

# Thi-Qar Governorate Profile



Source image: [JAPU](http://JAPU)

## Thi-Qar at a Glance

### Fast Facts

- Area: 12900 km<sup>2</sup>
- Average High Temperatures: 15°C (January) to 43°C (July)
- Population: 1,742,852
- Capital City: Al-Nassiriyah
- Average Low Temperatures: 7°C (January) to 28°C (July)
- Population Distribution Rural-Urban: 37,1%-62,9%

## Geography and Climate

The governorate of Thi-Qar (alternatively spelled Dhi-Qar) is located in the southeast of Iraq and shares internal borders with the governorates of Basrah, Muthanna, Qadisiya, Wassit and Missan. The Euphrates River crosses the governorate and feeds into the Hammar marshes, which once covered one third of the governorate's surface but shrunk drastically following the draining campaign of the 1990s. Parts of the marshlands had already been drained in the 1970s and 1980s to clear land for oil exploration. After the 1991 Shiite uprising, which will be covered in more detail in the historical introduction section, the Ba'athist regime constructed a series of dams and canals aiming to drain the marshes. By the time of the 2003 invasion, 90% of the marshland had disappeared. Efforts to reflood the marshes have been partially successful, but droughts and the decreasing water level of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers are hampering a full restoration. The draining also increased the level of salt in both the soil and the water in the area.

Thi-Qar has a dry desert climate typical of the region. The summers are hot and dry, with average high temperatures reaching above 40°C while the winters are mild. Rainfall is limited to the months of November-April and averages 100 mm annually.

## Population and Administrative Division

The majority of Thi-Qar's inhabitants are Shia Arabs. A Sunni minority and smaller communities of Assyrian and Chaldean Christians, and Mandeans also live in the governorate. The marshland of Thi-Qar is part of the ancestral homeland of the Ma'dan or Marsh Arabs, many of whom were displaced to other locations during the draining campaign. The Ma'dan inhabited the marshlands of Southern Iraq for centuries, living in reeds houses and practicing traditional methods of agriculture, fishing and water buffalo breeding. Tribal identity and structure remain strong in Thi-Qar. A patchwork of tribes, many of them descendants of the Muntafiq tribal confederation that governed the area in Ottoman times, is living across the governorate.

The governorate of Thi-Qar is divided into five districts: Al-Chibaysih, Nassiriyah, Al-Rifa'i, Al-Shatra and Suq Al-Shuyukh.

## Economy

The governorate of Thi-Qar is one of the most underdeveloped governorates of Iraq. The economy has remained relatively rural compared to other regions in Iraq. The agricultural sector however fails to provide jobs and income for the governorate's population. The sector has suffered from adverse side effects of the Public Food Distribution program, which was set in place after the 1990 invasion of Kuwait to provide Iraq's population with subsidized food rations. The program pushed down the prices of staple crops like wheat and rice, making them unprofitable for farmers. The draining of the marshes also devastated traditional fishing and farming methods of the Ma'dan.

The governorate also hosts a number of oil refineries, and a university located in the governorate's capital of Al-Nasiriyah.

During the past decade the public sector and construction have been major job providers, but low wages have been an issue for public service workers. The UN sanctions, which were imposed after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and lasted until after the 2003 invasion, were detrimental for Iraq's economy, including Thi-Qar. Thi-Qar's infrastructure however also suffered greatly from three decades of politically motivated neglect during the rule of the Ba'ath party in Iraq. Corruption has also been hampering the economic development of the governorate.

## Historical Introduction

The wetlands of Thi-Qar were the cradle of the ancient Sumerian civilization. The Muntafiq tribal confederation shaped the modern history of the governorate, which was known as Muntafiq governorate until 1976. The recent history of the area has been marked by brutally repressed Shia resistance against the Ba'ath regime.



Ma'dan village constructed of reed. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

Thi-Qar was not located directly on the frontlines of the Iran-Iraq war, meaning it escaped much of the devastation neighboring governorates suffered during the fighting. The wave of displacement set in motion by the war however also affected Thi-Qar. During the 1991 Gulf War the coalition's ground assault stopped just short of Al-Nassiriyah.

Following the Iraqi defeat at the hands of the International Coalition, mass revolts broke out in March 1991 in Iraqi Kurdistan and the Shiite southern governorates. The uprisings were inspired by the Ba'ath regime's apparent weakness and encouraged by former president George H. Bush's call on the Iraqi people to take down Saddam Hussein themselves. However, the expected American support for the revolts did not materialize, and after initial victories the uncoordinated rebels were quickly crushed by the Iraqi army. Unlike the Kurdish region, the Shiite south could not count on a no-fly zone imposed by the International Coalition. Thousands were killed in the fighting, including civilians who died when the Iraqi army indiscriminately targeted rebel held areas using heavy weaponry and helicopters. Many others were detained or executed, only to be found in mass graves after the 2003 invasion. Thousands of rebels and civilian IDPs sought refuge from the regime's persecution in the marshlands of southern Iraq. The Ba'ath regime however massacred many

of the Ma'dan and drained up to 90% of the marshland, forcing thousands of its inhabitants to flee to other regions in the governorate or neighboring Iran.

