

DRIVERS OF MARGINALIZATION AND NEGLECT AMONG CITIZENS IN THE SOUTH OF IRAQ



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While the north of Iraq was gripped by the ISIL conflict, social movements, and popular demands for change to the status quo were growing in the center and south of the country. The recurrence of protests and demonstrations trended upwards after 2017,¹ feeding a negative drift in the social and political environment in these areas. Frustration over poor governance and stalled living conditions formed the base of the population's demands for change. The lack of (efficient) responses contributed to growing distrust in institutions.² Underlying this trend is a sense of marginalization, especially in the southern governorates of Iraq, which this brief aims to analyze in more detail.

This brief is part of a larger research project, A Climate of Fragility, carried out by IOM Iraq and Social Inquiry, that provides the first detailed profiling of southern governorates in Iraq in a decade, exploring population demographics, housing, access to services, socio-economic situation, agriculture, migration, wellbeing, governance, security, and social cohesion. The profiling is based on a large-scale household survey.

The survey included a household module (applicable to the overall household situation), a personal module (gathering perceptions of the respondent), and a roster module (collecting personal characteristics of each household member). A total of 3,904 respondents were surveyed between December 2020 and January 2021 across the 18 districts in Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates. Thus, the sample is statistically representative at the governorate and district level, with district-level sampling stratified by urbanicity and gender, generating a representative sample for urban and rural respondents and male and female respondents. The outputs of this project also include a household profiling report of Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan governorates, two additional thematic briefs on various forms of capital and employment, and an online portal that includes all reports and analysis, key findings, a dashboard, and public datasets for use.

As in any society, people in southern Iraq hold an expectation of upward mobility and continued prosperity. In many contexts, state institutions are often looked upon to facilitate this endeavor either by facilitating an environment to do so, by directly supporting them or, at least, by not representing an obstacle. However, the data appears to reflect a perception that institutions have failed to act inclusively in this regard. As seen in Figure 1, more than 70% of the residents in all three governorates of Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan indicate feeling reflect extremely or very marginalized as citizens,

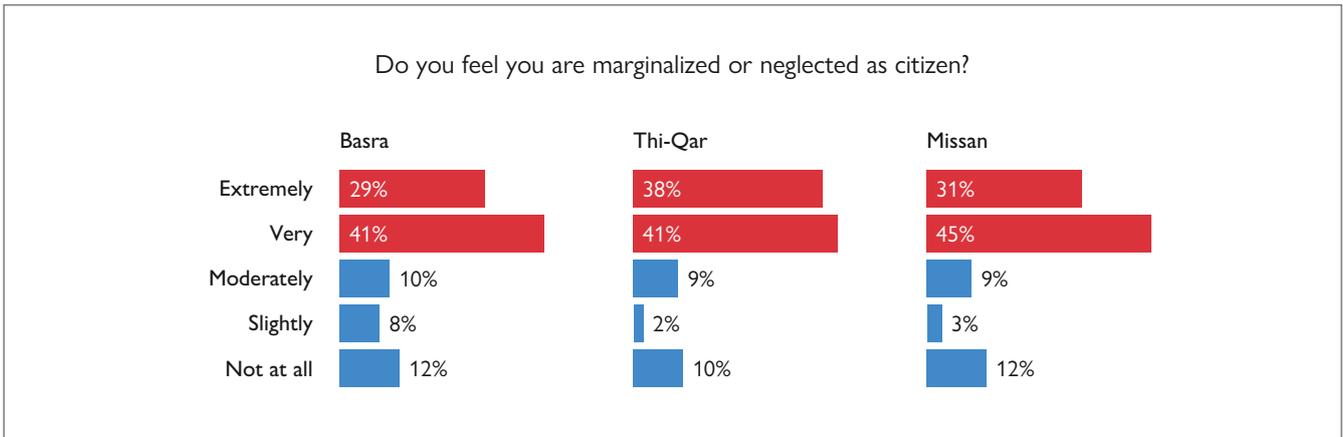
an indicator that can be used as a proxy to qualify the current social environment. Furthermore, they attribute this sense of marginalization primarily to the state as the vast majority point to the central government, as opposed to local authorities, security forces, or the rest of society. As such, there seems to be a pervasive sense that institutions, especially those further away from the citizen geographically and administratively, do not or are unable to act in the best interest of residents across the south of Iraq.³

1 ACLED, Iraq's October revolution: six months on (ACLED, 2020).

2 Maria Fantappie, Widespread Protests Point to Iraq's Cycle of Social Crisis (Brussels: ICG, 2019).

3 It is also worth noting that this sentiment is felt across northern and central parts of the country as well to roughly the same degree, see for example, IOM and Social Inquiry, Reimagining Reintegration: An Analysis of Durable Solutions through Short-term Rights Attainment and Longer-term Rights Fulfillment After Conflict (Baghdad: IOM, 2022).

