



## Article

# The Role of Civil Society in Combating Political and Financial Corruption in Iraq

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**Abstract:** Political and financial corruption is one of the most prominent challenges facing Iraq's political and economic process, and this hinders development and progress until Iraq became one of the so-called fragile states, that is, countries that do not own their political and economic decisions, and in this context we need to activate the role of civil society organizations in combating corruption by promoting transparency and accountability and raising community awareness about the dangers of corruption and its negative effects. This research aims to analyze the role of civil society organizations in Iraq in confronting political and financial corruption, by studying their work mechanisms, the main challenges they face, and the extent of their effectiveness in promoting integrity and accountability. The research relies on a descriptive and analytical approach, based on data and reports issued by local and international organizations, in addition to reviewing the legal framework that regulates the work of these organizations in Iraq. The findings indicate that civil society organizations contribute to the fight against corruption by submitting reports on corruption cases, conducting awareness campaigns, and cooperating with oversight bodies. However, CSOs face several challenges, most notably political interference and legal restrictions. The research recommends that the role of civil society organizations should be strengthened by creating a favorable legal environment, increasing cooperation between the state and these organizations, and enhancing transparency in the performance of government institutions, which will contribute to reducing corruption and promoting good governance in Iraq.

**Keywords:** Civil Society Organizations, Political Corruption, Financial Corruption

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## 1. Introduction

Financial corruption is one of the most serious challenges facing developing countries, especially those suffering from political instability and weak state institutions. In Iraq in particular, financial corruption is a major obstacle to achieving economic and social development, as it undermines public confidence in government, hinders the provision of basic services and exacerbates poverty and inequality.

Although the Iraqi economy is endowed with natural, human, material and historical resources that enable it to progress and develop, corruption, which is entrenched in both authority and society, has led to a huge waste of these resources and a loss of opportunities to increase economic activity. In this context, civil society organizations have emerged as key actors in the fight against financial corruption, working independently of government and the private sector and seeking to promote transparency, accountability and the rule of law, and civil society organizations play an important role in exposing corruption issues.

The research aims to explore the role of civil society in combating financial corruption in Iraq, with a focus on the working mechanisms of these organizations and the challenges they face. The importance of this research lies in the fact that it contributes to enhancing academic understanding of the role of civil society in combating financial corruption and political stability in fragile states such as Iraq. In addition, the research can provide practical recommendations for policymakers and civil society organizations to enhance their effectiveness in combating corruption. The research seeks to answer the following questions:

- a. Studying the nature of civil society and its organizations in Iraq.
- b. Studying the nature and causes of financial corruption in Iraq.
- c. How do civil society organizations work to combat financial corruption in Iraq.
- d. *What are the recommendations to enhance the role of civil society organizations in combating financial corruption?*

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1 Conceptual framework of civil society and financial and political corruption**

#### **2.1.1 The concept, importance and objectives of civil society organizations**

##### **2.1.1.1 The concept and importance of civil society**

"Organizations that integrate interests and benefits, contracting, understanding, difference, rights, duties, responsibilities, and holding the state accountable at all times when it is necessary to hold it accountable" [1], meaning they are non-governmental entities that operate independently of the state and the market, these organizations include NGOs, community groups, professional associations, social development and human rights organizations, charities, cultural forums, Civil society organizations (CSOs) play a critical role in promoting democratic governance, human rights, and social justice, and CSOs are becoming increasingly important in filling the gaps left by fragile state institutions.

##### **2.1.1.2 Objectives of civil society organizations**

The main objectives of civil society organizations in Iraq include promoting democratic values, protecting human rights, and combating corruption. These organizations seek to create a more inclusive and participatory political environment, where citizens can hold their leaders accountable, and we review the objectives as follows [2]:

- a. Providing services and caring for the interests of the community and preserving the rights of the community within the laws and legislation guaranteed by the state constitution
- b. Training, qualifying, and developing skills and capabilities within the community, which is one of the most important goals of civil society organizations
- c. Civil society organizations seek to promote comprehensive sustainable development in all sectors of the state, whether political, economic, social, or cultural
- d. Promoting a system of integrity and transparency in all state agencies, and becoming a partner of the government in providing suggestions and recommendations for laws and legislation that are submitted to specific and specialized bodies
- e. Achieving equal citizenship among all segments of society in terms of rights and duties, and encouraging voluntary initiatives and activities.

