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Women's Underrepresentation in Iraqi Parliamentary Committees: A Constitutional Analysis of Equality and Parliamentary Representation

Esraa Mahmood Alsamee^a

^a *Faculty of Law, University of Kufa, Iraq. E-mail: israam.alsamee@uokufa.edu.iq*

Article	Abstract
Keywords: Gender Equality; Iraqi Parliament; Parliamentary Committees; Political Empowerment; Quota System; Women's Representation. Article History Received: Sep 3, 2025; Reviewed: Jan 31, 2026; Accepted: Jul 12, 2026; Published: Jul 31, 2026. DOI: 10.28946/slrev.v10i2.5114	Despite the constitutional guarantees of equality and women's political participation under the Iraqi Constitution, women remain underrepresented in parliamentary committees, particularly in influential committees responsible for legislative oversight and policymaking. This article examines whether the legal framework governing committee formation effectively implements the constitutional principles of equality and representative democracy. The study adopts a doctrinal legal methodology, supported by comparative legal analysis, examining the Iraqi Constitution, the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Representatives, relevant national legislation, and applicable international legal instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The analysis indicates that constitutional guarantees of parliamentary representation have not consistently translated into substantive participation in parliamentary committees. The findings suggest that existing committee allocation procedures, together with political party practices and the absence of binding legal criteria, restrict women's access to influential committees and may weaken the effective realization of constitutional equality. The article argues that electoral quotas alone are insufficient to ensure substantive constitutional equality. It concludes that strengthening the legal framework governing committee membership, together with transparent allocation procedures and institutional safeguards, would better support women's effective participation in parliamentary decision-making.

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INTRODUCTION

The Iraqi Constitution guarantees equality, equal opportunities, and women's political participation through constitutional principles and the quota system, which reserves at least 25% of parliamentary seats for women. Despite these guarantees, women remain underrepresented in influential parliamentary committees responsible for legislative scrutiny, budgetary review, and executive oversight. This disparity creates a constitutional tension between the formal guarantee of political representation and women's effective participation in parliamentary decision-making. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: Does the legal framework

governing parliamentary committee formation adequately implement the constitutional principles of equality and representative democracy in Iraq?

Although women's parliamentary representation in Iraq has been widely examined from political and sociological perspectives, comparatively little attention has been devoted to the constitutional and legal regulation of women's participation in parliamentary committees. In particular, limited doctrinal analysis has assessed whether the legal rules governing committee membership and allocation are consistent with constitutional guarantees of equality and Iraq's international obligations concerning women's political participation. This doctrinal gap provides the foundation for the present study.

Given that parliamentary committees constitute the principal institutional mechanism through which legislative functions are exercised, equitable participation in these bodies is not merely a matter of numerical representation but of substantive constitutional equality and democratic accountability. The study therefore adopts a doctrinal legal methodology, supported by comparative legal analysis, to examine the Iraqi Constitution, the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Representatives, relevant national legislation, and applicable international legal instruments, particularly the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Through textual interpretation, contextual constitutional analysis, and comparative legal reasoning, the study evaluates whether the existing legal framework provides substantive constitutional equality in committee membership and, in doing so, contributes to constitutional law scholarship by reframing women's participation in parliamentary committees as an issue of constitutional governance rather than merely of numerical representation.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a doctrinal legal methodology as its principal research method, supported by comparative legal analysis and the examination of institutional parliamentary records. The research focuses on the interpretation, evaluation, and application of constitutional and legal norms governing women's participation in parliamentary committees rather than on empirical socio-legal investigation. The doctrinal analysis employs textual interpretation, contextual constitutional analysis, and comparative legal reasoning to evaluate the consistency of the existing legal framework with constitutional principles of equality and representative democracy.¹

The institutional dataset covers five parliamentary terms (2005–2006, 2006–2010, 2010–2014, 2014–2018, and 2018–2021). Committee membership and the gender composition of committees were identified through official parliamentary records and committee appointment documents issued by the Council of Representatives. These institutional data are used solely to illustrate parliamentary practice and support the doctrinal legal analysis; they are not treated as independent empirical evidence. To enhance the reliability of the findings, the study applies source triangulation by cross-verifying constitutional provisions, legislation, parliamentary records, official reports, and academic literature. The institutional data are analysed only to assess whether parliamentary practice complies with constitutional guarantees of equality and representative representation. A comparative perspective is incorporated through an examination

¹ Khushal Vibhute and Filipos Aynalem, 'Legal Research Methods Teaching Material', *Chilot*, 2009, 44.

of Sweden and Canada, selected for their relatively high levels of women's parliamentary representation, well-established parliamentary committee systems, and strong party institutions. A limitation of the study is that it does not employ interviews, surveys, or other empirical methods; accordingly, its conclusions are confined to the constitutional and legal evaluation of the existing regulatory framework.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The Theoretical and Legal Framework for Women's Participation in Parliamentary Work

The theoretical and legal framework for women's participation in parliamentary work provides an essential foundation for understanding how laws and political systems either enhance or restrict women's roles in legislative institutions. This framework encompasses defining the concept of women's political participation, analysing the pivotal role of parliamentary committees as platforms for policy formulation and government oversight, and examining national and international laws and legislation that affect women's representation, with a focus on Iraq as a case study.

The Concept of Women's Political Participation

Women's political participation refers to their involvement in political activities aimed at influencing decision-making in public affairs. This participation includes the right to vote and to run for election, engagement in party work, and contributions to social movements and civil organisations that shape public policy. Politically empowering women enhances gender justice and equality, ensuring the representation of the needs of all societal groups. This contributes to improving the effectiveness of public policies and achieving sustainable development.

The Legal Definition of Political Participation

Women's political participation engages women in activities that influence decision-making in public affairs at various national or local levels. This participation encompasses women's rights to vote, run for public office, engage in party work, and contribute to social movements or influence public policies through civil society organisations. It is a fundamental aspect of human rights, reflecting a society's and political system's commitment to gender equality and justice.²

Women's political participation encompasses a diverse range of activities and dimensions that enable them to influence government and societal policies. In the context of elections, women are granted the right to vote and run for office, a critical step toward effective political engagement. Women also contribute to political life through membership in political parties or by supporting electoral campaigns. Additionally, they can influence public policies by engaging in civic activities and collaborating with civil society organisations, thereby advancing human rights and equality initiatives.³

This participation extends beyond quantitative involvement to include a qualitative influence on political and social decisions that affect all segments of society. By actively holding positions in government, Parliament, or local councils, women play a significant role in shaping policies

² Pippa Norris and Mona Lena Krook, 'Gender Equality in Elected Office: A Six-Step Action Plan', *Warsaw: OSCE ODIHR*, 2011, 8–9.

³ Farzana Bari, 'Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges', *New York: United Nations DAW*, 2005, 4.

related to education, health, the economy, and social justice. Their involvement ensures that women's needs are fairly represented and that gender-related issues are incorporated into all areas of public policy.⁴

Moreover, women's political participation strengthens democracy and promotes social justice. Public policies reflect diverse perspectives by representing women in decision-making positions, enhancing transparency and governance accountability. The political empowerment of women is thus a crucial step toward sustainable development, leading to the adoption of more inclusive and balanced policies that address the concerns of all societal groups.⁵ Women's political participation is vital to building a democratic and balanced society. Encouraging women to run for office, vote, and participate in decision-making processes helps advance human rights and achieve justice and gender equality.⁶

Women's Representation in the Iraqi Parliament Before 2003

Before 2003, women's representation in the Iraqi Parliament was minimal. Despite some efforts by women's movements and social organisations to improve women's status, social and political challenges still restricted their participation in political life. This section provides a detailed overview of the critical stages of women's political participation in Iraq prior to 2003, with a focus on their representation in Parliament.

