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ARTICLE

A hybrid classification approach for exploring Iraq's welfare regime

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Abstract
Welfare regime theory remains a central framework in social policy literature, valued for its theoretical insights and policy relevance. However, as this framework is increasingly applied to countries in the Global South, scholars have questioned whether all contexts fit neatly into the established welfare regime types. Recent contributions suggest adopting a hybrid lens, which recognizes that welfare arrangements often vary within the same country, with different populations experiencing distinct forms of social protection. This study contributes to this evolving debate by exploring the development of Iraq's welfare system and proposing a hybrid classification within the welfare regime framework. We argue that Iraq functions as a hybrid welfare regime, where access to welfare and social protection is unevenly distributed across different segments of society. In doing so, the study extends welfare regime theory by classifying Iraq as a case of hybrid welfare regime and highlights the importance of hybrid welfare models for understanding welfare systems in the Global South.

Keywords: welfare regime; hybridization; informal; security; conflict; Iraq

Introduction

The article aims to explore the presence of various welfare regimes in the Republic of Iraq using the hybrid welfare regime framework - a country often overlooked in welfare regime research. A hybrid welfare regime, as defined by Mumtaz et al. (2023), p. 1), emerges in welfare regime classification debates when cases ("hybrids") do not entirely satisfy the characteristics of a given analytical category but instead reflect a combination of characteristics from more than one. A "regime" refers to the regulations, organizations, and aligned interests that govern individuals through enforcement processes (Krasner, 1982). Esping-Andersen and Standing (1990) categorizes states based on welfare provided by state, market, and family mechanisms into three types of welfare state regimes: liberal, conservative, and social democratic. Each category assumes the presence of formal labour markets and autonomous state functions that de-commodify labour to varying degrees. However, Esping-Andersen's typology has been critiqued for its Eurocentric perspective and for overlooking the role of informal or non-state provision of welfare services.

To address the limitations of Esping-Andersen's welfare state regime theory, Gough et al. (2004) introduced two additional categories to better capture the diversity of welfare arrangements in the Global South: informal security regimes and insecurity regimes. In informal security regimes, state welfare provision is weak, inadequate, or inefficient, leading citizens to rely heavily on family, community, and social networks for support (Wood & Gough, 2006). Nordensvärd and Ketola (2024) describe these

regimes as systems where rights and entitlements stem not from the state but from social relationships and cultural norms, often through kinship ties or clientelist arrangements. This aligns with Scott's (1977) concept of moral economies, where individuals manage risks, such as illness or crop failure, through reciprocal social support rather than state mechanisms. Examples include reliance on remittances and hometown associations in Mexico and familial obligations in Ghana, which often supersede formal policies. Similarly, Yörük et al. (2022) identify residual welfare regimes, akin to informal security regimes, in countries like Bangladesh and Peru, where formal social protection is minimal. Yörük (2012) notes a similar pattern in Turkey's Kurdish regions, where state support only partially mitigates the effects of conflict and displacement. Wood and Gough (2006) further distinguish between more effective and less effective informal security regimes based on the strength and reliability of these informal networks and welfare outcomes.

In contrast, the insecurity regimes, as conceptualized by Wood and Gough (2006), describes contexts where both formal and informal systems fail to provide adequate support, leaving individuals highly vulnerable to poverty and exploitation, often by non-state actors (Bevan, 2004; Mumtaz & Sumarto, 2025). While the insecurity regime concept highlights severe gaps in welfare provision, it often lacks a clear explanatory framework to account for its persistence. Yörük (2012) argues that this concept does not sufficiently address the causes of vulnerability, such as economic or political factors, state policies, or global pressures that perpetuate insecurity. However, Mumtaz and Sumarto (2025) argue that in insecure regimes, formal and informal social protection systems are undermined by domination, exploitation, and marginalization, particularly gender-based, driven by political-economic and precarious security conditions. They illustrate this in the context of Pakistan's insecure regions, where conflicts exacerbate these vulnerabilities.

The concept of a hybrid welfare regime suggests that multiple welfare regimes can coexist within a single country, with individuals experiencing different welfare arrangements simultaneously (Wood & Gough, 2006; Mumtaz et al., 2023). For example, Mumtaz et al. (2023) use the case of Pakistan to explain how various populations are incorporated into different welfare regimes based on their access to formal and informal welfare. A small segment of the population benefits from a welfare state regime, while the majority relies on informal security regimes. In conflict-affected regions, people experience insecurity regimes due to the prevalence of conflict and the breakdown of state institutions. Similarly, Shi (2012) highlights how fiscal and administrative decentralization in China fosters "welfare regionalism," with local governments developing distinct welfare systems, such as varied pension reforms and social assistance schemes, leading to pronounced regional disparities. Mok and Wu (2013) argue that dual decentralization in China - vertical and horizontal - results in diverse labour welfare regimes across coastal cities like Kunshan, Dongguan, and Wenzhou, shaped by local fiscal capacities, industrial structures, and government-enterprise dynamics. In South Korea, Hong et al. (2024) illustrate how local policy entrepreneurship, exemplified by Universal Basic Income (UBI) experiments like the Youth Dividend in Seongnam, creates subnational welfare variations. However, scaling these initiatives to a national level is hindered by political and fiscal complexities (Hong et al., 2024).

This study examines the case of the Republic of Iraq to explore various welfare regimes (hybrids) arising from the country's regional disparities. In some regions, due to past conflicts, people face severe insecurity, with little to no access to formal or informal welfare services (CFR, 2024). In other parts of the country, poverty rates are high, and people rely on informal networks to meet their needs due to the absence of formal state welfare programs (de Freitas & Johnson, 2012). Additionally, government employees, including those working for both the Government of Iraq (GoI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), receive the most extensive coverage through social welfare programs, including social insurance for family benefits, injury, sickness, maternity, disability, and old age (ILO, 2021a, 2021b). Given the uneven distribution of social welfare provisions and the widespread insecurity affecting much of the population, exploring Iraq's hybrid welfare regime is crucial.

Several studies have classified welfare regimes and examined social policies in the Global South, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. For example, Hasanaj (2023), through clustering 150 countries, argues that contemporary global welfare states follow systematically divergent

paths, revealing proactive, reactive, and dual patterns. Rudra (2007) analysed the systematic differences in political economies across various countries, focusing on their distribution regimes. Abu Sharkh and Gough (2010) clustered 65 non-OECD countries into different regime types and identified their transition patterns. Karshenas et al. (2014) examined the potential for developing countries, including those in MENA, to transition from authoritarian corporatist social policy regimes to democratic and developmental ones, in response to widespread socio-economic and political grievances. Loewe and Zintl (2021) argue that social welfare can be a powerful tool for reducing state fragility and rebuilding social contracts in the MENA region. Jawad (2009) explored the role of religion in welfare provision in the Middle East. Grossman (2007), using cluster analysis on 17 Middle Eastern countries, identified four distinct clusters: protective oil-rich, non-protective oil-rich, mixed, and corporatist regimes. In a more specific study, Mohamed (2018) argued that Egypt's current welfare state is best described as "conservative/informal," where social benefits are tied to formal sector employment, leaving families, religious institutions, and clientelist networks to meet the social needs of the larger informal sector.

