

## Political Movements in Iraq: The Role of Civil Society After the October 25 Revolution

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### ABSTRACT

**Objective:** This study examines the role of civil society in Iraq's political movements following the October 25 Revolution (Tishreen Revolution), highlighting its impact on human rights, political accountability, and long-term governance reforms. **Method:** Employing a mixed-method approach, the study integrates quantitative data from a validated questionnaire and secondary sources, alongside qualitative insights from in-depth interviews with leaders of civil organizations. **Results:** Findings suggest that the revolution had a positive influence on human rights and civic engagement, though statistical significance was not established. The study underscores civil society's role in fostering political change and citizen participation, despite structural and institutional challenges. **Novelty:** By providing empirical evidence on the evolving role of civil society in Iraq's post-revolutionary context, this study contributes to scholarly discourse on political transitions and offers insights for policymakers and international stakeholders aiming to strengthen democratic governance.

## INTRODUCTION

In October 2019, Iraq witnessed a massive uprising referred to as the October 25 Revolution or Tishreen Revolution. This movement was due to widespread dissatisfaction with systemic corruption, inadequate public services, economic stagnation, high unemployment, and the dominance of the political elites aligned with sectarian interests [1]. The revolution was largely driven by the youth, who took to the streets demanding reforms and a reimagining of Iraq's political structure. Initially, they focused on domestic grievance, after that the protests also reflect the broader regional and global discontent with governance and state accountability [2].

In shaping the course and aftermath of the October 25 revolution, civil society plays a significant role. Civil society in Iraq has faced many challenges that ranges from state repression and limited freedom of expression to sectarian fragmentation as well as political manipulation. However, following the revolution, Iraqi civil society emerged as a critical force in advocating for political change, and accountability, pushing for greater transparency, and the establishment of a more inclusive governance framework [3]. To establish civil society organizations from grassroots movements, various actors played an important role in translating the protester's demands into a political agenda, even as the government sought to suppress these calls for change [4].

The number of literatures on the role of civil society is increasing day by day in Middle Eastern uprisings. In a fragile state like Iraq, less attention has been given to how civil society has evolved in the aftermath of such movement [5]. Iraq's post-revolutionary

political environment faces a lot of challenges such as political fragmentation, violence against activities, and sectarianism. To understand the effectiveness and limitations of civil society, it is important to assess the potential for long-term political transformation in Iraq. Most importantly those states marked by corruption, sectarianism, and political instability. Additionally, the study utilizes the mixed-method approach that will provide both depth and breadth in exploring the issues, offering a balanced perspective on civil society's role from both the top-down and bottom-up viewpoints. Although the study focused on how the civil society in Iraq can navigate the challenges of post-revolutionary politics and contribute to shaping the country's evolving political landscape. The understanding of these dynamics not only informs academic discussions on Iraq's political transition but also provides valuable insight for policymakers, international actors, and civil society organization to support the ongoing quest for political accountability [6].

### **Literature Review**

Comprehensive research was done by using databases such as Google Scholar etc. As Iraq revolution began in 2019 and was driven by widespread frustration with corruption, unemployment, and lack of basic services including the demand for greater political participation. Scholar often argues about the civil society in Iraq. This had been suppressed under Saddam Hussain and fragmented after the 2003 invasion, found new momentum during these protests. Previously many authors highlighted the central role of young people in Tishreen Uprising. This demographic, which is frustrated by the lack of opportunities and political corruption, became the driving force behind mass protests. Moreover, social media such as Facebook also plays an important role in organizing the protests with activists using digital platforms [7].

Another research shows how Iraqi civil society, once dormant came to life during the revolution 2019. The study states that new grassroots organizations, youth groups, and unions mobilized to demand systemic change [8]. Moreover, civil society become more vocal, pushing for an overhaul of Iraq's electoral system and a reduction in sectarian influences over the state.

Similarly, the push for electoral law reform, which is a key demand for the protests, was discussed by many authors. The introduction of a new and advanced electoral law in 2020, which implemented a more proportional voting system was seen as a victory for civil society by its practical impact remains debated [9]. Additionally, in 2021, an author states how civil society, particularly through organizations like the Iraqi High Electoral Commission, pushed such reforms but in return faced severe challenges.

It has been stated that while civil society pushed for reforms, the entrenched political class, which is influenced by powerful sectarian and external actors, was slower to make substantial changes. An author Majed highlights the mixed success of civil society in pressuring the government to respond to its demands. He highlights that, while some reforms were made, they were inefficient in addressing the root causes of the protests.