Figure 1. Levels of marginalization or neglect by governorate



If left unaddressed, this deficit between social expectations and institutional delivery may persist and reinforce the political instability that has affected the whole country including the south over the last five

years. As such, to put forward actions to address this negative spiral, it is important to identify and analyze the drivers of marginalization in the south of Iraq and the profiles of those citizens who feel most marginalized.

KEY DRIVERS BEHIND WIDESPREAD FEELINGS OF MARGINALIZATION AND NEGLECT

This brief explores which factors are most correlated with feelings of marginalization; in other words, what conditions or characteristics tend to be common among respondents who express higher levels of marginalization, compared to those who do not. This analysis is centered around three main dynamics that appear to drive marginalization highest: (i) lack of

confidence in institutions and their capacity to provide services, (ii) inability to economically prosper, and (iii) persistence of an insecure environment.⁴ Where possible, this brief offers analysis into what factors may be influential in moderating the drift toward unrest and instability.

1. HAVING LITTLE CONFIDENCE IN INSTITUTIONS AND PUBLIC SERVICES IS A COMMON FACTOR AMONG THOSE MOST MARGINALIZED

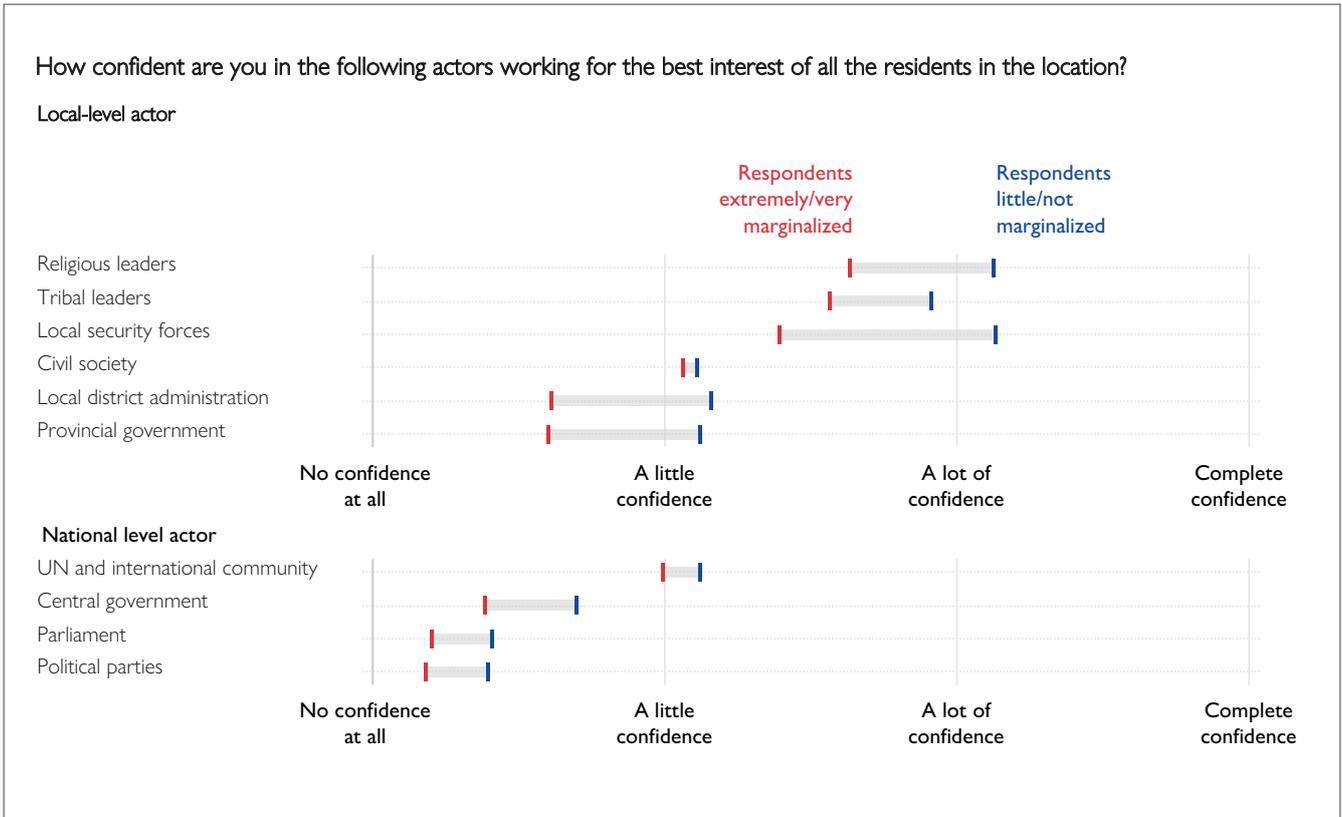
Confidence in institutions is the most determinant factor behind indicators of marginalization. When respondents expressed low confidence overall in different formal and informal institutions, they also tend to report a very high sense of marginalization as a citizen. Respondents' trust in local institutions in particular exhibited this pattern, with a significant difference emerging between residents who reported feeling most and least marginalized (Figure 2).

