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# Civic Space Monitor

National Reports on Civic Space 2022



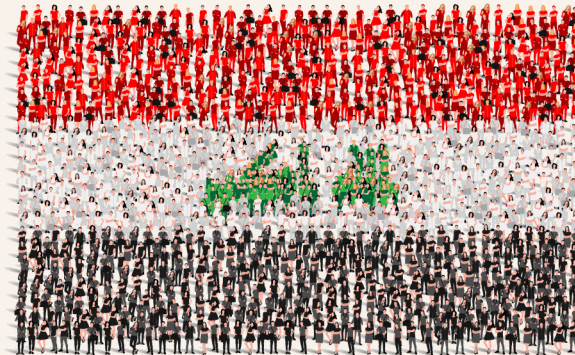
## Iraq

National Report on  
Civic Space



# Iraq

## National Report on Civic Space



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## Introduction

The early Council of Representatives elections on October 10, 2021 were a pivotal event in Iraq. The hope was that these elections would be the first step to exit the dysfunctional political reality and to transition towards a system of governance based on the concept of political majority. However, that was not actually the case. The results of the elections instead reflected these increasingly severe social divisions, and they may portend a deterioration of the current situation to unimaginable levels.

## Political Crisis

The elections were the result of the popular protests at the end of 2019 (Tishreen Movement), which prompted former PM Adil Abdul Mahdi's government to resign, leading to early elections. These elections were organized under a new electoral law that adopted the single non-transferable vote system and medium-sized electoral constituencies instead of proportional representation and large electoral constituencies.<sup>1</sup> The elections resulted in the victory of the Sadrist Movement, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, which secured the largest number of seats in Parliament (73). This prompted Muqtada al-Sadr to express his desire to form a parliamentary majority government that includes the Sovereignty Alliance and the Kurdistan Democratic Party and excludes certain traditional parties. However, political formations with significant representation in Parliament rejected any deviation from political consociationalism. These formations claimed that all social components should be represented within the government, considering that the Sadrist Movement does not have exclusive representation of the Shiite community. They also believed that the strong influence of regional powers, the international dimension, and the fact that local political parties seek to preserve the interests of these regional and international powers has led to a political deadlock, whereby the Sadrist Movement (or the

Coordination Framework/group of Shiite Islamic parties) is unable to form a coalition with a sufficient number of parties (Kurdish and Sunni) in order to reach a comfortable majority that allows it to hold a session to elect a president. This prompted the Coordination Framework parties to try and thwart the majority government project by refraining from attending the sessions to elect a President of the Republic, relying on the interpretation of the Federal Supreme Court that a quorum of two-thirds of the members of the Council of Representatives should be present. The main condition put forward by these parties before attending any session was that the prime minister is to be selected in partnership with the Sadrist Movement. The latter followed suit by putting forward two main conditions of its own: the exclusion of the strongest component of the Framework and the closest to Iran (State of Law Coalition and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq), while keeping Al-Kadhimi as Prime Minister. These conditions weaken the Framework, paving the way for unilateral control by the Sadrist Movement in the Shiite arena, as well as the application of the same idea in the Kurdish and Sunni factions by creating a vertical fissure that ensures the representation of these social components by one party. This idea has been accepted at the regional (Arab) and international (United States) levels, as it contributes to weakening the parties that have armed wings and are close to Iran. It also strengthens the international position in its dealings with the regime in Iran, which seeks to maintain the previous balance by ensuring the participation of all parties in the government without, except for those that were formed after the October protests.<sup>2</sup> International and regional consensus on the government formation can help resolve this deadlock. The Sadrist Movement resorted to violence, as its supporters broke into the Council of Representatives and the Presidential Palace. The Movement also besieged the judiciary, and part of its military wing entered an ill-conceived confrontation with the military wings of Framework parties. These developments may be one of the reasons why the consensus building process has



been accelerated, especially since al-Sadr distanced himself from politics and forced his followers to resign from the Council of Representatives in a serious political miscalculation that was in the interest of his opponents in the formation of the upcoming government. This led to resolving the issue of electing the President of the Republic and assigning the Coordination Framework candidate to form the government, after the number of Coordination Framework seats increased to 130 in the Council of Representatives due to the resignation of al-Sadr supporters. Thus, the formation of the government was accelerated, and the military option to resolve the political deadlock was excluded, as the political divisions could lead to a civil war, the extent of which would not only be limited to the Iraq but would have much wider repercussions, especially since Iran's military proxies are present in several countries in the region. If the consensus regarding the government formation was reached with the help of the United States, then al-Sadr contributed to accelerating this consensus by withdrawing from the political process.

If these early elections were held to avoid a political crisis, only for them to result in a political deadlock, the best solution would be to reinstate the power-sharing system, with calls for new early elections.

## Economic Crisis

The increase in global oil prices increased the state's financial revenues. However, the absence of a government with full powers left the state incapable of spending this financial surplus, as the state's Financial Management Law prevents it from any spending from its investment budget, as spending is limited to the operational side, i.e. paying workers' salaries and running state institutions without making any investment decisions. The economic failure is also due to structural reasons, which mostly include the spread of bribery, tribalism, clientelism, nepotism, and fanaticism based on social or economic exchange. This led to the emergence of a class that leads the public sector based on the cooperation of the parties in power with businessmen representing the economic circles belonging to the same parties, with the protection of their armed militants. This constitutes a profitable alliance to lead the state and its economy, with an integrated system based on smuggling, corruption, and seizure of public funds, in the absence of effective institutions that exercise control and accountability. In addition, the dependency of influential media outlets on this coalition has undermined society's ability to fight administrative and financial corruption, no matter how conscious, purposeful, and free society is. The causes of financial and administrative corruption are well known: the lack of transparency, the judiciary's weakness, the absence of the rule of law, the lack of accountability for corrupt officials in senior decision-making positions and related technocrats, and the security and political instability.<sup>3</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has revealed the true scale of the cumulative economic crisis, as it nearly led to the economic collapse of the state. The government was forced to borrow from banks to pay the salaries of its employees, as well as to float the currency as part in an attempt to address the low liquidity situation, based on the recommendations of the international economic alliance<sup>4</sup> to support the Iraqi government in implementing economic reforms. These reforms included finding radical solutions to the fiscal and customs systems, which

have not undergone any true reform process. The implementation of the government's white paper was limited to the devaluation of the national currency, which reflected negatively on the lower classes, whose suffering has increased, while fiscal and customs institutions remain high on indicators of corruption and poor transparency in their work.<sup>5</sup> Recently, for example, more than USD 2.5 billion were embezzled from amounts deposited as trusts for investment companies operating in Iraq, in a tragic development that reflects the scale of economic corruption.