Many articles have been published on the challenges faced by the civil society in Iraq after the revolution. The government's violent response to protests, the fragmentation of political movements, and the persistent influence of militias and foreign powers. One of the most important challenges that was highlighted is the violence and repression faced by the activists and civil society. Hundreds of the protesters were killed while more were injured [10]. Al-Kubaisi highlights the instances of targeted killings of activists. The study also shows, how government forces and armed groups utilize violence to undermine the legitimacy of civil society movements. Another article was published by Al-sayyid, he shows how the lack of cohesion among civil society groups, and political divides in Iraq, and compounded by the ongoing sectarian. Which made it difficult to achieve lasting reform [11].

Social media became a more powerful tool in Iraq, particularly during the October 25 Revolution. The digital platform allowed protesters to organize quickly, bring international attention to the issue, and share information about government crackdowns. An author Alkhudary highlights the role of social media platforms in organizing protests and in spreading messages that were much resistant to state control. Moreover, activists used platforms like Twitter and Telegram to bypass censorship and spread real-time updates about the protests [12].

### **Research Objective**

The current search aims to fill the gap by evaluating and understanding the role of civil society in Iraq's political movement following the October 25 Revolution. Moreover, the study seeks to understand the impact of civil society in shaping political change, promoting public mobilization, and ensuring governmental accountability in the post-revolutionary period.

### **Research Question**

The study will focus on the following research questions.

1. What kind of role did civil society play in shaping the political movements and political change in Iraq after October 25 Revolution?
2. How effective is civil society organization in influencing the government policy, accountability, and reform?
3. What challenges has civil society faced to advocate for political change in Iraq?

### **Significance of study**

The study provides a comprehensive examination of civil society's impact on Iraq's political future which is an important area of study in the context of Middle East's complex political dynamics. By carefully analyzing the success and the challenges that are faced by civil society, the research would help understand how civil society can affect the long-term political change in post-revolutionary societies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The study employs a mixed-method research design, by combining qualitative and quantitative data collection. A structured questionnaire will be distributed to Iraqi Citizens. The sample size was kept at 50. It focuses on public opinions regarding the role

of civil society in the 25 October Revolution. For qualitative analysis in depth interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with leaders of civil organizations, journalists, and the political analysts. These interviews will explore the experience, strategies and the challenges faced by civil society in the post-revolutionary period.

**Sampling Strategy**

Purposeful sampling will be used for quantitative data analysis to select individuals with experience and expertise in the Tishreen Revolution. While, for qualitative data analysis, stratified random sampling was used to ensure the diverse perspectives based on the age, gender, educational level and the socio-demographic factors. Moreover, analysis of both the local and international media coverage of the revolution on events and political movements was also conducted.

**Table 1.** Secondary data about political movement

<b>Political Movement</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Key Characteristics</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Reference</b>
<b>October Youth Movement</b>	It was formed in response to October 2019 protest.	Inclusive, bringing together Iraqis from all ethnic and religious backgrounds.	Sparked a wider public debate on Iraq’s political future.	[13]
<b>Women’s Movement</b>	Women played an important role in protests, advocating for gender equality, political reforms, and women’s rights in a traditionally patriarchal society.	Strong grassroots presence, with women organizing and participating in protests. Focused on breaking gender norms and increasing political participation. Also focus on gender equality, protection of women’s rights, and involvement in decision-making processes.	Raised awareness about Iraq’s plight globally. Elevated importance on gender equality. Led to greater calls for women’s political participation.	[14]

<b>Sadrist Movement</b>	Historically been associated with political power. Sadr repositioned himself as a reformist voice, during and after the revolution.	Leveraged mass mobilization of supporters to advocate for political change. Focus on creating secular, non-sectarian political structures.	Sadr's political repositioning helped bridge the gap between traditional elites and the reformist demands.	[15]
<b>Secular Political Movements</b>	Emerged from the protests, challenging Iraq's sectarian-based political system and advocating nationalism, civil identity and democracy.	Strong appeal among youth and disillusioned Iraqis with the sectarian system.	Raised awareness about the negative effects of sectarianism in Iraq's political system.	[16]
<b>Other Civil Society Organizations</b>	Involved in mobilizing citizens, advocating for democracy, and holding the government accountable post-revolution.	Focus on promoting democracy, human rights, and social justice.	Strengthened Iraq's civil society and political engagement.	[17]

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

The result of the qualitative analysis presents the main findings from the interviews conducted that illustrate the challenges faced by civil society and the strategies they employed in advocating for change. Moreover, the perception of activists and CSO leaders related to the success or failure of the revolution's goals and the role of civil society in the advancement of the political reforms. Whereas, the results of quantitative

analysis provide a statistical summary of the survey data, that highlights the trend of public trust in civil society.