None of the existing studies, to the best of our knowledge, whether at an aggregate or single-case level, have explored Iraq's welfare regime or classified the country within a specific regime type. As a result, there is a gap in the literature concerning Iraq's welfare regime classification. Addressing this gap is significant from both academic and policy perspectives. Academically, research on regime classification for countries in the Arab region is limited (see, for example, Eibl, 2020), with Iraq not explicitly categorized in welfare regime literature. Jawad and Loewe (2018) argue that this oversight reflects the Global North's preoccupation with geopolitical concerns, often at the expense of social issues in the region. By examining Iraq's welfare regime at a specific point in time through the lens of hybridization (see Choi, 2012; Yang, 2017; Mumtaz et al., 2023), this paper will contribute to the growing body of work on "hybridization" - a theoretical approach that has gained considerable traction over the past two decades - while expanding the welfare regime literature by including Iraq in the classification. From a policy standpoint, identifying the specific type(s) of welfare regime(s) helps development practitioners devise strategies to improve existing mechanisms and implement or reform social programs. Given Iraq's rising poverty rates and growing population, understanding the country's welfare regime(s) and exploring avenues for reform is increasingly critical.

The rest of the paper is structured as follows: The next section presents a review of the literature on welfare regimes and hybridization. This is followed by a contextual background of Iraq, including an analysis of welfare provisions throughout the MENA region and an overview of Iraq's social protection mechanisms, as well as the major developments that have shaped its welfare regime. The subsequent section outlines the study's methodology, followed by the results. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of the limitations and suggestions for future research.

Hybridization and welfare regimes

The concept of path dependency refers to the idea that decisions and outcomes are heavily influenced by previous choices and historical events, making certain paths or trajectories more likely than others (Kay, 2005). The term "regime" often implies path dependency. For instance, in a country with a strong welfare state (a type of regime), path dependency might manifest in the difficulty of reforming or dismantling welfare programs, even when new challenges or ideological shifts arise (Streeck & Thelen, 2005). The structures, institutions, and public expectations built around the welfare state create significant resistance to deviating from the established path (Mahoney, 2001; Graefe, 2004). Critical junctures are brief periods when structural constraints loosen, creating uncertainty and allowing political choices to shape long-term institutional outcomes (Capoccia and Kelemen, 2007). They mark points where paths can change or reinforce the status quo (Soifer, 2012). Many scholars have explained the development of welfare states through the lens of path dependency (see, for example, Esping-Andersen & Standing, 1990; Ebbinghaus, 2009; Kiess et al., 2017). This line of research has also led scholars to examine how welfare regimes transition from established paths, such as moving from liberal to conservative regimes or from

informal security to welfare state regimes. They identify various factors, such as political ideologies, welfare retrenchment, state capacity, and social conflicts, that contribute to these transitions (see, for example, Ferrera, 1996; Pierson, 1996; Abu Sharkh & Gough, 2010; Häusermann, 2010; Mok & Hudson, 2014; Sumarto, 2017; Roumpakis, 2020, etc.). Moreover, Jensen (2011) argues that the development of welfare states can be explained through three perspectives: the ideological perspective, which sees welfare reforms as outcomes of interactions and bargaining between competing ideologies (conservative, democratic, or liberal); the neo-institutional perspective, which links changes to the influence of institutional factors (e.g. vested interests and veto powers) on the expansion of policy areas; and the neo-functionalist perspective, which associates changes in welfare regimes with the evolution and adaptability of economic systems.

Scholars have argued that the trajectory of welfare state development differs between developed and developing countries (Malesky et al., 2011; Huang, 2015; Midgley, 2019). Han (2023), for example, shows that authoritarian regimes in Asia often expand welfare policies to promote economic development and maintain political stability, challenging the view that welfare state development is exclusive to democracies. Many scholars have increasingly extended welfare regime analysis beyond OECD countries, using empirical methods and policy-focused variables to capture the diversity of welfare systems in non-OECD contexts. For instance, Yang and Kühner (2020) apply fuzzy-set ideal type analysis to six East Asian societies (1990-2016), identifying three types of welfare change - quantitative, type-specific, and radical - across six policy areas. Their analysis distinguishes between "productive" and "protective" welfare dimensions, resulting in four welfare models and 15 sub-models. All countries except Hong Kong and Singapore experienced at least one radical shift, with South Korea adopting the most balanced approach. Similarly, Yörük et al. (2022) use cluster analysis to identify four global welfare regimes - institutional, neoliberal, populist, and residual - based on policy variables across five domains. They find that non-OECD countries, particularly emerging markets, tend to fall into the populist (moderate provision) and residual (limited provision) regimes. Furthermore, Mumtaz and Sumarto (2025) argue that factors such as conflict and terrorism can disrupt both state and non-state welfare institutions, complicating service delivery - an issue less prevalent in developed contexts. These studies underscore the need to move beyond simplistic welfare regime typologies to better capture the fluid and context-specific nature of formal and informal welfare systems in developing and less-developed countries (Han, 2023).

One of the frameworks that can be used to examine diverse welfare landscapes within a single context is the "hybridization" of welfare regimes, which has its roots in research on the transition of welfare state regimes. Mumtaz et al. (2023) argue that a welfare regime can depict characteristics of hybrid regime for two main reasons: (a) when countries are transitioning from one regime to another, they may exhibit characteristics of multiple regimes, and (b) the available analytical frameworks for welfare regime analysis may not fully capture the complex realities of a specific case. Esping-Andersen (1997) first coined the term "hybrid" welfare regime by examining Japan, which combines features of both liberal and conservative welfare regimes. This hybrid model is characterized by limited government involvement in decommodification (the extent to which labour is shielded from market forces) and a male-breadwinner-type social security system segmented by occupation (see also Han, 2023). Consequently, other regimes, such as "informal productive," "liberal productive," and "informal protective," have been identified in the literature to understand these transitions (see, for example, Aspalter, 2011; Yang, 2017; Sumarto, 2020). Wood and Gough (2006), in their seminal work on welfare regimes in the Global South, argue that a single country can exhibit elements of informal security, insecurity, or a welfare state regime simultaneously.