Private sector workers still face the same chronic problems, including their lack of access to social security, despite the fact that the Labor, Retirement, and Social Security Code issued in 2015 raised the percentage of registered employees. However, this percentage remained below the required level, as many companies refuse to register their employees. Some workers are also reluctant to register, as they cannot afford to pay a subscription fee as a percentage of their wages, which are already low and below the minimum living wage. Likewise, workers who are exposed to work accidents do not receive any guarantees or rights that help them bear the hardships of life after losing the ability to work. In addition, there is a large discrepancy between the upper limit for workers' retirement pension and the minimum retirement pension for a government employee.<sup>6</sup> All of these factors cause private sector employees to be reluctant to register, especially since most of them work in the informal sector. This leads to several disadvantages, mainly the low average wages, precarious work, and fewer benefits. Moreover, the sector often lacks formal contracts.<sup>7</sup> In addition to the growing phenomenon of informal work, these factors necessitate a review of the labor regulations and the activation of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security's inspection committees by removing bureaucratic obstacles impeding their work, providing appropriate financing methods that motivate entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises, and giving them the necessary confidence and reassurance to fully engage in the formal economy. In fact, many of them

refrain from registering because of the associated costs and efforts. They also avoid registration procedures that involve multiple and often complex obligations. Finally, the weak financing of these projects, along with the unfavorable business environment, keep workers outside the formal economy. This is a problem that isolates the private sector and prevents it from contributing to solving the youth unemployment crisis. Young people tend to work in the government sector, as these jobs offer social security after retirement. Another reason is the absence of a business incubator system that provides comprehensive support for projects in a way that enhances the entrepreneurial spirit of the private sector and provides entrepreneurs with administrative, consultancy, and marketing services that encourage them to contribute to lowering the unemployment rate, which has reached 16.5%, according to the statements of the Ministry of Planning.<sup>8</sup>

As for the government's announcement that economic growth has increased over the past year, experts believe that this growth is not related to the economy itself as much as it is related to the increase of oil revenues, due to the rise in global demand and higher prices. As such, this is simply an economic bubble that will not enable Iraq to improve its rank among the countries with a fragile economy, unless it addresses its structural problems, especially since no budget was adopted in 2022, which means that the government was unable to proceed with any investment project.<sup>9</sup> One remarkable improvement was the reduction in the amount of external and internal debt by nearly three trillion dinars. This prompted the Ministry of Finance to prepare a strategy to repay the public debt for the 2022-2024 period, at a time when World Bank experts emphasized the need to mitigate the impact of high food prices on the most vulnerable groups, along with the need to benefit from the favorable conditions in the current oil market to accelerate structural reforms and support socio-economic priorities in order to enhance the resilience of the Iraqi economy in the medium term.<sup>10</sup>

## Repercussions of the Political and Economic Crises on Society

In the World Economic Outlook report issued in October, the International Monetary Fund indicated that the Iraqi economy would grow by 9.3% in 2022.<sup>11</sup> However, this growth was not reflected in the social reality or poverty rates, which also witnessed a rise, reaching levels higher than they were before the adoption of the second national strategy for poverty alleviation in Iraq for the period 2018-2022. The strategy did not achieve its goals due to the repercussions of Covid-19, as an additional 1.4 million Iraqis were driven into poverty, bringing the total number of poor people, according to a statement by the Minister of Planning, to 11 million and 400 thousand individuals. The poverty rate also rose to 31.7% as a result of the pandemic, after it had been 20% in 2018, finally reaching 25% in 2022. The high poverty rates are concentrated in Muthanna, Maysan, and Dhi Qar, in addition to the regions liberated from the terrorist group ISIS, specifically Mosul, as these regions suffer from a decline in services more than the rest of the country's regions, which indicates the failure of the second national strategy to achieve its goals in reducing poverty levels<sup>12</sup> and its inability to deal with the negative impact of the pandemic and the currency depreciation. This resulted in a continuous rise in food prices, coupled with the devaluation of the dinar: international organizations. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Bank indicated that the poverty rate rose between 7% and 14% after the government's decision to float the currency. This figure is higher than the officially announced percentage,<sup>13</sup> not to mention that the government's measures have failed to minimize the damages resulting from its decision.

At the educational level, the exacerbation of conflicts, security and political instability, the escalation of violence and terrorism, and the absence of real investments have hindered individuals' access to

quality education. The damages to the infrastructure as a result of the conflict with terrorist organizations also led to the disruption of educational services. Data indicates that more than 3 million school-aged Iraqi children are out of school<sup>14</sup> due to several reasons, including: the increasing rate of poverty that drives families not to enroll their children in school due to high tuition fees, pushing them instead to work in illegal or informal activities; non-application of the legal provisions on compulsory education; failure of educational curricula to keep pace with global developments; and the very large discrepancies between the different educational institutions. When it comes to nurseries, and according to the local planning standard (one nursery for every 5,000 inhabitants), there is an estimated shortage of 5,800 nurseries and approximately 1,250 kindergartens. According to the Covid-19 recovery document, Iraq suffers from a shortage of high school teachers, whose number is about 6,121 teachers in 20,528 sections, and a shortage in the number of buildings in general, estimated at about 6,194 buildings in all governorates. The shortage in the number of elementary school teachers reached about 67,050, and the shortage in the number of classes and sections amounted to approximately 4,048. All of this is a result of an accumulation of government failures, whether in terms of planning or implementation.<sup>15</sup>

The economic and political failure was also reflected in the health sector. While the government allocated only 2.5% of the general budget to the Ministry of Health, it allocated 18% to security and 13.5% to oil. According to a report based on World Health Organization data, the Iraqi government spent far less on healthcare per capita than the poorest countries over the past ten years. The Iraqi per capita expenditure amounted to approximately USD 161 on average, compared to USD 304 in Jordan.<sup>16</sup> The cumulative lack of interest in the health sector dates back to the past four decades, according to the statement of the Minister of Health, Dr. Ala Alwan, who resigned due to his inability to improve the situation of the ministry.



## Climate Change, Scale of Government Response, and Civic Space

It seems that the serious warning signs about the repercussions of climate change in Iraq have been severe, which requires procedures to avoid further damage. The occurrence of nine dust storms within less than eight weeks led to the cessation of most life activities between mid-March and May.<sup>17</sup> Other negative climate indicators included the drought of Sawa Lake, the looming drought of several marshes that had previously been classified as world heritage sites, the unprecedented decrease in water levels in several water bodies, namely the Razzaza, Habbaniyah, and Hamrin lakes, and the increase in pollution levels in the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates, especially in the south of the country. All of this illustrates the need to instill a political culture capable of responding to climate change, by allocating a sufficient budget to address this issue and benefiting from higher oil prices to allocate part of the surplus revenues to encourage optimized water usage, especially in the field of agriculture, and put in place a proper water management regulations between local governments to avoid competition among them, which may turn into interpersonal conflicts reaching unprecedented levels of violence. All of this means that agreements should be concluded with neighboring countries, such as Iran and Turkey, to guarantee the downstream country's water rights in accordance with International Law.

