PhD thesis

Analysing Contemporary Shi'a Political Landscape in Post-2003 Iraq: A Bourdieusian Perspective on Power Dynamics

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the evolving power dynamics within the Shi'a political landscape in post-2003 Iraq. The study employs Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework and conflict resolution theories to dissect the interplay of historical legacies, cultural, symbolic, and coercive capital among Shi'a factions. The research also highlights the significance of the hawza (Shi'a religious seminary) and religious authority in shaping political alignments and power relations, underscoring the complex and heterogeneous nature of the Shi'a community. Furthermore, the research examines the Muhāsasa system, a post-2003 political patronage system in Iraq, and its influence on intra-sect power dynamics and political divisions.

Employing qualitative methodologies, including Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA), and drawing on semi-structured interviews, the study conceptualises the power dynamics and explores how cultural and symbolic capital are utilised to establish and maintain power relations.

The study's findings reveal that intra-Shi'a power conflicts manifest through elite discourse, with political actors strategically utilising religious symbolism and coercion to assert dominance. This strategic manipulation is exemplified by figures such as Muqtada al-Sadr, who leverages his symbolic capital and coercive power to navigate and influence the Shi'a political field, positioning himself as a nationalist and protector of Iraqi interests.

The dissertation also examines the role of foreign intervention, particularly by Iran and the United States, in shaping Shi'a political dynamics. It highlights the challenges posed by the proliferation of paramilitary groups like the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), which operate outside state control, undermining governance and stability.

Furthermore, the study addresses the need for constitutional and political reforms to address the pervasive issues of corruption, sectarianism, and ineffective governance. It emphasises the importance of developing a more unified foreign policy and engaging in comprehensive security sector reforms to mitigate the influence of coercive capital and promote inclusive governance.

By applying Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital, this research offers a nuanced understanding of the power structures within the Shi'a political landscape in Iraq. The dissertation provides valuable insights into the socio-political complexities of post-2003 Iraq, contributing to the broader discourse on stability, state-building, and political development in the region.

Acknowledgement

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to the Almighty Allah for granting me patience and belief through this fortuitous journey that has tested my resolve in more ways than I care to count. I have faced numerous challenges, doubts, and uncertainty through the various trials and tribulations and the exceptionally long journey toward this moment. However, I have succeeded with the help of the almighty family and the excellent supervision of Dr Keles and my dear friend Dr Mohamad Al-Hakim.

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Declaration of Originality

I hereby declare that this submission is my work. To the best of my knowledge, it contains no materials previously published or written by another person or substantial proportions of material which have been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any educational institution, except where due acknowledgment is made in the thesis. Any contribution made to the research by others is explicitly acknowledged in the thesis. I also declare that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my work.

List of Abbreviations

AAH - Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq

AUIB - American University of Iraq-Baghdad

CPA - Coalition Provisional Authority

ICM - Iraqi Council of Ministers

ICP - Islamic Call Party also known as Islamic Dawa Party

IGC - Iraqi Governing Council

IHR - Iraqi House of Representatives

IZ - International Zone

ISCI - Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq

ISIS - Islamic State in Iraq and Syria

JAM - Jayish Al-Mahdi Army

KDP - Kurdistan Democratic Party

KRG - Kurdistan Regional Government

MENA - Middle East and North Africa

NDI - National Democratic Institute

NGO - Non-Government Organisation

PDA - Political Discourse Analysis

PMF Popular Mobilisation Forces

PMO - Prime Minister's Office

PUK- Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

TA - Thematic Analysis

US - United States

UIA - United Iraqi Alliance

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CHAPTER I
FROM ROOTS TO REVELATION:
UNDERSTANDING HISTORICAL AND POST-2003 SHI'A POWER RELATIONS IN IRAQ

1.1 Introduction

This dissertation delves into the complex power dynamics that constitute Shi'a discursive practices in post-2003 Iraq. The project firmly positions itself within the conflict resolution theoretical framework and the Bourdieusian theory of field, capital, and habitus, comprehensively examining the socio-historical complexities that permeate the Shi'a political landscape in Iraq (Bourdieu & Johnson, 2011; Bourdieu, 1986- see chapter Three for detailed discussion on Bourdieu's theoretical framework).

Within this realm of study, the investigation situates itself within the unique historical and political peculiarities that have characterised the trajectory of Iraq post-2003 (Tripp, 2002; Kadhim & Szanto, 2015; Ismael & Ismael, 2017; Marr, 2019). Emerging from the 2003 Iraq War, the country was embroiled in enduring sectarian-coded tensions, political stalemates, and pervasive corruption (Jaber, 2018). These tumultuous circumstances have, in turn, reshaped the Shi'a political field into a complicated arena of power contestation (Dodge, 2019).

Prior to their political ascendency in the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Shi'a community grappled with the philosophical underpinnings of their political engagement. The debate was centred around Imamate[1],

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[1] The term 'Imamate' in Shi'a Islam refers to the institution of spiritual and political leadership over the Muslim community, a role Shi'a Muslims believe should be fulfilled by the successors (Imams) of the Prophet Muhammad. Shi'a believe that the Imam must be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, and Ali is considered the first Imam. The perception of the Imams, believed to be infallible and divinely guided and endowed with exceptional wisdom and knowledge, and therefore positioned as fitting leaders in religious and worldly affairs, sets Shi'a political thought apart from its Sunni counterpart. It is also important to note that This interpretation of 'Imam' should not be conflated with the term's conventional usage, where 'imam' refers to a man who leads prayers and attends to religious responsibilities in a mosque. The latter, while important in their own right, do not hold the same revered status and expansive roles as the Imams in Shi'a belief. Thus, 'Imam' in this thesis signifies the specific, elevated concept within Shi'a theology, rather than the more commonplace understanding of a religious leader or prayer guide.

asserting that only an infallible Imam can govern, creating a dilemma for Shi'a political leadership (Hamoudi, 2017). With Ayatollah Khomeini's (1902-1989) introduction of Wilayat al-Faqih 12/03/2024(Guardianship of the Jurist)[2] (Akhavi, 1996, pp. 229-268), Shi'as in Iraq found themselves propelled into the political scene, albeit in a volatile environment shaped by Saddam Hussein's authoritarian Ba'athist regime. Saddam's pan-Arab nationalism and perceived threat from the Iranian Shi'a regime led to further marginalisation and persecution of the Iraqi Shi'a community (Hashim, 2006). As noted, '[i]t is not that the Iraqi state wanted Shi'as to abandon Shi'ism nor was the state anti-Shi'a per se; rather, it would be far more accurate to argue that the pre-2003 state was suspicious of those whose lives and identities were embedded in Shi'a social and religious structures' and challenged the Iraqi national narrative (Haddad, 2016, p. 10).

The post-2003 period also marked a paradigm shift that offered the Iraqi Shi'a community its first opportunity to engage in political leadership. However, the immediate aftermath was a power vacuum resulting from numerous factors, including, but not limited to, the dismantling of Iraqi armed forces (Rubaii, 2019), Sunni opposition to Shi'a leadership (Haddad, 2006), regional influences from Iran and the Sunni Gulf states (Alaaldin, 2018) and the internal struggle within the Shi'a communities itself (Veen, 2016). These helped transform Iraq into a battleground of varied and competing interests (Mansour, 2023b).

Within this intricate landscape, applying conflict resolution theories provides a structural framework to interpret the conflicts' genesis, intricacies, and resolution strategies among Shi'a factions. This theoretical perspective offers a comprehensive window into the undercurrents shaping these conflicts, thereby contributing to a more nuanced comprehension of the peculiarities specific to the Shi'a context and its broader implications for Iraq's political fabric. Discussion of conflict resolution also opens a meaningful space for consideration of various power-sharing models and their role in shaping the post-2003

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[2] Wilayat al-Faqih, or Guardianship of the Islamic jurist (Akhavi, 1996). The doctrine asserts that a competent mujtahid should take on state leadership without a divinely appointed Imam (Kadivar, 2003; Algar, 1981). This will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3.5 'Applying Bourdieu's Theory to Shi'a Political Discourse' and Chapter 5.3 under section 'Authority Reimagined: The Ascendancy of Mujtahids in the Absence of Imams'.

circumstances in Iraq. In particular, this project is interested in a number of studies and discussions engaged with consociationalism as a power-sharing model in general (Boremann et al., 2019; Johnson, 2020) as well as within the Iraqi context specifically (Dodge, 2018; 2020; Dodge & Mansoor, 2018).

Complementing this approach, the research will employ Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice (1978). In particular, the study will draw on Bourdieu's conceptualisation of prestige, and recognition within social fields as these offer a useful lens to analyse the subtleties of power exercise and preservation. Moreover, Bourdieu's theory suggests that social spaces are structured by specific rules and forms of power, which shape the distribution of different types of capital, including (1) 'A social field,' which refers to a structured space of positions and relations governed by specific rules and stakes, a (2) 'Habitus' which refers to the set of skills and resources that people acquire from their social environment and use to navigate the field, and, finally, (3) 'Capital' which refers to the various forms of resources (economic, cultural, social, symbolic) that people possess and exchange in the field. As Dodge rightly states, the 'powerful insights of Bourdieu's work, especially when applied to the longue durée of Iraqi history, come primarily from his relational approach, where competition for dominance within a field shape both the nature of that field and the value of the capital being fought over.' (Dodge, 2018, p. 27).

It is also worth noting that the application of Bourdieu's theory in the Iraqi-Shi'a context is novel, as his view has not been used to understand Shi'a power dynamics. One notable exception is Toby Dodge (2018), who applies Bourdieu's framework in an attempt to understand the power struggle within the post-2003 political framework of Iraq's elite and sectarian entrepreneurs. However, his work does not focus on the intra-Shi'a dynamics but rather examines the overall political framework and its role in causing violence between sect-centric actors. The current project is different insofar as it offers a fresh lens through which to comprehend the power struggles within the Shi'a political field. This becomes increasingly pertinent as the Shi'a community navigates its newfound role in power politics, offering an up-to-date and nuanced understanding of the evolving political landscape in Iraq.

Thus, combining conflict resolution theories with Bourdieu's concepts will allow for a comprehensive analysis of Shi'a political discourse in Iraq. This approach will offer valuable insights into the structural foundations of power relations (through Bourdieu's forms of capital) and how conflicts arise and are addressed (*via* conflict resolution). Such integration will provide a richer understanding of the political, social, and cultural factors shaping the intra-Shi'a competition by contributing to the broader knowledge of stability and political development in Iraq. Bourdieu's theoretical lens represents 'possibly the most encouraging analytical framework for grasping power structures and relations' (Navarro, 2006, p. 13). By applying Bourdieu's framework to the study of discourse, I intend to analyse the internal power struggles and dynamics within the Shi'a political field.

Prior to delving into the subject of the Shi'a and the inter-group conflicts and power dimensions that further shape and define the region, the chapter first begins (Part 1), outlining the topic, its current research gaps, the methodology, and agenda for the project. Upon getting these formalities out of the way, Part 2 then focuses on the research subject itself (Shi'a) and the power dynamics of this group in post-2003 Iraq.

PART 1: RESEARCH GAPS, POSITIONALITY, METHOD, AND LIMITS

1.2 Research Gap

Given the fluidity of the situation in Iraq since 2003 and the ongoing numerous changing factors in the region, it is not all that surprising that a research gap can be found within the literature. However, it is also important to point out that the existing scholarship has primarily underscored the role of sectarian tensions[3] in precipitating conflict and power struggles in the Middle East (Hashemi & Postel, 2017). This is especially true in the case of the aftermath of the Arab Spring. The tensions in the region are often construed as deep-

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[3] Ussama Makdisi defines sectarianism as 'a process—not an object, not an event, and certainly not a primordial trait.' This process sees politicians or sectarian entrepreneurs, seeking to impose religious difference as the "primary marker of modern political identity …" (Makdisi 2000, 2008)

rooted animosities or tools that political elites exploit to fortify their power within a sectarian-oriented political order (Mabon & Ardovini, 2016, p. 552). Such characterisations have contributed to the ongoing gap in the literature.

This can also be seen in the case of Iraq, whereby the Iraqi political disputes among the competing elites were framed through sectarian categories and discourse that revolved around Shi'a victimhood and Sunni exclusion (Haddad, 2020, p. 71). This framing mobilised communities by playing on their fears, which in turn created a perception that sectarianism as a politically exploited category (Mansour, 2023; Valbjorn, 2020; Dodge, 2020; Mabon, 2019; Hashemi & Postel, 2017).

Moreover, since 2018, Iraq's power struggles have witnessed a significant shift. Once central to political discourse, identity-based discussions have been replaced by more resonant themes of change and reform, echoing popular demands. This shift is quite noticeable in the language used in election campaigns (see Veen & Shadeedi, 2022, p. 6). The dynamics have evolved into intra-group struggles among various factions (Hodge & Gopal, 2020; Ali et al., 2020; Alaaldin, 2023; Veen et al., 2017).

Haddad (2022) asserts in his article that 'Shi'a rule is a reality; it no longer has to contend with sect-coded existential threats as it once did…' Evidence of these sect-coded[4] departures could be seen in examples such as the Tishreen protests[5] spearheaded by Iraq's primarily Shi'a youth against its Shi'a government and elites, indicating a shift in domestic dynamics (Jabar, 2018). This view is also corroborated by Alshamary when she argues that; *"Back then, the fear of sectarian infighting and violence was very high, and now that it's diminished, it is a very good thing, and it heralds a change in politics where people's priorities have shifted."* (Alshamary 2022).

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[4] For Haddad, sect-coding denotes a self-defining focus on sect. this helps to better differentiate between for example a politician who just happens to be Shi'a from a Shi'a centric politician. For more please see (Haddad, 2022).

[5] Demanding an end to the Muhasasa Ta'ifiya (Sectarian apportionment), escalating protests reached their climax in October 2019, when significant demonstrations erupted in Baghdad and across southern Iraq. The protesters explicitly attributed Iraq's endemic corruption and the state's institutional inefficiency, which drastically affected service delivery. This protest, later referred to as Thawrat Tishreen or the October Revolution, evolved to advocate a pronounced secular nationalism, equality in citizenship, and a complete overhaul of the existing political structure (Dodge & Mansour, 2020; Ali, 2021).

It is important to recognise the disparity between the perspectives of elites and ordinary Iraqis, particularly regarding the constitution and consociational system. Elitist views often prioritise discussions on these institutional frameworks, which in turn influence shifting power dynamics, including intra-sect dynamics and broader ethno-sectarian relations. An illustrative example is the Kurdish Democratic Party's (KDP) stance concerning "reformist views" advocated by figures like the Shi'a religious cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in the 2021 government formation, who emphasised constitutional amendments. Such proposals conflict with the KDP's interests, as they strongly support the constitution due to the security and unprecedented benefits it affords to the Kurdish community. As such, allies such as Sadr and the KDP on such an issue can push this alliance further apart when it comes to conversations around the constitution. Moreover, this perspective is regarded as reflective of a "very high-level—almost elite-level view of politics—because it significantly influences how political leaders envision the portrayal and representation of their constituents within Iraqi society at large." (Alshamary, 2022).

Furthermore, through analysing electoral trends, Haddad underscored the waning relevance and trust the electorate has for Shi'a Islamist parties. This trend, alongside the noticeable fragmentation of these Shi'a political entities, helps contribute to the growing complexity of Iraqi politics (2022).[6]

Moreover, according to Alshamary, what distinguishes Shi'a politics is its multipolar nature. Unlike a monolithic structure, no single figure can assert leadership over the Shi'a community, whether within the Coordination Framework or more broadly (a coalition of Shi'a parties primarily united in their opposition to Sadr (Bobseine, 2022). With Iraq no longer facing existential threats from external forces like the Islamic

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[6] For example, in 2005 the top Shi'a coalition United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) received 47 percent of the vote, in 2010 the top performer shares of the vote received 24 percent, similarly in 2014 where Nouri al-Maliki from the State of Law received 24 percent as the highest share of Shi'a vote, 2018 Sa'iroon received 14 percent and the 2021 elections the top performer once again Sadr receiving 10 percent of the vote. Not only does this show the fragmentation of votes and the reduction in votes, for example 2005 elections participation turnout hovered around 80 percent, by 2010 this was reduced to around 62 percent and the more recent 2021 elections saw Iraqi's lowest ever turnout of around 41 percent (Stewart-Jolley, 2021). But this fragmentation also reflects the increased complexity of Iraqi politics, governance, and political competition.

State group or Kurdish secessionism, political leaders are now vying for leadership within their respective ethno-religious and ethno-sectarian groups. (Alshamary 2022).

Internal divisions within various ethnic and sectarian groups, such as disputes within Sunni leadership, internal Kurdish tensions, and Shi'a internal strife, have all become prominent in this new political landscape, and the literature on this issue is only now beginning to take greater shape.[7] In short, today's political landscape is vastly different from the basic outline of the post-2003 contested order (Haddad, 2022). More than others, the political class and Shi'a elites have undergone a deep and continuous fragmentation from the main Shi'a political blocs (Veen & al-Shadeedi, 2020). The falling out and fragmentation can, in part, be traced to some of the more recent uprisings in Iraq. It is estimated that 6000 protestors have died and over 20000 individuals have been injured during Iraq's most prominent and longest-lasting protest movement[8] in post-2003 Iraq (International Crisis Group, 2021). Protests that witnessed violent clashes between competing factions (Reuters, 2021) and one that reflects the increased complexity of Iraqi politics.

Haddad further highlights that in today's political climate, the primary lines of political contestation have been intra-sectarian, with rival, cross-sectarian alignments competing over the political and economic spoils of the state (2020). Currently, the primary challenge to Iraq's political stability and the empowerment of

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[7] As this thesis primary focus is intra-Shi'a conflict, I will in this instance not get into the intricacies of intra-Sunni, and Intra-Kurdish conflict as to not digress away from our main focus. However, for more context on intra-Sunni conflict see for example Hodge and Gopal (2020), and for context on intra-Kurdish conflict see for example Ali Saleem & Skelton (2020). As for Shi'a conflict, we will delve into the intricacies of the conflict further in this chapter and subsequent chapters. However, Alaaldin (2023) provides a good starting point.

[8] Social protest movements, or social movements, are concepts that have been defined in various ways, and there's no consensus on a single typology, as scholars emphasise different dynamics (Noble, 2014, pp. 518-524). Snow and Soule (2010, p. 6) offer a comprehensive definition that encompasses five key aspects: 1) Social movements are perceived as either challengers to or defenders of established structures or systems of authority. 2) They are collective, not individual endeavours. 3) They often operate outside conventional institutional or organisational arrangements. 4) They generally do so with a certain degree of continuity.

Based on these elements, Snow and Soule (2010) conceptualise social movements as collectives acting with a degree of organisation and continuity, partly outside institutional or organisational channels, for the purpose of challenging extent systems of authority or resisting change in such systems in the organisation, society, culture, or world system in which they are embedded.' This understanding of social movements integrates features from various other definitions, including those by McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001), Tarrow (1998), and Turner and Killian (1987). Snow's 2004 work provides a more detailed examination of some of these conceptual differences.

the Shi'a political elite is tied to two issues. On the one hand, there is the intra-Shi'a elite rivalry, and on the other hand, there is public discontent and mobilisation (ibid). Recent events, such as the 2021 Parliamentary elections, have demonstrated the challenges that arise from the power struggle between Shi'a actors such as the Sadrist Movement, led by populist Shi'a cleric Muqtada al-Sadr, and the Coordination Framework[9]. The Coordinating Framework emerged in October 2021 as an Iraqi political coalition comprising Shiite factions, with the objective of establishing a consensual quota government. However, Muqtada al-Sadr (Shi'a cleric), leader of the Sadrist movement, opposed this initiative, advocating instead for a political majority government.

The ongoing crisis surrounding elite political consensus and government formation primarily stems from the rivalry between Sadr and the Coordination Framework. This rivalry manifests itself as a battle of political influence, personal disputes, and competition for government positions rather than a divergence in policymaking approaches (Atwood & Higel, 2022). Prolonged government formation negotiations are not unusual in Iraq; however, the deadlock represented the most extended stalemate since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion. Given their significant influence on the overall political system, this situation underscores the importance of comprehending intra-Shi'a power struggles that have destabilised the nation, exacerbated existing ethno-sectarian divides and threatened the fragile stability achieved in recent years (ibid).

Given these noted divisions' centrality and political and social implications, the current research purposefully focuses on the competition among Shi'a political elites rather than non-elites. This is so for several reasons. First, the Shi'a community represents the majority of Iraq's population and, as a result, wields significant influence on the country's political landscape. Second, the actions and decisions of elites often have wide-reaching implications on the political landscape, directly influencing policymaking and strategic direction. Third, it offers a unique perspective into the underlying power dynamics and fragmentation processes that characterise Iraq's post-2003 Shi'a political discourse. Moreover, this

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[9] See Chapter 5 for more details.

approach contributes to the existing literature by exploring a dimension of Shi'a politics that has undergone a significant transformation but remains underexplored. Finally, understanding these intra-elite dynamics is vital for crafting effective governance strategies, identifying and understanding broader political trends, and navigating the complexities of Iraq's evolving political space.

As noted earlier, the application of Bourdieu's theory in this context is novel, as it has not been specifically employed to understand Shi'a power dynamics. However, addressing this gap becomes increasingly pertinent as the Shi'a community navigates and builds upon its newfound role in political power.

1.2.2 Positionality

Navigating through this intricate field of study, endeavouring to bridge the research gap, required a blend of academic rigour and a distinctly personal perspective. My positionality and reflexivity played pivotal roles in this study, resonating with Bourdieu's emphasis on the importance of these aspects in research (Deer, 2008). Reflexivity, in this case, involved a process of self-awareness, wherein I critically scrutinised my biases, assumptions, and their influence on my research. This act of reflexivity was closely tied to Bourdieu's concept of 'habitus', denoting the deeply ingrained habits and, skills, and dispositions that individuals develop due to their life experiences and social environments (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). These concepts will be further discussed in detail within the Theoretical Framework chapter.

As a British-Iraqi, my experiences shape my perspective and thus inform this study. I was born in Baghdad but was too young to remember its streets, towns, or relatives who resided there. Like many others, my father was an educated young man who found himself drawn to the Islamist narrative of Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr during a difficult era for the Da'wa party's supporters. The regime heavily targeted its members, leading many, including my father, to seek refuge elsewhere, in our case, Syria.

My earliest memories are carved not in my homeland but in Syria, amidst the life of a refugee. I vividly recall my father reacting emotionally to the news of Khomeini's passing on the radio. During those formative years, I became aware of the terror orchestrated by Saddam Hussein against the Shi'a. The tales

of his regime's brutalities and torture inflicted on 'our' people became etched in my mind, shaping my understanding of Iraq's political landscape.

These early experiences sparked my curiosity. I wondered what could drive a man to perpetrate such atrocities. The political discussions I overheard among my father's circle further fuelled my interest. These conversations left an indelible impression, leading me towards a political career focusing on Iraq.

In 2008, an opportunity arose to return to Iraq as part of the Coalition forces. This was not just a chance to step foot on my ancestral land but an opportunity to contribute to the healing and development of a nation wracked by years of conflict. I worked on projects to promote community cohesion and end sectarianism, further immersing me in the intricacies of Iraqi politics. This first-hand experience and growing interest in the political landscape led me to pursue a PhD centred on the issues plaguing Iraqi politics. This study, therefore, is not just an exploration of the power dynamics within the Shi'a political field; it is also a profoundly personal journey reflecting my experiences, insights, and quest for understanding the evolution of the Iraqi political landscape.

1.3 Objectives and Research Question.

The overall aim of this study is to investigate the complex interplay of power within the Shi'a political and social field in post-2003 Iraq, a period marked by profound political reconfigurations and social transformations (Dodge, 2018). By focusing on the Shi'a community, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on political sociology and the sociology of power, particularly within the context of Middle Eastern politics. The objectives and research questions are designed to help uncover the various layers of influence that shape power dynamics, considering both historical legacies and contemporary political practices. Furthermore, this exploration is grounded in the theoretical framework of Pierre Bourdieu, which allows for a nuanced analysis of how power is produced, contested, and maintained within

social fields.

Objectives:

1. **Analysing Power Conflicts:** To dissect the production and manifestation of power conflicts within the Shi'a field, particularly focusing on how elitist discourse drives intra-Shi'a power struggles. This objective will scrutinise the processes of legitimisation and delegitimisation of certain actions, beliefs, narratives, and framings within the field.

2. **Examining Historical Legacies:** To explore the impact of historical legacies on Shi'a political discourse and field dynamics, examining how these legacies shape interactions and power relations among different social groups and classes. This includes an analysis of how historical narratives continue to influence contemporary political and social configurations within the Shi'a community.

3. **Understanding Power Relations:** To provide a comprehensive understanding of contemporary power relations within the Shi'a political field, with a particular focus on the role of various forms of capital (e.g., cultural and symbolic capital) in influencing these dynamics. This objective seeks to understand how these forms of capital are mobilised by different actors to shape power relations and maintain dominance within the field.

Research Questions:

1. How does the ongoing power conflict within the Shi'a political field manifest, and what role does elitist discourse play in shaping these dynamics, particularly in the processes of legitimising or delegitimising specific actions, beliefs, or narratives?

2. How have historical legacies influenced the current interactions and power relations within the Shi'a political discourse, and in what ways are cultural and symbolic capital mobilised by different

social groups and classes to influence these dynamics in post-2003 Iraq?

3. What are the underlying structures and dynamics of contemporary power relations within the Shi'a political field, and how are different forms of capital, particularly symbolic and cultural, mobilised to shape and maintain these relations?

1.3.2 Methodology

In order to fulfil the outlined objectives, this thesis adopted qualitative research methodologies, utilising techniques including Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and aspects of Thematic Analysis (TA) — these will be defined and engaged in more detail in the next chapter. Twenty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted for data collection, and ten YouTube interviews were analysed. Through these approaches, the thesis aims to conceptualise the power dynamics and understand how cultural and symbolic capital has been utilised to establish and maintain power relations.

Given the above set of objectives and research questions, the following section offers an overview of the thesis structure. This overview aims to guide the reader through the organisation of the study, detailing how each chapter contributes to the central aim of exploring power dynamics within the Shi'a political and social field in post-2003 Iraq. By mapping out the trajectory of the research, this section ensures a coherent understanding of how the various components of the thesis interrelate and support the overall argument.

1.4 Overview Structure of the Thesis

1. Introduction: This chapter introduces the research topic and provides the background and context of post-2003 Iraq. It outlines the significance of examining Shi'a political discourse and presents the research question and objectives.

2. Literature Review: The literature on Bourdieu's theory of fields and capital, power dynamics in political discourse, Shi'a politics and political discourse in Iraq, and historical legacies in the Middle East is reviewed in this chapter. The review will aid in identifying gaps in current knowledge and laying the groundwork for the theoretical framework.

3. Theoretical Framework: This chapter applies Bourdieu's theory to studying Shi'a political discourse, concentrating on issues such as cultural and symbolic capital in politics and the significance of historical legacies in structuring the political field.

4. Research Methodology: This chapter discusses the qualitative research design and outlines data collection methods, including document analysis, in-depth interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis. It also explains the thematic analysis approach for data analysis and addresses ethical considerations.

5. Historical Legacies and Shi'a Political Discourse: This chapter analyses key historical events that have shaped Shi'a political discourse and discusses the impact of these legacies on the production of Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq.

6. The Mobilisation of Cultural and Symbolic Capital: This chapter covers various socio-economic groupings and classes within the Shi'a community and their techniques for mobilising cultural and symbolic capital in politics. It also shows how diverse players utilise their capital to build and sustain power connections.

7. Power Relations in Shi'a Political Discourse: This chapter examines the power dynamics within the realm of Shi'a political discourse, concentrating on the function of distinct types of capital in affecting these connections. It also addresses elements that contribute to the consolidation or fragmentation of power in Shi'a politics.

8. Conclusion: This last chapter summarises the study's key findings and discusses their implications for understanding power struggles in Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq. It also offers recommendations for future research in this area.

1.5 Scope and Limitations

Scope

This research focuses on power dynamics within Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq. Adopting a historical, sociological approach, the study investigates the development of Shi'a power relations and its impact on power-sharing political thought and practice in Iraq. The research utilises a qualitative methodology and data from semi-structured interviews and content analysis from televised interviews along with open access content from leading political figure's Twitter accounts[10], the purpose is to analyse the discourse produced by Shi'a political elites, including politicians, religious leaders, and other influential figures. The primary aim of this study is to deepen understanding of the dynamics of power in post-2003 Iraq and contribute to knowledge about the relationship between discourse, power, and broader social and political forces.

Limitations

While this study seeks to provide valuable insights into power dynamics within Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq, certain limitations must be acknowledged. First, the research is limited to the post-2003 Iraq context, and its findings might not be generalisable to other countries or periods. Second, the study focuses on Shi'a political discourse, and as such, it may not provide insights into the dynamics of power within other religious or ethnic groups in Iraq. Although valuable for in-depth analysis, the qualitative approach might not capture certain quantitative aspects of power dynamics, such as the distribution of resources or electoral outcomes. Furthermore, the research relies on the availability and accessibility of documents and interview participants, which may lead to potential gaps or biases in the data. Finally, the study's emphasis on political elites may limit understanding of the role of grassroots movements or non-elite actors in shaping Shi'a political discourse and power dynamics.

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[10] The Methodology in Chapter 4 will provide more details.

PART 2: SHI'A AND POST-2003 IRAQ

1.6 Research Context: Who are the Shi'a?

The term 'Shi'a' has come to generally denote the followers of a Muslim sect who affirm the authority of Ali bin Abi Talib (d. 661 AD) as the rightful successor to the Muslim community following the death of Prophet Muhammad (d. 632 AD) (Elbadri, 2009, p. 3). The Shi'a community support the view that leadership of the Muslim nation should be bestowed upon Imam Ali and his descendants (Tuyal, 2007, p. 35). [11]

The primary dispute that led to the emergence of Shi'a Islam was a succession dispute within the Muslim community after the death of Prophet Muhammad (Wehrey, 2017, p. 2). This schism, according to the majority of Shi'a scholars, initially surfaced as a political issue (Aghaie, 2005). The crux of the divergence between the two branches lies in their contrasting views on political and legal systems, with Sunnis adhering to the belief in the Caliphate and Shi'a upholding the doctrine of the Imamate. [12] In Sunni thought, the caliph is seen as the chosen and elected successor of the Prophet. This role designates the caliph as the leader in political and military domains but does not extend to equalling Prophet Muhammad's religious authority (Iqbal, 2020).

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[11]For more on this, see François Tuval, 'The awakenings of the excluded and their strategy' (PDF)
Twelver Shi'ism, which forms the majority of the Shi'a community, advocates the Imamate of twelve individuals, starting with Ali ibn Abi Talib and culminating with the twelfth Imam, Muhammad al-Mahdi. The twelve imams are considered to be 1- Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib (599-661): Known as Amir al-Mu'minin, he is the cousin and son-in-law of Muhammad. He ruled as the fourth caliph from 656 to 661. 2-Imam Hasan ibn Ali (625-670): He is the eldest son of Ali and Fatimah, the daughter of Muhammad. 3-Imam Husayn ibn Ali (626-680): He is the younger son of Ali and Fatimah. Husayn is an important figure in Islam as his martyrdom is commemorated annually by Shi'a during Muharram. 4-Imam Ali ibn Husayn, also known as Imam Sajjad or Zain ul-Abidin (658-713). 5-Imam Muhammad ibn Ali, also known as Imam Baqir (676-743). 6-Imam Ja'far ibn Muhammad, also known as Imam Sadiq (702-765). 7-Imam Musa ibn Ja'far, also known as Imam Kazim (745-799). 8-Imam Ali ibn Musa, also known as Imam Reza (765-818). 9-Imam Muhammad ibn Ali, also known as Imam Jawad or al-Taqi (810-835). 10-Imam Ali ibn Muhammad, also known as Imam Hadi or al-Naqi (827-868). 11-Imam Hasan ibn Ali, also known as Imam Askari (846-874). 12-Imam Muhammad ibn Hasan, also known as Imam Mahdi, who Shi'as believe is currently in 'occultation' (a sort of spiritual hibernation) and will return before the Day of Judgment to establish justice in the world.
[12] The term 'Imamate' in Shi'a Islam refers to the institution of spiritual and political leadership over the Muslim community, a role Shi'a Muslims believe should be fulfilled by the successors (Imams) of Prophet Muhammad.

In stark contrast, Shi'a Islam vests the leadership of the Muslim community in the Imam. While the Imam[13] is not a Prophet, they are seen as divinely inspired, sinless, and infallible, bearing religious and political leadership within the community (Pinault, 1992, pp. 8-9). The Shi'a also rely on the hadith of Position (Hadith al-Manzilah), which is accepted by both Sunni and Shi'a communities, where the Prophet says: "O Ali, you are to me in the position that Aaron (Harun) was to Moses (Musa), except that there is no Prophet after me."[14]

The Imam, seen as the final authoritative interpreter of God's will, encapsulated in Islamic law, serves as a political leader and spiritual guide. Sunni Islam, conversely, locates final religious authority in the consensus (ijma) or collective judgment of the community, particularly the consensus of the ulama (religious scholars) (Ali, 2010). Shi'a Islam emphasises continued divine guidance through their divinely inspired guide. In this regard, Shi'a tradition regards the caliphs as having assumed the authority that should belong to them (Elmaleh, 2019).

They further argued that the divine religion would not be left to the governance of ordinary people, chosen through communal consensus or voting. The leadership, they maintained, was to be preserved for Prophet Muhammad's household (*ahl ul-Bayt*), as they were the inheritors of the Prophet's lineage and carriers of his charisma and God-given spiritual attributes (Ṭabāṭabā'ī & Hossein Nasr, 2010). Deemed as the Prophet's trustees (*wasi*), they held exclusive access to his esoteric and religious knowledge, possessing the capacity to interpret the essence of Islam instead of merely executing its external manifestations (Sobhani, 2013).

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[13] Not to be confused with Imam as that who leads prayers during prayers, or religious scholar. In this thesis it's proscribed to the Twelve Imams that the Shi'a believe are direct descendants from the Prophets household and carry with them divine attributes.

[14] This hadith is reported in both Sunni and Shi'a sources:
In Sunni sources, it's found in Sahih Bukhari (Volume 5, Book 57, Number 56). In Shi'a sources, it's reported in Usul al-Kafi. The interpretation of the hadith varies between Sunni and Shi'a traditions. Shi'as generally interpret this hadith as evidence of Ali's designated leadership role, or Imamate, following the Prophet's death. The Sunnis, on the other hand, interpret this Hadith as an expression of the close relationship and brotherhood between Prophet Muhammad and Ali, and as a validation of Ali's high rank and virtue, but not necessarily indicating his direct succession to prophetic leadership.

Investigating the key distinctions between Sunni and Shi'a doctrines lays the groundwork for a more nuanced exploration of Shi'a belief systems. Of paramount importance to this exploration are two concepts. Firstly, the concept of Imamate is integral to shaping the socio-political awareness within the Shi'a community. Imamate in Shi'a Islam could be interpreted as a mechanism for maintaining religious, social, and political order (Hashemi-Najafabadi, 2011). Bourdieu would consider this as a form of symbolic power (1989, pp. 147-166)[15]. The symbolic power that the Imams hold is founded within the legitimacy proscribed as a source of religious and social authority. This power is embodied in their claimed lineage to the Prophet and the divine wisdom that they are believed to possess. Their ability to interpret religious law allows them to guide and influence their followers' beliefs and actions, similar to how symbolic power operates in Bourdieu's framework.

Secondly, in examining the evolution of Shi'a authority, it is crucial to understand the pivotal role played by mujtahids, especially during the era of occultation. The concept of 'Baydht al-Islam'—as defined by Shi'a scholar Kashif al-Ghita—is one of the critical foundations of Islam, with mujtahids taking on the responsibility of safeguarding the Citadel of Islam in the absence of the Infallible Imams (Kashif al-Ghita, 2001:18-19). This responsibility has historically positioned mujtahids at the intersection of religious and political fields, allowing them to influence and navigate socio-political landscapes based on their interpretations of religious duty (Kalantari, 2020, p. 222).

One notable figure, Nour al-Din bin Abd al-Ale al-Karki, was the first to assert that a mujtahid's religious authority is equivalent to that of the hidden Imam, underscoring their significant role in shaping both religious and political discourses within the Shi'a community (Fayed, 2010, p. 137). Their influence has fluctuated between activism and quietism, adapting to the socio-political context. For instance, during the early twentieth century, the political stances of mujtahids varied, with some actively engaging in Iranian

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[15] Chapter three will explore Bourdieu's framework and concepts in more detail.

politics and others adopting a quietist approach in Ottoman Iraq (Safshekan, 2017, p. 16; Keddie, 1969, pp. 31-53).

