

Basrah Governorate Profile



Source map: [JAPU](#)

Basrah at a Glance

Fast Facts

- Area: 19,070 km²
- Average High Temperatures: 17,7°C (January) to 41,8°C (August)
- Population: 2,403,301
- Capital City: Basrah
- Average Low Temperatures: 6,8°C (January) to 27,4°C (July)
- Population Distribution Rural-Urban: 20,1%-79,9%

Geography and Climate

Basrah is the most southern governorate of Iraq and borders Iran, Kuwait and Saudi-Arabia. In the south, the governorate is made up of a vast desert plain, intersected by the Shatt Al-Arab waterway which is formed by the confluence of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers at Al-Qurnah and empties into the Persian Gulf. Around Al-Qurnah and Al-Medina a number of lakes can be found, while marshland stretches from the north of the governorate into the neighboring governorates of Thi-Qar and Missan. The governorate is Iraq's only access to the sea.

Similar to the surrounding region, the governorate of Basrah has a hot and arid climate. The temperatures in summer are among the highest recorded in the world. Due to the vicinity of the Persian Gulf, humidity and rainfall are however relatively high. The governorate receives an average amount of 152mm of rainfall a year between the months of October and May.

Population and Administrative Division

The governorate of Basrah is subdivided into seven districts: Abu Al-Khaseeb, Al-Midaina, Al-Qurna, Al-Zubair, Basrah, Fao, and Shatt Al-Arab. The city of Basrah, the governorate's capital, is Iraq's third largest urban center.

Shia Arabs form the majority of the governorate's population, but Basrah also hosts a considerable Sunni minority, next to smaller Chaldean and Assyrian Christian communities and Mandaeans. Hundreds of Arab tribes and clans are living throughout the governorate. The marshes in the northern areas of the governorate and along the border of Iran are the ancestral home of the Madan or Marsh Arabs. The Madan inhabited the marshlands of Southern Iraq for centuries, living in reeds houses and practicing traditional methods of agriculture, fishing and water buffalo breeding.

Economy

Basrah's location at the Shatt Al-Arab and its vast oil reserves make it one of the economically most important governorates of the country. The port of Basrah and the port of Um Qasr, Iraq's only deep water port, are both located in the governorate, which makes the governorate a center for trade, transportation and storage. A number of manufacturing companies are also operating in the governorate. Off the coast of Basrah, the strategically important Al-Basrah Oil Terminal is the main oil outlet of Iraq. The massive oilfields of Basrah produce two thirds of Iraq's oil output. The city of Basrah also hosts a university and an international airport.

The governorate's poor infrastructure and aging oil installations are however hampering Basrah's economic prosperity. Basrah was a battleground in both the Iran-Iraq war and the two Gulf Wars, damaging the economic infrastructure and leaving a host of mines and unexploded ordnance littered throughout the governorate, which hampered economic development. The agricultural sector in particular is hindered by these leftover explosives.

The UN sanctions, imposed after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and only lifted after the occupation of Iraq in 2003, crippled the Iraqi economy and public infrastructure in general but hit the oil industry

especially hard. Due to import restrictions on spare parts and modern equipment imposed by the sanctions, the aging oil installations deteriorated, limiting their production capacity and increasing the risk of accidents. The diversion of resources to the military during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), insecurity and lack of investment after 2003 also contributed to the decay of the oil infrastructure.

The receding level of the Tigris and Euphrates, increased salinization and insufficient waste water treatment capacity hamper agriculture in the governorate. Furthermore corruption, crime and years of militant violence and sabotage following the 2003 American invasion also had a negative influence on the governorate's economic development.

Historical Introduction

The city of Basrah was founded during the early Arab conquests of the seventh century. Throughout the centuries, the city and its surroundings maintained their strategic and economical importance. During the last decades, Basrah was a battleground: the Iran-Iraq war, the two Gulf Wars, the Shiite uprisings against Saddam Hussain and the post-2003 insurgency all took their toll on the governorate.



The Shatt Al-Arab near Basrah. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

The main thrust of Iraq's initial attack against Iran was launched across the Shatt Al-Arab near Basrah. Later several major Iranian ground offensives targeted the city of Basrah and its surroundings. Throughout the war, the Shatt Al-Arab remained a contested frontline. The war devastated oil facilities and agricultural land around the Shatt Al-Arab. The city of Basrah was also targeted by Iranian shelling, missiles and airstrikes, killing civilians and destroying houses

and economic infrastructure. The fighting also forced thousands of civilians to flee the governorate.

The governorate of Basrah was also the launch pad of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990. The US-led international coalition launched a massive air campaign targeting Iraqi forces and several key installations like power plants and port facilities. Later, the Coalition's ground assault drove the Iraqi army from Kuwait, before pushing in to southern Iraq through the governorate of Basrah. Again, the governorate, its inhabitants and its infrastructure were devastated by war.