The main actor that the government should involve in its response to climate change is civil society and activists in the field of climate change. Government authorities do not have the sufficient capabilities to develop a strong strategy to adapt to climate change without making use of civil society's capabilities. For example, Humat Dijlah Association has worked with several international institutions to implement short-term projects related to agriculture and water. It has experience in identifying the most affected

communities, which affords it greater mobility in accessing and allocating resources if it receives government support.

## Civic Space Activities and Restrictions at the Political, Social, and Economic Levels

Despite the fact that its origins date back to the beginning of the last century, civil society suffered before 2003 from the public authorities' lack of acceptance of the idea of its existence and its role in the relationships with the individual, as the totalitarian regime sought to create façades affiliated with the Baath Party to prevent the emergence of parallel community organizations.

After April 2003, the situation changed, as hundreds of civil society organizations were established as a result of the political change. International organizations began to play a greater role in Iraq, as they offered assistance to a significant number of organizations through training, staff orientation, financing programs, and various activities. Civil society organizations have been able, within a short period of time, to play essential roles such as providing humanitarian aid to victims of war and violence, providing legal support to marginalized and vulnerable groups, disseminating and consolidating the principles of peace and peaceful coexistence, a culture of human rights, gender equality, women's empowerment, anti-corruption, monitoring parliamentary elections and provincial councils, and many other roles.<sup>18</sup> But despite these important roles, Iraqi civil society organizations faced many problems, challenges, and difficulties. Many believed that they are entities that practice their activities outside the control of the authorities. As a result, they are viewed as rivals, not as partners seeking cooperation or integration in order to

achieve genuine development. Therefore, the government does not provide aid and assistance to civil society except in rare cases, and even then the process is tainted with many challenges. These include offering aid and support to organizations that are not entitled to it, or favoring certain organizations over others due to political, regional, or factional considerations,<sup>19</sup> as the current power-sharing system requires the existence of façades through which political actors direct public opinion. They also benefit from external grants and programs by presenting some of these organizations that are affiliated with political parties as specialized and active bodies to be the local partner for the project or program offered. The current atmosphere of partisanship negatively affects the reality of civil society and the possibility of laying proper foundations for its work, as these parties establish organizations, associations, and research centers that are affiliated with them in an undisclosed manner and perpetuate their agendas or ideology in one way or another. They especially do so by taking advantage of the presence of some parties in power to push these associated organizations to implement programs in partnership with government sectors. In addition, the turbulent political and security situation and the prevalence of tribal values are still an obstacle preventing the acceptance of the concept of civil society. In light of these circumstances, the restrictions on civic space take several forms.

## First: Freedom of Expression

Freedom of expression in Iraq is still subject to legal restrictions. The impact of informal actors on this freedom is much greater than that of the law. Article 38 of the Constitution recognizes freedom of expression in all its forms. This includes the right to freely hold opinions without any interference and to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas by any means without restriction, unless they conflict with public order or morals. In order to achieve true freedom of expression, the following conditions should be met:

Establish a legal environment that allows for different opinions to be expressed in the media.

Ensure the political will to support and protect civil society within the framework of the rule of law.

Enact a law that guarantees the right to access information, especially information related to the public domain.

However, reality still falls short. Freedom of expression suffers from several obstacles at different levels. There are constant demands for the adoption of new laws governing the media to ensure evolution and the transition towards democracy. However, successive governments have not enacted any new laws to replace the laws of the previous repressive authorities. The government's 2011 draft law on the freedom of expression even imposed stricter penalties on those who commit an act that offends religious beliefs or practices. The government used the text of the Penal Code issued in 1969 and intensified the punishment stipulated therein. The other conditions did not differ much from the current law, and some are even more ambiguous. This enables security personnel to adapt their actions without effective controls preventing the abuse of the powers. For example, the law allows the use of force without offering a proper definition of the concept of "force." Therefore, non-governmental organizations rejected this version every time it was re-discussed within the Council of Representatives,

without convincing the government to cancel it and submit a new draft.

## **Provisions of Law and their Impact on Journalistic Work**

The Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 does not exempt journalists from accountability for the crime of defamation if they disseminate or publish information or data related to public authorities or individuals. The Publications Law also enables the authorities to imprison journalists for up to seven years if they are convicted of insulting the government, with vague provisions that can be interpreted in a way that might convict a journalist if he/she reports news that the government deems offensive. The Journalists Protection Law does not provide adequate legal protection, as part-time journalists, bloggers, and other individuals who work in news publications are excluded.

## **Journalistic Work: Continuous assaults and impunity**

Journalists face great difficulties in their work, due to the procedures imposed by local authorities and security and military officials, especially with regard to covering the state's performance in administrative affairs, corruption, and violations. As a result of covering the August protests in the cities of the Kurdistan Region, 57 journalists endured various assaults by security forces, as documented by the Journalists Support Committee in its follow-up of this incident.<sup>20</sup> The Press Freedom Advocacy Association in Iraq documents, in its annual report from May 2021 to May 2022, 280 cases of assault against workers in the media field. Erbil and Baghdad ranked first in the frequency of assaults, with 56 cases each.<sup>21</sup> Over the same period, the Iraqi Observatory for Human Rights also underlined the growing influence of parties that have an

interest in antagonizing freedom of expression and undermining the space for journalistic work in Iraq.<sup>22</sup> This report confirms the growing phenomenon of impunity for violations against those who express their opinions, as well as the threat of filing lawsuits against those working in the field of investigative journalism, which has led to its decline.

These violations were reflected in the report of Reporters Without Borders on world press freedom, as Iraq ranked 172<sup>nd</sup> out of 180 countries (down 9 places) for 2021.

## **Restricting and Suppressing Journalistic Work**

Some parties and the political class have restricted freedom of opinion and expression in Iraq by closing the offices of several satellite channels or news agencies. They also encourage their supporters to protest and storm the offices of media outlets that criticize them or host guests that make statements not aligned with the party's positions.<sup>23</sup> The Communications and Media Commission, which is the administrative body concerned with regulating the media sector, issued decisions to stop several programs following the airing of what the Commission considered as offenses against state institutions.<sup>24</sup> These measures prompted 3,005 activists, intellectuals, and politicians to sign a protest statement on 9/6/2022 titled "Defending Freedom of Expression," in which they warned of the negative impact of the violation of freedom of expression and of the dangers of continuing to restrict it.

## Second: Weak Regulation of Cyberspace

Iraq lacks integrated regulations governing cyberspace. The Cybercrime Law has been the subject of legislative deliberations for more than ten years, especially given the lack of the political will to enact it. This led to the transformation of electronic platforms into a safe haven for misinformation, misleading news, insults, defamation, and incitement to murder. On the other hand, civil society feared that the authorities sought to turn the law into a means to restrict Internet access and censor political opinions or beliefs through its vague wording, which facilitates the suppression of opponents or those who reject government policies. There were continuous calls to involve stakeholders directly in the process of preparing the draft, by presenting it to journalists, opinion-makers, and organizations concerned with freedom of expression and human rights.

