

# Iraq in the Wake of the 2003 Invasion: The Scars of Xenophobia, Racism, Discrimination and Exclusion

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

In-depth Report: [IRAQ REPORT](#)

*“Through a series of tragic events, contemporary Iraq has become an ideal place in which to test the thesis that severe insecurity leads to xenophobia.”[\[i\]](#)*

*Xenophobia, the fear of foreigners and strangers alike, has had an increasing influence on the peoples of Iraq. Ever since the US led invasion in 2003, insecurity, discrimination, and xenophobia have taken a larger, more influential role on Iraqi peoples’ perspectives.*

More so than during Saddam’s rule, the 2003 foreign military intervention of the United States brought about intense levels of disorder, unemployment, and terrorist attacks.[\[ii\]](#) This has provided a viable and justifiable reason for Iraqi citizens to fear foreigners and strangers. That is more obvious when one examines the fact that “59% of all Iraqis strongly agree that life in Iraq is unpredictable and dangerous today”.[\[iii\]](#)

The number of terrorist attacks in Iraq, in fact the highest of all countries of the world, strikes anxiety and fear in victims and witnesses alike.[\[iv\]](#) This results in a further increase in the exceptionally high levels of xenophobia and exclusion previously found in Iraq. In fact, Iraq “exhibits the highest levels of xenophobia found among the 80 societies for which data are available” according to the Values Surveys.[\[v\]](#) Specifically, the Kurds of Iraq show some of the world’s highest levels of xenophobia.[\[vi\]](#)

Because of the negative consequences of American and British intervention in Iraq, the Americans and the British were rejected as favorable hypothetical ‘neighbors’ (a question in the Values Survey) by the overwhelming majority of 90 percent of Iraqis, as presented by the Values Survey.[\[vii\]](#) Aside from xenophobia in regards to foreign peoples, the interethnic trust in Iraq is also shown to be extremely high in a global context. While the Kurds ‘trust’ over 90% of other Kurds, they only ‘trust’ a mere 30% of Shi’ite or Sunni Iraqis.[\[viii\]](#) The same trends can be seen with Shi’ite and Sunni Arab Iraqis, in respect to their groups.

“The Iraqi public also shows an exceptionally strong tendency to reject other out-groups, such as women...”.[\[ix\]](#) Despite the fact that historically, Iraqi women have had more opportunity to pursue education and careers than their counterparts in other Islamic societies, 93% of Iraqis agree that men make better political leaders than women, a higher proportion than that found in any other society.[\[x\]](#) This is yet another example of the abnormally high levels of insecurity and xenophobia that Iraqis demonstrate towards foreigners, other Iraqi ethnic groups, and women.

Racism, racial discrimination, and xenophobia have been an ever-increasing issue in the conference rooms of the United Nations. Among the many meetings and debates held for

finding solutions to xenophobia in member states, perhaps the most influential has been the Durban meeting, formally known as the “World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance”, that opened on 31 August and ended on 7 September of 2001 in South Africa.[xi] It is here that a Declaration and a Programme of Action were drafted and passed to combat the effects of xenophobia and discrimination.[xii] “One of the major obstacles to the eradication of racism and xenophobia has been the practice of denial; denial of responsibility over past deeds, denial of the plight of today’s victims and denial regarding future threats.”[xiii] That is why UNESCO initiated the Slave Route Project in 1994. This aims to locate and eradicate the source of xenophobia and racism.

Xenophobia, racism, as well as discrimination have all played an increasingly powerful role in the lives of Iraqi citizens. Iraq is currently listed as the country with the highest level of xenophobia in the entire world. This demonstrates the importance of an immediate solution. Iraq proposes that the restoration of public order and a reasonable measure of economic security should bring increasing tolerance and trust of outgroups, including foreigners, ethnic groups, and women. If, through entertainment and various forms of new media distribution, ethnic groups and foreigners can be portrayed in a positive light, then the discrimination between these groups should decrease in intensity, and consequentially Iraq will move down the list of ‘xenophobia levels in countries’ in the Value Surveys. This will enable the Iraqi government to more easily unite the ethnic groups into a cooperative whole, enabling it to bring about positive reform to eliminate the many economic, political and social issues experienced in Iraq today.[xiv]

Iraq must also strive to absorb a positive outlook on foreigners in the Iraqi population, thus enabling the Iraqi government to better and more successfully work with foreign powers to solve the aforementioned issues endemic to Iraqi society today. Xenophobia and ethnic discrimination have a much too powerful place in Iraqi society. It is of urgent importance that this issue must be addressed, and with the solution comes the ability for Iraq to coordinate more efficiently to solve the countless other social, economic, and political problems experienced in Iraq since the 2003 war.

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## Notes

[i] Inglehart, Ronald/Moaddel, Mansoor/Tessler, Mark, *Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq: A Natural Experiment on the Impact of Insecurity*. “Perspectives on Politics” Sep. 2006.

[ii] *ibid*

[iii] [http://www.apsanet.org/content\\_34672.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/content_34672.cfm)

[iv] Inglehart, Ronald/Moaddel, Mansoor/Tessler, Mark, *Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq: A Natural Experiment on the Impact of Insecurity*. “Perspectives on Politics” Sep. 2006.

[v] *ibid*

[vi] [ibid](#)

[vii] [http://www.apsanet.org/content\\_34672.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/content_34672.cfm)

[viii] Inglehart, Ronald/Moaddel, Mansoor/Tessler, Mark, *Xenophobia and In-Group Solidarity in Iraq: A Natural Experiment on the Impact of Insecurity*. "Perspectives on Politics" Sep. 2006.

[ix] [ibid](#)

[x] [ibid](#)

[xi] <http://www.un.org/WCAR/pressreleases/rd-d27.htm>

[xii] [ibid](#)

[xiii] [ibid](#)

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