representatives of different sectors of society, they offered a balanced range of opinions. The final part of the paper discusses the import of the findings and consequent recommendations.

Putting the Police in Context

Security agencies have proliferated in Iraq in the years following the toppling of the Baʿath regime, and international donor priorities have often side-lined the IPS in favour of the Iraqi army, federal police and counter-terrorist forces, while casting a wary eye at the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMFs), some of which have embedded themselves into the governance of security in parts of Iraq. However, in the aftermath of ISIL's defeat in 2017, there was a notable push for a shift in the security status quo 'from green to blue' (i.e. from a situation in which the military dominated, even within urban areas, to one where the police, and particularly a more citizen-facing one, prevailed).

Clearly, the militarisation of the police and the prevalence of institutional corruption represent significant barriers to creating a community-oriented service (i.e. an organisation that is primarily concerned with responding effectively and with restraint to citizens' grievances). Both factors merit some explanation.

Following the 2003 occupation of Iraq, around half the estimated 58,000 serving policemen deserted or were removed from their posts pursuant to the de-Baʿathification law,[4] and the agency was subsequently reconstituted by the Coalition Provisional Authority. In the rush to combat a rising insurgency against Coalition forces and the new government, screening of recruits was minimal, training sparse and heavily militarised. Policemen became common targets of armed groups between 2004 and 2008.[5] In 2006, the Iraqi Ministry of Interior (MoI) merged several ad-hoc special police battalions into a single Iraqi National Police Force (subsequently renamed the Iraqi Federal Police), a federally-controlled paramilitary organisation designed to undertake gendarmerie-type roles, sometimes in support of the provincial police, sometimes in support of the army. The IPS continued as a provincially recruited and administered force, tasked with basic law enforcement.[6]

The MoI was rapidly politicised by Shiʿa Islamist parties that dominated the new gov-

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[4] Inspectors General, 'Interagency Assessment of Iraq Police Training', *US Department of State and US Department of Defense*, 15 July 2005, available at https://bit.ly/2VgSOWp (accessed 7 July 2021).

[5] Mathieu Deflem and Suzanne Sutphin, 'Policing Post-war Iraq: Insurgency, Civilian Police, and the Reconstruction of Society,' *Sociological Focus* 39/4 (2006), pp. 265–283.

[6] Our interviews showed that a core incentive for men to join the Anbar police, rather than other security agency post-2014, was the ability to serve on their own turf, in direct defence of their families.

ernment.[7] At the provincial level, local agendas similarly influenced police recruitment and career advancement. Local police are answerable to provincial governors and also the MoI. The 2005 Iraqi constitution and 2008 law on governorates not organised into a region, give the governor, with provincial council assistance, broad powers to command the police, and indeed to choose the provincial chief of police.[8] Amendments to the 2008 law have created legal ambiguities over this right,[9] and there have been isolated cases of the federal government intervening to impose its own choice of police chief. Ultimately, the fact that police funding emanates from the MoI ensures police compliance. Yet, the governor's character and his relative influence within the federal government also has some bearing on this relationship.

At no point since 2003 has there been a consensus on the total number of serving policemen. Many trainees drop out before commencing active duty; some have been killed in action, others simply disappear but remain on the books as salary-drawing 'ghosts'. Nonetheless, numbers have vastly exceeded the initially proposed figure of 135,000. In 2020, the total number of MoI employees was put at 600,000, with the IPS thought to number around 350,000 including emergency battalions, traffic police, criminal investigations, station staff, and other specialisations. It seems improbable that all these were active, but reflecting broader patterns of state patronage, security agencies have become a core source of employment.

Corruption and violence are endemic in Iraq's political system. The toppling of Saddam replaced the power network of a single despot with multiple networks attached to political factions that gained prominence under the new settlement. Most rely on paramilitary support bases which are semi-independent of core state institutions and their coercive apparatus, but often infiltrate, overlap with, or supersede them. This enables political actors to make credible threats of violence if they are not accorded access to rents or other state-generated privileges.[10] One of the results of this system is that satisfying clientelist demands, based on ethnicity, sect and other markers of identity, has taken precedence over long-term institution-building processes.

Police recruitment quotas are controlled by the MoI to ensure that Iraq's various tribes and ethnic groups are represented, and in all barring one of our case studies, it was agreed that the composition of the local police reflects that of the community.[11] Yet, career appointments are heavily politicised and systemic corruption takes its toll on the police. Effective commanders can lessen these trends but cannot eliminate them. Some policemen addi-

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[7] Specifically the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq and the political wing of the paramilitary Badr Organisation.

