

IRAQ

More than 100 school students and dozens of university students and academics were killed in 2009-2012, and there were numerous direct attacks on schools. The targeting of students, teachers and academics continued in 2013 with shootings and bombings.

CONTEXT

Sectarian fighting put significant pressure on Iraq's education system in the years following the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Hundreds of academics were assassinated⁸⁴⁴ and the Ministry of Education recorded 31,600 attacks against universities and schools.⁸⁴⁵

After Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled, Iraq eventually fractured along sectarian lines as pro-Baathist forces and Islamist insurgents fought the US-led occupying forces and Sunnis and Shias fought each other. The levels of violence fell significantly by 2009 as a result of three main factors: US funding for militia comprised of Sunni tribesmen who had previously fought the US and Iraqi forces,⁸⁴⁶ a surge by US troops that pushed Islamist militants out of contested cities and provinces, and a Shia ceasefire.⁸⁴⁷ American combat forces withdrew from the country during 2011. However, education continued to be affected by violence and sectarian divisions.

Bombings remained commonplace, particularly in central Iraq, and armed groups, including Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) and Islamic State of Iraq (ISI), continued to carry out acts of violence targeting academics, security forces and government buildings.⁸⁴⁸ Violence also escalated in 2013 between Shias and Sunnis, partly provoked by the Shia-led government's perceived marginalization of Sunnis,

but also due to the growing strength of Al-Qaeda and other factors.⁸⁴⁹

In addition to the direct violence against education institutions and targeted killings of university staff, sectarian divisions shaped the higher education sector, putting pressure on students and faculty of opposing groups.⁸⁵⁰ Different sects controlled different Iraqi cities including the universities located in them.⁸⁵¹ There were also claims that control over particular universities was increasingly being handed to political parties. For instance, it was reported that Baghdad University had been 'allocated' to the Islamic Supreme Council in Iraq, Al-Mustansiriya University to the Sadr Group, and Al-Nahrain University to the Al-Dawa Party.⁸⁵² These groups interfered in many aspects of university life, including admissions, hiring, course content and physical security on campus.⁸⁵³ After the appointment in 2011 of a leading member of the pro-Shiite Islamic Dawa party, Ali al-Adeeb, as Minister of Higher Education, the education ministry fired large numbers of former Baathists from university faculties.⁸⁵⁴ Subsequently, complaints of sectarian bias in appointments were presented to the United Nations Human Rights Council.⁸⁵⁵

In addition, insurgent groups demanded changes to the curriculum or tried to deny access to education to students from targeted groups and often responded with violence when their demands were not met.⁸⁵⁶

Net primary enrolment in Iraq was 89 per cent (2007),⁸⁵⁷ net secondary enrolment was 44 per cent (2007)⁸⁵⁸ and gross tertiary enrolment was 16 per cent (2005).⁸⁵⁹ The adult literacy rate was 79 per cent (2011).⁸⁶⁰

ATTACKS ON SCHOOLS

There were 56 documented attacks on school buildings during 2009-2012. Five attacks on school buildings or facilities were documented in 2009, seven in 2010, 29 in 2011 and at least 15 in 2012.⁸⁶¹ Methods of attack included suicide bombings, use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs), mortar attacks and gunfire.⁸⁶² For example, on 24 September 2012 – the second day of the new school year – a suicide bomber drove his car laden with explosives into Al-Kifah primary school in Anbar province, killing five children and injuring six others. The blast caused severe damage to the school building.⁸⁶³

In addition, IEDs planted in the vicinity of schools impinged on access to school services: 54 incidents of IEDs affecting schools were reported in 2011 alone.⁸⁶⁴ In some incidents, the detonation of bombs outside schools was linked to intentional efforts to damage them. For example, on 1 March 2012, an IED exploded in front of a secondary school in Kirkuk and a police search revealed a second bomb in the school.⁸⁶⁵ In other cases, IEDs were planted to attack passing military targets but also put students and teachers at risk. For example, an explosive charge hidden in a rubbish bin went off near a primary school in the Al-Rashidiyah neighbourhood of northern Mosul on 25 March 2009, missing its passing US patrol target and instead killing four schoolchildren and injuring seven more as they were leaving the school to go home.⁸⁶⁶

