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Iraq's Democracy: its past, the present and its future

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المستخلص

أظهرت الاحتجاجات الجماهيرية التي اجتاحت المدن العراقية بين تشرين الثاني / نوفمبر ٢٠١٩ و ٢٠٢٠ أن الديمقراطية في البلاد ماتزال في مرحلتها الانتقالية. فقد نزل ناس عاديون إلى الشوارع للتعبير عن إحباطهم من الأحزاب السياسية الحاكمة في بغداد. لقد أدى إسقاط نظام صدام عام ٢٠٠٣ إلى إقامة ديمقراطية توافقية لحل الانقسامات الطائفية في العراق. لكن هذا النظام ، الذي تسيطر عليه الأحزاب السياسية الرئيسية ، أصبح عقبة في طريق ترسيخ الديمقراطية في العراق. فقد هيمنت الأحزاب السياسية العراقية على الديمقراطية وسيطرت عليها باسم طوائفها وجماعاتها. لذلك يشعر المواطنون العراقيون بأنهم مستبعدون من العملية السياسية على الرغم من مشاركتهم في التصويت في الانتخابات العادية.

أدت العوامل الخارجية ، ولا سيما التنافس بين المملكة العربية السعودية وإيران ، إلى تكثيف الانقسامات الداخلية في العراق وخلق أرضية لانعدام الثقة بين الطائفتين الرئيستين في البلاد. كما أثارت قضايا اقتصادية واجتماعية أخرى العديد من التساؤلات حول مصداقية الديمقراطية في العراق خاصة بعد التراجع المستمر لأسعار النفط. مثلت منظمات المجتمع المدني والمجموعات السياسية الصغيرة العمود الفقري للمظاهرات الأخيرة وستساهم في «التحول الديمقراطي» وتطوير المشاركة السياسية في العراق.

Abstract

The mass protests that swept Iraqi cities between November 2019 and 2020 demonstrated that democracy in the country is in its transitional phase. Ordinary people have taken to the streets to show their frustration against the ruling political parties in Baghdad. The toppling of Saddam's regime in 2003 led to the establishment of a consociational democracy to solve the sectarian divisions in Iraq. Controlled by the main political parties, this system has become an obstacle in the way of consolidating Iraq's democracy. Iraqi political parties have dominated and controlled democracy in the name of their sects and groups. Iraqi citizens feel excluded from political process though they participate in voting in regular elections.

External factors, notably, rivalry between the Saudi Arabia and Iran has intensified the internal divisions in Iraq and created the ground for communal mutual mistrust. Other economic and social issues have also raised many questions about the credibility of Iraq's democracy especially after the steady decline of oil prices. Civil society organizations and small splitting groups represented the backbone of recent demonstrations and will contribute to 'learning democracy' and developing the process of democratization in Iraq.

I.Introduction

The wave of protests in Iraq in the last two years affirmed that democratic process in the country is working yet still in an ongoing transition. Apart from economic and social demands that call for employment and improving services (housing, electricity, etc.), Iraqi protesters emphasized the need for a genuine, transparent and accountable political process. Although the call for political reform is popular, it nonetheless comes primarily from young people. Iraqi youth are more aware of and connected to an increasingly globalised world than their parents.

Political and social tensions about Iraq's fledgling democracy have revolved around two conflicting views: an elitist stance espoused by Iraqi ruling parties; and an egalitarian view that demands public participation that would eventually lead to a more democratic political system. Contrasting conceptions of politics are derived from the norms and practices adopted by political actors shaped by specific social contexts. Grassroots bottom-up challenges to the post- Ṣaddām state, in particular the established political parties, involving protests may be situated in an uneven process of democratic learning.

In this paper, we will illustrate an overview of Iraq's experiment of its democratic transition during the last sixteen years followed by an assessment of both internal obstacles and external drawbacks. In the last part of this paper, we offer our conclusions and delineate the future prospects of Iraqi's ongoing transition. But let us first provide some preliminary historical background as this will enable the reader to understand the context of the Iraqi experience with democratization itself.