[8] See article 122.3 of the constitution, available at: https://bit.ly/3iUss4J (accessed 27 July 2021); and articles 7.9 and 31 of the 2008 law, available at: http://bit.ly/3i4qUWQ (accessed 27 July 2021).

[9] Specifically, 2013 and 2018 amendments to article 7.9 of the 2008 law.

[10] For a detailed account of how this process has affected Iraq's political economy and how external actors can avoid exacerbating it further, see Alexander Hamilton, 'The Political Economy of Economic Policy in Iraq', *LSE Middle East Centre Paper Series* 32 (2020), available at: https://bit.ly/3xnxDjK (accessed 27 July 2021).

[11] In terms of sect and ethnicity, certainly not in terms of gender.

tionally engage in financial and administrative corruption, ranging from petty bribes on simple traffic offences, to extorting money from detainees' families, to abetting smuggling rackets. A 2013 poll indicated that a third of Iraqi households believed the police were corrupt, and the same percentage reported having paid a bribe for police services.[12] Assessing precisely how corruption functions in our sites was beyond the study's remit. Several participants identified corruption as a key deterrent to public recourse to police services. Yet overall, awareness of its prevalence did not necessarily negate appreciation of the police role. A civil society activist in Ramadi, for instance, told us in almost the same breath that some police were involved in illicit drugs racketing (a major source of crime post-ISIL), and that local police were largely professional and effective.[13]

In any case, specifically within provinces 'liberated' from ISIL, there is greater public support for the local police to provide security than for other agencies including the army, the Federal Police, and PMFs[14] whose members come from other provinces.[15] Taking advantage of renewed donor interest, in November 2018, the Iraqi Police Affairs Agency, with UN advisory support, inaugurated the Local Police Service Road Map. The document was designed to oversee the transition of the security portfolio from the security forces to the local police, and to develop trust between the local police and the public. The development of community policing was identified as a key objective.

Various ambiguities surround the concept of community policing, wherever it is applied.[16] While frequently identified as a philosophy that should imbue all forms of democratic policing, in practice it is often confined to specific units established to improve communication with the public or manage socially sensitive issues. In Iraq, although the goal of improving public relations applies to the IPS as a whole, the term 'community police' (*al-shurta al-mujtamaʿiyya*) is specifically associated with units pertaining to a programme piloted by the MoI in 2012, expanded in cooperation with the IOM post-2017. Through the programme, local police identified as having strong interpersonal skills are selected for training in dealing with disputes and sensitive grievances including domestic abuse and online blackmail. Community police centres and community police forums have been established in over 100 separate sub-districts of Iraq, including Ramadi and Mosul. In line with IOM priorities, the forums have a special focus on addressing the rights of women and minorities. Community police work unarmed and are not empowered to make arrests, but call on the local police to assist when needed.[17]

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[12] See the 2013 Iraq Corruption Report, available at: https://www.ganintegrity.com/portal/country-profiles/iraq/ (accessed 2 August 2021).

[13] Other comments by the same participant linked police professionalism with the current provincial police leadership.

[14] UNDP Iraq, 'Public Perception Survey', pp. 1–31.

[15] Although it is worth noting that the PMF are a diverse group, and include locally recruited tribal militias.

[16] For a critical assessment of how different interpretations of community policing have been implemented in non-Western contexts, see: Mike Brogden and Preeti Nijhar, *Community Policing* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013).

[17] 'Perceptions of Police, Security and Governance in Iraq', *International Organization for Migration Iraq*, May 2020, available at: https://bit.ly/37a771M (accessed 29 July 2021).

Case Studies

Our findings are drawn from four case study areas. While situated within just two provinces, both predominantly Sunni 'liberated' provinces which have been the focus of international donors post-2017, they demonstrate some of Iraq's demographic, political and economic diversity. As such they provide a good basis from which to identify commonalities and areas of divergence pertaining to making the local police more focused on community service.

