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Table Of Contents

Journal Cover	1
Author[s] Statement	3
Editorial Team	4
Article information	5
Check this article update (crossmark)	5
Check this article impact	5
Cite this article.....	5
Title page	6
Article Title	6
Author information	6
Abstract	6
Article content	7

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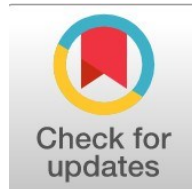
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The Role of the Political Participation of Informal Forces in Promoting Democracy and Shaping Public Policies

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Abstract

General Background This study examines the expanding influence of informal political actors—political parties, media institutions, and civil society organizations—as a result of democratic transitions that have reshaped governance structures in Iraq. **Specific Background** Although constitutional guarantees endorse political participation, practical engagement remains constrained by historical authoritarianism, sectarian divisions, and weak institutional cultures. **Knowledge Gap** Existing research has not sufficiently explained how informal forces simultaneously foster democratic practices and shape public policy within Iraq’s evolving political landscape. **Aims** This study aims to analyze the mechanisms through which informal actors contribute to democratic consolidation and influence policymaking processes. **Results** Findings indicate that political parties dominate policy formation, media act as pressure mechanisms that expose corruption and shape public opinion, and civil society organizations enhance political awareness and citizen engagement despite structural limitations. **Novelty** The study provides a comprehensive, system-based analysis of informal forces’ roles in both advancing democratic transformation and directing policy outcomes in a post-conflict political system. **Implications** Strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing media independence, and empowering civil society are essential to ensuring inclusive policymaking, improving accountability, and supporting Iraq’s long-term democratic development.

Highlights:

- Highlights how informal forces contribute to democratic development and policy formation.
- Underscores the influence of political parties, media, and civil society in shaping public decisions.
- Emphasizes that their impact varies according to the political system and democratic context.

Keywords: Political Participation, Informal Forces, Democracy, Public Policies, Iraq

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Introduction

First: Definition of the Topic

The right to political life is one of the basic rights, which are enshrined in most present-day constitutional systems, the international and regional charters [1]. Through this right, there is a systemic arrangement in the mechanism of distribution of the political authority. Some notable expression of political involvement is the involvement of informal forces in the process of formulating policies in the society and advancing democratic governance. This kind of involvement is best visible in a democratic system, where informal players have significant role on policy-making processes, and the degree of the role and effectiveness of informal institutions depends on the type of political system and the political climate at the given moment.

Contrastingly, in non-democratic systems the process of public policy making is usually monopolized by one power structure namely the executive branch with the functions of the legislative and judiciary branches accordingly being diminished [2].

The influence of informal institutions in such systems is virtually nonexistent since it is used not as a tool, but as a subsidiary of the ruling regime, and has no individual or worthy role.

Therefore, the process of creating the public policy is a multitude of variables, influences, and pressure factors [3]. This is due to the complexity and diversity brought about by the involvement of planning, programming, decision preparation and decision making processes. It is in this way that the process of public policy-making contains the true meaning of involvement in politics. It must not be limited to the people of authority but it must be a group of thoughts, debates, and interactions among the formal and informal players [4], [5].

Besides, the substantive role of the informal actors on the development of the public policies and the strengthening of the democratic institutions help to select the sovereigns and legislators legitimately and guarantee strict construction and implementation of the corresponding policy frameworks [6]. This dynamic also ensures that, in a self-enforcing cycle, full observation is done of how much the governmental agencies adhere to political, civil, social, and economic human rights that all individuals owe to them.

Second: Significance of the Study

The value of the current study lies in the fact that the involvement of the informal actors in the political processes is an essential mechanism and a practical tool that forms the basis of democratic governance. Without such involvement, any meaningful discussion on the existence of democracy, in itself, is unsustainable. Although modern constitutions usually clearly recognize the role of informal actors in the political decisions, the realities of politics vary within the normative continues [7], [8]. The novelty of the present research also lends to its relevance since it attempts to explain how informal actors can impact the process of making policies by the state and strengthen the principle of democracy in the Iraqi political system. The study also aims at enlightening the critical informal agents that influence the democratic development and the process of policymaking in the non-governmental level.

Third: Research Problem

The official recognition of the right to be involved in the political life and the legal codification of it has not been sufficient to remove the gaps in the process and to guarantee the effective and wide participation in the political life in diverse forms [9], [10]. It is not the articulations of the political participation which are important but the actualization of the articulations. Despite being full of constitutional provisions that support democratic principles, Arab states tend to exhibit the most non-democratic practise and the weakest structure of substantive political engagement. On the other hand, those states where genuine democracy prevails are the ones that have a smaller body of constitutional and legislative provisions, but which have a much greater practical role in the care of political affairs [11].

Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following central question: **To what extent do informal forces contribute to promoting democracy and shaping public policies within the Iraqi political system?**

Fourth: Research Methodology

The given study is written in the framework of the systems approach, which involves the analysis of the data related to the significance of the informal political activity in the creation of the public policies and advocacy of democracy in the Iraqi political system and the factors that determine this political activity. The methodology includes identification of the main phenomena and unit basic units that comprise the subject matter, creation of accurate information that would support a thorough understanding and the following analysis of the other contextual factors of the studied phenomenon.

Fifth: Research Structure

To address the research problem, this study is divided into **two main sections**, each comprising **two subsections**.

- Part I considers the nature of political engagement of informal forces in terms of the democratic transformation.
- The next part of the paper explores how much the informal forces have to do with advancement of democracy and shaping of the public policy.

Section One

The Nature of Political Participation by Informal Forces in the Context of Democratic Transformation

The active participation of the informal forces in political participation and decision-making has been empowered due to the democratic transformations. Without a true democratic model, it is unthinkable to have working institutions of civil society and a free media. It is crucial that the appropriate development of the public policy-making process entails actual and combined engagement of both formal and informal organs in the state. The character of political regime is a major conditioner of this interaction and its level based on the level of freedom given to informal forces.

The model of Iraqi politics is based on the parliamentary form of democracy that offers wider opportunities and larger areas of participation of informal institutions in the process of the formation of the public policy and popularization of democracy.

Due to the significance of this issue and to discuss it carefully, the given section is split into two subsections:

- The initial sub part is the description of the notion of political participation of informal forces.
- The second subsection explores the truth about the democratic transformation in Iraq.

Subsection One

The Concept of Political Participation by Informal Forces

To comprehensively address the various aspects of this topic, this subsection is divided into two parts:

1. The **first part** explains the **meaning of political participation**,
2. while the **second part** explores the **meaning of informal forces**.

Part One

The Meaning of Political Participation

In order to shed more light on the concept of political participation, this section will look at the issue in several aspects. It starts with the terminological definition of political participation, which is further followed up by the operational definition as follows:

First: The Terminological Definition of Political Participation

Participation Linguistically, participation is the formal, informal contribution of individuals, and groups to all that is going on in society economically, politically and socially with a view to the realization of the common good. The involvement of citizens, in this case, refers to the broad and direct role of people in the formulation of decisions that define the characteristics and size of the popular form of democracy, and in acting, monitoring and carrying out, and ultimately tracking the decisions. It also entails the right of the people to participate in the politics directly in a democratic way without being under the control of a particular person or a particular group.

The political participation, when used in one of its important meanings, presupposes the engagement of the maximum number of citizens in the most diverse activities and areas which should be related to their abilities and needs. It is a

type of involvement in the administration and control of the affairs and institutions of the people an element that makes the individual stronger in relation to the authority and makes him one of the elements of it. Further on, it is the voluntary acts of the members of the society to elect its rulers and representatives and take part, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly, in the process of policies and decisions making.

Political participation in its general sense can be expansion to any activity or action that is done by the citizens in the attempt to impact on the policies of the people and management of the state affairs or even in the selection of the people in the governance position. Therefore, political participation is one of the main rights of the citizen to take an active part in the political decision-making process as one of the political rights.

Second: The Operational Definition of Political Participation

The indicators of political participation operations can be acquired through numerous definitions, which assist in defining the practical aspects of the same. Political participation is a voluntary and optional act that is practiced by individuals, which is aimed at affecting the process of making a political decision in society and which is intended to bring an impact in political action. This is based on the fact that the citizen feels accountable to the society and obtained powers to make decisions that can help him or her participate in a democratic society in an effective way.

The other definition of political participation is the urge of the individual to have a positive role in the political process in the form of administrative processes like voting, elective office running, or discussion of political matters with other people or membership of go between organizations.

Based on these definitions, it is clear that the input of the people in the political participation either as an individual or as a group is realized within a democratic system. At the individual level, citizens have the chance to engage in the political life as voters, active political participants; in the group level, they can engage as members of the community organizations or labor unions. The political parties especially are one of the key institutions which enhance the actualization of political rights due to the organization of efficient involvement in political life of people.

In this regard, the present study will follow the following broad meaning of political participation:

The direct or indirect participation of citizens in the process of decision-making of the political system.

Second: The Operational Definition of Political Participation

There are a number of definitions that can be used to derive the operational indicators to understand political participation and make it clearer in terms of its practical aspects. Political participation can be described as voluntary and optional behavior of people whose purpose is to affect the procedure of forming majorities in politics and taking part in politics. Such involvement is driven by the feeling of social responsibility in the citizen as well as the capacity to make choices that can make him or her a success in a democratic society.