For example, respondents who feel marginalized tend to show nearly no confidence at all in their local and

provincial administrations, while less marginalized respondents tend to give at least a little confidence to them. Similarly, the group reporting higher levels of marginalization also expressed lower levels of confidence in security forces, religious leaders and tribal leaders than those who did not feel as marginalized. However, this divergence is less evident with national actors (central government, parliament, and political parties), for whom all respondents expressed near no confidence that these bodies were working for the best interests of all residents in their area.

⁴ For the selection of findings, statistical analysis was done using simple linear regression models between the indicator on marginalization and different variables present in the dataset around key topics on governance, economic situation, safety and social cohesion. Indicators were categorized in terms of being statistically significant, the sign of the relationship with marginalization, and its coefficient. Further checks for consistency were conducted by controlling results by gender and age of the respondent. The overall narrative emerging from this analysis is described in this brief and supported by more accessible data visualization elements.

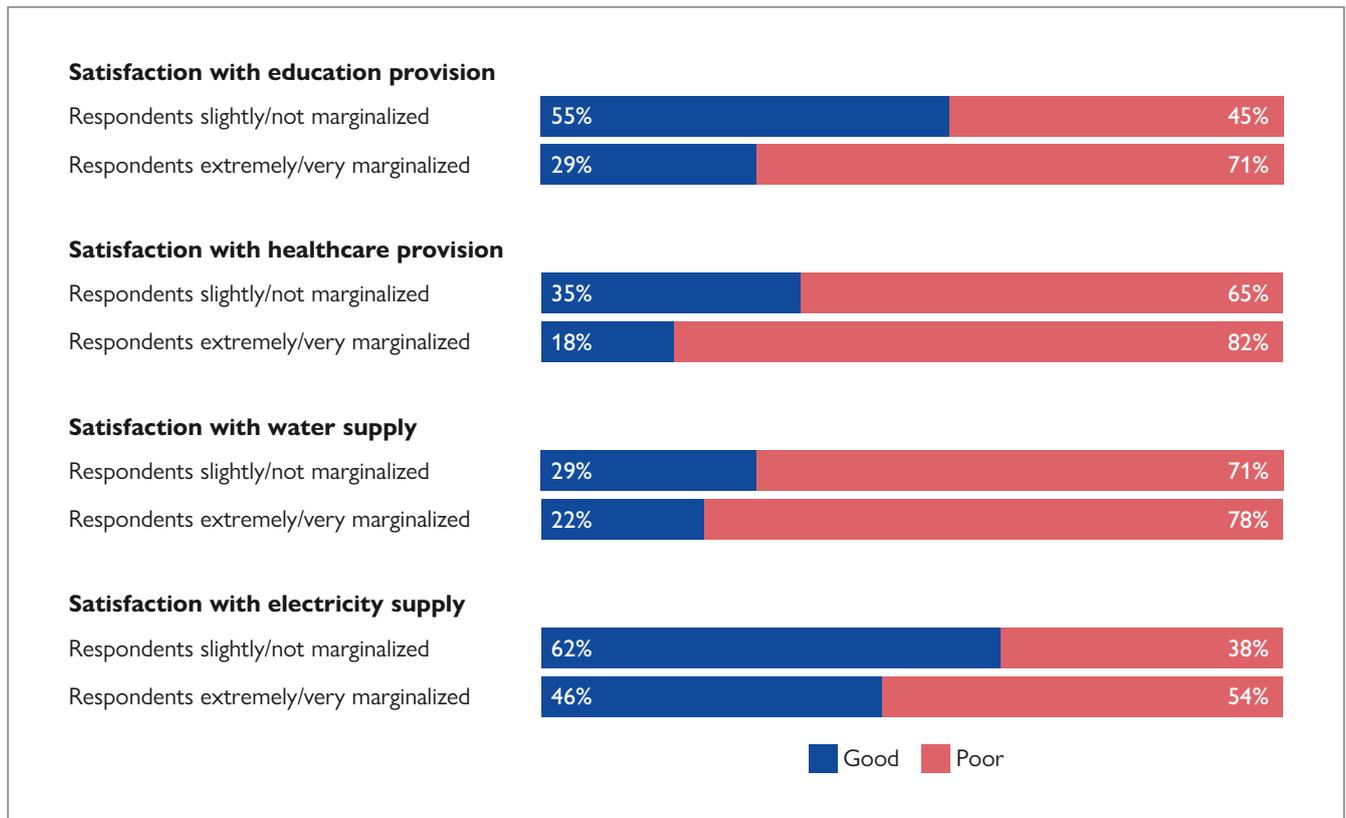
Figure 2. Level of confidence in actors by feelings of respondent marginalization



