



Supporting
Arab Women
at the Table



Women's Political Participation in Iraq



IRAQ

- ① What kind of programmes and procedures are political parties actioning to empower women politically?
- ② How did political parties deal with equality issues when promulgating laws and making public policies that impact women's lives?
- ③ What is the relationship between women's rights activists and the ruling political parties?
- ④ What kind of challenges and forms of violence do women face in politics?



CONTEXT

Following the change of the political regime in Iraq in 2003, a 25% women's parliamentary quota was introduced into the new Iraqi Constitution of 2005, imposed due to pressures by the feminist movement at the time. However, according to the "Women in Politics: 2020" index (UN Women), Iraq ranked 70th globally for "women in Parliament" and 176th for "women in ministerial positions". This disparity in representation raises many questions as to political agendas for involving and empowering women in politics and to the political parties' commitments to equality.



GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

The study was conducted in five governorates in Iraq: Basra, Kirkuk, Najaf, Nineveh, and the districts of Karkh and Rusafa in the Baghdad governorate.



METHODOLOGY

The study relies on in-depth interviews with 22 male politicians, 24 female politicians and candidates, and 19 female women's rights activists. Some were held before the parliamentary elections of October 2021, some pre-results, and some post-results.

Takeaways on Women's Role in Peacebuilding in Iraq

- Politically active women face various forms of gender-based psychological violence such as mockery, contempt, trolling, threats of publishing "scandals" about their personal lives on social media, fabrication of pictures and videos, tearing up campaign images, and spreading sexual innuendos by posting photos on social media of someone kissing an image of a female candidate or politician. There is also attempted blackmail, using hacked personal accounts or threats of publishing compromising pictures, unless the targeted women withdraw from the political field or pay money.
- Parties did not provide means of empowerment and training for new female parliamentarians or enable them to make decisions. Additionally, they courted female candidates who were not well-versed in women's rights issues and had no previous experience or expertise in political action. Such candidates submitted to the party leader's authority, thus confirming the stereotype that women are incompetent and not suited to political work and that the legal quota is only the reason for their accession to Parliament, emphasizing that politics are "a man's world."

PRODUCED BY

Iraqi Al-Amal Association - a non-political, non-sectarian association of volunteers actively engaged in projects for the benefit and wellbeing of the Iraqi population regardless of race, gender and political or religious affiliation.

- New parties that were formed outside the traditionally dominant parties, especially after the October Revolution of 2019, tended to have greater political representation of women within party structures. For instance, in one of these new parties, women's participation reached 50% of the number of candidates in the elections.

Policy Recommendations



Financial Support

Provide financial support to non-governmental organizations that seek to promote equality and the inclusion and participation of women in political and public decision-making processes.



Creating platforms for discussion

Create public-dialogue platforms between civil society organizations and political parties to discuss the obstacles and challenges facing women and develop mechanisms for joint action to increase women's representation in the political field.



Safety and security

Strengthen and ensure a sustainable and safe civic space for women and women's rights organizations to meet and hold decision-makers accountable on issues of discrimination and violence against women.

"Most political parties do not care what women look like, but rather who their husband, father or brother is and what their position towards the party is. One female candidate running in the third district is the daughter of a party leader. She is young and was first asked to wear a niqab in the picture, then a mask, then she removed them both. When she wins, she might be able to take off her hijab..."

"It all depends on women's role in the committee, whether they are the chair, deputy chair, or rapporteur, etc., but also on the types of laws we want to enact. People's opinion of women differs from their opinion of men. The Iraqi reality remains a patriarchal one."