Figure 1: Map of Ninewa and Anbar
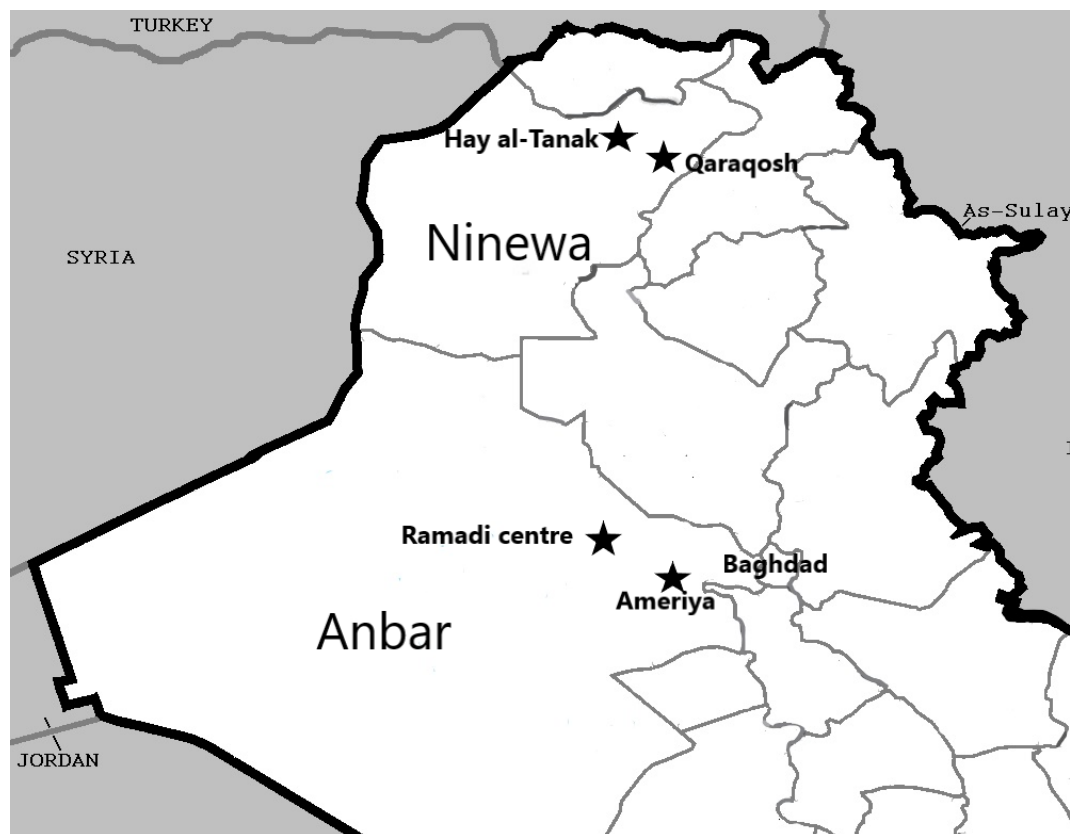
Map of case study areas in Iraq by Jessica Watkins.

Anbar

Anbar comprises around a third of Iraq's territory, but is mostly desert, and accounts for only around 4% of the total population. The vast majority of Anbaris are Sunni Arabs, and the region has a predominantly tribal character.

Under Saddam, a large proportion of high-ranking officers and security force members hailed from Anbar, and the de-Baʿathification process left many of them jobless. This, and the misconduct of some American soldiers in the province post-2003, contributed to many Anbaris joining resistance groups including al-Qaʾida. Few initially joined the

security forces for fear of the resistance, and those that did were often unfit for service. In mid-2007, however, the formation of the anti-al-Qaʾida Sahwa (Awakening) Councils with US military backing turned the tide against al-Qaʾida and subsequently, large numbers of tribesmen joined the IPS.

A period of relative stability ended in 2013 with growing protests against what many perceived as the sectarian practices of Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Many youth joined or sympathised with ISIL and other militant groups, which assumed incremental control of Ramadi, burning police stations and expelling police, after the latter had surrendered their weapons. By May 2015, ISIL declared total control over Ramadi and around 90% of the population, including 75% of the police, fled. The remaining police reconvened in Khaldiya and ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah.

The force was reconstituted with the international coalition's support to assist fighting ISIL. Most recruits were drafted into the military-style emergency battalions commanded by former army officers, and these battalions still comprise around 9,000 of the 15,000 strong IPS in the province. During the campaign, several predominantly Shiʿa PMFs fought alongside Iraqi security forces in Anbar. These groups have subsequently departed, but three locally-raised tribal mobilisation brigades, numbering around 13,000 remain, as well as the army, federal police, and counter-terrorist branch (whose activities are now concentrated in rural areas). Security agencies are all formally accountable to Anbar Operations Command.

Our research participants largely concurred that the current provincial police chief, who has been in post since 2014, has introduced extensive measures to improve the performance of the local police. Nevertheless, the force still includes many individuals appointed indiscriminately post-2007, whose conduct reflects poorly on the institution.

Tribal elders play a dominant role in settling common disputes, and indeed, due to the political strength of tribes and the fact that the police are recruited through their tribes, the police rely on backing from shaikhs to be effective. Religious figures are also sometimes consulted to resolve disputes, although their influence has lessened since ISIL's defeat. Within refugee camps, charitable organisations are also involved in solving disputes. Participants remarked on a progressive shift in attitudes in Anbari society since ISIL's defeat, particularly within Ramadi, but amongst the burgeoning number of civil society organisations and NGOs, many were dismissed as mere political fronts or scams to attract external funding. We spoke to some of those which the researchers identified as genuinely effective.