The Monarchy Era (1921–1958)

During the monarchy (1921–1958), Iraqi women had virtually no political representation, as public life remained dominated by men and constrained by prevailing social traditions. Although women's access to education gradually expanded, creating opportunities in education and public employment, these developments did not extend to political participation.⁷

The establishment of the Iraqi Women's League in 1945 marked an early effort to improve women's social status, particularly in education and health. However, its influence on parliamentary representation and political decision-making remained limited. Throughout this period, no constitutional or legal mechanisms existed to promote women's participation in Parliament or executive institutions, leaving women almost entirely excluded from political decision-making.⁸

The Iraqi Republic (1958–1963)

The establishment of the Republic following the 14 July 1958 Revolution introduced significant legal and social reforms under Abdul Karim Qasim.⁹

⁴ Valentine M. Moghadam and Lucie Senftova, 'Measuring Women's Empowerment: Participation and Rights in Civil, Political, Social, Economic, and Cultural Domains', *International Social Science Journal*, 57.184 (2005).

⁵ J. Duke, 'The Dynamics of Women Participation in Democratic Politics and Sustainable Development in Africa', *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 12.4 (2010), 85–86.

⁶ Shimelis Kassa, 'Challenges and Opportunities of Women Political Participation in Ethiopia', *Journal of Global Economics*, 2015, 1–2.

⁷ Orit Bashkin, 'Representations of Women in the Writings of the Intelligentsia in Hashemite Iraq, 1921–1958', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 4.1 (2008), 58–60.

⁸ Noga Efrati, 'Competing Narratives: Histories of the Women's Movement in Iraq, 1910–58', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 40.3 (2008), 447.

⁹ Ghsoon Mazhar Hussain Mazhar Hussain, 'National Identity in Speeches and Conversations of Abdul Karim Qasim 1958–1963', *Alustath Journal for Human and Social Sciences*, 228 (2018), 196–97.

Most notably, the Personal Status Law of 1959 strengthened women's rights in matters such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Despite these reforms, women's political representation remained negligible, as improvements in legal and social status were not accompanied by meaningful access to Parliament or senior governmental positions.¹⁰

Although women's organisations became more active during this period, they concentrated primarily on social and legal rights rather than parliamentary representation, resulting in limited influence over political decision-making.¹¹

Ba'ath Party Rule (1968–2003)

During Ba'ath Party rule (1968–2003), women's participation in education and public employment expanded, particularly in the education and health sectors. However, these gains did not translate into substantive political representation. Women's appointments to public office were largely administrative or symbolic, while political authority remained concentrated within the ruling party.¹²

Despite social advances in women's rights, such as their inclusion in government jobs, the regime needed to translate these improvements into meaningful political representation. Women had no substantial role in political decision-making, and their positions were primarily limited to administrative roles with little to no impact on public policy. The political leadership held absolute power, and the ruling party was more concerned with serving its interests than promoting women's participation in politics. Thus, women's representation in Parliament was largely symbolic, with their participation limited to administrative or representational roles that had minimal influence on politics.

During this time, some attempts were made to organise women's organisations affiliated with the regime, such as the "Iraqi Women's Union," which operated directly under government supervision. Although these organisations engaged in social and educational activities, their influence on politics or Parliament was minimal.¹³ These organisations participated in social activities but were unable to influence public policies or political decision-making. The ruling party's strict control over these organisations meant that women's role in politics remained purely formal, serving the regime's propaganda rather than making a genuine impact. Under the Ba'athist political monopoly, the regime opposed any form of political pluralism and imposed strict surveillance on political activities. The ruling party controlled the Parliament and political positions, leaving few opportunities for women to participate actively in political life. Women who sought to run for political office faced significant resistance from the ruling party, which prioritised its own interests over increasing women's representation in politics. As a result, women were not given a real opportunity to influence major political decisions.

In summary, despite improvements in areas like education and employment during the Ba'athist period, women's political representation in Iraq remained extremely limited. The positions held by women in government were confined to administrative and symbolic roles,

¹⁰ Aida R. Baghirova, 'The Arab Politics of Iraq during the Baath Party Rule: Between Theory and Practice', *Journal of Historical Studies*, 5 (2024), 6–7.

¹¹ Sana K. Qati and Inass A. Ali Batool H. Alwan, 'Iraqi Women's Leadership and State-Building', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22.3 (2021), 18–19.

¹² JD Reger, 'Ba'athist State Feminism: The General Federation of Iraqi Women in the Global 1970s', *Journal of Women's History*, 32.2 (2020), 60–63.

¹³ JD Reger. p64.

while the ruling regime dominated the Parliament and prevented any form of political pluralism. Ultimately, women could not play a genuine role in political decision-making, and their participation remained confined to a limited, non-influential role in public policy. Therefore, before 2003, Iraq's political situation was still characterised by repression and strict surveillance of opposing activities. While some social and legal improvements were made for women, their position in the Parliament needed strengthening. Women needed accurate representation in political or legislative decision-making, and their role in Parliament was virtually nonexistent. Although there were some attempts by civil society organisations to advocate for women's rights, these organisations were often limited to social roles. Political life was entirely under the ruling party's control, which did not allow women to have a meaningful role in politics or parliamentary bodies. While women gained some social rights in areas such as education and employment, their political representation remained limited, and any participation in Parliament or other legislative bodies was either symbolic or directly controlled by the regime.

Women's Representation in the Parliament After 2003: A New Era

Iraq experienced a significant political transformation after 2003 due to the U.S. invasion, which led to a complete change in the political system. This transformation marked the beginning of a new phase in women's representation in the Iraqi Parliament, with women assuming a more prominent role in political life, particularly after the establishment of a new constitution that guaranteed greater political rights for them. This period witnessed significant developments in women's representation, both in their participation in elections and in political and parliamentary institutions. This section outlines the key aspects of women's representation in the Iraqi Parliament after 2003.

The Iraqi Constitution of 2005: A Legal Shift Towards Women's Empowerment

The adoption of the Iraqi Constitution in 2005 marked a pivotal turning point in the trajectory of empowering Iraqi women. This Constitution laid the legal foundation for enhancing women's rights and representation in political and social life. Its provisions addressed longstanding challenges that previously hindered women's participation in decision-making, establishing a binding framework to ensure their contribution to building a modern state.

In a groundbreaking step to bolster women's political roles, Article 49 of the Constitution mandated that no less than 25% of parliamentary seats be allocated to women, known as the "women's quota." This provision was not merely a numerical requirement but a legal commitment that reflected the acknowledgement of women's role in legislative and political processes. Since the implementation of this system, women's representation in the Iraqi Parliament has increased significantly, reaching 27% in the 2018 elections and surpassing the minimum threshold. This representation enabled women to actively contribute to drafting laws and shaping national policies, with a focus on issues directly impacting society, such as education, healthcare, and family rights.

Beyond enhancing women's representation in Parliament, the Constitution also emphasised the protection of their rights across various spheres of life. Provisions related to marriage, divorce, inheritance, and employment underscored the guarantee of gender equality. For instance, the Constitution obligated the government to provide a legislative environment enabling women

to exercise their rights freely. Under personal status laws based on the Constitution, women received better legal protection, particularly regarding family rights.

Article 14 of the Iraqi Constitution further reinforced this approach by enshrining the principle of equality among all citizens, regardless of gender, religion, or ethnicity.¹⁴ This provision is a cornerstone for combating discrimination and promoting equal opportunities for men and women in all fields. Building on this principle, the Iraqi government launched initiatives to empower women to access leadership positions in governmental institutions. For example, in recent years, women have been appointed to key ministries and local councils, reshaping the traditional perception of women's roles in politics and public administration.