The increase in hate speech and incitement on social media is putting pressure on the legislative authority to adopt a moderate version of the law that contributes to limiting this phenomenon. Psychological and social therapy is encouraged as an alternative for criminal sanctions.

Cyberspace is also witnessing the spread of misinformation through the so-called “electronic armies,”<sup>25</sup> which have misled public opinion to the extent that they contribute to killing or threatening many activists. One example is the assassination case of Reham Yacoub in Basra at the end of 2020, who, despite her withdrawal from the protests for a long time, fell victim to a widespread conspiracy theory that accused her and a group of local youths of being “agents of a U.S. conspiracy.” The group had participated in the US-funded youth leadership program, but an Iranian news agency reported otherwise in a September 2018 report.

Shortly before her assassination, Yacoub’s photos suddenly spread widely on Facebook pages as one of the elements of the conspiracy, so the electronic armies’ campaigns were the reason behind her assassination.<sup>26</sup>

Facebook adopted a special plan to limit misinformation in Iraq, in cooperation with a group of independent investigative agencies. Alerts are posted to users informing them that the published news is misleading and has been scrutinized by independent expert bodies and artificial intelligence algorithms to confront the spread of such news and limit its negative effects on public opinion. However, it is still necessary to enact an integrated national law that defines legal responsibility for these actions.

The discourse of violence and hate online focuses in particular on the most vulnerable groups in society, such as women and minorities. The elections and the ongoing cabinet formation crisis have contributed to the increasing spread of this discourse on social media. This has even translated into actual rivalry between supporters of different political movements and mutual targeting, which amounted to physical violence and armed conflict.<sup>27</sup>

Opposition figures are also increasingly being demonized, threatened, and forced to leave their place of residence and move to other places or to the Kurdistan region, in order to avoid these threats that may affect their physical safety. Non-governmental organizations are also a target of this discourse, which accuses them of seeking to destroy families or spread moral corruption. Systematic campaigns are launched against every NGO project seeking to enhance the status of women or the youth, which some consider inappropriate for social, clan, and tribal reasons. All of this is done through the electronic armies affiliated with parties subscribing to political Islam.

Although it is no different from hate speech outside of social media platforms, the danger of online hate speech lies in the fact that it reaches a wide audience and lasts for a long time. This exacerbates



its negative impact, as it can circulate without being restricted to geographical borders and without any additional costs, as the person who promotes it can remain anonymous and avoid legal accountability.

## Third: Freedom of Assembly

Iraq has not yet reached a stage where it can be classified as a completely free or democratic country. The seemingly democratic elections, party pluralism, and peaceful transition of power do not mean that it is a democratic country and do not deny the fact that informal actors are most influential on the ground, to the extent that they can sometimes replace the State and compete with it as the sole legitimate power. Local and international organizations always indicate in their reports the weak democratic practices and the decline of freedom,<sup>28</sup> which is why Iraq is included in the Freedom House list as a non-free country, with a rank of only 29 points out of a total of 100 for 2021. Although the report indicated that regular and competitive elections are held and that there is political representation for political, religious, and ethnic groups, corruption and security threats impede democratic practices, while no party in Kurdistan is capable of containing the influence of those in power. Meanwhile, in Baghdad, Iran's influence on politics is unmistakable.<sup>29</sup>

## Selective Implementation of the Peaceful Assembly and Protest Law

The Coalition Authority Order No. 19 of 2003 regulating freedom of assembly is still in effect, as the enactment of a new law has stalled in the Parliament's halls. The Order in force requires obtaining official approval for any protest 24 hours before its date. The protest should have a specific

time and place and should not block public roads. However, these conditions are selectively applied by the state, as protests are prohibited when they are organized by popular movements under the pretext of not having obtained approval. As a result, the organizers of such protests are often prosecuted. On the other hand, political parties are not required to obtain any authorization or prior determination of the time and place of the assemblies or protests they organize. This selectivity has reached the point of almost completely disrupting the provisions of the law in practice, except when lawsuits are filed against some activists in popular protests for allegedly violating the conditions of assembly. Security forces deliberately prevent or disperse protests by all means, including excessive force. In fact, security forces have failed to deal with the popular protests that take place frequently, and their members resorted to using live bullets to disperse the protestors, injuring 3 people in Dhi Qar<sup>30</sup> when protests took place to demand an end to the legal punishments and prosecution against the October 2019 protestors. This reflects the inability of security officers to use non-violent methods to end protests.

## Early Elections and their Impact on Protests

By observing the popular protests, we notice that they shrank in size during the period preceding the parliamentary elections. Afterwards, they emerged as a means to highlight the size of political movements. Once the results were announced, the ruling parties staged protests in several regions to establish their presence.

This method prompted the Tishreen (October) movement activists participating in popular protests to also call for protests against the continued political deadlock. However, two protests were organized at the same time in one area of the capital, Baghdad. These protests reflected the division within the popular movement on how to address



the current political deadlock. The protesters' opinions contrasted, as one protest called for an overall change in the form of the political system and redrafting the constitution, while the second protest, comprising a number of political parties that emerged from the protests and others that boycotted the elections,<sup>31</sup> called for the dissolution of Parliament and for holding early elections within one year, while emphasizing the full application of the Law on Political Parties in a way that prevents the participation of parties with armed wings in the political process. Furthermore, a generational gap can be noted between protesters; the younger the individuals are, the more radical their demands for change and their rejection of the political elite and the regime.<sup>32</sup>

This reflects the nature of the division among protesters over how to address the political situation, which weakens the protest movement in general in the face of the current political crisis. Further, it should be acknowledged that the popular movement is more divided than ever, as a result of the infiltration of partisan and religious forces and their attempt to impose their objectives on the popular movement. In addition, some activists have now sided with the government, while others joined parties that emerged from the protests. Therefore, in light of this crisis, the impact of the October movement has dwindled. It is only capable of uniting its various components around some common demands in an attempt to produce a clear discourse that defines its approach, especially since the movement is occasionally exposed to organized smear campaigns.

## Fourth: Kurdistan Region and the Limits of Freedom

The Kurdistan Region has been facing a dire economic situation since 2014. This has negatively affected poor classes, as job opportunities have decreased, prompting the youth to consider leaving Iraq in light of the bilateral dominance over power and economy by two parties (Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK)) since 1992. The phenomenon of immigration is driven by the inability of the economy controlled by the two parties in the Kurdistan Region to absorb the rapid growth of the population under the age of thirty, especially with its dependence on rent, based on financial transfers from the federal government. It is also driven by the lack of a strong alternative capable of competing politically in light of the decreased power of the Gorran/Change movement, and the recent emergence of the New Generation movement. Both movements are predominantly present in Sulaymaniyah, while the rest of the provinces of Kurdistan Region (Duhok and Erbil) are fully controlled by the KDP.<sup>33</sup> As a manifestation of their hegemony, the authorities have refrained from calling for elections due to differences between the two main parties. The Region's parliament issued a decision extending its mandate.