## **2.2 The concept of corruption and financial corruption and its causes**

### **2.2.1 The concept of corruption and financial corruption**

The World Bank and Transparency International define corruption as "the abuse of public authority to obtain private gains" [3], and it can be defined as "the abuse of public office, position or authority to achieve private interests and personal benefits at the expense of the public interest", as corruption takes various forms, including bribery, embezzlement, favoritism (which is the implementation of actions in favor of an individual or an entity to which the person belongs), favoritism (which is favoring one party over another in the service without right to achieve certain interests), exploitation of public office (employee abuse of the functional powers granted to him according to the position and public office for personal material gain). This undermines economic development, exacerbates inequality, weakens public trust in institutions and promotes political and social instability [4].

A general and broad concept of corruption can be extracted as: "Any behavior or conduct by a public official or any person entrusted with a public service or the like that aims to achieve material, moral or social personal interests, whether for himself or other persons at the expense of the public interest and the exploitation of his actual or presumed powers for this purpose, and also includes the acts and conduct of the other party who offers or provides these benefits and everyone who participates or mediates in this" [5].

Financial corruption involves the illegal diversion of financial resources for personal or political gain and includes activities such as money laundering, fraud, and illicit financial flows, and financial corruption is a major impediment to economic recovery and development.

### **2.2.2 The causes of financial and political corruption**

The causes of financial corruption are multifaceted. These causes include weak governance structures, lack of transparency, political instability, and a culture of impunity, and the legacy of conflict and the presence of armed groups outside the military institution exacerbate the issue, and the issue of financial corruption is the basis for weak justice and equality and one of the biggest obstacles to sustainable development, despite the fact that Iraq enjoys natural, human, material and historical resources that enable it to progress and develop, but deep-seated corruption has led to the waste of these resources in a very large way and lost opportunities to increase economic activity and thus high unemployment rates [6].

It is worth noting that financial corruption results in the distortion of public expenditures, and the misuse of public revenues, as it negatively affects the allocation of public expenditures to achieve the minimum benefit from this spending, as apparent activities receive high spending while ignoring activities and economic sectors important to society, as well as high levels of military spending and the conduct and implementation of public projects with tenders with a high degree of bias, and financial corruption leads to the existence of wasteful spending due to the absence of accountability, such as excessive privileges given to those who will hold positions in the state, all from the public budget [7].

Corruption in general stimulates class disparity and inequality, undermines economic and financial stability, reduces the effectiveness of public administration, distorts decisions that affect the economic, social and political life of society, diverts resources against the needs of basic sectors such as health, education and decent housing, damages the reputation of countries and reduces their political and economic attractiveness.

### 3. Results

#### A. Analysis of the reality of civil society organizations and combating financial and political corruption in Iraq

Civil society organizations in Iraq work in various activities aimed at influencing political decision-making, these organizations call for political reforms, monitor government actions and mobilize public opinion, and despite facing challenges such as limited resources and political repression, civil society organizations have been an effective tool in pushing for transparency and accountability in governance [8], but they have not risen to the optimal and required level due to political distortions and rampant political corruption even among those organizations, although they are not governmental.

According to the Department of Non-Governmental Organizations of the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers, the number of these organizations reached more than 6000 in 2024, and their number is still increasing.

The increased need for the involvement of additional parties in the elimination of corruption, especially after the state and its agencies and resources failed to meet the economic, social and cultural needs of citizens, and since these needs are one of their rights, and meeting them has become urgent and necessary to ensure human security and social stability, it was necessary to expand the field for civil society organizations to become a partner in the process of combating corruption, especially financial and administrative corruption to benefit from their human and material resources and the expertise they possess, and this shows us an important fact that the fight against financial and administrative corruption is integrated: Between the state and civil society institutions, and therefore, in this field, we can refer to three types of areas in which civil society organizations work:

- a. Providing services, which are the traditional tasks that have been carried out by non-governmental and civil organizations for decades, which include associations, charitable bodies and specialized NGOs. It should be noted that civil society has high technical and technical capabilities that enable it to provide an acceptable quality of services, as well as its ability to reach the most needy groups, especially in rural and remote areas.
- b. Contributing to the development process by strengthening and empowering local communities, and in this field it has a role in capacity building, skills development and training in various development fields such as strategic planning, formulating and implementing development programs and expanding popular participation in them.
- c. Contributing to the formulation of public policies and plans at the national and local levels, by proposing and negotiating alternatives or influencing public policies to include these alternatives.