While there has been clear progress in promoting women's rights, major challenges still hinder the full implementation of constitutional guarantees related to gender equality. Social, cultural, and tribal traditions continue to play a significant role in limiting women's access to political and legislative spaces, thereby preventing their full and equal participation.

Despite these challenges, some positive developments have emerged. In recent years, women have become more active in parliamentary discussions, particularly on legislation related to family and women's issues. A key example is their growing role in the debate over the Family Protection Law, including the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, which is still under review in Parliament. However, women's presence in parliamentary committees remains limited, especially in powerful and decision-making bodies. In 2005, for example, six out of 24 committees did not include any female members. These included important committees such as Security and Defence, Oil and Natural Resources, Agriculture, Water, and Marshes. This lack of representation highlights the structural barriers that continue to restrict women's influence within legislative institutions and decision-making processes.

In conclusion, the Constitution of 2005 provides a progressive legal framework to empower Iraqi women and safeguard their rights. Despite ongoing challenges, effectively implementing the provisions of this Constitution strengthens women's role as active contributors to state-building. Achieving this requires combined governmental and societal efforts to address cultural and social barriers and advance policies that support gender equality across all domains.

The 2010 Parliamentary Elections: Strengthening Women's Representation in the Political Process

The 2010 Iraqi parliamentary elections marked a significant development in women's representation in Parliament. Thanks to the women's quota system, women successfully maintained the constitutionally mandated 25% quota, which legally guaranteed their participation in political life. Eighty-two women were elected out of 325 members, reflecting a gradual increase in female participation compared to previous sessions. This percentage was the result not only of the quota system but also of persistent efforts to enhance women's participation in elections, supported by political parties and community initiatives.

Despite this achievement, women's representation in Parliament remained heavily reliant on party lists, with political parties playing a crucial role in nominating female candidates to meet quota requirements. While this system increased the number of women in Parliament, it also

¹⁴ Republic of Iraq, 'Iraqis Are Equal before the Law without Discrimination Based on Gender, Race, Ethnicity, Nationality, Origin, Color, Religion, Sect, Belief or Opinion, or Economic or Social Status.', *Constitution of the Republic of Iraq*, 2005.

limited their independence. Female candidates were often selected for their loyalty to the party rather than their capabilities or political vision, thereby restricting their actual influence in decision-making within Parliament. This raised questions about their ability to represent women's and societal issues independently of party agendas.¹⁵

During the first parliamentary term (2006–2010), women held leadership positions in only two permanent committees. MP Ala Talabani chaired the Civil Society Institutions Committee, while MP Samira al-Mousawi led the Committee on Women, Family, and Childhood. This limited representation reflected broader challenges facing women in Iraq's political environment, particularly their difficulty in asserting leadership within male-dominated political blocs and influencing key decision-makers.¹⁶

The 2010 elections marked a gradual evolution in women's representation in the Iraqi Parliament, highlighting both progress and the need for further efforts to enhance their political participation. To build on this progress, it is essential to provide women with training programs that develop leadership skills, raise societal awareness about the importance of women's political roles, and strengthen their independence within political parties. Such measures can help women become more active and influential contributors to national policymaking. While the 2010 elections represented a significant step forward, they also underscored the ongoing need for sustainable reforms to support more independent and impactful female participation in Iraq's political process.

The 2014 Parliamentary Elections: Persistent Challenges for Women

The 2014 Iraqi parliamentary elections maintained women's representation at 25% of parliamentary seats, as mandated by the constitutional quota system. Despite this high numerical representation compared to many countries in the region, women's qualitative participation in the political process remained limited, particularly in critical parliamentary committees. While 83 women were elected out of 328 members, this percentage did not significantly influence political decision-making.¹⁷

Women faced significant social and political challenges in strengthening their effective presence in Parliament. Although elected through party lists, women were often placed in lower ranks or assigned to roles that required little political influence. This situation left many female parliamentarians in symbolic positions intended to meet quota requirements, without affording them opportunities for active participation in decision-making or policy formulation.

One of the critical challenges faced by women during this term was the lack of representation in influential parliamentary committees. Despite the large number of women in Parliament, their participation was confined mainly to committees with social or cultural mandates, such as family and education committees. Meanwhile, strategic committees, such as the Security and Defence Committee and the Foreign Relations Committee, remained dominated by men. No woman

¹⁵ Asaad Ghali Hamzah, 'Women's Political Empowerment in Iraq After 2003', *Middle East Journal for Legal and Jurisprudential Studies*, 2024, 49–50.

¹⁶ Badrea Salih Abdulla, 'The Role of Iraqi Women in the 2021 Elections', *Political Sciences Journal*, 65 (2023), 138.

¹⁷ Amir, Dima Kamel Abdul and APD Montaser Hussein Jawad Amir, 'The Quota System and Its Impact on the Political Participation of Iraqi Women After 2005', Baghdad: Imam Al-Kadhim College, 2021, 1745.

chaired any strategic committee, thereby limiting their influence over major national decisions, especially in security and foreign policy.

This marginalisation was reflected in legislative performance, with limited progress on laws addressing women's issues. For example, laws combating domestic violence and promoting equality in employment opportunities did not receive sufficient support within Parliament due to the absence of strong female influence in critical committees. Women who sought to advance such legislation often faced resistance from traditional forces with conservative views that restricted women's roles in public life.

To overcome these obstacles and enhance women's effective participation, structural reforms are urgently needed to ensure the equitable representation of women in all parliamentary committees, including those of strategic importance. These reforms should include mechanisms to mandate the fair distribution of leadership positions within Parliament and enhanced training programs to develop leadership skills among elected women. Political parties must also provide more significant support for women to meet quota requirements and empower them to play influential roles in decision-making.

In summary, while women achieved significant numerical representation in the 2014 elections, their impact remained limited due to political and social challenges. To ensure meaningful female participation, efforts must focus on dismantling traditional barriers and promoting women's leadership roles, ultimately reflecting positively on the political and legislative performance of the Iraqi Parliament.

The 2018 Parliamentary Elections: Growing Challenges and Continued Female Participation

The 2018 Iraqi parliamentary elections upheld the women's quota system, guaranteeing 25% representation for women in Parliament. This ensured numerical stability in women's representation. However, new challenges emerged that hindered women's effective participation in political work, primarily by limiting their roles within parliamentary structures and their influence over major political decisions.

One of the most prominent challenges faced by women was the symbolic nature of their representation. Some political parties used the quota to meet legal requirements without providing the support needed for women to assume genuine leadership roles. Women were often placed low on electoral lists, or their roles were limited to securing seats without involvement in political decision-making or party program development. This perpetuates the gap between women's numerical and qualitative representation in Parliament.¹⁸

Women also needed help in attaining leadership positions within Parliament. Key roles, such as chairing the Security and Defence or Foreign Relations Committees, remained under male control. At the same time, women's participation was confined mainly to committees with social or service-oriented mandates, such as family or education committees. This imbalance deprived women of the opportunity to influence major political and economic issues, leaving their presence in national policymaking weak.

In addition to political barriers, social factors played a significant role in restricting women's roles. Prevailing traditions and cultural norms in many Iraqi regions hindered women from

¹⁸ Diamant Youssef, 'Political Parties' Positions on Women Quota in the Lebanese Parliament: Lessons from the Iraqi and Algerian Cases', Beirut: American University of Beirut, 2025, 36–37.

running for office or participating effectively in election campaigns. The Parliament reflected a traditional political culture that excluded women from critical discussions and marginalised their opinions on strategic issues.

Furthermore, more institutional support is needed for women to participate effectively. Female parliamentarians needed more training and technical support to enhance their performance. Political parties also needed to provide more backing to help women overcome social and political obstacles. This institutional weakness made it difficult for female MPs to make tangible progress on critical issues, such as legislation promoting women's rights and combating domestic violence.