Community policing was established in 2017 but was not in practice activated until 2019. There are currently 14 personnel in Ramadi and 10 in ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah, but no women. A number of forums have been set up across the province, but participants reported them to be largely inactive.

Ramadi City Centre: Ramadi is Anbar's provincial capital and is divided into 40 separate districts. Within its current municipal borders, the area covers 8,543 km. The population as of 2019 was around 450,000.

Known as the gateway to Iraq, Ramadi is an important city for trade between Iraq, Jordan and Syria, linked by fast transportation lines with Baghdad and other cities near Iraq's western borders. Ramadi is the base for provincial administrative functions, local government departments, and Anbar University.

The city witnessed enormous destruction during the ISIL period. According to government sources, 80% of the infrastructure and over 3000 homes, 58 mosques and 85 schools were destroyed, many by coalition aerial bombings. While recorded crime is low, therefore, poverty and resentment are obvious causes of crime. Although the ISIL threat has been largely eliminated, and there have been no notable terrorist attacks within the past few years, there have been a number of attacks or killings of individuals accused of being ISIL sympathisers. Tribal disputes are common, but often resolved without police intervention. Other common offences involve drugs, as well as domestic abuse and harassment of women, which often go unreported.

ʿAmiriyat al-Sumoud: One of eleven districts in Anbar, located 30km south of Fallujah. The district covers about 253km². The 2014 census put the population at around 91,210 people, of which around 19,00 live in the urban centre. Post-ISIL, however, there are over 15,000 IDPs in camps and slums in the district. The Albu Issa tribe constitute 90% of the population, and are subdivided into al-Taia and al-Qaisiya.

According to the researchers' knowledge and participant responses, the most common sources of crime in the district relate to drugs, terrorism and revenge attacks against suspected ISIL affiliates, theft, tribal disputes over agricultural borders, and problems concerning IDPs. The women and community police officer interviewed stressed that harassment, domestic abuse and online blackmail were also highly prevalent, even if they were not often reported to the police.

In addition to the local police, which includes an emergency battalion, the Iraqi army is posted outside the urban centre, and a tribal popular mobilisation force is located to the south. There are four police stations within the district – ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah, al-Faris, al-Shahid Sami, and the district police directorate, where 17 officers and men work.

Ninewa

The northern province of Ninewa, located next to the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, is one of the country's most ethnically diverse, and in recent years, most violently contested provinces. While the majority of the population are Sunni Arab, there are also large Christian, Turkmen, Kurdish, Yazidi, Shabak and Kakaʾi minorities.

Between 2003 and 2014, the Kurdish Democratic Party vied with Sunni political actors in the province for political control.[18] In June 2014, ISIL seized control of the provincial capital, Mosul, and was not fully ejected until mid-2017, by a combination of international and Iraqi government forces, alongside various PMFs including the Shiʿa Badr, Asaʾib Ahl al-Haq, the Shabak 30th Brigade, and homegrown Sunni 'tribal' mobilisations.

Following liberation, a handful of Kurdish, Sunni and Shiʿa political factions have controlled provincial government. The fertile, resource-rich Ninewa Plains are heavily contested and have large deployments of Iraqi and Kurdish security forces as well the Assyrian Ninewa Plain Protection Units (NPUs), and the 30th Brigade.

Hay al-Tanak: Community Police Units were established in Ninewa in 2017. Their activities have diversified quickly, but they currently number just four officers and 53 members dispersed across the province. There are also 19 community policing forums.[19] Hay al-Tanak, officially named al-Rafidain, is a densely populated slum neighbourhood of northwestern Mosul. Al-Tanak lies south of Yarmouk neighbourhood. The residents, who are Sunni, originally set up homes illegally, and the district has been historically deprived of basic services, although it now has state electricity and water provision. Illiteracy and unemployment levels are high. Polygamy is common and children comprise a large proportion of the population.

Iraq's Department of Statistics has no estimates of Hay al-Tanak's population, and local *mokhatir* estimations vary widely, since movement in and out of the neighbourhood is frequent, but suggest there are over 60,000 residents.[20]

The district is divided into eight areas occupied by different tribes, and each is represented before the authorities by a *mokhtar*. Poverty has engendered relatively high crime rates. The neighbourhood was previously a recruiting ground for ISIL and while there have been no reported terrorist activities since 2017, there have been attacks against families associated with ISIL. Common crimes include theft, fraud, assault, suicide, begging, traffic offences and domestic abuse. Many of these issues are dealt with informally by tribal elders, religious scholars, or the tribal mobilisation, and not reported to the police.[21]

Al-Tanak neighbourhood falls under the administration of Yarmouk Police Station, which has an attached Community Police Unit comprising six police, although it is

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[18] For a detailed breakdown of governance patterns in the province, see Mac Skelton and Zmkan Ali Saleem, 'Iraq's Political Marketplace at the Subnational Level: The Struggle for Power in Three Provinces', *LSE Middle East Conflict Research Programme*, available at: eprints.lse.ac.uk/105184/3/Iraq_s_Political_Marketplace.pdf (accessed 29 July 2021).