II.Iraq and Democracy: From Constitutional Rule to the Sole Leader

For many years, western scholars and observers cast their doubt over the potential success of democracy in the Middle East [Gellner 89-1994:184; Kamrava 32-1998:31].(1) The Middle East seemed exceptional as a hostile environment for democracy. This pessimistic view of the Arab world has prevailed even among advocates of democratic transitions. Nathan Sharansky succinctly expressed this view that,

While it may be conceded that it is possible for Muslims to govern a democratic society, one could still say that Arabs cannot. It could be plausibly claimed that in the broader Muslim world, in countries that were once exposed to Western values, democracy might have a chance, but that in the Middle East, antidemocratic features tempered elsewhere are far more resilient [2004:36].

Yet the experiences of the past and of the present both provide different lessons. When Germany and Italy were under the dictatorships of Nazism and Fascism respectively during the 1930s, Egypt and Iraq were governed by parliamentary regimes. Following the example of the colonial rule, Egypt and Iraq had created political institutions inspired by liberal values and democratic principles. A separation of powers existed and the ballot box was the decisive arbiter between opposing candidates. Political parties founded, which in turn, competed to attain their share in institutions of representative government. Adeed Dawisha and Karen Dawisha observed that under the Hashemite monarchy,

Dissent and disagreement were generally tolerated. Debates in parliament were often vigorous, and legislators were usually allowed to argue and vote against the government without fear of retribution. Although the palace and the cabinet set the agenda, parliament often managed to influence policy [50-36 :2003].

Admittedly, the transformation from three previously separate Ottoman *walaŷaṯs* (provinces) (Baghdaŷd, Moṣul and Basrah) into a new single state in 1921 resulted in an unstable and divided society as the processes that created Iraq led to an 'administrative nationalism' rather than a genuine nationalism [Tibi 1981:19]. The process of nation-building caused entrenched divisions among various components of Iraqi society. Nationalism, in this sense, was imposed on Iraqi society according to the terms of the ruling elite rather than to suit the diverse social groups. Thus, Arab nationalism in Iraq has been a useful political glue used by the Sunni elite for internal pragmatic exigencies and an instrument for manipulation to gain political power, instead of building a stable nation-state.

Under a new wave of political, cultural and economic developments, two important, though separate changes took place in the beginning of the 1940s, leading to a transformation of the Iraqi political scene. The failure of Rashīd 'Alī al-Gaīlanī's coup in 1941 unleashed a swift yet visible change among the ruling

(1) For an opposing point of view, see Esposito and Voll's Islam and Democracy [32-12 ,[1996.

elite. As Phebe Marr noted,

The remaining wartime cabinets drew far more heavily on the Shi'a and the Kurds, who for the first time equally balanced or together sometimes outnumbered the Arab Sunnis in the cabinet. This circumstance provided an opportunity for emergence of new political figures and a younger generation among the Shi'a and the Kurds [2004:58].

Most importantly, the loyalty and allegiance to tribe and religious community increasingly dwindled and became less apparent than allegiance to novel political organizations. Between the founding of the first Iraqi government and the beginning of War World II, more than two- dozen political parties, active associations and intellectual organizations were established. These groups ranged from authorized moderate parties to extremist national clubs and anti- imperialist communist groups. Affiliation to political parties had become a distinct pervasive feature of Iraqi social life and shaped by social, economic and political motivations.

Political participation had become a significant channel of activity especially, but not exclusively, for educated people who found a new space for expressing their views and thoughts. Political powers under the monarchy, however, could not play their role in influencing the executive power. For example, the Iraqi parliament was largely unsuccessful in the realm of accountability between 1929 and 1958 due to the considerable power held in the King's hands [Jamīl 1983:75].