Overall, these findings confirm that, when citizens express confidence that (especially local) institutions are working for the best interests of the public, they tend not to feel as marginalized or neglected as their counterparts. A direct way to further assess how perceptions of marginalization and institutions

interplay is precisely through public service provision. In general, when residents reported satisfaction with public services such as education, healthcare, water, and electricity, they are significantly less likely to feel marginalized (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Satisfaction with public service provision by feelings of marginalization



Note: responses for ‘good’ and ‘very good’ are grouped together for ease of visualization, as for ‘poor’ and ‘very poor’.

The disaggregation shown above offers additional insights for which public services display this correlation. While water supply tends not to meet respondents’ expectations overall, a wide difference is seen in the quality of education and healthcare provision as well as electricity supply, on one side, and levels of marginalization on the other side. This is especially true for education: where education is more positively perceived, residents tend to report lower feelings of marginalization and neglect. This seems to indicate that people generally put a strong emphasis on this specific public service given that they likely value it as a driver of upward mobility for themselves and their children.⁵ In addition to this, it is no surprise to see that, in rural areas, where satisfaction with services is lower than in urban areas, the proportion of people who

feel marginalized is much higher. In general, thus, when public provision is viewed as not meeting needs, it more deeply reinforces people’s feelings that the government is not invested in their own and their families’ futures—investing on them (starting with education), thus, goes a long way to contain feelings of marginalization.

One last key point related to institutional trust refers to corruption. This issue was widely reported by all types of residents as a pervasive problem in their province—55% indicated it is a very serious problem and 28% that it is a somewhat serious problem. A rather obvious but nevertheless significant relationship is also found with levels of marginalization, in that these increase when residents perceive a stronger presence of corruption among institutions.

