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# *Intellectual Discourse*

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## Transliteration Table: Consonants

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
ب	b		ط	ṭ
ت	t		ظ	ẓ
ث	th		ع	‘
ج	j		غ	gh
ح	ḥ		ف	f
خ	kh		ق	q
د	d		ك	k
ذ	dh		ل	l
ر	r		م	m
ز	z		ن	n
س	s		ه	h
ش	sh		و	w
ص	ṣ		ء	’
ض	ḍ		ي	y

## Transliteration Table: Vowels and Diphthongs

Arabic	Roman		Arabic	Roman
اَ	a		اَ، اِيَّ	an
اُ	u		اُو	un
اِ	i		اِي	in
اَ، اِ، اِيَّ	ā		اَو	aw
اُو	ū		اَي	ay
اِي	ī		اُو	uww, ū (in final position)
			اَي	iyy, ī (in final position)

*Source: ROTAS Transliteration Kit: <http://rotas.iium.edu.my>*





# The Influence of Civil Society Organisations on Political Decision-Making in Iraqi Kurdistan

Jamal Mohammed Ameen Hussein\*  
Abdulwahed Jalal Nori\*\*

**Abstract:** The significance of civil society in any given society cannot be overstated, as it safeguards individuals' rights in various spheres of life, including the political realm. Iraqi Kurdistan's civil society encompasses various groups that influence the legislative, executive, judiciary, and political parties. The influence and consequences of civil societies vary depending on the geographical and organisational context. However, while civil society in Iraqi Kurdistan saw significant growth after 2003 and has a strong influence on political decisions, its involvement in political decision-making needs to be more to reach the required threshold. The present research employs historical and descriptive methodologies to showcase the influence of civil society organisations (CSOs) on political determinations in Iraqi Kurdistan (IK). This article examines the efficacy of CSOs in influencing political decision-making. It also identifies the obstacles that impede civil society's participation in this process by evaluating their effects on political parties and the government.

**Keywords:** Civil society, political decision-making, Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurdistan Regional Government, political culture.

**Abstrak:** Kepentingan masyarakat sivil dalam mana-mana masyarakat tidak boleh dipertikaikan, kerana ia melindungi hak individu dalam pelbagai bidang kehidupan, termasuklah dunia politik. Masyarakat sivil Wilayah Kurdistan

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Iraq (IK) merangkumi pelbagai kumpulan yang mempengaruhi perundangan, eksekutif, kehakiman dan parti politik. Pengaruh dan kesan pembentukan masyarakat sivil berbeza dan bergantung pada konteks geografi dan organisasi. Walaupun masyarakat sivil di Wilayah Kurdistan Iraq menyaksikan pertumbuhan yang ketara selepas 2003 dan mempunyai pengaruh yang kuat dalam membuat keputusan politik, pembabitannya harus lebih besar untuk mencapai tahap yang diperlukan. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan metodologi sejarah dan deskriptif untuk mempamerkan pengaruh organisasi masyarakat sivil (CSO) terhadap penentuan arah politik di Wilayah Kurdistan Iraq. Artikel ini mengkaji keberkesanan CSO dalam mempengaruhi pembuatan keputusan politik. Ia juga bagi mengenal pasti halangan yang menghalang penyertaan masyarakat sivil dalam proses ini dengan menilai kesannya terhadap parti politik dan kerajaan.

**Kata kunci:** masyarakat sivil, membuat keputusan dalam politik, Wilayah Iraq Kurdistan, Kerajaan Wilayah Kurdistan, budaya politik.

## Introduction

The US's overthrow of the Ba'ath regime in 2003 led to a freer and favourable environment for CSOs. This change in the Iraqi regime led to international organisations providing financial assistance to CSOs in Iraqi Kurdistan (IK). This helped them become independent and no longer rely on political parties. International organisations also opened courses for CSOs, such as commitment to democracy, election monitoring, and freedom of expression. This liberated most CSOs from political party dominance in IK.

It enabled CSOs of Kurdistan to exert a considerable influence on diverse facets of Kurdish society, encompassing the legislative, executive, and judicial branches and political organisations. In recent decades, Iraqi Kurdistan has experienced substantial political, economic, and social transformations, although they have faced various obstacles, including political party disputes and economic and social concerns. These challenges have presented impediments for CSOs to effectively engage in and exert influence over political determinations within the region of IK. As societal consciousness regarding individual rights and civic duties increased, and democratic institutions becoming more robust, CSOs have assumed a significant role in influencing political determinations. The rise in the number of charitable societies, development-oriented CSOs, and human rights organisations serves

as a testament to the expanding role of CSOs within the civil society framework. A growing call for reform is present along with this trend, which impacts political decision-making.