Militia groups also stored explosives at schools. Six schoolchildren were killed and 28 students and teachers wounded at the Abaa Dhar primary school for boys in 2009 when a cache of explosives hidden underneath the school's rubbish dump, allegedly by militia groups, was accidentally detonated by the head teacher while he was burning refuse.⁸⁶⁷

Armed groups threatened several girls' primary schools on different occasions by planting IEDs on the premises, attacking the schools at night and leaving threatening messages. In some incidents, schools or students were targeted because of the ethnicity or religious affiliation of the majority of the students, particularly in areas such as Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Baghdad.⁸⁶⁸

ATTACKS ON SCHOOL STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND OTHER EDUCATION PERSONNEL

During 2009-2012, some 106 school students were killed, 200 injured and 22 abducted; however, the number of attacks on education was greatly reduced compared to earlier years.⁸⁶⁹

Sectarian groups attacked students and teachers, in many cases apparently due to their status as students or teachers.

Although a UN respondent reported no school student or teacher victims in 2009,⁸⁷⁰ there was one media report of three female students wounded in an armed attack in western Mosul, on 25 May 2009, when an unknown gunman opened fire on them as they left their school in the Tamouz neighbourhood.⁸⁷¹

According to a UN respondent, in 2010, 49 school students were killed, 26 injured and five abducted in attacks on education.⁸⁷² The UN Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) separately reported that more than 10 school teachers and university professors were assassinated in 2010 in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Mosul, Al Kut (Wassit governorate), Al Anbar and Diyala, although it did not indicate how many of the ten were teachers. The motives for many of the killings were not known.⁸⁷³

In 2011, 37 students were killed, 33 students injured, and 13 students abducted, according to a UN respondent.⁸⁷⁴ Twenty-seven school personnel or education officials were killed or injured in incidents that included IEDs and direct shooting, mostly in Baghdad, Kirkuk, Ninewa, Salahaddin and Anbar. In all these cases, armed groups, including Al-Qaeda in Iraq and ISI, were responsible.⁸⁷⁵ For instance, on 11 December 2011, a bomb attached to a car carrying a Ministry of Education official in Baghdad's northern Shaab district exploded, killing him.⁸⁷⁶ The same day, a bomb attached to a teacher's car injured him when it detonated in the town of Muqadadiya.⁸⁷⁷

In 2012, 69 students were killed, 167 injured and four abducted, according to a UN respondent.⁸⁷⁸ For example, in Salahaddin governorate, two secondary school students were killed and another wounded when five masked armed attackers entered the school, made their way to a specific classroom and shot at the students on 22 April 2012. The UN reported that according to local sources, including local police, AQI was allegedly behind the attack, some mentioning that AQI had attempted to recruit the victims before the incident.⁸⁷⁹ The UN also reported that 19 school-level education staff were killed or injured in 2012.⁸⁸⁰ On 12 March 2012, a teacher from the Riyadh district, south of Kirkuk, died when a bomb attached to his car exploded.⁸⁸¹

Roadside bombs along school routes also killed or wounded a number of students and teachers, although they were not necessarily targeting education. In one incident, Baghdad high school students travelling by bus from Sadr City to sit their final examinations were caught in a roadside bomb explosion in June 2009. Police said that three pupils were killed and 13 people wounded, although the US army said there was one dead and eight injured.⁸⁸² On 10 January 2012, three boys were killed by a

roadside bomb while leaving their school in Yathrib, near Balad.⁸⁸³

Throughout 2009-2012, there were also several instances of arrest or harassment of students, teachers and teacher trade unionists. Ibrahim al-Battat, a leader of the Iraqi Teachers' Union, was arrested and then released on 22 February 2010 after an eight-day detention for his involvement in strikes and his refusal to divulge union members' names.⁸⁸⁴ On 26 February 2010, a warrant was also issued for Jasim Hussein Mohammed, the national leader of the Iraqi Teachers' Union (ITU), who was subsequently arrested and released.⁸⁸⁵