The last ten years of the monarchy in Iraq witnessed intense political circumstances. Political protests, student demonstrations and labour strikes had undermined the credibility of successive Iraqi cabinets and led to the eventual overthrow of the Hâshemite monarchy in 1958. A very peculiar feature that marked this period had been the increasing role played by 'the street' in the Iraqi politics [Marr 65 :2004]. Although these parties represented different ideological orientations, they formed a united front during demonstrations thus displaying a new sense of national solidarity among Iraqi people and an unequivocal opposition to the regime. Thanks to this new understanding, the main Iraqi political powers were able to form a new body, which was realized in 1957. This united front took the responsibility of preparing the ground for the next step, and although this front itself did not cause the '14 July Revolution' of 1958, it succeeded nonetheless in bringing together the divided Iraqi powers to overthrow the monarchical regime.

A successful coup d'état on 14 July 1958 overthrew the monarchy in Iraq. Opening a new course in Iraqi history, this episode brought about, among many other things, one lasting change to the Iraqi political arena. The demise of the monarchy transformed Iraq forever from a hierarchal kingdom into a republican system characterized by new political, social and economic facets. In fact, the '14 July Revolution' was one of the many upheavals that swept the countries in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s. Military officers in Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Turkey took the lead to overthrow governments and install new regimes

in their places [Kedourie 84-280 ,206-200 :1992].(2)

Monarchy was seen as institution of corruption and liberal democracy was perceived to be a rotten and obsolete process inherited from British colonial rule. Linking democracy to the former imperial power rendered the task of eliminating it simpler. For example, 'Abdul Karīm Qâsim who issued the Political Parties Law on February 1960 soon realized that it is better to put an end to it. Thus, Iraqi political parties that were publicly announced such as the National Party, the Iraqi Communist Party, the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Iraqi Islamic Party were persecuted only after a year and their members were arrested, and their newspapers closed for criticizing the policy of the government and demanding reform.

'Abdul Salâm 'Arif adopted the identical policy when he barred the activities of Iraqi parties, following his 'ideal example' of Gamâl 'Abdul Nâṣer's Socialist Union, which failed to propose an alternative coherent political grouping to replace these parties. As such, no breakthrough took place between 1958 and 1968. In fact, political life deteriorated to the extent that political parties were banned and replaced by the rule of the revolutionary leader and elections became a thing of the past.

Between July 1958 and 2003 Iraqis lived under three successive republican regimes that governed in the name of the Iraqi people. Yet whether during 'Abdul Karīm Qâsim (July -1958Febrary 1963), 'Abdul Salâm 'Arif (and to a lesser extent his brother 'Abdul Raḥman 'Arif, February -1963July 1968) or leading to the Ba 'th in 1968, democracy was merely a rhetorical device within a state-sanctioned political discourse rather than materializing on the ground.

Like their counterparts in Egypt, Iraqi military officers had the upper hand and the army was the real governing elite controlling the whole system. For example, 'Abdul Raḥman 'Arif attempted to reform the government when he named 'Abdul Raḥman al-Bazâz (the liberal Iraqi personal) as prime minister in April 1966, giving an early indication of his support for continuing reform and moderate change rather than radical and provocative policies. Al- Bazâz's attempt to accomplish his ambitious program was fruitless as his position was precarious within the military corps.

The Ba 'th party that came to power in July 1968 was at odds with the Ba 'th party of 1963. In fact, the term 'New-Ba 'th is applied to both branches in Syria and Iraq that re-emerged in 1960s as 'the Ba 'th Party of the 1960s was a very different party from that of the 1940s and 1950s, with new people in leadership roles, new emphases in ideology, and a new power factor- military officers acting

(2) In fact, Iraqi army officers were involved in politics years before their Arab counterpart in Egypt and Syria. Bakir Sidqi led the first coup d'état in 1936 and military officers continued to play their role in the 1940s (with the attempt of Rashid Ali al-Gailani) and later on in 1958. For further information about this topic, see Elie, Kedouri's, Politics in the Middle East [-200 [1992 84-280 ,206.

in its name' [Devlin 1976:187]. The Ba'th Party that came to power in 1968 learned the lessons of 1963 and, therefore, curtailed the power of military officers within the state. The party concentrated power in its hands and became the sole body entitled to govern. Political power was subsequently transferred from the party into the hands of Ṣaddām's entourage. Marked by the rule of Ṣaddām's family, 'Abdul Jabār labelled it as a 'neo- totalitarian' regime, where both the party and the familial connections worked hand-in-hand [13-12 :1998].