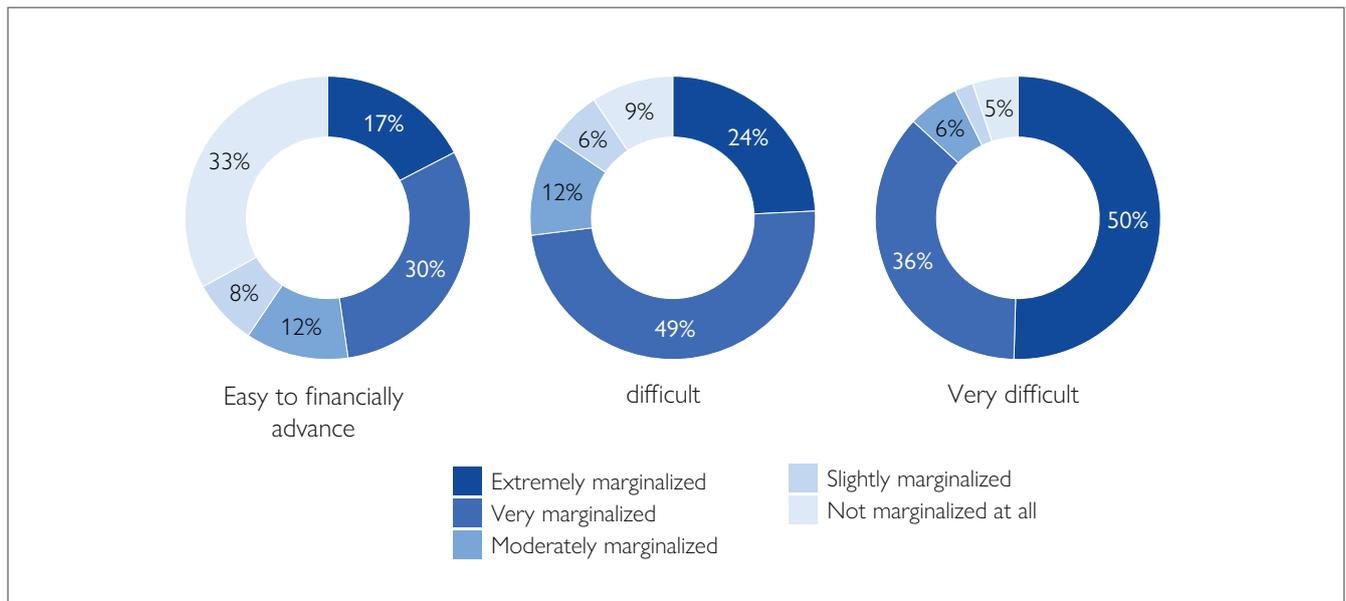
5 Insights on the gap between education outcomes and opportunities accessible for youth is discussed in International Crisis Group, Fight or Flight: The Desperate Plight of Iraq’s ‘Generation 2000’, Middle East Report No. 169 (Brussels: ICG, 2016).

2. THE PROMOTION OF PATHWAYS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC BETTERMENT IS LIKELY A KEY ENTRY POINT TO INFLUENCING PERCEPTIONS OF MARGINALIZATION

As highlighted above, the perceived opportunity for upward mobility is a key force in any society. This includes whether a respondent feels able to financially advance over time in their current circumstances. The largest proportion of respondents across the three governorates reported it was difficult (50%) or very difficult (35%) to advance financially. Only 15% reported

that it is easy for them to advance (with less than 1% reporting it was very easy). This key explanatory factor is strongly correlated with feelings of marginalization (Figure 4). Those who indicate greater difficulty in gaining upward mobility also more frequently report feelings of extremely to very high marginalization.

Figure 4. Percentage of respondents by feelings of marginalization disaggregated by reported ease to financially advance



A similar trend emerges when putting resident households' current domestic socio-economic situations into perspective. When households struggle to make ends meet and afford a minimum standard of

material wellbeing, they will likely express feelings of marginalization and neglect at considerably higher rates than households with a relatively more well-off socio-economic situation (Figure 5).

Figure 5. Household self-reported affordability by level of marginalization

Self-reported affordability		Respondents slightly/not marginalized	Respondents extremely/very marginalized
Lowest	We do not have enough money even for food	5%	10%
	We have enough money for food, but not enough to buy clothes and shoes as needed	20%	35%
	We have enough money for food and clothing, but not enough to buy expensive items	36%	35%
	We can buy some expensive items but we cannot buy everything we want	30%	20%
Highest	We can buy whatever we want	10%	1%
	Total	100%	100%

Based on these two indicators above, it appears conceivable that the promotion of pathways for socio-economic betterment is a key entry point to influencing perceptions of marginalization. Current opportunities for advancement in material wellbeing, however, remain significantly limited in Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan given economic and governance dynamics in these governorates.⁶ A critical example of this relationship pertains directly to the type of occupation.

A common situation among those most marginalized is that they rely primarily on unstable income sources, especially daily labor, on agriculture - which is a sector increasingly lagging due to environmental degradation - or are unemployed but looking for work (Figure 6).