In cases of hybrid welfare regimes, some segments of the population may benefit from state protection, while others rely on community and family arrangements or depend on highly personalized politico-military patrons, indicating the presence of a hybrid welfare regime within the country (Wood & Gough, 2006; Mumtaz, 2022). In these complex scenarios, simplistic categorizations of a dominant regime type do not fully capture the complexities of welfare provisioning in each country (Ibid). Furthermore, localized conflicts or wars affecting small segments of the population, which can cause

severe harm and suffering within a predominantly informal security or welfare state regime, may require immediate policy interventions (Bevan, 2004; Mumtaz & Sumarto, 2025). Rice (2013) contends that hybrid welfare regimes exist not only at the national level but also at the subnational level and within specific welfare programs (see also Cruz-Martínez, 2020). Yörük et al. (2022) identify the "populist welfare regime" in countries such as Brazil, Turkey, and China, characterized by a hybrid blend of formal social security and social assistance and healthcare programs for the informal sector. This hybridity integrates fragmented state-led social insurance with politically motivated initiatives for the informal sector, such as conditional cash transfers, shifting from post-war corporatist systems to neoliberal-era support for the informal poor. Yörük (2012) further illustrates this in Turkey, where the Green Card program disproportionately targets the Kurdish minority as a tool for political containment rather than purely for poverty alleviation, showing that hybrid welfare regimes combine formal structures with informal, discretionary practices driven by political strategies to manage social unrest. These situations are particularly relevant in many Global South countries, where inequalities in wealth and income distribution, conflicts, and external influences can create severe insecurity for populations (Gough et al., 2004; Mumtaz & Sumarto, 2025).

While understanding the development of welfare regimes is valuable, examining the hybrid nature of welfare regimes at a particular moment is equally important. From a policy perspective, we argue that greater focus should be placed on identifying the hybrid welfare landscapes within a country, particularly those shaped by severe insecurities and welfare inequalities among different segments of the population. However, Clasen and Siegel (2007) highlight the "dependent variable problem" in comparative welfare state research, referring to the challenge of defining and measuring welfare state effort due to the multidimensional nature of welfare provision. This issue becomes especially pronounced when attempting to incorporate informal welfare in the analysis of welfare regimes, which is typically unquantified, context-specific, and reliant on non-state actors such as families, NGOs, and informal labour markets. Informal welfare is difficult to operationalize because it lacks standardized data, varies widely across cultural and institutional contexts, and is not readily captured by conventional indicators such as public expenditure or coverage rates used in formal welfare analysis (Hudson, 2012; Kühner, 2015; Mumtaz et al., 2023). For example, in East Asian contexts, Yang and Kühner (2020) note the central role of familial welfare, rooted in filial piety, yet this dimension is not systematically captured in their fuzzy-set ideal type analysis. Similarly, Yörük et al. (2022) concentrate on formal welfare generosity and state-led efforts, omitting informal provisions such as community-based support that are especially prevalent in emerging market contexts.

However, to operationalize informal welfare, Mumtaz (2022) proposed a multidimensional framework with three core components: informal insurance, informal assistance, and informal labour market measures. Informal insurance includes mechanisms like community-based savings or mutual aid systems to mitigate risks. Informal assistance encompasses support from social networks, such as immediate and extended family, religious organizations, national and international NGOs, and faith-based organizations. Informal labour market measures involve livelihood strategies within informal economies, such as casual labour or community-driven employment initiatives. These components are facilitated by informal networks, including family, religious groups, NGOs, and faith-based organizations, which collectively provide informal welfare support. Mumtaz et al. (2023) operationalized this framework to capture the hybridization of welfare regimes. By using these three components, they developed a unique methodology that enables the analysis of informal welfare provisions alongside formal ones. This approach is grounded in the concept of the welfare mix - encompassing both formal and informal welfare - which serves as a foundational framework in social policy literature for understanding the composition and functioning of welfare regimes (Powell & Barrientos, 2004). Evers (1995) asserts that the theory of the welfare mix serves a dual purpose: it describes the empirical and historical diversity of welfare systems internationally and details the various types of welfare mixes present within a country. While Esping-Andersen and Standing (1990) used a welfare mix of the state, market, and family to analyse welfare states in high-income countries, Wood and Gough (2006) introduced the community as an additional layer for analysing welfare regimes in the Global South.

Wood and Gough (2006) argue that in Global South countries, the welfare mix, which includes the state, market, family, and community, forms a comprehensive system of institutional frameworks, policies, and practices that influence welfare outcomes.

Community is a crucial concept within social science, though it can be complex and somewhat contradictory in definition, encompassing multiple layers and meanings (Crow and Allan, 1995; Mumtaz & Kühner, 2025). Various scholars have different inclusion criteria for defining a community, ranging from mental constructs to physical spaces. Kamberi and Hashani (2023) note that definitions generally tend to include three essential characteristics: community as a human group, community when members share similar experiences, and community when this group resides in a specific territory. These characteristics are not mutually exclusive and often overlap. When studying community within a welfare mix framework, this sector is broadly recognized as non-state provisions, including but not limited to the voluntary sector, charities, community groups, social enterprises, civil society groups, and third-sector organizations (Macmillan & Rees, 2019). Abu Sharkh and Gough (2010) extend Gough et al.'s (2004) original welfare mix argument by adding an international dimension. They argue that with the prevalence of globalization, scholars must consider international actors when analysing a welfare mix. In this paper's case study, formal welfare mechanisms are defined as government-provided services, while informal welfare provisions - referred to as non-state actors and non-state provisions - are those provided by the community and family.

Formal welfare provisions, typically provided by the state and market, include services such as education, healthcare, pensions, social assistance, and social insurance (Paulus, 2016). The availability of these services varies by country and can be universal, targeted, or means-tested, usually funded through taxation and government spending (Ibid). In many developing countries, social protection has become a dominant formal social policy and development intervention since the 1990s, encompassing policies like social assistance, social insurance, and labour market measures aimed at safeguarding vulnerable populations from social risks, alleviating poverty, and promoting human rights and livelihoods (Cook & Kabeer, 2010; Bahle et al., 2010; The World Bank, 2015; Hickey et al., 2019). When implemented effectively, formal welfare provisions can play a crucial role in a nation's success, supporting citizens and fostering a positive relationship between citizens and the state (Cammett & MacLean, 2014). However, government-provided services do not always guarantee equal access for all citizens, as certain groups are often prioritized over others (Ibid). Powell et al. (2020) argue that informal networks, such as family-based care and community support, are integral to welfare regimes, particularly in Southern and Eastern European models. They note that access to informal services varies across regimes due to differences in state reliance on non-state actors, with Mediterranean welfare states leaning heavily on family networks for service provision, in contrast to more state-centric Nordic models.