In another definition, political participation is the individual wish to engage in the political process positively by participating in the administrative practices which includes voting, seeking elected offices, and talking with others about political issues, or by joining intermediary groups.

Based on these definitions, it is clear that individual or group contribution of the people in political participation takes place in a democratic system. People can be involved in politics as individual's citizens in the form of voters or as individuals who are actively involved in politics; they can be involved as groups of people by being members of community organizations or labor unions. Political parties are one of the primary institutions that make it possible to fulfill the political rights, namely, organizing the effective involvement of people in the political life.

Political participation, therefore, in this study defines it in the following broad manner:

A direct or indirect participation of citizens in the process of decision-making of the political system.

Second: The Operational Definition of Political Participation

The operational definition of how political participation can be understood can be explained by the various definitions that demonstrate the essential indicators of the political participation. Political participation can be defined as one of the voluntary activities carried out by individuals with the intention to impact the collective political decisions and

subsume political action. It is a result of the feeling of social responsibility of the citizen and the ability to engage in a democratic society.

The other definition considers the political participation to be the desire of the individual to be actively involved in the political process through exercising administrative rights and includes voting, representing the elective position, participating in the political discourse, or membership in an intermediary organization.

In line with these definitions, it is obvious that the political participation by people individually or in groups occur within a democratic system. People can act as voters or as political active citizens and organizations as groups can act in terms of membership in civil associations or labour unions. Political parties, especially, can be taken as a significant arena of fulfilling political rights through the establishment of effective citizen participation in the life of the society.

Thus, the paper will resort to the following broad definition of political participation:

The direct or indirect participation of the citizens in the decision-making process in the context of the political system.

Results and Discussion

Part Two

The Meaning of Informal Forces

The informal forces are those actors that impact on the political life and on determining the policy-making of the population but they are not members of the official state institutions. These parties are usually political parties, civil societies, and media. To explain the informal forces concept in more detail, this section will analyse the issue under various lenses; starting with political parties, next is the civil society organizations, and finally the media institutions, as discussed below.

First: Political Parties

A political party has been termed as: a group of people with similar orientation, views and with common principles who aim to accomplish the goals they believe in and who are related by a number of rules of organization that they have accepted and which define their relationships, their approaches and modes of action [12], [13]. A political party may be defined as the other definition as a political organization that has a public status and legal personality and takes a political program that seeks to achieve power. This definition is more organizational, and it determines that a party is an organized political sect of individuals and unions, who possess political ideas and vision, and the common purpose is to acquire power and in this respect all political parties, whatever their nature and ideological leanings, have the same purpose [14].

Political parties are a prerequisite of democracy. Political parties assist in developing a general political and social culture of people, participating in the formation of the public opinion, and giving citizens the opportunity to influence the process of public affairs or to impact on those, running it [15]. In addition, the existence of an opposition party allows the expression of other opinions and avoids the authoritarianism of the government.

Second: Civil Society Organizations

The civil society organizations (CSOs) refer to social organizations, movements, and other structures in the society with an aim of redistributing political and economic power resources. They are also characterized as a set of non-political civil unions and associations founded by active persons or academics interested in civil matters like human rights, labor and women rights with non-profit goals, not dependent on the authority of a specific organization [16].

CSOs can be described as organizations or community-based associations that become part of the local societies in order to serve the needs of the society as well as operating in the community development, progress, and education areas [17]. They are not profit oriented and they are not encouraging any particular political party but they tend to offer services and sensitize awareness in any particular areas especially the human rights.

The civil society organizations are, therefore, a product as well as a reaction to the requirements or purpose of the society [18], [19], [20]. They are the social service units that have been established with the purpose of realizing concrete goals and are the keystones of the community.

Third: Media

The term media can be defined as the totality of auditory, visual, print, and digital channels and tools that are used to pass information, news and ideas to the population. Media is a basic component of forming the mass opinion, as well as educating and raising awareness, social and political behavior. There are some categories of media:

1. **Print Media:** This involves the newspapers, journals and magazines. Newspapers represent one of the most notable and most powerful media in directing the public opinion in societies through opinions, articles, reports, and images that newspapers produce [21].
2. **Non-Print Media:** This type of media covers the visual, auditory, and electronic media. Television is one of the most important tools of visual media, which is actively used because of high rates of reaching numerous viewers and making a great impact, thus television is inalienable in modern communication [22], [23]. Internet is viewed as one of the latest media in the world that incorporates the elements of written, auditory, visual and electronic communication. The Internet has transformed the media and communication industry because of its availability and accessibility throughout the world.

Subsection Two

The Reality of Democratic Transformation in Iraq

To comprehensively address this topic, this subsection is divided into two parts:

1. The **first part** explains the **premises of democratic transformation in Iraq**,
2. while the **second part** examines the **challenges of democratic transformation in Iraq**.

