

# Major Factors Affecting the Crisis of Democracy in Iraq Society

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## Abstract

The present study aims to identify the most important factors affecting the crisis of democracy in general and consensual democracy in particular. It also aims to identify the level of effectiveness of pluralism, which hindered real democracy and gave rise to the one basket democracy, which marginalized the other social groups in the presence and permanence of the complex crises experienced by the Iraqi society. The social aspects play an important role in the crisis of democracy. They led to the failure of the consensual democratic model in Iraq as political parties that monopolized political power through democratic practice lack scientific, political, and economic programs.

**Keywords:** Crisis, democracy, crisis of democracy, pluralism, consensual democracy, quotas.

## Introduction

Every talk about political and social change must refer to the people's need for civil, political, and constitutional rights and pluralism that achieves a real democracy that aims to abolish exploitation in its various forms and achieve social justice. The democratic construction can only be completed and developed by reforming the political situation and the resulting reform of the economic, social, and cultural conditions. This requires that political pluralism work according to its natural context (competition in order to reach the votes of the electorate) through political programs and the achievements that people can achieve from legislation. This can only be done by moving away from the single basket legislation that is hidden from society due to the absence of political opposition for the government or for the blocs prevailing in Parliament. This has very significant negative effects in the settlement and institutionalization of corruption as the most important obstacles hindering achieving social justice. It is worth noting that this pluralism is not achieved on the ground simply by the presence of different parties or various groups as long as decisions are taken by consensus on the sharing of interests among the political classes without society getting anything from them. The social environment in the Iraqi society depends

on fluctuations in order for them to obtain the greatest amount of political advantages.

## First: The Main Research Elements

### 1. The Problem Statement

In modern Iraq, society is in crisis that often takes its chronic character, with a well-established historical dimension. No crisis was a societal product only, but most of the crises were the result of political factors created by the political regimes that have controlled the government since the establishment of the modern Iraqi state. It is not an exaggeration to say that some of these regimes adopted the crisis policy in many cases to extend their absolute influence in return for what can be expected from the popular anger rejecting these policies. The crises of society in Iraq in general and the crisis of democracy in particular were not the result of the present. But, they date back to historical extensions before the events of 2003, formed on social and cultural foundations invested by the ruling political systems as the most important source of the permanence of their control of power and their possession of influence, especially in the democratic stage. The most important questions that can be raised are as follows:

Is the consensual Iraqi democracy going through a crisis, or is it a crisis experienced by democracy in general in modern times?

Is pluralism an obstacle hindering achieving real democracy?

Did political parties play their role in deepening the pluralist crisis by eliminating political competition, which is one of the obstacles hindering achieving real democracy?

## 2. The Significance of The Present Study

The present study is significant due to the fact that it is a scientific attempt to diagnose the most important factors that contributed to the formation of the nature of the crisis of democracy in Iraq that led to the failure of the consensual democratic model in Iraq, which was represented in the inability to achieve social justice. Political parties that monopolized the political power in democratic practice lack scientific, political, and economic programs.

## 3. The objectives

1. Identifying the most important factors affecting the crisis of democracy in general and consensual democracy in particular.
2. Identifying the level of effectiveness of pluralism that hindered achieving real democracy and gave rise to the one basket democracy that marginalized the other social groups in the presence and permanence of the complex crises experienced by the Iraqi society.
3. Identifying the role of political parties in deepening the crisis of political competition, which blocks the way for the emergence of new political trends, which in turn are considered obstacles hindering achieving democracy.

## Second: Definition of Concepts

### 1. Crisis

It means the cessation of regular and expected accidents and the disruption of habits and customs, which requires rapid change to restore balance and to form new and more appropriate habits (Badawi, 1992). In politics, crisis is

defined as every sudden situation that results in a radical change in the existing situation. That either happens because of surprise, lack of time available for making the right decision, or threatening vital interests (Abdulhafeedh, 2020). In sociology, crisis is a kind of danger that threatens the existing "social system" and results in an imbalance in customs, values, and norms that requires rapid change to confront this danger and restore the balance process (Hassan, 2013).

The researcher defines crisis as every defect that affects the social system as a whole, leads to a change in the prevailing and recognized conditions, and requires change to restore balance.