This dynamic continued under Ayatollah Khomeini, whose advocacy for the Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine marked a significant shift in Shi'a political power, illustrating Bourdieu's theory of how capital functions within a field (Khomeini, 2019, p. 12; Bruno, 2019). The doctrine challenged traditional Shi'a habitus, redefining the role of mujtahids as representatives of the hidden Imam in both religious and political spheres. For a comprehensive analysis of this theme, including historical examples and theoretical implications, (please refer to section 5.3, "Authority Reimagined: The Ascendancy of Mujtahids," in Chapter 5).

1.7 Historical and Political Context of Shi'a in Iraq

Although the historical and political context of Shi'a in Iraq will be discussed in subsequent chapters in greater detail, it is useful to outline some of its development as part of setting up the project's focus. Historically, the Shi'a community has experienced significant political marginalisation, a reality that fundamentally shapes the habitus of Shi'a political elites today. Many of these post-2003 Shi'a Islamist actors[16] have inherited a history of exclusion and have spent much of their lives in exile or opposition to authoritarian regimes. Homogenous in their common bond of memories of discrimination, whether in the form of the mass executions common during the reign of Saddam or simply their exclusion from power throughout Iraqi history (Cockburn, 2003).

However, they are heterogeneous in that they are diverse groups (Kadhum, 2018); some are educated and middle-class, but more are poor Arabs living in rural southern Iraq or Bagdad's slums- they range from

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[16] Actors are understood as individuals or collectives such as social groups, organisations, institutions, or governments (Bourdieu, 1990). I will delve further into identifying who these actors are and the context of the power struggle that has developed between them in chapter 5.

deeply religious[17] to wholly secular[18] (Batatu, 1978; Stansfield, 2008; Marr, 2004; Tripp, 2007). There also lies deep-rooted divisions that, according to Mawlawi (2022), primarily revolve around the identity of the Iraqi state, a contest between antagonistic visions of what Iraq's state should look like- a competing vision of state identity. These views vary according to the positionality of ideological and religious assumptions, regional alliances, and other distinguishing features, which will be detailed in Chapter 5. By exploring this context, this thesis provides a historical perspective. It situates the reader within the unique socio-political environment to grasp the complexities and dynamics of Iraq's contemporary Shi'a political landscape.

Starting with the fall of the Ottoman Empire (*circa* 20th century 1922), this period marked the commencement of the modern Iraqi state. The carving of the Middle East was divided across the European powers of the Ottoman Empire. Iraq was then known by its three Wilayat. Mosul was the name given to the northern Kurdish-populated region. Most Arab Shi'a areas in the south fell under the wilayat of Basra. In contrast, the plurality of Arab Sunni regions in the centre fell under the wilayat of Baghdad (Khoury, 1997).

In the analysis of these ethno-sectarian communities, as highlighted by Tripp (2007), the lack of a shared national consciousness or history within the three divided communities became the basis for the formation of the unified borders of the newly established state of Iraq (Tripp, 2007, p. 2). However, it is crucial to acknowledge the nuanced perspective of the Kurds, who view themselves as a distinct nation with their own language and principles (Wilding, 2023). Assuming the necessity of a unifying 'national consciousness' overlooks this inherent diversity and becomes a source of contention rather than expecting a uniform national identity (Yaphe, 2014). The focus should shift towards understanding constitutional citizenship and identifying a shared set of values that could foster social cohesion. It is essential to recognise that the Kurds have consistently expressed their aspirations for a separate nation-state, distinct from Iraq or any other state in the region. This perspective sheds light on the complexities surrounding notions of national

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[17] ISCI, Sadrist, Da'wa are some of these primary groups that have an inherent religious dimension.
[18] The Iraqi National Accord, led by Ayad Allawi; The Iraqi National Congress, led by Ahmad Chalabi (1945-d.2015) are examples of secular Shi'a parties.

identity and citizenship within the Iraqi context (Kirmanj, 2013). As such, the matter of identity in Iraq is intricate, given its multicultural, ethnic, and religious diversity. Therefore, when referring to national identity in this thesis (and overcoming the complexities involved), it is understood as embracing a form of constitutional citizenship that binds Iraqi communities together while preserving their unique ethnic and religious characteristics.

The modern history of Iraq offers an account of how the inhabitants of the new Iraqi state were drawn into its domain (Marr, 2004). The establishment of Iraq as a new state in 1920–1921, with its borders, bureaucracy, and fiscal system, brought an evidently and vastly diverse vision for Iraq's future (Haj, 1997). The lines between these ideas shifted in the nation as various groups with varying degrees of power attempted to seize control and bring others aligned with their ideas for the country. Throughout Iraq's history, these perspectives have clashed and competed. Establishing a new political framework, embodying distinct ideas about government that imposed new demands on its inhabitants and compelled them to re-evaluate their existing political identities, values, and interests (Fuccaro, 1997). Occasionally, they were adapted to serve the state and its authorities and were marginalised or suppressed (Nasr, 2006). Therefore, the state's history is, in part, a history of the cooperation, subversion, and resistance strategies employed by various Iraqis attempting to come to terms with the force represented by the state (Hussain, 2014). It is also a history of how the state altered those who attempted to utilise it. These diverse modes of engagement shaped Iraqi politics and contributed to composite narratives of Iraq's modern history over time (Stansfield, 2008; Tejel et al., 2012). The term' narratives' refers to the accounts people tell themselves and others about a state and their attempts to shape its history to suit their self-image. Thus, it is a creative construct and organising principle that manifests in how those in positions of authority wield power (Tripp, 2007, p. 1).

Since the establishment of the state in the 1920s, it was evident that there were wildly divergent visions for Iraq's future. In the entirety of the nation, the lines between these concepts shifted as various groups with varying degrees of power attempted to seize control and bring others aligned with their vision for the nation. Throughout Iraq's history, these visions have clashed and competed along political lines as a means of

enforcing the government's vision of how society should be determined, creating fragmented communities (Thabit, 2003; Benedict, 2006; Al-Qarawee, 2014; Chokr, 2022).[19] Before moving on, tracing and providing an overview of the development of the Shia's political field in Iraq helps shed further light on the contingencies of the context undertaken in this study.

1.8 Tracing the Development of the Shi'a Political Field in Iraq: From Marginalisation to Mobilisation:

Iraq was part of a region ruled by the Mongol 'Il-Khanate' from Tabriz in modern-day Iran. After the Khanate's demise, Tamer of Samarkand invaded Iraq, and Baghdad was subjected to another devastating assault in 1401, surpassing even the Mongols in brutality and destructiveness. Following Tamer's attack, a new Turkmen federation, the Qara Qoyunlu (Black Sheep), seized Iraq, only to be swiftly followed by a rival Turkmen federation, the Aq Qoyunlu (White Sheep) (Sluglett, 2007: 202-222).

This period of unrest transformed Iraq into a strategically significant spaces, attracting two rising regional powers: the Shi'a Safavids of Persia and the Sunni Ottomans of Anatolia (Hashim, 2006:61). Transitioning into the era of Ottoman rule, the rise of Safavid Shia power next door was viewed by the Ottomans as an existential threat, challenging their legitimacy and establishing habitus as the dominant Sunni power in the Islamic world. Following the fall of Baghdad, Iraq was subjected to three centuries of Ottoman rule, during which the Shi'a community was systematically marginalised and persecuted (Stansfield, 2007: 23-26).

The Ottoman administration's marginalisation of the Shi'a community resulted in a significant loss of political capital for the Shi'a, impacting their ability to participate in decision-making processes and access social and economic resources. This further entrenched their marginalised status. The Ottoman authorities saw the Shi'a as a potential fifth column for Shi'a Iran, pushing them closer to the Arab Sunni population in Iraq, further marginalising the Shi'a community (Sluglett, 2007a:301; Marr, 2004; 58). It could be

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[19] For example, the British mandatory authorities in the 1920s, tribal sheikhs under monarchy and republic, Arab nationalists since at least the 1930s, Shi'a 'ulama throughout this period, the Iraqi Communist Party in the 1950s and 1960s, Kurdish parties in their conflicts with each other and the central authorities, Saddam Hussein, and the current democratic vision of a neoconservative American-led coalition (Tripp, 2007).

posited that such marginalisation contributed to entrenching deep-rooted tensions between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a groups, tensions that may have permeated the country's ensuing history (Hashim, 2006: 62). The Shi'a, in turn, elected to stay away from Sunni Ottomans, with Najaf and Karbala radiating hostile influence against the sultan. Furthermore, the Shi'a hostility towards their Ottoman 'usurper' can be seen when Hanna Batatu pointed out 'to the strict Shi'is, the government of the day…the government of the Ottoman Sultan that led Suni Islam …was, in its essence, a usurpation …they were, therefore, estranged from it, few caring to serve it or attend its schools.' (Batatu, 2004:17).

After Ottoman rule, the establishment of the British mandate represented another significant shift in the political landscape of Iraq. The impact of British rule in shaping modern Iraq has been second only to that of Ottoman rule (Marr, 2004; 21). With the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War 1, the British were granted mandates by the League of Nations to administer the territories of the former empire for various geopolitical and economic reasons. Britain established the mandate of Iraq, combining the three Ottoman provinces of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra into a single political entity. By doing so, Britain demarcated Iraq's geographical limits, thereby forming the modern state of Iraq.

In this process of state formation, the Shi'a community once again found themselves on the periphery of power. Their aspirations for greater political representation and autonomy were often overlooked in favour of Sunni interests, contributing to a deepening sense of alienation and resentment within the Shi'a community (Ibid).

The 1920 revolt against the British, primarily instigated by the Shi'a religious leaders[20] of the holy cities and disaffected mid-Euphrates tribal leaders (Marr, 2004; 23), provides another critical historical moment. There are conflicting views about why the revolt started. Some attributed to embittered officers from the previous Ottoman army against the British Acting Civil Commissioner Sir Arnold Wilson, slowly spreading to Shia regions of the middle and lower Euphrates (Atiyyah, 1973:307). An alternative interpretation

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[20] One such scholar is Sheikh Mehdi Al-Khalissi.

suggests that the uprising may have originated as a reaction to oppressive taxation, a new experience for the tribes. Coupled with the agitation stirred by Arab nationalists in the country's core, these factors might have converged to incite a broad-based rejection and rebellion against British rule (Hashim, 2006:65). This revolt represents an early instance of the Shi'a community trying to leverage their social capital through tribal and religious affiliations to challenge the British and asserting their influence in the political field.

However, despite the revolt and the costs endured by both sides it did not bring Iraqi independence. However, it allowed the British to redraft their approach and policy towards Iraq (Vinogradov, 1972:139).

This transition period began a new chapter in the Shi'a struggle for political power. Despite facing significant challenges, the Shi'a community continued to push for greater political recognition and participation. The imposing of a monarch in the person of Faisal, the third son of the Sharif of Mecca (Sunni Prince), an ally during the British wartime, and the creation of a constitution were crucial steps in shaping the political field in Iraq (Marr, 2004; 24).

In light of its precarious state foundations, the newly designated monarch found himself compelled to rely on Arab officers who had abandoned the Ottoman army, alongside British assistance, to lay the groundwork for the emerging state. In this regard, Sunni Arab civilian administrators and bureaucrats assumed prominent roles within the state structure. Their endeavours entailed the imposition of an educational and cultural framework to actively propagate pan-Arab nationalism and forging strong ties between Iraq and the Arab world to the West (Simon, 1997:87-104). The preceding Ottoman administration played a pivotal role in laying the groundwork for the subsequent rise of Sunni Arab dominance. However, the British further built upon and institutionalised this framework. They contributed to the consolidation of Sunni Arab control, establishing mechanisms and structures that solidified the position of Sunni Arab civilian administrators and bureaucrats within the state apparatus (Heller, 1977:75-86).

The Shi'a religious leaders refused to collaborate with the British; instead, they encouraged the populous against the British (Amarilyo, 2015:74)[21]. However, this use of religious capital backfired when the King, backed by the British, decided to arrest individuals, including clerics. This sparked several Shi'a mujtahids to withdraw to neighbouring Iran in protest. This event, known as the exodus of the mujtahids (Kalantari, 2020), represented a turning point in the Shi'a political struggle, significantly diminishing their political capital within Iraq and undermining their efforts to challenge Sunni dominance.

The Arabisation process, heavily influenced by nationalist orientation, marked the shift from Turkish to Arabic in the administrative and school systems. Promoting the Arabic language and Arab history, often with secular undertones, was another way in which Sunni nationalists mobilised cultural and linguistic capital to shape the field and reinforce their dominance. However, it also inadvertently created a shared linguistic field where the Shi'a community could articulate and assert their political demands and aspirations, giving them new tools to challenge the existing power structures.

Iraq's Shi'a political landscape underwent a significant transformation over the past century. The roots of this political mobilisation can be traced back to the British Mandate period, marked by a Shi'a rebellion in 1920 (Stansfield, p.60). However, this shift began manifesting in the post-monarchical era starting in 1958, considered as the second nation and State building project (Hashim, 2006:237).

1.9 Shi'a Awakening: Political Activism and Ascendancy

Historically, political representation in the Shi'a community within the Middle East has usually been characterised by one of three models: (1) clerical political leadership as exemplified by the Iranian revolution and the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih, (2) non-clerical control of sectarian organisations such as Nabih Berri's Amal movement in Lebanon, or (3) participation in secular nationalist activities often

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[21] Some of the prominent Shi'ite clerics (mutahidun) were Muḥammad Taqıal-Dın al-Shırazı and Fatḥallah al-'Isfahanı. For more context see for example Nakash, Yitzhak. The Shi'is of Iraq. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 21-5, 61-7, 71.

represented by leftist groups like the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP) and Arab nationalism like the Ba'ath Party (Devlin, 1991). In the late 1950s, another form of political representation emerged - a hybrid model consisting of scholars and non-scholars advocating for technocratic rule in accordance with the principles of Islam (Shanahan, 2004, p. 943). Hizb al-Da'wa al-Islamiya is an Arabic term signifying a call to embrace Islam as the true faith that embodied this new form of political representation, denoting modern Iraq's earliest Shi'a political group (Alaaldin, 2017).

Tracing the roots of this trend takes us back to the pivotal year of 1958 in Iraqi history populace after the overthrow of the monarchy and the republic's inception under 'Abd al-Kariim Qasim (1914-1963) and his ambitious modernisation project (Hashim, 2006, p. 237). The religious sphere, or the 'field' in Bourdieu's phrasing, hinged on the control wielded by clerics and their symbolic capital as a reputable source for the Shi'a community. This establishment faced a multi-dimensional threat to its authority and influence. This progression can be directly attributed to the policies of the secular regime, which prompted the involvement of the religious establishment in the political field to mitigate threats to their institutional integrity (Hasan, 2019).

The post-Abdul Al-Karim Qasim era, beginning in 1963, was marked by the deterioration of Iraqi politics into military autocracy. Given the predominance of Sunni Arabs within the senior officer corps, this shift led to minority control over the state. Further exacerbating this was the conservative Sunni Muslim General Arif, a post-revolutionary leader known for his disdain for the Shi'a (Hashim, 2006, p. 238). The introduction of land reforms signalled a transformative shift in the doxa (own distinct rules), altering the 'rules of the game' by threatening the clerics' traditional financial resources. This was also coupled with the ascendance of secular political factions that emerged as a substantial threat to the clerical order's traditional role (Batatu, 1981, pp. 578-594). It challenged its intellectual activity, a privilege now contested by these secular parties. As a growing contingent of Shi'as found resonance with these secular factions, the symbolic significance and authority traditionally vested in the clerical establishment began to recede. Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir Al-Hakeem (1939-2003), a notable cleric and adversary of the Ba'ath regime, stated that

the rise of Marxist-Leninist ideology invigorated the ulema, urging them to assume a more prominent political role (Shanahan, 2004, p. 945).

This trend underscored the clerical establishment's challenge to adapt to changing ideological currents within society. This broader societal shift culminated in the clerics' significant loss of human capital. As more individuals disengaged from the clerical establishment, the clerics gradually lost control over the people they represented, decreasing their symbolic capital within the community they served. For example, between 1918 and 1957, the number of students in Najaf Hawza decreased from 6000 to 2000, and only a fraction was Iraqi (Wiley, 1992, p. 32).

The complex interplay between these challenges—financial, symbolic, intellectual, and human capital— drastically reshaped the religious field that the clerics had previously dominated. These challenges could be seen as catalysts spurring the traditionally quietest clerical establishment to act, countering the political current within the political field to maintain its authoritative relevance within the religious and social domain.

In response to these shifting circumstances within the field, the clerical establishment embarked on a period of intellectual activity geared towards articulating the Shi'a Muslim aspiration for political governance in line with Islamic tenets (Aziz, 1993, p. 208). The emergence of Da'wa can be interpreted as an active response by a section of the Iraqi Shi'a ulama to perceived threats within the field. The encroachment of secular forces, embodied by Arab nationalism (Ba'ath party) and leftist political ideology (ICP), was viewed as a direct threat to the clerical establishments' control within the religious field, spurring efforts to regain their waning relevance (Shanahan, 2004, p. 944).

In order to formulate a response to the rising societal challenges and declining religious relevance, some ulama sought an innovative solution. They proposed a hybrid pact between scholars and non-scholars to foster the widespread adoption of Islam among the general populace (Latif, 2008). The party's innovative

response to the changing socio-political landscape is embodied in their choice of Da'wa, which could be interpreted as a tactical response to the changing forms of capital within the field.

Moving into the heart of Da'wa's appeal, we find its educated non-scholars, who were perceived as the driving forces of societal change. These individuals were vital to the party's innovative approach to addressing the shifting dynamics within the religious field and broader society, and they formed a new form of capital that could be utilised in the fight to regain the prominence of the clerical establishment (Shanahan, 2004).

Ayatollah Mohsen Al-Hakeem (1889-1970) was a key figure endorsing this initiative and a significant personality within the quietist tradition. Despite his theological leanings, he recognised the potential of Da'wa as a tool in preserving the Shi'a clergy's rights amidst the shifting dynamics within the religious field (Sakai, 2001, p. 2). Furthermore, he envisaged it as a counterweight against the spread of communist ideology, demonstrating the strategic nature of this partnership in response to the multi-dimensional challenges (Schmidt, 2009, p. 128).

In essence, the birth of the party was a strategic endeavour by the clerics to re-establish their symbolic capital, consolidate their financial capital, and retain their dominant position within the religious field amidst a rapidly changing socio-political landscape, thus illustrating the dynamism of Bourdieu's field theory when applied to historical and ideological changes.

Transitioning to the broader context, the dynamics within the Shi'a community did not evolve in a vacuum; local and regional developments significantly influenced them, for instance, with the rise of secular nationalist parties that took power from 1958 onwards and clamped down on competing secular political forces. This led to a loss of Shi'a representation, leaving parties like the Bath party primarily in the hands of authoritarian sectarian actors who were predominantly Arab Sunni (Schmidt, 2009, p. 124) that drew heavily on European legacies of French fascism and Nazism (Herf, 2005, pp.39-56) This environment and the weakening of competing secular political forces allowed the rise of Islamist ideology. This was further

intensified by the policies of Abd al-Salam Arif (president 1963-66) and Abd al-Rahman Arif (President 1966-68), which sometimes incited feelings of sectarian discrimination, thereby providing an impetus for the Shi'a community to rally around their shared faith as a form of political mobilisation (Alaaldin, 2017, p. 61). As the state's authoritarian grip tightened, particularly after the Ba'athist coup in 1968, Shi'a activism became increasingly pronounced. This upsurge was primarily driven by a sense of sectarian victimhood, a sentiment that was, in turn, fuelled by the state's oppressive policies (Jabar, 2003, p. 102). The strategic utilisation of state policy to marginalise the Shi'a community led to intensifying their activism, further deepening the sectarian divides within the nation (Ibid).

According to Alaaldin (2017), these protests and disruptions marked two significant turning points in the Iraqi state's history and Iraqi Shi'a's political landscape. These developments coincided with the Da'wa Party's emergence and the clerical establishment's growing politicisation, indicating the changing doxa within the Shi'a community. Firstly, they indicated the growing unity and collaboration among diverse segments of the Shi'a community, which had previously been heterogeneous. Secondly, they brought the Shi'a population closer to the *Marji'iyya* (religious authority). It became evident that the Shi'a community was undergoing a process of political mobilisation, leveraging its numerical strength, religious institutions, and social networks, and motivated by the sense of marginalisation and victimhood (2017, p. 61).

On the other hand, regional factors also played a crucial part. The ascendancy of the Shi'a clergy to governmental power in neighbouring Iran. This development shaped the Iraqi state's perception of Shi'a political activism and significantly influenced the mobilisation of the Shi'a identity within Iraq. This change accentuated the political significance of Shi'a centricity, a dynamic further amplified by recurring conflicts between Shi'a Islamists and the state (Sluglett & Slugglet, 2001, pp. 198-99).

Many Iraqi Shi'a activists adopted evasive measures to counter this severe repression, going underground or escaping the country. This behavioural adaptation led to the creation of covert networks and opposition groups, significantly reconfiguring the political field by posing fresh challenges to the ruling government (Momtaz, 2003, pp. 78-92). The emergence of militant organisations marked a notable shift in the Shi'a

habitus, transforming into underground resistance forces against the current regime. The significance of this oppositional movement has been noted by prominent political and religious figures, such as Amar Al-Hakeem, as being a primary cause for political instability in post-2003 power relations (this will be further explored in Chapter 5).

Shifting the focus to the impact of regional politics, the oppressive regime of Saddam Hussein and regional shifts nudged Shi'a individuals away from secular political groups towards Islamic-inspired groups (Isakhan, 2010). This shift could be considered a direct response to the oppressive conditions, showcasing a clear cause-effect relationship between political repression and the rise of political Islam among the Shi'a community. The brutal repression under Hussein's regime dismantled the Da'wa party. It catalysed the formation of a distinct political organisation that came to be known as the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), based in rival neighbouring Iran, and the revived 2.0 version of Muhammad Bakir al Sadr by his relative Muhammad Sadiq al-Sadr's vast social network to be inherited and utilised to mobilise in the post-2003 era (Cole, 2003). It is also important to note that Shi'a identity and victimhood were not the primary motivation for Iraqi Shi'a Islamism. However, it evolved within the changing circumstances and fate of leftist and nationalist parties in Iraq (Haddad, 2022).

This shift is epitomised by exiled groups such as the SCIRI, which, supported by Iran, conducted cross-border operations into Iraq along with Da'wa party members. It is essential to underscore the significance this transition into political exile, armed resistance, and dependence on external regional actors could have on a range of Islamist political actors. These individuals, deriving from diverse backgrounds and different parts of Iraq, became homogenous in their opposition to the authoritarian regime. Consequently, their collective habitus was moulded in the crucible of exile.[22]

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[22] This point has been highlighted by Ammar Al-Hakeem, that the mentality of the exiled elites in opposition served a specific period, and post-2003 requires a different mentality based on nation-state building. See chapter 1.8 for more context

This evolving habitus, shaped by years of repression and exile, found a critical point of expression in the 1991 Shi'a uprising, a moment that not only reinforced their shared sense of marginalisation but also left a lasting imprint on Shi'a political strategies in the post-Saddam era.

The 1991 Shi'a Uprising and its impact on Post-2003 Iraq

The 1991 Shi'a uprising in southern Iraq, also known as the Intifada Sha'baniyah, was a pivotal moment that underscored the deep-seated grievances of the Shi'a population against Saddam Hussein's regime. While the uprising began spontaneously, largely fuelled by frustration and discontent among Iraqis after the Gulf War, its disorderly nature created challenges in identifying clear leadership or structure.[23]

From a Sunni perspective, particularly those aligned with Saddam's regime, the uprising was often framed as an Iranian-backed insurrection aimed at destabilising Iraq (Zenko, 2016). By portraying the rebellion as a foreign conspiracy, the regime was able to delegitimise the grievances of the Shi'a population, linking the uprising to external aggression rather than acknowledging internal oppression. Proponents of this narrative claimed that the mass graves resulting from the regime's brutal crackdowns were filled with Iranian agents and sympathisers, which further entrenched the regime's portrayal of the uprising as a national defence against foreign intrusion (Haddad, 2006).

However, for the Shi'a community, the uprising represented decades of marginalisation under a regime that systematically excluded them from political power and repressed their religious identity. Groups such as the Islamic Dawa Party and the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (then known as the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI) were seen as central players in resisting Saddam's rule, though their roles during the uprising were more complex (Zenko, 2016). Both groups were exiled and operated from abroad, particularly Iran, where they garnered support, yet they struggled to fully lead the spontaneous,

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[23] It is widely accepted that the uprising started in Basra between February 28 and March 1, 1991, and quickly spread northward to other southern cities. The initial momentum was propelled by disgruntled soldiers and civilians, but the lack of coordination and centralized leadership made it difficult to sustain (Haddad, 2006).

decentralised uprising. Their opposition to the Ba'ath regime, however, laid the groundwork for their later involvement in shaping Iraq's political landscape after 2003.

The legacy of the 1991 uprising, particularly the sense of betrayal and abandonment by the international community, has had a profound effect on the Shi'a habitus—the ingrained dispositions and perceptions that shape how individuals and groups navigate their social and political environments. Following the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003, the Shi'a political elite, many of whom were part of Dawa or SCIRI, assumed prominent roles in the new Iraqi political order. Their collective memory of marginalisation and the experience of the 1991 uprising influenced how they approached power, governance, and relations with Sunni and Kurdish groups in the post-2003 period.

In Bourdieu's terms, the Shi'a political actors in post-2003 Iraq brought with them a habitus shaped by decades of repression, exclusion, and resistance. This habitus influenced their strategies in the newly formed political field, where they sought to consolidate power to ensure that the historical marginalisation they experienced would not be repeated. The perceived need to secure political capital, both domestically and in relation to regional powers like Iran, can be seen as a reflection of the collective memory of past vulnerabilities.

Moreover, the fractured nature of the 1991 uprising, with its lack of centralised leadership and coordination, has parallels in the post-2003 Shi'a political landscape. The internal divisions within the Shi'a political field, exemplified by rivalries between parties like Dawa and SCIRI, reflect the ongoing struggle to balance the pursuit of power with the preservation of Shi'a identity and religious authority. The habitus of Shi'a leaders, forged in the crucible of the uprising and years of opposition, continues to shape their actions in a political environment that remains marked by competition, sectarianism, and external pressures.

As we examine the trajectory of Shi'a political activism, the 1991 Shi'a uprising emerges as a crucial turning point that had long-lasting effects on the collective consciousness and political strategies of the Iraqi Shi'a community. The aftermath of this uprising, which began spontaneously in southern Iraq following the Gulf

War and was brutally suppressed by Saddam Hussein's regime, played a pivotal role in shaping the Shi'a political habitus. The regime's framing of the rebellion as an Iranian-backed conspiracy allowed Saddam to dismiss legitimate Shi'a grievances and reinforced sectarian divisions. While the uprising was disorganised and lacked clear leadership, it left an indelible mark on the Shi'a community's collective memory. The repression and mass graves from this period further deepened a sense of victimhood and marginalisation, shaping the dispositions of Shi'a political elites in post-2003 Iraq.

By incorporating the lessons from this uprising into their political strategies, Shi'a groups such as Da'wa and SCIRI navigated the new political landscape, drawing upon their historical experience of resistance to craft policies that ensured their dominance in post-Saddam Iraq. The impact of the 1991 uprising, therefore, cannot be understated when considering the Shi'a community's pursuit of political capital in the post-2003 era. This dynamic will be explored in the following discussion on the rise of Shi'a political power after the fall of Saddam Hussein. The legacy of the uprising, coupled with decades of political exile and repression, shaped the strategies of Shi'a political actors as they navigated the post-Saddam political landscape.[24]

As a result of the combination of regional developments and internal pressures, which irrevocably shaped the political landscape of Iraq, the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 signalled the beginning of a new era. For the first time in Iraqi history[25], the stage was set to assume a pivotal role in state and nation-building. However, this shift also initiated a contentious struggle for power and resources, fundamentally changing the dynamics of the political field (Hashim, 2006, p. 40).

This drastic change ushered in the opportunity for parties like Da'wa, SCIRI and the Sadrist movement to leverage their historical, communal relations and organisational strength to seize political power, indicating a shift in the balance of capital within the political and religious fields (Dagher, 2022).

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[24] For further details see Hashim, 2006; Haddad 2006)

[25] Although it could be argued, this is not the first real opportunity Shi'a have faced, for example the 1920 period under the British mandate is one that Shi'a politicians and clerical establishments have etched in their memories of lost opportunities. See for example Tripp (2002) ; Stansfield, (2007) for more on this period.

Transitioning from a historical perspective, our discussion has thus far traversed the long and winding road of Shi'a marginalisation, starting from the Ottoman period through the British mandate, the era of monarchy, and culminating in the Ba'ath era. Each epoch contributed unique and significant features to the multifaceted Shi'a political landscape, laying the groundwork for today's dynamics and conflicts.

As we move forward, the discussion takes a pivotal shift to focus on a transformative and arguably unprecedented era in Shi'a political history — the post-2003 period.

1.10 The Iraqi Political Landscape in Post-2003

The aftermath of Saddam's reign left Iraq grappling with significant changes and challenges emerging from decades of dictatorship and brutal repression under Ba'athist rule.[26] These repressive policies profoundly impacted the nation's political, social, and cultural landscape. The former single-party dictatorship under Saddam Hussein had left Iraq with a monolithic political culture. Institutions and the rule of law were either severely compromised or manipulated to preserve the autocracy (Veen, 2020, p. 8). With Saddam's fall, this autocratic political culture was disrupted, leading to a redistribution of power and reshaping the 'rules of the game' of power accumulation.

The drafting of a new constitution in 2005 defined Iraq as a 'republican, representative, parliamentary, and democratic system' of government (Article 1 of the Iraqi Constitution)—a stark contrast to the previous autocratic framework. However, a legal framework was hastily assembled amidst boycotts from the country's Arab Sunnis (Deeks & Burton, 2007). The new legal framework *"introduced a set of governance principles, terms, and conditions that were poorly understood, contested, and inadequately thought out"* regarding their implications for the actual business of governance (Veen 2020, p. 8, emphasis in original). Consequently, a significant gap in governance principles emerged. Key issues related to state authority

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[26] For a detailed account of the rise of the Ba'athist dictatorship, its methods of rule under Saddam Hussein, and practices of collective punishment, see Blaydes, L. (2018). State of repression: Iraq under Saddam Hussein. Princeton University Press.

division and power allocation were delayed, only later ensnared in sectarian strife (Veen, 2020, p. 9, citing Makiya, 2016; Al-Qarawee, 2012).

An extensive void notably marked post-2003, the political terrain of Iraq resulting from the Ba'athist regimes' monopoly over the state, which effectively restrained the development of robust political institutions or parties capable of governing. What existed were primarily opposition groups that operated in exile under their hosts' support. When these exiled leaders returned to Iraq after 2003, they lacked considerable practical legislative and management skills to manage the state. This lack of experience included a lack of practical understanding of the socio-economic conditions under Saddam's rule (Makiya, 2016). According to Bourdieu's framework, such rapid changes mark a shift in the doxa or the unspoken rules and assumptions that guide behaviour within the field. The disintegration of the old political order created a void in political knowledge, expertise, and support bases, highlighting the lack of robust political opposition during Saddam's reign. The hastily assembled new political environment reflected this void and illustrated the consequences of not thoroughly considering the implications of such a drastic shift in the political landscape (Al-Askari, 2023; Sharistani, 2023; Al-Hakeem, 2023).

However, the new democratic system has been overshadowed by ongoing instability, corruption, and conflict (Dodge, 2018). The post-2003 political landscape in Iraq has been characterised by a complex array of power struggles, particularly among Shi'a political actors (Boot, 2022). The Shi'a actors can be divided into two principal groups that emerged as a result of the October 2021 elections. The Coordination framework, comprising a cluster of Shi'a ruling coalition of Iraqi parties and armed groups (see chapter 5.4), primarily united in opposition to the religious cleric Muqtada al-Sadr (Bobseine, 2022). While members of the coordination framework house these elites, they are not homogeneous in their ideological or political trajectory (Al-Hakeem, 2021). Some of its members are closely connected to Iran and advocate for wilayat al-faqih (see chapter 3.5). There is a conflicting current with opposing views and intense competition among them for power and resources. However, they are homogeneous in their opposition to Al-Sadr and his attempt to form a government in coalition with the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) led

by Masoud Barazani (President of KDP and former President of the Kurdistan region of Iraq 2005-2017) and the Sunni Taqadum Party (Progress Party) led by Muhammad al-Halbusi, (Parliamentary House Speaker 2018-2023) (Saadoun, 2022). These struggles have occurred across multiple fields and have involved various forms of capital, such as economic, social, and symbolic (Dodge & Mansour, 2020).

1.11 Importance of the Research

Studying Shi'a groups in the context of the thesis question is valuable for several reasons. Firstly, Shi'a Muslims are the majority ethno-sectarian group in Iraq, making up roughly 60-65% of the population, and have played a significant role in shaping the political landscape in post-2003 Iraq (Cockburn, 2003). As such, it is crucial to examine the political discourse of this group to gain a comprehensive understanding of the power struggles and dynamics that have emerged in the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime.

Secondly, Shi'a groups in Iraq have distinct social, cultural, and historical backgrounds that have influenced their political ideologies and discourse (Veen et al., 2017). For example, the Sadrist movement, which emerged after the US-led invasion in 2003, is rooted in the legacy of Grand Ayatollah Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr (1935-1980) and his vision of Islamic governance (Aziz, 1993). This movement has a significant grassroots following and has mobilised large swathes of the population to push for political and social gains.

Thirdly, Shi'a political discourse in Iraq is unique in its emphasis on Islamic principles and values and its long history of marginalisation and victimhood (Haddad, 2016; Makiya, 2006); Dodge, 2018), unlike other ethno-sectarian groups who may prioritise their ethnic or national identities (Cornish & Pitel, 2019; Yaphe, 2014; Natali, 2001; Kirmanj, 2013; Mikail, 2020). The Shi'a emphasis on Islamic principles and victimisation has implications for how Shi'a political actors conceptualise and prioritise different forms of capital to maintain leverage within the new power-sharing model of post-2003. This will be further explored in Chapters 5 and 7.

Studying Shi'a groups in post-2003 Iraq is valuable as it provides insight into the emerging power struggles and dynamics and the distinct social, cultural, and historical backgrounds that shape Shi'a political discourse. Furthermore, understanding how Shi'a groups conceptualise and prioritise different forms of capital can help shed light on the broader dynamics of power and influence in Iraq and the Middle East.

A more substantive analysis of such a fraught field and set of power relations and dynamics would greatly benefit understanding the complexity of the region itself and its political actors. By adopting Bourdieu's theory of fields and capital, this thesis will develop a framework for analysing the power relations within social fields. The unique distribution and accumulation of various forms of capital categorise these power relations. As such, Bourdieu stipulates that social actors and those involved in political power struggles are competing for capital within a particular field of practice. This is important as capital distribution within these fields shapes these power dynamics and relations (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-258). However, Bourdieu's theory requires a historical context that can shed some light on key events that have shaped the current political developments. Therefore, this thesis will adopt a historical and sociological approach (Erikson, 1970; Roux & Courty, 2013). This approach has allowed this thesis to trace the political transformation of Shi'a thought and practice.

The data is required to analyse key factors such as the power dynamics (social and political), as well as historical legacies in shaping the post-2003 Iraq political landscape. These were extracted from the Semi-structured interviews I conducted with several key actors and political elites (Chapter 3 provides a full list). By unveiling how various social groups mobilise various forms of capital, the thesis benefits from understanding the intersections between religion, politics, and governance in the region. Finally, by employing a historical approach, the thesis benefited from understanding the role of historical legacies in shaping the field of politics and the production of Iraq's Shi'a and the state's political discourse, allowing us to appreciate past events and experiences in shaping contemporary political dynamics.