Structural reforms are essential to support more effective female participation in light of these challenges. This can be achieved by mandating that political parties allocate specific quotas for women in leadership positions within parliament and influential committees. Additionally, developing training and mentorship programs is crucial for enhancing the skills of female MPs, enabling them to contribute effectively to policy formulation and decision-making.

In conclusion, while women's numerical representation in the 2018 parliament persisted, the lack of qualitative and leadership empowerment prevented them from having a tangible impact on political work. Addressing this shortfall requires a genuine political commitment to strengthening women's roles, not just as numbers in Parliament but as active and influential contributors to shaping Iraq's future.

The 2021 Elections: Women's Participation Amid Persistent Challenges

The 2021 Iraqi parliamentary elections marked a significant shift in women's representation in politics. While women maintained the 25% quota mandated by the Constitution, this election witnessed notable growth in female participation. The number of female candidates increased significantly, reaching around 950 out of 3,200 candidates, reflecting a growing desire among women to engage in politics. Notably, women exceeded the legal quota for the first time, securing 97 seats out of 329, surpassing the minimum 83 seats allocated to them. Despite this numerical progress, women continued to face numerous challenges.

Most female MPs were elected through party lists, reflecting the ongoing dominance of a male-centric party system that often limits women's ability to influence major political decisions. Additionally, societal constraints remained a significant obstacle. Cultural and tribal traditions, especially in rural areas and conservative provinces, restricted women's ability to run competitive election campaigns. Many female candidates faced smear campaigns or efforts to undermine their reputations, further hindering their electoral efforts.¹⁹

At the same time, the 2021 elections saw the emergence of several independent female candidates who contested the polls without affiliations to traditional parties. Some of these women succeeded in garnering community support, particularly from youth seeking change. However, independent candidates faced additional challenges, including the need for more financial and media support than their party-affiliated counterparts. The situation regarding representation in influential parliamentary committees remained unchanged from previous elections. Women were more represented in social and service-oriented committees, such as

¹⁹ Marsin Alshamary, 'The Protest to Parliament Pipeline: Women's Political Participation in Iraq', *Cambridge, MA: Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs, Harvard Kennedy School*, 2024, 13–14.

family and education committees. In contrast, key committees, such as security and defence, economics, and foreign affairs, were dominated by men. This continued imbalance reflected the traditional perspective that confines women's roles to less impactful issues in public policy.²⁰

While women's numerical representation in 2021 improved, the lack of qualitative and leadership roles hindered their ability to enact significant political change. Activist Nahla Al-Anzi highlighted this issue, stating that many critical laws, such as the Domestic Violence Protection Law and the Cybercrimes Law, remain stalled in Parliament, leaving women as the primary victims of their absence. She attributed this to the reliance on the quota system rather than women's capabilities, which often relegates women to roles aligned with party ideologies rather than empowering them as actual decision-makers. Al-Anzi noted that women MPs were divided between those who supported women's rights and those who opposed them, weakening their collective influence and undermining women's rights.²¹

The broader failure of Parliament to enact or monitor key legislation was not solely the fault of women MPs. As of February 2021, out of 1,844 legislative proposals in the fourth parliamentary term, more than 1,150 still needed to be stalled. This legislative inaction further compounded public scepticism about Parliament's effectiveness. Businesswoman Rehab expressed her doubts: "I do not trust female representation to counter voices that strip women of their most basic rights. ' I did not vote before, and I do not plan to participate in elections where men control women's futures." Nevertheless, feminist activist Suha Qadir emphasised that women must continue striving for change. "Despite the task's difficulty amid political blocs seeking to marginalise women, the only option for women is to actively vote to change their reality by electing candidates who believe in women's rights and possess the experience and competence to defend them. Women must choose independent voices, not those aligned ideologically with parties that nominate them solely for electoral purposes."²²

In summary, women's political participation in Iraq has improved relative to 2003, particularly with the constitutional guarantee of 25% parliamentary representation. However, significant challenges persist, including the dominance of partisan systems that determine women's roles based on party or regional calculations, limiting their opportunities for leadership or meaningful political influence.

Cultural and social barriers also restrict women's participation, as traditional roles often limit their involvement in public life. Although the number of women in Parliament has increased, their representation in influential committees, such as those dealing with economics, defence, and foreign affairs, remains weak. Women are often relegated to committees with less impact, such as human rights or culture and media committees, reducing their influence on significant policies.

Despite these challenges, there is hope of enhancing women's roles in Iraqi politics by empowering them in leadership positions and enabling them to participate actively in national decision-making. Building on the progress made since 2003, it remains possible to improve

²⁰ Marsin Alshamary. p16.

²¹ Kholoud Salam, 'Women's Representation in the Iraqi Parliament: Feminizing the Numbers Is Not Enough, Iraq Open Data, Last Modified 2022', *Middle East Research Institute (MERI)*, 2024 <<https://www.merik.org/iraqopendata/التمثيل-النسوي-في-البرلمان-العراقي-تا>>.

²² Kholoud Salam.

women's political representation by addressing partisan and social barriers and promoting their active participation in all aspects of Iraqi politics.

Challenges Facing Women's Representation in Iraqi Parliamentary Committees

The representation of women in Iraqi parliamentary committees has improved in recent years. However, women still face numerous challenges that limit their effective participation in these crucial tools for influencing political and legislative decision-making. These challenges stem from legal, social, cultural, and political factors. Below is a comprehensive discussion of these challenges, focusing on the legal dimension and relevant political examples.

Legal Challenges

Although the Iraqi Constitution guarantees women's rights by allocating 25% of parliamentary seats to women, these legal guarantees do not always translate into meaningful and effective representation in political life, particularly in influential parliamentary committees. The electoral system, which supports the allocation of women's quotas, does not ensure a balanced distribution of women in committees with significant decision-making power, such as the Security and Defence Committee or the Economic Committee. In practice, women often find themselves in less impactful committees, such as the Culture and Media Committee or the Human Rights Committee, which limits their ability to influence strategic and critical issues.²³

Moreover, women's representation in political life faces additional challenges due to the weaknesses in some supportive laws. Although there are legislative efforts aimed at enhancing women's rights in Iraq, significant gaps remain in the effective implementation of these laws. For example, specific personal status laws, such as the Ja'fari Personal Status Law, present obstacles for women striving to achieve full equality in political and social life. These laws reflect structural challenges that Iraqi women face, making it difficult to empower them fully in the political sphere.

These legal challenges highlight that more than the constitutional allocation of parliamentary seats for women is needed to ensure effective political participation. Addressing this issue requires amendments and improvements to legal and executive policies to guarantee a more balanced representation of women across all parliamentary committees and leadership positions.

Political Challenges

Iraqi politics presents a complex and challenging environment that directly affects women's ability to influence parliamentary decision-making, especially within highly influential parliamentary committees. Party dominance is one of the most significant obstacles for women, as the political process in Iraq relies heavily on parties that control the allocation of positions in Parliament and its committees. Women are often selected through party lists, which limits their political independence and ties their participation in parliamentary committees to party interests. This political dominance confines women to less influential roles, particularly in strategic committees, where leadership positions, such as committee chairmanships, are predominantly reserved for men.²⁴

²³ Sana K. Qati and Inass A. Ali Batool H. Alwan, 'No Title', *Supra* N11, 26.

²⁴ Taif Alkhudary, 'As Iraq Backslides on Gender Equality, Where Are Its Women MPs?', *Middle East Centre Blog, LSE*, 2023 <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mec/2023/09/26/as-iraq-backslides-on-gender-equality-where-are-its-women-mps/>>.