The objective of this study is to explain the influence of CSOs on political decision-making in the region of IK. This study also aims to evaluate the potency of civil society in driving political reform. It is based on elite interviews and perception studies while considering the degree of freedom these organisations possess. The principal inquiry driving this investigation is: “What is the influence of civil society on political decision-making in IK?” The primary inquiry leads to various subordinate inquiries, including the emergence of civil society in IK, the essential regulations governing CSOs, and the underlying reasons for their substantial involvement in political decision-making.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative research method was implemented to investigate this research, incorporating primary and secondary data sources. Primary data was acquired through the use of interviews and document collection. During the period from 2021 to 2022, the researchers conducted a series of interviews with a cohort of twenty respondents. The sample included executives of CSOs with expertise in various domains, such as electoral observation, human rights advocacy, youth mobilisation, women’s affairs, and education. Interviews were also conducted with professionals from academia, politics, and law. The process of selecting CSOs for the interviews was predicated on their proven level of activity and involvement. The data collection process included audio-visual techniques to guarantee accuracy in data recording.

Structured and semi-structured interview questions were employed to gather pertinent information efficiently. Interviews were conducted in the Kurdish language and were subsequently translated and transcribed into English. Interviews are essential for this qualitative research since they assist the study in describing, better understanding, and exploring the research subjects’ viewpoints, attitudes, perceptions, and experiences regarding the impact of political decision-making in IK. After this, all interview data were analysed in English. In transcription and translation, the study achieved data immersion, which assists in identifying themes during subsequent analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Supplementary sources, including but not limited to secondary data such as books, articles, and online newspapers from domestic and international sources, were utilised to augment the research outcomes in conjunction with primary data. The sources have furnished significant perspectives regarding the functions and undertakings of CSOs in the region of IK. These inputs have substantiated the examination of the influence of CSOs on political determinations. The present study endeavours to elucidate the efficacy of CSOs in the political decision-making process in Iraqi Kurdistan through an all-encompassing research methodology that involves collecting primary and secondary data. Comprehending the function of CSOs and the obstacles they encounter is imperative in augmenting the involvement of civil society in moulding the political milieu and advancing substantial reforms.

### **Literature Review**

The existing literature on the influence of CSOs in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been criticised for its lack of rigorous academic inquiry, as noted by Sofi (2009), NCCI (2011), Poutros and Zubaida (2013), and Medeni (2017). Several scholars have analysed the progression of CSOs in Iraq throughout history and the government's efforts to curtail their operations. The studies have recognised the reliance of CSOs on political parties and the decreased significance of CSOs due to the 2011 legislation. Political parties have used their sway over these entities to acquire monetary advantages and privileges from prominent individuals.

Nonetheless, extant research has yet to investigate the influence of CSOs on political determinations comprehensively. Hakeem (2017) has provided insight into the historical and developmental aspects of CSOs operating under the authority of the KRG. The author has highlighted the democratic milieu established for these organisations' functioning and operations since the KRG's inception. Furthermore, Hakeem has analysed the internal and external impediments that impede the operations of CSOs. Hassan Kawa's (2015) work focuses on the efforts of ruling parties to establish family rule and limit democratic processes. Kawa emphasises the importance of CSOs in advocating for an end to corruption through public demonstrations and exerting pressure on those in power. Kawa has emphasised the influence exerted by CSOs and opposition political parties on the IK parliament, leading to the passage

of significant legislative amendments to the Election Commission Law and the reduction of political parties' budgets.

Hoshyar Malo's scholarly investigation delves into the inadequacies of antecedent inquiries by focusing on the activation of civil society institutions in IK via a series of legislative measures and resolutions promulgated by the KRG and Parliament. Malo (2022) observes that the enactment of Law No. 1 in 2011 was a response to the influence and recommendations of CSOs. This legislation established the Office of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) within the KRG, which includes CSOs, and assumed responsibility for registering all CSOs without requiring a licence from the Ministry of Interior.

Drawing from the extant literature, the subsequent observations can be discerned: Primarily, the need for more literature and research that delves into the institutions of civil society and their influence on the political decision-making process. The extant literature predominantly comprises prospective analyses, envisioning potential trajectories for civil society organisations and political decision-making in IK. Furthermore, the studies have established conceptual frameworks and have acquainted themselves with the topic, facilitating an examination of the substance of the exemplar studies utilised in the current investigation. The main emphasis of these studies has been to provide a comprehensive portrayal of the topic at hand. The writings above and studies hold significant value in comprehending civil society, its inception, the pivotal regulations governing its functions, and the phases of the reformation procedure in IK.

### **Historical Background**

The UK and France divided the Kurdish region into four parts as per the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) (Gunter, 2011). As a result, Britain and France forcibly annexed the vilayet of Mosul, which is now Iraqi Kurdistan, to Iraq (Farhad, 2021). This situation sparked a liberation movement to realise the Kurdish nation's rights.

The political struggle had an impact on CSOs, which are an essential part of Kurdish society, and they acquired political traits in addition to their civil role. During the monarchy, most CSOs in Iraq primarily served charitable purposes and did not have a political impact. The

royal regime banned CSO activities if they were politically influential (NCCI, 2011).