However, as democracy had been in vogue during the second half of the twentieth century, the Ba'th Party adopted the term of 'popular democratic' as part of its principles. Popular democracy was meant to keep both executive and legislative power and 'place them in the hand of the people a perpetual trust' [Bengio :1998 58]. Ṣaddām Husseīn, even as vice president, was the real ruler as the head of the Revolutionary Command Council. Even this council had no power save that given by Ṣaddām to its members.

At both national and local levels, appointees among the members of the Ba'th Party were nominated to be elected to form popular councils (*majaīis sha'bīyya*) and national council (*al-majlis al-waṭany*) respectively. In short, political life after 17 July 1968 was characterized by the dominance of the Ba'th Party, and the exception was the entry of the Iraqi Communist Party to the National Progressive Front called by the Ba'th on 17 July 1973. This was a short-lived experience, however disrupted a few years later, with the regime continuing its dominance until its fall on April 2003.

III.Post-2003 Iraq: Democracy from Above

On 9 April 2003, the United States removed the Baʿth regime in Baghdād. Although the search for Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction was the declared motive for the American invasion, spreading democracy in the Middle East has purportedly been understood as the real reason behind its military campaign in the region [Freedman 8-507 ,397 :2009; Kagan 2003:154].

At the eve of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the picture in Iraq seemed to have been very different on the ground from the one that has often been studied and analysed in western academia [Tripp 277-275 :2000; Jabar 2003; Freedman 433 :2009]. It was not unexpected that exiled movements like the once strong Iraqi Communist Party, the Daʿwa and SCIRI (the Supreme Council of Islamic Revolution of Iraq) appeared to be disconnected from Shiʿa Iraqi masses, who were now mainly influenced by either the decrees of the charismatic Grand Ayatollāh 'Alī al-Sīstānī or the orders of the young radical Muʿqtada al-Ṣadr [Kubba 50-2004:141; Rahim 77-1994:153].

This complicated picture imposed itself on the dynamics of the post2003-political game. As such, old and traditional Shiʿa players like the Daʿwa party, SCIRI or even the liberal Aḥmad al-Chalaby were challenged by local actors who had not been in exile. This explains in part the rivalry, disorder and chaotic positions that surfaced soon after the invasion, as local and exiled Shiʿa powers had different and sometimes conflicting outlooks and agendas [Napoleoni 140-2005:135].

To achieve transition into a democratic Iraq, the American administration showed support to those groups and individuals who defied Ṣaddām. Due to the fact that Shiʿa and Kurd bore the brunt of Ṣaddām regime, the American regarded them as 'new allies' to build a new democratic Iraq. As Carrie Manning has indicated,

The notion that politicians with the qualities desired by external interveners could be shoehorned into power, either directly or through institutional engineering, relied upon an extremely voluntaristic view of politics that either ignores or is based on a very limited understanding of historical and social context and their role in shaping the outcomes of political transition [2006:725].

Thus, it became clear that rivalry would go beyond the cleavages that existed among Iraqis (Arabs and Kurds) or between its religious sects (Shiʿa and Sunni groups) to groups of the same orientation. This manifested itself soon with regard to the political groups' standings towards, among other things, the form of the new state, the American presence in Iraq and the Iraqi constitution [al-Ḥmood 222-2017:137; Napoleoni ibid:167-163].

The first American step to tackle the deep-rooted divisions among Iraqis was to create the provincial governing council (*majlis al-ḥuḳm al-intiqaʾy*) in July 2003. This political body, which consisted of 25 members (13 Shiʿa, five Sunnis, five Kurd and two from other ethnic groups), was meant to represent and appease

the diverse Iraqi ethnic and religious groups. Yet rather than resolving or managing the cleavages among Iraqis, this formula perpetuated ethnic and religious divisions and further entrenched them in Iraqi political society. Accordingly, previously religious and ethnic groups, have become now politically institutionalized. Humphrey Hawksley correctly stated that,

Tribal and religious division have become institutionalized into power blocks that have led to ethnic cleansing. Political parties rely on brute force and patronage. Parliaments represent not broad constituencies but vested interests and, amid much fanfare, constitutions are written, but rarely upheld [2 :2009].