In many Global South countries where the state struggles to effectively manage and deliver social protection services, informal networks have increasingly stepped in to fill this gap (Mumtaz, 2022). Weisbrod (1988) notes that non-state actors, such as community organizations, are likely to provide services in areas where market provisions are not feasible, often due to financial constraints and the absence of the state. These informal networks include NGOs, religious groups, sectarian organizations, civil society, and international organizations, collectively offering informal social protection (Mumtaz, 2022). Roumpakis and Sumarto (2020) argue that in many developing countries, these provisions often become more dominant than state-driven formal social protection, particularly in informal security regimes where the government fails to provide adequate services (Wood & Gough, 2006). Nordensvärd and Ketola (2024) propose a theory of informal and formal social citizenship, emphasizing that access to informal services, like kinship-based support and transnational remittances, is critical in contexts where formal welfare states are weak. They argue that informal services, rooted in moral economies and community reciprocity, often dominate welfare provision in developing countries and complement formal systems in developed ones, creating interdependent welfare practices. However, there are limitations to the effectiveness of non-state provisions, and ongoing discussions question whether they may sometimes have more negative than positive outcomes in certain communities. The diversity in

motivation and origins among non-state actors can influence the quality of services provided and the distribution of welfare (Cammett & MacLean, 2014).

Additionally, the relationship between non-state provisions and state welfare mechanisms is sometimes contested. MacMillan and Rees (2019) highlight the history of conflicts between the state and the community or voluntary sector. Scholars have developed frameworks to evaluate these relationships and their impact on the welfare provided to citizens. One such framework is a typology developed by Mumtaz (2023), which assesses the relationship between informal and formal social protection. This method categorizes these interactions into five types: complementary, substitutive, compliant, crowding out, and conflicting (Mumtaz, 2023). Understanding these interactions is crucial within welfare regimes, where multiple actors provide social protection.

Biswas and Sambo (2024) argue that the established welfare state literature of the Global North is inadequate for analysing the unique path dependencies of welfare regimes in the Global South, where national and international actors, as well as domestic and international political and economic conditions, significantly influence welfare systems. Similarly, Mumtaz et al. (2024) caution against assuming a linear 'catch-up logic' with the West in social policy, emphasizing the significant differences between the developing and developed worlds and the need for careful prediction of social policy models, particularly from a Global North perspective (see also Midgley, 2019; Surender, 2019). This trend is particularly evident in non-democratic regimes such as China, where the welfare system has expanded significantly since 2003. Ngok and Huang (2014) argue that this shift was prompted by the SARS crisis and the rise of the Hu-Wen leadership, signalling a transition from a market-oriented model to a more proactive, state-led approach. This transformation involved substantial policy expansion in areas such as social insurance, healthcare, education, and housing, although regional disparities persist. Similarly, Hong and Ngok (2022) contend that China's authoritarian state has increasingly prioritized welfare as a means to mitigate social unrest, reduce urban–rural disparities, and respond to external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. Through increased social spending, efforts to integrate urban and rural welfare systems, and recentralization measures, the central government has sought to reassert its authority - though it continues to face challenges from local resistance and the complexities of decentralization. Therefore, it is imperative to examine the unique political-economic conditions and the role of national and international actors that influence the development of welfare systems in the Global South.

Social policy in Iraq

Iraq's welfare regime is shaped by colonial-era policies that favoured elites and formal workers, sidelining rural and informal populations. Selective welfare programmes - like the 1956 Provident Fund, 1980s health system, and Public Distribution System (PDS) - reflect this legacy. With around 60-70% of the workforce in the informal economy, welfare gaps are often partially filled by tribal leaders, religious groups, NGOs, and community networks.

Colonial foundations of social policy (1920s–1950s)

The British colonial administration in Iraq (1920-1932) prioritized political control over inclusive state-building, shaping a welfare regime that favoured elites and formal sector workers (Isakhan & Dawood, 2016; Soer, 2019). Drawing on colonial India's model, the British introduced public pensions and works programs to secure loyalty and maintain order (Sluglett, 2007; Jones, 2013; Soer, 2019). The 1922 pension law benefited mainly colonial administrators and select urban elites, reinforcing bureaucratic authority (Alzobaidee, 2015; Wilks, 2016). Public works employed informal labour to support colonial economic goals and suppress tribal unrest (Dodge, 2003; Jackson, 2016). Granting rent-free land to tribal elites entrenched inequality and exclusionary land systems (Dodge, 2006; Fieldhouse, 2008), leading to uneven

service delivery, especially in rural areas (Batatu, 1978). This elite-focused approach laid the groundwork for post-colonial welfare exclusion.

During the British Mandate, most Iraqis worked in agriculture under the influence of rural elites, leading to uneven economic development (Batatu, 1978). The British governed rural areas through tribal leaders, granting them land and authority (Tripp, 2007). These leaders served as informal welfare providers, distributing resources in exchange for loyalty, based on pre-colonial customs (Dodge, 2003). For instance, "Shaikhs" organized communal labour for irrigation, compensating for limited colonial investment in rural infrastructure (Sluglett-Farouk & Sluglett, 2001). While effective locally, this system excluded marginalized groups like landless labourers and reinforced an unequal, community-based welfare model that outlasted colonial rule (Sluglett-Farouk & Sluglett, 2001).

Post-independence (1950s–1960s) welfare

After independence in 1932, Iraq's monarchy sought to modernize state institutions, but social policies remained rooted in British colonial legacies (Dodge, 2003; Tripp, 2007). In the 1950s, Iraq introduced contributory social security schemes for formal sector workers, funded by employers and employees (Alnasrawi, 1994; ILO, 2001). These schemes, covering only about 10% of the labour force, were backed by rising oil revenues and aimed to stabilize the urban workforce during industrialization (Alnasrawi, 1994; Tripp, 2007).

Public works projects shifted from colonial infrastructure to national initiatives like the Dokan Dam and urban schools (Marr & al-Marashi, 2018). Funded by rising oil revenues - from approximately $50 million in 1950 to $200 million by 1958 - these projects generated urban employment but deepened regional inequalities. In 1957, only around 20% of rural children attended school compared to approximately 60% in urban areas (Alnasrawi, 1994; Marr & al-Marashi, 2018). Despite economic growth, elite rule rooted in colonial structures limited welfare expansion (Alnasrawi, 1994; Dodge, 2003; Tripp, 2007). Landowning elites resisted protections for rural and informal workers to maintain cheap labour (Warriner, 1957; Batatu, 1978), leaving schemes like the Provident Fund to benefit mainly urban elites and formal workers, excluding the rural and informal majority - a continuation of colonial welfare patterns (Batatu, 1978; Alnasrawi, 1994; Tripp, 2007).