In this context, the Kurdistan Scientific Society was established in 1922 as a CSO focused on promoting education and awareness. The leadership and members of this group supported the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan (Tahiri, 2007). Additionally, in 1937, a group of patriotic Kurdish youths formed the Brotherhood Association (Brotherhood Movement) in Sulaymaniyah under the leadership of Sheikh Latif, the son of Sheikh Mahmoud Al-Barzinji. They aimed to achieve independence for Kurdistan (Gardawani, 1999). However, due to the dominance of Arab nationalist ideologies among Iraqi students and youth organisations, Kurdish students and youth were marginalised in their activities. As a response, the Kurdistan Students Union and the Kurdistan Youth Union were established on February 18, 1953, to defend the rights of Kurdish students and youths and contribute to the development of the Kurdish liberation movement (Farhad, 2021).

Following the revolution on 14 July 1958, teachers, workers, students, and women actively participated in the formation of political parties and associations. However, Jabbar (2006) argues that the 1958 Revolution marked the beginning of the decline of civil society. During the 1960s, opposition political forces in Iraq and Kurdistan, as well as democratic organisations in Iraq, engaged in clandestine struggles. The burden of fighting against the dictators and occupiers of Kurdistan fell primarily on the Kurdish revolutionaries, leading to a decline in the activities of democratic organisations across Iraq. Furthermore, the Iraqi government should have paid more attention to Iraqi Kurdistan. Iraqi President General Qassim rejected the peace process with the KDP, denying the Kurdish nation their rights according to the 1958 Iraqi Provisional Constitution (Rubin, 2007). These circumstances ultimately led to the September Revolution of 1961, against General Qassim's government, further intensifying the Arab and Kurdish nationalist movements.

Consequently, CSOs faced increased risks (Muhammad, 2007). Under the Ba'ath regime from 1963 to 1991, the activities of CSOs in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan were prohibited unless they were officially affiliated with the Ba'ath Party and implemented the regime's agenda (Rusty, 2010). Viewing CSOs as a threat to their power, the Ba'ath Party

witnessed numerous demonstrations against its rule by CSOs during from 1975–1991. These protests resulted in the killing or imprisonment of hundreds of civil activists by the Ba’athist regime. For instance, Snawbar, a teacher, was martyred during the demonstrations in Qaladze on April 4, 1983 (Noradini, 2022). However, CSOs were allowed more freedom of activity whenever revolutionary leadership was in place (Azad, 2022). After the uprising in 1991, the door opened for CSOs to engage in freedom-working efforts, but until 2003, their freedom was limited (Najih, 2021). Nevertheless, after the fall of the Ba’ath regime, CSOs had more significant opportunities to operate freely and influence political decisions (Dana, 2021).

### **Overview of Iraqi Kurdistan**

The majority of people in IK, a region in northern and eastern Iraq, are Kurds, with notable Turkmen and Christian minorities (Gunter, 2011). The Hashemite monarchy, established in the British Protectorate of Iraq in the 1920s was the first modern Iraqi state and saw the birth of Kurdish parties, associations, and organisations (McDowall, 1996, p. 166).

From the beginning of the Republic in 1958 to 1990–1991, Kurdish nations in Iraq were subjected to harassment, and the government forbade Kurdish political parties. Iraqi Kurds, demanding their national rights, have waged several uprisings and revolutions against previous regimes and the Ba’ath regime, including the September Revolution in 1961 and the New Revolution in 1975 (Farhad, 2021). The Ba’athist regime systematically attempted to destroy Iraqi Kurds, committing genocide and chemical attacks (Galbraith 2005). Iraqi Kurds were victims of crimes against humanity and genocide under Saddam Hussein’s regime. According to Leezenberg (2017), the Iraqi dictatorship could only retain control of IK through intimidation and large-scale brutality, which reached genocide levels during the 1988 Anfal Campaign. As Davis (2005) argued, for more than four decades, Iraqis had no freedom to establish CSOs independent of the state and the Ba’athist regime in Iraq. The September Revolution in 1961 and the new revolution on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1976, brought together all such organisations in the national struggle for political rights.

After the issuance of UN Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 688 in 1991, the Ba’ath regime withdrew its administration from IK, imposing an economic embargo and creating an administrative vacuum.

(Gunter, 1995). The US protection of the Kurdistan Region from the Iraqi regime and military enabled de facto independent governance, and the democratic electoral process took place in IK under the auspices of the UN on May 19, 1992, to fill the administrative vacuum. IK, under the Kurdistan Regional Government, has also made progress in social and economic rehabilitation following the first free elections held in 1992, which led to the establishment of a parliament and a Kurdistan regional government.