Various components of Iraqi society unsurprisingly found themselves in a state of conflict. Although the Interim State Administration Law and the Permanent Iraqi Constitution of 2005 did not explicitly provide for the distribution of presidential or other posts in the Iraqi state on the basis of ethnic and religious quotas, this idea found its way in political practice [al-Ṭaeī 2008:140]. As such, the main political groups, Shi'a, Sunni and the Kurd, advocated variety of 'consociational democracy' to provide an alternative model of competitive or representative democracy [Lijphart 2006]. Whereas the Iraqi constitution of 2005 has theoretically adopted a majority democracy, the practical application of the political process is being carried out with a distorted application of consociational democracy.

Ministerial portfolios (including sovereign position) were distributed according to sectarian quotas to appease particular political actors. For example, it has become an established political convention to select a Kurd for Iraq's presidency, a Sunni as the speaker of parliament and a Shi'a in the post of prime minister despite no such clauses in the Iraqi constitution. Other ethnic and religious groups also receive ministerial and diplomatic portfolios according to an informal quasi-confessional quota. Even the formation of Iraq governments has become subject of political factions' agreements, and positions distributed according to behind-the-scenes bargaining involving sectarian compromises and at most times with foreign influence. This also brings us to another issue that is the geographical factor. Galbreath noted how important the geographical location is in democratic transition. He stated that:

The world saw democratization spreading from Southern Europe to Latin America to Central and Eastern Europe. Initially, the debate was whether or not we could use the same explanatory models for Latin American and post-Communist states. Perhaps location has made a difference to the path and nature of democratization in different states in different regions of the world [Galbreath 30 :2012].

Galbreath proceeds to quote Schneider and Schmitter 'that many Central and East European democratizing states have performed far better than their South European and Latin American counterparts' [30 :2012). He pointed out how 'the war in Iraq has illustrated the importance of exogenous actors and their impact on the democratization process, and democratization studies must change to continue

to have some explanatory power'. However, the 'international factor' should not be limited to the United States role in toppling Ṣaddām's regime but also to include other regional complexities. It is important, in this regard to highlight the considerable effect of the tensions between the Saudi Arabia and Iran.

Iraq's recent democratic model has attracted political machinations by competing states in the region for two conflicting reasons: democracy and sectarianism. The country is located within the buffer zone of the current sectarian conflict between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia and its Gulf allies have demonstrated an aggressive position against the Iraqi transition to democracy not only for its perceived adverse results of political change but for religious reasons [Hinnebusch 357-335 :2015; Bishara 12 :2019].

One outcome of the American invasion of Iraq has been the convulsion of the sectarian identities within Shi'a and Sunni communities in Iraq and in the Arab and Islamic world in general. Accordingly, sectarian divisions among Iraqis, portrayed as a new phenomenon, were a result of and brought about by the American invasion. This view seems to partially place the blame on Iraqi Shi a for marginalizing other Iraqi communities and creating new divides in the country, let alone for the eruption of 'the sea of sects' in the Gulf region.

Sunni and Shi'a groups have frequently carried out armed operations against foreign and government forces. In 2006, the Salafī-Muslim Brotherhood factions received popular attention in the Gulf, especially after the events of Sāmarrā', and increased support from all Arab countries, especially the Gulf States at the popular and intelligence levels, and this support was weakened only after the *Ṣaḥwa* (Awakening) victory over al-Qā'eda in 2008. Cessation of Gulf support for Iraqi armed factions at the end of 2011 prompted the leadership of those factions to accept the political process [al-Hāshimy 209-208 :2016]. *Ṣaḥwa* leaders and fighters have been pacified and incorporated within the main Sunni groups now participating in the government.