[19] In Ninewa, the researchers spoke extensively with members of the community police, but they did not get the chance to directly interview other members of the local police, due to the timing of a prime ministerial directive to security sector personnel, advising against giving media or research-related interviews. However, one of the researchers is a former police officer who is well-connected and informed on how the local police operate.

[20] Authors' interviews with *mokhatir* of Hay al-Tanak in January 2021.

[21] Authors' background interview with a local researcher on slums in Mosul, August 2020.

relatively inactive in Hay al-Tanak. A community police forum in nearby Hay al-Aslah al-Zaraʾiʿ has been established under the direction of a school headmistress, and the forum also covers Hay al-Tanak.

Mosul overall is managed by the Nineveh Operations Command, though certain areas are jointly managed with the PMF.[22] The National Security Agency is active, following up on terrorist operations and public security. Other security agencies active in Hay al-Tanak are two emergency battalion police squads; the Nineveh Guard Mobilisation (a Sunni PMF belonging to Osama and Athil al-Nujaifi formed in 2014, with Turkish support in the Kurdish region[23]) and the tribal mobilisation affiliated with a local personality, Shaikh Jamil al-Jubouri.[24]

Qaraqosh: The urban centre of Hamdaniya is one of thirty districts in Ninewa. Qaraqosh itself (also known as Hamdaniya) is predominantly Christian, but the district has sizeable Shabak (Sunni and Shiʿa) and Sunni-Arab populations, as well as small Kakaʾi (Shiʿa Kurd) and Turkman populations. The official language is Aramaic and Swuaddia-Sureth (the common dialect), but the residents also speak Arabic and in some cases, several other languages. The population pre-ISIL was around 58,000, but has now dropped to an estimated 22–23,000 due to displacement.[25]

The political sensitivities of the Ninewa Plains are reflected in the complex security landscape in and around Qaraqosh, and discomfort with the security situation around the town dissuaded many inhabitants from returning. In the city centre, the main security actors are the local police (who have a station as well as criminal investigation and intelligence departments), and two battalions of the Ninewa Plains Protection Units (NPU), a Christian force comprising local men. The police and NPU jointly man checkpoints around the city centre. Outside, the 30th Brigade of the PMF, a Shiʿa Shabak force, mans a secondary checkpoint at the southern entrance. The Facilities Protection forces and National Security are also active in the city. Both the NPU and 30th Brigade were formed during the anti-ISIL campaign in 2014 and are considered part of the PMF.

The ISIL campaign and counter-campaign caused devastation in Qaraqosh and since 2017, the town has attracted extensive humanitarian and civil society activities with the support of international agencies, these include reconstruction efforts, initiatives promoting peaceful co-existence, as well as the improvement of livelihoods. Hamdaniya's historical importance as an agricultural and mercantile centre has been undermined due to sustained violence and mass displacement.

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[22] These include Badr, Asaʾaib Ahl al-Haq, and the 30th Brigade.

[23] The Ninewa Guard number around 2,500 men province-wide. They are commanded by a retired former army Brigadier General and contain many former Iraqi army officers. The researchers noted that they have played a major role in maintaining order and controlling local security post-ISIL.

[24] The tribal PMFs are paid by the Iraqi government's Popular Mobilisation Command.

[25] The authors obtained these figures from the Director of Hamdaniya Nationality and other local figures. The Iraqi MoI's Planning's Department of Statistics in Ninewa put the current number of residents at 48,000 people.

Crime levels are overall low, and most issues are managed within the community or with PMF assistance without being taken to the police. The Church has taken a leading role in governance post-ISIL and manages social grievances of all kinds. Other influential actors are the district mayor, members of the Qaraqosh elders council, and six *mokhatir* who represent their residential districts before the authorities.

Post-ISIL, Hamdaniya's police have, by instruction of the MoI, recruited more Christians to reflect the composition of the population.[26] There is currently no community policing unit in Qaraqosh, and a senior member of the Christian community indicated that the Church would not necessarily support the introduction of such a unit, given its own prevailing role in dealing with domestic issues.[27] Others suggested that a unit that dealt only with harassment and electronic blackmail of women might be acceptable, but one that dealt with cases of domestic abuse would not. There is, however, a forum, run by a Christian women's rights activist, which liaises with the provincial community police directorate.