The partisan domination in the Region is based on oppression rooted in the social, political, and economic structures. There are three prevailing powerful entities, mainly: 1) tribes and tribal leaders who enjoy great social, political, and economic power; 2) religious figures and institutions supported by the authority; and 3) political parties. While the two parties and the two ruling families are attempting to establish an undemocratic, totalitarian regime, people aspire to more democracy and to the rule of law, transparency, and accountability. These demands lead to regular protests against the lack of the rule of law, the phenomenon of impunity, and rampant corruption at the highest

levels,<sup>34</sup> in light of a conflict between two competing sides. Meanwhile, opposition political forces have emerged, and their influence is increasing among people, as well as their representation in the Federal House of Representatives. Therefore, the authorities reject any call for protests by the opposition parties. The authorities suppressed the protests called for by the leader of the New Generation Party/Shaswar Abdulwahid in the face of corruption, poverty, and unemployment. As a preemptive measure,<sup>35</sup> security forces also arrested dozens of journalists, activists, and politicians on 5 and 6 August 2022, prior to the set date of the protests.

## **Fifth: Relationship between Civil Society and the Government**

The fact that there are obstacles facing civil society action does not imply a complete rupture between the government and social organizations. Rather, there is a kind of rapprochement and cooperation in sectoral areas, especially regarding relief or development and other areas in which civil society has succeeded in implementing the government's programs, namely during the Covid-19 pandemic. The government relies on the services, capabilities, and programs provided by NGOs, through which it can enhance people's living situation. On the other hand, in programs implemented by the United Nations or based on grants from international organizations, the local partner in Iraq should be registered in NGO departments in all ministries. Further, the implementation process always requires some cooperation between both sides. Non-cooperation sends a negative message to the international community, which the state tries to avoid. As such, not all aspects of cooperation are rooted in the belief in the role of civil society.

## **Means of Successful Cooperation between Civil Society and Government Institutions**

Through its various activities, civil society seeks to enhance participation and cooperation with the government in the field of developing strategies in areas of common interest. On 21 September 2021, the Iraqi government launched the Women's Economic Empowerment Plan for 2021-2022, with the support of the World Bank Group. The plan aims to remove constraints and create more economic opportunities for women. It also outlines the government's priorities in line with the reform program. The Women's Economic Empowerment Plan followed extensive discussions and consultations that included all concerned parties and stakeholders, and it is supported by the Iraqi Ministry of Planning, the Women's Empowerment Directorate at the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, and the High Council for Women's Affairs in Kurdistan Region of Iraq. It is also supported by national and international civil society organizations, in addition to the private sector and experts.

On the other hand, NGOs, unions, and federations now have a role in the formulation of government strategies through their membership in committees, whether it is the National Strategy for Iraqi Women,<sup>36</sup> the National Strategy for Early Childhood Development, or the National Anti-Corruption Strategy.<sup>37</sup> This consolidates the visions underpinning these strategies, as well as partnership in their implementation process to reach the intended goals.

In the context of cooperation with the government, CSOs contributed to the launch of a broad and diverse advocacy campaign on the occasion of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. It extended over 16 days, from November 25 to December 10, and involved significant cooperation with the state's institutions

in support of the campaign. Many campaigns and workshops were conducted in ministries during this period, under official guidance, to define the campaign and its objectives and enhance the status of women in society. This was done through coordination, planning, and role-sharing between the organizations and state departments, which resulted in significant progress in defining the concept of combating violence against women, by raising the awareness of various groups – an effort that could largely contribute to changing societal behavior in a positive manner.

Within the framework of governmental cooperation and coordination, the department concerned with the activities of NGOs has worked on strengthening the procedural protection of organizations, in a way that prevents some executive or security institutions from interfering in their work or illegally requiring NGOs to submit their financial statements, as a condition for obtaining approvals to work on certain projects. The NGO Department issued Decision No. 1565 on 16/1/2022, informing all state institutions that organizations established under the law may not be required to submit any financial statement or a statement of their activities except by contacting the Department, which is the entity authorized to implement the law and follow up and assess NGOs activities as well as the extent to which they respect the law. Further, the reasons for requesting the financial statement or the nature of the organization's activities shall be stated. The Central Bank also supported this decision with regard to commercial banks. This measure constitutes a supportive and advanced step to support the freedom of civil society action and prevents the interpretations of some government institutions that obstruct civil action.

## **Restrictions on Civic Space and its Activities**

There are still significant difficulties preventing civic space from exercising its role of influencing and being influenced. These difficulties can be noted

in the legal framework, as well as in the prevailing social perception of its effectiveness, as follows:

### **Legal Framework Governing the Work of CSOs**

No legislative changes have been made regarding the laws governing the work of NGOs, as Law No. 12 of 2010 is still not a priority on the governmental or parliamentary agenda, despite the demands of several organizations to reconsider some of its provisions which partially restrict the work of organizations, especially the lengthy incorporation conditions. In contrast, the implementation of the provisions regulating the work of unions has been difficult. The judiciary considered that the text of Law No. 48 of 2017, which abolished the possibility of re-electing the presidents of trade unions and professional federations multiple times, applies to all community organizations, regardless of their specific laws or internal regulations. This led to confusion in the work of some organizations, including the Bar Association, as the judiciary considered that the candidacy ban includes those who had previously won, even those who were a reserve member of the offices or executive bodies of the Association. In addition, the judiciary's narrow interpretation of the text will lead to the unjustified restriction of the right to trade union work, as it does not promote trade union action.

### **Governmental and Political Intolerance of Criticism**

In addition to the legal restrictions, there is the problem of the security situation and its impact on the personal security of civil workers. Indeed, the house of the Head of the Iraqi Engineers Association in Diyala was targeted with an explosive device, a syndicate member was assassinated in Basra Governorate, and several threats were made against civil society activists. Further, critics of government policies were prosecuted, including a lawsuit filed against the Head of the Iraqi Artists Syndicate after he criticized the government's poor performance at

the opening of a certain festival.