Sunni-Shi'a clashes also led to an eruption of mutual violence in some areas of Iraq and this created a great rift in Iraqi society and the exploitation of this rift by internal actors to further their political goals. American efforts to remove Ṣaddām for Laurence Whitehead led to,

The outcome of the Iraq war was therefore 'pivotal' in terms of its global as well as its regional and local consequences. This time, however, instead of triggering a wave of enthusiasm for political processes of this kind, it has elicited a widespread sense of dismay and even revulsion. Thus, most profoundly of all, it has raised serious doubts about the conceptual foundations of the Western pro-democracy consensus [221 :2009].

Apprehensions within the Syrian regime about the new Iraq revolved around other political reasons. Despite the fact that the Syrian regime has very strong religious ties with Baghdād's new leaders, it nonetheless felt unhappy about a

democratic Iraq. Iraq's fledgling democracy is seen by Damascus as a disease rather than remedy for Syrian problems. A successful democratic transition in Iraq might have spread similar sentiments among the Syrian people that would later destabilise the authoritarian regime of al-Asad family. In September 2009, the government of Nuri al-Maliki accused its neighbour of facilitating the flow of "foreign terrorists" across the border into Iraq (France2009 24). The rise of ISIL (Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant) brought Baghdâd and Damascus together in a common cause against a threat to their geographic integrity.

Democratizing in Iraq has faced and generated various challenges in not yet creating a common political culture amid ethnic, sectarian and class-based groups. Almost four decades of totalitarian and authoritarian rule has had deleterious effects on the middle class. Wars, economic sanctions and political unrest forced thousands of educated Iraqis to seek refuge outside of their country's borders. Baghdâd's political elite mostly comes from returned exiles known locally as *Iraâqiõ al-khaârij*. Although a strong correlation between democratization on the one hand and a middle class and increasing incomes on the other hand has been proposed, [Huntington 1993], the fragile process of democratisation in Iraq has mobilized millions of Iraqis to the ballot box even in circumstances tantamount to war and economic collapse.

Additionally, traditional religious authorities, led by Grand Ayatollâh Alī al-Sīstânī, have taken a decidedly favourable stance on the legitimacy of representative government and encouraged their followers to vote as a demonstration of their religious duty. However, a diverse civil society made up of both peaceful and militant groups has seen political violence of a scale involving sectarian identities which threatens the tenuous foundations of the new Iraqi state. This has led to the emergence of small secret opposition groups including the al- Ṣarkhayya, the use of violence and the emergence of mutual political violence.(3)

In the last ten years, protesters from economically marginalized and political excluded groups have mobilized against the central government in Baghdâd and its representatives throughout the country's towns and cities. They are mostly migrants who have left southern Iraq to the cities in the Euphrates. Political exclusion from the competition and distribution of state resources led to the anger of protesters in Najaf and Karbalâ. A few splinter organisations like the al-Ṣarkhayya and small groups affiliated to al-Ṣadr's movement have added organizational muscle to the recent protests. Secular activists mainly in Baghdâd, but not limited to the capital,

(3) The al-Sarkhayya is named after their leader Mahmoud bin al-Hassan al-Sarkhy who claims to be a descendant of Imam al-Mahdi (the Awaited Imam by Shi a). It is one of the many groups in the Shi a scene that have articulated social, political and economic discontent following the introduction of the post-Saddam political system in Iraq and attracted Shi a form poor southern cities such as Karbala and Diwaniya. Al-Sarkhayya, in particular, were subject of a heavy-handed campaign conducted by Iraqi security forces in Karbala in July 2014 as it was blamed for carrying out attacks against Shi a ulama and government institutions. For more details, about these groups, see Dho al-Fiqar's al-Harakat al-mahdawaya, tarikhaha, aqaeudaha, khataruha [2014].

include members of ICP and those who describe themselves as champions of 'Iraq First' (*al-ʾIraq Awalan*).

An independent report about the 'state of democracy in Iraq' covered ten Iraqi provinces and surveyed more than 2,400 peoples from diverse ethnic and social backgrounds concluded that more than %60 of those participated in survey displayed their 'dissatisfaction' towards the 'equality principle among Iraqis'. Although they welcomed some aspects of democratic transition (free media, political activities and so on), a majority stated either 'there is no equality (*musaŵaẗ*) at all or it exists to a small degree' [Markaz al-maloomah lil baḥath wal taṭwīr 35-34 :2011].