Since then, new realities and problems have emerged in terms of reconstructing the political system, establishing new power-sharing agreements development in Iraqi Kurdistan and freedom of civil society activities. The 2003 fall of the Iraqi government, led to international organisations like USAID (US Agency for International Development), NPA (Norwegian People's Aid), Iraqi Crisis Response and Resilience Programme (ICRRP under United Nations Development Programme or UNDP), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) providing financial assistance to CSOs in IK. This led to many organisations, such as Peace and Freedom Organisation (PFO), becoming independent and no longer relying on political parties (Hoger, 2022). Following the establishment of new laws governing the operation of CSOs in 2011, the CSOs in IK have the opportunity to impact political decision-making in Iraqi Kurdistan to change the process toward better governance, respect for human rights, the rule of law, and overall, the consolidation of a democratic society.

### **The Concept of Civil Society**

The precise definition of civil society is a subject of debate among scholars. In broad terms, civil society refers to a collection of voluntary and non-profit organisations that function in the public interest, serving as intermediaries between the government and the populace. These organisations communicate the populace's requests to the governing body through proposals and applying influence to preserve democracy, human rights, social equity, political transformation, and the liberty of speech in all domains of existence. The significance of civil society in a given society is paramount, as it endeavours to tackle a range of issues at the community level by utilising its inherent strengths, institutional framework, and cultural conventions. Even with its potential benefits, implementing civil society institutions at the state level poses specific



difficulties owing to the heterogeneous character, constraints, and extent of such entities across various domains. Civil societies' efficacy relies on factors such as their allocation of human and financial resources, geographical placement, and specialised domains.

### **Political Decision-Making Actors in Iraqi Kurdistan**

The notion of political decision-making in administrative behaviour was first introduced by Simon (2013). Russo (2014: 1) subsequently defined this concept as a process involving various interactive steps, including goal determination, information collection and processing, solution design, effectiveness evaluation, answer selection, decision implementation, and long-term feedback (Laoyan, 2021). According to Livingstone and Lunt's theory from 1994, the incorporation of public participation acts as a mechanism for guiding policies in the public interest. Additional means of public and civil society engagement and responsibility in the decision-making process encompass scrutinising alternative undertakings and resisting the trend towards participatory democracy. As regards Iraqi Kurdistan, both official and unofficial institutions make political decisions. The official institutions encompass the legislature authority, executive institution, and judiciary authority, while the unofficial institutions consist of political parties.

### **Official Policymakers**

Official policymakers have legal power to participate in the formulation of public policy, including the legislators' authority, executive institution, and judiciary authority.

#### *Legislative Authority*

To establish proficient legislative leadership in Iraqi Kurdistan, the authority of the parliament's leader must be unambiguously delineated, particularly in light of the involvement of all political factions in parliamentary proceedings (Omotoso, 2010). In the executive-centred phase of the legislative process, policy proposals are initiated by the President, high-ranking officials, and advisors. According to Sarwar (2022), the parliament possesses the legal authority to develop policies, necessitating the head of parliament to introduce and endorse multiple policy proposals.

The parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan is comprised of a total of 111 seats, of which eleven are designated explicitly for the representation of religious and ethnic minority groups such as Christians, Yazidis, and Turkmen. The first session of the parliament was held on June 4, 1992, and it is presently in its fifth term, as Noradini (2022) reported. Throughout its tenure, the parliament has observed noteworthy political events. Several significant developments have occurred, including establishing the Regional Council of Ministers and a separate ministry law that excludes regional ministries. Additionally, a resolution was issued on October 4, 1992, in support of establishing a federal union to establish legal relations with the central government. The Judicial Power Act was adopted in 2016, and a law authorising the deployment of Peshmerga forces to protect the city of Kobane in West Kurdistan from the occupation of the ISIS terrorist organisation was passed in 2015. As of 2022, the Kurdistan Parliament has legislated 405 laws since its inception (Sirwan, 2021).

#### *The Executive Institution*

A diverse group of well-known people and organisations responsible for creating policies make up Iraqi Kurdistan's executive power. These individuals comprise a group of high-ranking officials who hold critical positions within the government of Iraqi Kurdistan. This group includes the President of Kurdistan Region, Nechirvan Barzani, the Vice Prime Ministers of Kurdistan Region, the Prime Minister, Masrour Barzani, the Vice Premier, ministers, advisers, top political aides, and administrators who are responsible for overseeing critical departments within the region. Since the inception of the Kurdistan Region in 1992, several legislative measures have been implemented to distinguish between entities such as organisations, trade unions, and groups, all of which are subject to legal regulation (Hoshyar, 2022). The 9th Cabinet of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), established in 2018, adopted a unique approach in its operations, prioritising the objectives and undertakings of various entities in relation to governance. As a result, according to Barzan (2022), the KRG decided to establish fifteen boards, of which three are currently in use.