Studying elitist discourse (Dunmire, 2012) is important because it can provide insights into the power and capital sources underpinning Shi'a political struggles. Elite discourse represents the views and interests of

those with the greatest access to resources and power within the Shi'a political field. By analysing the framework, symbols, and narratives (Ehrmann & Millar, 2021) used by these elites to advance their agendas, the thesis gained insights into the power relations and its impact on power-sharing within the political field and identified how these resources could be mobilised to produce and reproduce power struggles.[27]

1.12 Tracing the Evolution of Conflict and Power Dynamics in Post-2003 Iraq

From a legislative standpoint, the Coalition Provincial Authority (CPA) implemented a form of ad-hoc consociationalism while establishing the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC). This approach promoted a sect-coded dynamic, subsequently becoming the general political framework of post-2003 Iraq (Dodge, 2005, p. 719). Holding a primordial perspective of Sunni and Shi'a relations, the CPA managed the political transition and orchestrated elite participation within the governing structures. According to Dodge (2005), primordialising Iraqi society was the gravest mistake. This approach, encouraged by the U.S. and aided by Iraqi advisors, portrayed Iraq as inherently divided along ethnic and religious lines. This discourse extended to U.S. President Joe Biden's proposal for a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional Iraqi state to solve the conflict fuelled by these primordial divisions (Mackey, 2019).

The U.S. administration's perception of Iraq as a nation inherently characterised by a tripartite communal identity, with oppressed Shi'a and Kurds on one side and oppressive Sunnis on the other, conveniently aligned with the ethno-sectarian focus of the exiled Iraqi opposition. The political framework that the U.S. and its Iraqi collaborators established post-2003 closely reflected this communal viewpoint (Tikriti, 2008). This set a precedent for a political landscape characterised by sectarian themes. This type of politics, which

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[27] For example, an analysis of elitist discourse might reveal that certain political actors rely heavily on economic capital to advance their agendas, while others prioritise social or symbolic capital. This information can help us understand the sources of power that drive political competition within the field and identify how different forms of capital are used to advance particular interests or agendas.

significantly depended on religious and ethnic sect-coding, dominated Iraq from the U.S. invasion until the general elections of 2018 (Haddad, 2022).

The notion of a Sunni-Shi'a divide was particularly significant, defining a narrative of Shi'a victimhood and Sunni exclusion, which mobilised communities and raised sectarian violence (Kadhum, 2018). However, the concept of sectarianism itself has been a subject of dispute in political discourse, with various experts asserting that the concept lacks a unified theoretical framework and even workable definitions (Cheterian, 2021; Valbjorn, 2021, p. 614; Masarra, 2013). Thus, this thesis understands sectarianism as a self-defining emphasis on a sect in pursuing political advantages (Haddad, 2022).

The debate is polarised between two camps, the 'primordial' (Axworthy, 2017; Fisher, 2014) and 'instrumentalist' (Abdo, 2017; Hashimi & Postel, 2017), both of which carry such flaws that it becomes crucial to transcend them (Valbjorn, 2018). In the latter half of 2019, a notable shift occurred in the narrative surrounding the Middle East (Valbjorn, 2020, p. 12). The media spotlight was drawn to Iraq and Lebanon, detailing how these nations were 'shattering the sectarian chains' and instigating a 'revolution against sectarianism' led by a 'nationalist movement against sectarian politics', implying the 'demise of sectarianism' (Tayara, 2019; Cham & Salem, 2019; Hasan, 2019).

The anti-sectarian protests in Iraq and Lebanon were part of a broader regional trend. Simultaneously, academia witnessed the emergence of research projects focused on 'de-sectarianisation', like the SEPAD project (Mabon, 2019b). Publications exploring themes such as 'The Ecumenical Frame' (Makdisi, 2019), 'Mitigating Sectarianism in the Middle East' (Martini et al., 2019), and 'Sectarian De-Escalation' (Mohseni, 2019) also began to emerge.

For example, in a recent podcast, Middle Eastern politics and military affairs expert Kenneth M. Pollack noted:

> "*We Americans, Westerners have greatly exaggerated its [sectarian relations] impact … I hate the ancient grievances narrative; I think that is utterly mistaken… even if you want to*

say there is ancient hatred… for most of the modern history of the Middle East going back

1500 years, the most powerful dominating this part of the world has not been the Sunni-

Shi'a conflict, but rather the Arab -Persian conflict." (Brookings, 2022)

This view highlights the shift from sect-coded divisions towards regional geo-political rivalry as the primary driver of regional conflict.

The Tishreen protests in Iraq present a historical juncture in the evolving trend within the sectarian debate. While it is true that these events had substantial ramifications on the political field in Iraq (Adil abd al-Mahdi and his government had to resign), it also led to two competing trends: a bottom-up movement demanding institutional change symbolised by a low voter turnout,[28] and a top-down system that reinforces identity-based politics and the post-2003 order (Mansour, 2018).

In contrast, there has been a considerably increased intra-sect competition, as illustrated earlier in the chapter. The escalating tensions, which frequently erupted into violent clashes between intra-sect rivals, were of such intensity that they presented the most significant threat to state stability since the sectarian-inspired civil war (Mansour, 2023). Another critical factor is the power dynamics post-2003 crystalised (Haddad, 2022). This was demonstrated in an interview with former House Speaker Mahmud al-Mashhadani. In a televised appearance preceding the 2018 elections, al-Mashhadani spoke of political entitlements with a newfound acceptance, stating that *'our share [Sunnis] is known; six ministries, nine Commissions, and more than 60 other positions-special grades…this is our share…'* (YouTube, 2018). This acknowledgement underscores a marked shift from the fiercely contested debates of previous years, post the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, where sectarian rivalries dominated the political discourse (Al-Dulaimi, 2003; Al Jazeera, 2007).

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[28] This shift is supported by patterns seen in electoral trajectories over the past six cycles. An examination of these patterns shows a decline in the political relevance and utility of communalism, with an evident fragmentation of the initial ethnic and sectarian political blocs of 2005 (Haddad, 2022).

With the post-2003 hierarchies established and sectarian relevance diminishing, the political landscape in Iraq is experiencing a reorientation. It is worth noting that this change does not indicate sectarian insignificance but indicates the evolving dynamics of conflict and violence in Iraq (Haddad, 2022). Slogans such as 'in the name of religion the thieves have robbed us' (*Bism al-din bagunna al-haramiya*) and 'we want a homeland' (*Nurid watan*) the 'deep state' (*adawla al ameqa*) in Iraq (Al-Adnani, 2022; Hameed & Khalaf, 2022) is a clear statement by the protesters who view religion as an exploitative source of political and economic wellbeing. As such, it symbolises deep feelings of disconnection between the people and the elites (Pursley, 2019). This shift emphasised a new area of research that takes away the 'excessive focus on sectarianism and the policies of Sunni- Shi'a divide, to a far more relevant divide between elites and people' (Haddad, 2019).[29] A shift occurred, leading to political, social, and cultural consequences on the power relations among competing Shi'a blocks (Jabar, 2018).

This shift is mirrored in the protest movement's emergence as a potent realm of symbolic legitimacy, adopting a secular-nationalist perspective that contrasts with the prevailing sectarian and party factionalism in the politically dominant Islamist sphere (D'Cruz, 2019, p. 262). In this case, political actors actively sought to leverage this legitimacy, a shared objective apparent in various instances. For example, in March 2017, Salim al-Jaburi, a prominent Sunni politician affiliated with the Iraqi Islamic Party (The Iraqi Muslim Brotherhood), announced the formation of a new electoral coalition, al-Tajammu al-Madani lil-Islah (The Civil Assembly for Reform). This move could be viewed as a symbolic shift in discourse, as he acknowledged that the prevailing conditions in the country were moving towards a civil state rather than aligning with the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al Jazeera, 2017).

Another illustration can be found within the Sadrist trend and its winning coalition in 2018, Sairoon (Marching Forward), formed through an alliance between the Sadrist movement and a range of secular and leftist political groups, including al-Hizb al-Shuyu'i al-Iraqi (The Iraqi Communist Party – ICP). This

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[29] The waning relevance of the Sunni-Shi'a divide April 2019.

coalition stemmed from a broader, cross-ideological social movement alliance between the Sadrist movement and the so-called al-Tayyar al-Madani (Civil trend), a political movement advocating reform within a secular ideological framework (Turlione, 2023). Furthermore, Muqtada al-Sadr's portrayal of himself as a paternal figure to the young revolutionaries in Iraq offers them praise and appreciation for their actions (Al-Sadr interview, 2020). This clearly resonates with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital. In this context, Al-Sadr's supportive role and acknowledgement serve as a form of symbolic capital, contributing to his influence and legitimacy within the social and political landscape. By positioning himself as a mentor and expressing approval for the protestors' endeavours, Al-Sadr accumulates symbolic capital that strengthens his standing and connection with the aspirations of the youth, further solidifying his role in shaping the narrative and discourse surrounding the protests.

While other Shi'a groups, such as Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (League of the Righteous AHH), endeavoured to capitalise on the civil trend and leverage the symbolic resources of the protests, they employed a strategy termed 'civil mobilisation' (al-Hasd al Madani). This branding tool sought to connect their involvement in the Popular Mobilisation Units (PMF) against the Islamic State (IS) with the political reform agenda of the protest movement (D'Cruz, 2019, p.262).

Given these sorts of tensions and exploitations of various capital, this study aims to examine further the shift towards intra-sect competition, specifically the Shi'a intra-power relations and the impact on power sharing. It acknowledges that while the 2003 U.S.-led invasion restructured the nature of politics in Iraq, the traditional concepts and categories, such as sectarianism, used to comprehend Middle Eastern politics are no longer suitable (Nasr, 2006, cited in Hashemi 2016, p. 65). As such, this research addressed the intra-sect power relations and conflict through new borrowed concepts provided by Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

What was once a contest along identity lines is now shifting towards a struggle for community representation within the same sect (Mansour, 2022). This shift was starkly visible during the past

legislative elections between 2003 and 2021, providing an example illustrating the shift from inter-sectarian to intra-sect-based competition for power. [30]

Consequently, the study of sectarian identity and its role in the conflict is losing its potency as a tool for understanding the political dynamics in Iraq. It is not that sectarian grievances have been resolved. Instead, an altered enabling environment has emerged, limiting the space for which sect-coded dynamics can be fully optimised (Haddad, 2021).

Equally important and an integral part of this change in the 'rules of the game' is the Muhāsasa system development and deployment within Iraq's constitutional framework. It transformed the criteria for political appointments rapidly. Instead of merit, competence, or political ideas, politicians were nominated and appointed based on their ethnic or sectarian identity (Stewart-Jolley, 2021, p. 3). The Muhāsasa system was easily grafted onto existing ethno-sectarian identities, which had been hardened under the Ba'ath regime's repression of Iraq's Shi'a and Kurds (Blaydes, 2018). According to Ammar Al-Hakeem (Political party leader of Hikma), the atmosphere was of concern and fear, and the climate of fear-imposed details on its [Constitution] that later became constraints on the political system (Interview with Amar al-Hakeem, Feb 2023)

On the other hand, the forces that wrote the Constitution did not have governance experience. There is a difference between perceptions and practical practices. 'When we entered into managing the country, we faced many obstacles that we could not solve because the Constitution stands against this or that issue' (Ibid).

This system did not simply influence the political structure superficially but created an undercurrent that permeated the entire political field. It defined the expectations for political appointments, the strategies

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[30] For instance, SCIRI experienced a division when Badir departed, and al-Hakeem established his own youth-led political party (National Wisdom Movement). Additionally, Daw'a witnessed fragmentation when its first Prime Minister from post-2003, Ibrahim Jafari, formed his own political party (National Reform Trend), leading to further splits between the Maliki-led (State of Law) and Abadi's (Victory Coalition). These few examples illustrate how the fragmentation of Shi'a parties has resulted in the dispersion of votes across multiple entities, leading to internal competition to garner voter support to maintain political relevance and capital.

employed by political entities, and the outcomes of power struggles. This is further corroborated by creating a point system that offers a systematic approach to power allocation within parliamentary seats, allowing political parties to manoeuvre their way through the new landscape.

The introduction of the point system functions as a foundation for the division and allocation of political capital within parliamentary seats.   It provides parties or coalitions with a negotiation platform for roles and a means to enhance their presence within the political arena. The prime political positions, the 'Three Presidencies' - President's Office, The House Speaker, and the Prime Minister - are occupied by Kurdish, Arab Sunni, and Shi'a representatives, respectively, as per an unwritten 'gentlemen's agreement' (Dodge & Mansour, 2020; Mansour & Salisbury, 2019).[31]

1.13 The Muhāsasa System and Its Controversies

Despite its transformative effect, the Muhāsasa system has not been without significant controversy. The Tishreen protest was the loudest in conveying their message of discontent with the system, and political figures such as Nouri Al-Maliki (Prime Minister 2006-2014). Muqtada al-Sadr and others contend that the quota system has failed to provide security, economy, and services to the Iraqi people (Arabi Post, 2018). Despite these critiques, the Muhāsasa system keeps emerging as the solution to the problems of political representation within the political field. It has thus far served to stay in check and provide subsequent governments (Mansour, 2023)[32].

Moreover, the impact of the Muhāsasa system extends beyond the political realm and penetrates deep into societal issues. According to Dr Al-Hashimi (2020), an Iraqi academic, Iraqi leaders' unwavering

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[31] This distribution of ministries follows an informal, tacit agreement: Shi'a receive 54%, Sunni 24%, Kurdish 18%, and other minorities 4% (See Appendix for illustration of Iraq's minority groups (Veen & Al-Shadeedi, 2020, p. 10). This division was evident in Adel Abdul-Mahdi's 22-ministry cabinet 2019, which allocated 12 ministries to Shi'a, 6 to Sunni, 3 to Kurds, and 1 to a minority group, typically the Christian community.

[32] See chapter 6 and 7However, within the interviews I conducted7, there seems to be a stance on the issue, with most of the views pointing towards the possibility of adjustments being made to present a more focused, less divisive, and incorporative constitution that prioritises a national coherence that resembles a national identity but also keeping in mind Iraqi diversity

commitment to implementing political, sectarian, and national quotas has manifested itself as a flawed system that perpetuates marginalisation, excludes competent individuals, and incites internal conflicts among citizens sharing the same nation, language, and religion. Furthermore, it has facilitated the rise of religious extremism and violence, compromising the country's security and stability. This situation represents a significant challenge for every government. Al-Hashimi further adds that the Muhāsasa system's influence has expanded, embedding itself deeply into the minutiae of Iraq's political operations. Even under the pretence of state stability, the leading political factions benefiting from the Muhāsasa system have devised special accommodations for themselves. These exceptions have begun to threaten Iraq's national identity, with these dominant factions placing the interests of their sub-groups and their tribal, sectarian, or national alliances above the wider public good (Mansour, 2023b)

Indeed, the habitus (see Chapter 3.3 on Bourdieu's concept of Habitus) of these political groups in Iraq can be considered to have been heavily influenced by the culture of Muhāsasa and the politics of quota division. A good example comes from the testimony of an Iraqi government official, Muhammad al-Kinani, as quoted in Al-Adnani (2022). He sheds light on how this ingrained culture impacts the day-to-day operations within governmental institutions.

Al-Kinani perceives that *"The culture and style of the party and sectarian quotas in Iraq, and the logic of "sharing the cake"*, however small, is the prevailing approach in most of the country's institutions. The political class are so immersed in this habitus that competition spreads further down to the departments within a single ministry. Those departments considered more influential than others become the focus of significant contention among the influential parties. "*The department concerned with investment, contracts, and financial matters is not the same as the one concerned with training and community affairs*," (Al-Kinani, 2021)

Al-Kinani further highlights the extent of the issue by acknowledging that "party and sectarian quotas in Iraq extend even to matters of dispatching abroad, who has the right to travel, and monopolising profit-generating missions. This approach has gone out of control after the parties' representatives and political

blocs managed to penetrate the furthest decision-making points in the Iraqi institutions. Consequently, Al-Kinani observes that the *"cure will only be amputation, i.e., eliminating the principle of quotas from its root."*

The testimony of Al-Kinani offers an insider's view on the way the habitus of the political actors in Iraq has evolved under the influence of the Muhāsasa system. It shows how the logic of 'sharing the cake' has not only influenced the distribution of high-ranking positions in the political field but also permeated the functioning of governmental institutions at various levels. The deeply entrenched system of party and sectarian quotas has created a complex network of interests and power dynamics, which is hard to untangle and reform. A broader perspective of the Muhāsasa brings into play an international-regional dynamic. Some analysts emphasise the roles of the U.S. and Iran, who are perceived to endorse the Muhāsasa system as an effective instrument of divide-and-rule policy, aiming to ensure Iraq can never regain full sovereignty (Jabar, 2018).

Further insight from an anonymous source, identified as a director in the Iraqi Ministry of Youth and Sports under the pseudonym "Ous Kamel," shows that political parties in Iraq have established a standard for operational control across various institutions. However, this standard does not rely on the competencies of party members or their associates but rather on their ideological and sectarian alignment. This mechanism, referred to as 'the right of privilege,' varies among individuals even within the same party, depending on factors like party standing, loyalty, and obedience to party policy. He observes that such candidates prioritise showing allegiance to their party over the interests of Iraq. This 'right of privilege' becomes a form of symbolic capital in the political field of Iraq, reflecting a person's standing within their political party and conferring power and influence based on loyalty and obedience to party policy. The same source also points out another dynamic where parties and armed factions prioritise regional, class, tribal, and doctrinal identities over national identity, causing societal division and weakening the state and its law. Ministries and institutions have effectively become controlled by political parties, manifesting what is commonly called the 'deep state' in Iraq (Al-Adnani, 2022). These activities reflect a specific form of habitus in which

loyalty and sectarian alignment are privileged over administrative competence—a behaviour shaped by the conditions of the political environment.

In one of my interviews with former Oil minister Hussain Al-Sharistani (2023), he acknowledged that party loyalty took precedence over administrative competence, resulting in appointments that did not match the required skill sets for effective management. Consequently, underqualified individuals were appointed to crucial roles based on their allegiance to the party. This trend became widespread, replacing the selection of technocrats best suited for the job with prioritising loyalty to the group. This trend represents an effort by political parties to exert control over the political field or doxa by leveraging symbolic capital (party loyalty) over other forms of capital (such as competence or expertise), thereby shaping the rules and expectations of the political landscape. Appointing underqualified individuals effectively meant the party could control the field and dictate its rules.

In the interview with Sayid Amar Al-Hakeem (2023), he comments on this issue. He sees that the individuals, primarily skilled in opposition and guerrilla warfare, lacked the knowledge and foresight necessary for state-building. He argues, *"Revolutionaries are often engrossed in the revolution and their fight against the authoritarian regime to such an extent that they lack time to learn and grow in civilian areas. They are competent insurgents, but not necessarily adept at state-building or understanding state management"* (Interview with Amar Al-Hakeem, 2023).

His comments suggest a shift from traditional leadership, potentially fuelled by his advocacy for youthful initiative and his exasperation with the older generation's opposition to change. This resulted in an internal conflict within the party, where Al-Hakeem clashed with the more established senior leadership. This conflict can be seen both as a power struggle and as a clash between different habitus: the existing habitus of the older revolutionary generation, shaped by long years of political struggle and experience, and the new habitus that Al-Hakeem is attempting to foster among the younger generation, emphasising fresh perspectives and innovation. The introduction of new political perspectives by Al-Hakeem might have been difficult for the older members to accept. He notes*, "When we get a certain ministry, a disagreement occurs.*

The youth say that the elders have taken their opportunities, and they have been leading in the opposition for twenty years and in governance for three or four rounds, and today is our chance to present something new. As for the elders, they say that these young people do not have enough experience. We can maintain responsibility and pass our experiences on to them" (Interview with Ammar Al-Hakeem, Feb 2023).

At the heart of Hakim's argument is the need to harness the political enthusiasm of the younger generation towards state-building. Despite his reluctance to relinquish control of ISCI, Al-Hakeem established his party, Tayar al-Hikma al-Watanil (National Wisdom Movement), indicating a significant shift in Shi'a political dynamics and a new significant player in the Iraqi political field. This move signifies a substantial shift in the larger political field of Iraq, establishing a new political field within it, characterised by its own distinct rules (doxa) and dispositions (habitus). This new habitus reflects the views and aspirations of a younger generation that are more in tune with what it prioritises, marking a significant departure from the existing political field dominated by the older generation of revolutionaries.

As such, the government formation process in Iraq has consistently presented a significant stumbling block for the Prime Minister, particularly when attempting to negotiate with a complex assortment of politically ambitious actors. These competing interests and varying motivations are particularly evident during negotiations with political blocs to finalise cabinet posts (Al-Sheikh Ali, interview 2018). The views of former Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi underscore this intricacy, as he once shared in an interview that he often *"found himself caught between his principles and the political realities of needing to accommodate the demands of various factions."* He recognised that *"outright rejection of all proposed names for cabinet posts would be unrealistic"*; instead, he had to *"strike a balance between his personal preferences and the pressing demands of political blocs"* (Haider Al-Abadi interview-YouTube, 2014).

The persistent issue of political factionalism and self-interest within the Iraqi Shi'a political actors remains prevalent today, and it continues to inhibit meaningful progress. A poignant example can be found in the words of Izzat al-Shabander (a former senior Da'wa party member and MP), commenting on Prime Minster Sudani's newly formed government. He contended that *"the Shi'a political parties have been presented*

with a golden opportunity - not for self-gain, but to rectify the wrongs that have been inflicted upon the nation due to their actions." However, he expressed dismay that *"their mindset has remained unaltered, stuck in the same patterns that influenced the formation of ministerial offices in 2006, 2010, and 2014."* Al-Shabander laments that this pervasive mentality, which has contributed to a state of political stagnation, "appears to be unchanging - as if history has left no imprint on their consciousness" (Al-Shabander interview, YouTube, 2022).

The Tishreen protests Shabander references as the 'wake-up call' to the Shi'a political actors demonstrate the direction of the political currents' trajectory. The narratives of the protests, such as *'nurid watan'* (we want a homeland), arguably reflect a broader level of national consciousness that connects to notions of communal and territorial identity (Halawa, 2021). This key issue has been prominently featured in the interviews conducted for this thesis. Both political actors and subject matter experts have expressed their thoughts on how political party groups could bridge the gap between national and ethnoreligious identities. While not everyone called for a complete overhaul of the current Constitution, they all pointed out deficiencies. Some participants proposed a thorough rejection of the Muhāsasa system (Sadrist). Others advocated for amendments to the Constitution, acknowledging the intricate challenges it will entail (The Wisdom Movement who advocate for a new social contract which seeks to reassess and amend the Constitution based on the understanding that its initial composition was shaped by conflicted factions each promoting their interests). Some views argue for better adherence to the existing Constitution, asserting that many current political issues arise from its noncompliance (interviews with subject matter experts and Iraqi Think Tanks).

Despite their agreed-upon limits, the Muhāsasa have thus far maintained the political process active despite the country's many challenges (Mansour, 2023). The political power structure is a key factor; the benefits and the ongoing conflict for power have upheld the status quo, making it increasingly difficult for politicians to abandon this system. It is because Muhāsasa ensures their share in the spoils of the Iraqi economy and safeguards their status and power. An intriguing observation is that the coercive apparatus wielded by armed

political factions is not typically used to threaten the political system. Instead, it is employed to exert pressure on political partners in various forms. A case in point is the Sadrist movement, which used its coercive capital as leverage against the coordination framework rather than the state itself (Mansour, 2021). In contrast, there have been instances where coercive capital was used to uphold the state's status quo, as evidenced during the Tishreen protests. In this case, factions of the PMF were implicated in violent crackdowns on protestors, with the intensity of the situation escalating to the point that well-known protestors were individually targeted and assassinated (Tenkingunduz, 2021).

Implementing Bourdieu's theory to the Muhāsasa system in Iraq offers an interesting perspective. The system's practices and beliefs seem to have become entrenched within the political 'doxa', or the accepted knowledge of Iraqi society, reinforcing the view that political power and positions ought to mirror the ethno-sectarian makeup of the nation. This aligns with Bourdieu's notion that struggles for dominance within a political field often involve attempts to impose presiding categories of practice on society, dictating societal structure, membership, and permitted identities (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 172; 2005, pp. 33-29).

Furthermore, as highlighted by Al-Kinani, this deeply rooted culture and practice have produced issues such as favouritism, inefficiency, and corruption. These issues collectively stifle the country's political and economic progress, underscoring the urgent need to question and resist this 'doxic' belief system. According to Bourdieu, 'symbolic capital' - the ability to shape the norms or 'nomos' that define society's structure - is the most precious asset in the contest for domination of a country's political field. It subsequently shapes how people perceive their world. Hence, the struggle within the Iraqi political field could be interpreted as a contest for symbolic capital, with the Muhāsasa system representing one form of this capital in the current socio-political landscape.

In today's political landscape, the political classes within Shi'a elites, more than any others, have undergone a deep, continuous fragmentation process. This dilutes the power among more competitors, and, according to Al-Jabouri, 'it intensifies competition as more deals and negotiations are needed' (Interview, Jan 2023).

This is far from earlier eras, where the struggle over power was across inter-sectarian struggles over the definition of the new Iraq and the relations of power within. However, since the relation of power had crystalised, so did the political salience of sectarian identity diminished (Haddad, 2022). Haddad further highlights that in today's political climate, the primary lines of political contestation have been intra-sectarian, with rival, amorphous, cross-sectarian alignments competing over the political and economic spoils of state (ibid). Currently the primary challenge to Iraq's political stability and the empowerment of the Shi'a political elite has shifted towards intra-Shi'a elite competition on the one hand, and public discontent and mobilisation on the other (ibid).

CHAPTER II
DECODING POLITICS:
FROM DEFINITIONS TO BOURDIEU'S CONSTRUCTIVISM

2.1 Introduction

In pursuit of a power-sharing model[33] for post-2003 Iraq, the Lebanese political system offered Iraqis a framework that operates through power-sharing arrangements organised along state-recognised sectarian lines (Fakhoury, 2014). The pact resulted in the Kurds occupying the presidency, and the Shi'a ensured the post of the Prime Minister, and the Arab Sunnis would hold the post of the House Speaker.

This system's theoretical underpinnings were largely rooted in Arend Lijphart's contributions to the subject (1997 and 2000). Lijphart proposed that societies marked by 'segmental cleavages,' encompassing factors like religion, ideology, language, region, culture, race, or ethnicity, are likely to encounter hurdles in setting up stable democratic frameworks (Lijphart, 1997, p. 4). Among the plethora of power-sharing studies, consociational democracy is perceived as a distinctive approach to governance in societies marked by religious or ethnic distinctions (Bogaards et al., 2019; Boremann, 2019; Ernst et al., 2017; Johnson, 2020). Often termed "power-sharing democracy" (Lijphart, 2000) and occasionally categorised within the broader context of "consociationalism" (Guelke, 2012), this strategy emphasises a balanced distribution of power among significant factions. It structures political dynamics based on constitutional mandates, formalised representation, proportionality, and group self-determination. Advocates of this theory contend that it pursues dual objectives. Firstly, it introduces mechanisms to mitigate conflicts, and secondly, it ensures the preservation of democratic systems (Fakhoury, 2014, p.232).

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[33] Power sharing is a broad term that scholars understand as referring to the range of methods designed to manage conflicts in divided societies.

Prominent figures, including Ahmed al-Chalabi (d. 2015), were crucial in advocating for this power-sharing model in Iraq (Roston, 2008; Bonion, 2018, pp. 137, 142, 160). This advocacy contributed to shaping the discourse around the US mission to transition Iraq from authoritarian rule to a democratic political system, and consociationalism or sectarian apportionment, termed Mūhasasa Taifiya, emerged as a notable framework in this context (Mako, 2021; Veen et al., 2017).

While designed to ensure broad representation and prevent the return of a Ba'athist or the ascendancy of a future authoritarian regime, this system's legitimacy has been under continuous scrutiny and criticism (Aboultaif, 2020; Bogaards, 2019b; Dodge, 2020; Fantappie, 2023). Many Iraqis have demonstrated their dissatisfaction through low election turnout and protests demanding an end to this system (Al-Kinani, 2021). Scholars, too, have critiqued the system. Various reasons are offered to support this using different case studies and reports. For example, drawing on the post-2003 Iraq model, O'Driscoll and Costantini (2023) argue that the failure of Iraq's model teaches us that consociation in Iraq had a '*shelf life because the governance needs continuously grow as a repercussion of them not being met and eventually reach the level where they outweigh the conflict-mitigating benefits of consociation.*' (O'Driscoll & Costantini, 2003, p. 2). It is worth noting that O'Driscoll and Costantini still hold the model as one of the leading mechanisms for addressing deeply divided post-conflict societies but highlight the failure of political actors to bring about its potential. However, they do not take up the inner dimensions or interplay of the Shi'a community in any great detail. Others take issue with the appropriateness of the model in the context of Iraq itself. Thus, some root the failure in the flawed design of the framework itself. In a recent report by the Chatham House (2023), Al-Ali identifies several structural limits and a failure for anyone to champion the newly advocated values of addressing reform, accountability, marginalisation and so on (Al-Ali, 2023). Others argue that from the start, the framework always lacked some of Lijphart's four conditions for a successful power-sharing state to be realised (Abu Ltaif, 2015).

Most recently, there has been a growing focus on the particular actors of the various parties and their causal role in the erosion of the system and disconnection between constituents and their respective parties. This

is alluded to explicitly in Maria Fantappie's recent 2022-2023 report on 'why Iraq's consociation has become a driver for chronic instability,' arguing,

> "*In its current form, Iraq's political system has eroded the space for coemption and compromise, consolidating power in the hands of a diminishing number of individuals. The political parties that once dominated Kurdish, Shiite, and Sunni politics are in crisis . . . [Today] Shiite parties' leadership councils and Kurdish parties' politburos are consumed with internecine fights and no longer function as platforms for competition, bargaining, and negotiator. Instead, a few individual leaders hold all the levers of power—political, economic, and military—and rely on co-optation and coercion to govern their constituencies. Increasingly, politicians exclude their competitors to become the lone representation of the Kurdish, Shi'a, and Sunni communities. Excluded politicians capitalise on the discontent this creates to mobilise masses and use coercion to prevail.*"
>
> (Fantappie, 2022, p. 2)

This observation that certain key individuals within the Kurdish, Shi'a, and Sunni communities have come to consolidate power for themselves and, as a result, have disrupted the development of the power-sharing process is not necessarily surprising or novel. However, the shift of focus from the model itself or the interplay between Iraq's three main communities (Kurdish, Shi'a, and Sunni) to a closer look at its individual actors and their impact on the process is more novel. It also generates an interesting space to draw out these actors and their causal roles.

Transitioning from this backdrop, this project is interested in further examining the particularities of the Shi'a community and its critical political actors, doctrinal claims, and politics in general. This literature review aims to engage with the breadth of literature concerning the struggle for power within the Shi'a political class in post-2003 Iraq. It does so by considering key debates and shifts in power dynamics, the various theoretical frameworks, and approaches for understanding power and politics. It also highlights the value of adopting a political discourse and historical, sociological approach to the subject. The latter is

grounded in Bourdieu's analysis of power structures and relations. In what follows, first, a discussion of the nature of politics and its intended goal is taken up as a way of situating a larger discussion on the nature of power and its exercise. This is done in preparation for drawing on Bourdieu's framework to guide the analysis of this project. I then return to a discussion on the elite members of the Shi'a community and their relation to the study.

2.2.1 Defining Politics: Perspectives and Critiques

Defining 'politics,' like many terms in social science, is not immediately clear or straightforward. Moreover, this issue is not novel in social science literature.[34] Building on this notion of definitional complexity, scholars attempting to characterise 'politics' have grappled with several challenges. The term's broad range of meanings and interpretations has precluded a universally accepted definition, leaving room for an array of legitimate connotations and making it a highly nuanced concept (Alexander, 2014). As a result, several conceptual frameworks have been proposed to unpack the term 'politics,' such as the art of government, which associates politics closely with the state and governmental institutions (Heywood, 1997). Other approaches view politics as a study of conflict resolution (Lasswell, 1958) or as an analysis of power dynamics (Dowse & Hughes, 1972). Each perspective offers unique insights into different dimensions of the concept, collectively enriching our understanding of the term. Some scholars propose a model that arranges these varying definitions along a spectrum ranging from 'narrow' to 'broader' interpretations

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[34] This definitional complexity could be seen across the social science discipline. For instance, Walter Laqueur's stance on the term 'terrorism'. He conceded that given its multitude of forms and the diverse contexts it arises in, the task of articulating a comprehensive definition becomes an insurmountable challenge (Weinberg, Pedahzur and Hirsch-Hoefler, 2004, p. 777). Another concept 'radicalisation' proves similarly challenging. A literature survey once noted, 'The causes of radicalisation are as diverse as they are abundant' (COT, 2008, p. 11). Rik Coolsaet, a Belgian authority on the topic, who was part of the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, described radicalisation as an 'ill-defined, complex, and controversial' notion (Coolsaet, 2011, p. 240). An Australian research team concurred that, while radicalisation can be commonly agreed upon as a process, the extensive variation in its interpretation renders existing research largely incompatible (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011, p. 13).

(Modebadze, 2010), further illustrating the multi-dimensionality of the concept. Several of these conceptions are fleshed out in what flows to situate their relatedness to the post-2003 Iraq context.

2.2.2 Politics as The Art of Government

Theorists of the more traditional school of thought envisage politics as closely associated with the state, government, or related institutions. For example, Laksi (1893-1950) observes the study of politics to concern itself with a man's life concerning organised states; Garner defines politics as political science that begins and ends with the state, or Leacock political science deals with the government. The 'father of modern social science,' Weber (1864-1920), viewed politics as *"the pursuit for a portion of power or for influencing the division of power whether it is between states, or between groups of people which the state encompasses,"* emphasising the central role of governmental institutions and processes in shaping political life (2015, p. 136).

The state, for Weber, was seen as a human community that (successfully) claims a monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory (Weber, 1921, p. 1). Within these defining frames, Weber's concept of politics could be seen as the 'art of government' (Modebadze, 2010). Within this approach, the emphasis is placed firmly on the central role of governmental institutions and processes in shaping political life. In other words, political practices are primarily situated within the context of government departments, cabinet rooms, and legislative chambers. This is where key decisions are made, policies are formulated, and laws are enacted. Thereby, it emphasises the importance of formal institutions, such as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government (Heywood, 1997). Within such definitions, politics includes actions that either involve or affect the state's institutions, individuals involved in the institutions of the state, and places in which these activities and people are present.

Opposing scholars, in this instance, argue that this approach, in which emphasis is placed within the boundaries of the formal institutions, takes away agency from the other informal institutions and social movements outside of the government power dynamics (Goldstone, 2004; Bertsou, 2019). While it is true

that formal institutions play a crucial role in shaping political life, the scope for grassroots activism and advocacy has been considerably limited in this perspective.

This can be seen in the Iraqi context when, for example, a question was posed to the SCRI senior leader Humam Hamoudi regarding the Tishreen unrest and the implications/challenges it might pose on the leading political parties. He responded that there were no alternatives to these groups and that people would have no option but to conform to what was available. This is a telling response, as it suggests that the current political order has monopolised the field and thus will not give way to new political or non-political actors to progress or form a meaningful opposition (Humam Hamoudi interview 2023)

However, history is full of examples of grassroots movements' significant change and impact in various contexts. These include the social campaign led by the Suffrage movement demanding the right for women to vote, Martin Luther King's activism for equal rights for Black Americans, and, more recently, the Arab Spring[35] in the Middle East and the Tishreen movement in Iraq.[36] The success of these movements had little to do with any direct involvement from state actors. As such, an important aspect that can considerably impact public policy is not accounted for. Furthermore, this narrow definition limits our understanding of how societies distribute power. Focusing only on formal government structures ignores essential questions about who holds influence behind the scenes and what factors shape decision-making at all levels. In short,

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[35] The Arab Spring, unprecedented in the annals of Arab history, was sparked by the protest of a single marginalised and humiliated vegetable vendor in a small Tunisian town. This isolated act of defiance rapidly escalated into a popular uprising, leading to the ousting of the nation's leader. What was first depicted as the Jasmine Revolution swiftly spread, affecting the entire Arab world. Neither republican nor monarchical nations proved immune to public demonstrations and demands for reform. While the scale of involvement and nature of protests varied across countries, a unified demand for change resonated across borders. Never in the past had such a powerful wave of public dissent swept across the region, not aimed at foreign powers, but at their domestic rulers (Kumaraswamy, 2011, pp. 52-62; Ghanem, 2016; Anderson, 2011, pp. 2-7; Spanos, 2012, pp. 83-119).

[36] Demanding an end to the Muhasasa Ta'ifiya., escalating protests reached their climax in October 2019, when significant demonstrations erupted in Baghdad and across southern Iraq. The protesters explicitly attributed Iraq's endemic corruption and the state's institutional inefficiency, which drastically affected service delivery. This protest, later referred to as Thawrat Tishreen or the October Revolution, evolved to advocate a pronounced secular nationalism, equality in citizenship, and a complete overhaul of the existing political structure (Dodge & Mansour, 2020; Ali, 2021).

while Weber's conception provides valuable insights into certain aspects of politics, it fails to capture its full complexity when viewed through a broader lens (Barnett & Duvall, 2005).