The Security Council has stressed the importance of civil society participation and has demanded that gender mainstreaming be considered as a comprehensive issue in all phases of the mandate of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq, including providing guidance and assistance to the Iraqi government to ensure the full, equal, and targeted participation of women at all decision-making levels, including in the context of elections, cabinet formation, and the promotion of women's economic empowerment.<sup>38</sup> However, senior government officials, as well as some members of the Council of Representatives, stood against the civil society report submitted by Ms. Hanaa Edwar (Chairperson of Iraqi Al-Amal Association/NGO), who was subject to a defamation and hate speech campaign, after the statement she delivered at the UN Security Council session to brief the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Ms. Jeanine Plasschaert. In her statement, she highlighted "the role of non-governmental organizations to restore society's awareness and point out the gravity of impunity." She referred to the "political stagnation" and stressed the need to promote reform and peaceful coexistence, as well as the importance of involving civil society organizations in the initiative to activate their role in defending human rights, public freedoms, and the rule of law."<sup>39</sup>

## Advocacy Campaigns and Networking in Civil Work

In Iraq, civil society's interaction with advocacy campaigns has developed along with an increase in collective action networks that aim to unify fragmented efforts within a clearly structured organizational framework capable of achieving broader strategy development and implementation.

"In Defense of Women's Freedom" was an advocacy campaign launched by a group of activists on social media to repeal Article 398 of the Penal Code.

That article allows rapists to escape punishment by marrying their victims so they have a legal excuse that reduces their penalty and might even lead to the suspension of the penalty's implementation. The campaign was launched under the hashtag #398\_إلغاء\_المادة (Repeal Article 398), given that this article was intended to reward the rapist rather than punishing them. The United Nations Human Rights Committee had previously confirmed that the legislative provisions in the Iraqi criminal code provide for reduced penalties for so-called "honor crimes." The Committee believed that these provisions are discriminatory against Iraqi women and that Iraq must review its domestic legislation to repeal or amend provisions that allow violence against women. Human rights activists believe that the abolition of these articles is not sufficient and that there should be more focus on activating and developing mechanisms for filing complaints related to rape crimes, providing comprehensive protection for victims of different types of violence, and changing the stereotype that views them as suspects, rather than victims. However, due to the political deadlock, the Council of Representatives did not convene a session, which prevented the campaign from achieving its goals of persuading the Council to reconsider the provisions of the law and abolish the mitigating excuse for perpetrators of rape crimes.

"Reforming the Legal Environment for Local Governments"

As part of NGO efforts to influence public policies, programs were launched to reform the governorate councils' (local governments) legal system. These councils had been dissolved previously by a decision of the Council of Representatives, since they exceeded their legal mandates. The purpose was to restructure the relationship between the central government and the governorates, which leads to restoring development. Legal system reform programs aim to reconcile the demands of protesters (who refuse the return of governorate councils to power since they are part of the system of corruption and financial squandering)



with the need to have such councils to monitor executive work in local governments and to have governors who are chosen by elected persons in the provinces instead of being appointed by the central government. These programs consult with elites and specialists in legal and electoral affairs in order to reach a suggested draft that can be presented to legislators in Parliament, in order to ensure that the legislative will is compatible with the people's will.

## Civil Society's Efficiency and its Role in Promoting the Rule of Law

Activists on social media launched a campaign against a security officer to end impunity. The campaign was related to accusations that the officer in question had violated human rights during the fight against ISIS as well as during the October 2019 popular uprising in Dhi Qar governorate. Iraqis residing in the United States formed a non-profit organization whose goal was to work on ending impunity. The organization conducted an investigation that involved documents and video recordings about alleged violations committed by the aforementioned officer; this forced the government to re-interrogate him after having closed the case. Collective efforts on social media led to the intervention of the Prime Minister to promptly conduct judicial investigations, resulting in a trial before the criminal court.

## Development in the Legal Environment Concerning Civil Society Organizations' Areas of Impact

One main development in this area is the consequence of the Federal Supreme Court issuing its internal regulations to organize its work in reviewing the constitutionality of laws and other powers entrusted to it by the Constitution.<sup>40</sup> The

internal regulations explicitly enabled civil society organizations to appeal the court's decisions on the unconstitutionality of laws in accordance with the requirements specified in the court's internal regulations and law through a direct lawsuit.

This legal authorization for civil society organizations to file a direct lawsuit constitutes a basic and vital indicator of the important role played by these organizations in the life of the people and reflects the court's positive view of this role. However, the court's implementation of these provisions will determine to which extent it can file lawsuits that ensure the public interest, as the literal application of the text and the requirements of the court's internal system might hinder this right. For the lawsuit to be accepted, the text must be applied to the party claiming unconstitutionality, which might impede the organizations' lawsuits if they aim to protect the public interest, not private interest. Nevertheless, enabling organizations to file direct lawsuits before the court remains a major positive step.

## Networking Projects in Volunteer Work

The report of the European Union Election Observation Mission to Iraq 2021 concerning parliamentary elections applauded the role of domestic observers. The most organized group according to the report was the Alliance of National Networks and Organizations to Observe Elections, which included seven observer coalitions (Shams, Tammuz, Nooraqib, Ein, Alliance of Iraqi Minorities, Freedom Ambassadors and South Youth). Together, these coalitions deployed around 8,800 observers across all governorates. Their observation and public reports – before, during, and after election day – had a positive impact on the transparency of the process<sup>41</sup> despite the difficulties they encountered. Networking between these organizations strengthened their position in the monitoring process and enhanced coordination through joint reports issued during the election



process. The reports highlighted the importance of maintaining such efforts and not being limited to the functional dimension aimed at achieving immediate participation in monitoring elections. Rather, the functional aspect needs to be transformed into a long-term strategic dimension that achieves the organizations' goals in the process of promoting democracy, by uniting efforts to have an influence and exert pressure, exchanging experiences, and transferring or strengthening capabilities within the framework of a stable institutional network.

## **Sixth: Protest Movement's Impact on Society and Civic Space**

The protest movement's repercussions on society and civic space in general reveal its practical impact.

### **Emergence of New Political Parties from the Popular Movement, Some of which Entered Parliament**

By disseminating the details of the new law prior to elections, NGOs had an influential role in the 2021 elections, as they contributed to the arrival of new parties and independent figures to Parliament. These parties gained an understanding of the electoral mechanism by addressing voters who took part in the popular protests.

Parties formed after the protests did not benefit much from the new electoral law because they focus more on the idea of participation than on their strategic efforts to win or enter Parliament. This caused them to lose many opportunities to increase the number of their MPs by drawing on popular support. However, this does not mean that there were not any positive aspects in their participation,

especially since they contributed, for the first time, to the election of young MPs under the age of thirty.

These parties still suffer from organizational splits for many reasons, including their leaders' unilateral decision making, the lack of harmony, and the lack of a unified political vision to deal with the parties in power, which pushes those who disagree with them to withdraw from the organizational framework. Moreover, they were subjected to systematic media attacks carried out by traditional parties that felt threatened by their growth. In fact, this social class still does not believe in the participation of new parties in effective political action that does not involve the traditional parties that have ruled the country successively since 2003. This is clearly evident as representatives of the new political parties who were elected as MPs for the first time, along with some independent MOs who represent the October protests, were not originally invited by the Prime Minister to attend the dialogue held to resolve the political crisis.