### 2. Democracy

The political encyclopedia defines democracy as a social political system that establishes the relationship between members of society and the state in accordance with the principle of equality among citizens and free participation in the development of legislation that regulates public social life (Alkayyali et al. 1986). Democracy is a term that denotes active participation of political pluralism in the Western civilization (Alsawani, 2014). Democracy is a social system that has a comprehensive approach based on resolving contradictions and preventing conflicts between the various conflicting interests of social and political groups (ibid).

The researcher defines democracy as the social system that members of society believe and follow in all their lives aspects and shapes all patterns of their relations with the societal other with their awareness of political, cultural, and moral concepts that call for the necessity of peaceful periodical transfer of power.

### 3. Consensual democracy

It is defined as agreeing to share power and divide it within the government between the various sectors of society that may share the element of citizenship, but they may differ in terms of language, ethnicity, or religion. Within this framework, consensus is to participate in the decision-making process in order to obtain the

common benefit of the system, which requires a full clarification of the rights of groups (Odah, 2016). Consensual democracy is a peaceful mechanism for power-sharing in a multiple society that faces the risks of divisions due to the extremism of its social components and lack of trust among them. Therefore, leaders of these components resort to consensus as a way to securely share power and take decisions on the basis of compromise in accordance with the logic of political settlement (Almughairibi, 2016).

### **Third: Major factors affecting the crisis of democracy**

Social aspects play an important role in the crisis of democracy. Ethnic, national, religious, and sectarian value differences make it difficult to embark on a genuine democratic transformation process because with these divisions, pluralism gives each of these components a kind of narrow sub-affiliation that is far from the total affiliation to the homeland. This leads to the lack of the possibility of consolidating national unity because democracy is not only a political system, but it is a system of social and behavioral values that lead to individual participation in the political process, which presupposes awareness of the importance of participation in national political life (Al-Aswad, 1990).

Diagnosing the crisis of democracy in the Iraqi society has received very great attention in recent years in both scholarly literature and popular commentaries. Many political observers claim that the Iraqi democracy is in crisis as a result of several factors, including high levels of discontent among citizens with politics, lack of political literacy efforts, low levels of trust in governments and politicians, as well as declining desire for political party membership, the increased power of electoral accountability actors, and the lack of proliferation of complex governance arrangements, which have led to the evasion of Accountability, transparency, and the failure or ineffectiveness of representation (Selen, and Jean-Paul, 2014). In his book, the Social Contract, Rousseau discussed the legitimacy of representation, claiming that the

incompatibility of democracy with the legitimacy of representation causes a crisis in the democratic practice (Bowman and Bordoni, 2018).

In the Arab world, all societies are characterized by the absence of a democratic process due to depriving citizens from practicing their human rights and basic freedom (Jameel, 1986). The existing Arab political democracy does not go beyond being a slogan that does not reflect the depths of the political trends of Arab rulers and politicians as individual ruling and dictatorship prevail. In the overwhelming majority of Arab countries, access to power is not achieved through the popular will, but through revolutions and bloody coups. The political structure is characterized by the absence or weakness of individual and collective participation because Arab authorities do not seek to serve the people, but they have turned into authoritarianism, which does not express the rules of collective action. The worsening economic, social, and political conditions are also reflections of the lack of real democracy in reality, which led to the deterioration of these conditions, making the feature of underdevelopment in various aspects the dominant feature of Arab countries (Al-Zubaidi, 2018). This made the absence of the Arab model of real democratic governance a feasible achievement. It also directly contributed to the absence of enlightened democratic thinkers who are able to crystallize the vision or the project that links the universality of the democratic idea with the process of investing it locally in a way that is compatible with the Arab and Islamic social specificity at the center of political decision or the center of influence with decision-makers (Almughbishi, 2012).

As for the Iraqi society, which is characterized by the presence of pluralism, the relationship between its components has been characterized by hidden and overt sensitivities as a result of the mistakes made by the United Kingdom, the first sponsor of the establishment of the Iraqi state in the modern era, which was represented by its work on relying on the policy of sectarian tensions. In addition to the impact of the backward cultural and religious reality witnessed in that period and the impact of partisan conflicts

on power in the Iraqi society to make national and sectarian divisions a basis for loyalty at the expense of the state and the homeland, this matter represented an obstacle to the growth of democratic values and ideals (Hafidh, 2007).