For example, during the 2018 parliamentary elections, 83 women were elected to the 329-member Parliament. Despite this substantial representation, women's roles in key committees, such as the Security and Defence Committee or the Foreign Relations Committee, were minimal. Men held the majority of leadership positions in these committees.²⁵

This party's dominance in position allocation and the absence of women in strategic committees significantly challenge their ability to influence critical national decision-making. Although some women were elected to Parliament, their representation on important parliamentary committees, such as the Security and Defence Committee and the Finance Committee—which play central roles in shaping national security policies and managing budgets and financial resources—remains minimal. These committees oversee pivotal issues that affect the country's future, thereby reducing women's influence over public policies related to security and the economy.

Additionally, women in the Iraqi Parliament need more political support and training in decision-making mechanisms. They often need equal opportunities to access advanced training programs on legislative issues or political negotiations, hindering their ability to participate actively in influential parliamentary committees. This lack of training and political mentorship contributes to the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within Parliament. Reaching high-ranking roles in parliamentary committees is a significant challenge for women under these circumstances, making it difficult for them to exert meaningful influence on the formation of national policies. These challenges highlight the need to enhance training opportunities and political empowerment for women in Iraq to ensure their adequate representation in political decision-making.

Social and Cultural Challenges

Social and cultural factors significantly shape the challenges to women's participation in Iraqi political life, particularly their representation in Parliament and its committees. One of these factors is the traditional gender roles that remain deeply ingrained in Iraqi society. Within the prevailing social culture, women are primarily viewed as central figures in the family and community, reinforcing restrictions on their participation in political activities.

Although the number of women elected to Parliament has increased, they still face social and cultural pressures that may limit their ability to engage actively in political work. In some cases, women holding political positions are perceived as mere "figureheads" or "symbolic representations" used for political propaganda, preventing them from having a genuine opportunity to influence political decision-making within Parliament. This societal attitude hinders women from playing a significant role in shaping influential policies.

Additionally, gender discrimination in leadership positions remains one of the primary obstacles to women's participation in critical decision-making processes. Despite the Iraqi Constitution guaranteeing women 25% of parliamentary seats, they face marginalisation when accessing leadership roles within parliamentary committees. For instance, in the 2014 elections, while women constituted 25% of parliamentary seats, their representation in leadership roles, such as chairing parliamentary committees or representing Iraq in international conferences, was minimal. Gender-based discrimination in the allocation of positions limits women's influence

²⁵ Taif Alkhudary.

over critical decisions on security, defence, the economy, and foreign policy—strategic issues that shape the country's future.

Consequently, addressing the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions within Parliament is a crucial issue that requires structural reforms to empower women and enable them to play a meaningful role in political processes and decision-making.

Political Examples of Challenges to Women's Representation in Parliamentary Committees

Despite the legal quota ensuring women's representation in the Iraqi Parliament, significant challenges hinder their effective influence on decision-making within parliamentary committees, particularly those with strategic importance. A key example is the 2018 parliamentary elections, in which many women were elected to Parliament, yet their representation on influential committees remained limited. Although women held approximately 25% of parliamentary seats, they were largely absent from critical committees such as Security and Defence, Economy, and Foreign Policy.

For instance, only one woman chaired the Human Rights Committee, while men dominated most other committees. This outcome reflected the Iraqi political system's inefficacy in enabling women to assume leadership roles, significantly impacting national decision-making.

Another prominent example is the underrepresentation of women in the Security and Defence Committee, which addresses sensitive national stability issues. Despite the growing number of women in Parliament since 2003, their participation in this committee has remained minimal. Leadership positions in the committee have been predominantly held by men, underscoring the absence of women from strategic discussions shaping Iraq's security and future. This lack of representation underscores the structural barriers that prevent women from contributing to critical decisions on sovereignty and national security.²⁶

Despite women's challenges in attaining leadership positions, some female parliamentarians have overcome these obstacles. Many have succeeded in reaching Parliament and holding significant positions within committees, but they still face substantial difficulties in influencing legislation concerning women's rights. Their efforts often clash with opposing political agendas that marginalise women's issues or obstruct legislative decisions aimed at securing women's full rights. This reality underscores the political and societal barriers faced by female MPs when advocating for women's rights in the Iraqi Parliament.

In addition to security-related committees, women face marginalisation in key economic committees such as the Finance Committee, which plays a central role in shaping the country's economic policies. These committees address vital issues, such as the national budget and financial reforms, that directly affect citizens' lives. While women occasionally serve on less influential committees, they encounter significant difficulties accessing committees that deal with economic policymaking or sensitive portfolios such as foreign relations and defence. This dynamic reflects the dominance of a male-centric political culture within Parliament, where partisan and regional priorities take precedence over equitable female representation in strategic matters.²⁷

²⁶ Huda Al-Tamimi, 'Effects of Iraq's Parliamentary Gender Quota on Women's Political Mobilization and Legitimacy Post-2003', *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 11.3 (2018), 42–44.

²⁷ Sana K. Qati and Inass A. Ali Batool H. Alwan, 'No Title', *Supra* N11, 8.

These examples collectively illustrate the substantial challenges faced by Iraqi women in achieving genuine and impactful representation in Parliament, particularly within its most influential committees. While there has been some progress in the number of women elected, their influence on major, decisive issues still needs to be strengthened. Structural reforms are essential to ensure fair representation of women across all parliamentary committees, including those dealing with security, defence, the economy, and foreign policy.

Opportunities and Future Directions

Despite the numerous challenges, several opportunities exist to improve women's representation in Iraq's parliamentary committees. Reforming the party system is a crucial step toward this goal, as it can provide greater opportunities for women to attain leadership positions in Parliament and its committees. Encouraging political parties to promote women's participation in leadership roles and creating a legislative framework that fosters gender equality are essential measures.

In addition, raising awareness and encouraging active participation are crucial. Awareness campaigns to support women in politics and specialised training programs can empower women to compete for significant positions, such as chairing influential parliamentary committees. These efforts would enhance their capabilities and influence decision-making processes.

Furthermore, introducing and enforcing gender-equality-focused legislation can strengthen women's participation in strategic parliamentary committees, such as the Security and Defence Committee. Balanced female representation in such committees is vital for inclusive decision-making, particularly on critical national issues.

While the Iraqi Constitution guarantees a 25% quota for women in Parliament, significant challenges remain in translating this quota into effective representation in parliamentary committees. Legally, women often face barriers to equitable distribution across influential committees. Politically, party dynamics frequently limit their participation in decision-making.