#### *Judicial Authority*

The judiciary is responsible for assessing, overseeing, and interpreting public policies and their execution in the interest of the public and the

Constitution. However, it is essential to note that this function may differ across diverse constitutional frameworks (Anderson, 2014). IK's judicial system comprises of the Ministry of Justice and its affiliated agencies, which play a role in the functioning of the Supreme Court and the Court of Personal and Criminal Procedure. The Kurdistan Region Shura Council (KRSC) is also involved in the judiciary. By the legislation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Regional Shura Council Law enacted in 2008, the KRSC is a duly constituted legal and judicial entity vested with the power to oversee the judiciary and the board of directors of the region. The primary responsibilities of this entity include the composition and thorough examination of legislative proposals. The Shura Council is an administrative body that is institutionally integrated into the Ministry of Justice. Its operations comply with the 2007 Law of the Ministry of Justice. Law No. 14 of 2008, also referred to as the KRSC Law governs the establishment and authorisation of these councils. According to Karwan's (2016) analysis, the KRSC has implemented various legal and administrative frameworks that efficiently facilitate the execution of the Council's mandates and instructions. As per Rudaw's report in 2015, it can be inferred that the KRSC has two fundamental roles: a judicial function and a legislative function. Furthermore, it has a significant impact on shaping political determinations in the region of IK.

### **Unofficial Policymakers**

According to Knutson (2023), unofficial policymakers are actors who have an interest in policy outcomes and work hard to influence policy outcomes but lack the legal standing to make a policy decision. Unofficial actors are always going to be unofficial because they do not have the legal authority to make policy decisions. In this section, we aim to focus on political parties in IK and examine the influence of CSOs on these parties through research and analysis.

#### *Political Parties*

Political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan function within a structured legal framework. The legislative body of Iraqi Kurdistan enacted legislation in 1993, 1997, and 2002 mandating political parties to adhere to the electoral procedures and pertinent regulations (Gunter, 1993). The Iraqi Constitution of 2005, in Article 39, guarantees the freedom to establish associations and political parties subject to legal regulation. According to Gunter (1993), the Legislative Council facilitates establishing political

parties while affording citizens and eligible residents the opportunity to engage in and affiliate with any such party.

The political parties operating in Iraqi Kurdistan are comprised of individuals who share similar ideologies and objectives and are dedicated to gaining influence over the governmental machinery. Upon attaining power, a political party's government officials formulate policies congruent with the party's programme and manifesto, as per the report by Freedom House (2021). The prevalence of the Barzani family in Erbil via the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) and the Talabani family in Sulaymaniyah through the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) has constituted a distinctive characteristic of Kurdish political affairs, as Freedom House (2021) reported. The cooperation between the two parties is deemed crucial for the region's development, despite the presence of historical, ideological, and sociological divisions between them. Notwithstanding their divergent perspectives, the Kurdish political leaders are committed to advancing the Kurdish nationalist agenda. Efforts to simplify the intricate nature of Iraqi Kurdish politics by categorising their political ideologies into tribal or socialist labels are deemed oversimplified (Stansfield, 2003; Morris, 1999).

Political parties do not influence the decision-making process in Iraqi Kurdistan; rather, a small number of individuals do. While political parties may participate in debates and engage in questioning, the ultimate authority to make decisions rests with a select few individuals (Hoger, 2022).

### *The Influence of CSOs on the Legislative Authority*

Civil society organisations (CSOs) are involved in political decision-making through their active participation in elections, process monitoring, and public participation advocacy. The extent to which they influence political decision-making depends on the organisation and contextual factors, as Sangar (2022) notes. According to Hoger (2022), CSOs can indirectly influence political decision-makers through their involvement in public life and participation in electoral processes. This capacity is crucial in enabling the empowerment of all societal segments. The ongoing and significant measure of the development of IK pertains to the influence of CSOs in political decision-making. Their involvement can be observed in the legislative, executive, and judicial

branches of government, as expounded upon in subsequent sections (Hoger, 2022).

Various CSOs operating within the region have presented several significant legislative proposals to the Parliamentary Committee on CSOs. The items comprise proposed legislation about the issue of violence against women and a legislative proposal to curtail the budget of political parties and facilitate the election of House Representatives. Many bills submitted by CSOs avoided party scrutiny (and political vetoes), especially those submitted to the Kurdistan Parliament by several CSOs on demonstrations and the Draft Law on the Right to Information submitted by the Journalists' Union and the Metro Centre (Gharib, 2022).

For example, the Kurdistan Region-Iraq Demonstration Law and the Kurdistan Region-Iraq Right to Information Act (Law No. 11 of 2013) have been achieved as a result of the endeavours of CSOs. Moreover, the Kurdistan Parliament enacted Law No. 2 of 2009 to institute a quota system for women's representation in parliamentary and governmental roles. The Parliament has shown favourable reception towards a significant bill proposed by women's organisations concerning implementing the Personal Status Law (Dlsoz, 2022).

The enactment of Law No. 1 of 2011, about establishing and registering non-governmental organisation (NGO) offices, presented a notably arduous undertaking. The issuance of work permits to establish organisations is exclusively under the purview of the Ministry of Interior, which also undertakes the more scrutinising tasks of the judiciary (Ako, 2022).

The Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament has enacted several laudable legislations while also subjecting various ministers in the ninth cabinet of the KRG to scrutiny. The occurrence did not subvert the essential supremacy of the KDP and PUK factions; however, it exhibited the efficacy of civil noncompliance in contesting their monopolisation of authority. Consequently, an allocation of 1% of the budget has been made to independent CSOs, reducing the financial burden on political parties. Before this allocation, political parties were receiving the equivalent of USD 54,493 per seat per month, as Hassan (2015) reported.

CSOs have exerted a significant influence on the political decision-making process in Iraqi Kurdistan. The Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament passed law No. 1 of 2011 in response to the requests of civil society organisations such as Public Aid Organisation (PAO) and Kurdish Human Rights Watch (KHRW). These entities have significantly promoted dialogues among different groups, as evidenced by their participation in congressional hearings. Moreover, they have provided insightful viewpoints on crucial issues, such as the transition from a closed to an open electoral register, reducing the minimum age requirement for parliamentary members, and establishing the Women's High Council.

### *The Influence of CSOs on the Executive Institution*

At the request of women's organisations, the KRG has established the Women's High Council and Development, which is affiliated with the Council of Ministers. It seeks to realise women's rights in the political, economic, and social spheres. Also, the number of women in the Kurdistan Parliament and local councils increased from 25% to 30% (Bahar, 2022). The number of members of the Kurdistan Parliament is 111, with 34 women; and this played a role in empowering women and giving them more opportunities to participate in the political process and take ranks in Kurdish parties (Hoshyar, 2022). CSOs such as KHRW, PAO, Dabin Organisation and Metro Centre have impacted the KRG, and, on their proposal, several offices and bodies have been established by the KRG, such as the Human Rights Commission and the Intelligence Commission (Dilsoz, 2022).

At the request of the teachers' unions, the Ministry of Education changed the primary, secondary and high school curricula to suit the education systems of developed countries. In addition, communication between CSOs and the KRG has led to disability benefits and social welfare payments for disadvantaged groups, and the issuance of a law against domestic violence. Several years ago, local government and political parties ignored the role of women and youth, but the growth of CSOs led to political parties and KRG offices opening the doors for young people and women to participate in political processes. Regarding this point, women and young people in political parties have played roles in the democratisation process. Before 2011, the Ministry of Interior and the security agencies allowed CSOs' work, but now such activities

are civil and not security-related (Gulpy, 2021). In elections in KRG, the age for candidates has been reduced from 30 to 25, enabling young people to run for parliament and local councils, which is an important achievement for CSOs. Bahar (2022) argues that actively developing the democratic process in Kurdistan played a role in establishing several bodies, including the Integrity Commission and the Human Rights Commission.

In addition, CSOs have an active role in improving the performance of the KRG. It is known that members of CSOs such as PAO, Civil Development Organisation (CDO), Dabran institution, Rwanga institution, and Kurdistan child protection organisations have many workers in the administrative and service fields in the administrative units and bodies, which affects the development work of members of CSOs in the development of administrative and service institutions and government bodies (Hoshyar, 2022). CSOs' belief in collective action makes them more connected to the principles of democracy in their administrative positions and away from the dictatorial mentality in governmental positions (Saman, 2022). Through suggestions, criticism, and volunteer work, they also learn that they are more involved in developing and promoting their work in government business units. Political decisions are made by official and unofficial institutions that shape the political decision-making process (Anderson, 2014).

In a constructivist dialectical tension, civil society does not oppose the state; rather, it recognises the state's formal and essential validity. Furthermore, civil society is not merely a buffer zone between perceptions and markets, but an ever-evolving process as well as a tool for achieving democratic dynamics (Mexhuani & Rahmani, 2017). Raouf (2010, p. 38) argued that CSOs in IK worked to encourage the leaders in IK to produce a civil society for democratic transition. In this regard, it should be noted that community organisations such as the Kurdish Institute for Elections, PAO, PFO, Dabran Institution, Pay Centre for Monitoring of Parliament, Metro Centre, and RWANGA foundation have played an important role by raising awareness of people's rights and duties, encouraging people to participate in elections, observing elections, spreading a culture of mutual acceptance, carrying out collective projects, and working to change the Kurdish community into a democratic community.

Many CSOs have had direct and tangible impacts on the KRG, such as securing their cooperation and facilitation of numerous projects by the PFO, CDO, and PAO. Specific examples include opening computer and English courses for young men and women and seeking to provide young people with self-reliance to secure their lives. Also, other CSOs, such as the Rwanga foundation, financially support young men and women to initiate small projects for themselves. CSOs, such as the Kurdistan Economic Development Organisation (KEDO), Stop Organisation, and Pay Centre, influence the government by lobbying and suggesting ways to improve the economic situation and reduce administrative and financial corruption. Other groups and CSO - such as contract teachers, disgruntled teachers, disabled people, and Dabin organisations for Democracy and Human Rights Development, influence the government through protests and demonstrations to demand rights. The impact of CSOs on the KRG varies and depends on the different activities and capabilities of CSOs, their relationships with political parties, and their working geographical contexts.