Iraq's informal economy remained dominant, with most rural workers involved in agriculture and small trade (Batatu, 1978). State programs like the 1956 Provident Fund, similar to 1922's pension law, excluded informal labourers, who instead depended on tribal and religious networks (Tripp, 2007). Shi'a and Sunni groups supported welfare through Zakat and Khums, particularly in southern Iraq (Jabar, 2003). Shi'a clerics in Najaf and Karbala provided education and charity to fill state service gaps (Nakash, 1994). As oil revenues grew, tribal influence declined in urban areas like Baghdad, while religious charities expanded (Batatu, 1978). The 1958 revolution further diminished tribal authority, strengthening religious networks - especially in Shi'a communities - as key social service providers (Jabar, 2003).

Ba'athist era and welfare expansion (1970s–1980s)

The Ba'athist regime (1968–2003) used rising oil revenues to expand Iraq's welfare system, aiming to promote national unity amid ongoing sectarian and regional divides (Helfont, 2016; Isakhan & Dawood, 2016). Oil income rose from about $1 billion in 1970 to $20 billion by 1980, funding major social investments (Dawisha, 2009). By the 1980s, Iraq had one of the region's most advanced healthcare systems, with centralized, oil-funded hospitals and clinics. The doctor-to-population ratio reached 1:1,700 by 1985 (Alnasrawi, 2002), and infant mortality fell from 80 to 40 per 1,000 live births between 1970 and 1990 (UNICEF, 1990). Education also improved, with primary school enrolment at 95% by 1985 (World Bank, 1987). Nonetheless, urban-rural gaps persisted - Baghdad had nearly twice as many hospital beds per capita as rural areas (Tripp, 2007).

The 1964 Social Security Plan, expanding on the 1956 Provident Fund, offered pensions, disability, and maternity benefits mainly to public sector workers by the 1980s - a continuation of colonial welfare patterns. Pensions reached up to approximately 80% of salaries for some formal workers and consumed about 15% of government spending by 1988, raising concerns over fiscal sustainability (de Freitas & Johnson, 2012). While public works like the Basra - Umm Qasr Canal created jobs for informal workers, they offered no social security, leaving approximately 60% of the workforce unprotected (Alnasrawi, 2002). The Ba'athist welfare model reinforced colonial-era exclusions by privileging urban elites and formal sectors, while sectarian favouritism toward Sunni areas further limited equitable access, fuelling unrest in the 1990s (Tripp, 2007; Dawisha, 2009).

The Ba'athist regime's oil-funded welfare expansion reduced urban reliance on informal actors but continued to neglect about 60% of rural and informal workers (Alnasrawi, 2002). The Iran-Iraq War (1980–1988) damaged infrastructure, especially in the south and east, creating governance challenges and disrupting health and education services (Tripp, 2007). In response, tribal leaders and religious institutions resumed key welfare roles - Sunni tribes in Anbar provided protection and aid, while Shi'a clerics in Basra used Khums to fund medical support (Dawisha, 2009; Haddad, 2011). NGOs like the Iraqi Red Crescent also helped informal workers excluded from the 1964 Social Security Plan (ICRC, 1990). However, these efforts were often fragmented and reflected the same sectarian inequalities embedded in state systems (Haddad, 2011). Ongoing governance challenges, economic pressure, and urban bias reinforced the informal economy as a parallel welfare provider for excluded groups (Alnasrawi, 2002; Tripp, 2007).

Sanctions, conflict, and welfare erosion (1990s to date)

The Gulf War (1990–1991) and UN sanctions (1990–2003) devastated Iraq's economy, cutting oil revenues to about $500 million annually by 1995 and reducing social spending from 25% to 5% of the budget (Alnasrawi, 2002). Infrastructure collapsed: health facilities halved, primary school enrolment fell to 70%, poverty rose from approximately 15% to 60% by 1996, and infant mortality doubled to 100 per 1,000 by 2000 (Garfield, 1999; UNICEF, 2000). The 1990 PDS reached 95% of households but met only 60% of caloric needs and often favoured Sunni regions, reinforcing sectarian divides (WFP, 2004; Haddad, 2011).

The 2003 U.S. invasion and ensuing sectarian violence displaced millions, overwhelming informal welfare networks like Sunni Zakat, Shi'a Khums, and tribal bartering, which supported 20–30% of households in areas such as Najaf and Anbar (Tripp, 2007; Haddad, 2011). NGOs like the Iraqi Women's League and World Vision provided microcredit and aid but had limited impact amid ongoing insecurity and displacement (MERIP, 2023). With over one million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as of 2024, effective social protection remains hindered (IOM, 2023; see also Table 1). Iraq's social protection coverage is approximately 40.5%, slightly above the Arab States' average of 39.5%, yet insufficient for

Table 1. Coverage of social protection programmes

Country/ region	Population covered by at least one social protection benefit (excluding health) – %age	Universal health coverage – %age	Expenditure on social protection (excluding health) – %age	Expenditure on social protection systems, including floors, by broad age group			Health expenditure – %age
				Children	Working age	Old age	
Iraq	40.5	61	7.6	4	2	5.6	1.7
Arab states	39.5	63.5	4.6	0.1	1.4	3.8	3.2

Source: ILO, 2024.

Table 2. Comparison of Iraq's poverty and inequality with Arab countries

Country/ region	Human development Index (HDI) Rank	Population living below monetary poverty line (%age)	Population in multidimensional poverty (headcount %age)	Income inequality	Income shares held by (%)			Life expectancy at birth (years)	Expected years of schooling (years)	Mean years of schooling (years)	Gross national income (GNI) per capita (2021 PPP $)
					Poorest 50 percent	Richest 10 percent	Richest 1 percent				
Iraq	0.695 (126)	27.5	2.9	25.5	16.8%	45.1	15.6	72.3	12.4	6.8	12,654
Arab States	0.719	22.9	10.6	24.5	9-12%	58	15-20	72.5	12	8.1	15,825

Source: ILO, 2024; UNDP, 2025; UNDP & OPHI, 2024; World Inequality Database. (n.d.); World Inequality Lab, 2023.

vulnerable groups like IDPs (ILO, 2020; see also Table 1). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed system weaknesses, pushing poverty up and unemployment to around 22% in 2021, particularly affecting IDPs, returnees, female jobseekers, and informal workers (ILO, 2020; World Bank, 2021). The Israel-Hamas War, beginning in October 2023, further destabilized Iraq, with Iran-backed militias targeting U.S. forces and worsening economic and infrastructure challenges (Knights, 2023; ICRC, 2024).