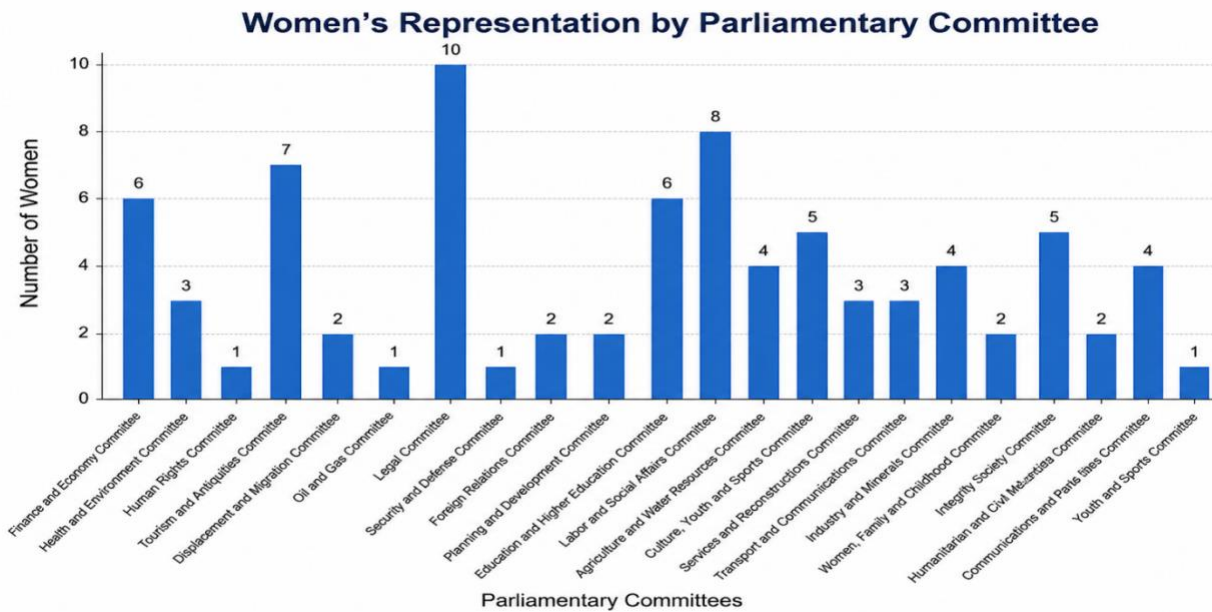
Socially, cultural norms and attitudes further restrict women from assuming leadership roles. Addressing these issues through party-system reforms, improved training opportunities, and more robust supportive legislation can significantly enhance women's roles in parliamentary committees. These steps would empower women and represent a critical advancement toward achieving equality and justice in Iraq's political system.

Opportunities to Enhance Women's Representation in Parliamentary Committees

Women's participation in political life, particularly within parliamentary committees, remains a critical constitutional and legislative issue in Iraq. Although the Iraqi Constitution guarantees that women hold at least 25% of parliamentary seats, this constitutional provision has not translated into equitable representation in influential parliamentary committees. Women remain underrepresented on committees that exercise key legislative, financial, and oversight functions, limiting their effective participation in parliamentary decision-making. Figure 1 illustrates the distribution of women across parliamentary committees and highlights the disparity between constitutional guarantees and institutional practice. This imbalance underscores the need for legal and institutional reforms to ensure substantive, rather than merely numerical, representation.

Graph 1 provides an illustrative example from the fourth Parliamentary Term (2018), demonstrating that women remain concentrated in social and service-oriented committees. In contrast, their representation in influential committees—such as Security and Defence, Foreign

Relations, and Legal Affairs—is considerably lower. This example illustrates that, although the constitutional quota has secured women's numerical representation in Parliament, it has not ensured equitable participation in parliamentary committee assignments, thereby highlighting the need for legal reforms governing committee allocation.



Graph 1. Women's Representation by Parliamentary Committee

Constitutional and Legal Framework of Women's Representation

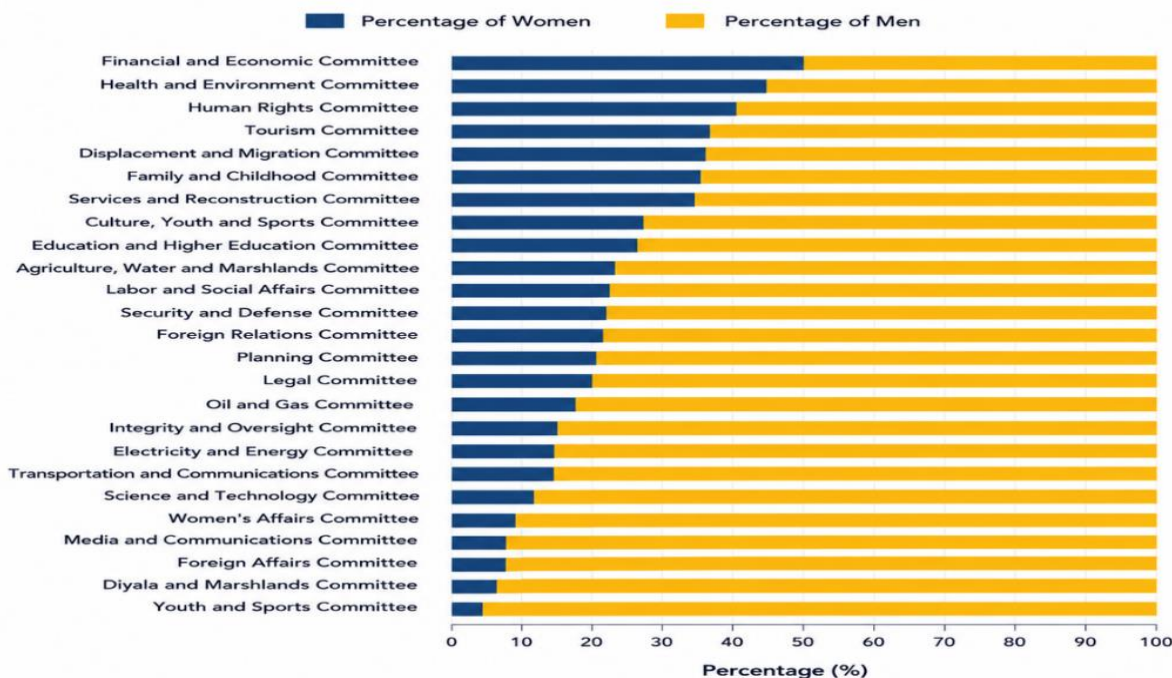
Enhancing women's representation in parliamentary committees is not just a legal step but a process that requires a comprehensive legislative framework to ensure balance across all political areas. After 2003, under the Iraqi Constitution, 25% of parliamentary seats were allocated to women, an essential achievement for women's representation. However, despite this quota, women's representation in influential parliamentary committees remains imbalanced, especially in committees with significant impact, such as the Security and Defence Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, and the Financial Committee. Even when women occupy seats in Parliament, they are often marginalised in critical committees, where leadership is predominantly held by men, limiting their ability to influence major strategic issues. Figure 2 illustrates the unequal distribution of women across Iraqi parliamentary committees, highlighting the disparity between constitutional guarantees of representation and their practical implementation within the committee system.

Graph 2, based on the Fifth Parliamentary Term (2022–2025), further illustrates that the constitutional quota has not translated into equitable representation in key parliamentary committees. This supports the conclusion that the current legal framework does not fully realise the constitutional guarantees of equality and equal opportunities of the Iraqi Constitution. Amending the internal regulations of the Iraqi Parliament is a necessary step to achieve accurate representation of women in these critical committees. Laws should be introduced requiring Parliament to allocate female quotas on vital committees. For example, internal regulations could be amended to ensure that 25% of positions in key parliamentary committees are reserved for women, including the Security and Defence Committee, the Foreign Relations Committee, and the Economy Committee. This amendment would give women a greater opportunity to

participate effectively in decision-making, providing them with platforms to contribute meaningfully to national politics, particularly on issues affecting national security, the economy, and international relations.

Women's Representation in Parliamentary Committees

The percentage of women in the majority of committees remains low



Source: Al-Marsad Al-Niyabi Al-Iraqi (Iraqi Parliamentary Observatory)

Graph 2. Women's Representation in Iraqi Parliamentary Committees

Furthermore, legislation concerning leadership positions within parliamentary committees could be strengthened. Laws should mandate that political parties allocate a specific number of leadership positions in parliamentary committees to women, including roles such as committee chairs or vice-chairs. These legal measures would give women a better chance of reaching senior positions in Parliament, allowing them a more influential role in shaping state policies.

Similar policies have proven highly successful in some countries. For example, Rwanda adopted a quota system ensuring 30% female representation in Parliament, making the country one of the most advanced in women's political representation. Similarly, Sweden implements a gender balance policy in political life, which has enabled women to hold significant positions in government and Parliament. If Iraq adopts these practices, women's representation could improve significantly, and their influence in political decision-making would increase.