2.2.3 Politics as The Public-Private Dichotomy

Instead of situating politics in the art of government, some conceptualise politics in terms of its focus. Put differently, it differentiates between public and private affairs (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1989; Walzer, 1997; Putnam, 2000). The separation between the state and civil society exemplifies this distinction. State institutions are, therefore, regarded as part of the public sector; conversely, civil societies are limited to the private sector. With this conceptualisation, the public sector holds the political institutions, while the private sector is outside the political domain. Under this framework, politics is fundamentally a public activity outside the private sphere of life. This approach seeks to separate the two and limit the encroachment or interference upon the private sphere of life by the public (government) sphere. This perspective emphasises the importance of preserving a clear boundary between the political and the private, ensuring that each domain maintains its autonomy and functions independently.

As with the previous definition, this approach has its share of critics. For example, Bobbio (1989) argued that such a dichotomy oversimplifies the complex interplay between politics and private life, as many political decisions directly affect individuals' personal lives (Schwartz, 1979; Squires, 2018). For instance, this argument can be illustrated better when we look at issues such as domestic violence or reproductive rights that cannot be neatly categorised as solely public or private but involve both spheres in intricate ways (Enck, 2022). Therefore, it is necessary to question whether the separation of public and private affairs truly reflects the reality of contemporary politics and society, especially in areas where overlap or interdependence exists. This fluidity can lead to complexities in defining and understanding the scope and nature of politics in various contexts, underlining the need for a nuanced and context-sensitive approach to political analysis (Weintraub, 1997).

With this in mind, it is crucial to acknowledge that the distinction between public and private affairs is not always straightforward and may be influenced by contextual factors. Furthermore, it is essential to

acknowledge that the public-private dichotomy has been historically employed to exclude or curtail certain groups from political participation and representation, such as women and minority groups, whose private lives have often been subject to political scrutiny and control (Kristanti, 2022). This could be illustrated by the oppressive nature of the ruling elite assassinations of activists, limiting the potential of developing political competition and leaving them to dictate and control large aspects of the political field (for example, many Tishreen protestors or activists such as Doctor Riham Yaqoob. (see, for example, Kaufman, 2021)

2.2.4 Politics as Conflict Resolution

Others, such as Crick (1929-2008), view politics as the solution to the problem of order; in it, the choice for conciliation is preferred over violence or coercion (1964:30). This approach emphasises rationality and acquiring resolutions through dialogue, forming a consensus to reach a mutually agreed resolution (Ehrmann & Millar, 2021). Furthermore, it recognises that power dynamics and inequality contribute to conflict, and managing them requires an inclusive approach (Ho-Won, 2009). In adopting this perspective, we are presented with a more comprehensive understanding of politics. A perspective that encompasses conflict resolutions at multiple levels that include interpersonal, local, national, and international contexts. This perspective of politics highlights the importance of peaceful negotiation, deliberation, and compromise in resolving disputes and maintaining social harmony.

While this definition offers valuable insights into the importance of conflict resolution in political processes, it has been criticised for painting an overly optimistic picture of the nature of politics. Critics argue that this approach may overlook the potential for conflicts to escalate into violence or coercion when consensus-building fails or is manipulated by powerful actors (Fisher, 2000; Guillaume, 2013). Moreover, critics suggest that this definition may not fully account for the role of power and structural inequalities in shaping political outcomes and perpetuating conflicts (Bal, 2012; Malin, 2017). For instance, marginalised groups might find it challenging to engage in political negotiations on equal footing with more powerful actors, limiting their ability to achieve fair and just resolutions (Kabeer, 2005). Although it emphasises the

importance of conflict resolution, this perspective may not account for the complexities of power dynamics and structural inequalities within societies and influence political processes and outcomes.

2.2.5 Politics as the Exercise of Power

Another conceptual approach to politics is grounded in viewing politics as the study of power. It suggests that political dynamics are not solely within the state's or political parties' confinement. They also permeate all other aspects of human existence and manifest in different ways and contexts. For example, Sociologists Dowse and Hughes (1972) argue that politics is fundamentally about power and occurs wherever differentials exist. This perspective implies that any social relationship involving power disparities can be considered political, encompassing various interactions from family dynamics to workplace hierarchies and military command structures (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995). This understanding of politics challenges the conventional view that politics is limited to the activities and processes within state institutions or governmental structures. Instead, it highlights the pervasive nature of power dynamics in all aspects of human life, from interpersonal relationships to organisational structures and societal norms.

To illustrate this, we can consider examples of civil rights movements in the United States or the Middle East, where power dynamics served a crucial role in shaping political processes and outcomes. They transcended the boundaries of state institutions and governmental structures. These movements show how grassroots activism, motivated by a desire for social change and greater equality, can upend conventional power structures and challenge accepted conventions. They also emphasise the significance of investigating the interaction between human agency and structural restrictions while analysing power dynamics in various political situations. The civil rights movement demonstrated the power of collective action between communities and activists in resisting and challenging established power structures through peaceful means while achieving changes in laws that impacted the lives of African Americans and other oppressed groups within the United States.

With equal effects, the Arab Spring uprisings could be viewed as another example of a community uprising against perceived injustices by the leading elites. What is also uniquely observable is the transcending

message that swept across multiple nations across the regions, echoing similar messages of injustice by the ruling elites. Although the outcomes of these uprisings varied considerably among nations, they succeeded in disrupting existing power structures and reshaping the region's political landscapes. These instances highlight the necessity of understanding power dynamics as a critical part of politics, one that extends beyond conventional state borders and includes a broad set of individuals and societal factors.

Similarly, power struggles have been a defining feature in forming the Iraqi state, adding another layer of complexity to the regional landscape of political conflict and change (Dawisha, 2009). With each period of conflict, distinct power struggle dynamics lay. The post-2003 era of the Iraqi state has continued this trend of conflict. However, this time, it has revolved around different principles framed along sect-centric lines, primarily on a Sunni rejection of the Shi'a-centric vision of state-building (Haddad, 2016). This is hardly novel as the question regarding the placement of the boundaries of Iraq's political field and who has the right to be a member of it has been a key point of contention since the creation of the state in 1920 (Dodge, 2018, p. 4). However, it shows that the terrain over which this struggle has been fought is itself a competition for the symbolic power to define boundaries and membership.

Of course, power remains a complicated and nuanced concept. Political theorists have offered various definitions of power to understand power dynamics in social relationships better. According to Weber (1978), power is 'the probability that one actor within a social relationship can carry out their will despite resistance'. This definition of power indicates that power dynamics depend on the relationship and that resistance can have positive and negative effects. For instance, a learner and an educator may have different power dynamics than two strangers in a grocery store. However, Dahl highlighted power's repressive nature while ignoring its positive aspects, defining it more briefly as *'A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something B would not otherwise do*' (1957: 201-215). Arendt (1970) provided an alternative definition of power, emphasising the capacity to act independently and collectively. However, as seen in Weber's definition, this definition overemphasised the individual and downplayed the significance of social connections. Power is seen by functionalist sociologist Parsons (1963: 107, 232-262) as a mechanism that

influences how social interaction occurs. However, his emphasis on structural changes risked leaving out individual agency in using power. As such, when examining power dynamics, attention must be paid to the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints.

For Navarro (2006), social life is anchored within any discussion on power. In other words, an interpretation of power in a given context requires a 'theory of society' to escape the risk of an analysis that reduces power into a variable of 'factor', a discreet and one-sided component of social action, and the multiple aspects of social arrangements. The reasons for such requirements are straightforward, in Navarro's opinion. Suppose power is prevalent and establishes the entire set of social relations and structures. In that case, it is hardly imaginable that power can be theoretically (and concretely) understood without a broader understanding of society (p. 12). It means that debates about power are occasionally flawed as they significantly lack social factors and are thus incapable of analysing power as a relational process that sustains the fabric of society (ibid). Even if forms of power are scrutinised, they are based upon a larger structure that is the ultimate reality of a given social order (Haugaard, 2003).

With so much of Iraq's post-2003 conflict pinned on ethnic and sectarian rhetoric, it makes sense to investigate literature that attempts to synthesise between the culturalist and rationalist approaches to understanding power dynamics. As such, searching through the vast literature on ethnicity, politics, and nationalism[37], we find that the politics of ethnicity and nationalism are viewed through two approaches (Smith, 1996, pp. 445-458). The first view, unified under instrumentalist and modernist approaches, suggests that politics is a central concept impacting ethnicity and national identity (Anderson, 1991). Signifying the utility of ethnicity and nationalism in the power struggle between leaders and parties. This commonly leads to a micro-analysis of ethnic politics or a process from which states fashion ethnic groups and nations and their conflicts, producing a macro-analysis of national formation. It, therefore, assumes that ethnicity is plastic and flexible, an instrument for other ends, usually those of political elites, and that nations

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[37] As we will see in Iraq's modern history of state-building, the failure to adequately balance, ethnic, religious and nationalist sentiments have directly or indirectly led to the demise of the political order of the time. This will be further explored later in the history of Iraq's political systems.

and nationalisms are the product of precisely modern conditions like the modern state, bureaucracy, secularism, and capitalism.

On the one hand, the second approach emphasised the influence of ethnicity and nationalism on politics. This approach is personified through primordialism and perennialism. It tends to assume that ethnic communities are an extension of their primaeval human condition and that nations are imagined through their ancestral heritage (Smith, 1996, pp. 445-458). States, parties, bureaucracies, and politics are mainly regarded as the public expression of these pre-existing ethnic cleavages and cultural identities. It signifies how groups and nationalist movements seek their political goals.

On the other hand, it leads to a micro-analysis of the politics of ethnic nationalists or as a way of understanding the position of culture and ethnicity in creating states and influencing state systems, producing a macro-analysis of state and inter-state formation. However, Smith (1996) argues that none of these standpoints are plausible or adequate. He argues that in primordialism, it is untenable to explain why humans are generally distinguished by ethnic origin and culture. This is because it fails to explain why, in some cases, we witness a fierce, less tolerant ethnic nationalism and a more tolerant, multicultural national identity in others. Regarding perennialism, Smith argues that a more acceptable version holds that in most periods of history, nations are continually formed and dissolved based on pre-existing ethnic ties, making it a feasible proposition to be tested. In the case of instrumentalism, it fails to explain why ethnic conflict tends to be unpredictable and intense.

Moreover, why would the masses respond to the call of ethnic origin and culture and be ready to sacrifice their lives? Modernism also faces similar shortcomings as its account of nations and nationalism only tells part of the story, the part concerned with modern contexts. It fails to include that many modern nations have been carved from pre-existing foundations. Such foundations are rooted in ethnic communities, which form the basis for much of the ethnic nationalism drawn from its historic ethnic sentiments and shared memories.

These include myths, religious symbols and values omitted from a modernist perspective (Smith, 1996, p. 446).[38]

A more contemporary analysis provided by Gorski and Turkmen-Dervisoglu (2013) finds that scholarly work on the connection between religion, nationalism, and violence has fragmented along disciplinary and theoretical lines, primarily between rationalist theories of violence and culturalist theories of violence. In sociology, history, and anthropology, a macro-culturalist approach reigns. In political science, economics, and international relations, a dominant micro-rationalist approach is used to explain ethnoreligious violence in terms of greed, grievances, and guns. A more prevalent method that is widely adopted can be found within the individualist and instrumentalist approaches. This can be found in current efforts to deal with the spread of sectarian identity in the Middle East (Dodge, 2019). This has been personified by Hashemi and Postel's 'sectarianisation thesis', which primarily focuses on a top-down level of power-wielding elitest that modernist approaches have previously critiqued (Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Hutchinson, 2005). Within this approach, emphasis is geared towards the ruling elites; It is the prominent actions of ruling elites used to explain the rise of sect-centricity (Matthiesen, 2013, pp. ix-xii; Wehrey, 2014, p. 205; Al-Rasheed, 2017, p. 143).

The 'sectarianisation thesis' (Hashimi & Postel, 2017) demonstrates the utility of sectarian division and the manipulation of sectarian identity to strengthen personal capacity to rule. However, such an argument also produces a problematic issue that needs to be addressed. Dodge (2020) identifies two main flaws in proscribing such a notion. The first, he explains, leads to an assumption that without the inducing self-seeking ruling elites of sectarian division, sectarian mobilisation would not have occurred, and differences in religious doctrine or ritual would not have been politicised. It, therefore, infers that the region's elites

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[38] Smith defines an ethnic community (ethnies) as a named human population of alleged common ancestry, shared memories, and elements of common culture with a link to a specific territory and a measure of solidarity. A 'nation' is defined as a named human population sharing historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties; and 'nationalism' as an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem themselves to constitute an actual or potential nation (Smith, 1996, p. 447).

possess remarkable influences of both persuasion and political mobilisation at the moment their legitimacy declines. Secondly, sectarianisation appears to contrast strategic, rational, and destructive ruling elites against a mass population. The unknowing masses are, hence, easily mobilised to engage in events that favour the ruling elites' interests but not their own (p. 110). However, contrasting events like the recent Tishreen protest in Iraq would suggest otherwise.

Moving away from rational instrumentalism towards the alternative 'culturalist' approach eliminates the top-down causality and has explanatory weaknesses. At the centre of the 'culturalist' approach is Anthony Smith's work, which is extensively quoted by those seeking to develop an explanation of ethnic conflict that focuses on the power of symbolic politics (Hutchinson, 2005; Kaufman, 2001; Haddad, 2006). Smith's work is built around two arguments: The first look at the historicity of nations. This argument makes him vulnerable to Fearon and Laitin's accusations of essentialism.[39] Smith argues there is a short continuity between the pre-modern and modern, with the vehicles of this continuity being 'ethnies'[40] (Smith, 2009, p. 26). Smith argues that political actors forge modern nations by relying on these ethnies that stem from historical, ancestral connections. The second dominant aspect of Smith's most influential work is the focus on competing myth symbol complexes[41] or 'ethnohistorical memories' (Hutchinson, 2005, pp. 2-9; Haddad,

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[39]William C. Bagley (1874-1946) is commonly referred to as the founder of essentialist education theory see Null (2007). **Essentialism** in nature is defined as the concept or perspective that categories of people, including men and women, heterosexual and homosexual people, or members of ethnic groups, possess inherent differences or intrinsic characteristics and dispositions. A cornerstone of essentialism is the view that people and things have inherent, unchangeable properties. The main characteristics of essentialism include the perspectives that everything and everyone possesses an essence, that core human nature is unchangeable, and that men and women are fundamentally different. Essentialism, however, does not provide an accurate picture of other cultures and some groups within a culture. **Cultural essentialism** is the categorisation of people within a culture or those originating from other cultures according to essentialist qualities. In cultural essentialism, it is asserted that people are passive bearers of their culture, and their attitudes, beliefs, and achievements are reflective and indicative of classic cultural patterns. When cultural essentialism is contextualised in racial identity, it transitions to the proposition that categories in the race are associated with distinct, fixed, and unchanging patterns of culture. These unchanging patterns conclusively and stably define the psychological characteristics of members of a certain group within a race and actively differentiate them from members of other groups. Within the context of cultural essentialism, categorisation works by putting peoples who share similar cultural characteristics in a similar group and thereafter defining these peoples by the properties of these groups.

[40] Smith refers to ethnic communities as 'ethnies'

[41] Smith, who states that the core of ethnic identity is made up of a "myth-symbol complex," consisting of myths, symbols, historical memory and key values. According to Smith, myths and symbols guarantee the preservation and the passing down to future generations of ethnic identity.

2011; Grosby, 2015). This understanding of myth-symbol complexes' emotive and competitive power has become influential (Dodge, 2020, p. 110).

However, to escape the claims of essentialism, the notion of the myth-symbol complex needs to be cut from Smith's first argument about the historicity of ethnies. This would mean analysing myth-symbol complexes as modern creations, as powerful discourses created at specific times for specific reasons (Hutchinson, 2005, pp. 21-26, 74). Attempting to provide a solution, Kaufman (2001) and Ross (2007) carefully focus on Smith's ethno-symbolism, not his understanding of ethnies, but with a strong sense that ethnic and sectarian conflict is more likely to appear. The volatility caused by competing myth-symbol complexes may be resolved; however, the cultural differences present the most robust ideological developed in any given society and are the most likely to provide the base for political mobilisation.

With that said, a rising number of academics seek to understand the complexities of power structures by deploying Pierre Bourdieu's (1930-2002) 'theory of society' to synthesise the variant approaches. These have included studies on single mothers on welfare feeding their families (Power, 1999) to modern-day power structures of the Middle East (Kandil, 2016; Beczko et al., 2017; Dodge, 2020).

2.3 Bourdieu's Constructivist Instrumentalist Approach

Turning from the post-Iraq power-sharing context, a framework for analysing the circumstances and the generated space is needed. As noted in the previous chapter, Bourdieu offers a flexible method for analysts to factor in the ideational and material causalities behind the events researchers seek to understand.

Before delving into why Bourdieu, it is worth first explaining why I chose not to adopt another theorist's framework for this project. In a brief comment in one of his articles, Dodge (2019a) notes that 'Antonio Gramsci's notion of the war of position and the manoeuvre within an ongoing struggle for hegemony or Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the struggle for domination within the political field may be more

applicable to contemporary Iraq. There are interesting commonalities but also differences between Bourdieu's and Gramsci's work.' (Dodge, 2019a, p. 39). However, Dodge does not elaborate much more.

However, in a chapter titled *Cultural Domination: Gramsci meets Bourdieu*, Burawoy (2012) explores the intersection of Gramsci's and Bourdieu's theories in understanding cultural domination within the context of social and economic structures. He delves into how, by focusing on the role of ideology and cultural institutions in maintaining power relations, Gramsci's concept of hegemony can be complemented by Bourdieu's notions of cultural capital, habitus, and field. By synthesising elements from both theorists, Burawoy highlights the complexity of cultural domination and how it operates through a combination of institutionalised power dynamics and individuals' internalized dispositions. The chapter ultimately underscores the significance of integrating Gramscian and Bourdieusian frameworks to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the intricate mechanisms through which cultural domination is perpetuated in contemporary societies.

Yet, despite the suggestion to integrate ideas from the two theorists, doing so would have brought an unnecessary element to the project that would require a larger undertaking as a means of analysing and maintaining both theorists in view. Instead, I opted to maintain a primary focus on Bourdieu's framework.

Bourdieu described his work as 'constructivist structuralism'. By this, he meant his work identifies causative structures beyond the consciousness of agents; the agents' perceptions have a 'social genesis' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 123). However, Bourdieu also wanted to reinstate the role of agency that structuralism had sought to eliminate, to make people's actions more than the outcome of obeying rules. He emphasised that solidifying ethnic and national identities during political mobilisation resulted from competitive struggles over social classification. Those who managed to control the most symbolic and material power dictated which social categories came to dominate the moment (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 220-221; Swartz, 1998).

Yet, at the core of Bourdieu's method and key to examining intra-sect competition in Iraq are four key concepts: (i) habitus, (ii) fields, (iii) various forms of capital, and (iv) the central notion of symbolic power

and symbolic violence.[42] Bourdieu's approach can be applied in this instance without succumbing to an explanation that prioritises structure or agency to exclude the other, as we have seen with other traditional arguments between the constructivist and rationalist approaches, thereby overcoming such dichotomies.[43]

Instead, Bourdieu's theory is considered an elaborate effort to deal with old dilemmas in the social sciences. He intended to produce a theory of social practices and human action halfway from the different extremes of either an overemphasis on the agency or a one-sided position on structures. However, Bourdieu's general theory and some of its most essential concepts, like habitus and field, transcend these dilemmas. Perhaps he was one of the first prominent social scientists to deal with those disputes in the post-war period and to eventually offer a theory that avoids those analytical impasses (Navarro, 2006).[44] For Bourdieu, the social world can be conceptualised as a sequence of comparatively independent but structurally 'homologous'[45] fields producing various cultural and material resources. Bourdieu proposes a science of social practices that posits that all practices are oriented towards maximising material or symbolic results, mainly interest motivated. Symbolic or material interests are tangible forms of benefit, and this assumption allows him to develop concepts such as cultural and religious capital as complex forms of power. These forms of capital can be generated under several approaches and control of resources, collected, and traded with other forms of capital, including economic capital. They are resources transformed into capital when they operate as

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[42] These concepts will be examined within the theoretical framework chapter.

[43] Bourdieu attempted to balance individual agency with structural causality owes its origins to the milieu (social environment) within which he developed as an intellectual. Bourdieu was born in 1930 and grew up in south-west France, arriving as a student in Paris as an outsider in terms of both class and geography. The Paris in which he became an academic was dominated by the structuralism of the anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss and the increasing influence of PB intellectual contemporary, the Marxist philosopher, Louis Althusser. Bourdieu developed the concept of habitus to challenge the free choice at the centre of Jean-Paul Sartre's' existentialism. His work evolved to balance structuralism with discussions of improvisation and strategy. Bourdieu shaped his work through a detailed dialogue with classical sociologists, including Marx, Weber, and Durkheim.

[44] Bourdieu's work reflects the distinct and eclectic influence of classical sociology. He gains several insights from Durkheim, Marx and in particular, from Weber. From Marx he was inspired by the idea of social reproduction and his theory incorporates historical materialism and the idea that class conflicts and material interests are primarily pillars of social inequalities. He also incorporates the Marxian idea that symbolic systems help consolidate forms of domination. However, he refuses the idea that there are direct results of material dimensions, in particular the unequal appropriation of wealth (p14).

[45] The idea of homology within cultural studies marks the synchronic relationship by which social structures, social values and cultural symbols are said to 'fit' together. The concept is used to describe the 'accord' between a structural position in the social order Barker, C. (2004). Homology. In The SAGE dictionary of cultural studies (pp. 88-88). SAGE Publications Ltd, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221280.n113

social relations of power that the structures that give rise to social hierarchies, thus turning into entities of struggle as valued assets (ibid, p. 14).

Therefore, Bourdieu's preliminary position is grounded in accepting two fundamental principles of human behaviour. The first, which leans on Weber (but expands his scope), claims that all activities by individuals in social arrangements are driven by interest (Navarro, 2006, pp. 11-22). This constant pursuit of resource accumulation results in creating a permanent awareness to validate social differences. This is why Bourdieu's theory is largely political and deals with power relations as its primary purpose (Dodge, 2018).

The second underlying principle in his theory holds that culture is the ground for human interaction and a unique terrain of domination. He argues that all symbolic systems are attached to the culture and consequently determine our perception of reality. They ensure communication and interaction and create and maintain social hierarchies (p. 15). Culture, in the form of dispositions, objects, institutions and language (amongst other things), enables social traditions by linking people and groups to established hierarchies. Thus, it essentially embodies power relations. Whenever a given society shifts and expands through social diversity and increasing complexity, culture and symbolic systems may develop separate arenas for the struggle for difference *vis-à-vis* other fields.

2.4 Political Discourse Analysis: An Overview

Having established the theoretical framework through Bourdieu's constructivist instrumentalist approach, which offers a nuanced understanding of the interplay between structure and agency within social fields, we now turn to the critical examination of language as a powerful tool in shaping and maintaining political realities. The following section delves into Political Discourse Analysis (PDA), exploring how language not only reflects but also constructs and perpetuates power relations within the political sphere. By understanding the role of discourse, particularly in the context of Shi'a political dynamics in post-2003 Iraq, we can better comprehend how linguistic practices influence and are influenced by the power struggles discussed earlier.

What is the relationship between language and politics? Chilton and Schaffner (1997), for example, insist that 'it is surely the case that politics cannot be conducted without language, and it is probably the case that the use of language in the constitution of social groups leads to what we call 'politics' in a broad sense' (p. 206). Noting that the study of language extends beyond the domains of literature and linguistics, Pelinka (2007) contends that 'language must be seen (and analysed) as a political phenomenon and that politics must be conceived and studied as a discursive phenomenon (p. 129).

Discourse is closely related to Foucault's understanding of power, as it plays a significant role in shaping and maintaining power relations. Defined as 'a group of statements which provide a language for talking about, *i.e.,* ways of representing particular kind of knowledge about a topic' (Hall, 1992, p. 291). These statements construct the topic in a particular way, limiting how it can be thought about and understood. Power operates through discourse by shaping what can and cannot be said, which ideas are acceptable, and how certain topics are discussed. Discourse produces and reproduces power relations by normalising certain ways of thinking and marginalising others (Al-Thamzi, 2016).

The study of political discourse has gained immense popularity. Researchers like Norman Fairclough and Teun van Dijk have created critical and cognitive discourse analysis techniques to investigate how individuals and groups understand language and how it reproduces social inequality and power relations (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 2003). The interdisciplinary approach to studying political discourse has resulted in a better understanding of how political discourse affects political behaviour, judgment, and social change.

The study of Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq, in which language marks a key factor in defining power relations, outlines the importance of analysing these discursive practices to unpack how conflict for power and influence occurs. Language is not only a tool for communication but also a means through which power relations are established, maintained, and transformed. It becomes essential to consider the role of discursive practices in shaping the political landscape and how these practices reflect and reinforce existing power dynamics (Al-Thamzi, 2016).

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) comprises inter- and multi-disciplinary research that focuses on the linguistic and discursive dimensions of the political text and talk and the political nature of the discursive practice (Dunmire, 2012, p. 1). The phrase, PDA, points to the two-faced character of the nominal and its enterprise. For instance, PDA may refer to political discourse analysis defined as the text and talk of politicians within an overtly political context or as a political, i.e., critical approach to discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1997, p.15). PDA is therefore concerned with understanding the nature and function of political discourse and with critiquing the role discourse plays in producing, maintaining, abusing, and resisting power in contemporary society (Dunmire, 2012). As such, PDAs should be able to 'answer genuine and relevant political questions and deal with issues discussed in political science' (Van Dijk, 1997, pp. 11-12). Others, such as Chilton (2004), ground his approach with a fundamental question; 'What does the use of language in contexts we call 'political' tell us about humans in general?' (p. xi). Chilton assumes a link between language, politics, culture, and cognition that entails a 'socially concerned linguistic framework for examining those linkages and the intricacies of political thought and behaviour (p. x). Such work concerns evidence, authority, and truth, achieving legitimacy in particular political contexts (p. 23). Political discourse, therefore, serves as the primary means through which political actors express their thoughts and initiate actions that bring about political change (Chilton & Schaffner, 2003, p. 3).

On the other hand, Okulska and Cap (2010) prefer the term' analysis of political discourse' (APD) and conceive of it as socially oriented studies of 'polity and politics, located at the intersection of political/public discourse and political/social institutions' (p. 4). As such, scholars have come to recognise their enterprise's linguistic, discursive, and symbolic dimensions (Luke, 2002). At the time, Bell (1975) described this trend as a new paradigm that conceived language as the 'perceptual lens' for examining political phenomena and political deeds as being 'built of and around words' (p. ix-12). According to Hudson (1978), language should be understood as a strategic resource whereby politicians gain and hold power. Within this view, political 'statements' do not represent 'cool', 'objective', and 'comprehensible' utterances but rather function as a screen, a false scent, a safety net' designed to achieve political goals, create alliances and oppositions, and

present an image of unity (pp. 61-41). Pelinka (2007) argues that although the primary contributions to research on language and politics have typically come from linguists and sociolinguists, political scientists have also made important contributions (p. 130). Researchers from various disciplines, including Political Science, Critical Discourse Studies, Pragmatics, Communication studies, and Cultural studies, have shown significant interest in analysing political discourse (Fetzer, 2003, p.1). For example, Dallmayr 1984, examined the role language and language policy have played in developing the modern nation-state and national identity. Others, such as Bugarski 200, identified the verbal interactional features of international negotiation. Meanwhile, Bell (1988) analysed the mobilising force language serves concerning the social cleavages (Pelinka, 2007, pp. 134-5).

Dahlberg (2011, p. 14) suggests that all forms of discourse are political, as discourse theory is inherently a theory of politics. However, this perspective can blur the distinction between the politics of language and the language of politics (Okulska & Cap, 2011, p. 6). Therefore, it is crucial to focus on analysing 'politics as a discursive' phenomenon rather than considering 'the discursive as political' (Hay, 2013, p. 323). Political Discourse Analysis becomes relevant when discourse structures can be connected to the properties of political structures and processes (Dijk, 2002, p. 203).

The definition of politics can be categorised around two major contradictory themes (Fetzer, 2013, p. 9). First is a deliberation among different political actors to make decisions and identify feasible choices for actions (Hague et al., 1998, pp. 3-4; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012, p. 17), or as *"a struggle for power, between those who seek to assert and maintain their power and those who seek to resist it,"* (Groth, 2019; Chilton, 2008, p. 3). To address this contradiction, Sarcinelli (1987, cited in Lauerbach & Fetzer, 2007, p. 5) distinguishes between the production and presentation of politics. The instrumental dimension (*i.e.,* the production of politics) refers to the decision-making process that necessitates cooperation to resolve conflicts and make decisions. In contrast, the expressive dimension (*i.e.*, the representation of politics in the media) often results in conflict and antagonism. The media acts as a frontstage where political actors prioritise the representation and justification of their actions over the political deals made backstage

(Wodak, 2011, p. 24). It is essential to note that conflict and disagreement often intertwine in practice, as 'conflict is a disagreement between two or more parties who perceive incompatible goals or means of achieving those goals' (Jones, 2001, p. 91). A further assertion by Dynel (2015, p. 340) observes that conflict and disagreement may be studied within broader communicative phenomena, such as arguments and disputes. Van Dijk (1997) based his definitions of political discourse on the aims, goals, or functions within politics, emphasising the language used in political domains, such as political systems, structures, processes, actors, and values, form political discourse. Therefore, diverse actors are involved, such as politicians, citizens, organisations, and institutions (p. 15).

Van Dijk's (1997) definition of political discourse is mainly dependent on the specific context and purpose of the discourse (pp. 16-18). Thereby acknowledging that political discourse can be fuzzy or unclear but maintaining that it is a vital component of politics (p. 13). Therefore, his definition could be understood as the language of politics rather than the politics of language. In other words, his focus lies in understanding how political discourse is used and comprehended in political contexts rather than analysing the linguistic structures or features of political discourse. He emphasises analysing political discourse as a communicative activity within particular social and political contexts rather than seeing it as just a set of linguistic structures or features. In other words, he is interested in how political actors use language to achieve their political aims and how different types of discourse construct and maintain power relations within political systems. Van Dijk leans on the social and political factors that help shape the production of political discourse and recognises that the meaning and impact of political discourse are influenced by the broader social and political context in which it occurs. To illustrate this, the thesis can share two examples demonstrating political discourse's inherently adaptable and content-dependent features in how Shi'a political actors strategically craft their messaging to address specific situations, whether during a national crisis or an election campaign.

For example, in times of crisis, such as the infiltration of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) into large parts of Iraq, political actors were united in their focus and imminent security threat. The

perceived danger and brutality of a sectarian-natured terrorist group shaped the meaning and impact of Shi'a political discourse. As such, in response to the perceived crises, Shi'a political actors emphasised unity among Iraqis to combat and protect the community and its sacred and religious symbols. This sense of 'forced' unity brought about the birth of the PMF, which was comprised predominantly of Shi'a paramilitary forces and volunteers. The political discourse during this time often invoked religious symbolism and emphasised the importance of defending Iraq and its people against the threat posed by ISIS. The discourse served to legitimise the role of the PMF and other Shi'a actors in the fight against terrorism and the protection of the Shi'a community.[46]

However, within the context of elections, Shi'a political actors have emphasised their credentials and experiences during the fight against ISIS to appeal to voters. For example, Kais al-Khazali, a prominent Shi'a leader who led a paramilitary group within the PMF, used his role in the fight against ISIS to demonstrate his commitment to Iraq's security and stability. In this context, political discourse focuses on the achievements of Shi'a actors, such as the successful campaign against ISIS and the sacrifices and lives lost to liberate Iraqi land from extremist, sectarian groups.   This allowed Shi'a actors such as Kais al-Khazali to present themselves as credible and capable leaders, accumulating symbolic capital in the eyes of the electorate. Moreover, during election campaigns, Shi'a political actors might also emphasise the importance of religious identity, social justice, and the need to address socio-economic issues that affect the Shi'a community. The discourse in this context might highlight the role of the Shi'a political actors in promoting the interests and well-being of the Shi'a population, thereby appealing to voters who buy into the same rhetoric.

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[46] In this thesis, Shi'a actors are understood to be an all-encompassing unit of those who identify themselves as Shi'a, however, as I have already alluded to in chapter 1, these actors are not homogenous whether in their religious piety, or political views. Therefore, it encompasses those with nationalist, religious, secularist and so on. Since the majority of Shi'a Islamist groups were forged in opposition to the Ba'athist regime, or in the instances of post-2003 in opposition to U.S occupation, there is a substantial element of these groups linked with armed opposition and they too are part of the Shi'a actors this research is referring to.

In both examples, the context in which the political discourse occurs—whether during a crisis like the ISIS infiltration or an election campaign— Shi'a political actors adapt their messaging to the specific context, using language and arguments that resonate with their target audience and address the Shi'a community's concerns, fears and aspirations. This demonstrates the significance of context in political discourse analysis, as it plays a critical role in determining how political actors use language to achieve their goals and how the public receives their messages.

Moreover, and in keeping within the Middle Eastern context, scholars have increasingly studied political discourse to understand social movements (Shirazi, 2013; Berriane & Duboc, 2019), authoritarian regimes (Karakoç, 2015; Lynch, 2019) and political conflict (Tartory, 2020). Furthermore, after the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003, Shi'a politics in Iraq entered a new stage. It is no longer a cast away observing from afar; it is now at the helm of political decision-making and increasing its influence significantly within the political field.

The emergence of various Shi'a political parties and movements has made the construction and contestation of Shi'a political identity a critical research theme, with media discourse playing a significant role in shaping public perceptions. For instance, Isakhan's (2007) article analyses how the Australian and Middle Eastern print media reported on Iraq's democratisation process and highlights the differences and similarities in coverage. The Australian print media focused on the US's role in imposing Western-style democracy on the country. In contrast, the Middle Eastern print media highlighted the internal Iraqi dynamics of the constitution-making process. The different media frames reflect the broader geopolitical and cultural contexts in which they operate. In another study, Schmidt (2009) explores how Shi'a-Islamism shapes politics in Iraq. Popp and Mendelson (2010) use corpus-assisted discourse studies to identify patterns in language use and understand the discursive strategies used in media coverage of the Iraq conflict. Popp and Mendelson's other work examines how Time magazine used visual discourse to represent the war in Iraq, constructing a simplistic narrative of heroism and villainy. Tahmazi's (2016) study examines how Facebook is used for political discourse in Iraq, contributing to the pursuit of power by different socio-political

communities. Chandler's (2010) article explores the discourse of defeat concerning the US-led invasion of Iraq and its aftermath, arguing that political actors have used it to frame the conflict simplistically and reductionist. The discourse of defeat creates a sense of victimhood and resentment, contributing to ongoing violence and instability in Iraq, and reinforces a simplistic and reductionist worldview that undermines efforts to promote dialogue, cooperation, and understanding among different nations and cultures.

2.5 Historical Legacies and The Development of Shi'a Political Discourse

After providing the theoretical context, I will now provide a detailed analysis of Shi'a political speech. The internal conflict within the Shi'a community in Iraq has been a subject of growing scholarly interest and concern, given its impact on the country's political stability, social cohesion, and regional dynamics (Dodge, 2018; Haddad, 2011; Hashemi & Postel, 2017; Philips, 2005; Hashim, 2006; Gause, 2011). While various studies have explored aspects of the Shi'a political discourse (Al-Tahmaz, 2016; Ayoob, 2010), the development of ideologies (Marr, 1985; Baram1991), and the role of religious authorities (Norris, 2022; Marr, 2004; Tripp, 2007; Nasr, 2006), there remains a need for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the intra-Shi'a discursive conflict. Applied for its utility in examining how societies, over time, have changed and how various social, economic, and political factors have been shaped (Bhambra, 2016, p. 2). The historical, sociological approach enriches studies by providing context to the development and evolution of socio-political-economic factors. *"By studying historical patterns and trends, we can better understand how social structures and institutions change over time.*" (Mahoney, 2000, p. 509) This approach has been applied in numerous studies that sought to examine key historical periods and their significance in shaping the themes, ideologies, and narratives of the Shi'a community in Iraq (Nakash, 1994; Cole, 2002; Marr, 2004; Tipp, 2007; Stansfield, 2007), these studies have shed light on the roots of the internal conflict and the contemporary manifestations of Shi'a grievances and aspirations. Its relevance is further argued within the context of understanding contemporary Iraqi politics. Dodge (2018) argues that the historicity of nations over the longue durée is an essential aspect of understanding the formation and mobilisation of groups. He also suggests a strong continuity between pre-modern and modern times, with

'ethnies' serving as vehicles for this continuity. Therefore, historical context is crucial in understanding how political identities are formed and transformed. (p. 3) Historical sociology *"allows us to study long-term trends and societal patterns."* (Smelser, 1998, p. 636), allowing us to 'gain insights into contemporary social issues and problems.' (Smelser 1998, p. 642).