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. The expected American support for the revolts did however 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 Marsh Arabs and drained up to 90% of the marshland, forcing thousands of its inhabitants to flee to other regions in the governorate or neighboring Iran. Again, the governorate of Basrah suffered extensive damage to its infrastructure.

In 1999, another Shiite uprising broke out in Basrah. 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. In Basrah, police stations and offices of the Ba'ath party were stormed. The security forces again reacted forcefully, detaining and executing hundreds.

The governorate of Basrah was the entry point of the American-led coalition that invaded Iraq in 2003. After a two week long siege and heavy fighting Coalition forces took the city of Basrah. After the invasion, the governorate became a flashpoint of militia conflicts and resistance against the Multinational Force and the new Iraqi government. The British forces assigned to the governorate lacked the manpower, equipment and strategic planning to maintain order and security in Basrah, and between 2004 and 2008 the governorate slipped out of control of the Iraqi government. A number of Shia political groups like the Sadrist Trend and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), each with their own militia, vied for control over the governorate's economic, political and security institutions. Iranian weapons and funding played a significant role in the rise of these groups and their armed wings. The security situation rapidly deteriorated as militias fought each other and the British forces, who finally withdrew to their base at the Basrah Airport. Criminals ran rampant, while sectarian violence targeted Sunnis and Christians. The militias forcefully Islamized Basrawi society, barring secular or moderate Shiites from public life, intimidating women who did not adhere to a strict Islamic dress code and closing alcohol shops. Between March and May 2008, Iraqi security forces, backed by Coalition troops, launched a large scale clearing operation in Basrah. After heavy fighting, a truce was reached with the Sadrist Jaish Al-Mahdi and the militias withdrew from the streets, bringing the governorate back under government control.

Ever since the 2008 clearing operation, the governorate of Basrah has remained relatively peaceful. Calls for regional autonomy were heard in Basrah, just like in the other southern Shia dominated governorates, but they never reached critical momentum. For now the governorate also remained spared from the 2014 IS onslaught.

Humanitarian Issues

The governorate of Basrah has remained relatively stable and secure since the 2008 clearing operation. Security incidents however do occur and often revolve around tribal conflicts. The relocation of security

forces to the frontlines of the conflict with IS in 2014 could be a factor influencing the frequency of security incidents.

	Population under the poverty line	Unemployment	Enrollment primary education	Enrollment secondary education	Literacy
Basrah Governorate	16,1%	10,3%	91,4%	43,6%	81,9%
National Averages	11,5%	11,3%	91%	48,6%	79% ¹

The percentage of people living under the poverty line of \$2,5 a day in the governorate of Basrah is higher than the national average. Moreover, the level of poverty has seen an increase from 14,3% in 2007 to 16,1% in 2011. Poverty and food insecurity (21%) do vary greatly between the various districts of the governorate.

Concerning education and literacy, the governorate of Basrah scores a bit better than the national average. The exception is the enrollment rate in secondary schools, which is lower than the national average and also saw a decrease from 45% in 2006 to 48,6% in 2011.

The unemployment rate of Basrah is lower than in most other governorates of Iraq, but the labor market participation rate of women (10,3%) is among the lowest of the country.

More than 80% of the Basrawi households report power cuts of at least three hours daily, forcing almost 80 % of the governorate's inhabitants to rely on additional sources of power like private or shared generators to cover the failing public network.

The population of Basrah has among the highest rates of access to improved water sources and also enjoys an above average connection to the public water network. Nevertheless, almost half of the governorate's inhabitants report the availability of drinking water as bad or very bad. Less than half of the people connected to the public water network have water available for the full day. 93,6% of Basrah's inhabitants have access to improved sanitation facilities, but 26,7% rely on covered canals to dispose waste water.

The limited availability of drinking water is directly connected to a number of environmental problems threatening Basrah's fresh water supply. Dams and irrigation projects on the Tigris and Euphrates rivers have diverted much of the water flow heading to the Shatt Al-Arab, and with the receding water levels in the rivers, salt water from the Persian Gulf has been reaching ever further inland. Waste water from both Iraq's and Iran's industry and households flows into the rivers untreated, further diminishing the

¹As by UNICEF, *State of The World's Children 2015 Country Statistics Table*, http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/iraq_statistics.html , 25/02/2015. All other data are from JAU, *Basrah Governorate Profile* (2013), <http://www.jauiraq.org/documents/378/GP-Basrah%202013.pdf> , 17/03/2015.

water supply. Salinization and pollution do not only threaten the drinking water supply but also have devastating effects on agriculture.

Basrah's history as a battleground also left huge amounts of ordnance littered around the governorate. Landmines and unexploded ordnance form a direct threat for the governorate's inhabitants, but the long term health effects of depleted uranium (DU) and heavy metals like lead and mercury used in ammunition are also extremely harmful. The spate in birth defects, miscarriages and cancer that hit the governorate's population since the 1990s has been attributed to these wartime leftovers.

Basrah's relative safety and stability make it an attractive location for IDPs fleeing the violence that swept northwestern Iraq in 2014. 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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