Findings

This report concentrates on three questions relating to the core prerequisite for increasing public trust in the local police, the accessibility of police services to women, and common interpretations of the societal role of the local police (including the Community Police Units). The sections below provide a brief summarising note on these themes and a selection of responses from amongst our participants.[28]

Prerequisites for Strengthening Public Trust in the Police

Across our sites, there was a broad consensus that public confidence in the police had increased compared to the pre-ISIL period. However, four assessments of core challenges to increasing public trust in the police recurred. One related to financial and administrative corruption at the very highest levels of government, which filtered into the police. Another concerned the overall lack of police training in how to deal respectfully with the public. The third was the assertion that the onus of responsibility lay not only on the police but on the community: citizens needed to cooperate more, and therefore more public awareness raising was needed. And the last point, concerned how representative participants felt the police to be.

Beyond these points, there were significant variations in opinions across sites. In Anbar, police pointed out that they lacked sufficient qualified officers. In Hay al-Tanak, residents

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[26] Although we learned that, for instance, the Kaka'i (who have no members of parliament) are not represented in the local police.

[27] Several women interview participants indicated that divorce was not an option in the Church, so raising cases of domestic abuse to the police was likely to only aggravate the matter.

[28] We received dozens of thoughtful responses to these questions across the sites: the citations just reflect some of them.

and experts on the area noted that there were hardly any policemen recruited from the area, and that this was a prerequisite to raising public confidence in the force. And in the predominantly Christian town of Qaraqosh, a number of respondents alluded to the fact that the de facto authority of the police was overshadowed by that of the NPU and the PMF. They also indicated that while the composition of police was now more representative of the local population, for confidence to be elevated, even more Christians in key positions were needed.

> One of the major impediments to police work in the district is administrative and financial corruption, such as paying bribes..., the absence of the rule of law is also a problem...plus the state's weakness, the spread of corruption in its institutions, and the transformation of the local police into a military force. We desperately need a process of educating police and changing their behaviour to deal well with citizens rather than treating them like terrorists.... My suggestion is to strengthen the local police with better civilian personnel rather than reinforcing it with more police, and highlighting the role of women in it: solving society's problems without women is a one-sided solution, especially since in most cases the woman is one of the parties to the problem.
>
> (Muslim scholar, ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah, 20 December 2020)

> Administrative and financial corruption is one of the biggest obstacles for the local police. From my point of view, most members need awareness training about human rights and other courses designed to change the culture of dealing with others.
>
> (Civil society activist, ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah, 27 December 2020)

> The biggest challenge is the character of security personnel, which is hot-headed .... Also, with elections approaching, there is interference in the work of the police, meaning there are political challenges... though this problem is smaller in Anbar than elsewhere.
>
> (Academic, Ramadi, 22 December 2020)

> The Ramadi police...are well-disciplined, unlike their affiliates in other governorates. This is thanks to disciplined leadership, and Major General Hadi Razij increasing the competencies of the local and community police. They need citizens to cooperate with them.
>
> (Former local council member, Ramadi, 15 January 2021)

> The biggest challenge we faced was that some areas didn't understand the idea of community policing or didn't accept it, but this challenge seemed to fade with time. Currently there is no major challenge. We need joint workshops and sessions between the community and the community police to strengthen the relationship between the local police and the citizens.
>
> (Director of community policing in Ninewa, 28 December 2020)

The door to recruitment must be opened so that people in Hay al-Tanak can join the police... if residents of the area belonged to the police, they'd know how to deal with its citizens.

(*Mokhtar*, Hay al-Tanak, 3 January 2021)

People rarely resort to police. The local police in these areas [Hay al-Tanak] are considered reliable, but there is a kind of social detraction for people who go to the police and bypass the tribe. And it's seen as a kind of cowardice, like you couldn't get your rights yourself.

(Academic, Mosul, 15 December 2020)

Currently, we live in a multi-party country, and they may interfere in police affairs through affiliated militias or security forces, and this hinders the work of the police and cancels its role sometimes...

(Civil society member, Hamdaniya, 3 January 2021)

Citizens lack confidence in the police, because their role is absent due to the presence of other forces controlling the ground, namely the PMFs. We need organisations or NGOs to build bridges between civil society and the local police...