The historical event has given rise to different kinds of narratives, which defined the relationship between Iraqi ethno-sectarian groups that eventually were used to legitimise conflict and violence (Ehrmann & Millar, 2021, p. 589). It is essential to shed light on the unique features of Shi'a political discourse that differentiate it from other forms of discourse. To do so, the thesis will briefly examine the history of Shi'a politics in Iraq and the key events and turning points that shaped the contemporary Shi'a political landscape.

2.6 Key Historical Events and Turning Points in Shi'a Political Discourse

Invasions, conquests, and the ever-changing dynamics of ruling powers have moulded the historical context of Shi'a political discourse in Iraq. A pivotal moment in Shi'a history can be traced back to 680 CE—the events of Karbala, which led to the martyrdom of Hussein, Prophet Muhammad's grandson. The commemoration of this event by Shi'a followers highlights themes of injustice, victimisation, and martyrdom, which are deeply intertwined with the formation of their religious and political identity (Hashim, 2006, p. 234).

The events of Karbala have become a defining moment in Shi'a history, shaping collective memory and fostering a sense of martyrdom and victimhood that permeates contemporary Shi'a political discourse. Despite Hussein's defeat extinguishing prospects for a direct challenge to the Umayyad Caliphate, Shi'ism gained traction as a moral resistance against the Umayyads and their demands (Nanji, 1986). Consequently, the military defeat evolved from a political insurrection against Ummayad authority into a moral and religious opposition to what that authority embodied and represented (Nasr, 2006, p. 42).

Hussein emerged as a symbol for Shi'ism, representing its claim to the leadership of the Islamic world and epitomising chivalry and courage in the just cause of confronting tyranny. Karbala signifies suffering and

solace for Shi'as and the refusal of true Muslim authority to be constrained by pragmatic considerations and its willingness to challenge illegitimate authority—not only that of the caliphs but also of any ruler who falls short (Kramer, 1987, pp.1-19).

Shi'as have frequently invoked the story of Hussein to contextualise their modern conflicts, such as against Shah's forces in Iran in 1979, Israeli troops in southern Lebanon in the 1980s, Saddam Hussein's authoritarian Ba'athist regime (Nasr, 2006, p. 43), and post-2003 sectarian wars against Sunni insurgencies and ISIS (Alshamary, 2017). More recently, this narrative has been employed in intra-sect rivalries between opposing Shi'a factions (Mansour, 2023).

In modern-day Shi'a discourse, the Karbala event holds immense significance as it is a powerful symbol to galvanise communities and inspire collective action. The themes of martyrdom, sacrifice, and resistance against oppression that stem from Karbala resonate deeply with the Shi'a faithful. This narrative provides a unifying force, drawing on the shared history and emotions to mobilise communities in times of need or conflict or propping political actors and groups.

The historical and emotional weight of the Karbala event serves as a cornerstone for Shi'a identity and resistance, as seen in the numerous modern conflicts in which the story of Hussein has been invoked. This powerful narrative has persisted through centuries of turmoil and continues to shape contemporary political discourse and actions. Furthermore, the events following the sacking of Baghdad in 1258 and the centuries of rule under various Mongol, Turkic, and Persian forces have only served to underscore the importance of the Karbala event in unifying and mobilising Shi'a communities in the face of adversity. As Iraq became a battleground between the Shi'a Safavids of Persia and the Sunni Ottomans of Anatolia, the Karbala narrative provided a common rallying point for the Shi'a faithful, reminding them of their shared history and resistance against oppression.

The Ottomans perceived the Safavid Shi'a power as a threat, resulting in three centuries of Ottoman rule over Iraq, during which the Shi'a community was marginalised and persecuted (Hashim, 2016). The

Ottoman officials enacted discriminatory policies, such as land confiscation and exclusion from political power, favouring the Sunni population and further marginalising the Shi'a majority (Marr, 2004). These policies contributed to long-standing tensions between Iraq's Sunni and Shi'a groups (ibid). The Ottomans relied on Arab Sunni tribes to maintain control over Iraq, granting them autonomy and allowing them to practice their own rules and customs (ibid). This governance system established long-term power structures and resentment towards central authorities (Tripp, 2007). Arab Sunnis were given key positions in the state's administration, giving them experience and influence over decision-making processes (Hashim, 2006). This exclusion and marginalisation of the Shi'a community had far-reaching consequences that continue to shape Iraq's modern history and political landscape (ibid).

The historical experiences of the Shi'a community in Iraq can be seen as a continuum of challenges and adaptations, with each era presenting its own unique circumstances that have shaped the present-day Shi'a discourse. For instance, the Ottoman Empire's rule over Iraq significantly impacted the Shi'a community, particularly in terms of marginalisation in political and social spheres (Marr, 2004). This period also saw the rise of Shi'a religious scholars, the Maraji', who played a crucial role in preserving and nurturing the religious identity and practices of the Shi'a community amid the challenges of Ottoman rule (Nasr, 2006).

Transitioning from Ottoman rule to the era of British influence and the establishment of modern Iraq, the Shi'a community faced new challenges and opportunities. British rule significantly shaped modern Iraq by demarcating its geographical boundaries and forming the modern state of Iraq (Marr, 2004, p. 21). After the fall of the Ottoman Empire in WWI, Britain established the mandate of Iraq, merging Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra into a single political entity (Gregory, 2004, p. 145). The 1920 revolt against the British, led by Shi'a religious leaders, resulted in significant casualties for both sides and a change in British policy. The Cairo Conference of 1921 conceived the three pillars of the Iraqi state: monarchy, treaty, and constitution (Marr, 2004, p. 24).

Despite opposition and the issuing of fatwas by the most important ayatollahs in Najaf to boycott 'bogus' elections (Hashiem, 2006, p. 246), Faisal was installed as Iraq's first king on 27 August 1921. The

repatriated Iraqis filled high offices, marking the first step in establishing Arab-Sunni dominance in the government (Marr, 2004, p. 25). Arabisation in the education and military systems further perpetuated Sunni dominance, clashing with Kurdish and Shi'a visions. Shi'a religious leaders' refusal to cooperate with the British led to some clerics withdrawing to Iran in protest. However, their appeals to foreign powers alienated British and Sunni politicians. Ultimately, they were allowed to return on the condition of renouncing political activities, leaving leadership in the hands of Arab Sunni nationalists more willing to cooperate with the British (Nakash, 1994, pp. 78-88). These historical periods and the view that Shi'a was looked at by first tomans as a third column to Shi'a Iran (Stowasser, 1987p. 107) and the subsequent refusal to take part in the elections by Shi'a clerics left the Shi'a community outside the box and power firmly in the hands of Arab Sunnis. Bridging these historical developments, it is evident that Iraq's Shi'a community has faced significant challenges in translating their demographic majority into tangible political influence. Iraq's Shi'a could never parlay their majority status into a key role in the country's politics. Even though they participated in the nationalist uprising against Britain's attempt to colonise Iraq directly, the Shi'a lost out during the first phase of the nation and state-building in the 1920s (Martin,1987, pp. 31-3).

The second nation-and-state building project came in 1958 with the overthrow of the Hashemite monarchy and the establishment of the Iraqi Republic by Abd al-Karim Qasim. It allowed the Shi'a population to participate more actively in the political process. The growth in the Shi'a masses' political awareness, adherence to mass parties such as the Iraqi Communist Party (ICP), and Qasim's sympathy towards them led the Shi'a to believe they would become a vital political force (Hashim, 2006, p. 237). The ICP emerged as a big force among the urban poor in Shi'a neighbourhoods, but the Shi'a could never use the ICP as a vehicle for their political and social integration into the state. Moreover, it was viewed with suspicion by the Arab nationalists in power.   After the overthrow of Qasim in 1963, Iraqi politics degenerated into a military dictatorship. Because of its primarily Arab Sunni senior officer corps, this meant control of the state by the minority, with post-revolutionary leadership such as General Arif, a conservative Sunni Muslim who despised the Shi'a (Hashim, 2006, p. 238).

The third nation-and-state building project came with the takeover by the Ba'ath party in 1968. This was the most secular and radical nation-building experiment undertaken by an Iraqi ruler and was dominated by a small element of the Sunni Arab population from the formerly poverty-stricken town of Tikrit. Saddam Hussein failed to win the active allegiance of the Shi'a and Kurdish populace to his amalgam of ancient Mesopotamian, Arab and Iraqi identity (Dawisha, 1999, pp. 553-67). The Shi'a did not favour this new regime because of its pan-Arab ideology, early militant secularism, and its policy of weakening the power of the clerical establishment (Wiley, 1992, pp. 45-71). The Shi'a clerics and the regime clashed, and after the Iran revolution in 1979, the Shi'a opposition to Saddam's regime turned actively militant and called for the overthrow of the regime and to be replaced by an Islamic government. The politicisation of the Shi'a via the vehicle of religion constituted a national security threat to the construction of a 'progressive' and 'modernising' Arab power and to the country's national identity as defined by the Ba'ath. To eliminate these threats, the regime resorted to brutal ways where thousands of Shi'as and clerics died or were deported to Iran. The 1980s saw a series of uprisings by Shi'a groups, which were brutally crushed by the regime. The repression intensified during the 1991 Gulf War, when Shi'a rebels rose against Saddam's rule, only to face brutal reprisals (Haddad, 2006, pp. 65-87).

These historical events, from the tragedy of Karbala to the rise and fall of various ruling powers such as the Ottomans, the British mandate, the monarchy, the republic, and ultimately the Ba'ath regime under Saddam Hussein, have profoundly shaped the Shi'a narrative in Iraq. The continuous struggle for recognition, representation, and religious freedom has left an indelible mark on the collective memory of the Shi'a community, forging a resilient identity that persists in the face of adversity and informs contemporary political discourse and aspirations.

To better understand the intricacies of the intra-Shi'a discursive conflict within these periods and, consequently, within emerging political actors, it is essential to consider alternative analytical approaches considering the social and power dynamics at play. As a standalone approach, the advantages of adopting a historical sociology approach may not fully capture the complexity of the intra-Shi'a discursive conflict,

as it does not explicitly address the social dynamics and power relations at play. For instance, Bhambra argues that historical sociology does not explicitly address social dynamics and power relations. She suggests this is because it focuses on macro-level structures and processes rather than micro-level interactions and power relations. For example, she writes: 'The problem with this approach is that it tends to obscure how social dynamics and power relations are played out at the level of everyday interactions' (2016, p. 338). Other critics "*argue that focusing on history in sociological research can lead to neglecting contemporary social issues and problems*." (Go, 2008, p. 60).

Furthermore, "*Historical data may be incomplete or biased, which can make it challenging to draw accurate conclusions about past events.*" (Smelser, 1998, p. 641) – whilst a complete focus on this approach "*can lead to a neglect of contemporary social issues and problems.*" (Smelser, 1998, p. 642). To complement the historical perspective, some scholars have turned to Pierre Bourdieu's theory as a framework for studying the Middle East (Zubaid, 1958; Kandil, 2016; Beczko et al., 2017; Dodge, 2019). The utility of Bourdieu's theory goes beyond the narrow focus on ideational structures or individual rationality. Instead, it suggests a broader approach that considers the complex interplay between structure and agency and the historical and institutional context in which political identities are formed and transformed. (Dodge, 2018, p. 1)

2.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, we engaged with the breadth of literature surrounding the struggle for power within the Shi'a political class in post-2003 Iraq. Our exploration examined power struggles during the formative period of post-invasion Iraq, where sect-coded discourses were notably entrenched. We have identified key themes in the literature, such as the ancient hatred or instrumentalist view of primordialism, the shifting political landscape expressed through mass protests, and the decline of sectarian bargaining chips (Wehrey, 2017, pp. 5-7).

Importantly, this review highlights that understanding the power dynamics in Iraq necessitates a shift from focusing on sectarian divides to emphasising intra-sect conflicts. As evident in the recent political tensions

among the Shi'a political elites, the real struggle lies within these groups rather than between them. Furthermore, the site of inquiry gets even further into the group by focusing on its key members and actors.

Our engagement with the literature on politics and power illuminated different views and approaches to understanding these concepts, primarily through the lenses of instrumentalist and modernist approaches and primordialism and perennialism. While the former considers politics a tool to shape ethnicity and national identity, the latter emphasises the influence of ethnic and national identities on politics (Anderson, 1991).

Bourdieu's theoretical framework emerged as an encouraging lens to explore power structures and relations, leading us towards a constructivist instrumentalist approach recognising structure and agency (Bourdieu, 1990; Swartz, 1998). This approach helps overcome the dichotomy often seen in traditional arguments between constructivist and rationalist approaches.

Examining political discourse and the historical, sociological approach to this research enriched our understanding of the discursive practices used by political elites and the historical patterns that shape social structures and institutions. This research also explored the significant historical periods shaping the themes, ideologies, and narratives of the Shi'a community in Iraq (Nakash, 1994; Cole; Dodge, 2018).

In conclusion, this literature review provides a comprehensive foundation for our research into the Shi'a political class in post-2003 Iraq. It outlines the key debates and shifts in power dynamics, explores the various theoretical frameworks and approaches to understanding power and politics, and highlights the importance of political discourse and a historical, sociological approach to our research. It illuminates how the past still shapes the present, setting the stage for our investigation into the contemporary power dynamics within the Shi'a political field. This review underscores the need to investigate intra-sect politics further, signalling a new direction in the literature, one that moves beyond the well-trodden path of sectarian analysis. As such, it provides the critical context for exploring these dynamics in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Bourdieu's Theory: An Overview

So far, Bourdieu's framework has been briefly discussed and mentioned in the previous two chapters as part of the fundamental framework of the current project. The current chapter further evaluates the value and usefulness of Bourdieu's framework for assessing the power dynamics in post-2003 Iraq. In what follows, I first provide an overview of Bourdieu's framework and central features, stressing his social constructivism and developed views of habitus and capital. I then apply Bourdieu's framework to the Shi'a context to help elucidate some of the underlying tensions informing the dynamics of the group and its political power.

The political field in Iraq has been marked by ideological contestation[47] since the creation of the state in 1920 under a League of Nations mandate. Over the nearly one-hundred-year history of the modern Iraqi state, contestation over power and government framework have been marked by distinct violent episodes that reign in a new era of ideological frameworks where at least one portion of Iraqi multi-ethnic and sectarian groups felt marginalised. Navarro (2006) suggests that it must be anchored on a broader view of social life to initiate a rigorous and productive discussion on power. Put differently, an interpretation of power in a given context requires a 'theory of society' to escape the risk of an analysis that reduces power into a variable of 'factor', a discreet and one-sided component of social action, and the multiple aspects of social arrangements. According to Navarro, the reasons for such requirements are straightforward. Suppose power is prevalent and establishes the entire set of social relations and structures. In that case, it is hardly

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[47] Michael Freeden's (2006) definition of ideology is a "form of political expression" that reflects various groups' and individuals' values, interests, and aspirations. According to Freeden, ideologies are not static belief systems but are like languages containing certain concepts whose meanings may change over time. He further contends that ideologies are organised around core concepts that determine their identity and coherence. In his article, Freeden expands on his definition, characterising ideology as "a set of ideas by means of which people live; a set of ideas that assists or prevents people from making sense of the world; a set of ideas that motivates people to act politically in certain ways; a set of ideas that justifies or challenges existing arrangements of power; a set of ideas that distorts or illuminates social reality."

imaginable that power can be theoretically (and concretely) understood without a broader understanding of society (p. 12). It means that debates about power are occasionally flawed as they significantly lack social factors and are thus incapable of analysing power as a relational process that sustains the fabric of society (ibid). Even if forms of power are scrutinised, they are based upon a larger structure that is the ultimate reality of a given social order (Haugaard, 2003).

Drawing on this notion of power, some scholars adopt Bourdieu's theory of fields and capitals as a flexible method for analysts to factor in the ideational and material causalities behind the events researchers seek to understand (Dodge, 2022). As noted by Navarro (2006) and Dodge (2018, 2022), Bourdieu's theory can help decipher the complex power relations and historical and social struggles that have brought forward such dividing notions, transcending the debate beyond the confines of sectarianism and ancient feuds (Dodge, 2018). some also view Bourdieu's contribution as an elaborative effort to deal with old dilemmas in the social sciences (Navarro, 2006). He intended to produce a theory of social practices and human action halfway from the different extremes of either an overemphasis on the agency or a one-sided position on structures. Bourdieu's general theory and some essential concepts, like habitus and field, transcend these dilemmas. Bourdieu is perhaps one of the first prominent social scientists to deal with those disputes post-war and offer a theory that avoids those analytical impasses (Navarro, 2006).[48]

As a 'constructivist structuralist,' Bourdieu highlights the importance of social structures and institutions in shaping political behaviour and outcomes (Ritzer, 2011). Structuralism is a theoretical approach that emerged within the social sciences in the mid-20th century. It is mainly associated with the work of Claude Lévi-Strauss (1908-2009), who applied structuralist ideas to study phenomena such as kinship, myth and

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[48] Bourdieu's work reflects the distinct and eclectic influence of classical sociology. He gains several insights from Durkheim, Marx and in particular, from Weber. From Marx he was inspired by the idea of social reproduction and his theory incorporates historical materialism and the idea that class conflicts and material interests are primarily pillars of social inequalities. He also incorporates the Marxian idea that symbolic systems help consolidate forms of domination. However, he refuses the idea that there are direct results of material dimensions, in particular the unequal appropriation of wealth (p.14).

language.[49] As noted by Williams and Sewell (1992), 'Structure is one of the most important elusive and under-theorized concepts in social science' (p. 2). Structuralism posits that social phenomena are not the result of individual actions or intentions but are the product of underlying structures within a particular society or social context. It is left to be criticised for tending to assume a far too rigid causal determinism in social life or the idea that social outcomes are predetermined and inevitable based on the structures within a society (Lizardo, 2010). What tends to get lost in the effectiveness of human action or 'agency'? Instead, they tend to appear resistant to human agency, to exist apart from it, and to determine the essential shape of transactions that constitute the experience of social life (Williams & Sewell, 1992, p. 3). In other words, structuralism places too much emphasis on the objective reality of social structures in shaping human behaviour and not enough on individuals' subjective experiences and perceptions, therefore downplaying the agency of individuals and the role of historical contingency in shaping social outcomes. While social structures can shape and influence individual behaviour, individuals can also subvert these structures and create new forms of social organisation and cultural practices. Ignoring this agency can lead to a deterministic view of social outcomes that does not fully account for the role of human agency and contingency (Lizardo, 2010).

Constructivism emerged as the leading metaphor of human learning by the 1980s and 1990s as interest waned in behaviourist and information processing perspectives (Mayer, 1996). Opposite in their worldview, constructivists utilise a broad approach that could be applied to multiple fields of education and international relations. Two constructivist forms are claimed to be the most prominent: cognitive constructivism[50] and social constructivism[51] (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 387). Regarding relevance to this

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[49] See A. de Rujiter (1983) for more on the nuances of the theoretical approach: PDF access: jaso14_3_1983_273_291.pdf (ox.ac.uk)

[50] Also known as radical constructivism, cognitive constructivism, associated with Piaget, Bruner, Ausubel, and von Glasersfeld, focuses on the individual's intrapersonal process of knowledge construction, emphasising learner-centred and discovery-oriented learning. Social environment and interaction are considered stimuli for individual cognitive conflict.

[51] Social constructivism, linked to Vygotsky, Kuhn, Greeno, Lave, Simon, and Brown, highlights the central role of the social environment in learning. Learners become enculturated into their community through interactions with their immediate learning environment, making learning largely situation-specific and context-bound.

research, it will focus on its application in sociology. Constructivism implies that human knowledge is constructed (Hwang, 1996, p. 343). One of the key strengths is that it challenges traditional positivist assumptions about the objectivity of knowledge and the existence of a single, objective reality (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 387). By emphasising the social construction of knowledge, constructivism recognises that social and cultural factors, including language, historical context, and power relations, shape our understanding of the world. As such, constructivists accept multiple realities in place of one reality, meaning that reality is subjective and can be different from one person to another. Therefore, those who adopt a constructivist worldview seek not to offer a binding statement but rather to address sense-making within social and historical contexts (Hwang, 1996, p. 344). This approach can be particularly useful for understanding how social structures and institutions are created and maintained and how they can be transformed through collective action.

However, there are several criticisms, or as Phillips (1995, p. 5) puts it, the 'bad side of constructivism' that are worth noting. One such criticism is that it can be overly relativistic, leading to a rejection of universal truths and an emphasis on subjective interpretation. This can make it difficult to establish common ground for communication and limit the ability to generate objective knowledge.

Moreover, critics argue that constructivism can be overly deterministic, suggesting that social reality is a product of human construction and negates the role of material factors, such as biology or physical environments. Furthermore, some critics argue that constructivism can be used to justify the status quo and neglect issues of power and inequality. For example, by emphasising the social construction of knowledge, constructivism can suggest that all knowledge is equally valid and that there is no objective basis for evaluating different perspectives. This can lead to a neglect of issues of power and privilege and can make it difficult to challenge dominant discourses and structures of inequality (Terhart, 2003; Fox, 2001; Biggs, 1998; Jin & Cortazzi, 1998).

These two views contrast Bourdieu's position, which can be seen as occupying a middle ground. He observes social structures as patterns of relationships, which ultimately organise social life (Dodge, 2018).

According to Bourdieu, social structures are the rules, norms and values that shape individuals and groups in society (Bourdieu, 1990). As such, these structures are reflected in the individuals and how response becomes intrinsic to the environment that helps produce practices (Yang, 2013). Bourdieu views primary groups in society as social class groups, and power is understood as the ability to dominate other groups through various attempts to legitimise their worldview. Social structures and power relations become the determining factors for individuals' behaviour, thereby reducing the dependency on individual agency and emphasising a more macro-level view of social structures (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 123). In other words, individual agency refers to the capacity to act independently to influence the social world around them. However, these independent decisions for Bourdieu are not entirely free or unconstrained. They are shaped and mediated by the social structures and cultural norms within a particular society and the cultural conditions in which they operate (Lizardo, 2010, p. 666).

For example, an individual's social class background is important in positioning them to access resources and opportunities. This includes job opportunities in a particular field or access to education and, therefore, their ability to accumulate different forms of capital. Bourdieu's theory, therefore, suggests that structural factors limit an individual's agency, and these factors play a big part in shaping an individual's life chances. As such, the individual must use their agency strategically to overcome the limitations and constraints imposed by their social class.

The deterministic perception of human behaviour constrained by social structures and external forces brings with it certain limitations. The assumption of human behaviour as being passive agents, primarily shaped and controlled by social structures that limit their agency in shaping their own lives, tends to ignore the active role that individuals can play in shaping their social world and can overlook how social structures themselves are shaped and contested through human action.

To restore the significance of agency that structuralism aimed to eliminate, Bourdieu sought to consider people's actions as more than just the outcome of following rules. As such, his theory of fields and capital identifies the agency's role in shaping social behaviour and practices (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 220-221; Swartz,

1998). Bourdieu proposes understanding the social world as a succession of relatively independent but structurally homologous[52] fields. These fields produce various cultural and material resources and are structured by similar principles of competition that share forms of capital (economic, cultural, symbolic) with different values in each field. For example, Shi'a political and religious authority are two fields that share similar forms of symbolic capital, such as knowledge of Islamic law and theology and the ability to mobilise followers based on religious legitimacy. Social agents in these fields compete for symbolic power by creating or promoting ideas seen as legitimate or valued by others in the field.[53]

In post-2003 Iraq, intense competition emerged between various Shi'a political groups and religious authorities seeking to control the Shi'a community and state resources (Alaaldin, 2023). For instance, the Da'wa Party, the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), and the Sadrist Movement have consistently competed to control political and religious institutions. Simultaneously, religious authorities such as Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani and Grand Ayatollah Muhammad al-Yaqubi have vied for the loyalty of Shi'a Muslims by presenting differing interpretations of Islamic law and theology (Rojhelati, 2023). In this context, the political and religious authority within the Shi'a community can be seen as homologous fields, sharing the valuing of symbolic and cultural capital forms like religious knowledge and legitimacy. The criteria for what constitutes value or prestige in each field may differ, but the underlying principles of competition remain the same.

Bourdieu's concept of homologous fields emphasises various fields' interconnectedness and mutual influence (Reay, 2004). Examining the similarities and differences between fields helps develop a more comprehensive understanding of how social structures and practices form and replicate in society. On Bourdieu's account, social agents compete within different fields for various forms of capital. Capital

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[52] The idea of homology within cultural studies marks the synchronic relationship by which social structures, social values and cultural symbols are said to 'fit' together. The concept is used to describe the 'accord' between a structural position in the social order Barker, C. (2004). Homology. In The SAGE dictionary of cultural studies (pp. 88-88). SAGE Publications Ltd, https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781446221280.n113.

[53] Examples of this will be provided in Chapter 5.

distribution within a field shapes the power relations among social agents and the field's structure. Thus, social agents are not merely passive recipients of cultural norms and rules but actively contribute to constructing and reproducing social structures (Fowler, 1997). Individuals possess the agency to negotiate their position within a field and challenge dominant social categories and practices. However, their agency is not unlimited, as it is constrained by the distribution of capital within the field, limiting their possibilities for action and shaping their strategies for gaining power and influence.

Symbolic violence is central to Bourdieu's politics, akin to the Marxist idea of "false consciousness." This phenomenon leads individuals to internalise dominant discourses, making even intolerable conditions seem acceptable and natural (Bourdieu in Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008, p. 46). Historical events, such as the African American Civil Rights movement, exemplify this process, with segregated facilities based on skin colour once considered socially acceptable. Bourdieu contends that such conditions persist in contemporary society, questioning 'self-evident' concerns and challenging the 'acceptance of commonplaces' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 8).

Bourdieu's theory of symbolic violence refers to the maintenance and reproduction of power relations through cultural practices and symbols (Bourdieu, 1989). Dominant groups use their cultural power to impose their values and beliefs on subordinate groups, producing unequal power relations without explicit coercion or force. This form of power operates through manipulating cultural symbols and meanings rather than overt physical violence. Bourdieu's theory has been influential in various fields, including sociology, cultural studies, and political theory (Springer, 1989, pp. 14-25), offering valuable insights into how cultural practices and symbols reinforce social inequality and maintain the status quo.

Bourdieu developed his theory of fields and capitals in response to structuralism's limitations, particularly its tendency to downplay the role of agency and the importance of social context in shaping individual behaviour (Dodge, 2018). Bourdieu's theory differs from structuralism's approach to the relationship between structure and agency. Structuralism emphasises the role of underlying structures in shaping individual behaviour and views individuals as passive subjects of those structures (Ritzer, 2011). In

contrast, Bourdieu emphasises the agency of social actors in navigating and contesting social structures and the importance of the social context in shaping their actions (Ivana, 2020). According to Bourdieu, social structures are not static or fixed but constantly negotiated and contested by social actors with their interests and strategies. He developed the concept of fields to describe the dynamic and competitive social spaces in which social actors compete for various forms of capital (Claridge, 2015). The distribution of capital within fields structures them, and social actors must navigate the rules of the field and compete with other actors to accumulate capital and gain power and influence. On the other hand, structuralism tends to view social structures as existing outside of the individual agency and emphasises the role of deep structures in shaping individual behaviour. Structuralism argues that individuals are shaped by the underlying structures of society, such as language, kinship, or economics, and that these structures are often invisible and difficult to change (Hays, 1994).

Moreover, Bourdieu's theory of fields and capitals differs from structuralism's approach to cultural analysis. Structuralism emphasises social life's symbolic and cultural dimensions and seeks to uncover the underlying structures that shape cultural practices and beliefs. In contrast, Bourdieu's theory highlights the role of cultural capital in social competition and power dynamics and how cultural practices and beliefs are shaped by social context and power relations (Gartman, 1991).

While both Bourdieu's theory of fields and capitals and structuralism are concerned with understanding the underlying structures and patterns of social life, they differ in their approach to agency, social context, and cultural analysis. Bourdieu's theory emphasises the importance of social actors, the competitive nature of social spaces, and the interplay between different forms of capital in shaping social practices and beliefs. This perspective highlights the complexity and dynamism of social life and the agency and power of individuals in negotiating and shaping social structures (Ritzer, 2011).

The research questions[54] of the current project would benefit from adopting Bourdieu's theory of fields and capital. The utility of Bourdieu's theory provides a helpful framework for analysing power struggles in different social contexts, specifically within the political discourse in this case.

The theory posits that social actors struggle to accumulate and control different forms of capital, such as economic, cultural, and social capital, within specific fields. In this case, the competition falls within the field of politics. Therefore, the study would focus on Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq, and the social actors are competing categories of politicians and religious leaders.[55] The theory also considers the importance of habitus, or the internalised dispositions and strategies of the actors, which may influence their actions and choices within the field.[56] This could be particularly relevant for understanding how elites use social media interactions to further their agendas and control the discourse narrative. In contrast, structuralism theories of politics focus on the broader social structures and institutions that shape political processes and outcomes and may not provide as much insight into the specific power struggles within Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq. While these theories may help analyse the broader context in which the discourse occurs, they may not be as helpful for understanding the micro-level dynamics of power struggles within the discourse.

Having established the relevance of Bourdieu's theory in understanding power struggles in Shi'a political discourse, the following section delves deeper into the key concepts of Bourdieu's framework: field, capital, and habitus. It elucidates their applicability in analysing the intricacies of the Shi'a political landscape in post-2003 Iraq.

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[54] Kindly refer back to Chapter 1 for a delineation of the research inquiries.

[55] In addition to various other social participants, there exist notable entities contending in the domain, with the primary focus being on the two aforementioned groups. Their substantial influence stems from the symbolic and coercive leverage they exert over others,

[56] Chapter 5 will deal with the issue of access.

3.2 Capitals: Sources of Conflict and Power

Bourdieu's primary position centres on fundamental principles of human behaviour that draw from Weber's work (O'Neill, 1986). He emphasises the importance of resource accumulation as a key driver of social behaviour, which leads to the creation of hierarchies and social differences (Swartz, 1997). Individuals and groups seek to accumulate different forms of capital, including economic, cultural, and social capital, motivated by self-interest in their actions within social arrangements. As a result, social struggles arise as individuals compete to advance their interests and accumulate various forms of capital. However, competition is not just a matter of individual self-interest. According to Bourdieu, capital distribution within a field is shaped by social struggles between individuals and groups who seek to maintain or challenge the existing power relations (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 241-258). These struggles can take many forms, from overt conflict to more subtle manipulation and manoeuvring. Therefore, while self-interest remains an important motivating force in human conduct, social struggles and competition for different forms of capital are the chief aspects of social arrangements. This perspective highlights the importance of power relations and social structures in shaping individual actions and choices. It provides a valuable framework for understanding how different forms of capital are distributed within a given field (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 70).

Bourdieu identifies four primary types of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital includes properties or financial resources, while social capital refers to social networks and obligations, the ability to organise and mobilise, and the benefits of a group membership. On the other hand, cultural capital exists in three forms: embodied state, objectified, and institutionalised state. The embodied state encompasses skills, habitus styles of conversation, and posture (ibid). In other words, it is about knowledge and culture communicated through a person's mind hexis. According to Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, p. 38), bodily hexis refers to 'the forms of bodies, and bodily movements and deportment that are commensurate with, authorised by and appropriately reflected the values of the cultural field'; the family and schools provide these (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 4; Bourdieu, 1990; Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, p. 4; Swarts, 1998; Schirato et al., 2012, p. xviii). The value of religious and cultural customs

is one manifestation of Iraq's cultural capital. Traditional beliefs and practices, especially those associated with Islam, are highly valued in Iraqi culture (Nakash, 1994). For instance, one who exhibits knowledge of and adherence to Islamic customs and practises may be considered to have high cultural capital. This can be especially crucial in fields like law and politics, where understanding Islamic law and customs is valuable.

Another example of cultural capital in Iraq can be seen in the importance of family connections and the extent of networks. In Iraqi society, family connections and networks can play a significant role in accessing opportunities such as employment. The post-2003 *mūhasasa*, a political patronage system, has significantly allocated government jobs and resources in Iraq (Dodge, 2020). This has led to a situation where belonging to a particular political group or party can be a key factor in accessing job opportunities and other cultural capital. Under the mūhasasa logic, political affiliations and connections have become important social status and power markers in Iraq. This has created a situation where people who are not affiliated with a particular political group may find it difficult to access important cultural capital such as jobs, education, and other opportunities.

In this way, the mūhasasa system has entrenched the role of political alignments in Iraqi society, making it difficult for people to access important cultural capital without the support of a particular political group or party (Kathem, 2019).

The fourth type of capital, symbolic capital, is the most significant for Bourdieu, and symbolic violence is using that capital to influence perceptions and shape society (Dodge, 2018). The struggle to obtain symbolic power and impose symbolic violence is the competition to structure common sense in any field and across society. Bourdieu believes that common sense[57] is structured through the classification process, the division,

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[57] Common sense or *doxa* along with the political social relations that are obtained in a particular moment in a particular society- for more see for example Deer, 2014 Doxia in *Pierre Bourdieu*; Lizardo, 2004; Wacquant, 2004. It is also understood as the rules of the field. we will refer to those rules as *doxa* following Bourdieu (e.g., Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). The *doxa* expresses the historically generated rules of functioning: they are commonly accepted, unquestioned and taken for granted by those in the field, even if they may seem strange to those who are not part of

and order of the social world through the imposition of categories and their naming. This is how agents gain their perception of the social world and are allocated to specific groups and identities (Bourdieu, 1991, pp. 105, 170, 238). Symbolic violence establishes hierarchies and distinguishes between groups (Swartz, 1998, p. 87). In the case of Iraq, the fight for symbolic power was to impose classifications of how the social world should be understood and which social categories should influence common sense and be seen as legitimate.

Bourdieu rejects the assumption that economic capital should be considered a superior form of capital. Instead, he argues that capitals are interchangeable and assume different forms, originating in various fields and structuring a tangible social order. Different forms of capital create separate hierarchies and dimensions of power. The fluidity in exchanging forms of capital could be seen in how certain agents (people or groups) may command differing absolute stocks of capital (under its different forms), which will make up varying proportions and a resulting positional field (Bourdieu, 1984, pp. 128-9).

Bourdieu's perspective highlights the importance of power relations and social structures in shaping individual actions and choices, providing a useful framework for understanding how different forms of capital are distributed within a given field. Tracing the build-up of different forms of capital makes it possible to interpret how separate hierarchies and dimensions of power are created.

Overall, Bourdieu's ideas emphasise the significance of resource accumulation, the importance of different types of capital, and how they shape social order and power dynamics. While self-interest is an important motivating force in human conduct, social struggles and competition for different forms of capital are the chief aspects of social arrangements. Social struggles take different forms, from overt conflict to subtle forms of manipulation, and Bourdieu's ideas can help us understand how these struggles shape society.

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that field (Bourdieu, 1977). In the academic field, for example, presenting one's research at international conferences is part of the *doxa* to obtain a better position in the field, while it may only appear as an occasion of knowledge-sharing for those outside the academic field (Williams and Mavin, 2015).

3.3 Habitus: Shaping Human Interaction and Power Dynamics

Habitus is an essential principle highlighting culture as a basis for human interaction and a unique terrain of domination. Bourdieu developed the idea from his early studies in Algeria in the 1950s, and it is very much grounded in Aristotle's philosophical notion (Wacquant, 2016; Wisse, 2003). Habitus attempts to explain the embodiment of social structures and history in individuals. It refers to dispositions reflecting external social structures, influencing how the individual perceives and acts. The social structures embodied in habitus do not determine behaviour; instead, the individual is predisposed to act under the social structures that have shaped him/her because, in effect, he/she carries those social structures themselves. Sociology leads to a common root of the classifiable practices that agents produce and the classificatory judgments they make of other agents' practices and their own, as per Bourdieu's argument. The habitus becomes the generative principle of objectively classifiable decisions and the method of classification (principium divisions) of these practices (Bourdieu, 2010, pp. 165-166).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus is also considered a function of knowledge and acts as a source of knowledge an individual accumulates throughout their upbringing (Bourdieu, 1990). The source of knowledge is gained from a particular culture an individual lives within.[58] According to Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, 'knowledge (the way we understand the world, our beliefs, and values) is always constructed through the habitus, rather than passively recorded (Webb et al., 2002, p. 38). Habitus, as observed by Loïc Wacquant (2005), facilitates the revocation of common-sense dualism among the individual and the social by capturing the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality. Society becomes deposited in the person through long-lasting dispositions or trained capacities and designed inclinations to think, feel, and act in specific ways—eventually guiding them in their responses to the constraints and solicitations of their extant milieu (Wacquant, 2005, p. 316).