Democracy in Iraq is imported, which means that it is not its original land because it was not brought about by cumulative developments or by the popular will, but rather by the will of the occupier. This led to the creation of a pattern of chaos and social fragmentation and a kind of loss of values because the Iraqi society suffered from a severe crisis of confidence among its political components. This led to the replacement of the components and the establishment of a sectarian state, which contributed to the loss of the centrality of the decision as a result of sectarian quotas.

In general, Iraqis suffer from the problem of coexistence with democracy by pleasing everyone to participate in power as a national entitlement. The feeling of some political parties being marginalized or not participating in a reasonable manner as they deserve in decision-making in general has prevented the realization of aspirations for the future development of democracy (Al-Ghalibi, 2015). In fact, the current situation of the democratic imbalance is due to the crisis of the state, its inability to act as the strong and decisive axis in social mediation, a regulator of the economy, and a guarantor of safety (Bowman and Bordoni, 2018). In the Iraqi society, the state is going through a crisis because of the random administration. This type of administration, which is without vision or planning, causes crises, which are not normal, but they are dangerous, destructive, and destroying everything (Isa and Amir, 2017). In the Iraqi society, the emerging democracy has occurred with a number of symptoms, mistakes, or gaps that were the main reasons of the crisis. The most important reasons can be referred to as follows (Al-Ibadi, 2015):

### **1. The absence of a culture of democracy**

Democracy is not just an institutional approach, but it is a general culture. What happened in the Arab societies is that the creation of democratic institutions preceded the dissemination of

democratic thought and culture. That is the opposite of what happened in the West as the thought of the Renaissance and Enlightenment era paved the way for the establishment of democratic regimes. These factors have deepened the crisis of democracy and weakened its role in the Arab political arena. Therefore, the transition process towards democratic construction in the Arab societies requires the availability of a set of indicators that should be activated in order to establish a conscious political culture to advance the requirements of democratic political life in a way that leads to building a political culture that is aware of the needs and requirements of people (Al-Mughbishi, 2012).

The Iraqi society lacks political culture and awareness. Democracy needs to raise the level of awareness of both politicians and citizens. It's not just an idea. Rather, it is a tool whose use, development, and preservation should be known by spreading the culture that membership in sects and nationalities should not cancel out the feeling of belonging to the homeland. The real value of citizenship lies in belonging to the homeland in addition to belonging to a particular sect. There is no contradiction between the two aspects. The Iraqi democracy is suffering from a crisis due to the absence of its cultural components, as well as the absence of the popular base on which it is based. Also, the Iraqi culture is dominated by sectarian and clan nature. It is an exclusionary negative culture. Political sectarianism was one of the most important cultures that hindered the emergence of a democratic political culture due to the fear of recognizing the other and diversity.

### **2. Replacing representative democracy with consensual democracy**

The other problem with the birth of democratic Iraq is the nature of the application of consensual democracy. The past years have proven that this was the ideal recipe for political paralysis. Ministers of this type became responsible for fulfilling the desires of their blocs, leaders, and components instead of being responsible for the people, parliament, or the prime minister. Those governments have

become led in contrasting directions and sometimes in opposite directions. Huge resources were wasted in them. The quotas imposed ministers with limited competence and loyalty. It is noticed that they are jostling for a job and position, which is of no use to citizens, but rather to achieve their own interests (Hafidh, 2007).

The misapplication of consensual democracy in the Iraqi society after the change in 2003 and the lack of readiness of the Iraqi society and political parties for this type of democracy, which regulates the relationship between parties and socially active groups in multiple and diverse societies has led to its transformation into a kind of political quota based on sectarian and national foundations for the parties' to deal with it as a concept rather than a means to achieve political participation, which made parliamentary oversight of state institutions almost impossible (ibid).

In Iraq, consensual democracy transformed the social component into a political party that has the exclusive social character, such as Shiite parties, Sunni parties, and Kurdish parties, with a phenomenon of vertical polarization that establishes and consolidates differentiation. Because it is based on partnership, authorities have stuck to consensus in order to achieve their own interests and their presence in power as it is based on the participation of everyone in the government and state institutions according to the size of the component. It is also based on the fact that all components need to agree on any political, social, or economic decision regarding the future of the country. This led to the creation of weak, slow, and flabby governments, because each party is trying to defend the rights of their sect far from the national identity.