(Female civil society activist, Qaraqosh, 17 December 2020)

Women and the Local Police:

Currently, women comprise only around 2% of the IPS, and these are mostly concentrated in the capital. Even the community police, which deals with matters affecting women (such as harassment, domestic abuse and online blackmail), include very few women. Across our sites, respondents, including civil society activists, academics, local government officials and tribal shaikhs, agreed that women rarely go to police stations alone, and would only go if accompanied by a male relative. Their reasoning was broadly the same and concerned the stigma attached to being seen in the vicinity of the police station;[29] fears of being harassed by the police themselves; the lack of women police officers; and/or the suggestion that apart from domestic affairs, women were rarely affected by crimes. Like men, women in our study sites noted that they would seek assistance from tribal shaikhs, religious figures, and, in Ninewa, locally mobilised PMFs, before turning to the police to resolve social problems.[30]

On balance, most participants, including several from more stereotypically 'conservative' parts of society, favoured women's recruitment in the community police, if not the rest of the local police, although several suggested it might be more socially acceptable if they were to be described in terms other than 'police women' (e.g. social worker or case worker).

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[29] Currently, Community Police Units are co-located with local police stations, which increases the difficulty for women to visit them surreptitiously.
[30] It is worth noting that the PMFs to which they referred were those whose members hailed from the same area, not those mobilised elsewhere.

Women will have more confidence in the police if they are women, because they are most able to understand and thus prevent a woman from being assaulted or harassed if she submits complaints to policemen... There is a big change in society's ideas about women, especially after ISIL... and there is some limited acceptance of the possibility of women volunteering in the police, but the issue of harassment by policemen remains and makes it harder for women to join or for their families to accept them joining.

(Women's rights activist, Ramadi, Anbar, 8 January 2021)

I visited the police chief and... submitted a request to him to open the door for women to volunteer, but it was rejected because of the financial crisis.... In Mosul, there are no female members of the local police. Only in the community police, where there are only two women. We need to open the door to volunteering for easy practices such as searches, passports, and traffic. We received lots of calls from women who wanted to join the police, but there is no opportunity.

(Woman advisor to the Governor of Mosul, Ninewa, 22 December 2020)

I don't think it's necessary for women to be in the police, because there are women in the community police and they deal with sensitive issues concerning women.... Most problems in Hamdaniya [Qaraqosh] don't concern women. They are economic problems and property disputes. As for social problems, people often go to the church but may contact the police in certain cases.

(Civil society activist, Qaraqosh, 14 January 2021)

There are women in the court. We don't need women in the community police. I wouldn't allow my sister or daughter to join the police. For this idea to be feasible, Hay al-Tanak would have to like al-Zahur and al-Nur neighbourhoods: a neat, tree-lined street.

(*Mokhtar*, Hay al-Tanak, 19 January 2020)

The Societal Role of the Police

Considering the prevalence of violence and corruption in Iraq in recent decades, and the repressive character of the preceding Baʿathist era, it is notable that interviewees were well aware of what a public-facing police service *should* look like.[31] There was a consensus across sites that this ideal could be promoted by training the police to deal better with the public, increasing outreach and public awareness-raising activities, and encouraging civil society actors to play a greater role in building bridges between the police and the public. Although naturally, different categories of participant tended to emphasise different aspects of socialising the police.

Evidently, the community police are specifically designed to improve police-public relations. Their training by international police advisors was evident and in interviews they

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[31] Though given that the participants were informed on police affairs, this was perhaps unsurprising.

emphasised the common philosophy about community policing: that prevention of crime is better than cure. A community police officer in Ninewa commented in interview:

> All components of the MoI work to serve the citizen, but we consider the community police to be the smiling face of the MoI.
>
> (Community policing officer, Mosul, 9 December 2020)

Community Police Units' activities are extensive, and include dealing with cases of domestic abuse and harassment, and online blackmail, for which they have become best known, but also, in some areas, visiting schools, distributing aid, assisting in public health regulations (particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic); visiting markets and schools and disseminating material relating to the dangers of drugs. Despite this, their numbers, and thus their impact, is as yet limited. While the majority of our participants had heard of the community police, many maintained that the population at large were unaware of them, due to their minimal or non-existent presence. While most of them praised the community police objective of solving societal problems without needing recourse to the courts, one women's rights activist in Mosul suggested that in Ninewa, this practice was exploited as a means of cutting the number of crimes that the local police had to report to the MoI.