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[58] By way of example, a working-class individual will have a particular, class-based understanding of the world due to their cultural exposure, education, and social relations. Individuals from a middle-class background would have accumulated a different perspective based on their experiences, education, and social relations. Moreover, these understandings are reflected in the person's behaviour, such as how they talk, vocabulary usage, attitudes, and values.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus suggests that an individual's disposition is unconsciously reflected in their actions and behaviour and is marked in and through a person's bodily hexis and socio-cultural behaviour. The habitus is profoundly ingrained and likely to persist long into adulthood as a "*durably installed generative principle of regulated improvisions*," shaping an individual's thought processes, actions, values, aspirations, and mannerisms (Bourdieu, 1978, p. 78). As a set of durable and transposable values and dispositions, the habitus is merged at the unconscious level of bodily actions, dispositions, and styles, incorporating the values and essentials of different fields as subjects move through them (Webb et al., 2002, pp. 36-37). While the habitus is relatively continuous, it can also incorporate changes within and across different contexts and conditions (Schirato & Roberts, 2018). However, the habitus is not only the product of structures and producer of practices but also the reproducer of structures, as individuals tend to create practices that agree with the social conditions that produce their habitus. Thus, people reproduce social structures (potentially with modifications)[59] by continuing to act under the structures that helped to create their habitus. Additionally, Bourdieu argues that an individual's habitus is the target of ongoing ideological or symbolic societal struggles to shape perception and action (Bourdieu, 2010).

In the context of post-2003 Iraq, the concept of habitus is particularly relevant as individuals' understanding of the social world would have been transformed by the material and ideational struggles to dominate the country's political field in the aftermath of regime change. For Shi'a political elites in Iraq, their experiences of resisting the Ba'athist regime and struggling for political power have shaped their habitus significantly (Bourdieu, 1978; Schirato & Roberts, 2018). For instance, their experiences of oppression may have led them to develop a deep mistrust of the state and a strong commitment to protecting the interests of their community, leading to behaviours that prioritise Shi'a interests over those of other groups or view state institutions with suspicion (Webb et al., 2002; Cokburn, 2003). Conversely, their experiences of struggle

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[59] As such, habitus helps shape and produces practice- however, it does not determine it. By way of example, the flexibility of practice, regulated by habitus, has been compared to the musical practice of a jazz musician. Jazz musicians stay within certain musical boundaries, follow a particular jazz tradition or style, and are limited by the physical constraints of their instrument. However, they may improvise almost endlessly on a musical theme, elaborating versions barely recognisable (Navarro, 2006).

and resistance may have fostered a strong sense of collective identity and solidarity among Shi'a political elites, leading to the prioritisation of the interests of the Shi'a community as a whole over individual or factional interests and cohesive maintenance of their position of power. Furthermore, the cultural and religious values of the Shi'a community could also influence their political beliefs and actions, such as their commitment to social justice and resistance against oppression as a reflection of the values of the Shi'a faith.

Understanding the habitus of political elites in post-2003 Iraq is crucial for gaining insights into the underlying motivations and values that drive their actions and the broader cultural and social context in which they operate (Schirato & Roberts, 2018). Nevertheless, comprehensively examining the habitus of political elites could present difficulties for various reasons. This challenge arises from the need for considerably extended interview durations with participants, which becomes even more demanding given the nature of these participants. Specifically, political actors already engrossed in their commitments may not be amenable to providing the necessary interview time. In light of this, published autobiographies may serve as a useful alternative for gaining insight into the habitus of key Shi'a political elites (Webb et al., 2002). Despite these challenges, it is essential to examine the habitus of political elites to fully comprehend the underlying cultural and social factors that shape their political behaviours and priorities in post-2003 Iraq. Bourdieu acknowledges the importance of examining how societies altered by modernity become divided into specific spaces for competition, which he labels as fields (Bourdieu, 1978).

3.4 Fields: Contextualising Political Interactions

The concept of habitus is essential to understanding Bourdieu's work, and it operates within the structure of fields. Fields are structured spaces that revolve around specific types of capital, with dominant and subordinate positions, and Bourdieu has analysed fields such as law, art, education, politics, science, and religion (Bourdieu, 1992; Swarts, 1997). Bourdieu defines fields as a 'network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions'. These positions are objectively defined in their existence, and they impose determinations upon their occupants, agents, or institutions based on their present and potential

situation in the structure of the distribution of species of power or capital (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). Fields represent a particular dispersal structure of certain types of capital, and they indicate grounds of struggle around the production, circulation, and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status and the competitive positions held by actors in their struggle to accumulate and monopolise these different kinds of capital (Swarts, 1997, p. 117).

Even though the fields are interconnected, they can be differentiated based on the type of competitors and the conflicts they are involved in. Additionally, the rules and principles of a particular field are determined by the competing agents and the field's constraints. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, pp. 97-105). According to Bourdieu, the most decisive field is the field of power. While power is present in all fields, Bourdieu argues that a specific field of power, the 'meta-field,' organises differentiation, struggles through all fields, and represents the dominant class. Bourdieu considers conflict as the fundamental dynamic of social life, the beating heart of all social arrangements, and the struggle for power, material resources, and symbolic power. He considers the function of resources as capital when they are 'a social relation of power'. This establishes value upon resources when agents' interest is manifested (or disputed). Therefore, studying the field of power is necessary to uncover a clear explanation of the origin, meaning, and consequences of power and power relations in any society (Bourdieu, 1992).

Struggle for Iraqi identities after 2003 primarily occurs in Iraq's political field, specifically within Shi'a politics, where different intra-group factions vie for power. Initially, this struggle was based on ethno-sectarian lines, but it has since evolved into a competition between various Shi'a factions. Sponsors shape the struggle for power and identity, primarily international actors, particularly concerning nationalism, Arabness, and related matters (Hashmei & Postel, 2017). This highlights the vital role of power and its distribution in Shi'a politics, where various groups compete for resources, including the symbolic power that comes with shaping and defining Iraqi identity. Therefore, understanding the dynamics of Shi'a political competition for power is critical to comprehending the ongoing struggle for Iraqi identity.

3.5 Applying Bourdieu's Theory to Shi'a Political Discourse

Pierre Bourdieu developed concepts of fields and capital that may be applied to understand the power struggles within Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq. Bourdieu's theory of fields suggests that social spaces are structured by specific rules and forms of power, which shape the distribution of different types of capital. In Bourdieu's theory, capital refers to the various forms of power individuals and groups can possess, including economic, cultural, and social capital. Bourdieu's theory of fields and capitals provides a useful framework for analysing such power struggles and understanding how different actors within the field compete for power and resources. In this instance, Bourdieu's analysis can help us understand the intra-Shi'a power struggle seen within competing groups such as the Sadrist movement and the coordination framework and their struggle for power within the field of Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq.

In the case of Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq, the political field is the social arena or the space where different actors compete for positions, resources, and power. These actors will employ various forms of capital to ensure the required results. These forms of capital can include political power, economic resources, social status, religious authority, and other relative capital that can be used to pursue their interests or motivations. Within this field, different actors have different cultural and social capital levels, which can affect their ability to exert power and influence over others.

For example, the Da'wa Party and AAH (Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq) bolstered their symbolic capital by exploiting their historical resistance to authoritarianism and foreign intervention to gain legitimacy and support as a strategy for securing political power. The Da'wa Party, in particular, mobilised public support in post-2003 Iraq by emphasising their historical stances against Saddam Hussein and their pursuit of Shi'a justice against a long history of Shi'a victimhood. They leveraged their close ties to the religious figure Muhammad Baqir al-Sadr, who was tortured and killed by the Ba'athist regime, to enhance their legitimacy further. Consequently, the party's members suffered persecution, imprisonment, and exile, reinforcing their image as staunch defenders of the Shi'a cause.

The Da'wa Party's opposition to Saddam Hussein and their sacrifices for the cause of democracy and human rights may have contributed to their credibility and legitimacy in the eyes of many Iraqis (Hassan, 2019). This, in turn, could have made it easier for them to mobilise support for their political agenda and programs in the post-Saddam era. Likewise, Qais Al-Khazali, a notable leader known for his resistance against the US who later transitioned into a political role, employs reasoning akin to that of the Da'wa Party to gain legitimacy and support for their political agenda. By highlighting their historical opposition to the American occupation and their role in combating ISIS to defend Iraq and the Shi'a community, they aim to establish their credibility and legitimacy as a political force in post-war Iraq. Al-Khazali asserts that:

> *"If someone has his own historical background, he can, within his right, be proud of it. Most of the political blocs that came after 2003 came with his historical background, as resistance to Saddam, as a fight against Saddam, as a martyr from the Dawa party and so on. History is appreciated and allowed; it also must not be denied to others. What I say is that I may represent in my personal historical past the things that I am proud of and have witnessed by our people to have such an honourable past that we stood by our people with natural dignity when most left us alone or just became observers from a distance. We believe that this is an important point we can use to prove to the people our sincerity and trustworthiness to become representatives of the causes in the upcoming project."* (Qais Al-Khazali interview Al-Iraqiya TV, May 09, 2018).

By positioning himself as a group with a history of resistance against external and internal threats to Iraq's sovereignty and security, the AAH may be trying to appeal to a sense of national pride and patriotism among Iraqis, particularly among a Shi'a constituency. This, for Al-Khazali, is a legitimate way of harnessing historical achievements for future political roles akin to his predecessors and current political partners.

Similarly, political parties and other groups in the political field may have access to other forms of capital that they can leverage to gain or maintain power within a field. Moreover, Bourdieu's theory of fields also suggests that actors within the field struggle to define legitimate forms of capital and the rules that govern their distribution. This struggle can be seen in the competition between political parties and religious leaders

over the definition of legitimate and illegitimate forms of capital within the field. For example, religious leaders may argue that their cultural and symbolic capital should be valued over economic or political power. In contrast, political parties may argue that their ability to govern and control resources is the most important form of capital.

This brings forward another argument that *wilayat al-faqih* (guardianship of the jurist) is a central tenet of the Islamic Republic of Iran's political system (Sabet, 2014). According to this doctrine, the supreme leader (a Shi'a cleric) has ultimate authority over political and social affairs, including appointing senior government officials and interpreting Islamic law. This doctrine has attracted support from the political and resistance factions (mainly Iranian-sponsored). However, many Shi'a scholars and political leaders in Iraq and other countries do not support it. Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani is one of the most prominent critics of wilayat al-faqih. He has argued that clerics have an essential role in guiding and advising political leaders, but they should not have direct political authority in promoting a civil state (Al-Khoei, 2016). The struggle over the doctrine of wilayat *al-faqih* and the role of Shi'a clerics in politics can be understood in terms of Bourdieu's concept of field. In this case, the field is Iraq's political and religious sphere, characterised by a complex network of power relations and competing interests. The struggle over the role of Shi'a clerics manifests this broader struggle for power and influence. It is played out in multiple arenas, including the media, public opinion, and political institutions. Regarding Bourdieu's theory of capital, the debate over Shi'a clerics' role is fuelled by various forms of capital, including religious, symbolic, and political capital. Those who support the doctrine of wilayat al-faqih are drawing on their religious capital and the symbolic power of the Iranian regime, while those who oppose it are drawing on their forms of capital, including political legitimacy, popular support, and nationalism.

3.6 Historical Sociological Approach

The historical, sociological approach is a methodological framework used in social science research to contextualise current social concerns and debates within a larger historical context. Its goal was to investigate the link between history and sociology (Delanty & Isin, 2003). According to Elias (1991), it is

a lens that examines how individual people join to form society and how this society might evolve in connection to its history. This perspective adheres to the epistemic ideal of uniting the historical sciences and the social sciences in a single paradigm, as exemplified by the paradigmatic ideas of social science history, historical sociology, or *'historische Sozialwissenschaft'* (Abrams, 1982; Smith, 1991; Wehler, 1980) Several major scholars, including Norbert Elias, Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, Charles Tilly, Theda Skocpol, Michael Mann, and Immanuel Wallerstein, developed this approach (Subrt, 2017, p. 6).

The historical sociology approach arose due to a perceived vacuum in the social sciences, specifically a lack of attention in analysing social phenomena to historical and contextual variables (Lorenz, 2015). Before introducing this approach, social scientists tended to focus primarily on existing societal concerns, frequently neglecting or downplaying the significance of historical and sociological causes that contributed to their origin and persistence (Keizer, 2015; Subrt, 2017). Barrington Moore Jr. was a leading proponent of the historical sociology approach, arguing that understanding the intricate interplay of cultural, economic, and political elements that determine social outcomes requires a historical perspective. Moore's work emphasised the necessity of situating social phenomena within historical and cultural settings, and he sought to discover historical variables that contributed to creating and maintaining patterns of inequality and conflict in civilisations (Stedman-Jones & Moore, 1980). In other words, and in connection to this thesis, contemporary power dynamics, whether intra- or inter-sectarian, necessitate a strategy that takes a historical view and evaluates prior trends.

Immanuel Wallerstein (1930-2019) was a prominent figure in the construction of the historical sociology approach, arguing that global historical processes such as colonialism, capitalism, and imperialism impacted social phenomena. Wallerstein's work emphasised the necessity of understanding how global power dynamics affected the creation and persistence of social disparities and identifying the mechanisms by which these inequalities were repeated over time (Wallerstein, 2000). Although it was designed to discuss modernisation challenges, the applicability of this technique is not confined to specific fields. It is a comprehensive scientific approach that examines numerous topics and problems in the culture, religion,

nationalism, politics, international relations, armed conflict, and various other disciplines (Subrt, 2017, p. 4). Unfortunately, this approach has certain drawbacks. Spohn (2015) identified three major concerns, the first of which is the link between theory and procedure. Several approaches to history, such as structural history and social-scientific history, use different ideas, methodologies, and analysis styles to make sense of historical processes and societal changes. Theda Skocpol (1984, pp. 356-91), Charles Tilly (1984, p. 84), and Charles Ragin (2000) have proposed alternative approaches to categorise these methods, but the relationships between them still require further examination (Hall, 1999, p. 173).

The role of culture in historical social science is a second point of emphasis. Social-scientific approaches to history sometimes emphasise economic, social, and political dimensions while ignoring the relevance of culture (Hunt, 1989; Dirks et al., 1994; Mergel & Welskopp, 1997). As a result, the "cultural turn" has evolved, contesting these approaches with other perspectives that emphasise the importance of culture in history (Stones, 1979; Luedtke, 1989). This movement has created new subdisciplines and shifted from social-scientific history to cultural-scientific history (Bonnell & Hunt, 1999). Lastly, the final focus in historical social science emphasises the resurgence of historicism and cultural-scientific historical approaches. The 'cultural turn' highlights qualitative, interpretative methodologies and the significance of culture as a deciding factor in history (Hunt, 1989; Dirks et al., 1994; Mergel & Welskopp, 1997). This movement corresponds to broader changes in the social sciences as institutional and cultural paradigms gain traction in a variety of fields, including economics and economic sociology (North, 1981; Monkkonen, 1994; Swedberg, 1998), sociology (Crane, 1994), political science (Monkkonen, 1994), and anthropology (Crane, 1994; Monkkonen, 1994). As a result, new interdisciplinary opportunities develop, encouraging collaboration among social and cultural disciplines and enriching historical study. In recent years, historical and social science has seen substantial developments, with the "cultural turn" highlighting the role of culture in history and spawning new subdisciplines and methodologies. This tendency echoes analogous shifts in the social sciences, where institutional and cultural perspectives are gaining prominence. These

transformations open new avenues for interdisciplinary collaboration between social and cultural sciences, enhancing our understanding of historical processes and societal changes (Spohn, 2001).

Applying a historical sociology perspective to Bourdieu's idea of field and capital is crucial for numerous reasons. Bourdieu sees this as an important aspect of understanding social change where he sees that 'the only way to bring about organisational change that does not entail merely replacing one modality of domination with another is to address specifically and to undo the mechanisms of dehistorisation[60] and universalisation[61]…' (Emirbayer & Johnson, 2008, pp. 47-8). In other words, to unveil the power dynamics and injustices that are usually obscured by the processes of dehistorisation and universalisation. For example, within the context of this thesis, if we consider neglecting the historical context, one might assume that the Shi'as, being a majority in Iraq, would have a unified political agenda to build Iraq, more so after the fall of Saddam Hussein. However, the historical context of intra-Shi'a rivalries, regional influences (such as Iran), and the legacy of the Ba'ath regime's repression play a significant role in shaping the contemporary Shi'a political landscape. This reveals important insight into the ideological and political historical legacies that shaped antagonisms between intra-Shi'a actors. As such, it is vital to consider the historical relevance as it allows one to identify the power dynamics and divisions among various Shi'a factions and political elites.

On the other hand, universalisation assumes that all Shi'as in Iraq have related interests and ambitions; we might overlook the differences among the Shi'a political elites and their factions. For example, the rivalry between Muqtada al-Sadr's nationalist movement and the camp of political elites that Iran sponsors highlights the differences in political goals, ideologies, and regional influences within the Iraqi Shi'a community. Universalising the issue would result in a simplified understanding of the complex intra-Shi'a dynamics.

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[60] Dehistoricisation refers to the removal or neglect of historical context.
[61] Universalisation implies treating concepts, principles, or experiences as if they apply equally to everyone without considering differences or unique situation.

Applying features of the historical, sociological approach provides a more sophisticated understanding of the social mechanisms that determine capital allocation and accumulation within a specific field. Secondly, it enables a more thorough examination of the historical and cultural elements that influence the formation and replication of social fields. Finally, it aids in the identification of power relations within a certain field and how more significant historical and social issues impact these ties.

In response to the constraints of a structural examination of social fields, the historical sociology approach to Bourdieu's theory of field and capital will benefit this research and thus be employed in parallel to Bourdieu's analytical framework. While structural analysis provides a valuable framework for analysing agents' interactions within a field, it sometimes overlooks the historical and cultural elements that impact these interactions (Tollefson, 2015, p. 125). Using a historical, sociological method allows us to address this constraint by investigating the broader social and historical circumstances in which fields are generated and reproduced. One of the primary arguments for using a historical sociology approach is that it aids in identifying power relations within a certain field. Power relations are shaped by individual agency and larger historical and cultural forces (Elikdemir, 2020). The thesis can better grasp how power is constructed and reproduced within a certain field by investigating these aspects.   Another reason for using a historical, sociological approach is that it provides a more comprehensive examination of the cultural and historical factors that impact the development and replication of social fields. This is especially relevant in the context of Bourdieu's theory of field and capital, which emphasises the relevance of cultural capital and how it is valued across different social fields. A historical, sociological approach can aid in identifying the historical and cultural processes that determine the distribution and accumulation of cultural capital within a certain field. While the historical sociological approach gives essential insights into social phenomena' historical and cultural background, it has flaws. A critical shortcoming of this approach is its inclination towards determinism, which can lead to a deterministic view of social phenomena in which historical and cultural causes are considered the sole drivers of social behaviour and identity. The approach's intrinsic determinism has been critiqued by Anthony Giddens (1976) and Pierre Bourdieu (1977), who argue that it fails to account

for the agency's role in influencing social behaviour and identity and might lead to a static view of social phenomena. Another drawback of the historical, sociological approach is its propensity towards essentialism. This might lead to an essentialist view of social phenomena, in which social categories and identities are perceived as constant and unchanging over time and location. Judith Butler (1990) and Stuart Hall (1990) have critiqued the approach's essentialism, stating that it fails to account for how social categories and identities are built and performed and can lead to a static and reductive picture of cultural identity.

To address these flaws, historical and sociological studies must carefully avoid deterministic and essentialist conceptions of social phenomena. This can be accomplished by stressing social phenomena' dynamic and contested nature and recognising the importance of agency and performance in defining social behaviour and identity. Researchers can also use intersectionality as a framework to examine how many historical and cultural elements overlap and interact to form social phenomena such as power dynamics and social inequality (Crenshaw, 1989). While the historical sociological approach has several flaws, it is nonetheless a useful theoretical framework for understanding social events' historical and cultural background. By being mindful of these flaws, researchers can use this approach to provide significant insights into the systems of power and inequality that operate inside society. Despite the critiques, I argue that using a historical, sociological approach is justified within Bourdieu's theory of field and capital, especially when studying Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq. This is due to the diverse and multifaceted historical and cultural processes determining cultural capital distribution and accumulation within the Shi'a political field. The thesis can better grasp the power dynamics within the field and how larger historical and social issues shape them by investigating these elements.

The historical, sociological approach, for example, can help us understand how the legacy of colonialism and the Ba'athist dictatorship shaped the development and reproduction of the Shi'a political field in post-2003 Iraq. This method can also assist in identifying the important historical and sociological elements that have contributed to the creation and perpetuation of power relations, social inequities, and political disputes

within this community. Furthermore, the historical, sociological approach can enrich Bourdieu's theory of field and capital by providing insights into how historical and sociological circumstances impact discursive practises within a certain field. Researchers can acquire a more nuanced knowledge of how these activities are utilised to mobilise communities and shape power dynamics within the field by researching the historical and sociological elements that have shaped discursive practises within Shi'a discourse.

3.7 Application of Political Discourse to Understanding Shi'a Political Conflict in Post-2003 Iraq

In political discourse, Bourdieu's theory provides a framework for analysing the power relations that shape political communication. Bourdieu's concepts of field, habitus and capital are particularly useful in understanding how political actors use language to reinforce or challenge existing power structures.

Firstly, the concept of field refers to the social space in which actors compete for power and resources. In the context of political discourse, the field might refer to the sphere of the public debate on various media platforms in which actors seek to advance their agendas and win support for their positions. Within this field, different actors possess different amounts of symbolic and social capital, which can give them an advantage in shaping the discourse. For example, a well-respected religious figure might have more symbolic capital than a secular politician and be more effective in shaping the discourse around issues related to religious identity.

Within political discourse, habitus might refer to the cultural norms and expectations that shape how different actors use language to communicate their ideas. For example, a Shi'a political leader might draw on a long tradition of religious rhetoric to appeal to voters, using language that resonates with the cultural values and expectations of their audience or long-standing fears of the authoritarian past that can equally resonate freshly in the minds of those who witnessed such suffering invoking painful memories within communities.

Finally, capital refers to the various forms of social, economic, and cultural capital that actors can use to advance their positions. In the context of political discourse, this might include access to media outlets, the ability to mobilise large numbers of supporters or possessing specialised knowledge and expertise. Actors who possess more capital are often better positioned to shape the discourse and set the terms of the debate.

Applying Bourdieu's theory to political discourse involves analysing how actors use language to advance their positions in public debate. This might include examining how different actors draw on their habitus to craft messages that resonate with their audience or how they use their capital to shape the terms of the debate. By understanding the power relations that shape political discourse in this way, analysts can gain a deeper understanding of the dynamics of political communication and how it contributes to the reproduction or transformation of existing power structures.

3.8. The Limits of a Bourdieusian Analysis in Post-2003 Iraq

However, it would be somewhat misleading only to discuss the expected benefits of adopting a Bourdieusian framework in this project. There are also limits to his view —particularly in hindsight upon completing the search and analysis in later chapters. Overall, the Bourdieusian framework has proven highly effective in analysing the complex interplay of various forms of capital within Iraq's shifting political dynamics. By applying Bourdieu's concepts of capital and field, this study has shed light on the predominant forms of capital utilised by political actors. For example, the prominence of religious symbolism as a form of capital indicates a society where religious authority holds significant sway over public and political life. This insight suggests that any interventions to balance power dynamics must consider the deep-rooted influence of religious narratives. Similarly, the role of coercive capital—comprising military and paramilitary strength, police forces, and other means of physical control—sheds light on Iraq's current state of governance and public order.

The reliance on coercive capital by various political factions, especially those with paramilitary wings as I argue in Chapter7 and Chapter 8 suggests a fragmented authority structure where the state's monopoly on

legitimate violence, as theorised by Weber, is contested. This diffusion of coercive power often correlates with heightened instability and persistent conflict as competing groups leverage their militaristic capabilities to negotiate political spaces or enforce their agendas. For instance, the frequent clashes between different Shia paramilitary groups and their involvement in political processes highlight the complex relationship between militaristic strength and political influence in the region.

Moreover, the results that identified the strategic use of coercive capital by figures such as Muqtada al-Sadr consolidates their political authority. It positions them as key arbiters in conflict resolution and escalation within the country. This dual role can paradoxically contribute to both the stabilisation and destabilisation of the political landscape, depending on the prevailing circumstances and alignments. Such dynamics are critical for understanding the broader societal impacts, as the proliferation of coercive capital often perpetuates cycles of violence and undermines efforts towards peace and democratic governance.

As such, the insights gained from examining the distribution and effects of coercive capital within Iraq's political field illustrate the need for comprehensive security sector reforms and disarmament initiatives. Addressing the entrenched reliance on coercive capital is essential for moving towards a more stable and inclusive state structure that respects the rule of law and seeks to reduce sectarian divisions. This perspective, informed by Bourdieu's framework, not only enriches our understanding of Iraq's political environment but also informs policy recommendations to foster long-term peace and national integration.

Bourdieu's framework also allows me to see how capital is not static but evolves in response to the political environment. The ability to identify which forms of capital are most effective at different times provides valuable insights into the broader societal values and pressures. For instance, if religious capital is particularly potent, this signals a society highly responsive to religious authority, which could influence strategies ranging from political campaigning to policy-making.

However, there are also limitations to the application of Bourdieu's framework that are worth noting as they generate some important implications for their use in future analysis. The first is inherent in the framework

itself. Bourdieu's theory emphasises the role of habitus, the internalised set of dispositions, and capital accumulation in shaping individual behaviours and positions within society. However, this emphasis on structure can often overlook individual agency and the capacity for resistance and transformation. Individuals are not passive recipients of social forces but actively negotiate and contest their social positions. There is the risk that Bourdieu's framework will sometimes oversimplify some of the complexities of human agency, neglecting how individuals navigate and challenge social structures (Arnholtz & Hammerslev, 2013; Baczko & Dorronsoro, 2022)

Another limitation of Bourdieu's framework concerned the limits of engaging with intersectionality in his framework. While this project dealt with the Shi'a exclusively, Bourdieu's analysis prioritises one element (namely, class) as the primary axis of social differentiation, often downplaying other forms of identity. This posed less of an issue in the current project as the focus was more limited. However, a more comprehensive analysis of the Iraqi political field may benefit from going beyond just Bourdieu (Baczko & Dorronsoro, 2022), such as Intersectionality theory. Multiple axes of oppression intersect and interact, shaping individuals' lived experiences in complex ways. Including other theories and frameworks may help better capture a fuller extent of the social inequalities within the political field.

Finally, Bourdieu's theory generally conceptualises social space as a structured field where individuals and groups compete for symbolic capital. There is a static conception tied to the state that fixes its boundaries in various ways. However, this static conception can limit a more dynamic political field with more fluid social boundaries. While social spaces are not fixed and constantly evolving through contestation, negotiation, and change processes, Iraq's case has been even more so since 2003.

Thus, while Bourdieu's analysis offers valuable insights into the workings of social structures and cultural phenomena, it is not without its limitations.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have embarked on a comprehensive exploration of Bourdieu's theory, specifically his concepts of Fields, Habitus, and Capital, and how they are instrumental in understanding the Shi'a power dynamics in post-2003 Iraq. As proposed by various scholars, this theoretical lens offers a robust methodology for deciphering intricate power relations and socio-historical struggles, bridging the gap between extreme positions in the social sciences that overly emphasise agency or structure.

Bourdieu's concept of capital, examined in this chapter, plays a pivotal role as a source of power and conflict. By drawing upon inherited grievances and perceptions of marginalisation, the concept of habitus enables us to understand the power dynamics that mould human interaction. It equally provides a foundation for analysing how Shi'a elites today may employ such historical legacies of marginalisation, perceived injustices, and victimhood narratives to mobilise people and communities.

Furthermore, we examined Bourdieu's concept of fields and its potential in framing political interactions within their socio-historical context. This exploration aligns with the historical sociology approach, which places current social concerns and debates within a larger historical setting (Delanty & Isin, 2003). With Wallerstein's work (2000) underscoring the necessity of understanding global power dynamics and their implications on social disparities, it is crucial to incorporate a historical sociology perspective.

This approach facilitates a nuanced comprehension of the social mechanisms that regulate capital allocation and accumulation within a specific field. It also enables an in-depth examination of the historical and cultural factors influencing the formation and replication of social fields, along with identifying power relations within them.

By integrating Bourdieu's ideas into political discourse, we are able to construct an analytical framework that underscores the power dynamics shaping political communication. Bourdieu's theory of field, habitus, and capital facilitates interpreting how political actors utilise language to either perpetuate or challenge existing power structures.

In conclusion, this theoretical framework chapter laid the foundation for understanding and examining the complex dynamics of Shi'a politics in Iraq. Drawing from Bourdieu's theory, the framework provides a lens through which we can examine the socio-historical complexities of the Shi'a political landscape, particularly their power struggles. By doing so, this research will contribute to a nuanced understanding of the power dynamics and struggles within the Shi'a political field in Iraq. As we progress into the empirical chapters of this thesis, the insights gleaned from this theoretical exploration will continue to inform our analysis and interpretation of the dynamics of Shi'a politics in post-2003 Iraq.

CHAPTER IV
METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology employed in this project exploring power dynamics in Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq, using Bourdieu's theory of fields and capital as a theoretical framework. The chapter comprehensively describes the research design, data collection methods, and analytical techniques used in this study.

This research is motivated by post-2003 Iraq's unique historical and political context, with its ongoing politically induced tensions and corruption. By examining Shi'a political discourse using Bourdieu's theory of fields and capital, this study aims to elucidate complex power dynamics and the strategies and tactics actors employ to accumulate and maintain power within the field.

The principal data sources for contextualisation of the topic include references to literature through secondary academic sources in sociology and politics, assessed using inductive reasoning. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews have been incorporated as a source of primary data. The chapter then describes the sample population and the data sources used in this study. The chapter will then describe the analytical techniques employed in this study, based on a Political Discourse Analysis (PDA)[62] and elements of Thematic Analysis (TA).[63]

A qualitative approach is adopted to gain in-depth insight into power dynamics in the four groups of Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq. These groups are generally categorised into (1) politicians, (2) Religious leaders, (3) Shi'a social and cultural groups, and (4) External actors. By following such a categorisation, the research was able to collect qualitative data that supported this research in achieving its

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[62] See van Dijk (1997) 'What is Political Discourse Analysis'.
[63] See, for example, Mihas, 2023.

aims and objectives. The categories resemble different viewpoints on the issue of power dynamics in Shi'a political discourse through those directly involved in its perpetuation and those passive actors who are affected by it.

4.2 Philosophical Worldview

Scientific inquiry in social sciences has been characterised by two main traditions: positivism, which focuses on discovering facts and establishing causal relationships, and interpretivism, which emphasises understanding the meanings and intentions behind human actions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These traditions, as Georg Henrik von Wright (1971) explains, evolved separately and are distinguished as Aristotelian (i.e., teleological) and Galilean (i.e., causal).

As represented by some of its proponents, such as August Comte and John Stuart Mill, positivism assumes observable political events, actors, and structures about which one could make *"reasoned, informed, and intelligent, analytical statements"* (Landman 2000, p. xvii). This approach treats the social world as similar to the natural world, governed by deterministic laws that make it predictable and measurable. However, the anti-positivist philosophy, represented by Max Weber and Wilhelm Dilthey, challenges this view by emphasising the importance of understanding the intentions and meanings that human actors attach to their actions in specific social contexts (see Berger & Luekmann, 1980; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007; Crotty, 2007; Neuman, 2013).

Karl Popper (1972) presents a continuum that stretches from the most irregular, disorderly, and unpredictable 'clouds' on one end to the most regular, orderly, and predictable 'clocks' on the other. Popper asserts that 'all clouds are clocks, even the most cloudy of clouds' (Popper, 1972, p. 210), reflecting a deterministic view of the social world. Nevertheless, concerns have been raised about the 'applicability to human subject matters of a strategy used in hard science' (Almond & Genco, 1977), leading to calls for a coherent philosophy that combines the two traditions of positivism and interpretivism.

Bourdieu's philosophical approach can be viewed as an attempt to bridge the positivism and interpretivism gap by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the social world. His concept of habitus acknowledges the importance of subjective[64] experiences and meanings in shaping social action, aligning with the interpretivist emphasis on human actors and their intentions. At the same time, Bourdieu focuses on objective[65] social structures, such as class and power relations, which shape individuals' habitus and actions, echoing the positivist emphasis on observable and measurable phenomena.

By combining positivism and interpretivism elements, Bourdieu's work transcends the limitations of either perspective alone. His concept of 'field' addresses concerns raised by Almond and Genco (1977) about the need for a philosophy of science that accounts for both the determinate and creative aspects of human behaviour, as they argue that social disciplines require 'their philosophy of science based on explanatory strategies, possibilities, and obligations appropriate to human and social reality' (ibid, p. 522). Fields are social spaces where individuals and groups struggle to maintain or enhance their position within a given social hierarchy, reflecting social life's dynamic and unpredictable nature. This challenges the view of the social world as being entirely 'clock-like,' measurable, and predictable, as suggested by Popper (1972).

4.3 Research Design

Research design refers to the plan to conduct research that involves the intersection of a philosophical worldview, a strategy of inquiry, and research methods (Creswell, 2009, p. 5). Within this thesis, the research design has been formulated to investigate the dynamics of intra-Shi'a competition and the strategies different actors employ to maintain or gain power. This thesis borrows Bourdieu's theory of fields, capital, and power relations, and in its analysis of the data, this thesis has lent on PDA and aspects of TA.

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[64] Objective social structures, on the other hand, refer to the external, observable patterns of social organisation that exist independently of individuals' subjective intentions. These structures encompass the institutions, norms, rules, and systems that shape and constrain human behaviour, relationships, and opportunities. Examples of objective social structures include the economic system, legal framework, educational institutions, and cultural norms.

[65] Subjective intentions refer to the individual thoughts, beliefs, desires, motivations, and goals that drive people's actions. These intentions are internal and personal, reflecting the individual's perspective on the world and their place within it. Subjective intentions can be influenced by various factors, including personal experiences, values, emotions, and cultural background.

The thesis has highlighted the benefits of PDA in the previous chapter. Thus, it has been employed in this research to analyse the language and rhetoric espoused by Shi'a political actors, focusing on how their habitus, capital, and the fields they operate within help shape their discourse. PDA has also aided this research to uncover the underlying assumptions, ideologies, and beliefs that inform these actors' political discourse and actions. This approach involved a detailed examination of the language, rhetoric, and argumentation employed in the political discourse. PDA was also used to investigate how political actors construct and contest meanings, identities, and power relations.

TA will supplement PDA to systematically organise and interpret qualitative data, enabling the identifying, analysing, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data. TA has been used to explore the beliefs, actions, and meanings associated with democracy and power dynamics in the Shi'a political discourse and how habitus, capital, and fields influence these themes. TA has also helped to identify the links between different themes, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the social and political context.

Bourdieu's theory of fields, capital, and power relations offers a valuable lens through which to analyse the complex interplay of power and competition among Shi'a political factions in a historically and socially situated context. This theoretical framework has been utilised to examine the role of various forms of capital (e.g., economic, social, cultural, and symbolic) in shaping the dynamics of intra-Shi'a competition and the strategies different actors employ to maintain or gain power.

In this research, contributors are organised into distinct categories, offering unique perspectives and insights into the Shi'a community. The diversification aids in understanding the intricacies of intra-Shi'a competition and power dynamics.

A. **Shi'a Political Factions**: Comprising various Shi'a political groups and parties, these groups compete for power within the community.

B. **Shi'a religious groups and leaders:** This category consists of influential religious figures and organisations within the community that may impact the competition among political factions.

C. **Shi'a social and cultural organisations**: This category encompasses non-political social and cultural groups within the Shi'a community that may shape the intra-Shi'a competition.