Approximately 67% of Iraqi workers operate within the informal economy, while state programs such as the PDS and the Social Safety Net (SSN) - which supports around over one million households - struggle to reach informal workers and IDPs, particularly in Kurdistan, where access to the SSN's online platform is limited. Iraq's social security system, rooted in colonial-era pension laws, includes a public sector fund that covers nearly half the workforce with fiscally unsustainable benefits, and a private sector fund that reaches only around 13-16% of workers, placing the burden of maternity and injury costs on employers. Community-based welfare, including religious endowments such as the Al-Khoei Foundation and tribal support in Nineveh, provides essential assistance to displaced families but meets only around 20% of the needs of informal workers. Iraq's Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.695 remains below the Arab States' average of 0.719 (Table 2). While monetary poverty (27.5%) is higher and headcount multidimensional poverty (2.9%) is lower than regional averages, inequality persists: the richest 1% of the population controls 15.6% of income, highlighting entrenched disparities (Table 2).

Colonial-era policies such as British public pensions and the 1956 Provident Fund established a path-dependent state-led welfare model that disproportionately benefited urban elites and formal workers. These institutional legacies, reinforced by the centralized health system of the 1980s and the PDS, have entrenched patterns of urban bias, elite favouritism, and sectarian division. Fragmented governance and continued reliance on oil revenues have undermined the development of inclusive welfare institutions, leaving Iraq's social protection system poorly equipped to meet the needs of the majority. As indicated in Table 2, Iraq experiences greater income inequality (25.5%) than the Arab States' average (24.5%) and has a lower gross national income (GNI) per capita ($12,654 vs. $15,825).

Methodology

Iraq presents an ideal case study for exploring hybrid welfare regimes due to two key factors. First, the country's sectarian divisions, history of conflict, and economic disparities result in varied experiences with state-led and community-provided social protection, making it a rich context for analyzing hybridization in welfare regimes. Second, the absence of existing literature classifying Iraq's welfare regime underscores the need for exploratory research, offering valuable insights for both academic scholarship and policy development aimed at improving social protection systems.

This study adopts a non-systematic review approach to explore Iraq's welfare regime, drawing on a diverse range of secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, working papers, policy proposals, government documents, statistics, and reports from international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), World Bank, and United Nations. These sources were accessed through ProQuest, Google Scholar, University of Bristol digital Library, and Google, which provided comprehensive coverage of both academic and policy-oriented materials. The involvement of reputable international organizations like the IMF, World Bank, and UN in Iraq ensures the credibility and authority of the data used, while Google's global reach facilitated access to a wide array of resources, addressing challenges in sourcing data for an understudied context.

A non-systematic review was chosen for its flexibility and suitability for exploratory research, particularly in contexts where existing literature is limited or fragmented, as is the case with Iraq's welfare regime. Unlike systematic reviews, which prioritize rigid inclusion criteria and may exclude relevant but diverse sources, non-systematic reviews allow for a broader synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data (Sukhera, 2022), capturing the complexity of hybrid welfare regimes. This approach is particularly valuable for identifying emergent trends and synthesizing insights from varied sources, such as government policies, academic studies, and international reports, to develop hypotheses about Iraq's

welfare landscape. Sukhera (2022) highlights that non-systematic reviews are rigorous when guided by clear research aim(s) and transparent source selection, as applied in this study, where the focus was on mapping the diversity of welfare provisions – formal and informal welfare.

Alternatively, a historical institutionalist (HI) approach could have been considered. HI examines how institutions evolve over time, emphasizing path-dependent trajectories shaped by historical events and structures (Plaček et al., 2022). While HI is well-suited for analysing long-term institutional development, it risks overemphasizing established pathways at the expense of capturing dynamic, contemporary interactions between state, market, family, and community actors in Iraq's welfare system. For instance, HI may depict actors as overly constrained by historical contexts, potentially overlooking the agency of non-state actors, such as NGOs and faith-based organizations, which play a significant role in Iraq's informal security regime (Peters et al., 2005; Bell & Feng, 2013). Additionally, HI's focus on historical continuity may undervalue emerging phenomena, such as the recent shift toward long-term developmental strategies by international organizations like UNHCR (Steinmo, 2016). Given the exploratory nature of this study and the need to integrate diverse data sources to understand Iraq's complex welfare landscape, a non-systematic review provides a more flexible and comprehensive framework, enabling the identification of hybrid welfare regimes without being constrained by predetermined institutional paths. Therefore, a non-systematic review was conducted with methodological rigor, ensuring transparency in source selection and alignment with the study's aim to hypothesize about Iraq's hybrid welfare regime.

Results - a hybrid welfare regime in Iraq

We explored the data drawn from government documents, journal articles, and reports published by international organizations, including primary and secondary data collection, such as surveys and interviews. These results will be presented by categorizing the findings according to the three welfare regimes discussed above.

Potential welfare state regime

The formal public and private sectors in Iraq represent the foundation of a potential welfare state regime, as they currently receive the most generous social welfare benefits. Public sector employees of the GoI and the KRG receive the most generous social protection program benefits. Jawad (2009) notes that Iraq's public sector social protection system, particularly for GoI and KRG employees, reflects a corporatist approach, where benefits are tied to formal employment status. These public sector benefits include comprehensive social insurance covering family benefits, workplace injuries, sickness, maternity leave, disability support, and pensions for old age (ILO, 2021a, 2021b; ILO, 2024; IMF, 2024). The formal private sector, though secondary to the public sector in terms of social welfare, is also a key part of this potential welfare state. Private sector employees are entitled to government-provided social insurance, which covers injury, disability, survivor benefits, and pensions for old age (Nader, 2024). However, the scope of benefits for private sector employees is generally less comprehensive than that provided to public sector workers ILO, 2021a).

Iraq's federal structure allows the KRG to manage its own social protection programs, which are largely modelled after the GoI's system. The KRG's programs align with the Law on Workers' Pensions and Social Security Law No. 39 of 1971, which guarantees old-age pensions, disability payments, and survivor benefits for employees within the Kurdish region (NRC, 2023). Public sector employees are subscribed by default, ensuring universal coverage of this group (Irwani, 2024). Private sector employers are mandated to register their employees through the Social Security Agency, and there has been a marked increase in employer registration, with employee coverage nearly doubling between 2018 and 2023 (GOV.KRG, n.d.; Abbas et al., 2023).). However, the potential welfare state for the public and private sectors still faces several challenges, including economic instability, regional disparities, and a gap in coverage between the public and private sectors (ILO, 2021a; 2021b).

