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EMPOWERING IRAQI YOUTH THROUGH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT: A STRATEGY FOR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL PROGRESS

Abstract: This policy brief delves into the challenges facing governance and public services in Iraq, particularly stemming from the ethnoveterinary power-sharing system established post-2003. It explores the dissatisfaction among demonstrators with the current political model and suggests strategies to strengthen governance and public services. The brief emphasizes the need for inclusive political engagement, building strong national institutions, and harnessing the demographic opportunity posed by Iraq's youthful population. Additionally, it proposes ways to empower young people politically, economically, and socially. Lastly, it suggests avenues for international support and dialogue to address Iraq's political challenges.

Keywords: Iraq, governance, ethnoveterinary power-sharing, public services, political engagement, national institutions, demographic opportunity, youth empowerment, international support, dialogue.

Introduction:

Massive riots broke out in Iraq in October 2019 and continued for several months before being put an end by the Covid-19 epidemic. The demands put out by demonstrators had two facets. The state's performance in guaranteeing social fairness, combating pervasive corruption, and providing public services was the first thing they revealed. However, they also showed a general dissatisfaction with the very essence of a political system that puts identity politics ahead of issue-based legislation and citizenship rights (O'Driscoll, D. et al., 2020).

The demonstrators made a clear connection between the corrupt governing model, which is defined by ethnic and religious power-sharing, and the depreciating infrastructure (Dodge, T. and Mansour, R., 2021). Even while the political system itself need serious reform, doing so soon seems doubtful. This policy brief instead examines what may be done to strengthen governance and public services (Bourhrous, A. et al., 2021)

Understanding political strategy and governing challenges:

Conflict and bloodshed have plagued Iraq for many years. Power-sharing was used in the political system that emerged after 2003 as a way to encourage interethnic and interreligious harmony. Over time, however, the political system has hampered the creation of reliable institutions or supervision and accountability systems, both of which are essential for power sharing and greater state performance (Dodge, T., 2020).

Following the first national elections and the approval of a new constitution in 2005 in the wake of the 2003 US-led invasion, Iraq's political system, known as muhasasa taifia (ethnoveterinary apportionment), was created. The informal agreement amongst the elite that split the nation along ethnoveterinary lines and utilized this as the foundation for allocating public resources and posts in



the state lies at the core of this political system (Dodge, T.,2020). The makeup and staffing of ministries and state institutions, as well as the administration and allocation of public funds, are all determined by this power-sharing framework, which also governs all other parts of the political process. Thus, rather than being driven by policy concerns, the process of forming a government is subject to a series of agreements over the allocation of ministries, their budgets, public appointments, etc. This procedure is rife with backroom negotiations, especially now that ethnic and religious divisions inside legislative blocs have begun to show up.

The political system also makes political action very challenging outside of ethnoveterinary communities and makes any assertion of people' rights reliant on the exploitation of ethnoveterinary identities (Yahya, M., 2017). Most public policies lack any desire to promote the general welfare of all citizens. Instead, serving the interests and needs of political elites and blocs is the primary motivation. Thus, the effective use of public resources suffers because of the prioritizing of the ethnoveterinary allocation of power, which has negative repercussions for the coherence and continuity of development initiatives and programmes. However, with rising intra-group rivalry and tensions, the gap between the ethnoveterinary elite and the populations they profess to represent has dramatically expanded.

These divisions and the widening chasm between certain militias and the government considering the recent elections have shown the challenges the political elite has in enlisting larger groups along ethnoveterinary lines outside of their core constituency (Dodge and Mansour, 2021).

The demonstrations in October 2019 highlighted the broad anger and dissatisfaction with the ruling class as well as a strong mistrust of the government and its institutions (O'Driscoll et al., 2020).

The poor participation and voter indifference during the October 2021 snap parliamentary election, which was called in accordance with a new electoral legislation sought by the protestors, showed that the population's problems are still very serious (Alkhudary, T., 2021).

The Political Section:

(Isolate, Engage, Build)

• Goal: Assist the Iraqi people in creating a democratic national compact that has wide popular support, cutting off the adversary from most of the population.

We are aiding the Iraqi government in achieving this goal:

1 – By combating false propaganda and proving to the Iraqi people that they have a stake in a viable, democratic Iraq, you may separate the enemy's hardened forces from those who can be persuaded to join a peaceful political process.

2- Expand the opportunities for peaceful engagement to involve individuals who are not already involved in politics and to welcome those who are prepared to abstain from violence.

3- Create strong, inclusive, and efficient national institutions that can safeguard the rights of all Iraqis and aid in the country's complete assimilation into the world.