In light of the challenges that the parties emanating from the protest movement are exposed to, they tried to reach the Arab Sunni popular base, by establishing organizational offices without being limited to the same social segments of existing parties in the Shiite geographical framework. This was a positive development in the political work of these parties, as they transitioned from the local level to the national level. This strengthens the citizenship concept as an essential part, in contrast to the concept of components that traditional parties base their work upon.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Among the challenges faced by civil society organizations is their limited influence on policies. This is due to the hostility of the political class towards them; its clear denial of their existence; the weak focus and networking in these organizations' work; and the fact that some of them are linked to political parties, which affects their independence. Moreover, people in power do not believe in the role that civil society structures can play if provided with an enabling environment and a fair enforcement of the law.

The effectiveness of civic space is seriously affected by the threats, harassment, and intimidation against prominent human rights defenders, journalists, and civil society actors. These campaigns prevent them from achieving their goals, whether by stopping their legitimate activities or minimizing their impact, under the pretext that they criticize or oppose the government's positions, policies, or procedures, thus limiting and restricting civic space. In fact, some activists in the protest movement were subjected to assassination or enforced disappearance by unidentified individuals, who could not be uncovered through official investigations. Even in the event of the arrest of these individuals, the legal procedures remain slow and are not commensurate with the seriousness of the crimes committed, as some of these activists are forced, due to threats, to leave their place of residence and move to another governorate or settle in the Kurdistan Region.

Violent non-state actors have been working to change a consistent pattern, which is the government's monopoly on the means of violence. They now possess these means to the extent that they are able to take the initiative and practically confront government bodies, which undermines the idea of State sovereignty on the ground and the role of civil society.

Turnout in the elections reached 41%, the lowest rate since 2005. This reflects voters' frustration

and their inability to consider elections as a means of change, in addition to the boycott campaigns that some political forces have called for to reject the current political class. Moreover, some online platforms, supported by parties in power, seek to discourage dissatisfied people from voting, since their participation and votes negatively affect the continued presence of those parties in the political scene.

The main challenge that the civic space may face is the transformation of the current political crisis into a battle between political parties; the August 29 events<sup>42</sup> were a painful example where dozens of people have been killed. In addition, the extension of the conflict to other areas may lead the country to a civil war that threatens the State's sovereignty, especially since the parties to the political conflict often disregard the initiatives put forward by civil society as a roadmap to resolving the crisis.

The youth are still reluctant to engage in political action within an organized structure (joining political parties). This pushes them to organize social events and express their political vision through their work in non-governmental organizations, which leads to the politicization of civil society as an alternative, since they refuse to engage in political parties.

## Recommendations

- An integrated legal framework should be developed to regulate how cyberspace is tackled in the media or through daily interaction through the enactment of a cybercrime law. This law should limit hate speech and incitement to violence against the most vulnerable social groups and prevent approaches that threaten civil peace by holding bloggers who deliberately provoke sectarian, racial, and religious tensions accountable.
- An integrated regulatory framework should be established for freedom of assembly based on giving notice, rather than obtaining authorization. Moreover, the right to access information should be explicitly recognized. The failure to recognize this right decreases the effectiveness of civil society and its ability to efficiently intervene in policymaking.
- Civil society should work to analyze and influence the annual budget draft in a way that contributes to building a budget based on sustainable development and aimed at avoiding an oil-dependent rentier economy. It should also work on monitoring government spending and its consistency with what is approved by the legislative authority in the annual budget, in order to benefit from it.
- Human capital should be enhanced while providing social protection, in order to secure social cohesion and consolidate social integration.
- It is important to develop the youth's capabilities in political work, strengthen their position in political parties, and highlight their active role in society. This would allow them to actively participate in the decision-making process. This is because political systems cannot be effective

without the participation of all segments of society, which requires respect for various rights: freedom of expression, freedom of peaceful assembly, elimination of discrimination, and the lack of fear and intimidation, among others.

# Endnotes

- 1 During the period between 2005 and 2021, Iraq adopted electoral systems based on proportional representation; that is, voting on the basis of a list, with the distribution of seats according to the votes obtained by the list in relation to the total number of votes cast, with a change in the proportional representation mechanism from the largest remainder to the Sainte-Laguë mechanism with different proportions. As for the October 20 a21 elections, and as a result of popular pressure, a new, majority electoral system was adopted instead of a proportional representation system, which is the single non-transferable vote system known as (SNTV). It is an electoral system used in electoral constituencies that have more than one seat, where the voter casts one vote to one candidate within the constituency, then the seats are filled with the candidates who obtained the highest number of votes. If an electoral constituency has three seats, they are allocated to the three candidates who obtained the highest number of votes.
- 2 Al Furat Center for Development, Challenges of the Next Government's Formation, posted on the website <https://fcds.com/polotics/1656>
- 3 Jamal Aziz Farhan, Triple Economic Failure in Iraq (poverty, unemployment, corruption), Al Kut Journal of Economics and Administrative Sciences, Wassit University, issue 19, page 67.
- 4 The alliance includes the G7 countries: the United States, United Kingdom, Japan, France, Germany, Canada and Italy, as well as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank; while the Iraqi delegation includes the Ministry of Finance, the Central Bank, and the Parliamentary Finance Committee.
- 5 The border crossings policy caused Iraq to lose more than 3 trillion dinars in 2021, according to a statement by the President of the Iraq Future Foundation, based on a comparison between the export figures announced by customs authorities in seven major countries from which Iraq imported goods and the figures announced by the Customs Authorities of Iraq <https://economy-news.net/content.php?id=29245>.
- 6 Assaad Zalzal, Workers in Iraq: Unions, committees, and laws, yet no guarantee of a decent livelihood <https://bit.ly/3URwH25>
- 7 Small and medium-sized companies rarely offer formal or written contracts, which undermines the rights of employees, especially since there are more job opportunities in the informal sector for the young workforce compared to the formal sector. The figures indicate the extent of the deterioration in the private sector, as the percentage of health insurance by the employer does not exceed 4%, while the paid annual leave reaches 8%. As for the percentage of social security coverage, it is 9%, according to data collected by the International Labor Organization, Diagnostic of the Informal Economy in Iraq, pp. 22-23.
- 8 Kazem Khamat Salman, Small and Medium Enterprises and their Role in Economic Growth in Iraq, Muthanna Journal of Administrative and Economic Sciences, issue 5, 2013, p. 85.
- 9 Ahmed Dabbagh, Iraq is the Fastest Growing Arab country: Why is this not reflected in its population?
- 10 Presse release No. 22/159, published on the International Monetary Fund website.
- 11 The forecast rate of economic growth, according to the International Monetary Fund, was 9.5%.
- 12 Zaid Salem, Increased Level of Poverty in Iraq <https://bit.ly/3Wb9s3Y>
- 13 Ammar al-Hadithi, "Poverty in Iraq: Abundant Resources... yet the poor are greater in number," published on <https://www.noonpost.com/content/43884>
- 14 Dr. Sultan Jassim al-Nasrawi, Education in Iraq: Turning Crisis into Opportunity, Al-Furat Center for Development. <https://fcds.com/social/1694>
- 15 Dr. Sultan Jassim al-Nasrawi, *ibid.* <https://fcds.com/social/1694>.
- 16 Ahmed Dabbagh, How Well Can Iraq Cope with Covid-19?, <https://www.noonpost.com/content/43884>
- 17 Iraqi Meteorology Organization sets the date for the end of the ninth dust storm, <https://bit.ly/3Ht9dNH>
- 18 Hammurabi Human Rights Organization, civil society organizations in Iraq and their impact on democratic transitions. <https://bit.ly/3HpZ4RN>
- 19 Saeed al-Nouman, Civil Society Organizations: Current situation and future prospects, Iraqi forum ([iraqi-forum2014.com](http://iraqi-forum2014.com))
- 20 According to a report published by the Journalist Support Committee on its website, the documented violations included: Journalists arrested: 23, Attacking the role of journalists: 4, Prevented from covering: 16, Injury with tear gas: 8, Confiscation of journalistic work tools: 23, Website closure: 1. <https://www.journalistsupport.net/article.php?id=378705>
- 21 "On World Press Freedom Day - The Fall of The Constitutional High Ceilings on the Freedom of Journalistic Work in Iraq." To view the full report, visit <https://pfaa-iq.com/?p=5944>
- 22 The report issued by the Observatory <https://bit.ly/3iVqW6j>
- 23 Taha Al-Ani, What is the most prominent challenge facing Iraqi journalists on World Press Freedom Day? <https://www.aljazeera.net/news/humanrights/2022/5/3>
- 24 The commission's decision is published on the website <https://www.nasnews.com/view.php?cat=74107>. It is related to a