On the other hand, respondents with public sector employment are less likely to report as high a level of perceived marginalized as those without such income. Opportunities to access stable income sources like a public sector job are, however, increasingly limited, especially for younger generations (despite their higher education attainment than earlier generations).⁷ This is of extraordinary importance given that 70% of the population of these governorates is under the age of 30.⁸ Similarly, more than half (54%) of those who reported feeling very or extremely marginalized also tend to indicate that they face exclusion and barriers in accessing better employment, compared to 25% reported by those who do not feel as marginalized.

6 See, IOM and Social Inquiry, *Employment in the South of Iraq: Challenging Prospects for Women and Youth* (Baghdad: IOM, 2022).

7 IOM and Social Inquiry, *Between Fragility and Resilience: An Exploration of Human, Social, Natural, Physical, and Financial Capitals in the South of Iraq* (Baghdad: IOM, 2022).

8 IOM and Social Inquiry, *A Climate of Fragility: Household Profiling in the South of Iraq Basra, Thi-Qar, and Missan* (Baghdad: IOM, 2022).

Figure 6. Feelings of marginalization by different occupation of respondents

	Occupation frequency among respondents	% of respondents with this occupation that feel extremely/very marginalized
Employed in public sector	13%	64%
Employed in security forces	5%	53%
Employed in formal private sector	1%	66%
Employed in daily labor/ self-employed	25%	76%
Employed in agriculture	4%	83%
Unemployed but looking for work	6%	86%
not in workforce	46%	75%
Total	100%	

Finally, another smaller but still significant correlation appears in explaining the links between feelings of marginalization and one's socio-economic situation. Migrant households, who commonly have left rural areas due to lack of opportunities there, tend to also express higher feelings of marginalization and neglect, pointing to the heightened challenges (especially in socio-economic terms) that these types of households currently face.⁹

Taken together, these findings illustrate a clear dynamic: that the inability to fulfill employment expectations of an increasingly educated population, which in part is caused by a public sector unable to absorb more employees and a weak private sector, are fueling feelings of marginalization. Indeed, Arab Spring revolutions were strongly correlated to this exact dynamic: a youth "bulge" entering a labor market unable to provide enough opportunities for them.¹⁰

9 See, IOM and Social Inquiry, *A Climate of Fragility*; and IOM and Social Inquiry, *Migration into a Fragile Setting: Responding to Climate-Induced Informal Urbanization and Inequality in Basra* (Baghdad: IOM, 2021).

10 Filipe R. Campante and Davin Chor. 2012 "Why Was the Arab World Poised for Revolution? Schooling, Economic Opportunities, and the Arab Spring." *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 26 (2): 167-88. <http://doi.org/10.1257/jep.26.2.167>

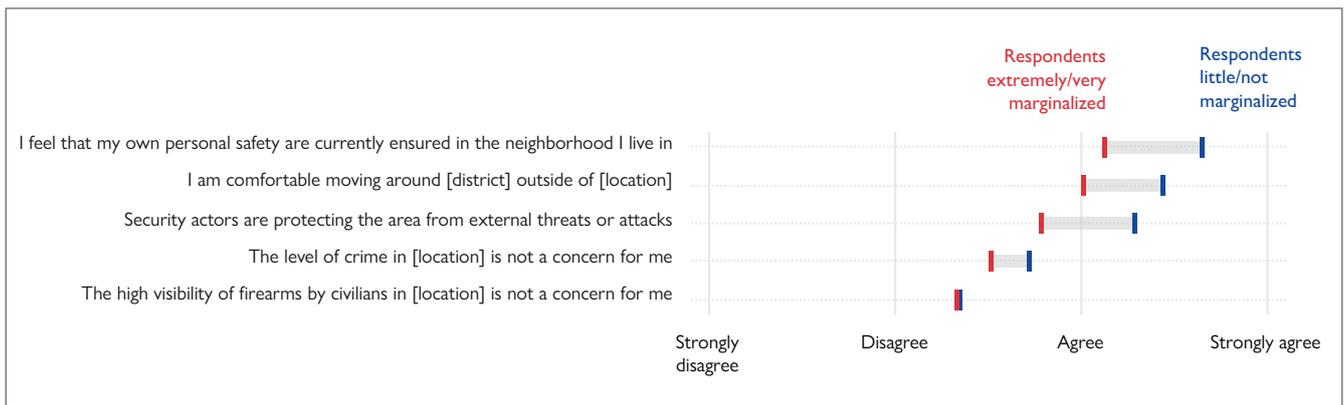
3. LIVING IN AREAS MORE EXPOSED TO VIOLENT EVENTS CONTRIBUTES TO A SENSE OF NEGLECT