By increasing opportunities for political participation at all levels of government, involving the region and all Iraqi communities to show that there is a place for all groups in the new Iraq, and developing national Iraqi institutions and international support to advance the rule of law and provide the Iraqi people with a strong framework for a better and more peaceful future, our efforts and those of the Iraqis are aimed at isolating hard-core rejectionists (Shafaq News, 2019).

It's working to isolate, engage, and build: Iraqis are on schedule to complete the next political milestone in their transitional political process, which is the December elections to choose a four-year administration under a democratic constitution, with full participation from all of Iraq's major ethnic and religious groupings (Hasan, Harith., 2018).

The judicial system in Iraq has developed into an autonomous arm that is better equipped to uphold the rule of law: (Sajad Jiyad, 2015)

1. Like most of nations with civil law, the judiciary in Iraq is run by an autonomous council of judges. The "secret courts" system put in place by Saddam Hussein has been dismantled.



2. Less than 10 cases and investigation hearings might have been prosecuted by the Central Criminal Court of Iraq monthly a year ago. The Court prosecuted more than 50 multi-defendant trials and had more than 100 investigation hearings in only the first two weeks of September 2005. With independent branches in several regions, the Court is currently extending its influence over all of Iraq.

3. Since Saddam Hussein's overthrow, hundreds of judges have received training. These judges are presently engaged in case resolution in accordance with Iraqi legislation. In 2003, the courts in Iraq handled over 4,000 criminal cases. They settled more than twice as many cases in 2004 (President George W. Bush, January 2005).

There are certain disparities in Iraqi youth's knowledge and awareness of the socioeconomic and political environment that surrounded them, which was marked by wars, crises, and conflicts, but overall, they share perspectives, behaviors, and goals with their Arab counterparts. "Even though today's youth have a lot of advantages, they also must deal with a challenging economic, social, and development context that is imposing constraints and interfering with national policies because not all nations had the tools necessary to manage their integration into the global economy and give their citizens access to social and economic opportunities at the time. Youth are vulnerable because they lack the information and abilities needed to adjust to a new economic and social environment (The International Organization for Migration, 2019).

It's crucial to accurately identify and analyse the difficulties that young people are facing to design appropriate responses. This is especially critical when dealing with difficult topics that affect young people. We propose a strategy that begins with the responsibility to offer youth opportunities, involvement in the community to exercise their rights and obligations, and to offer opportunities to enable young people to prepare themselves for the next stages of their lives by adopting the concept of empowerment and not support and care for – to achieve an ideal balance between what the state wants from youth and what they themselves want. The National Youth Survey (NYS2009) offered a sizable database that made it possible to extract significant quantitative indicators on the topics that young people find troubling, including their opinions and behaviour. Additionally, the data gathered from various statistical surveys and the efforts put forth by the MoYS provide a solid foundation for creating youth policies and strategies based on information gleaned from actual fieldwork in order to offer advice and share lessons learned about the basis for doing so (Dr. Walid Alkhatib, 2014).

Due to institutional and demographic factors, the NYS2009 investigation revealed a number of results about Iraqi youth that call for a thorough and well-articulated youth strategy in Iraq, including the following: (Marsin Alshamary, 2018)

Consideration of the Population:

The research emphasized the need of taking advantage of the forthcoming demographic opportunity. Iraq will see a demographic window within a decade, according to the analysis. This calls for prioritizing youth as human capital to equip them with the necessary knowledge and skills, increase their participation in the workforce, boost their productivity, and achieve a significant reduction in economic dependence. If not, this invaluable chance to improve the standard of living for the Iraqi people will be lost. The demographic window is a change in population brought on by low fertility rates; it is the transition from a society dominated by children, youth, and those who are dependent on them to one where the population of people who are working age and of productive age is larger than that of any other group.

The rate of the economically active population (15–64 years) is higher than the rate of the dependent population (under 15 years and over 64 years). According to estimates from 2006, there are 8 million young people in the age range of 15 to 29 years, or 28% of the overall population. Under conditions of high fertility, the number might rise. Even if the fertility rate declines, it may be assumed



that the youthful age structure will ensure that the absolute number of births stays high. The demographic window created by Iraq's high youth population presents a potential for economic growth, but only if effective social and economic policies are created and put into action.

Considerations for Institutions:

The formal and informal institutional settings that are concerned with youth issues reflect institutional aspects, including tools, structures, policies, and connections to and relationships with youth. The research identified the following issues that call for immediate action to hasten the implementation of national youth plans and programs. The report specifically makes the following observations: (Christia, Fotini and Dekeyser, Elizabeth and Knox, Dean, 2016)

1. The services supplied to adolescents had less of an influence on their welfare and future goals since there was no comprehensive national policy-oriented sector.