D. **External actors and influences**: This category includes regional and international actors or factors that may influence the dynamics of intra-Shi'a competition and its potential to escalate into violence. By categorising this, the research was able to collect quantitative data to help this research achieve its aims and objectives.

E. **YouTube and Twitter**: This category encompasses interviews conducted by various journalists, along with access to Twitter accounts of key politicians and contributors. It provides additional context that supports the data extracted from the semi-structured interviews.

Group	Description	Interviews
1. Shi'a Political Factions	Comprising various Shi'a political groups and parties, competing for power within the community	**1**-Sadrist MP and Sadr Office member (anonymity preferred) **2**-Sayid Ammar al-Hakeem, Leader of al-Hikma Party **3**- Mr Ali al-Adeeb, Minister for Higher Education **4**-Dr Hussein al-Sharistani, Minister for Energy, Deputy Prime Minister **5**-Dr Humam Hamoodi, leader in SCIRI and Head of Iraqi Constitution Drafting Committee **6**-Dr Muhammad al-Ghaban, Interior Minister **7**-Dr Husham al-Alawi, Foreign Affairs **8**-Dr Utoor al-Musawi, Director General within Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs

Group	Description	Interviews
		9-Dr Ibrahim Bahrul-Uloom, Minister of Oil **10**-Dr Sabah al-Tamimi MP **10**-Dr Sami al-Askari, Advisor to Prime Minister on Political Affairs **11**- Abu Ali-al-Basri, Head of Counter Terrorism and Intelligence **12**- Dr Jasim Jaffar, Minister for Youth and Sport **13**- Sadiq al-Bahadili, Former Intelligence Services **14**- Dr Sabah Al-Timimi
2. Shi'a Religious Leaders and Groups	Influential religious figures and organisations shaping this group, impacting political factions	**15**- Sayid Hussein al-Shami, Head of Shi'a Endowment Office **16**- Sayyid Ali al-Alaq MP (Previously, Head of the endowment committee in Parliament) **17** – Dr Ali Al-Khateeb (Deputy Chairman of the Shi'a Endowment Office)
3. Shi'a Social, Cultural, and Academic Orgs	Non-political, social, and cultural perspectives with an academic lens	**18**- Ibrahem al-Abadi, Journalist at Al-Sabah Newspaper **19**- Dr Osama al-Shabeb, Head of Al-Baidar Centre for Studies and Planning **20**- Dr Ali Tahir al-Hamoodi, Head of Al-Bayan Centre for Research Studies **21**- Professor Sami al-Madhi, University of Baghdad **22**- Dr Muhammad Khafil, University of Baghdad
4. External Actor	Regional and international actors influencing intra-Shi'a competition and potential for conflict	**23**- Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, Mohammad-Kazem Al-e Sadegh
5. YouTube Interviews	Crucial individuals in Iraq's political landscape interviewed via YouTube	**24**- Nouri al-Maliki, Iraqi Prime Minister and Head of Da'wa Party **25**- Muqtada Al-Sadr, Head of Sairoon political block

Group	Description	Interviews
		26- Haider al-Abadi, former Prime Minister **27-** Qais al-Khazali, Head of paramilitary group Asab ahl al-Haq (AAH) **28 -** Dr Izat al-Shabandar, MP **29**- Gaith Al-Timimi

Having identified the key contributors in the various categories—political factions, religious leaders, social and cultural organisations, academics, external influences, and figures appearing in YouTube interviews—it is apparent that each contributes a unique lens through which we can view intra-Shi'a competition. They offer invaluable insights into the operational mechanics of this competition and the underlying structures, influences, and motivations that shape it.

This brings us to an exploration of the theoretical framework underpinning this research. The categories represent diverse perspectives on the issue of intra-Shi'a competition, encompassing both those actively involved in its perpetuation and those passive actors drawn into the dynamics of competition within the Shi'a community. The relevance of this approach considers both the political and social impact on individuals or groups to possess their social constructs. According to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, 'any repeated action frequently becomes cast into a pattern, which can then be…performed again in the future in the same manner and with the same economic effort' (1966). In other words, not only do we construct our society, but we also come to accept it as reality; subsequently, if man renders these situations real, they are real in their consequences (Thomas & Thomas, 1928).

This is vital concerning this research. The theoretical assumption adopted in this thesis is based on Bourdieu's theory. It applies a historical, sociological approach, which assumes that various actors deliberately manipulate power dynamics within the Shi'a political discourse to maintain or gain power. By

utilising Bourdieu's concepts of field and capital, this research was able to analyse the complex interplay of power and competition among Shi'a political factions in a historically and socially situated context. This assumption allows for an in-depth examination of the strategies employed by different Shi'a political actors, their motivations, and the consequences of their actions, particularly in the context of intra-Shi'a competition and the potential eruption of violent conflict. The historical, sociological approach provides a framework to understand how historical and social forces have shaped the current dynamics of Shi'a politics and how these forces contribute to the ongoing struggle for power among various factions.

The role of international actors, such as the US invasion and the installation of a new political framework based on Mūhasasa, which pushed ethno-sectarian groups to use sect-centric rhetoric to support their campaigns, can also be considered as an external factor shaping the power dynamics within the Shi'a political field that prevailed in post-2003 Iraq. This perspective aligns with Jacob Mundy's argument on inherited violence and conflict in the Middle East. Mundy suggests that we need to investigate the actions and policies of foreign powers that have come to shape conflicts as a local reality, which are exported issues that have come to be seen as a local phenomenon (2019).

Understanding and interpreting individual or group realities is pertinent to this research design in light of this research's aims and objectives. Comprehending individual and group circumstances and motivations based on societal norms and situations required an interpretive approach. An approach that facilitates and examines the multiple factors involved allows for an interpretive stance. This is based on the collected data from observation and interviews reflecting perceptions, attitudes, and feelings (Cherney et al., 2018, p. 28). Such factors include the geopolitical landscape, economic deprivation, the rule of law, and ethnic and sectarian rivalries. Since no single reality exists, multiple realities determine the individual or group's context.

4.4 Methods of Data Collection

In qualitative research, there are several ways in which data is obtainable (e.g., interviews, analysis recordings, etc.). However, choosing the data collection method relies primarily on several factors. These

include objectivity, target population group, resources, and accessibility, particularly in post-conflict zones, making collecting certain information using qualitative interviews and discussion groups difficult (Dolnik, 2011).

For example, studies have shown the difficulties of gaining access due to unstable security situations across Iraq, making travelling to the field extremely difficult and time-consuming to conduct such a method. These can include accessibility that depends on the general security of the area, the researcher's identity, and resources (Dixit, 2012, p. 134). To mitigate these concerns, Jonathan Goodhand suggests that the only safe and practical way to gain access is 'through aid agencies already working on the ground' (Goodhand, 2000, p. 13).

I anticipated to encounter similar problems in gaining access to the field; as such, I opted to collaborated with NGOs, academic institutions, and research centres such as the Al-Bayan Centre for Planning and Studies in Baghdad and The American University Baghdad (AUIB). With their support, this research gained assistance in accessing the groups highlighted earlier since the possibility of going to Iraq and conducting such an exercise is no longer feasible. The collaboration also yielded other benefits. It provided an added perspective on the subject from different viewpoints. There is also the added issue of time, as qualitative research tends to consume more time due to the data collection methods such as interviews and focus groups, resulting in a smaller sample size than quantitative research (Cherney et al., 2018, pp. 30-32).

By adopting a qualitative methodological approach, this research was able to enrich the researcher's understanding of the participant's experiences through techniques that can voice and articulate perspectives while identifying reoccurring themes and patterns. This was achieved through open interviews and discussions. Thus, the data unearthed from the qualitative approach provided valuable insight into the power dynamics of intra-Shi'a competition by conducting interviews to measure feelings, attitudes, and perceptions towards a given subject, such as power dynamics in Shi'a political discourse.

4.4.1 Primary Data

Silke (2004) highlights the benefits of using interviews and claims to have certain advantages in gathering data by highlighting their flexibility, the measure of control that rests with the interviewer, the high response rate achieved to the question asked, and the ability of the interviewer to probe further with supplementary questions. (Silke, 2004, pp. 64-65 in Clutterbuck and Warnes, 2013, p. 17). As such, interviews have the potential to provide valuable insights into the motivations, strategies, and perspectives of political actors, policymakers, and various ethno-sectarian groups, thus helping to understand the complexities of intra-sect rivalry.

Due to the interactive nature provided in interviews, the interviewer can confirm and clarify points or issues raised by the interviewee in real-time, allowing the opportunity to explore other areas that may emerge. Another advantage of this data-gathering tool is detecting the interviewee's feelings, emotions, perceptions, and non-verbal communication. This would not otherwise be accessible in other techniques, such as written text (ibid).

However, Silke also highlights the disadvantages of conducting interviews, which revolve around the time scale and resources required to source and secure relevant interviewees. Another highlighted disadvantage is the risk of bias and reliability, whereby subjects identified for interviewees will result from opportunity sampling rather than systematic sampling[3] (Ibid).

The other issue that requires careful attention concerns interviewing government or security officials. The concern is that the' official' line or perspective can provide this category of potential participants' information. In this regard (Clutterbuck & Warnes, 2013) suggest that this issue can be mitigated by having good knowledge of the subject and the field. This allows the interviewer to probe further into the answers that challenge any biases in the information provided by the individuals. By delving deeper into their responses and seeking further clarification where necessary, researchers can gain a fuller understanding of the complex issues at hand. Secondly, researchers need to formulate open-ended questions that allow interviewees to express themselves freely and provide richer detail about their experiences or perspectives

on specific topics. This approach avoids leading respondents down predetermined paths and encourages them to speak candidly about their thoughts without fear of judgment.

A further pitfall for researchers to consider is the concept of circular reporting. This is where the same information is obtained from different 'official' sources; thus, the assumption is incorrectly made that the data is accurate. However, according to (Clutterbuck & Warnes, 2013, p. 18), this is not necessarily the case, as the source could be the same further back in the chain. It is, therefore, vital for researchers to seek out multiple independent sources of information and cross-reference them against each other. By doing so, researchers can gain a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the subject. This is particularly important when dealing with sensitive subjects such as politics or security matters.

4.5 Deciding on Appropriate Interview Techniques

According to social scientists, there are three levels of knowledge: Exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. This must be considered when designing the interview questions, as the types of questions used can affect the level of the data obtained. Therefore, questions primarily based on 'what' and 'when' will lead to descriptive data, while 'how' and 'why' will stimulate a more explanatory data type (Yin, 2003).

'Strictly speaking, no 'right' or wrong' methods exist. Instead, data collection and analysis methods can be more or less appropriate to our research question' (Willig, 2008, p. 22). Rubin and Rubin (2005, p. 4) define qualitative interviews as '…conversations in which a researcher gently guides a conversational partner in an extended discussion. The researcher elicits depth and detail about the research topic by following up on the interviewee's answers during the discussion'. Woolrich et al. (2011) draw an analogy between ingredients and recipe: the art of conducting a practical study and pulling together appropriate elements to construct the right recipe for the occasion, i.e., it addresses the purpose of the study while working with available resources.

This method has been championed by academics such as Malinowski, who stress the importance of using this type of conversation to obtain points of view. Furthermore, (Burgess, 1982) highlighted the importance

of this process more so when there is a case to acquire an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon that has proven to hold inherently diverse opinions, and more appropriately in this research, where theories are plenty; however, there are few that corroborate these theories with valid empirical data.

Moreover, this method's utility provides the researcher with face-to-face contact with their participants, presenting an opportunity to further probe into the question and respond to the answers by observing body language, amongst other things and in turn, allowing for in-depth discussions by creating a relaxed atmosphere through the tone and surroundings. This flexibility and level of observation cannot be obtained, for example, in a questionnaire. Moreover, this method allows for a semi-structured discussion where participants can freely express their thoughts. Therefore, this research would be advantageous, as this may lead to unearthing other relevant topics I may not have previously considered.

Clutterbuck and Warnes (2013) describe the effectiveness of adopting semi-structured qualitative interviews as a valuable tool for conducting interviews whose 'experience, particularly when interviewing government and security officials [consider] the use of a semi-structured interview format… to be particularly effective' (Clutterbuck & Warnes, 2013, p. 11). This allows the interviewer flexibility to present added questions as required to develop or clarify any response or topic. This frequently results in added valuable data and improved clarification of issues (ibid).

With this in mind, the need to be focused is paramount, as outlined by Wright Mills, who states that 'human actors do vocalise and impute motives to themselves and others' (Mills, 1940, p. 904). Thereby, accounts are attributed to individual perceptions rooted in the mind due to past events. A possibility is that the researcher needs to be aware that particular considerations need to be made in response to the validity of the accounts presented by the participants.

Lyman and Scott followed the same caution and understood the 'vocabularies of motives to be 'accounts'. The accounts are understood as a 'statement' created to explain 'untoward' behaviour, whether made for themselves or others (Lyman & Scott, 1970, p. 112). For Lyman and Scott, this is assumed to

result from having different forms of accounts that the individuals could readily access and rely on, which depends on the motivation. Therefore, a researcher needs to be made aware of these conditions and subsequently anticipate these concerns by focusing on the consistency, reliability and credibility of the data collected through the utility of a semi-structured interview.

Consequently, it is vital to know that the respondents will be tempted to provide their perspectives from their perceived realities and convictions. The consequences of this may be seen from a research point of view as not providing value-neutral accounts, but rather and more probably, the accounts would be based on motives.

Another relative concern presenting itself within the realm of this type of approach is leading the interview in a specific direction, allowing for manoeuvrability at the same time. This concern had been highlighted by the likes of (Grey, 2004, pp. 224-5) when talking about interviewing methods and the need to exercise control by 'minimising long-winded responses and digressions', adding that it is in the researcher's interest to interrupt the interview if this causes the discussion to be more focused. Therefore, it is essential to maintain focus and avoid being steered away from the nature of the inquiry. This may take away vital time that could be otherwise better utilised in extracting essential data for the research.

4.5.1 Interview with Elites

literature on interviewing elites (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Mosley, 2013) confirms the significance of this method in collecting qualitative data, particularly regarding political issues (Pierce, 2008, p. 119). It has been argued that the majority of work by political scientists is concerned with the study of decision-makers, with a key tool being elite interviewing (Burnham et al., 2004, p. 205). Beth Leech suggested that treating a respondent as an expert on the topic at hand is appropriate in elite interviewing, and this approach has been followed in this research (2002, p. 663).

Interviewing elites, therefore, is key to obtaining information on political issues. Oliver Halperin and Sandra Heath contend that 'elite interviews can enable a researcher to make inferences about beliefs or

actions of a wider population of political elite' (Halperin & Heath, 2012, p. 273). Although elite interviewing, in specific cases, could be used exclusively to determine a political elite's views on related topics, this approach has been criticised as 'unrepresentative and atypical' (Devine, 2005, p. 141). Notwithstanding that criticism, nevertheless, it is not binding in the context of the subjects explored in this thesis in the context of Iraq, particularly when it comes to an understanding of the factors involved in producing conflict to gain power, which is predominantly politically driven in Iraq.

The strength of elite interviewing depends on three factors: the socio-political context, the questions asked and the position of participants. In this thesis, all of those factors contribute to the strength of elite interviewing. Iraq is divided along ethno-sectarian lines, and in turn, there is an internal division amongst competing groups and is still considered in a state of transition. The Iraqi political elites, representing diverse groups, propound what they believe in relation to controversial issues would be in the best interests of their political factions. The questions asked were concerned with issues of significant importance in shaping Iraqi politics. The elite that I interviewed have at least held a significant political position, and as representatives of their groups, they would be inclined to express their stance. By targeting different political leaders among the Shi'a, a general political pattern concerning conflict issues could be discerned among these groups.

4.6 Ensuring Reliability, Validity, and Rigor in Data Collection and Analysis

Assessing the reliability of study findings requires researchers to judge the 'soundness' of the research concerning the application and appropriateness of the methods undertaken and the integrity of the conclusion (Noble & Smith, 2015). Qualitative research has faced criticism for lacking scientific rigour, with concerns about the justification of methods, transparency in analytical procedures, and potential research bias (Rolfe, 2006; Noble & Smith, 2015). This section discusses the challenges, debates, and various perspectives in qualitative research, emphasising rigour, validity, and reliability. It also offers suggestions for enhancing credibility and trustworthiness in qualitative research findings by incorporating

Anderson's (2017) six criteria: reflexivity, methodological coherence, sampling and data access issues, member-checking, transferability discussion, and ethical issues.

1. **Nature and Diversity of Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is a vibrant field characterised by interpretive, naturalistic, and holistic inquiry. The diversity in epistemological and disciplinary positions has led to a lack of consensus on 'rigour' (Barusch et al., 2011). Researchers in this field assume multiple realities influenced by participants' experiences and meanings (Henry, 2015). The diverse paradigmatic perspectives include critical theory, interpretivism, feminism, constructivism, and critical realism, impacting the understanding of rigour and using terms like validity and reliability.

Consequently, assessing rigour in qualitative research requires an appreciation of these diverse perspectives and an understanding that traditional concepts of validity and reliability may not always be directly applicable. Rigour, which encompasses the trustworthiness, credibility, and plausibility of research, is typically judged by theory, research design, data generation, and data analysis. However, some transformative paradigms argue that this understanding of rigour is limited, as it fails to consider research outcomes' motivation, purpose, and social or community-related effects (Dellinger & Leech, 2007). Recognising this limitation, it is essential to acknowledge that qualitative research differs from quantitative research philosophically and purposefully, necessitating alternative frameworks for establishing rigour (Sandelowski, 1993). For example, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose criteria such as truth value, consistency, neutrality, and applicability, while Anderson (2017) suggests six specific criteria for evaluating rigour in qualitative research: reflexivity, methodological coherence, sampling and data access issues, member-checking, transferability discussion, and ethical issues. Researchers can enhance the rigour and credibility of their studies by applying these criteria. While Anderson's (2017) six criteria offer valuable guidance for enhancing rigour in qualitative research, it is essential to recognise that no single framework can capture all aspects of rigour or be universally applicable to all qualitative research contexts. Each study may present unique challenges and require adapting or supplementing these criteria to meet the specific

research context's demands. Moreover, the criteria may not fully account for the diverse epistemological and methodological positions within qualitative research, which could necessitate additional considerations for rigour, validity, and reliability. Thus, researchers should critically examine the applicability of Anderson's (2017) criteria to their work and be prepared to adapt or expand upon these criteria as needed.

Bearing these limitations, researchers must focus on validity and reliability in their qualitative research, as these concepts form the foundation of a study's trustworthiness and credibility. Validity refers to the integrity and application of methods and the precision with which findings accurately reflect the data. On the other hand, reliability describes consistency within analytical procedures (Long & Johnson, 2000; Rolfe, 2006). However, due to inherent differences between qualitative and quantitative methods, the appropriateness of terms like reliability and validity has been debated (Golafshani, 2003). Leung (2015) suggests redefining these terms for qualitative research to establish accuracy, using terms like credibility, transferability, dependability, consistency, and trustworthiness instead.

In light of this, it is essential to consider that qualitative researchers have been accused of lacking 'truth criteria' and using unreliable methodologies that cannot be generalised. However, Gray (2004) argues that the lack of generalisability does not diminish relevance, emphasising the unique insights that qualitative research can provide. Qualitative research can provide unique insights and an in-depth understanding of specific contexts or phenomena (Quintan Wiktorowicz, 2004, p. 2). 'By focusing on transferability, researchers can discuss their findings' applicability to other contexts or settings, addressing generalisability concerns. This emphasis on transferability is just one aspect of a larger framework for enhancing rigour in qualitative research. Incorporating Anderson's (2017) six criteria can further strengthen the credibility and trustworthiness of research findings. These range from reflexivity to ethical issues. I take up each in turn.

Practical Implementation of Reliability Measures

1. **Reflexivity**: Throughout the research process, I engaged in ongoing self-reflection to identify and mitigate personal biases and preconceptions. For instance, I maintained a reflexive journal where I documented my thoughts, decisions, and potential biases during data collection and analysis. This practice ensured that I remained aware of how my background and assumptions could influence the research and allowed me to adjust where necessary.

2. **Methodological Coherence**: To ensure coherence between the research question, methodology, and methods, I conducted a thorough review of relevant literature to align my research approach with the study's objectives. For example, I selected a case study approach due to its suitability for in-depth exploration of complex social phenomena within specific contexts. The methodology chapter clearly articulated the coherence between my research objectives and methodological choices, demonstrating the rationale behind my decisions.

3. **Sampling and Data Access Issues**: In addressing sampling challenges, I implemented a purposive sampling strategy, selecting participants directly relevant to the research questions. To mitigate potential biases, I ensured diversity within the sample by including participants from various social, economic, and political backgrounds. Additionally, I documented the limitations of my sampling strategy, such as the difficulty in accessing certain groups, and discussed how these limitations might impact the findings.

4. **Member-Checking of Data Collected**: To enhance the credibility of the data, I employed member-checking by sharing preliminary findings with selected participants. Their feedback was incorporated into the final analysis to ensure their perspectives were accurately represented. For instance, after conducting interviews, I summarised key points and shared them with participants to verify the accuracy of my interpretations, leading to adjustments where discrepancies were identified.

5. **Discussion of Transferability**: I provided detailed descriptions of the research context, including the socio-political environment, cultural factors, and the specific characteristics of the participant groups. These 'thick descriptions' enable readers to assess the applicability of the findings to other contexts. For example, the contextual factors influencing Shi'a political dynamics in post-2003 Iraq were elaborated, allowing readers to draw parallels or distinctions with other settings.

6. **Ethical Issues**: Ethical considerations were rigorously adhered to throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they were fully aware of the study's aims and rights. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising participants' identities and securely storing sensitive data where necessary.

Case Study Example: One of the practical applications of Anderson's criteria was during my fieldwork in Iraq, where I encountered challenges in accessing certain participant groups due to political sensitivities. To address this, I adapted my data collection methods by employing snowball sampling, which allowed me to gain access to key informants who were initially difficult to reach. This adjustment was made while maintaining the rigour of the study by carefully documenting the process and ensuring that the sample remained representative of the broader population.

Another essential consideration in qualitative research is striking the right balance between rigour and flexibility. While maintaining rigour is crucial for the credibility and trustworthiness of research findings, qualitative research often requires flexibility to adapt to unique contexts and challenges that may arise during the research process. This flexibility may involve adjusting data collection methods, revising research questions, or refining analytical procedures in response to new insights or unexpected developments. For example, during data analysis, I revisited my research questions to better align with emerging themes, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in the data while also responding to the evolving research context.

By incorporating Anderson's (2017) six criteria for evaluating qualitative research and addressing challenges related to validity, reliability, and generalisability, researchers can contribute to the ongoing development and recognition of qualitative research as a rigorous and valuable approach to understanding complex social phenomena.

Reflexivity and reliability are essential in ensuring the quality and rigour of any research. In this study, reflexivity is particularly crucial due to the politically sensitive nature of the topic and the diverse backgrounds of the participants. By being aware of potential biases and taking steps to address them, I was able to develop a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

The absence of reflexivity in much published qualitative research is surprising, although Wang and Roulston (2007) provided a useful discussion of this issue. The acknowledged subjectivity of qualitative methods and the importance of the 'researcher's lens' in qualitative research require a discussion of the researcher's context, positionality or standpoint and the possible effect of this on the research process and outcomes (Muir, 2014).

Bourdieu (1992) presented an idea of reflexivity that defines the researcher's ability to understand and react to the subject being addressed. Depending on the researcher's perspective, this may lead to different conclusions in research. Bourdieu addressed distinct biases when conducting research interviews, such as language barriers or overlooking specific points due to fears over expressing opinions in a politically tense period. During the interview process, issues such as the reflexivity of the participant and the researcher's background as an interviewer or researcher were considered. This ethical consideration is crucial for preserving the data and information and the confidentiality of all subjects involved.

Reliability refers to the extent to which the data sources can be relied upon, and hence the data itself. To ensure data quality is reliable, the researcher will establish a clear plan and procedure for ensuring reliability. This will include triangulation of data sources, checking for consistency in data collection, and establishing clear criteria for data selection. Triangulation is a research strategy that involves using multiple

methods, data sources, or theoretical perspectives to enhance the reliability and validity of the findings. In this study, data analysis had been triangulated by combining PDA, elements of TA, and Bourdieu's theoretical framework.

To implement reflexivity in this study, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process, documenting my thoughts, feelings, and potential biases. As recently noted by Stevens and Cooper (2023), journal-keeping is used by teachers for classroom prep to field workers making observations and identifying their thought patterns. It is also frequently used to document a process. Moreover, I regularly discussed with peers and advisors to critically examine their biases and assumptions and ensure the research process's transparency.

4.7 Sampling Methods

Addressing the research question of power struggle in Shi'a discourse in post-2003 Iraq, this study combined purposive and snowball sampling methods to select a diverse and representative sample of political leaders and parties within the Coordination Framework Coalition and the Sadr Movement. The primary aim of this research is to investigate the factors driving power dynamics in Shi'a political discourse. This aim allowed this research to explore the complex interplay of numerous factors, such as historical context, political environment, religious institutions, and socio-economic conditions, contributing to the power struggles within Shi'a political discourse.

To ensure the representativeness and diversity of the sample and address the research question and objectives, I adopted purposive sampling techniques, focusing on four separate groups: 1) intra-Shi'a political factions, 2) Shi'a religious groups and leaders, 3) Shi'a social and cultural organisations, and 4) external actors and influences. This approach allowed me to select participants with specific characteristics and experiences, ensuring a range of perspectives related to the research question.

In determining the sample size, I considered several factors. Due to time and resource constraints and ethical guidelines from Middlesex University, it was not possible to travel to Iraq and conduct the required

interviews on the ground. As a result, I had to generate interest and sign-up participants remotely, which took longer. Considering these limitations, in consultation with my supervisors, it was determined that a minimum of twenty interviews would be necessary for this research. Ultimately, I conducted twenty-four semi-structured interviews, supplemented with ten previously televised interviews of key political figures. In qualitative research, the sample size is typically smaller than in quantitative methods because the focus is on obtaining a deep understanding of a phenomenon, centred on exploring the nuances of how and why particular issues, processes, situations, subcultures, or social interactions unfold (Dworkin, 2012). The purpose of conducting in-depth interviews is to derive categories from the data and analyse the relationships between them while capturing the "lived experience" of the participants to gain insights into their real-world perspectives (Charmaz, 1990, p. 1162). Some interviews were conducted face-to-face with participants in the UK, while others were conducted through online platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and other mobile applications.[66]

Previous interviews with key political actors who could not be reached directly were utilised to supplement the interviews. These interviews, found on open-access platforms such as YouTube, discussed the political situation, escalations, and current political affairs in Iraq, which were relevant to the research question. A total of 10 interviews contributed to the data set. Using a combination of primary interviews and existing interview data, the study maintained a robust and diverse sample despite the challenges in accessing participants. Given the post-conflict environment in Iraq and the research focus on understanding the power

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[66] Debates on the appropriate sample size for qualitative research often centre around the concept of saturation, where no new information is gained from additional data collection (Mason, 2010; Charmaz, 2006). Saturation is influenced by several factors including the homogeneity of the population, the research budget, and the researcher's experience and expertise in identifying when saturation is reached. Opinions vary widely on the ideal number of interviews, with recommendations ranging from 5 to 50 participants, depending on variables like the quality of data, the study's scope, and the nature of the topic (Morse, 2000).

Despite the variability, there is a consensus that reaching saturation is more critical than the number of interviews. This concept involves developing a range of relevant conceptual categories, thoroughly supporting these categories with data, and ensuring a comprehensive explanation of the findings (Charmaz, 1990). To provide clarity and consistency, the Archives of Sexual Behaviour recommends a minimum sample size of 25–30 participants. This number is deemed sufficient to explore the research questions adequately, identify and explain relationships between categories, and include a variety of perspectives (Charmaz, 2006; Morse, 1994, 1995).

struggle in Shi'a discourse in post-2003 Iraq, practical, logistical, and ethical challenges must be addressed during the sampling process. To overcome these challenges, I used non-probability sampling methods such as snowball sampling, which is appropriate for this research context (Dixit, 2012, p. 134). Snowball sampling is 'a technique for finding research subjects where one subject gives the researcher the name of another, who provides the names of a third, and so on (Vogt, 1999). This method's utility, especially within a post-conflict environment where a researcher is met with several obstacles, including distrust and suspicion from target participants, is considered 'significant' in many research cases, mainly in areas where there are marginalised populations. Therefore, the snowball sampling method deals with similar challenges in similar research areas (Cohen & Arieli, 2011).

I employed various strategies to ensure the sample was diverse and representative of the Shi'a political factions and actors involved in power struggles in post-2003 Iraq. First, l sought out participants with diverse backgrounds, affiliations, and viewpoints to capture various perspectives. Second, I paid particular attention to the sample's representativeness in terms of gender, age, and social status, as well as the roles and influence of the participants within their respective organisations or factions. Third, I contacted various networks and contacts, including academic researchers, journalists, and civil society organisations, to identify potential interviewees who can provide valuable insights into the research question. Lastly, to ensure the inclusion of marginalised or underrepresented voices, I was open to adjusting my sampling strategy during the data collection process based on the emerging patterns and themes identified through the initial interviews and data analysis.

For this research, twenty-four semi-structured interviews were conducted with key individuals from the Coordination Framework Coalition and the Sadr Movement. Where possible, these interviews were conducted in person or via WhatsApp or Telegram online communication platforms. However, a further ten YouTube interviews were used to supplement the data source for hard-to-reach politicians and actors. These YouTube interviews were selected from cross-sectarian and non-partisan TV channels to ensure political inclusiveness in the policies of the TV channels selected. All datasets included interactions

dealing strictly with political issues related to Iraq's political regime and process rather than other general issues. I also employed the Twitter accounts of several prominent leaders to capture and document some of their publicly available sentiments and thoughts.

The datasets chosen for analysis were narrowed to a specific timeframe, primarily focusing on periods starting from 2014 onward. This period was significant due to the emergence of ISIS, which presented a considerable challenge to Iraq. It prompted the Marji'iyya to issue a fatwa and led to a period of unity among Shi'a elites against a common enemy. However, it also laid the groundwork for potential internal conflicts, particularly between factions backed by foreign states like Iran and those opposed to arming groups, such as the Sadrist movement and the Hawza (for more on this issue, see Chapter 5). Other critical periods relevant to this research include the unrest following the October 2021 elections, characterised by armed clashes between Al-Sadr loyalists and PMF factions at the International Zone (IZ) gates. It was during this month that Al-Sadr temporarily withdrew from the political scene. This period also saw the emergence of the Coordination Framework, which played a pivotal role in forming the ensuing government, with Muhammad Al-Sudani appointed its prime minister. As emphasised by Khazali, "This is our Muhammad", signifying that this is our government, and it is in their interest to make sure that it succeeds. (Qais al-Khazali interview, Al-Iraqiyya TV, November 20, 2022)

By employing Bourdieu's theoretical framework and using PDA and TA to analyse the data, this research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the power struggle in Shi'a discourse in post-2003 Iraq, focusing on the Coordination Framework Coalition and the Sadr Movement. The selection and sampling methods described above will ensure that the research captures diverse perspectives and experiences, contributing to a deeper understanding of the complex power dynamics in the Iraqi Shi'a political landscape.

4.8. Data Analysis Approach

Data analysis will be conducted using the thematic analysis technique, a widely accepted method for qualitative data analysis (Guest, 2012). Researchers favour this method due to its capacity to 'minimally

organise the data and describe it in rich detail' (Boyatzis, 1998) and its potential to provide solutions to particular research challenges (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97). It is especially accessible to novice researchers because it does not require the same level of theoretical and technical knowledge as other qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I utilised NVivo software, which is reputed for its effectiveness in managing and analysing large interview datasets, to facilitate data analysis. The advantage of computer-assisted qualitative data analysis over manual methods was faster coding (Welsh, 2002). NVivo, not only accelerated data analysis but also increased the rigour of the research. The software offered a variety of analytical techniques, with word search queries and word frequency queries proving to be the most effective, allowing for rapid searches and prompt responses.

During the initial phases of data analysis, the word frequency tool played a crucial role in identifying potential themes within the data. NVivo had been instrumental in managing and ensuring the accuracy of the massive quantity of interview data. A manual evaluation will be included to strengthen the interpretive validity despite the researcher's reliance on computer-assisted analysis for efficiency.

The analytical procedure will involve the following phases:

Phase 1: Familiarisation

This initial phase consists of a three-stage, sequentially organised process. Initially, I engaged in a thorough reading of the transcripts to familiarise them with the dataset. Following that, I revisited the content to identify recurring patterns. In the final step, I manually underlined quotations with high relevance and significance. In this step, Braun and Clarke recommended using a broader perspective of looking beyond surface meanings. They encouraged more attention towards the contexts to capture a 'rich' and 'compelling story' as part of the sense-making process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2009).

Phase 2: Generating Initial Codes

Once I have become thoroughly immersed in the dataset, the next phase of thematic analysis, which involves coding, is initiated. During this phase, I shifted towards extracting the most intriguing and pertinent excerpts, subsequently organising them into preliminary codes. As I sift through the data, particular attention was given to identifying the most prominent nodes or recurring patterns inherent within the overarching category, a methodology following Braun and Clarke (2006). Furthermore, using coding stripes within the NVivo software played an instrumental role in facilitating a more vivid visualisation of emerging patterns and the identification of collective groupings, or nodes, throughout the coding process (see appendix).

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

After initial coding, themes had been produced to complete the third phase of thematic analysis. This stage necessitated a detailed investigation of the larger patterns as well as the incorporation of the researcher's views. Although prevalence is noted, it does not always indicate its importance and, therefore, requires the researcher's judgment field (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Unlike assembling a predetermined puzzle, this iterative process required careful attention to preserve the accuracy of the picture conveyed. Themes are different from codes. They involve formulating phrases or short sentences that capture the meaningful associations within the data.

Phases 4 & 5: Reviewing and Finalising Themes

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the final stage of thematic analysis commences when all themes are final and dissemination of the story begins. When defining and naming themes in these final stages of analysis, it is important to connect the thematic content into a unified narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 2018). After recognising the overarching themes, I examined each grouping to see if they could be consolidated or nested as subthemes without losing their unique contribution to the findings. I then merged and split groupings until I was confident all the important phenomena are present. After allowing some time and further reflection, I renamed the themes to be more

refined and framed to respond more appropriately to the research questions. This iterative approach was time-consuming, but I can develop a thematic framework once I reached more consensus on the themes. Similar themes and ideas had been clustered in groups and organised in the thematic framework. All themes and sub-themes will be explained and described in detail in the last step.

4.9 Risk to Participants

A pertinent ethical requirement for conducting field interviews is obtaining the full consent of participants and the provisions made to ensure complete and transparent information is offered in both oral and written format outlining their involvement and right to cancel at any time. These provisions will be in place to reduce the risk of causing direct or indirect harm to the respondents.

These risks will also be significantly present within the practitioner's sub-group. This subgroup does not enjoy the secure attachment and, in some cases, would risk upsetting rival community members or political groups if seen collaborating with perceived foreign figures. In this case, anonymity and security concerns would be important to allow participants of this group to volunteer in an interview and share important first-hand information that benefits the research. For ethical reasons, gathered data will only be used if consent is granted, ensuring the data collected will be anonymous.

The research will avoid mentioning any names or locations to provide added privacy to participants. Interviews had been kept on an external drive, and hard copies of the manuscripts locked in secure premises. The data will only be accessible to the research supervisors (upon request). This information will also be made available to the participants.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter has engaged in a thorough exploration of the methodological underpinnings that will drive the subsequent analysis of this thesis. Anchored in Bourdieu's theory of fields, capital, and power relations, the

intention is to dissect the intricate dynamics and power struggles within the Shi'a political discourse in post-2003 Iraq.

The decision to employ a combination of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Thematic Analysis (TA) has been justified by highlighting their capacity to extract meaningful insights from political actors' language and rhetoric and the broader themes and ideologies within which they are implied. The capacity of PDA to expose underlying assumptions and power relations in discourse, combined with TA's ability to organise and interpret qualitative data, creates a powerful, multilayered approach that embraces the complexity of the political landscape in question.

Within this methodological framework, particular attention has been drawn to the role of reflexivity, underlining the researcher's awareness of potential biases and the impact of their standpoint on the research outcomes. Reflexivity, intertwined with reliability and validity, forms the foundation for maintaining quality and rigour in the research process. These aspects are especially critical due to the politically sensitive nature of the research subject and the broad spectrum of participants' backgrounds.

