Iranian Association of Geopolitics (I.A.G)

Article Type: Research paper

Explaining Political Instability in Iraq's Heterogeneous Society (2003-2022)

*Hossein Karimifard

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran

Article Info.

Abstract

Stability and dispute in heterogeneous societies with diverse racial, linguistic, religious, and ethnic factors are among the topics of interest to researchers and social scientists. They try to understand how rival social groups can communicate without conflict, chaos, or collapse while avoiding violence and oppression and achieving stability through "bargaining and compromise" (since otherwise, the institutionalization of sectarian identities may result in conflict over leadership and power among various groups). Like other Middle Eastern nations, Iraq has a mosaic-like social structure. This country's diverse population includes ethnic and religious diversity, resulting in ethnoreligious structural gaps. In addition to the three major groups-, namely Kurds, Sunnis, and Shiites- minority groups of Iraq include Mandaeans, Jews, Christians, and Yazidis. Iraq also hosts Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Turkmens as eth-

Mohammad Ghafarifard, Ph.D
Address: Department of Political Science, Ahvaz Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ahvaz, Iran
E-mail: hkarimifard@hau.com

nic groups. This country is divided into eighteen provinces; the three North-ern provinces are home to Sunni Kurds, the three northwestern and western provinces to Sunni Arabs, and the nine eastern and southern provinces to Shiite Arabs. Demographically, none of the ethnic and religious groups constitutes the absolute majority. The Kurdish provinces of Iraq share borders with Iranian, Turkish, and Syrian Kurds. Sunni parts of Iraq border Sunni countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, while Shia provinces of Iraq border Iran. This has led to interaction between these social groups and their neighboring countries.

During Saddam's rule over Iraq, there was no balance between the "society", "sovereignty", and "identity" of the government. People lacked a sense of be-longing to Iraq as a nation or as Iraqis, and the government did not properly represent all social groups. On the one hand, the fall of Saddam's dictatorial re-gime and the absence of civil and democratic culture, the rule of law, non-com-pliance with democratic rules, and disregard for the interests of society caused disputes and tension between various groups in Iraq, resulting in widespread turmoil and instability.

A study of political developments in Iraq from 2003 to 2022 shows that de-mocracy has survived in the country despite several civil wars. Although the elections is still accept by all different groups, competition between different sects and political groups has become instability and chaos.

Since there were various sects and political groups in Iraq after Saddam, the political elites agreed to establish an associative democracy model based on a power-sharing approach. Associationalism and power sharing are complemen-tary aspects of the same concept. Associationalism is a theory that examines power distribution in highly diversified societies. Power distribution necessi-tates that various parties have access to key positions of decision-making au-thority. According to social theory, political stability in ethnically, religiously, or linguistically heterogeneous societies is created by evaluating the power dis-tribution at the leadership level.This research used descriptive, interpretive, and explanatory methods; this research employs an inductively based analyti-cal-explanatory method. Consulting library and internet sources, as well as ar-ticles and geographical maps depicting the status of various religious or ethnic groups collected data. The paper illustrates the instability in Iraq by focusing on the conceptual model of associative democracy, the system of power sharing, and sectarianism.

According to the findings, after the occupation by America and the fall of Saddam Hussein, the country of Iraq has faced many difficulties and after years

of war, sanctions and occupation, it entered the difficult stage of transition to democracy. Current Iraq is a clear example of the identity crisis. Ethnic and religious pluralism has caused conflicting political and social differences. Shiites, Kurds and Sunnis are the main players in this country. Until 2033, different ethnicities and identities did not have the opportunity to express themselves. The American attack and the overthrow of the Baath regime brought Iraq into a new and unstable stage, and different groups and ethnicities pursued the goals and demands of their conflicting political and social identities. The downturn of the Iraqi central government has stimulated the cycle of violence and sectarianism in this country. Due to the central government's inadequacies, ethnic and religious groups, as well as politicians, have increased their expectations of gaining more power. On the other hand, sectarianism has led to government instability, increased foreign military intervention, and intensified power struggles. The securitization of sectarian identities has become a source of instability, conflict, and increased fragmentation within the borders. Although the new Iraqi constitution emphasizes a democratic or pluralistic political and legal policy, it will take a considerable amount of time for such a policy to be institutionalized or fully established.

There are different views about the causes of tension and violent conflicts in Iraq. Some researchers emphasize the external factor and emphasize the role of great powers and   some regional actors. For example, some consider the occupation of Iraq by the US and the presence of the country's military forces as an important cause of instability and internal conflicts in this country. In addition, others, the presence of Israel, Arabia, and Turkey have highlighted the ethnic and religious divides in Iraq and the transfer of insecurity to other countries.

In this research, emphasizing the type of political system and the population structure of Iraq deals with tensions in this country. Contemporary Iraqi history shows that Britain and France created it after the Ottoman collapse. Since then, there has been tension in this country with the integration of demographic groups with diversity and conflicts of identity in Iraq combined with the manipulation of geopolitics and artificial borders by Britain and France.

During Saddam's rule over Iraq, stability was established with the means of repression and fear. Post-Saddam Iraq has been described as an example of shared or consensus democracy. Amidst the deep social divisions that characterize pluralistic societies, this model is thought to be effective in supporting democracy in a country. Heterogeneous societies are divided into sub-communities by religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic, or racial factors, with nearly distinct political parties, influential groups, and media. Some re-

searchers think that the present-day issues in Iraq are a result of the country's political system or associative democracy: associative democracy has caused the deepening and escalation of groupings, government inefficiency, and, finally, instability and chaos in Iraq. Most notably, pervasive disaffection with Iraq's ethno-sectarian sociopolitical system has fueled an increasingly coordinated protest movement that has brought over a million people to Baghdad's and southern Iraqi cities' streets since 2019. Politicians are devastated by the Iraqi government's ineffective measures to transform a dictatorial system into a democratic system after 2003. From the perspective of Iraqi citizens, politicians use their positions only for personal gain and neglect their public responsibilities to improve the economy, security, services, and infrastructures. They claim that widespread corruption is strongly associated with ethnic sectarianism in the Iraqi parliament. According to them, although the distribution of political power based on ethnic and religious minorities may help maintain elite consensus because party-political networks are based on sects and tribal policies, they prioritize control over participation, loyalty over qualifications, and personal interests over public interests. These factors impede Iraq's development and stability. To restore stability in Iraq, political elites should use democratic bargaining methods to achieve peace and fulfill their requirements. Supporting policies that strengthen pervasive coalitions and veto power may help to stabilize the system and reduce cultural conflicts. To sum up, effective governance in Iraq necessitates prioritizing public interests over private interests.

Key words: Iraq, Consociational Democracy, political instability, sectarianism.