Part One

Premises of Democratic Transformation in Iraq

After the U.S occupation in Iraq the United States tried to legitimize its stay in the country by the use of the United Nations. The United Nations passed a resolution that empowered the United States to occupy Iraq and administer it according to the provisions of international law. Due to the pressure, the United States took a number of steps to form a political structure and end the occupation [24].

This was followed by a consensus that was achieved between the U.S. Civil Administrator, the Ambassador Paul Bremer and the rotating President of the Iraqi Governing Council, Jalal Talabani. It was agreed under this that the Governing Council should prepare a Transitional Administrative Law (TAL) by March 2004 which would govern the transition of power in Iraq between the Coalition and a temporary Iraqi government by the summer of 2005. The interim government was charged with the responsibility of coming up with a permanent constitution that would be put to a popular referendum either to be approved or rejected by the people of Iraq by the summer of 2005 [25], [26]. After these steps, a federal parliament would be elected, which would choose a permanent federal government by the end of 2005, thus creating a new political system in federal Iraq such as republican, parliamentary and decentralized in the management of institutions within the executive state.

In retrospect of the point of change between the former and the new era April 9, 2003 this day is when democratic change in Iraq started. As is common knowledge, the political system that governed Iraq between 1968 and 2003 was not subject to competitive democratic systems; there was no political and ideological pluralism, plurality of parties. After the overthrow of that regime, the official talks eventuated on how a democratic transition would proceed in Iraq, with the required politics and steps in carrying out this transition [27]. The regime did not initiate this process, neither was it an outcome of the domestic mobilization or internal circumstances but the consequence of the military interference by the United States and its allies that overthrew the regime. It suggests that extrinsic forces were of the major role in triggering democratic change in Iraq which was followed by a process of coordination of the actors of such intervention with those who took responsibility of political affairs and political activity in Iraq, under the umbrella of the international system that gave the legal provisions to such a change.

The main pillars or rules that governed the democratic transition in Iraq were:

1. **Resolutions of United Nations Security Council:**
 - a. **The Iraqi people have the right of free determination of their political future which was affirmed by Resolution 1483 (promulgated on May 22, 2003).**

- b. **Resolution 1511 (October 16, 2003), that stressed the necessity of the Iraqi people to establish an internationally recognized government that reflected the populace, and the creation of a broadly representative Governing Council as one of the steps to an internationally recognized government. This was done by creating an advisory body by the occupation authorities known as transitional governing council. The Preparatory Constitutional Committee was also established in the same year to give recommendations on how to write the constitution without extensive authority.**

The legal but not practical termination of the occupation by resolution 1546 (June 7, 2004) confirmed the acceptance by UN of the proposal of political transition to democratic governance, and fixed a timetable of elections and constructing a political system on the basis of their results.

1. **The Law of the Independent High Electoral Commission** on March 31, 2004.
2. **The Law on Political Parties and Entities** on June 7, 2004.
3. **The Permanent Iraqi Constitution** on October 15, 2005.

When it comes to the political parties of Iraq, their position of that time could be mostly described as favorable of the recent political process and the establishment of the Iraqi government. They aimed to mobilize the masses towards joining elections but they failed to agree on the constitution [28]. The issues that the parties that constituted the government which included Shiites, Sunni and Kurdish conflicting sides differed on issues like federalism, allocation of resources, state religion and the Arab identity of Iraq. As a result, the Sunni bodies did not support the final version of the constitution, with the exclusion of the Iraqi Islamic Party which showed its approval after some amendments were implemented [29], [30]. In 2005, the constitution was then subjected to a referendum in which the constitution was ratified.

Therefore, the elections of January 30, 2005, and the creation of the National Assembly, the constitutional referendum on October 15, 2005, and the Parliamentary elections on December 15, 2005, should be considered as the key signs of the democratic change in Iraq.

Part Two

Challenges of Democratic Transformation in Iraq

The democratic transformation in Iraq has been surrounded with several issues especially considering that establishment of democratic system requires a concrete social, cultural and civilizational base [31], [32]. This type of foundation should have the capacity to uphold the tenets of democracy practice such as accountability, popular participation, peaceful transfer of power, rule of law, institutional governance and citizenship as precursors of belonging. Further, there can be no democratic experience that will work without democrats in the government and opposition. In this regard, democratic practice is a national obligation and should be institutionalized at party and media levels and controlled by the constitution.

Nevertheless, among the initial facts that can be noticed in the modern Iraq is that the most threatening fact that can arise in the way of democratization transformation is the inability of non-democrats to accept democracy [33]. The majority in Iraq is the non-democrats either as individuals or groups. The logical reason behind such a struggle is that this majority have not yet accepted or quite comprehended the need to learn the political culture needed to exercise democracy and this makes the democratic transition more of political affair than a transformation to the society [34].