A final trend observed in terms of key drivers of marginalization pertains to security. While this driver is less determinant for marginalization as compared to confidence in institutions, service provision, and socio-economic situation, it is still imperative to consider given the prevalence of violence in the south of Iraq, increasingly linked to political dynamics.¹¹ As described earlier, residents' views on institutions indicated that there is a very wide gap in terms of confidence in security forces between those who reported feeling very or extremely marginalized and those who did not—specifically indicating that those most marginalized

tend to have only a little confidence in such actors.

This link is further manifested in the finding that a lack of safety is correlated with marginalization. Those that live in what they perceive as relatively insecure areas also tend to express stronger feelings of marginalization and neglect (Figure 7). Thus, a safer overall environment contributes to less marginalization, though to a lesser degree than the other factors described in this brief. It should be noted however that specific issues like raising criminality and the high visibility of weapons in the streets are concerns raised by nearly all residents irrespective of their feelings of marginalization.

Figure 7. Feelings of safety and security by levels of marginalization



11 IOM and Social Inquiry, A Climate of Fragility; and IOM and Social Inquiry, Migration into a Fragile Setting: Responding to Climate-Induced Informal Urbanization and Inequality in Basra (Baghdad: IOM, 2021). See more recently, Mustafa Salim and Kareem Fahim, "Iraq Cleric Orders Supporters to Retreat after Clashes Kill Dozens," Washington Post, 30 August 2022.

WAYS FORWARD IN REDUCING FEELINGS OF MARGINALIZATION AND NEGLECT

When people mobilize into the streets, particularly in the south of Iraq, it seems to be primarily in response to the marginalization and neglect that is manifested in the different indicators highlighted in this brief. Indeed, further analysis of the data indicates that those most marginalized are those also most engaged in public affairs.¹² Low trust in institutions, poor perceptions of public service provision and increasing corruption, lack of socio-economic opportunity, and mixed feelings of safety are all correlated with each other and interconnected, mutually reinforcing an overlapping fragility. In other words, where there is low confidence in institutions and weak service provision, there also tends to be economic and physical insecurity.¹³ This implies that isolated interventions alone cannot not effectively staunch marginalization, but that these issues need to be addressed in a holistic and more simultaneous manner.

Narrowing the gap between people's expectations for wellbeing and their current situation requires investment in physical infrastructure through the reinforcement

and expansion of quality service provision and public facilities, especially in rural areas. Greater economic opportunities (beyond the public sector) and more equitable and just access to stable employment are needed to address the sense of stagnation among poorer households and younger populations. More local law enforcement, with direct ties to the community, and a lower prevalence of politicized security actors can contribute to a betterment of safety and security among the population.¹⁴ In short, responses to marginalization require at their core effective and inclusive governance.

These actions depend on local and national authorities, which can be supported through capacity building and resources. The critical point however is that any response must be Iraqi led. Meeting people's demands for a just and equal society when they voice them is a central part of governance and is the primary avenue to reduce marginalization and increase stability.

12 Another correlation found in the analysis is that, when respondents expressed being extremely/very marginalized, their likelihood to have participated in expressed grievances or demands in public, contacted a community leader, etc. is significantly increased. It can be argued that a stronger feeling of marginalization does push people to collectively mobilize (as opposed to the other way around).

13 See, IOM and Social Inquiry, *A Climate of Fragility*; and IOM and Social Inquiry, *Migration into a Fragile Setting: Responding to Climate-Induced Informal Urbanization and Inequality in Basra* (Baghdad: IOM, 2021).

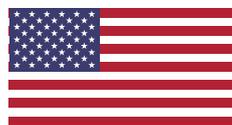
14 IOM and Yale Law School Center for Global Challenges, *Perceptions of police, security and governance in Iraq* (Baghdad: IOM, 2020).

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