ATTACKS ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Almost 500 Iraqi academics⁸⁸⁶ were killed in the nine years from the fall of Saddam Hussein to April 2012, but the vast majority of assassinations occurred before 2009. Since then, attacks on higher education have continued at a much lower rate, with 26 killings recorded by media and human rights groups from 2009 to 2012. In two cases in 2010, professors who had recently returned to Iraq from exile were killed, contradicting the higher education ministry's claims that it was safe for academics to come back.⁸⁸⁷ UNAMI reported the separate killings of six academics and the combined kidnapping of two professors in 2011.⁸⁸⁸ The majority of those killed were shot or targeted by explosions caused by magnetic or 'sticky' bombs, often placed under vehicles, or other devices planted near the victims' homes. However, at least one professor was stabbed to death and another was hanged after unidentified attackers stormed his house.⁸⁸⁹ In another incident in July 2011, the Director-General of Iraq's Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Dawood Salman Rahim, was reportedly assassinated, along with his son, in their car in west Baghdad's Ghazaliya district by a group of unknown armed men.⁸⁹⁰

A compilation of media and human rights reports suggests that as many as 20 higher education students may have been killed and 115 injured between 2009 and 2011. Of those killed, most were reported to have been shot, many in drive-by shootings in which the perpetrators and motives were not known.⁸⁹¹

In 2010, at least 100 students were injured when a convoy of buses, escorted by Iraqi forces and transporting college students from Christian towns and villages in the Nineveh Plain back to classes at the University of Mosul, was attacked.⁸⁹² A car bomb exploded as the first buses crossed a checkpoint along the internal border between the semi-autonomous Kurdish region and the rest of the country. Shortly afterwards, another roadside bomb went off.⁸⁹³ The area around Mosul University had already experienced several attacks and threats of attacks in 2009, which is why students travelled in these types of convoys.⁸⁹⁴ The attacks on Christian students were part of a spate of dozens of attacks against Christians in Iraq in 2010.⁸⁹⁵ According to Worldwatch Monitor, nearly 1,000 students stayed away from class for the rest of the semester as a result of the convoy attack.⁸⁹⁶

Students in Kirkuk and the northern city of Mosul were repeatedly targeted.⁸⁹⁷ In another incident on 11 August 2011, five Shiite university students were shot dead by a drive-by assassin on a motorcycle while they were swimming.⁸⁹⁸ On 6 June 2012, another student was killed by a magnetic bomb attached to a vehicle.⁸⁹⁹

ATTACKS ON EDUCATION IN 2013

School drop-out rates in 2013 were the lowest for a decade, which the education minister said resulted from better security, removal of armed groups, rebuilding of schools and increased recognition of

the value of education.⁹⁰⁰ However, there was an upturn in the level of general violence in 2013,⁹⁰¹ approaching the levels of 2008, and there were numerous reports of attacks on education, including against school students,⁹⁰² tertiary-level students,⁹⁰³ teachers,⁹⁰⁴ academics⁹⁰⁵ and education ministry officials.⁹⁰⁶ There were multiple accounts of teachers being targeted individually and some reports of large numbers of students being killed. For example, on 6 October 2013, a suicide bomber drove a truck full of explosives into the wall of a primary school playground in Tel Afar, north-west of Mosul, and detonated them, killing at least 12 pupils and their head teacher.⁹⁰⁷

Attacks on higher education institutions and students and academics continued. In January, Dr Abbas Fadhil Al-Dulaimy, the President of Diyala University, survived an assassination attempt in which his convoy was hit by the detonation of a roadside bomb, which killed two of his bodyguards.⁹⁰⁸ Tikrit University was repeatedly targeted. In March, a bomb went off on its campus, injuring five students.⁹⁰⁹ In June, a suicide bomber attacked the campus, killing a police officer.⁹¹⁰ Four university staff members were also reportedly killed in a bomb attack in March north of Tikrit, but it is not clear whether they were targeted as university staff members.⁹¹¹ In the most serious incident affecting students, two suicide bombers blew themselves up inside and outside Habib al-Asadi Shiite mosque in Baghdad in June 2013, killing 34 people and injuring 57 others. Most victims were students from the nearby Imam Al-Sadiq University for Islamic Studies who regularly attended the mosque for midday prayers, although it is not known if they were being targeted.⁹¹²

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