In 1999 the assassination of the popular Shiite cleric grand Ayatollah Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr, a staunch critic of the Ba'ath regime, triggered a wave of civil unrest and violence among Iraq's Shiite population. This unrest also reached Al-Nassiriyah, where a government building was stormed. Scores of people were killed and many more arrested when the security forces crushed the revolt.

During the 2003 invasion the capital Al-Nassiriyah witnessed one of the fiercest battles of the campaign. Coalition forces on route to Baghdad encountered stiff resistance in the city and its surroundings, which was only subdued after almost a week of intense fighting.

The governorate of Thi-Qar remained relatively quiet in the years after the 2003 invasion, although sporadic attacks against Coalition forces and the new Iraqi security forces did take place. Just like the other southern governorates, Thi-Qar was also a contested area between various Shia factions of which Moqtada Al-Sadr's Sadrist Trend and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI) were the most significant. These factions and their militias not only attacked Iraqi security forces but also clashed violently among each other. The March 2008 government crackdown on Sadrist and other Shia militias in Basrah spilled over to Thi-Qar, with militias briefly taking control over Al-Nassiriyah. After an agreement was reached between Sadrist leader Moqtada Al-Sadr and the Iraqi government the situation has remained relatively peaceful, with Shia factions mainly competing through the ballot box. Calls for regional autonomy were heard in Thi-Qar, just like in the other southern Shia dominated governorates, but they never reached critical momentum.

The governorate was spared from the Islamic State conquests which swept large parts of northwestern Iraq in 2014.

## **Humanitarian Issues**

Thi-Qar has been relatively stable since the 2008 clearing operation in Basrah. The governorate has among the lowest number of reported security incidents in Iraq. Mines and unexploded ordnance remain a threat in the marshlands of the governorate.

The governorate of Thi-Qar is the poorest governorate of Iraq. The population living under the poverty line of \$2,5 a day significantly increased from 20,9% in 2007 to 37,8% in 2011. The level of poverty does vary between the various districts and is the most stringent in the marshland areas. The local agricultural-based economy of the marshlands was devastated by the draining campaign and needs significant investments in infrastructure and other services.

Connected to the high level of poverty is the number of people facing food insecurity, which rose from 4% in 2007 to 17% in 2011 and the above average rate of unemployment. Child malnutrition however did decrease in the same period. Regarding education Thi-Qar also scores below average. Literacy and the enrollment rate in both primary and secondary education are lower than the Iraqi average.

	Population under the poverty line	Unemployment	Enrollment primary education	Enrollment secondary education	Literacy
<b>Thi-Qar Governorate</b>	37,8%	19,4%	88,6%	42,2%	71,4%
<b>National Averages</b>	11,5%	11,3%	90,4%	48,6%	79% <sup>1</sup>

The access to services like water and electricity in Thi-Qar is below the national average. Only 78,9% of Thi-Qar's inhabitants has sustainable access to an improved source of water, which is lower than the national average of 86,8%. The governorate also has one of the lowest rates of connection to the public water network. Only one fifth of the governorate's population relies on the public sewage system as the primary way of disposing of waste water, with others using septic tanks or covered canals outside their house.

Less than 30% of the population relies solely on the public electricity network, with the majority of Thi-Qar's inhabitants using private or shared generators to complement their electricity supply. 70% of the households who are connected to the electricity network report daily power cuts of more than 12 hours.

The governorate of Thi Qar hosts a number of IDPs. The majority of these IDPs are Shia Arabs who fled the violence resulting from the militant takeover of large parts of northwestern Iraq in the summer of 2014. Rented housing and the host community (friends, relatives and non-related families) are the main form of accommodation for these IDPs. In early 2014 the governorate also witnessed a significant wave of Iraqi returnees from Syria. The wave of IDPs and returnees is putting pressure on the local economy and labor market. For an up to date overview of the numbers and locations of IDPs, refugees and camps in the governorate please consult [IOM's displacement tracking matrix](#) or [REACH Iraq's resource center](#).

## Presence of NGOs

Please see the [members' area](#) on NCCI's website for full access to our weekly field reports, which include an up to date humanitarian situation overview. NCCI's [online NGO mapping](#) gives an oversight of local and international NGO presence on a governorate level.

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