In this regard, consensual democracy should not be considered a final form of democracy and it should not be defended as the possible solution. It is the transitional stage, which must be passed over for better stages. It becomes the worst mechanism for managing institutions in the state because it certainly includes the impasse or paralysis that involves the permanent disruptive ability in favor of one of the many veto owners,

which results in the state of permanent paralysis and the inability to respond to the aspirations of its citizens (Hafidh, 2007). The consensual democracy brought by Arendt Lijphart was not represented in the political process. Thus, it was unable to achieve its goal in the Iraqi society as it is based on a well-established democracy, not a nascent one, but the Iraqi society has not been able to qualify for the stage of achieving democratic consensus. Therefore, the dilemma facing the Iraqi democracy is that social diversity in Iraq is not accompanied by the presence of elites that are characterized by the conciliatory ability that advocates coexistence and acceptance of the other. On the contrary, these elites manipulate this diversity in order to serve their narrow goals.

### **3. Adopting the principle of sectarian and ethnic quotas**

Quotas mean dividing the whole into its components according to the demographic entitlement of the parties participating in the political process. It is a political method that allows all the winning party components through democratic elections to participate in the government and assume responsibility for the state administration (Al-Rubai'ee, 2007). It is difficult to say that the quota system in the Iraqi society is a democratic system because the existence of political parties and organizations as well as holding elections does not mean achieving democracy because democracy takes upon itself the regulation of society's relationship with the state through laws and social, economic, and political relations. But, within the Iraqi society, this relationship was characterized by conflicts to serve its own interests and not a peaceful struggle between the various classes that allows the peaceful transfer of power. This division has led to the fragmentation of the society and the absence of citizenship.

The religious, ethnic, and sectarian quotas system in which the Governing Council was formed under the American tutelage continued to overcome the process of forming the Iraqi Council of Representatives. Many of the representatives have devoted after the quotas

ethnic, sectarian, and partisan under the name of consensual democracy, which made the House of Representatives in no spirit for lack of opposition and accountability because the members belong to the parties participating in power. Therefore, they do not reject the decisions of the executive authority for fear that they will be affected by party sanctions that prevent them from membership in the Council. This led to its transformation into the Council of Parties or the Council of Leaders of Political and Party Blocs. With the convergence of their interests and differing agendas, which sometimes reach the point of contradiction, those leaders were a major factor in impeding the provision of objective conditions instead of building a democratic state (Abdulkhidhr, 2017). So, state institutions, especially ministries, belonged to the components because they have become the monopoly of political coalitions in hidden agreements known as the one basket that guaranteed a free and lawful possession of the political blocs. Consequently, quotas took root, which resulted in political corruption, which led to great financial and administrative corruption and became difficult to overcome (Bahr Al-Oloum, 2020). The absence of a parliamentary majority, the application of political quotas by distributing positions between blocs, and the absence of parliamentary opposition leads to emptying democracy of its true content. This is why political sectarian quotas produced negative effects. Consensual democracy based on quotas is not subject to abolition or modification as it is the realistic solution to this problem. The quotas and political consensus and its division among the blocs led to the spread of political corruption and the emergence of party loyalty and nepotism over competence and experience.

#### **4. The establishment of major political blocs on sectarian and ethnic bases**

The transition in the Iraqi society from autocracy to democracy requires the existence of democratic requirements. The most important requirements may be the presence of political parties that are capable of framing political action towards achieving general social goals with well-defined political programs that are responsible for their implementation. But, this

matter so far does not exist in the Iraqi political process. The present political parties in Iraq, of all kinds, are nothing more than mere facades for sectarian, political, or clan figures who lack any ideological vision or political programs (Abdulkhidhr, 2017).

The absence of democratic partisan conditions in the Iraqi political parties is also noticed, especially in their life and internal organization, which directly contributed to distorting the general democratic practice. Most parties are overcome by individual party leaderships for long periods of time, in addition to the political inheritance of these leaders, which led to the absence of pluralism, as well as the absence of partisan leadership on the one hand. On the other hand, there is a lack of clarity in the vision and methodology of the Iraqi political parties, especially regarding the issue of democracy. The Iraqi party scene is mostly characterized by the spread of Islamic and nationalist political organizations, which mostly intersect with democracy as a theory of the practice of governance as well as a social culture. Also, its intellectual, religious, nationalist, and Islamic background does not converge with positive democracy, which relies on its theoretical premises and political action (Hafidh, 2007).