Popular discontent against the prevailing economic situation is expressed in language, norms and behaviour that have been learned by protesters. Although the dominance of the state over the economy has weakened the role of civil society, it has also given ordinary people, poor people in particular, an opportunity to raise their voices against their elected 'representatives'. Collective mobilizing against the status quo can be seen as an example of democratic learning leading to the awareness that elections alone will not result in an equitable society.

Ideas are a powerful driving force in shaping the motives of Iraqis to learn democratic behaviour while they create bodies of knowledge that help to sustain democratization with a local character [Sadiki 721-702 :2015]. No blueprint exists for Iraq which political elites and citizens can merely implement ignoring the particular cultural, economic, political and social characteristics of their society in the twenty-first century. The process of democratic learning is a local activity that contains an uneven scoresheet of advances in certain areas, popular mobilizing in protests, and regressions in other areas, exclusive monopoly of political parties in government.

While parliamentary elections in 2005 showed Iraqis' great enthusiasm for democracy with a voter turnout of %79, the next three elections of 2014 ,2010 and 2018 attest to the reluctance of Iraqis to participate in voting as a sign of their anger. Unsurprising, voter turnout reached less than %40 in 2018 and the low turnout has sent a clear message: democracy is not only about the right of voting but mainly about the sharing, delegation and accountability of political power. As Baghdâd's governing elite dominates political and economic deals, with rumours and news about corruption and nepotism, Iraqis have come to recognize the urgency of their role in achieving political reform [Markaz al-maloomah lil baḥath wal taṭwīr ibid:128 -125].

In fact, the dependence of the Iraqi economy on the oil sector alone and its association with the global oil market have generated dissatisfaction among Iraqis particularly following the sharp reduction of oil prices compounded with the increasing burden of war against Daʿèish or ISIL. A state of anger spread especially among the Shiʿa community who were affected mostly by the budget deficit between 2014 and 2018. Following the expulsion of ISIL fighters from Sunni regions, major projects of post-conflict reconstruction in Anbâr, Ṣalâh al-Dīn, Diyâla, Kirkuk and Nīnewa were funded by international donors (UNDP 2020). A

report issued recently by the Ministry of Planning showed that while Kurdistan regions like Sulaīmaānīya, Dihook and Erbīl have been the less affected by the economic crisis, some Shi ī regions like Muthana, Dīwaānīya, Dhī Qār and Mīysaān have the highest number of poor people [Wizarat al-takḥṭīṭ 2020].

A decade earlier before the erupting of the 'Arab uprisings', Larbi Sadiki highlighted how the acute economic and social problems will trigger the protest movement. He wrote in prescient words that,

In the impoverished Arab states, unemployment will always be a potential detonator of social discontent and political instability... The pressure of population-growth further compounds economic hardship. The annual population-growth rate, fluctuating between 2 percent and 4 percent, is very high given the modest resources of impoverished Arab states. This not only means further pressure on housing, water, food, employment, education, and health care; it also presents the more daunting prospect of a doubling of the total population by the year 2025 [Sadiki 95-71 :2000].

There is a general link between economy and democracy not only in the development sense but essentially in achieving the process of proper democratization. The more diversified the economy, the greater the chances of democratization, because of the effects of this diversification on citizens and the structure of civil society [Haynes 98-94 :2002; Tornqust 99-97 :1999]. The growth of civil society can accommodate and channel ethnic and sectarian identities towards a greater awareness of shared values and norms as a result of frequent interaction. Membership of professional, volunteer, student and advocacy organizations has the potential to allow Iraqis to learn the skills of organizing themselves within Iraqi society but outside of their immediate ethnic and sectarian affiliations. However, the youth have been routinely excluded from institutional forms of politics and the jockeying for political office among political parties.