2. Diverse needs and a lack of coordination among the organizations that offer assistance to youth have resulted in dispersed efforts. A strategy framework with interconnected and complementary aims and objectives is required to address the worries and ambitions of young people.

3. The lack of political and economic stability in Iraq, as well as youths' worry and anxiety about the future, are the main causes of these changes.

4. The absence of employment initiatives to address the rising young unemployment.

5. The lack of a plan or policy for young people in Iraq might be deduced or constructed.

6. Given the significant changes in Iraq's political, economic, and social conditions, as well as the country's inadequate strategic planning framework, it is difficult to pinpoint the attitudes, behaviors, and practices of the country's young.

7. Weak community involvement and civil society institutions' contributions to the creation of youth-focused governmental policy.

The essential components of the youth approach:

Given that different age groups have distinct demands, the report emphasized the significance of setting age restrictions for children. A consistent definition of the young category, especially at the national level, was suggested by the study. The study found that youth attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors have a propensity to be uniform at the national level for the younger age group, which might interfere with the objective of developing a conceptual framework for both the necessary strategy and policies (Munqith Dagher, 2020).

The suggested strategy's aim: is that "Iraqi young are educated, conscious, and engaged, connected to national identity and culture, enjoy civil, political, social, and economic rights, deal with world scientific advancement, and contribute to constructing and growing their society."

The calculated strategy: A strategic approach based on political, social, and economic considerations was advised in the study for youth empowerment. To successfully integrate young people into their community and keep them away from harmful attitudes, deviation, and extremism, they are interconnected.

Three Ways to Empower Young People

youth's **political** empowerment should be acknowledged in terms of exercising democracy, enjoying citizenship, and upholding their human rights. The ability of the government, political parties, and civil society groups to offer young people chances for political involvement determines prospects for political empowerment. Political empowerment, which includes political activities that represent the contribution of young people and their role in the democratic system to influence governmental decision-making, deepens their sense of loyalty and belonging to the country, develops a sense of national duty and accepts the obligations with understanding the rights, and actively engages in political participation (Munqith al-Dagher, 2018).



Depending on the level of investment made by the public and private sectors in modifying social and economic institutions and political choices to better suit the requirements of young people, the **economic dimension** of empowerment offers potential for the development of young people. (Jabar, F., 2018)

It is essential for the **social** component to promote the ideas of equality, equal opportunity, and bridging gaps between young people and other community members as well as among themselves. This calls for actions to protect the rights and interests of youth in all sectors and to promote harmonious relationships between generations (Tim Arango, 2015).

Normative Principles

The following guidelines should serve as the foundation for the youth strategy (Amirali, A., 2019).

1. **The human condition:** The strategy will be based on a non-discriminatory approach between young men and women based on class, language, minority, religion, and sectarian, in accordance with the Iraqi constitution, and should enhance the dignity of young people and empower them to enjoy a life of dignity, peace, and security. It should also seek to provide a standard of living adequate for the growth of physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social development (Shatha Khalil, 2020).

2. **Educational Principle:** The strategy should be centered on fostering young people's care and education, with a special emphasis on fostering good society (family, school, university, community), and to connect youth national issues, and to enable them to play an active and positive role in maintaining national unity, and to help them organize themselves into entities that allow them to express themselves and to participate in making decisions that concern them (J. Mac Skelton & Zmkan Ali Saleem, 2019).

3. **Development Principle:** The plan should work to include youth in the goals of comprehensive development in order to promote fairness and equitable opportunity to empower both men and women. (Ahmed Mehdi, 2018)

4. **The principle of development and change;** The plan should seek to alter young people's views, actions, attitudes, and routines in order to help the Iraqi community improve. (Al-Maleki Y., Istepanian H., Tollast R., 2018)

The Youth Strategy's goals:

The following goals should be pursued by the youth strategy, according on our study of survey data and other information sources. (Hussein, M. 2018)

1. Increasing the contribution of young people to production by improving education, preparing them for the problems of the labor market, and speeding up the process to keep up with the development of information technology

2. Increasing the contribution of young people to societal security and stability, opening avenues for genuine engagement, and establishing the values of responsible citizenship and the exercise of civil rights.

3. Reduce young people's exposure to threats to their bodily and mental health and broaden their cultural and social interests (e.g. encouraging the exercise of sport).

4. To minimize negative effects from ICT and media openness, it is important to emphasize the national identity of young people via the development of their cultural and artistic orientation and to change their bad attitudes and conduct.