The second significant problem is the failure by the new elites to organize the process of democratic transformation and lead it successfully. It has been thoroughly established that the politics of ruling elites is significant in ensuring that they can effectively manage the divisions in the society in a way that can lead to all parties governing the state in a democratically acceptable way [35].

Nevertheless, the new political elite in Iraq started to emerge as a challenge to the democratic transition, and they tried to reduce the role of their competitors with the help of the position of power. Their politics was mainly sectarian with focus on ideologies that had no common political, social or cultural vision and this led to intra-religious conflicts and disagreements. This compromised the right leadership of the state more so when democracy in its various forms became

a platform of warfare amongst political classes where the interests of the parties, their members and leaders were put above those of the general good [36], [37]. Consequently, democracy was more of an obstructive mechanism than of progress in a nation that was in dire need of quick development and not slow growth.

Furthermore, the policy of the United States in relation to the political process in general and to the Iraqi political forces in particular was not based on the honest intentions to reconstruct the Iraqi state. The U.S. also permitted some political forces to use violence that weakened the political stability so that the war is not seen as Iraqi-American but as Iraqi-Iraqi. This plan helped the U.S. to improve its position in the negotiations in Iraq as well as to decrease its load. The U.S. also did not take any serious actions to eradicate the underlying factors of instability including violence, corruption, and displacement that continued to breed mistrust and recrimination within the Iraqi political forces that were involved in the political process and the government [38], [39].

Sectarian disintegration was therefore in line with the arguments of the ineffectiveness of state institutions and civil society organizations, although the political and social changes after the end of the regime occurred namely the reappearance of most of the historical political parties on the political scene as well as the functioning of human rights, professional, and trade organizations. The cause of these issues, however, goes back to the pre-2003 era, when the socialization of politics in the failed regime was erroneous, based on coercion, force and hollow slogans. This caused citizenship in Iraq to be weak, partial loyalties as tribal or sectarian affiliation were more important than national loyalties and a large number of the Iraqis did not have clear understanding of what was helpful and harmful to the country. The result was a threat of existence in the form of the sectarian world around, thus putting the Iraqi population at risk to the U.S interests of formation of sectarian societies [40]. This atmosphere continued to support the supremacy of sectarianism and strengthened it.

Section Two

The Scope of the Role of Informal Forces in Promoting Democracy and Shaping Public Policy

The various forms of collective participation in political life are such that they cannot be comprehensively addressed individually, but only in a group context [41]. By joining together, people are more impactful in political matters and the outcome of their activity is higher. By uniting people together, one will acquire better tools to make their demands and has a chance to reach their goals and objectives through the power of the personal capabilities of a group. This group of influences becomes the core of informal political forces which are involved in political life.

Recognizing the importance of this topic and aiming to address it precisely, this section is divided into two subsections:

1. The **first subsection** examines the role of political parties and media in promoting democracy and shaping public policy.
2. The **second subsection** clarifies the role of civil society organizations in promoting democracy and shaping public policy.

Subsection One

The Role of Political Parties and Media in Promoting Democracy and Shaping Public Policy

To comprehensively address this topic, this subsection is divided into two parts:

- a. The **first part** explains the role of political parties in promoting democracy and shaping public policy.
- b. The **second part** examines the role of media in promoting democracy and shaping public policy.

Subsection One

The Role of Political Parties in Promoting Democracy and Shaping Public Policy

Political parties are deeply rooted in the political system, especially in the context of the modern interpretation of political governance that stipulates about the contemporary foundations of developing the state and community on the basis of the general political participation. The political party is the most important institution that creates the authority and is the foundation of the democratic system [42], [43]. Political orientations are also articulated through the party particularly when it brings forward its political agenda as a basis of governance under multi-party political systems or as a broad outline of criticism to the opposition.

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The political parties and forces in Iraq are predominant in the political process, as they are involved in the formulation of the public policies by being represented both in the legislative and the executive branches. The type of political structure in place in Iraq according to the Constitution of 2005 is the parliamentary system of democracy with the multi-party foundations. Of course, political parties have a significant part in making the policies of the people. It is understood that today, Iraq has become open to democracy and oriented to the political pluralism after decades of centralized government and single-party control, which the post-regime events transformed [44].

Political parties can be studied in terms of their role in formulating the government policy in Iraq through their involvement in the policy making processes. This starts with the determination of issues affecting the society through the communication channels between the decision-makers and the people. Another frequent way of increasing the capacity of the Iraqi parties is by having draft laws submitted to the council of Representatives by the party representatives in parliament. Regardless of whether the law is adopted or not, based on the policy of the party in question, the very process of submitting the law indicates the significance of the matter and the suggested strategy in addressing the parliamentary block and, later, the party itself. Draft laws have been promoted by many ruling parties and political forces via their offices in Baghdad and the provinces [45].