The Iraqi experiment in consociational democracy based on sectarian identities has been badly shaken in recent years. Despite the memory of bloody internecine conflict between Shi ʿa and Sunni groups, the narrowing down of the political field to a few members of the post- Ṣaddaām elite led to an erosion of loyalty among ordinary people to political parties. An ongoing economic crisis also contributed to a deterioration of public support for electoral politics. Mass demonstrations in November 2019 and again in November 2020, a reaction to the status quo, saw crowds of Iraqis protestors who in the past could have been counted on to support the sectarian parties in government and parliament. Political exclusion seems to have created a sense of moral outrage and an understanding of democracy as a basic right. Slogan carried by Iraqis such as irīd ḥaqī (I want my right), and norīd waṭan (we want a homeland) highly express this understanding of democracy. Grassroots demonstrations show the mobilization of citizens, mostly youth, without employing armed violence to voice their discontent at the government.

IV.Assessing Iraq Democracy

The Iraqi political scene that emerged after 2003 has been in many ways a break with Iraq's old state model of the preceding century. If one considers 1921 as the year of the formation of the Iraqi state, then 2003 can be viewed as the rebirth of this state. It is clear that the second Iraqi state that was established in 2003 represents the utter opposite of the one founded in 1921. Although these two junctures have been conditioned by almost identical historical events, foreign occupation in particular, the sequence of the two births was completely dissimilar. The result of the British occupation was a constitutional monarchy with virtual control of the Sunni minority over the Iraqi state and a 'policy of exclusion or unfair representation for certain individuals or groups' [Bengio 22 :2003] that ended only with the American occupation of 2003. The American invasion, by contrast, led to the creation of parliamentary rule with obvious Shi'a control, the fact that largely explains the ensuing events whether in Iraq or across the Middle East. At any rate, these two contradictory pictures point to the turbulent course of Iraqi history at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The recent 'Arab uprisings' and the Iraqi experience of mass protests have demonstrated that people in the Arab world are making demands for democracy and they are not the exception in a world of individuals and groups struggling for citizenship rights and accountable governments. Iraq's experience, however, has showed the faults and shortcomings of 'democracy by force'. There are, according to David Beetham,

Two main reasons why democratization through invasion is intrinsically flawed and self- contradictory: the first stems from the democratic logic of self-determination; the second from a consideration of democracy's preconditions [454–443 :2009].

Also, Iraq's past legacy, in particular the Shi'a- Sunni divide and the Kurdish question, has left its mark on the current state of democracy in Iraq. Until now, mutual mistrust prevails among Iraqi politicians and ordinary people alike. The inter-communal factor is still playing a substantial role and is difficult to ignore. Various components of Iraq's society feel like minorities against each other and 'a permanent minority may become permanently alienated, and soon may seek to secede in geographical fact as well as emotional feeling' [Lucas 250 :1976]. Without properly addressing Iraq's internal problems, a tentative and ongoing process of democratization will inevitably be subject to regional interference. Iraq's relationships with other Arab and Islamic states need to be put on the right track as no other country like Iraq is linked with the whole Arab and Islamic past history.

Although Iraqi democracy has made good progress in several aspects including free media and journalism, holding regular local and national elections, and most

importantly the peaceful alternation of power, it is still in need of consolidation. Democratic consolidation may occur in Iraq when 'contending social classes and political groups accept both formal rules and informal understandings determining political outcomes: that is, 'who gets what, where, when, and how. If achieved, it signifies that groups are settling into relatively predictable positions involving politically legitimate behaviour according to generally acceptable rules' [Haynes 82 :2002].

Democratization in Iraq presupposes the existence of a shared identity, if not of nationhood, at least of civic solidarities. Institutionalization of democracy at the top without including ordinary citizens will inevitably fail to generate a legitimacy among the latter. This is to say that 'if democracy is not implemented carefully, the process could cause the deaths of a lot of people and fail to deliver dignity and good governance' [Hawksley ibid: 6]. Frequent elections among a select few, the established political parties, without greater inclusion among the youth at all levels of the decision-making process may continue to generate popular discontent and mass protests for the foreseeable future.