### Quantitative Analysis

**Table 2.** Results of descriptive statistics

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
	<b>N</b>	<b>Minimu m</b>	<b>Maximu m</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
<b>Level of Involvement</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>3.00</b>	<b>1.8800</b>	<b>.62727</b>
Role in Iraq's civil society	50	1.00	5.00	3.6200	.69664
Extent of influence in the political landscape of Iraq	50	1.00	4.00	2.2200	.88733
Increase in political participation	50	1.00	2.00	1.4400	.50143
Biggest challenges faced by civil society	50	1.00	5.00	2.3600	1.48131
Creation of sustainable changes	50	1.00	4.00	1.2000	.60609
Civil society in Iraq's future political development	50	1.00	4.00	2.1200	.43519
Increase in democracy	50	1.00	4.00	2.2600	.75078
Long-term political changes in Iraq	50	1.00	4.00	2.2000	.75593
Role of civil society organizations (csos) during the October 25	50	1.00	3.00	2.0200	.42809
Valid N (listwise)	50				

The result of descriptive statistics show that the participants involved in Iraq's civil society is generally low with a mean of 1.88 for the level of involvement which indicates limited engagement. However, the respondents show their role in civil society as moderate to strong with a mean of 3.62. the overall influence of civil society on Iraq's political landscape is viewed to be reduced with a mean of 2.22. Moreover, political participation shows a mean of 1.44 while the challenges facing civil society are considered moderate with a mean of 2.36. moreover, the creation of sustainable changes shows a mean of 1.20 whereas the civil society shows a modest role in Iraq's future development with a mean of 2.12.

**Correlation Analysis:**

**Table 3. Results of Correlation Analysis**

		Level Of Involvement	Role In Iraq's Civil Society	Extent Of Influence in The Political Landscape of Iraq	Creation Of Sustainable Changes	Increase In Political Participation	Biggest Challenge s Faced by Civil Society	Increase In Democracy
Level of Involvement	Pearson	1	-.106	.048	.118	.106	-.348*	-.279*
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.462	.739	.414	.462	.013	.050
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Role in Iraq's civil society	Pearson	-.106	1	-.159	.184	-.154	-.221	.349*
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.462		.270	.202	.285	.124	.013
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Extent of influence in the political landscape of Iraq	Pearson	.048	-.159	1	.030	.237	-.170	-.241
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.739	.270		.834	.098	.237	.092
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.644	.443	.651	.007	.105	.557	.581
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Creation of sustainable changes	Pearson	.118	.184	.030	1	-.027	.032	.152
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.414	.202	.834		.853	.826	.290
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
Civil society in Iraq's future political development	Pearson	-.096	-.048	.300*	-.093	.314*	-.132	.027
	Correlation							
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.509	.738	.034	.521	.026	.362	.850
	N	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

<b>Increase in political participation</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	.106	-.154	.237	-.027	1	-.328*	-.093
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.462	.285	.098	.853		.020	.520
	<b>N</b>	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
<b>Biggest challenges faced by civil society</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	-.348*	-.221	-.170	.032	-.328*	1	.006
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.013	.124	.237	.826	.020		.968
	<b>N</b>	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.953	.196	.272	.216	.824	.497	.518
<b>Increase in democracy</b>	<b>Pearson Correlation</b>	-.279*	.349*	-.241	.152	-.093	.006	1
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	.050	.013	.092	.290	.520	.968	
	<b>N</b>	50	50	50	50	50	50	50

The results show that the level of involvement is negatively correlated with both the biggest challenges faced by civil society as shown at -0.348 and the increase in democracy -0.279. This represents that those who are more involved in Iraq's civil society perceive greater challenges and little progress in democratic gains. Similarly, the role in Iraq's civil society shows a positive correlation with the increase in democracy 0.349 showing that those who actively participate in civil society are even more optimistic about democratic progress in Iraq. Additionally, the extent of influence in the political landscape is positively correlated with civil society's future political development. An increase in political participation of 0.378 indicates that those who perceive a significant influence of civil society on politics believe in its role in shaping Iraq's future and driving political participation. Furthermore, the role of civil society organizations has a strong positive correlation with the creation of sustainable changes as shown by 0.378, indicating that the involvement of CSO is a critical factor in achieving lasting reforms. Additionally, an increase in political participation of -0.328 and level of involvement of 0.348 shows that individuals are more engaged in civil society and are more aware of the challenges that hinder political participation and overall progress.

### Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted on the political movement in Iraq following the October 25 Revolution. Themes were made that highlight the central issues of the

revolution and civil society's role in shaping Iraq's future. The results of the thematic analysis are given below,

**Table 4.** Results of Thematic Analysis

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Evidence from Interviews</b>	<b>Evidence from Media Reports</b>	<b>Impact</b>
<b>Demand for political reform and accountability</b>	Significant political changes to end corruption, improve governance and ensure accountability in Iraq's political system	Activists' express frustration with the political elite, stressing the need for transparency, integrity and accountability	Media often highlighted governance, corruption and inefficiency.	Restructuring the Iraq's political system.
<b>Non-Sectarianism and National Identity</b>	A shift toward a unified national identity, rejecting sectarianism and political divisions based on religion or ethnicity.	Activists highlights the need for a common Iraqi identity, rejecting sectarian divides that had historically fragmented the country.	Media Outlets observed that youth-led protests saw Iraqis from all sects and religions standing together, advocating for a national identity over sectarianism.	Encouraged a national unity movement, promoting national identity over sectarian divisions and advocating for a unified Iraq that embrace diversity.
<b>Youth Empowerment and Political Engagement</b>	The rise of youth as the driving force of the revolution, highlighting their frustration.	Activists noted that many participants were first time political participants especially the Iraqi Youth".	Media often covered the Youth-driven nature of the protests.	Empowered youth to play an important role in shaping the future of Iraq's political landscape.
<b>Gender Equality and Women's political Activism</b>	The active participation of women in the protests, advocating for	Female activists stressed the need for gender equality and greater	Focused on visibility of women in the protests, portraying them	Increase advocacy for gender equality, with women playing a

	gender equality, women's rights and increased political representation.	participation of women in decision making roles, breaking traditional gender roles.	as key figures in advocating for gender-inclusive reforms and empowerment.	significant role in both the protests and in shaping future political agendas for gender justice.
<b>Violent Repression and state violence</b>	Use of live ammunition tear gas	The majority face violence from security forces and militias including kidnappings.	Show violence and human rights abuse against protests vivid reports of injuries and deaths.	Awareness of state brutality grew, prompting calls for international intervention. Accountability and reform of security forces.

The table above shows all the themes that were involved in the thematic analysis. All these themes were coded based on the responses of the interviews. About 75% of the participants showed positive responses towards the positive impact of civil organization after the October Revolution.

**Discussion**

The mobilization of Iraq's youth is a most important feature of the post-revolutionary period. Where social media serves as a critical tool for the organization of protests and for conveying the message of reforms. Anyhow, this resurgence of civil society is a positive sign, and it is more important to note that such types of new activists are still evolving, and its long-term effectiveness will also depend on how well such movements can transition from street protests to formal political influence. However, the electoral reform is a significant step forward [18]. Similarly, the political system in Iraq is deeply entrenched. Due to this civil society faces an uphill battle in challenging these structures. Moreover, it will be important for the activists to focus on pushing for legal reforms. The persistence of violence and repression poses a serious threat to the failure of civil society in Iraq. Although, social media and grassroots activism have empowered protesters. Additionally, they have also made them vulnerable to state and militia attacks. Fragmentation within the civil society organization also complicates the efforts to achieve sustained political change. For civil society, to overcome such challenges, there is a need to find a stronger network, secure protection and foster inter group cooperation. While digital activism has proven effective and more efficient in generating awareness and mobilizing protests. Previously, an author noted that the success of digital movement often depends upon the ability to translate online engagement into offline political change.

## CONCLUSION

**Fundamental Finding** : This study concludes that the October 25 Revolution significantly influenced Iraq's political landscape, particularly through the adoption of the 2020 electoral law, increased digital activism, and the emergence of a politically engaged youth movement. However, the transition from protest movements to sustained political influence remains uncertain. **Implication** : The findings highlight the need for strategic interventions to strengthen civil society's role in democratic governance, emphasizing the importance of political engagement, institutional reforms, and international support in ensuring long-term political accountability. **Limitation** : The study is limited by its reliance on qualitative data from a specific subset of civil society actors, which may not fully capture the broader political dynamics and diverse perspectives within Iraq. **Future Research** : Further studies should explore longitudinal impacts of civil society engagement, the effectiveness of policy reforms post-revolution, and the role of international actors in supporting Iraq's democratic transition.

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