The second step is adoption and legislating of the social policies. Political parties mostly revolve around elections as a tool to gain a position in the government as gaining power is in many cases very significant to the parties themselves than the policies. Through membership in parliament, there is a great role of legislation and approval of the policies of the people since members of the Council of Representatives often vote based on the stance of their parties and not necessarily their own belief. Thus, the party with the majority of parliament decides on the policy.

The control part of parties comes after the adoption phase. The legislative power plays out through political parties that ensure that there is monitoring and evaluation of the public policy implementation in the executive branch. The supervisory power of the Iraqi Council of Representatives is not so strong, however. As an example, under the third term of parliament (2014-2018), parliamentary committees only questioned one minister in charge of Electricity Minister Qasim Al-Fahdawi on a request by an MP of the Iraqi Forces Coalition Salah Al-Jubouri, and was cleared by the parliamentary interrogation organ.

The last step of the parties in the public policy-making is the evaluation stage. The members of the parliamentary parties evaluate the content of the programs based on the feedbacks received in their constituencies and the responses of the voters, which affect their ability to be reelected. Changes or demands to revise the government policies are based on the competence with which the policies are handled, the loopholes and failures caused by the application, political sensitivity or age of the affected or concerned groups, the outcome of the policies against the cost imposture and the expected future results.

The increased role in the making of public policy in Iraq after 2003, therefore, is a feature developed by the political parties in Iraq. The political process has involved almost every political party, which exploits its participation in state institutions in all levels of identifying and defining problems through to adoption and monitoring thus taking an active and significant role in formulating the social policy and advancing democracy.

Subsection Two

The Role of Media in Promoting Democracy and Shaping Public Policy

Media has a major influence on the formulation of the public policy in Iraq through the pressure it mounts on policy-makers. Media influence has been felt in situations whereby, policymakers have avoided applying some policies under the scrutiny of the masses. As an example, the problem of illegal occupants on the state land, which was highly reported on the media with its social effects, such as the removal of thousands of families prepared to be demolished, prompted government authorities to delay their policy of eviction of residents in order to be demolished. In the same vein, when a substantial amount of money was appropriated in the 2013 budget to buy armored vehicles to the parliament members, the media reports caused a massive campaign that forced the Council to vote in a massive majority to redirect the money to other budgetary items.

The media also has a key role to play in the exposure and confrontation of corruption, in the regions of the central government and in the Kurdistan Regional Government. Media is a real pressure mechanism by pointing to financial and administrative corruption, although it may also be partially restricting the abuse of public funds. The impact of this

influence is seen in the fact that government organizations that were accused of corruption have sued media companies that have reported on suspicious dealings. To illustrate, the Iraqi Ministry of Youth and Sports sued a newspaper that it wanted to compensate it one billion Iraqi dinars because it was reporting on financial and administrative corruption.

Therefore, media has a major influence upon the crafting of public policy as it can either increase or reduce the popularity of a policy in the minds of people that is a measure of how the people reacted. Media in democratic systems has the freedom to communicate and interact with events and issues thus enhancing its policy making potential. Conversely, in authoritarian regimes, the flow of information is top-down undermining the possible influence of the media. In addition, in most cases, the media have more trust than the governmental institutions.

Media is also important in ensuring that the attitudes and opinions of the people of Iraq are relayed including demonstrations and protests. This unique role allows the media to expose the concerns and issues of large groups of Iraqi society to the eyes of the official policy-makers. Meanwhile, media enlightens people, and it is evident that it shapes the opinion of the population by controlling attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions, in addition to predicting the upcoming trends. Media also appeals to emotions and feelings of the individual and this is also Iraqi, as the Iraqi society is very emotional and responds quickly to societal problems. Modern communication and media technologies have only increased the influence of the media.

According to the above, media plays a significant part in the establishment of the public policy, and the role of the media is still developing with the greater awareness and knowledge regarding democracy, political involvement and rights and duties of the society. Nevertheless, the other dimension of Iraqi media influence on policymaking is their weakness caused by lack of funding, expertise and protection that has rendered media to be controlled by political groups and their international and regional sponsors. This has sometimes made media a platform that heightens tension in the society, which has led to the prevalence of sectarian media in Iraq and which may have serious consequences to the whole society. As a result, certain media houses are currently airing hate speech, fomenting sectarian violence, and propagating incorrect, or deviant cultural processes and habits without any legal or moral responsibility.

Subsection Two

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Democracy and Shaping Public Policy

To comprehensively address this topic, this subsection is divided into two parts:

- a. The **first part** explains the role of civil society organizations in promoting democracy.
- b. The **second part** examines the role of civil society organizations in shaping public policy.