#### *CSO's Influence on the Judicial Authority*

Although the KRG formally separates the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, specific legislation had to be passed to make the judiciary an independent power under Law No. 23, which was passed in 2007. It subsequently enacted Law No. 7 of 2009 to facilitate the appointment of qualified judges and legal staff. In this regard, several independent CSOs such as KEDO and Halwest have highlighted the politicisation of the courts in IK, and the political affiliation of judges and other officials means that their decisions cannot be considered objective and independent (Najih, 2022). Sometimes political parties interfere directly in the affairs of the courts, and the executive branch is higher than the judiciary, with the Prime Minister appointing judges.

Consequently, the head of the judiciary is effectively under the power of the Prime Minister (Hussam, 2022). Nevertheless, the level of political power over the judiciary has relatively declined since the Ba'ath regime broke down in 2003. After that, the KRG Judiciary Institute was established at the request of CSOs in the capital, Erbil. On the other hand, Sirwan (2021), believes that the CSOs have had a positive influence on the judiciary's independence within the limited



extent possible in this context, and the judiciary is a de jure independent authority.

### *CSOs' Influence on Political Parties*

According to Hassan (2015), the dissolution of the strategic agreement between PUK and PDK in 2014, which had previously apportioned governmental and administrative positions between the two parties, resulted from the pressure exerted by CSO. Furthermore, CSOs actively monitoring elections impacted election results, as evidenced by their ability to diminish the number of votes garnered by the Change or Gorran Movement during the 2021 Iraqi election in Sulaymaniyah.

CSOs such as CDO, Dabin Organisation, and the Metro Centre operating in Sulaymaniyah significantly impact political decision-making, particularly at the grassroots level. They exert internal pressure on political processes within the Kurdistan region. Conversely, it can be observed that international CSOs such as PAO, PFO, and Rwanga Institute situated in Erbil exert a hierarchical impact on the political landscape, utilising backing from global stakeholders (Majeed, 2021). The ruling factions in Iraqi Kurdistan exhibit inherent opposition towards the independence of CSOs. It can be argued that the objectives of CSOs aimed at advancing democratic principles and fostering cultural refinement within the Kurdish community do not intrinsically clash with the concerns of other stakeholders (Najih, 2021). CSOs have enhanced operational efficiency, reducing bureaucratic and corrupt practices. This has led to a favourable outcome for the operational units. Although the dominance of the political parties may hinder the KRG's democratic space's advancement, CSOs have successfully used this space to aid in the creation of a democratic environment.

According to Kamrava's (1998) argument, civil society is a product of a political culture that arises from the democratic organisation of individuals and plays a crucial function in maintaining democracy. CSOs play an active role in the national and private spheres concerning freedom of expression and human rights. They collaborate with political entities to advocate for the protection of these fundamental rights. CSOs share a collective policy to safeguard human rights and uphold freedom of expression. This function enhances community consciousness and influences the establishment of institutions within the KRG.

## **The Influence of CSOs in Decision-Making**

Civil society is an integral part of Iraqi Kurdish society, with the role of ensuring democracy, human rights, and social justice in all areas of life. The effectiveness of CSOs varies in Iraqi Kurdistan according to their human and financial capacity, geographical boundaries, and specialisation. IK has not been isolated from the debate on CSOs and human rights, where the political situation has significantly promoted their development. The issue of the influence of CSOs on political decision-making in the IK is a living one, as is the issue of political reform in the IK. According to Kaase and Marsh's (1979) definition, political participation refers to the deliberate actions undertaken by individuals to exert influence on political decisions across various tiers of the political structure. Nonviolent political engagement and participation are essential for advancing socioeconomic and civil society in IK as an independent nation or within Iraq.

Since 2003, international organisations like USAID, NPA, and JCC have opened courses for civil society organisations, including promoting democracy, freedom of work, teamwork, election participation, election monitoring, and support for freedom of expression and social justice. This has significantly impacted the actions of various of these organisations and liberated several CSOs from the control of political parties in IK. The independence of CSOs has grown, but this has been met with commensurately strong challenges to their emerging activities, including political challenges and direct government influence, media impacts, legal restrictions, economic and financial problems, cultural barriers, religious challenges, and corruption issues (Sangar, 2022). All these challenges hurt the scope of CSOs and reduce their activities on the ground. However, there are about 5,700 registered CSOs in 2021 in the KRG; the majority of them are also active and have an influential role in Iraqi Kurdish society.