Additionally, training programs and financial support should be provided to women running for parliamentary positions, as the challenges go beyond representation and include inadequate qualifications and training in politics and decision-making. NGOs and civil society organisations can enhance women's political skills by organising workshops and providing educational resources to help women influence parliamentary committees more effectively.

Through these steps, women will have a more significant opportunity to bring about change in Iraq, ensuring fair and effective representation of the female community in major political issues that shape the country's destiny and future.

Electoral System Reform

Electoral reform should extend beyond guaranteeing women's numerical representation in Parliament to ensuring their effective participation in parliamentary committees. Although Article 49(4) of the Iraqi Constitution secures a minimum level of parliamentary representation for women, it does not regulate the allocation of committee membership or leadership positions.²⁸ This legislative gap allows women to remain underrepresented on committees that exercise core legislative, financial, and oversight functions.

Accordingly, the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Representatives should be amended to require that parliamentary blocs nominate gender-balanced committees and to establish transparent criteria for committee membership and leadership appointments. Such reforms would give practical effect to the constitutional principles of equality and equal opportunities under Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution, while reinforcing substantive rather than merely numerical representation.

Political Capacity-Building for Women

Constitutional guarantees require institutional support to ensure their effective implementation. Strengthening women's participation in parliamentary committees therefore necessitates specialised capacity-building programmes in legislative drafting, constitutional interpretation, parliamentary oversight, and budgetary review. These programmes should be institutionalised through the Council of Representatives in cooperation with academic and professional institutions.

Particular attention should be given to women from underserved regions, where limited educational and professional opportunities continue to affect political participation. Enhancing legal and parliamentary expertise would improve women's ability to assume leadership positions within parliamentary committees and contribute more effectively to legislative and oversight functions.

Supporting Civil Society Organisations and Women's Initiatives

Civil society organisations play an important complementary role in promoting the effective implementation of constitutional guarantees relating to women's political participation. Their contribution extends beyond advocacy to monitoring compliance with constitutional principles of equality and supporting legal reforms that enhance women's participation in parliamentary committees.

These organisations can monitor the implementation of parliamentary rules governing committee membership, publish independent reports on gender representation, and advocate amendments to parliamentary procedures where disparities persist. They may also provide legal awareness programmes and policy dialogue platforms that strengthen cooperation between Parliament, political parties, and women's organisations. Such initiatives contribute to improving institutional accountability and facilitate the practical realisation of Article 14 and Article 16 of the Iraqi Constitution, as well as Iraq's obligations under Article 7 of CEDAW. Accordingly, civil society should be regarded as an institutional partner in promoting constitutional equality rather than merely an advocacy actor.

²⁸ Republic of Iraq, 'The Elections Law Shall Aim to Achieve a Percentage of Representation for Women of Not Less than One-Quarter of the Members of the Council of Representatives', Constitution of the Republic of Iraq, 2005.

Developing a Culture of Gender Equality

Legal reform alone cannot achieve substantive equality without addressing structural barriers that continue to influence women's political participation. Promoting gender equality therefore requires integrating constitutional values into educational and public institutions through civic education programmes that emphasise equality, democratic participation, and constitutional rights.

Educational institutions, together with public media and governmental bodies, should promote awareness of women's constitutional role in legislative decision-making and encourage participation based on competence rather than traditional social perceptions. Expanding legal and civic education, particularly in underserved areas, would help reduce structural inequalities that indirectly affect women's access to parliamentary leadership positions. Strengthening constitutional awareness alongside legal reform therefore provides a more sustainable foundation for achieving substantive equality in parliamentary committees.

International Pressure and Participation in International Institutions

International initiatives and external pressure are essential for enhancing women's representation in Iraqi politics, especially in parliamentary committees. Many international agreements and conventions to which Iraq is a party, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), provide a legal framework that promotes women's rights and their active participation in political life.²⁹

One effective way for Iraq to benefit from these agreements is through international pressure from the United Nations and other non-governmental organisations. Through this pressure, the Iraqi government can be influenced to implement policies and regulations that ensure fair representation of women in parliamentary committees. Among the tools used in this context are the international agreements Iraq has signed, through which the UN and human rights organisations can monitor the government's compliance with international standards on women's rights. Periodic reports and reviews from these organisations can emphasise the need to improve women's representation in political institutions and ensure the creation of leadership platforms for women within influential parliamentary committees.

In addition to international pressure, participation in international forums and women's parliamentary unions offers Iraqi women a valuable opportunity to exchange experiences with counterparts from other countries. Participating in the Arab Women Parliamentarians Forum, for example, serves as a powerful platform for Iraqi women to coordinate with women from other countries in the region and advocate for better representation in Iraq's parliamentary committees. These international forums provide a supportive environment for exchanging ideas and strategies to empower women politically and strengthen Iraqi women's ability to influence the decision-making process.

Moreover, these forums can be pivotal in guiding Iraq's government policies by sharing knowledge on best international practices for women's empowerment and building local and international support networks. International pressure and participation in these forums could have a long-term impact on improving the status of women in Iraq, enhancing their active

²⁹ Dana Kamal Ahmed Amir and Ahmed Pasha Dhari Mahdi Jawad, 'No Title', *Supra* N11, 1751.

participation in political and parliamentary fields. By combining these international initiatives with local efforts, Iraq can significantly improve women's representation in parliamentary committees and achieve the required balance in decision-making across all political and social levels.

Therefore, improving women's representation in parliamentary committees requires an integrated effort that includes strengthening supporting legislation, electoral system reform, training and empowering women, supporting civil society organisations, and fostering a culture of gender equality. These opportunities can ensure greater participation by women in critical legislative decisions, contributing to achieving equality and justice in Iraqi political life.

International Experiences and Lessons Learned

International experiences with women's representation in parliamentary committees are an essential source of lessons that Iraq can draw on to enhance women's political participation. Around the world, many countries have made significant progress in increasing women's representation in legislative bodies and parliamentary committees, aligning with international standards promoting gender equality. This research section will review notable international experiences in this area and explore lessons applicable in Iraq to improve women's representation in parliamentary committees.

The Swedish Experience

Sweden is one of the leading countries in the world that has adopted legislative and administrative policies to enhance women's participation in political life, including their representation in parliamentary committees. The Swedish model is based on policies that ensure a balanced female representation, making it a pioneer in achieving gender equality in politics. Sweden serves as a role model in promoting women's representation in politics, particularly in parliamentary committees, and its practices offer valuable lessons for Iraq and other countries seeking to enhance the role of women in their legislative institutions.

Since the early 1990s, Sweden has adopted the principle of allocating women's quotas in central parliamentary committees, such as the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Budget and Finance Committee, where at least 40% of seats are reserved for women to ensure balanced representation. For example, in the Swedish Parliament, a specific proportion of seats on the Foreign Affairs Committee is reserved for women, ensuring their active participation in foreign policy matters. This allocation enhances the diversity of opinions within committees, enabling more comprehensive discussions and emphasising the importance of women's involvement in strategic decision-making.³⁰

Additionally, Sweden ensures that women hold leadership positions within parliamentary committees. In some committees, such as the Justice Committee and the Social Affairs and Employment Committee, it is required that women hold leadership roles, such as committee chairperson or vice-chairperson, ensuring an active role in the decision-making process. For example, in 2014, Cecilia Nilsson, a member of the Swedish Social Democratic Party, became the Chair of the Social Affairs and Employment Committee, exemplifying how women are

³⁰ Diana Z. O'Brien and Johanna Rickne, 'Gender Quotas and Women's Political Leadership', *American Political Science Review*, 110.1 (2009), 113–14.

empowered in leadership positions within parliamentary committees. Sweden is also one of the countries that has adopted a range of integrated legislation to promote gender equality in political life. In 1994, Sweden enacted the "Gender Equality in Political Parties" law, which obliges political parties to allocate a certain percentage of leadership positions to women. This law increased women's representation in national and local parliaments. Furthermore, Sweden introduced financial incentives for political parties that commit to reserving a percentage of their candidate lists for women, encouraging parties to take concrete steps toward gender equality.³¹

Sweden's efforts are not limited to legal reforms; the country has also worked on changing cultural perceptions through awareness programs and political education targeted at women. These programs aim to enhance political awareness among women and teach them how to compete in elections and run for positions in parliamentary committees. For instance, many Swedish NGOs offer training programs for women of all ages and backgrounds, including those from rural areas, to promote their political participation. Programs like "Women's Leadership," provided by the "Kwazi" Foundation, exemplify these educational efforts.

