



Media Use in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan

Iraq boasts the fourth-largest population of any Arab country (after Egypt, Algeria, and Morocco), and one of the most robust domestic news media markets in the region. With dozens of daily newspapers, radio stations, and TV channels serving the country and home satellite service ubiquitous, most Iraqis and Kurds have a wide range of news options. The fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 swept away the strict government control over Iraq's media and ushered in an era of extreme media pluralism, with groups all over the country starting hundreds of newspapers and dozens of radio and television stations. However, ongoing sectarian conflict and political control of many Iraqi media organizations hampers the population's access to reliable, objective news content.

General Media Environment

As in much of the Arab World, satellite TV is almost ubiquitous in Iraq, present in 97.3% of households (versus 35.1% with radio and 50.4% with the Internet). Ethnic Kurds and those with a college degree are much more likely than other Iraqis to have Internet access at home; those living in Anbar province are less likely than average to have it (21.9%), as are Iraqis with only some intermediate education or less (37.7%). More than nine in 10 Iraqis (92.2%) have their own mobile phone, and 35% have accessed the Internet via mobile device in the past week.

The ongoing conflict has displaced many residents and has hindered their access to TV, radio, and the Internet. More than one-quarter (27.0%) of Iraqis say that they have been "displaced" in the past 12 months due to instability, with larger percentages displaced in ISIL-controlled areas of Anbar and Ninevah and in the disputed area of Salah ad-Din. The instability has disrupted many Iraqis' access to TV and Internet, in particular, with 31.5% saying instability is hindering their access to TV frequently (12.0%) or occasionally (19.5%); 38% say it is hindering their access to the Internet frequently (19.9%) or occasionally (18.3%) and 15% say it is hindering their access to radio frequently (4.9%) or occasionally (10.1%);

Despite the disruptions, Iraqis and Iraqi Kurds remain frequent news consumers. Half of the respondents to this survey (49.5%) reported following current events in the country "a lot," while an additional 21.5% follow them "somewhat." The vast majority of Iraqis (82.8%) indicate they access some type of news at least daily, and a similar proportion (80.3%) say they discuss or share news with others weekly. Most Iraqis (57.0%) access news *and* share it with others every day. Weekly users of international news media are even more likely to access and share news daily.

Trust in news media varies significantly across regions in Iraq. During the survey period, the country was in the grip of a major conflict between central government and Kurdish forces on one side and ISIL on the other, with ISIL in control of the predominantly Sunni Arab provinces of Anbar and Ninewa, and vying for control of Salah ad-Din, Diyala and the mixed-ethnicity province of Kirkuk. Iraqis living in the predominantly Sunni Arab provinces are more likely to "strongly distrust" news from television or radio than those living in areas consisting mostly of Shia Arabs or Kurds. Those in ISIL-controlled, predominantly Sunni, areas were also more likely to "strongly *trust*" news from the Internet than Iraqis in other regions.

Television

TV is the primary source of news in the country with more than nine in 10 (92.1%) adults saying they watch TV news at least weekly. Friends and family is the only other source from which a majority of Iraqis (72.6%) get news weekly or more. About one-third get news from the Internet, social networking sites and text messages at least weekly, while only about one in five Iraqis gets news from radio or print media that often.

While the three most popular TV stations nationally in terms of past-week reach are Al Iraqiya (68.8%), Al Sharqiya (65.2%), and Al Sumeria (58.1%), politics and sect strongly affect TV viewership. Second place Al Sharqiya TV, as well as other top Sunni-oriented channels Baghdadia TV and Al Arabiya do much better in the ISIL-controlled and disputed areas, which have much higher proportions of Sunni Arabs. Sunni Iraqis have frequently criticized Al Iraqiya, for example, as being biased against them and/or overly friendly to the Shia-led government.

Radio

About one-fourth of respondents (27.7%) report listening to the radio in the past week and 19.7% of Iraqis use it weekly for news. Weekly radio use is most common among men, better-educated Iraqis and Kurds. Most past-week listeners (69.4%) say they tune in via FM, though one in five (20.8%) use AM and 15.4% use shortwave. Those living in the predominantly Shia Arab provinces south of Baghdad are particularly likely to use shortwave on a weekly basis, at 23.0%.

Mobile Phones

Virtually all adults (92.2%) own a mobile phone, and about one-third of the population (34.1%) has used a mobile phone to access the Internet in the past week — almost as many as say they accessed the Internet in the past week at all during that time.

Three in 10 mobile phone owners say they have used a mobile phone to download video or audio clips or access social networking sites. More than 25% say they downloaded or used a mobile app in the past week, while only 16.3% say they used a phone to listen to the radio in that time. Men, young adults and the college-educated are particularly likely to use mobile phones for all of these activities, except listening to the radio, which skews significantly toward young people alone.

Internet

Two in five (40.3%) adults report having accessed the Internet in the past week. That figure rises to about half among Iraqi men, Kurds and those aged 15 to 24, and more than three-fourths among Iraqis with a college-level education.

Internet users are heavy video consumers. Three-fourths of weekly Internet users (73.9%) went online to view videos such as TV programs, news reports, video clips, sports or movies. In contrast, 63.3% went online to find out the latest news and 58.1% did so to access audio news reports, music or radio programs. Weekly Internet users aged 15 to 24 are particularly likely to have watched online videos, at 80.1%. Those with a college education are more likely to have gone online to search for the latest news (75.7%) than are weekly Internet users with less than intermediate education (51.5%).

Men, young adults and the better educated are most likely to get news online. Similarly, Kurds are much more likely than Arabs or other Iraqi ethnic groups to access news on the Internet, whether through social networking sites or other websites. Men are also more likely than women to listen to radio news at least weekly.

Most of Iraq's weekly Internet users consume online content in Arabic only. Even Kurdish Iraqis more commonly use content in Arabic (74.1%) than in Kurdish (60.5%). Overall, only 4.9% of past-week Iraqi Internet users do not use Arabic content.

Social Media

Three in 10 respondents report using social networking sites at least weekly. Among those with at least some college education that figure rises to about two-thirds (65.5%); men, younger adults and Kurdish Iraqis are also particularly likely to use social networks weekly or more. Facebook is by far the most popular social networking site, with almost all past-week social media users (94.3%) having accessed it in the past seven days. The next most popular are Google+ at 41.8% and Twitter at 25.8%.

Methodology

This data is based on 2,735 landline and mobile telephone interviews with adults aged 15 and older living in Iraq with access to a landline or mobile telephone. Trained interviewers conducted the fieldwork Oct. 18 – Dec. 2, 2014, in Arabic and Kurdish with Iraqi adults in all 18 provinces. Results represent approximately 20,245,000¹ adults living across Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan. Researchers stratified the target population by governorate.

Out of a total sample of 2,735 interviews, researchers proportionally distributed 2,015 across all 18 governorates. Researchers conducted an oversample of 720 interviews in the three governorates where the majority of the Kurdish population lives — Sulaymaniya, Arbil and Dahuk — to ensure at least 1,000 interviews with Kurdish respondents. Researchers weighted all post-stratification results by age, gender and education.

Contact

For any questions or further information on this data, please contact the Broadcasting Board of Governors at publicaffairs@bbg.gov or 202-203-4400. Follow us on twitter at @BBGgov