statement made by a guest that appeared on a live political program entitled “Clearly” from the Zagros satellite channel, although the insult represents the point of view of the guest, not the channel.

Among the programs that were also suspended was a scene that included accusations against the Ministry of Defense was broadcast on the UTV channel on the first day of Ramadan .The program was suspended after the Ministry filed a complaint against the program” With Mulla Talal “which contained false accusations ,while the official Iraqi channel sought to stop the ”Al-Muhayed “program and dismiss its editorial team from their work ,in June ,2022 after hosting the political analyst Sarmad Al-Taie ,who severely criticized the President of the Supreme Judicial Council .Throughout the episode ,the guest accused him of political bias in favor of movements supported by Iran ,as he described them ,although the program was broadcast live ,and it was not possible for the broadcaster to predict what the guest would say .Meanwhile ,the Council filed a lawsuit against the political analyst on charges of insulting public authorities in accordance with the provisions of Article 226 of the Penal Code ,which criminalizes insulting state institutions.

25 Electronic armies are fake social media accounts linked to each other, aiming to manipulate discussions that take place on the Internet, as well as to discredit opponents or spread fake news, in order to achieve the goals of their funders.

26 Electronic armies: Digital predators and the worst in the Middle East. <https://bit.ly/3PkQJ3U>

27 France 24, Iraq: The death toll in the clashes between the Sadrists and factions loyal to Iran and the security forces rose to 30. <https://bit.ly/3Bo95v2>

28 In this context, see the statement of the head of the Center for Political Thinking, Dr. Ihsan Al-Shammari, as well as the Human Rights Watch website <https://www.hrw.org/ar/report/2020/06/15/375258>, and the report issued by the US State Department for 2021, <https://iq.usembassy.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/245/IRAQ-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT-AR-1.pdf>

29 Bassem Muhammad Khreisan, Iraq in the World Freedom Index 2021, Al-Bayan Center for Studies, Baghdad, p. 8.

30 Injuries from live bullets during the dispersal of a protest in Nasiriyah. <https://www.iqiraq.news/security/32433--.html>

31 The protest issued a statement in the name of 11 political movements that described their initiative to solve the crisis. These are: the Iraqi Communist Party, the Social Democratic Party, the Iraqi Al-Umma Party, the National Civil Movement, the Nazil Akoth Haqi Democratic Movement, the Faili Front, the Iraqi Al-Bayt Movement, the Democratic Current, the Consultative Council, Tishreen Democratic Movement.

32 Protest Movements in Iraq in the Era of a “New Civil Society,” published on <https://fanack.com/ar/opinion-ar/protest-movements-in-iraq~124550/>

33 Mera Jasm Bakr, Escaping from the Duopoly Rule: How a Two-Party System Drives Kurds to Migrate in Masses, Al-Bayan Center for Studies and Planning, Baghdad 2022, p. 5.

34 Kurdistan's Politicized Society Confronts a Sultanistic System <https://carnegie-mec.org/2015/08/18/ar-pub-61024>

35 Human Rights Watch report, see <https://www.hrw.org/ar/news/2022/08/28/kurdistan-region-iraq-arrests-deter-protest>.

36 Dr. Yusra Karim's statement on civil society organizations participating in formulating the women strategy for 2023-2027, <https://ninanews.net/Website/News/Details?Key=964947>

37 The role of civil society organizations in implementing the national anti-corruption strategy [https://nazaha.iq/pdf\\_up/6479/Str002021.pdf](https://nazaha.iq/pdf_up/6479/Str002021.pdf)

38 Published on the United Nations website <https://news.un.org/ar/story/2022/05/1103002>

39 Full speech on the website of Al-Zaman newspaper. <https://www.azzaman.com/archives/389484>

40 The competent court empowered to determine the constitutionality of laws and interpret the constitution. According to the provisions of Article 93 of Iraq's 2005 Constitution, it is entitled to resolve legal disputes between the federal government, regions, governorates that are not part of a region, municipalities, and local administrations; adjudicate issues arising from the enforcement of federal laws, decisions, regulations, instructions, and procedures issued by the federal authority; determine the validity of accusations against the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister, and ministers; approve the final results of the general parliamentary elections; adjudicate conflicts of jurisdiction between the federal judiciary, judicial bodies of regions and governorates that are not part of a region, as well as conflicts of jurisdiction between judicial bodies of the regions or governorates that are not part of a region.

41 EU Election Observation Mission in Iraq 2021 Parliamentary Elections, Final Report, p. 31.

42 Moqtada Sadr's supporters broke into the presidential palace and organized a sit-in outside the headquarters of the Supreme Judicial Council, which resulted in an armed fight in the International Zone, as well as an armed clash in the southern governorates. This situation could have spread to the capital and other governorates, but the Sadrist Movement leader ordered his supporters to withdraw.