Part One

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Promoting Democracy

The role of civil society organizations is particularly evident in their focus on youth. They serve as a nurturing environment that equips young people with awareness and a clear understanding of local, regional, and international issues. This awareness encourages their engagement in political life, fosters their desire for political participation, and strengthens their sense of belonging and loyalty to their country. Consequently, youth become citizens capable of fulfilling their responsibilities and roles within society.

Civil society organizations achieve this by providing political education that focuses on key elements, including political interest, political knowledge, and political participation, such as voting. Additionally, these organizations instill democratic values in youth, which are reflected in their behavior, interactions, and the ways they express their ideas and opinions.

To enhance youth political participation, civil society organizations implement programs for political education and awareness, highlighting both the processes of political engagement and the associated responsibilities and obligations. They also adopt programs that explain to individuals the methods to be used in political participation to achieve their demands and convey their ideas, while emphasizing the importance of their involvement and the impact of their voice on the political arena.

Moreover, these organizations play a key role in fostering a culture of political participation in elections. They target youth who already possess a sense of belonging and citizenship, as well as the capacity to participate actively. Civil society

Indonesian Journal of Public Policy Review

Vol. 27 No. 1 (2026): January

DOI: 10.21070/ijppr.v27i1.1467

organizations further strengthen engagement by conducting internal elections within their institutions, which aim to raise awareness among young people and enhance their ability to take part effectively in political life.

Thus, civil society assumes several important roles in the democratic transition process, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Civil society organizations provide an environment of freedom in which members can express their opinions, positions, and perspectives through meetings and organizational activities. This positively impacts individuals' organizational and political skills. These organizations also foster a spirit of competition among members to elect their leaders, subsequently leading to candidacy, participation in elections, voting, oversight, and accountability.
2. Civil society organizations act as a safety valve that protects individuals from state dominance while also shielding the state from collective unrest that may be caused by individuals. They provide a peaceful channel for expression, reducing the likelihood of violence.
3. Civil society organizations complement the role of the state by filling gaps left by the state's retreat in various sectors, thereby positioning themselves as partners in the development process.

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Part Two

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Shaping Public Policy

Civil society groups are instrumental in the making of the policy in that they offer avenues of civil contribution as well as lobbying. They summarize and discuss the issues, needs and views of citizens with the policymakers, and make sure that the extensive spectrum of interests of the society should be reflected when it comes to decision-making. These organizations aid in creating policies that are more responsive, inclusive and effective through research, policy analysis and public campaigns.

Moreover, the civil society institutions keep an eye check on the execution of the government policies, which keeps the government institutions responsible in keeping their promises and increasing transparency. They also mediate between the state and the citizens, and facilitate communication between the parties involved and promote consensus on controversial matters. Civil society organizations can facilitate the realization of the policy making process being democratic and guaranteeing social justice by empowering the marginalized groups and giving them a voice.

Altogether, the civil society organization plays a critical role as the mediator in the political system of Iraq that can support the democratic government and make sure that the policies adopted in the state are guided by the interests and desires of the population.

These roles make civil society organizations bear the responsibility of mobilizing the youth to participate in politics, which is only possible when these organizations review their programs and mechanisms of engaging the youth, improve their participation frameworks, and establish an active way of involvement of the youth in politics. Iraqi civil society, especially in the existing conditions, has the duty of fulfilling its functions in diverse levels and spheres, so as to promote the democratic process, and aid in the establishment of a state of institutions, teaching the values of tolerance, cooperation and respect of others, and rejecting violence and extremism among people.

Branch Two

The Role of Civil Society Organizations in Public Policy Making

The ambitions, goals, and objectives of the founders and leaders of civil society organizations in Iraq have not been the same, and they may be categorized into material gain and personal ambition, political, which can be summarized as the promotion of the political process, consolidation of democracy, and the contribution of the construction of the rule-of-law state. The operations of these institutions and associations are various and can include the organizations that are involved in political affairs, organizations that help in the humanitarian activities, as well as other organizations that deal with the human rights and specifically the rights of women.

In Iraq, the pressure of the government institutions by civil society institutions and non-governmental organizations is directed at the reforms of electoral system, plagued with a lot of flaws in it. These attempts have been fruitful in the quest of civil rights, fair and equal citizenship, devoid of ethnic and religious affiliations, and effective women involvement.

Civil society organizations in Iraq and in general offer much information and alternative to the policymakers. In addition, the communication revolution within these societies has enabled these groups to communicate with the policymakers enabling them to relay their demands through the modern and varied medium, especially the Internet.

The civil society organizations in Iraq have been able to execute eight projects relating to service provision, human rights and anticorruption projects, in most cities of Iraq. They have also entrenched long-term lines of communication and collaboration between the civil society and the government to ascertain the availability of civil society in the processes of formulation of policies. This solidifies their participation in formulation and shaping of the policies of the people.