CSOs operating within indigenous knowledge have demonstrated efficacy in galvanising political entities to safeguard shared interests, as evidenced by their efforts during the conflict with ISIS in 2014. CSOs demonstrated constructive involvement in devising a comprehensive strategy for collaboration with other regions of Kurdistan, specifically in West Kurdistan; they effectively rallied resources to safeguard the city of Kobani, as per Noradini's (2022) findings. Furthermore, CSOs

engage in political activities by organising quadrennial conferences to revise their objectives and select new boards of directors. This practice has played a significant role in fostering the establishment and growth of democratic procedures within political party entities. Additionally, they have been actively involved in formulating a unified policy to safeguard human rights and promote freedom of speech. CSOs function at the grassroots level, aiming to create awareness and exert influence on establishing institutions. For instance, in 2015, Hoshyar (2022) reported that CSOs such as the KHRW played a pivotal role in establishing gender unit in the Ministry of Peshmerga.

CSOs have a significant role in imparting knowledge to individuals regarding their obligations. As an illustration, the KRG implemented prisoner training programmes and founded a Ministry of Human Rights in 2001 due to the impact of CSOs. It participates in the national political process and contributes to developing Iraqi Kurdistan (IK), albeit with varying degrees of engagement contingent on its expertise and capabilities. Specific organisations prioritise providing services and developing capacity for young individuals and women. In contrast, others monitor the government's administration, finance, law enforcement, and transparency agendas. CSOs, including STOP Organisation for Monitoring and Development, Halwest, the Metro Centre, and the American-Kurdish organisation, are crucial in promoting government accountability through monitoring endeavours (Sangar, 2022).

Women's organisations have significantly impacted public life and the promotion of women's rights within the United Kingdom. The Supreme Council of Kurdistan Women was established by various women's organisations with distinct ideological and religious orientations. Its primary objective is to promote women's rights and establish direct communication with the leader of the KRG.

Delsuz (2022) reports that notable advancements have been achieved in women's rights, with the presentation of legislative proposals to the Kurdistan Parliament aimed at bolstering the empowerment and safeguarding of women. Regarding political participation, it is currently observed that women occupy leadership roles in all political parties within the Kurdistan Region, with varying degrees of representation. Females are extensively involved in the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, along with political parties. Prominent instances

comprise Dr Rewas Faiq, the female parliament speaker hailing from the PUK, Dr Vala Fried, a minister associated with the KDP, and Kuestan Mohammed, Minister of Labour and Social Affair. Furthermore, women, being tasked as university presidents, judges, and general managers across the Kurdistan Region, are in prominent roles. The Kurdistan Parliament implemented legislation in 2009 that mandates a minimum of 30% female representation in electoral lists and political entities, promoting women's participation in political decision-making.

The CSOs are essential in developing democracy, freedom of expression, and oversight of the executive and legislative institutions. In this regard, Kurdistan Region (Law of Non-Governmental Organisations in Kurdistan Iraq) or KRG Law No. 1 of 2011 provided for the establishment and operation of CSOs, and since then, until 2021, several thousand CSOs have been established under this legal framework. According to a senior official involved in the management of CSOs in IK, they work in relief and assistance, developing democracy, legal awareness, justice, and human rights, empowering women and youth, and monitoring government and parliamentary actions and policies (Ako, 2022).

## **Conclusion**

CSOs play a crucial role in advancing the political and social interests of communities, which governments often neglect. In IK, the NGO Law implemented since 2011 has improved registration and funding processes for CSOs, establishing conditions for their financial sustainability. Since 2013, there has been a notable and positive shift in the work of CSOs, impacting political decision-making and political parties such as the PAO, PFO, CDO, Dabin, Rwanga foundation, Metro Centre, Pay Centre for Parliamentary Monitoring, KHRW, People's Development Organisation (PDO), and KEDO. The influence of CSOs on political decision-making varies according to the nature of their activities and capabilities, and their impacts vary from city to city. CSOs have been influential in preparing discussions between factions in conferences, having serious views on changing the closed electoral roll to the open list, reducing the age of parliament members, and influencing the formation of the Women's High Council. They have successfully lobbied the Parliament to pass several laws and amendments, such as the Right to Information Law No. 11 of 2013 and the Demonstration

Law No. 11 of 2010. However, increased competition among political parties in Iraqi Kurdistan can pose challenges for CSOs, particularly those affiliated with specific parties. Building robust CSOs remains crucial for strengthening the democratic process, as democracy is an inclusive process that allows individuals, political leaders, and civil society to intervene in various ways.

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(i) direct quotation, write as 30:36

(ii) indirect quotation, write as Qur'ān, 30:36

Reference:

*The glorious Qur'ān*. Translation and commentary by A. Yusuf Ali (1977). US: American Trust Publications.

## **Ḥadīth**

In-text:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, 88:204 (where 88 is the book number, 204 is the ḥadīth number)

(ii) Ibn Hanbal, vol. 1, p. 1

Reference:

(i) Al-Bukhārī, M. (1981). *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr.

(ii) Ibn Ḥanbal, A. (1982). *Musnad Aḥmad Ibn Ḥanbal*. Istanbul: Cagri Yayinlari.

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