Civil society organizations suffer from two things, the first is the political challenges, threats and violations that limit the work of these organizations, and the second is the societal culture that permits the looting of public money as a booty for everyone and there is a right to seize it, both of these two things are among the most important challenges of these organizations until they fail to achieve their goals or deviate from the real goal, and to define financial corruption is explained by the lack of real actual impact of government budgets on the Iraqi economic reality, such as providing services to society (education, health, electricity, drinking water, sewage and sanitation, housing, roads and bridges, etc.) as well as fictitious projects, money laundering and obscene privileges for senior officials, all of which are examples of looting public money [9].

This means that corruption is rooted in all joints of the state, small and large, and its results include poverty, hunger, deprivation and severe class disparity, so Iraq ranked (154) that infamous rank in front of countries that do not possess what Iraq possesses and have achieved great developmental leaps and lifted their societies from all manifestations of backwardness.

This year's Corruption Perceptions Index shows that corruption is more widespread in countries where huge funds flow freely in election campaigns, and where governments listen and watch only to the voices of wealthy politicians who spend countless funds on their election campaigns without any legal accountability (where did you get this?!!!!), the Transparency International report for 2023 AD, which includes 177 countries, listed Iraq in 154th place globally among the most corrupt countries for 2023 AD, noting that the report does not evaluate cases of money laundering and smuggling.

**Table 1.** Shows the development of the Corruption Perceptions Index in Iraq for the period 2003-2023.

Number of countries in the ranking	Corruption Perceptions Index	Year
133	115	2003
159	141	2005
178	175	2010
167	161	2015
180	160	2020
177	154	2023

Source: Website <https://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/>

The issue of human rights and freedom of expression had an impact on the Corruption Perceptions Index (2020) in Iraq Iraq and the popular demonstrations calling for the need for political and economic reform and holding accountable the corrupt in the political class and the thieves of public money, and the violations and the use of excessive and often deadly force and failure to respond to the demands of the public until those demonstrations ended with the outbreak of the Coronavirus and the policies of health closure and curfew to prevent the spread of the virus.

The challenge of Corona in Iraq was very great, but taking important measures despite the weak funding of the health sector and limited capabilities in terms of buildings and laboratories shows that Iraq has overcome the pandemic through popular support, civil society institutions, religious institutions, business sector companies and the media, and the challenge of transparency of government contracts, projects and procurement is still the largest in the corruption file, which caused great waste and appropriation of public money by influential parties, inflated speculative prices in contracts, projects and procurement, and weak public policies in integrating the private sector into the national economy and protecting investment [10].

Successive governments have failed to meet social demands and with the continued political fragmentation and the intensification of the struggle for power and the keenness of government elites to maintain the status quo and not find real remedies to achieve the demands of the people, especially the youth, led to social unrest that culminated in popular protests in 2019 demanding improved public services (education, health, water, electricity, employment, infrastructure) and the elimination of financial and administrative corruption that exhausted budgets and missed many golden opportunities to activate various economic sectors and hold corrupt people accountable, and this is what prompted the Iraqi youth to

After we have reviewed some of the reality of corruption, we can summarise what civil society organisations seek to achieve during their work in Iraq if they are not interfered with politically and without pressure:

First: Human building



The vision of the social axis, working to create a social development based on the methodology of truth and contribute to building an influential personality (human being: man/woman) who seeks to achieve himself as an achiever, creative, responsible and effective who has an influential role in leadership, construction and development in a way that makes human security an opportunity available to all, and this construction is through a set of goals that achieve justice and sustainable development, including:

- a. Alleviating poverty
- b. Providing decent job opportunities for all the unemployed
- c. Establishing a high-quality and inclusive education system
- d. Promoting an effective and comprehensive health care system
- e. Providing decent housing and removing informal neighborhoods

#### Second : Good Governance

The vision of the institutional axis and good governance is to create government administrative institutions that ensure respect for the political, civil and human rights of citizens by providing equal opportunities for all, adopting a culture of performance and achievement to reach the required paths in order to achieve equality for all citizens before the law and work to achieve the following goals:

- a. Supporting the rule of law, providing access to justice, and promoting good governance
- b. Improving administrative decentralization and public participation in decision-making
- c. Promoting integrity and transparency, and combating corruption
- d. Reforming public financial management and achieving financial sustainability

#### Third : Safe society

- a. Promoting a culture of tolerance, dialogue and peace
- b. Ensuring the advancement of families, women and vulnerable groups
- c. Promoting the values of citizenship and reducing inequalities
- d. Spreading the spirit of achievement, initiative and voluntary work

Providing sustainable solutions to internal and external migration and displacement

### **B. Mechanisms to combat political and financial corruption through civil society organizations in Iraq Civil**

society organizations represent the authority of society in the face of any monopoly or tyranny that may be issued by state agencies and sectors, and must be aware of the role played by civil society organizations in confronting corruption crimes, and identify the most important mechanisms by which civil society organizations work to confront corruption.

The current and new government that takes over the reins at the present time (2025 AD) must develop a realistic development strategy in the short and long term and respond to the visions of civil society organizations as they are in contact with Iraqi society and are aware of what members of society need, in order to build a socially cohesive state with sovereignty and economic influence in the region that aims to combat corruption in all its forms, peaceful transfer of power and political reforms that enhance the ability of governments to serve society as well as achieve justice, as well as support civil society organizations that act as observers of the work of governments and diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of the The government administration provides proposals to address them, which achieves political and economic stability, especially through the following mechanisms [11] :

#### **1. Advocacy and awareness campaigns**

Civil society organizations in Iraq conduct advocacy and awareness campaigns to educate the public about the dangers of financial corruption. These organizations use

various media platforms to disseminate information and mobilize citizens to demand accountability from their leaders

## **2. Monitoring and reporting**

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in monitoring government activities and reporting cases of corruption. They use tools such as social audits, citizen reports, and investigative journalism to expose corrupt practices.

## **3. Legal and political advocacy**

Civil society organizations engage in legal and political advocacy to drive reforms that promote transparency and accountability. They work with legislators to draft and implement anti-corruption legislation and policies.

## **4. Capacity Building and Training**

CSOs provide capacity building and training programmes for government officials, civil servants, and the general public. These programmes aim to enhance skills and knowledge in areas such as financial management, ethical leadership, and anti-corruption strategies.

## **5. International cooperation**

Civil society organizations in Iraq work with international organizations and networks to share best practices and resources. They participate in global anti-corruption initiatives and leverage international support to strengthen their efforts.

## **6. Accountability**

CSOs work hard to achieve political, economic, social and other reforms in the various state agencies and sectors, and to hold people in high-level positions accountable for the results of their actions.

The development of civil society organizations is a preventive measure aimed at strengthening the immunity of public institutions against corruption by issuing awareness bulletins on the causes of corruption through various educational institutions, promoting transparency in the work of these institutions, preparing educational programmes and seminars, building a tolerant community culture against all forms of corruption, and protecting public money and public property, which is considered the collective property of citizens.

## **4. Discussion**

### **A. The server is busy, Please try again later**

#### **1. Political Reform and Good Governance**

The priority in Iraq should be to refocus the political settlement on development and restore the authority of the state's official institutions over non governmental actors. When the elite agreement in Iraq is directed toward growth and development, citizens will enjoy the benefits of peace and will be more inclined to grant public institutions and the ruling elite the legitimacy necessary for governance. Additionally, the state's official authority over non-governmental armed groups must be restored [12].

Consensus democracy has failed to manage Iraq economically and politically, in addition to the eruption of a significant crisis of trust among the diverse religious, ethnic, and sectarian components of Iraqi society. This is evidenced by the Iraqi reality witnessed over the past nineteen years, where a crisis of trust has emerged among political parties due to the opportunistic pursuit of political office by some elements seeking executive and legislative positions, exploiting sectarian rhetoric and the legacy of the past. As a result, consensus has become a reason for reinforcing financial and administrative corruption and the plundering of public funds, explaining the absence of a future developmental vision and weak economic justice [13].

Therefore, it is preferable at present (2025), as we approach new parliamentary elections, to abandon consensus and opt for a majority government that takes on the responsibility of managing the country and bears accountability for any failures that may arise. As one political entity has pointed out, political reform can be achieved by forming a "national majority government," where the parliament consists of two blocs:

- a. The Governing Bloc (Loyalist Bloc): This bloc forms the government and undertakes political, economic, and social reforms.
- b. The Opposition Bloc : This bloc is tasked with oversight and does not participate in forming the government ,This requires the existence of a genuine and unified political opposition in its actions and in confronting the governing bloc.