Informal security regime

The prevalence of a large informal sector without adequate social protection coverage demonstrates the features of an informal security regime in Iraq. With 4 million informal workers there are significant gaps in social protection coverage. Informal labour is particularly prevalent in rural areas (60.4%) compared to urban areas (51.6%), highlighting the greater vulnerability of rural workers due to fewer formal sector opportunities and economic instability (ILO, 2015; 2021a). The construction industry has the highest rate of informal labour at 95.4%, reflecting its heavy reliance on informal workers who often lack job security and social protections (ILO, 2021b). Similarly, primary occupations like agriculture show high levels of informality, with 91.7% of workers operating outside formal frameworks and facing barriers to social insurance (UNDP, 2021).

Within the informal workforce, around 85% employed in informal facilities and 15% in the family sector (ILO, 2022). This widespread informality weakens social protection systems, exacerbates income inequality, and perpetuates economic insecurity, especially for rural and low-skilled workers. Despite coverage for private and public sector workers, Iraq's labour force faces low participation rates and high unemployment, leaving many without access to social protection provisions (ILO, 2022). For example, the pension program covers only about 15% of the population, mainly those in the public sector. Shaw et al. (2024), through a series of interviews, found that 76% of citizens in both the Republic of Iraq and the KRG believed government services were inadequate to meet basic needs. The researchers highlighted the additional challenges faced by marginalized groups, particularly due to limited employment opportunities, which effectively exclude them from accessing social protection guarantees offered by the public or private sectors.

Given these gaps, informal labourers rely heavily on welfare services from charities, endowments, families, community networks, and NGOs, which provide some form of security - a feature of an informal security regime (Al-Katawi, 2014; Shaw et al., 2024). Various faith-based organizations play a critical role, offering shelter, healthcare, education, and cash transfers (Calabrese, 2022). Sunni Muslims often depend on Zakat, while Shi'a communities utilize Khums for social protection, with Christian NGOs and groups like Christian Aid also providing support (Abdullah et al., 2018; Calabrese, 2022). Additionally, Iraq's strong family ties and tribal solidarity, including clan funds, offer support to those excluded from government programs (Al-Katawi, 2014; Chokr, 2022). The PDS serves as the main social protection program for informal labourers, providing temporary relief in the form of food (de Freitas & Johnson, 2012; Devereux, 2016).

Despite this avenue for support, numerous service providers operate within patronage networks that trace back to the civil war era (Al-Katawi, 2014). These informal and inconsistent forms of support often fail to meet the needs of certain groups, such as women with disabilities and rural youth, and in many cases, actually worsen their challenges and heighten their vulnerability. As noted by Shaw et al. (2024) that current social assistance mechanisms lack dignity, pose safety risks, perpetuate exclusion and inequality, and suffer from poor organizational efficiency.

International organizations also contribute to social protection. The UNHCR and IOM work with Iraqi and Kurdish authorities to support internally displaced persons (IDPs), with UNHCR historically providing cash assistance for essentials and planning a shift to long-term developmental strategies (IOM, 2023; UNHCR, 2023; United Nations Iraq, 2023). The World Food Program (WFP) offers food assistance and school lunch programs, while an EU-led initiative involving UNICEF, WFP, and ILO aims to improve social protection nationwide (WFP, 2023).

Insecurity regime

Iraq's prolonged conflict and political instability have significantly impacted social protection systems - formal and informal, contributing to an informal security regime characterized by conflicts, illicit trade, corruption, and breakdown of welfare services in some parts of the country (Ali, 2012; Bird & Silva, 2020; Irwani, 2024). The rise of the Islamic State in 2014 led to extensive conflict and displacement, with

around 1.2 million people still displaced today (IOM, n.d.; Thibos, 2014). The struggle to reintegrate displaced populations is hindered by ongoing sectarian tensions and political instability, while the absence of formal welfare services exacerbates their insecurity.

Illicit trade and corruption further destabilize the country. Weakened borders and political unrest have allowed non-state actors to control key entry points, fuelling the illegal trade of goods, arms, and drugs (OECD, 2022). Additionally, Iraq's emergence as a hub for illegal organ trade and cultural looting reflects the broader challenges of governance and stability (Ibid).

IDPs, especially in the Kurdish region and southern Iraq, struggle with inadequate support, and have strained any social services that have existed (Irwani, 2024). Recent droughts and water scarcity have worsened their situation, highlighting the insufficient development and implementation of social protection initiatives for IDPs. Corruption and inefficiencies within the government further impede effective management and distribution of social services. Even when social protection mechanisms are in place, their stability is undermined by Iraq's reliance on volatile oil revenues, creating a "rentier state mentality," and weakening the citizen-state accountability. (World Bank, 2014; Irwani, 2024). Inflation, oil price crashes, and sanctions contribute to the instability of these mechanisms, while governance issues and widespread corruption exacerbate misallocation and mismanagement of resources.

As international aid agencies and NGOs have intervened since the early 1990s in the KRG, they did not have many existing policies to pull from, resulting in them making their own policies and procedures, which led to an influx of contradictory social policy, once again destabilising the system (Irwani, 2024). International support also tends to exclude certain groups in need, that is, marginalized communities, as they primarily focus on refugees and IDPs, ignoring groups that need more than just family support, such as those with overlapping disabilities (Shaw et al., 2024).

As of 2022, despite some improvements and ongoing reconstruction efforts, significant challenges remain. While many displaced Iraqis have returned home, 1.2 million are still displaced, facing poor living conditions and limited access to basic services (UNHCR, 2022; IOM, 2023). Social, ethnic tensions and fragmented security continue to complicate the situation, indicating that a substantial portion of the population in Iraq is faced with insecurity.

Discussion and conclusion

Iraq's welfare regime is shaped by four interrelated factors - colonial legacies, political-economic instability, cultural influences, and prolonged conflict - that reinforced one another through path-dependent mechanisms. From a path dependence perspective (Pierson, 2000), these dynamics entrenched an exclusionary and fragmented system by generating high political, economic, and social switching costs, which reinforced urban-elite bias, reliance on informal networks, and state fragility. Britain's *colonial legacy* of indirect rule established a fragmented administration and a welfare system that privileged elites and urban formal workers while marginalizing rural and informal populations (Sluglett, 2007). Institutions such as the 1922 pension law created lock-in effects by channelling benefits to elites, generating increasing returns for patronage networks and making inclusive reforms politically and economically unfeasible. Post-independence measures inherited these asymmetries, so that even reform attempts sustained exclusionary norms and preserved Iraq's welfare regime's urban bias (Dodge, 2003).