Furthermore, Swedish media has been crucial in shifting societal perceptions about women's political roles. Through television and radio programs, successful women in politics, such as Margot Wallström, who served as Sweden's Foreign Minister, were highlighted, helping to strengthen the image of women as political leaders. National media devoted time to showcasing the stories of female leaders in Parliament, including those serving in parliamentary committees.³²

Despite women's political challenges, Sweden is a living example of how supportive legislation, educational programs, and media support can enhance women's participation in political life, particularly in parliamentary committees. These policies ensure better representation of women and strengthen their ability to influence political decision-making, building a more balanced and just democratic society.

For Iraq, the principal lesson lies not in introducing statutory quotas for parliamentary committees but in reforming the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Representatives to establish transparent criteria for committee membership and leadership appointments. Encouraging parliamentary blocs to adopt gender-balanced nomination procedures would better implement the constitutional principles of equality and equal opportunities under Articles 14 and 16 of the Iraqi Constitution while promoting substantive rather than merely numerical representation.

The Canadian experience

Canada is a prominent model for promoting women's representation in political life, especially in parliamentary committees, through various government policies that fund political parties, enhance gender diversity, and provide financial incentives to parties that adhere to policies promoting women in leadership positions. The Canadian government requires political parties to allocate a certain percentage of their candidate seats to women and offers financial incentives to

³¹ Josefine Erikson and Cecilia Josefsson, 'The Legislature as a Gendered Workplace: Exploring Members of Parliament's Experiences of Working in the Swedish Parliament,' *International Political Science Review*, 40.2 (2019), 2–3.

³² and Erika Hedling Karin Aggestam, Annika Bergman Rosamond, 'In The Politics of Feminist Foreign Policy and Digital Diplomacy', *Political Leadership and the Digital Diffusion of Feminist Foreign Policy*, 2024, 35–36.

parties that comply with these standards. These policies effectively ensure fair and balanced representation of women in parliament and parliamentary committees. For example, parties that achieve at least 30% female representation receive additional government funding, which helps them attract more women to participate in the political process.³³

Moreover, Canada focuses on ensuring gender diversity within parliamentary committees, particularly in committees that deal with economic issues, such as the Finance Committee, the Budget Committee, and the Economic Affairs Committee. These policies ensure that decisions reflect the needs of all segments of society, including women, contributing to fairness and equality in political decision-making. Additionally, Canada pays particular attention to female representation in health and social committees, such as the Public Health Committee, where women play a pivotal role in healthcare and health insurance discussions, helping promote gender equality in health. Alongside gender balance, Canada enhances cultural diversity in Parliament, reflecting multiculturalism and ensuring broader representation of various social groups.

Political parties in Canada also play an essential role in supporting gender diversity by developing training programs for women who wish to run for political office, including in parliamentary committees. These programs focus on developing leadership, negotiation, and communication skills, helping women to compete fairly in elections. Furthermore, political parties allocate special funding to support women's electoral campaigns, helping ensure gender-balanced representation in elections. Parties also support appointing women to leadership roles within parliamentary committees, including committee chairs or vice-chairs, in committees dealing with issues that directly impact women and society.³⁴

Canada's experience in women's political representation, including in parliamentary committees, provides an advanced model that other countries, such as Iraq, can follow. By applying supportive government policies, funding political parties, and enhancing gender diversity in parliamentary committees, Canada has made significant progress in representing women. Countries that aim to improve female representation in parliamentary committees can benefit from these policies, as focusing on gender diversity in committees ensures fair representation of all segments of society in the decision-making process and strengthens women's participation in political life.

Lessons Learned and Potential Applications in Iraq from the Swedish and Canadian Experiences

The comparative experiences of Sweden and Canada demonstrate that effective representation of women in parliamentary committees depends less on statutory quotas than on institutional mechanisms that promote substantive equality. Despite following different approaches, both countries have developed parliamentary practices that facilitate women's participation in legislative decision-making through transparent committee appointments, leadership opportunities, and sustained political support.

³³ Lynda Erickson, 'Might More Women Make a Difference? Gender, Party and Ideology among Canada's Parliamentary Candidates', *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 30.4 (1997), 669–70.

³⁴ Jennifer Galandy and Deidre Serjeantson Tavcer, 'Improving Gender Representation in Canadian Federal Politics and Parliament', *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, 2019, 15.

For Iraq, several legal and institutional lessons emerge from these experiences. First, the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Representatives should establish transparent criteria governing committee membership and leadership appointments to ensure that constitutional guarantees of equality are effectively implemented. Second, parliamentary blocs should be encouraged to adopt gender-balanced nomination procedures when assigning members to parliamentary committees, particularly those exercising significant legislative and oversight responsibilities. Third, institutional capacity-building programmes in constitutional law, legislative drafting, parliamentary oversight, and budgetary scrutiny should be developed to strengthen women's effectiveness within parliamentary committees. Finally, continuous monitoring of committee composition and leadership would improve institutional accountability and facilitate the practical implementation of Articles 14, 16, and 49 of the Iraqi Constitution, as well as Iraq's obligations under Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Rather than replicating foreign models, Iraq should adopt comparative practices compatible with its constitutional framework and parliamentary system. Such reforms would strengthen substantive equality within parliamentary committees while enhancing democratic governance and legislative effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the underrepresentation of women in Iraqi parliamentary committees is not merely a question of political participation but a constitutional issue concerning the effective implementation of the principles of equality, equal opportunities, and representative democracy enshrined in Articles 14, 16, and 49 of the Iraqi Constitution. Although the Constitution guarantees women's parliamentary representation through the electoral quota, it does not provide a legal framework ensuring equitable participation in parliamentary committees, where legislative scrutiny, policy formulation, and executive oversight are primarily exercised. This constitutional gap undermines the realisation of substantive equality within parliamentary institutions. By adopting a doctrinal legal analysis informed by comparative constitutional perspectives, the study found that the principal deficiency lies not in the constitutional quota itself but in the absence of legal rules governing committee membership and leadership appointments. The research therefore contributes to constitutional scholarship by shifting the focus from women's numerical representation in Parliament to the legal framework governing effective participation in parliamentary decision-making. Accordingly, the study proposes a legal reform roadmap centred on amending the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Representatives to establish transparent criteria for committee membership and leadership appointments, consistent with the constitutional principles of equality and equal opportunity. It further recommends institutional mechanisms for monitoring committee composition, strengthening parliamentary capacity-building for female members, and aligning parliamentary practice with Iraq's obligations under Article 7 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). Rather than advocating additional constitutional quotas, these reforms seek to ensure the effective implementation of existing constitutional guarantees, thereby promoting substantive equality, strengthening parliamentary accountability, and enhancing the legitimacy of Iraq's constitutional democracy.

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