This approach is an imperative necessity to pass policies aimed at achieving political, social, and economic justice and rescuing Iraqi society from poverty and unemployment. By "majority," we mean a political majority described as a horizontal majority that spans the entire country, with supporters and bases from various human groups in the country, rather than a communal majority described as a vertical majority based on sectarian and ethnic affiliations [14].

## **2. Building Trust Between Citizens and the Government**

Building trust is not just about slogans but requires credibility, transparency, and clarity in government actions. To build trust between citizens and the government and address grievances, Iraq must do the following [15]:

- a. Strengthen existing accountability institutions to enable them to respond effectively to public concerns about corruption.
- b. Ensure that accountability and justice institutions focus on mitigating the risks of corruption and enhancing government performance.
- c. Strive to improve citizens' actual experiences with corruption, bureaucracy, abuse of power, and arbitrary practices.
- d. Automate services, such as providing electronic services, to address corruption issues like bribery, favoritism, and other forms of harassment that occur during citizens' interactions with government employees and officials.
- e. Ensure political leaders are committed to political and economic reform, disclose their assets and income, and reveal their financial records.

## **3. Proper Utilization and Allocation of Resources**

The fair distribution of resources (human, natural, and material) and ensuring their benefits for both current and future generations are among the most important requirements for achieving economic justice This includes [16].

- a. Fair Distribution of Resources : All resources belong to the entire society, and rights to these resources are only established through legal provisions. To achieve economic justice among members of society, resource ownership should be represented in:
  - Private Ownership : For resources linked to the nature and needs of society, as private ownership motivates work, production, and land development.
  - Public Ownership : For resources that must be allocated to areas of public benefit, such as necessities (food, water, clothing, security, education, health, defense, transportation, housing, communications, etc.) and areas where the private sector is unwilling to invest. Public ownership works to achieve community development in partnership with individuals, meet social solidarity needs, and ensure intergenerational balance.
- b. Fair Distribution of Returns : Resources contribute to the production process, and the returns generated should be distributed fairly based on the role and importance of each resource in the production process, according to supply and demand, mutual agreement, and choice. Achieving fair resource distribution contributes to high living standards for society.



- c. Avoid Harming Future Generations : Future generations must be enabled to benefit from resources and their returns, and resources must not be depleted.

The Iraqi government must work diligently toward the optimal and efficient use of available economic resources, correct structural imbalances, and reduce reliance on the oil sector, which is volatile and makes the Iraqi economy vulnerable to external fluctuations. Additionally, the government must consider the rights of future generations to these resources, which are currently being used without establishing sustainable development projects for future benefit. Therefore, the following must be done:

- a. Diversify the Economic Base : Reduce dependence on a single source, such as crude oil, and move toward producing natural gas and other resources. Support the agricultural sector by increasing spending allocated to this sector and providing economic incentives to encourage landowners to increase production and utilize their land, achieving self-sufficiency and food security, which are essential for economic justice.
- b. Develop Infrastructure : Prepare infrastructure that facilitates the work of economic sectors, such as roads, bridges, railways, schools, hospitals, public projects, and electricity.
- c. Support the Private Sector : Provide loans, incentives, and facilitate investment procedures to increase its contribution to economic development.

## 5. Conclusion

Civil society organizations play a vital role in combating financial corruption in Iraq through monitoring, legal and political advocacy, capacity building, and international cooperation, and contribute to creating a more transparent and accountable governance system. However, these organizations face significant challenges, including limited resources, political repression, and a culture of impunity.

Recommendations the research is: (1) Strengthen legal frameworks: The Iraqi government should enact and implement comprehensive anti-corruption laws that provide CSOs with the necessary legal tools to effectively combat corruption. (2) Promote transparency and accountability: The government should promote transparency by making financial information publicly available and establishing independent oversight bodies. (3) Build capacity: More financial and training support should be provided to civil society organizations to strengthen their anti-corruption capacity. (4) Public Awareness : Continuous awareness campaigns should be implemented to educate citizens about the dangers of corruption and the importance of accountability. (5) International support: The international community should provide technical and financial support to Iraqi civil society organizations to enhance their anti-corruption efforts.

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