With the increasing organizing of the Iraqi civil society organizations, a coalition of over 6,000 organizations was formed. The Iraqi Council of representatives passed a new law on non-governmental organizations (Law No. 12 of 2010) on January 25, 2010, a major achievement of the Iraqi civil society leaders and their role in influencing the policy makers of the Iraqi people.

It is also notable that most civil society groups in Iraq lack organization experience and the knowledge on how to mobilize social and official support among other deficiencies and also corruption because of lack of supervision of donors that may subject these civil society groups to corrupt practices, such as mismanagement of funds or misuse of mandate. But there are instances that these institutions and associations have been able to accomplish few achievements, especially on the part of election awareness and procedures, election monitoring, and the spread of the democratic ideas and the constitution. Regardless of the inadequacy of the civil society organizations in Iraq, the mobilization of their operations has become part of the political process to an extent that the group is one of the social, political and economic rights bred by the political and societal change process in Iraq.

In this way, civil society organizations in Iraq, despite the flaws that accompany their activities, fulfill significant and high-ranking roles in terms of increasing the awareness of the citizens and their education, as well as assisting in restoring the political identity of both the individual and the Iraqi society. The success of the civil society organizations in shaping the public policy in the state is evidenced by the fact that the civil society organizations have become a crucial civilizational need, a powerful institutional development tool. In addition, there are future signs that these organizations will become pivotal in the future of Iraq and redefine the political landscape of the country, owing to the large amount of reach, popularity, and influence over a significant number of mosques and newly founded Islamic and non-Islamic cultural organizations.

Conclusion

At the conclusion of our study, we arrived at a set of findings and recommendations, hoping they will be beneficial and impactful for all. These are presented as follows:

First: Findings

1. The dominant and central role in the country is played by the political parties that shape the public policies of the country and are involved in the democratic transition. This is manifested by the involvement of the most influential entities in the constitution of the parliament and the government i.e. in the legislative and executive level. It is an indication of the transformation of party programs into relevant policies of the people. A party is powerful when it is out

Indonesian Journal of Public Policy Review

Vol. 27 No. 1 (2026): January

DOI: 10.21070/ijppr.v27i1.1467

of power because of recognizing the needs of society and pressure or when it is an in power party because it is within power.

2. The media is central in ensuring that there is political awareness, pluralism and free debates, checking on the governance performance of the authorities and also bringing to light shortfalls, corruption and dubious government decisions. This helps in the creation of an enlightened and engaged citizen opinion, strengthens the pillars of democracy, and transforms the media as vital collaborators of the public policy-making. Nevertheless, certain media houses have been seen to be sponsored, both technically and financially, by political blocs, parties and regional actors in an exchange of furthering particular agendas in the policies of the institution.

3. The experience of democracy has provided the civil society organization with many avenues to grow and guarantee political involvement of citizens. The institutional channels in their diverse forms and patterns have increased in order to meet the needs of political participation and offer the democratic avenues agreeable to the Iraqi society.

4. The role of the pressure groups and civil societies in Iraq is weak. In democracies, these institutions tend to act as bridges between the society and the state through which the demands of the society can be addressed to the officials in the legislative and executive arms. However, in Iraq, they still only play a marginal role, not to the required extent, either because of their own inabilities or because of efforts by the governing political power to keep them out of the national policy-making process and marginalize them.

5. Even though Iraq has embraced the right to political participation, the situation on the ground is a pointer to the fact that the right has been limited. Such channels as election fraud, political money, and tribal, sectarian, and ethnic influence are still the most effective ways to affect the freedom of the people and their political decisions.

Second: Recommendations

1. It is advisable that a legislation and regulatory measures should be implemented to provide a balanced and successful political representation of the Iraqi political parties at every level of the Iraqi national policy making and drafting of laws. This would ensure transparency, fairness, and equal opportunities by parties devoid of any political, sectarian or ethnic exclusion or discrimination, which would strengthen democracy principles and political pluralism, and avoid abuse of influence or hinder the political process in one or other way to serve personal and group interests.

2. It is advisable to have an independent authority that monitors the media institutions, has a balance in the coverage, keep media independent and neutral and not to use it as a means of party or political loyalty. This would enhance transparency and enhance the position of the media as an ally in consolidating democracy and shaping of public opinion.

3. It is suggested to correct the provisions of all laws that deny equal citizenship rights, freedom of opinion and expression as well as adopt the articles and clauses of international agreements signed by Iraq especially those relating to human rights in a way that improves the political participation and democratic transition.

4. It has been suggested that the civil society organizations should be on major frontier in strategizing state-building in liaison with governmental institutions and that this role has to be triggered by constructing functional frames to localize and institutionalize civil activities

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