Tools for democratic action are missing within these parties that lack ideological belief in them as a system and practice. They were established and built in a way that ensures the perpetuation of the powers of the dominant parties, and not for the sake of building the democratic system because it was based on the agreement among them to reach the political product away from the will of the people through compatibility with each other.

Although for all people, democracy represented the path of optimal governance to achieve good governance for them, in the Iraqi society, it is still the home of strangeness of what the region offers in contrast to that as it has been burdened by the burdens that pull it back. Democracy provides a theater for the struggles of the political class and for the illusions that simulate and reduce the public interest to achieve the interests of the party and its members and the

narcissism of its leaders. This made it a hindrance and not a development mechanism. The problem is exacerbated by the fact that the state and the government are the ones who run almost all the joints of the country. Therefore, if they are hindered, they cause the whole society to stagnate and paralyze (Jabir, 2015).

Therefore, the reason is not the illegal way to build democracy in the Iraqi society by the occupation because there are successful global experiences that have taken place in the same way that occurred in Iraq, but the problem lies in the country's pluralism, its nature, and the nature of the relations among its components as it is a country in which sectarian and national conflicts have been established through Date (Al-Ghalibi, 2015). In addition, the role of the economic factor cannot be neglected with the success or failure of democracy because most of the concerns of the Iraqi individual have become economic concerns today. Without a strong economy that secures a decent life, the importance of democracy and its effectiveness in achieving equality and well-being will be questioned by the Iraqi citizen (Al-Kilabi, 2020).

#### **Fourth: Conclusions**

1. One of the most important obstacles that hinder achieving democracy in the Iraqi society is related to the social dimension that is related to clan aspects and their political exploitation, including what is related to the religious aspect and sectarian conflict as well as the weakness of the state, in addition to that political parties in Iraq are among the most important reasons that led to the relapse of democracy because they inflate their powers on democratic consciousness. They look at the state as a booty that they share among themselves according to the parliamentary weight.

2. The lack of awareness of the Iraqi people about democracy always leads individuals to error. The problem is not related to the structure of the political system only, but it is a social problem because the prevailing social values in the Iraqi society are the old values. This democracy is still in a closed circle of crises. Its main problem is with the ruling political class that has dominated the assumers of power.

Political authorities do not have the program that consolidates democratic maturity, but they rather work to stabilize fragile democracy.

3. The political system in Iraq has not produced real democratic institutions that establish the rule of law and order as much as it produces the growth and strengthening of the power of the political class, as well as the powers of parties under their different names at the expense of the general social and national interest. The first responsible for the successive crises that the Iraqi society is exposed to are the ones who assumed power, in addition to the political parties and blocs. The political systems produced a distorted image of a state that lacks all democratic elements.

4. The Iraqi consensual democracy has made this system an anomaly because it is based on the consensual sharing of power in the government. The consensual experiment has proven its failure within the Iraqi society as it was the reason for transforming Iraq into sectarian and nationalist cantons because the political system in Iraq since 2003 contributed to the destruction of the state by disregarding accountability and opened the gate of consensus as a way to lose control and threaten societal peace, which led to the dismantling of society and the loss of the state.

5. Social pluralism hindered achieving democracy because it suffers from the intellectual narrow-mindedness of the elites who are in charge of the political process. Formal pluralism highlighted the social closure within the constituent groups of society. This led to the exacerbation of local problems at the expense of interest in national identity.

6. The lack of a culture of democracy was the result of the absence of the basic components on which democracy should be based. This made it suffer from a crisis represented by the absence of awareness, which is a social problem of the Iraqi democracy, which made it revolve in closed loops of crises because of the prevailing political system that lacks programs that consolidate its democratic maturity, which led to the consolidation of a fragile democracy that turned consensual democracy into a recipe for paralysis. Political leaders have become

responsible for fulfilling the desires of the component they represent, not to the people.

7. The Iraqi political system is weak and fragile because it derives from national, religious, and sectarian quotas through consensus and compromise in a closed basket that contains only factional interests. It lacked transparency, which is one of the most important components of democracy maintenance.

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