The strategy's scope

Following the recommendations of the study, we suggest that the strategy's vision, methodology, principles, and goals be coordinated as follows in accordance with the WPAY: (McKernan, B., 2017)



1. **Production and Youth:** Enhance education, equip young people for the problems of the labor market, expand job options for respectable work, and hasten young people's absorption into the ICT environment.

2. **Youth and Health:** Handle the physical and psychological hazards that young people are exposed to, as well as the health difficulties they face.

3. **Youth and Society:** Expand the role of youth in society, expand their involvement in fostering security and stability, and promote civic ideals, values, and civil rights among young people.

4. **Promote the function of the media in improving identity,** broaden young people's cultural horizons, and alter unfavorable attitudes and behaviors.

5. **The institutional framework for the youth policy incubator** Boost institutional capability to offer supportive environment for developing and carrying out youth policies and strategies. **The role of youth organizations in Iraq in the social and political aspects.** (Wahab, B., 2019)

First: Youth and production come:

- Increase educational achievement and equip young people for the demands of the work market

- Hasten young people's adaptation to the advancement of information technology

Second: Youth and health come:

- Address the risks to youth's physical, mental, and emotional health

Third: Youth and Society:

- Increase young participation in society and their contribution to its security and stability

- Expand the role of youth in society and create opportunities for their engagement.

- Instill the values of citizenship and civil rights in young people.

Fourth: Identity and Youth:

- Activate the media's role in enhancing identity

- Raise awareness of cultural issues

- Changes in Perceptions and Behavior This succinct paper has concentrated on the issue of how to enhance the democratic elements of Iraq's political system, including what real-world administrative steps are required to that end. The study that came before has shown that the democratic nature of the Iraqi state is still being developed. This is completely understandable given the lengthy and ongoing cycles of conflict the nation has experienced since the 1980s, as well as the fact that its current constitution and political system were established in the wake of an invasion and during a period of political fragmentation, which was then followed by increased violence, a civil war, and radicalism. (Saleem, Z. and Skelton, M., 2019)

It would be simple to conclude that the Iraqi Constitution's application requires significant revision, that the Al-Muhasasa system should be abandoned, that the electoral system needs to be changed, that the civil service should be filled on the basis of merit, and that the Al-Muhasasa system should be scrapped. The Iraqi government must strengthen the democratic nature of its rule, institutions, and practices if it is to better serve its people and the country's progress, but wild speculation won't cut it. (Kuruuzum, U., 2018)

Conclusion:

Considering this, international actors can assist by upholding the moral standards for the conflict between Iraq's social forces in accordance with the UN Charter, the International Declaration of Human Rights, and other pertinent provisions of international law to guarantee the respect for the rights and dignity of individuals and groups and the smooth conduct of events. The UN has a crucial role to play in defending the rights of demonstrators to articulate their concerns and ensuring their safety, highlighting the responsibility of the government to keep public order and hold those guilty for excessive violence accountable.



• International actors can also encourage peaceful and informed social contestation between Iraq's social forces, such as its political parties, elite networks, tribes, ethno-sectarian groupings, religious authorities, and demonstrators, rather than influence or determine it. One method for doing this is:

- provide areas for safe and free dialogue. Create a venue or spaces where Iraq's social forces (see above) may debate and combat political problems that require reform in a well-organized, well-facilitated, safe, and knowledgeable manner. Participants should specify the topics, which may include specific concerns like the effectiveness of Iraq's election system and constitution as well as more general social issues with political implications like the place of women and young people in the country's political destiny. The goal is to make sure that these venues are safe, inclusive, and informed by examination of approaches and solutions to comparable political challenges abroad. Participants should be able to meet and dispute without fear of negative consequences.

- Improve your knowledge about Al-Muhasasa. Increase your knowledge of the benefits and drawbacks of the Al-Muhasasa system, including how it functions now and how it may or cannot benefit Iraq in the future. Instead of just condemning the practice, such dialogue should consider the fact that Iraq will continue to be a very varied society with several competing interests, necessitating strong – and long-lasting – mediation institutions and procedures. For instance, breaking through the system's present gender and age barriers would already be a significant accomplishment that calls for cultural, institutional, and party-political adjustments.

- developing leaders Launch a cross-sectarian leadership "development" program with the goal of enhancing political leadership, creating a shared political vision for Iraq (e.g., using scenario planning), and boosting confidence among various Iraqi social forces, including its political parties, tribes, sociogenic groups, armed organizations, and religious authorities. 100 Leaders from the established order, such as those from the political parties now in power, as well as more impartial outside voices, such as those from Iraq's numerous religious authorities and tribes, should be represented among the participants (s). These programs should concentrate on enabling women and youth groups to cross generational and gender gaps using the knowledge gained from other leadership development initiatives.

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