This colonial legacy was amplified by *political - economic inst*ability rooted in oil dependence. Rentier practices allowed ruling elites to consolidate power through patronage and urban-biased investment, which proved cheaper and less disruptive than universal welfare provision (Le Billon, 2007; IEA, 2012). Oil booms under the Ba'athist regime expanded benefits selectively, while sanctions and fiscal volatility after 1990 constrained provision. These dynamics generated increasing returns for rentier survival strategies, embedding oil rents and patronage as low-cost substitutes for structural reform (Hertog, 2020). *Cultural networks* further legitimized this exclusionary trajectory. Tribal and religious systems - historically co-opted during colonial rule – offered welfare through Zakat, Khums, and Christian NGO

provision (Jawad, 2009). Their embedded legitimacy created cultural lock-in by normalizing reliance on kinship and tribal authority, which often provided social cohesion and dispute resolution more effectively than Iraq's fragile state institutions. As a result, informal provision became indispensable, reducing incentives to expand formal welfare and reinforcing the Iraq's welfare regime's hybridity.

Prolonged conflicts acted as critical junctures that deepened existing lock-ins and deepened Iraq's exclusionary welfare regime. Wars, invasions, and insurgencies destroyed welfare infrastructure, displaced millions, and forced reliance on sectarian and kinship networks as embedded alternatives (CFR, 2024; Silverman, 2020). Violence and high reconstruction costs entrenched veto points among fragmented groups, amplifying reliance on informal systems and closing off paths to universal provision (Pattanayak, 2005; Cordesman, 2022). Collectively, these dynamics explain the enduring fragility of Iraq's welfare regime. Colonial legacies institutionalized exclusionary structures, oil dependence sustained patronage, cultural legitimacy normalized informal reliance, and conflicts reinforced fragmentation. Post-2003 reforms faltered under elite resistance and ongoing instability, underscoring how cumulative lock-ins have preserved Iraq's path-dependent, welfare regime.

Therefore, Iraq's current social welfare landscape reveals substantial disparities in the forms of social protection provided to different groups of citizens (Bilo & Machado, 2018). These disparities are primarily based on labour market participation, geographical location, and membership in marginalized groups (World Bank, 2008). In Iraq, public sector workers generally have good coverage, and formal private sector workers often receive generous welfare benefits, indicating a potential welfare state regime for these groups. This classification is consistent with the presence of formal labour markets and autonomous state functions. The state's commitment to fulfilling its duties to these constituents aligns with the criteria for a potential welfare state regime outlined by Wood and Gough (2006). According to Esping-Andersen, welfare state regimes decommodify the labour, reducing the extent to which citizens' livelihoods depend on market forces. This is reflected in the entitlement of public sector workers to social insurance programs, including work, injury, sickness, disability, maternity, and pensions schemes ILO, 2021a; 2021b). Welfare state regimes in Iraq are more prevalent in urban areas and are primarily determined by profession rather than geographic location, as the GoI and the KRG provide these social protection mechanisms.

Given that state-run social protection targets the majority of the formal labour market, the high unemployment rates across Iraq and the prevalence of a large informal sector highlight issues with the distribution of resources and significant disparities in welfare access (Hasan, 2018). Consequently, those unable to access state social protection, such as unemployed or informal sector workers, increasingly rely on community-based sources for support. According to Wood and Gough (2006), this scenario reflects an informal security regime. In Iraq, this reliance on community aid is evident as many citizens seek support from NGOs, religious groups, international NGOs, and family networks. Although economically inactive individuals can access the SSN and some citizens are eligible for the PDS, these measures have not fully addressed all needs and do not provide adequate security. The rise in local and international NGOs following the 2003 invasion, during a period of severe financial and political instability, underscores the vital role of community aid in compensating for inadequate government support (Alzobaidee, 2015). Therefore, large segments of Iraq's population experience an informal security regime, characterized by high poverty levels and substantial reliance on community support due to limited access to formal social protection mechanisms.

Bevan's (2004) description of an insecurity regime applies to Iraq due to its history of civil conflict, which has exacerbated vulnerability and undermined the effectiveness of both formal and informal social protection mechanisms (see also Mumtaz & Sumarto, 2025). The results highlighted the prevalence of state corruption, which impedes good governance and the effective delivery of services. Despite ongoing instability, the proportion of citizens experiencing insecurity regimes is decreasing. This research did not uncover the role of other countries or criminal networks in the provision of social protection in conflict-affected areas, which can occur in insecure regimes (Bevan, 2004), particularly when unequal support deepens instability for specific groups. A substantial portion of Iraqis experiencing an insecure regime are IDPs, who, for many years, had no targeted government programs and were difficult to reach by

community organizations. However, with the current UNHCR and IOM initiative, in collaboration with the KRG and the GoI, aimed at supporting IDPs in the Kurdish region, such groups are likely to start experiencing an informal security regime.

As Wood and Gough (2006) argue, welfare regimes in Global South contexts are rarely mutually exclusive; instead, they often coexist across population segments and geographic areas. Iraq exemplifies this hybridity: informal security and insecurity regimes operate alongside fragmented state provision, reflecting the country's heterogeneous welfare landscape. This coexistence underscores that Iraq's welfare regime is not merely fragile but structurally hybrid – where path-dependent colonial legacies, oil rents, cultural legitimacy, and conflict have entrenched a parallel system of formal exclusion and informal reliance.

Based on this discussion, we hypothesize that Iraq's welfare regime is best understood as a hybrid, combining elements of a potential welfare state, informal security, and insecurity regimes. In advancing this perspective, we contribute to the literature on hybrid welfare regimes by offering a new case study. However, further research is needed to accurately determine which geographic areas and population segments experience the various welfare regimes and to identify the dominant regime(s) in Iraq, along with their contributing factors. It is also important for future studies to empirically examine the drivers behind the emergence of these regimes within the Iraqi context. Comparative research could explore similar hybrid welfare arrangements in other Arab countries - an area that remains largely under-explored in the welfare regime classification literature. Additionally, future studies should investigate the spatial and demographic distribution of these regimes to identify potential transition pathways that could enhance welfare coverage and reduce insecurity across Iraq's diverse population. Moreover, this study did not assess the impact of these regimes on welfare outcomes for citizens, which presents a valuable direction for further inquiry.

This exploratory study aimed primarily to develop hypotheses about the hybrid nature of Iraq's welfare regime - a perspective not previously explored. It aligns with emerging literature suggesting that not all countries conform neatly to traditional welfare regime classifications (see Mumtaz et al., 2023), and it supports the view that non-state actors play a significant role in delivering social protection through community-based systems. Refining current regime typologies to incorporate hybridization can help policymakers better understand how to reform welfare systems to meet the needs of marginalized groups and promote collaboration between formal and informal actors in the provision of social protection.

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