> Through communication and good manners, we gain citizens' confidence. Satisfying their demands and providing them with services is key to winning hearts, as well as choosing competent and reputable personnel.
>
> (Community policing officer, ʿAmeriyat al-Fallujah, 22 December 2020)

> The police are the protectors of society and guarantors of stability. They are keen to keep society coexisting peacefully, and this means their role is not restricted to the text of the law in dealing with crimes; they need to deal with the spirit of law... the law is a spirit before it becomes texts and penalties and this spirit represents the ultimate goal of its existence: to protect society.
>
> (Criminal investigations officer, Ramadi, 6 December 2020)

> The relationship between the security agencies and the people is interrupted at times, and this requires the police to extend bridges of trust. They must play a more humanitarian role, educate the community, fortify society, and prevent addiction and intolerance. Therefore, their true message is the societal role that precedes the security role. Prevention is better than treatment.
>
> (Female academic, Ramadi, 5 January 2021)

> The order was issued to Anbar Police Command and the General Directorates for the police to move away from militarisation and to take the reins instead of the army, which protects outside the city, but this is still in its infancy and needs a long time to be implemented. Our problem in police leadership is the lack of staffing and this is difficult due to the lack of new appointments....
>
> (Police brigadier, Ramadi, 7 December 2020)

...weapons should be removed from city centres and the focus should be on the societal side of policing. Until now, society may not understand the role of community policing, so we must clarify that many problems affect youth and women, and that community policing contributes to solving them so that they don't escalate.

(Head of district council, Hamdaniya, 27 December 2020)

We need to increase awareness of the importance of the police and their roles by conducting awareness campaigns in schools... especially in the elementary and middle stages, and raising awareness about contacting the police. There is a need for specialist training and instructions on how to deal with citizens, and this falls under the heading of the societal role of the police.

(Civil society activist, Qaraqosh, 8 January 2021)

Conclusion

Beyond mere technical solutions, police reform in any context is notoriously difficult. The police are tightly woven into the fabric of their societies and political systems, and the breadth and depth of their activities surpasses those of any other public institution. In Iraq, the complexity of the IPS organisational ethos is magnified by the country's highly diverse regional demographics and political cartographies. In this report, we have given a broad overview of the problems facing the IPS and pointed to areas that our respondents have indicated need to be redressed, whilst highlighting those that we believe could be feasibly achieved. However, we recognise the need for detailed research into the implementation of individual goals, and their potential impact at the subnational level. This research can be effectively undertaken by Iraqi research centres, such as those involved in this project.

While the federal government exercises control over the local police through the budget, and most international support is similarly channelled through the centre, the premise that initiatives rolled out from the centre (including the community police one) will take equal effect in the peripheries is doubtful. In some areas, the most salient divisions are inter-sectarian, in others they are inter-ethnic, class, tribe-related, or pertain to gender. We should expect community police to prioritise building bridges with different constituencies accordingly. If, for instance, the community police are to be an effective instrument for promoting peaceful co-existence in divided communities, including those with sizeable minorities such as in Ninewa, then those minorities need to be represented within Community Police Units, and community forums.

Although the community police initiative is young, its future trajectory is significant. Respondents across sites disagreed on the extent to which community police should operate (physically and administratively) independent of the rest of the local police, reflecting issues of command hierarchies, police competencies, regional variations and

also the preferences of more vulnerable sectors of the community, who are typically uncomfortable seeking police assistance. Naturally, the idea of promoting community policing beyond its actual scope in order to buy acceptance for more repressive aspects of police work is not particular to Iraq, or indeed to post-conflict settings. Given the challenge of de-militarising the IPS, and the possibility that it will in future be required to contribute to counter-insurgency operations again, external donors may well see the community police initiative as an appealing, manageable recipient of international assistance. It is, but only if it can be implemented in a way that complements wider efforts to make the IPS more responsive to public needs.

In some post-conflict settings where the 'official' police have been marginalised by other state/non-state and semi-state security actors, and their popular legitimacy is undermined, international donors have questioned whether to continue reinforcing the state security apparatus in any capacity. In Iraq, where the security sector has arguably transitioned in recent years into an amorphous arena,[32] the relative merits of continued support for traditional security agencies are certainly called into question. This is a complex issue that touches on normative conceptions of what the state is or should be. But if we are primarily guided by what Iraqis think, then the evidence (of recent polling at least,[33] combined with our interview findings) suggests that they have definite expectations that the IPS should be their primary security provider. The international community owes it to Iraq to assist in achieving this goal.

Realistically, this probably will not entail another comprehensive institutional overhaul. Given the nature of Iraqi society, in which non-state actors, including religious and tribal figures have, even at the best of times, played decisive roles in settling citizens' disputes, we should not necessarily expect a public-facing police service to supplant the roles of these actors. Yet, even if citizens see the local police primarily in terms of their role in upholding day-to-day stability, as opposed to their potential to settle interpersonal disputes, the importance of equipping the police to deal sympathetically with the public remains paramount.

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[32] The term 'security arena' was coined by Alice Hills. See: Alice Hills, 'Security Sector or Security Arena? The Evidence from Somalia', *International Peacekeeping* (2014) 21/2, pp. 165–180.
[33] UNDP Iraq, 'Public Perception Survey', pp. 1–31.

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