The data collection method, particularly via interviews, has been presented comprehensively, signposting the benefits and constraints of the chosen approach. Importantly, despite challenges in accessing participants, the research has taken advantage of a combination of face-to-face and online interviews, supplemented by previously conducted interviews, ensuring a rich and diverse dataset is available for analysis.

Addressing sampling, a reflexive approach has been applied to navigate practical, logistical, and ethical challenges associated with the post-conflict environment of Iraq. Employing non-probability sampling methods, notably snowball sampling, offers a practical solution to these challenges and ensures that the research remains robust despite potential obstacles.

This chapter has provided a comprehensive methodology that provides the blueprint for the upcoming analysis. It reflects a sensitive and reflective approach to the complex political dynamics of post-2003 Iraq,

setting the stage for an in-depth exploration of intra-Shi'a competition. This methodology, underpinned by a theoretical framework and a particular data analysis strategy, equips the research to deliver insightful and nuanced contributions to understanding Shi'a politics in Iraq.

CHAPTER V
NAVIGATING AUTHORITY: SHI'A POLITICAL REALITIES IN CONTEMPORARY IRAQ

5.1 Contextualising the Interplay of Doctrine and Politics in Post-2003 Iraq

While initially planning to write this chapter, I intended to focus mainly on the political parties and actors in the post-2003 and provide a contextual understanding of the political and social environment as a precursor to what may impact the power-sharing model and power relations. My goal was to offer the reader an insight into the subtle dynamics at work. However, as the research progressed through interviews, the significance of the hawza repeatedly emerged in discussions. This might not be surprising given that most of those I interviewed were Shi'a (given the study's context). However, as noted in Chapter 1, It is crucial to recognise that although the Shi'a can be perceived as homogeneous in their shared experiences of victimhood and certain aspects of their ideology, considerable diversity exists among them. As succinctly stated by Amar Al-Hakeem,

> "*The Shi'a, from an ideological perspective, are one. They are linked by one ideology, and that is why they follow the wisest Marji and don't consider his birth certificate or his country of origin. They follow him because he is the wisest in religious jurisprudence from the perspective of Twelver Shi'a. Therefore, the Marji can be Arabic, Farisi, or of another origin. This pertains to ideology."* (Al-Hakeem, 2021).

However, the Shi'a differ in various aspects and are not a monolithic group. Significant heterogeneity and overlapping disparities in positions and beliefs exist within Shi'a communities. For instance,

> "*a Shi'a as an individual human being can adopt various views, such as liberal Islamist communist. They are a sect joined by an ideology but differ in their political views. To assume that Shi'as share identical views, traditions, or a common project is not correct.*"
> (ibid)

This complexity mirrors the diversity found within the hawza itself, underscoring the need to approach the subject with nuance and a deeper understanding of the variations among individuals and groups.

The hawza's importance cannot be undermined. As noted at one time by Babak Rahimi (2007),

> "[The] *hawza represents not only the intellectual centre but also an important source of political and religious authority in the Shi'i world; it embodies the seat of Shi'i learning against a backdrop of Sunni-dominated governments from the Seljuq era to the Tikriti-Ba'athist regime of Saddam Hussein.*" (Rahimi, 2007, p. 5).

It is important to emphasise that the current chapter is not a data (or finding) chapter. Instead, this chapter serves as a precursor to the findings as it aims to situate the hawza and the ideological assumptions that transcend into the various political positions and, thus, power relations and conflict within the Shi'a communities in post-2003 Iraq. The data findings will be presented in the following chapters. The post-2003 period marks a significant change in the Hawza's relation to state politics. As recently noted by Alhammood (2023), 'the hawza was not completely disengaged from public affairs in the pre-2003 period, but deep and complex equations have driven it in this context.' (Alhammood, 2023, p. 11). As a result, the 'fields of social and political studies are also increasingly interested in an in-depth understanding of the hawza, the Shi'ite seminary, as well as the mechanics that govern it, its financial resources, and its orientation toward state- and nation-building, especially after 2003 in Iraq.' (Alhammood, 2023, p. 11).

In what follows, section one situates the current divide within the hawza on the relation between religion and the state. This crucial division among the assorted Shi'a communities constitutes one aspect of a broader divergence, playing a distinct role in shaping political alignments, as I will attempt to showcase later in this chapter. These complexities have rendered Shi'a politics progressively challenging to define and have evolved to encompass numerous aspects (Haddad, 2022).[67] To better understand Shi'a politics and power

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[67] For example, Shi'a politics can allude to elements of sectarian identity or serve as a synonym for Shi'a Islamism. The question arises: does it pertain to specific discursive practices, constitute a style of political rhetoric, or necessitate speaking in the name of Shi'a? (Ibid)).

struggle, efforts have been made to categorise the groups along distinct lines. For example, Veen (2016) provides a useful categorisation in which groups are assorted based on their ideological and philosophical positions, constituencies, and tactics.

Section two examines how authority has been reimagined within the hawza since 2003. This will assist with section three, where the focus turns to the dynamics of Shi'a politics post-2003. In doing so, I can then focus on section four to better understand the mainstream Shi'a Islamist parties through their coercive apparatus, in other words, the Popular Mobilisation Unit (or forces) (PMF) that have emerged during the last two decades. A number of recent studies, such as the International Crisis Report (2018), Veen (2016), Alami (2018), and Al-Marashi (2021), divide the ideological and coercive elements of the Shi'a groups into three distinct categories. They can be roughly divided into (1) groups with Wilayat al-Faqih tendencies (pro-Iran), (2) those associated with the Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani of Najaf, and (3) those affiliated with political parties, or in some cases, Alami (2018) places Muqtada al-Sadr into his own category.

5.2 Navigating Perspectives

Traditionally, in Arabic, the term 'hawza' means 'domain', but in its contemporary usage, the term is 'confined almost exclusively to Shi'ite religious circles, where it refers to the religious institutes that teach Islamic legal sciences and graduate clerics based on Twelver Shi'ism'(Almadan, 2023, p. 13). Today, the hawza of Najaf consists of a 'cluster of seminaries and religious scholarly institutions governed by high-ranking clerics who receive religious taxes from devotee Shi'is around the world.' (Rahimi, 2007, p. 5).

While its origin stayed closer to jurisprudential and religious concerns, its relation to political rule has been a subject of great division. More secular liberal, leftist ideologues, such as the outspoken political Shi'a actor Faiq al-Sheikh Ali, advocate for a clear division between politics and religion and point to the role Hawaza has served in this goal. He calls 'against mixing the clerical establishment with politics', asserting

that 'politicians are deliberately staining the reputation of the Marji'iyya' (source of emulation). [68] He believes politicians 'exploit the Marji'iyya to boost their political standing, paying no heed to its sanctity'. He claims these politicians would 'readily betray the Marji'iyya if they thought it would aid their climb up the political ladder' (YouTube, 2018).

This view is not unique. For instance, in the interview with Dr al-Tamimi, she stressed her 'liberal views', 'Baghdadi heritage', and 'credentials that make her a worthy Iraqi nationalist candidate', as opposed to the 'sectarian, unqualified, unpatriotic actors who sought financial gains above Iraqi national interests' this is about the Shi'a elites who have been accused of harbouring foreign interest over the Iraqi national interests. Despite being a Shi'a, she argues that 'faith is for God, and the nation is for the people' (Al-Tamimi interview, Jan 2023).

Holding less explicit views can be seen as having been adopted by the likes of the former oil minister Dr Bahrulolum, who agrees with the current Marji'iyya stance of observing a quietist trend explaining that:

> "*We do not advocate the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih. Quite the opposite, figures like Sheikh Mohammad Shams al-Din and Sayyid Bahr al-Ulum believed in the guardianship of the nation over itself. They believed that the cleric's role is to oversee the general order rather than intervene in governance details. This is what we believed in*" (Bahrulolom interview, Jan 2023).

This view can also be found in statements by former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi (2014), Nouri al-Maliki (2013; 2021), Amar al-Hakeem (2023), who champion the current Marjiya's quietest tradition towards politics,

For instance, Maliki stated that:

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[68] A marja' is a jurist who gives religious rulings based on Islamic teachings. The word marja' (Arabic: مَرْجَع) literally means 'source'. This source may be a person, an entity, a system, or anything else. Islam regards a Marja' is as a 'source to follow'.

"*If the marjaiyya wanted to take over, we would have all followed it and obeyed its decisions. But it has stepped away and left the decisions to the political class. That is why the responsibility falls on the shoulders of politicians. They either lead the country to chaos or to real shared reform.***"** (Nouri Al-Maliki YouTube interview*, 2021)*.

Furthermore, in an interview with Sayid Ali al-Alaq regarding the Islamist trend and aspirations in Iraq, he highlights that:

"*We do not confiscate the rights based on religious/Islamist tendencies. We do possess a vision and belief of how we conduct and live our lives, but we remain under the constitutional framework which governs our public policy for the state.***"** *(*Al-Alaq YouTube interview, 2018*)*.

 This indication is a clear statement that within the current Iraqi social and political environment, such ambitions for an Islamic state are constitutionally unachievable, and the basis of the Constitution was agreed upon and blessed by the Marji'iyya itself**.**

On the other side of the divide are those with a more rigid position (Badir, Asib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) Kataib Hezbollah, SCRI- (see Appendix 7 for a breakdown of Shi'a categories and armed groups), who support a Wilayat al-Faqih role in Iraq's political scene; regardless of individual perspectives, it is evident that the Marji'iyya plays a crucial role in the socio-political landscape of Iraq, and considered as 'constantly powerful and decisive force in Iraq's ongoing political transition' (Khalil, 2019). In an interview conducted with AAH leader Sheikh Qais al-Khazali, he elaborated on the transition from an armed resistance group to becoming an active participant in politics. Khazali remarked that '*the sacred mission of defending the homeland from invaders and ISIS by force had reached its endpoint, making way for a new phase in the political arena'***.** This marked the new trajectory of the armed groups into the political domain. However, he was keen to underscore the necessity of this separation '*to shield the honoured reputation of the armed resistance from the often murky and complex realities of Iraqi politics*' (Interview, Dec 2022).

This nuanced stance prompts further reflection, casting doubt on the feasibility of an Iraqi Islamist[69] framework akin to the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). Khazali's insistence on preserving the sanctity of the PMF by keeping it untainted from politics raises questions about how such a system could be implemented in Iraq. If the political landscape is seen as incompatible with armed resistance, how can it be suitable for the Marji'iyya? How would the concept of wilayat al-faqih materialise if the demographic of the Iraqi population would not enable such visions? His views open up complex questions about the intersection of religious authority, armed resistance, and political governance in the evolving Iraqi context. This prompts a crucial question that resonates with contemporary contexts: What does it mean to be an Islamist group in contemporary Iraq?

Moreover, the first Islamist Shi'a political party, Da'wa, was a product of the socioeconomic struggles of the religious establishment in modern Iraq.[70] As hawza grappled with the threats and challenges of the contemporary world, the birth of this party marked a significant juncture in religious-political relations (Alaaldin, 2017). The relationship between politics and Mujtahids (Shiʿi jurists) finds its roots in debates throughout the history of Shi'a Islamic jurisprudence (Al-Hamoudi, 2017).

This chapter will explore this further in the section titled 'The Dynamics of Shi'a Politics in Post-2003 Iraq'.

I will focus on one crucial ideological component of Shi'a thought: jurisprudential considerations surrounding the protection of Baydhat al-Islam." (Citadel of Islam).[71]

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[69] Islamists are understood as political activists who not only believe that Islam 'is an ideal holistic religion with a political agenda' but also strive to establish a Sharia-based Islamic state (Islam, Citation 2015, p. 6). For the Islamists, Islam is 'as much a political ideology as a religion' (Roy, 1994, p. vii).

[70] Within Iraq's evolving socioeconomic environment of the 1950s and 1960s, the Shi'a religious institution of the hawza encountered challenging shifts that threatened their resource streams, whilst a growing segment of the Shi'a populace began gravitating towards secular nationalist political parties, such as the Arab nationalist Ba'athist party, or the communist party. To offset this balance of legislative and social factors, the clerical establishment commissioned the birth of the first Shi'a Islamist party in contemporary Iraq.

[71] Please see Chapter 1 for additional context.

Returning to Bourdieu, his theoretical framework (1986), symbolic capital, when perceived through the lens of competition for power, helps us dissect the historical episodes. For instance, the espoused duty that has fallen upon the Mujtahids from their ongoing debates elevated the mujtahids to the position of protector of the Citadel of Islam from perceived threats, a sacred duty conferred upon the mujtahid during the absence of the awaited Imam. Throughout history, this principle has guided the ijtihad (independent jurisprudential reasoning) of qualified Shi'a mujtahids, guiding their decisions to engage in political activism or adopt a quietist stance contingent upon the specific circumstances. Fulfilling this sacred duty enables the mujtahids to accumulate symbolic capital within their religious field, gaining respect, recognition, and legitimacy. However, this symbolic capital also reflects their ability to navigate the complex socio-political landscape, interpret religious texts with authority, and mobilise followers, enhancing their influence within their religious and socio-political fields. Applying this concept concerns how Shi'a mujtahids accumulate prestige, honour, and influence by protecting the Citadel of Islam and adeptly navigating the socio-political landscape. The accumulation of symbolic capital influences the mujtahids' social position within their religious and socio-political field.[72]

During the first three centuries of Islamic history, Shi'a underwent socio-political evolution, reflecting a worldview that did not sharply differentiate itself from the broader Islamic community (Iqbal, 2020).[73] The politically reserved stance of Muhammad Al-Baqir and Jafar Al-Sadiq set a lasting precedent, steering the Shi'a Imams and subsequent mujtahids towards a path of religious guidance over political leadership. This significant shift underscored the Imamate's sacred nature, reducing the emphasis on its political aspect, which was considered secondary to its spiritual role (Zayd al-Din bin Ali, 1988, p. 149).

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[72] This topic will be delved into more thoroughly in this chapter. This viewpoint stems from the historical interpretations given by the Mujtahids, underscoring moments, when necessary, actions couldn't be taken due to a lack of community backing. This, therefore, underlines the importance of mobilisation and the crucial role played by a supportive social base.

[73] Post the fourth Imam Al-Sajjad's death, a significant schism arose. The Shi'a community splintered into two primary factions: the Zaidis, led by Zaid ibn Ali ibn Al-Sajjad, and another contingent, spearheaded by Muhammad Al-Baqir, Al-Sajjad's son, and later his son, Jafar Al-Sadiq. The latter chose to abstain from political engagement, largely due to their follower base's numerical disadvantage compared to the Zaidis (al-Hamoudi, 2017).

However, during the Safavid era in Iran, two distinct schools within Twelver Shi'a Islam emerged: The Usuli and the Akhbari.[74] The Usulis, who became the dominant school, emphasised reason and *ijtihad* for interpreting religious texts, advocating for mujtahids in each generation to apply these texts to contemporary situations (Momen, 2003**).** This viewpoint gains significance within Bourdieu's framework, emphasising the essential role of preserving and controlling capital in sustaining the field**.** Usuli scholars grant high authority to the mujtahids, subscribing to the concept of Marja'iyat. In this dynamic, the followers (muqallid) are guided (taqlid) by a living mujtahid in matters of religious law and ethics (Kadhim & F. Alrebh, 2021). The prevalence of this Usuli methodology and the practice of taqlid become part of the doxa within the Shi'a religious field, reinforcing the authority of Usuli scholars and reflecting Bourdieu's 'habitus' concept.[75]

The Usulis perceive the Shi'a Imams' approach to political activism as contingent on their ability to amass a robust popular base. This interpretation draws heavily from Imam Ali's historical actions, especially regarding the caliphate succession issue after Prophet Muhammad's death.[76] This quietist-activist dichotomy is echoed in later Imams, especially after the Karbala tragedy (Al-Hamoudi, 2017, p. 85). This, in turn, had a tremendous effect on how authority was (re)imagined.

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[74] The Akhbari and Usuli schools of thought emerged within Twelver Shi'a Islam during the Safavid era in Iran, which spanned from the 16th to the 18th centuries. these schools developed within the broader historical context of divisions and debates within Shi'a Islam over questions of leadership, authority, and religious interpretation. The Akhbari school gained prominence in the late 17th and early 18th centuries but was later supplanted by the Usuli school in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Usuli school has since been the dominant school of thought within Twelver Sh'ia Islam. For more on these two schools of thought please see for example Momen, M. (2003). Usuli, Akhbari, Shaykhi, Babi: The Tribulations of a Qazvin Family. Iranian Studies, 36(3), 317-337. https://www.jstor.org/stable/4311546; also see Andrew J. Newman,1992 'The Nature of the Akhbārī/Uṣūlī Dispute in Late Ṣafawid Iran. Part 1: 'Abdallāh al-Samāhijī's "Munyat al-Mumārisin https://www.jstor.org/stable/620475

[75] On the other hand, the Akhbari differ in how they use the methodology to deduce Islamic laws and understand its principles. Emerging as a reactionary movement against Usuli dominance in the 17th century, their methodological stance is an adherence to the strict use of the traditions (akhbar) of the Prophet Muhammad and the Twelve Imams. Rejecting the use of ijtihad to deduce legal rulings, they believe that the Quran and the traditions (Hadith) should be the sole sources of law (Newmen,1992: 22-51). As such, they challenge the mujtahids' authority and resist the Shi'a clergy's hierarchical structure, offering a contrast to the Usuli approach.

[76] For example the stance by Imam Ali from observing a quietist stance to then adopting an active stance- on this matter Imam Ali acknowledges that 'had it not been for the presence of the pressing crowd, were it not for the establishment of (Allah's) testimony upon me through the existence of supporters, and had it not been for the pledge of Allah with the learned, to the effect that they should not connive with the gluttony of the oppressor and the hunger of the oppressed, I would have cast the reins of the caliphate on its own shoulders'. (Nahj al-Balagha, 2013:70).

5.3 Authority Reimagined: The Ascendancy of Mujtahids

Shi'a mujtahid Kashif al-Ghita (d.1812) defined 'Baydht al-Islam' as one of the critical foundations of Islam. Without these, the existence of Islam and the Muslim community is endangered (Kashif al-Ghita,2001:18-19). During the era of the occultation, the responsibility of safeguarding the Citadel of Islam fell to the general deputies of the Infallible Imams - the qualified Shi'a mujtahids (Kalantari, 2020, p. 222). Nour al-Din bin Abd al-Ale al-Karki (1464-1534) was the first to declare that a mujtahid's status in religious matters is equivalent to that of the hidden Imam (Fayed, 2010, p. 137). As deputies of the hidden Imam, they navigated the socio-political landscape, involving themselves in state politics at times and adopting a quietist stance at others.

According to Shi'a doctrine[77], the primary responsibilities of the Imams were to safeguard the Muslim community and protect the Citadel of Islam. After the occultation, this became the responsibility of the Shi'a mujtahids. According to the prominent compiler of Shi'a traditions al-Kulayni (d. 941), the seventh Imam says that 'faithful jurists are fortresses of Islam, [they protect Islam] as the walls of a city safeguard it'. (Al-Kulayni,1987, p. 38). The role of the mujtahids, as described by the seventh Imam, illustrates their critical position at the intersection of the religious and political fields. This placement allows them to influence both fields, shaping the socio-political landscape based on their religious duty and strategy interpretations.[78]

This fluctuation between activism and quietism is evident during various episodes of Shi'a history. For instance, in early twentieth-century Iraq, from 1914 to 1924, the mujtahids' interpretation of 'protecting the Citadel of Islam' led them to two contrasting political postures. While many Shi'a mujtahids were actively involved in Iranian politics during the Russo-Persian wars (1804-1828), the Tobacco Revolt (1891) and the

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[77] Here I intend that the Usuili school of thought which is the mainstream school of thought within Shi'a
[78] In the early period of the occultation, the majority of mujtahids saw that protecting the Citadel of Islam required them to engage in compiling the teachings of Imams. As such, they established learning circles and seminaries and engaged in debates. During the Safavid dynasty (1501-1722), some mujtahids considered fulfilling this responsibility by legitimising and advising the Shi'a monarchs (Abissab,2004:22). In contrast, other mujtahids took a more active political role during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Keddie, 1969).

Persian Constitutional Revolution (1905-1911) (Safshekan, 2017, p. 16; Keddie, 1969, pp. 31-53), they remained relatively quiet regarding Ottoman Iraqi politics during the nineteenth century.

These dynamics shifted during World War I when Mujtahids spurred their followers to join the Jihad against the British invaders, siding with the Ottomans (Farazmand, 1995, pp. 227-257). This shift is exemplified by Sayyid Muhammad Kazim Yazdi (1831-1919), who led a quietist camp during the Persian Constitutional Revolution but issued a Jihad fatwa against the 'non-believer' British during World War I. This underscores the adaptability of Shi'a mujtahids and their strategic use of political activism or quietism based on the socio-political context and their interpretation of their religious duty in protecting the Citadel of Islam.

Under Ayatollah Khomeini's leadership, the ulama was seen as preservers of Islam and protectors of the Citadel of Islam and establishing an Islamic government was necessary (Khomeini, 2019, p. 12). However, it should be noted that this was not a universally accepted viewpoint among the mujtahids of that time. Many other mujtahids believed that protecting the Citadel of Islam required them to concentrate on scholarly pursuits and deliberately avoid direct political involvement (Kalantari, 2020, p. 220). [79]

Ayatollah Khomeini's successful advocacy for the Wilayat al-Faqih doctrine represented a major turning point in the dynamics of Shi'a political power (Bruno,2019). It reshaped the religious and political landscape and demonstrated Bourdieu's theory of how capital functions within a field. Underscoring how shifts within one field can permeate the other. The prominence and influence achieved by Ayatollah Khomeini also demonstrate the potential for religious figures to amass substantial political capital.

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[79] The Iraqi scholars represented by Ayatollah Ali Sistani uphold a more traditional interpretation of Shi'a Islam, (quietism) which champions a divide between religious authority and political power (Bruno, 2019). They propose that while religious leaders should guide the community in faith and morality matters, political decisions should rest with the laypeople. The principle of wilayat al-Faqih is neither intuitively obvious nor rationally necessary. It is neither a requirement of religion (din) nor a necessity for denomination (mazhab). It is neither a part of the Shi'i general principles (Usul) nor a component of the detailed observance (foru'). It is, by near consensus of Shi'i ulama, nothing more than a jurisprudential hypothesis, and its proof is contingent upon reasons adduced from the four categories of the Qur'an, tradition, consensus and reason. (Kadivar, 1377/1998: 237)

As the Shi'a community in Iraq continues to evolve in response to changing circumstances, the Marjiya succession and the endorsement or rejection of the doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih will likely play crucial roles in shaping not only the Shi'a habitus but also the broader socio-political landscape. The use of symbolic capital, whether through claiming the status of Imamate or asserting a new role for mujtahids, is not confined to the boundaries of the religious field. Instead, it has the potential to spill over and shape the political field. This potential shift underscores Bourdieu's theory, demonstrating how changes within one field can influence another and how the habitus can evolve in response to these shifts.

One could argue that the historical significance of Shi'a doctrinal heritage has contributed to forming a specific habitus concerning political participation. The doctrine of Wilayat al-Faqih challenges this traditional habitus. It aims to redefine the nature of symbolic capital in the field, asserting a new role for mujtahids as the representative authority of the concealed Imam both in political and religious matters. This potential recalibration of symbolic capital illustrates the dynamic nature of the habitus within the context of evolving socio-political landscapes, providing critical insights into the unique challenges, aspirations, and strategies of Shi'a leadership.

5.4 The Dynamics of Shi'a Politics in Post-2003 Iraq

In the immediate aftermath of the U.S.-led invasion, intense political competition unfolded for control over the emergent Iraqi state. The primary competitors were those allied with the U.S. and those who opposed them (Veen et al., 2017, p. 17) or those pragmatics versus radicals to borrow Mumtaz's phrase (Veen et al., 2017, pp. 80-88).[80]

The U.S. foreign relations resembled a Manichean principle (an old philosophical, religious belief that breaks things down into good or evil and has come to mean duality sees things as black or white) – 'You

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[80] This split places groups such as Da'wa, SCIRI, PUK, KDP, Ayatollah Sistani on the pro or 'pragmatic' list, whereas Al-Sadr movement and a considerable number of Arab Sunni opposition and actors represent the 'radical', 'anti-U.S.' list.

are either with us or against us.'[81] This was evident when its Defence Secretary made a statement regarding their vision for Iraq's future, especially given that Iran had cultivated strong allies in the form of Iraqi Shi'a opposition groups. Rumsfeld stated, '*If you're implying our reaction towards a government akin to Iran, where a small number of clerics control everything, the response is that it won't happen*' (BBC, 2003). This stance may, to some degree, explain why the rhetoric of SCIRI's leader, Muhammad Bakir al-Hakeem (d. 2003), had liberal undertones. During his 23-year exile in neighbouring Iran, he had advocated for the implementation of an Iran-style clerical-led government (Mumtaz, 2003, p. 84) within the changing dynamics, al-Hakeem's pragmatism was reflected in the decision to send his brother Abdul Aziz al-Hakeem (d. 2009), to be a member of the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC)[82] that was developed by the American Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) (Dobbins et al., 2009).

This strategy, expressed by Muhammad Baqir al-Hakeem, revolved around a simple premise: *'If we don't cooperate with the Americans, someone else will, and we will have lost our opportunity'* (MacFarquhar, 2003, cited in Mumtaz, 2003, p. 85). Dr Utoor explains that 'pragmatism was crucial' at the time because '*the political parties neither instigated these changes nor were voted in by the people; the advantage was with the invaders, and success favoured those who closely aligned with U.S. policies*' (Interview with Utoor, Jan 2023). Though some disagreed with the U.S.-led role in the invasion to overthrow Saddam, the exiled elite lacked the means or power to resist; if they sought to influence, compliance with American strategies was necessary. The shift in approach or adoption of pragmatism can be understood as a transformation in interpreting political Islam. Cesari (2018) argues that political Islam is not about fundamentalism but rather

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[81] This policy and phrase which has become well known was coined during the former President of the United States George W. Bush in a joint meeting with the French President Jacques Chirac (1932-2019), President Bush highlighted that the fight against terrorism requires nations to either be with us or against us, Bush said that 'A coalition partner must do more than just express sympathy, a coalition partner must perform.' See, for example, CNN.com - 'You are either with us or against us' - November 6, 2001

[82] The CPA established the IGC in July 2003 in collaboration with the United Nations. The formation of the IGC was based on the presumption that it accurately represented the ethnic composition of Iraq. This assumption led to the expansion of cabinet portfolios, allowing for a more evenly distributed division of political power, aligning with the perceived ethnic makeup of the country (Dodge, 2005:715). For more context on the IGC please see for example (Otterman, 2005). For more context on the CPA see for example (Baker & Rubin, 2011)

is undergoing a process of dilution in the traditional understanding of political Islam, reflecting a reaction to the imperatives of modernisation associated with Western colonialism and occidental influences.[83]

This evolution is evident in the development of Islamist opposition, as highlighted by Dr. Al-Askari in my interview. Al-Askari reflects that Initially, Islamist groups *'refrained from even mentioning the term "democracy," as it was once deemed heretical'*. Over time, however, the term gradually found its way into Islamist literature, slowly paving the way for increased collaborations with non-Islamist entities, '*something that we Islamistst) thought would never happen*. The dynamic shifted, and *'Islamist groups were no longer the sole leaders in the opposition, It became apparent that, despite our unwavering dedication and faith in our cause, success was unattainable without the support of the international community, a realisation underscored by the events of the 1991 Intifadha al shabaniya'*(Jan 2023).

In line with this perspective on the dilution of political Islam, my interview with al-Hamoudi unveils a striking reality that resonates with this changing interpretation. According to him, within the contemporary groups advocating Islamist ideologies,

> "*There seems to be no genuine Islamist vision for state and nation-building. Instead, the prevailing understanding among these actors is superficial, focusing merely on obligatory religious practices such as prayer, fasting, and the Hajj pilgrimage*. (Al-Hamoudi, 2023)

Al-Hamoudi further argues that '*beyond these rituals, nothing inherently Islamic exists about their political affiliations or ideologies"* (Jan 2023).

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[83] For Cesari, political Islam is 'multifaceted religious nationalism' (p. 2). It refers to the variety of ways in which religion permeates, underpins, and gives texture to the experience of life in the modern nation-state. It is primarily an immanent cultural phenomenon, or experience, rather than party programme.
Specifically, she holds that 'political Islam … results from grafting the concepts of religion, nationalism, and secularism in Muslim territories' (p. 5) It is not primarily a doctrine but an institutional project, 'a modern technique of governmentality with the adoption of the nation-state and the westernization/secularization of Islamic tradition' (p. 7). But, more strongly, Cesari does not see political Islam as a cultural construction of modernity, something created by efforts to form modern states in lands where in most cases European-style ethno-linguistic or ethno-nationalist identities did not drive the demand for national independence. For Cesari, 'political Islam is not simply a religious version of the national ideology, or rather, merely an ideology. More accurately, political Islam is the cultural bedrock on which both nationalist and Islamist ideologies are grounded' (p. 7). For more please see (March 2021)

This shift is fittingly illustrated in my discussion with Dr Al-Khateeb (Deputy Chairman of the Shi'a Endowment Office in Iraq), who, despite acknowledging that the Shi'a community is going through a 'golden age', he concedes '*that Shi'a political actors still lack a political direction and consensus'* (Interview Feb 2023). Bahr al-Uloom echoes this sentiment and has even attempted to present a 120-page document as a roadmap to Shi'a politics in Iraq. All Shi'a competitors initially signed and agreed to this document. Still, as Bahr al-Uloom notes, *'as soon as the national issue that brought these groups together disappears, they return to their old ways, full of distrust'* (Bahr al-Uloom interview, Jan 2023).

Despite the quietist stance adopted by Ayatollah Sistani (Diamond, 2006), senior clerics were determined to seize this opportunity to ensure the Shi'a majority's inclusion in Iraqi politics (Abdullah, 2006; El Horr, 2012; Noorbaksh, 2008). Sistani's first significant move was urging Iraqis not to resist the U.S.-led forces (MacAskil, 2003). The historical legacies of previous errors had left their mark on the hawza; an aide to the Ayatollah stated, *'The Marji'iyya have studied everything surrounding the 1920 revolution. The British ended up writing our Constitution. Now we insist that the same mistake not be made again'* (Murphy, 2005). The religious field, wherein the Marji'iyya holds considerable symbolic capital, began to intersect with the political field in post-2003 Iraq.[84] This new political engagement was a tactical adjustment to secure Shi'a representation in the evolving political system. Nakash (2003) argues that fragmentation among Shi'as would undermine their aspiration to control a prosperous state—an ambition born from their 1920 revolt against the British.

The symbolic capital held by the clerical establishment was so significant that politicians sought to borrow its legitimacy for their political campaigns (Shmidt, 2009, p. 133). While rooted in a tradition of quietism,

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[84] His influence can also be seen in further involvement, such as the cease-fire between the Sadrist and the coalition forces (Mansour, 2022) or in the interjection of Nouri al-Maliki, one of the most powerful political actors at the time, from holding office for a third term in 2014 (BBC, 2014). Ayatollah Sistani also issued a fatwa urging Iraqis to take up arms against the Islamic State (ISIS) in Iraq and Syria (al-Kadhimi, 2015). This pivotal intervention is widely credited with helping defeat ISIS in local and broader regional conflicts (Kadom, 2018:53). These shifts underscore how the intersection of religious institutions and their leaders, not merely political actors, has reshaped Iraq's political landscape. Through their actions, these religious figures have crossed from the religious field to the political, altering the power balance and redefining the rules of the game in post-2003 Iraq.

it is understandable to question why the religious establishment did not capitalise on the chance to adopt a political framework akin to IRI. The view shared by the likes of Dr Uttor, Dr Bahr al-Uloom, Dr Al-Khateeb and Dr al-Hamoudi highlights that the socio-political conditions in Iraq did not present a similar opportunity to Iran's. Utoor laminates that they (as Islamists) were not oblivious to the nature of the Iraqi unique composition as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, in contrast to the IRI. Thus, achieving consensus on a religious leader in a nation with such diverse dynamics could prove significantly challenging.

With the Marji'iyya wielding its symbolic grassroots support, and the general perception of the political parties falling out of favour with the population (report by CSIS in Iraq from August 2003 to October 2004 reflected this negative consensus towards political parties, with over half of the respondents expressing little or no confidence in them (Zirpoli, 2004, p. 23). Aware of the overall mood, Shi'a blocs were found to position their electoral posters to include images of revered Shi'a figures such as Sistani or Imam Ali (Summer-Houdesville, 2017, p. 240). Politicians unite around the marji'iyya in this distinctive relationship to garner public sentiment. Simultaneously, this alliance is met with a reluctance to intervene in political affairs consistently. This reluctance stems from the desire to preserve the Marji'iyya's reputation and an acknowledgement that the concept of Wilayat al-Faqih is a distant reality within the intricate ethnic and cultural environment.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that an underground perspective emerges, as some of my interviews suggested a deeper involvement of the Marji'iyya in politics. For instance, discussions on potential candidates for the premiership or other political matters indicate the Marji'iyya's influence. A respondent, requesting anonymity, shared an incident wherein the Marji'iyya questioned the absence of Adil Abd al-Mahdi's name among the three potential candidates for the premiership. According to the respondent, '*this incident conveyed a clear message that the Marji'iyya favoured Adil Abd al-Mahdi for the position*', leading to his assumption of the prime ministerial role.

While the Ayatollah's actions opposed U.S. intentions, the Marji'iyya advocated for the Iraqi people to draft the Constitution themselves rather than accepting a pre-packaged American version (Hamoudi, 2023). There were also concerns put forward that the Ayatollah was attempting to take advantage of the fragile security situation, particularly in the provinces of Anbar, Nineveh, and Salahuddin, where insurgents repeatedly

Figure X: The poster features an image of Ayatollah Sistani prominently displayed, accompanied by his fatwa urging people to vote during the elections. This visual representation underscores the significance of symbolic capital and the strategic utilisation of religious figures in influencing public opinion and political participation. (Source: NBC News Nov 30/2004 -Iraq confronts

targeted polling stations and threatened to kill anyone who voted (Ono, 2005). A fear once prevailed that the Ayatollah was manipulating Shi'a voters to exploit the absence of Sunnis to push the Shi'a agenda (Kadom, 2018, p. 46). However, this perspective has been strongly refuted, as illustrated by an incident recounted by Dr Bahr al-Uloom. Following the success of the vote on the Constitution, a delegation visited Sistani, anticipating a celebratory response. Instead, they were met with Sistani's dissatisfaction. Sistani voiced his concerns over the delegation's failure to involve the Sunni community in the constitution-writing process. He emphasised that their absence disregards an integral part of the Iraqi identity (Interview, Jan 2023). Despite the U.S. concerns, the elections were hailed as an example of democratic transition post-2003. This was not seen as an outright success of U.S. democratisation endeavours in the Middle East, but it offered a much-needed respite amidst escalating issues and violence.[85] It provided a glimmer of hope that things might improve (Visser, 2006). Moreover, a more sceptical stance was being adopted by the regional

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[85] For more on these issues, see Mansour, 2019.

Arab states. They perceived that if the American project succeeded, it could threaten their authority over their respective states (Raphaeli, 2005).

According to Schmidt, Sistani's role in contemporary Iraqi politics and his position on political issues could not have been determined by his background and education- like any social institution, he developed his role. He functioned as a result of an interaction between the inherited traditions (Habitus) and institutions and the challenges of contemporary developments (doxa). Sistani's role may be viewed as a highly successful result of such a historical intersection (2009, p.133).

5.5 Unveiling Coercive Dynamics

5.5.1 The Symbolic, Political, and Economic Forces within Iraq's Popular Mobilisation Units

The post-2003 period in Iraqi political history witnessed the emergence of numerous armed groups due to the weakening of the state's security apparatus. This was primarily a result of the dissolution of the Iraqi armed and security forces under Paul Bremer, the second *de facto* head of state and leader of the Coalition Provincial Authority (CPA) (Rubaii, 2019). This power vacuum allowed local and regional actors to vie for coercive capital, giving them the means to assert political and economic advantages (International Crisis Group Report, 2018).

In 2014, under Nouri al-Maliki's premiership, Iraq faced significant losses to extremist Sunni elements, later identified as the Islamic State (ISIS). This led to the dislodgment of the Iraqi state's armed forces and an aggressive push by ISIS towards capturing Iraqi cities and extending into neighbouring countries like Syria (Byman, 2016, pp.127-165).

The international response to the ISIS threat involved a US-led coalition, with the active involvement of neighbouring countries such as Iran and Turkey. Internally, Shiite calls to arm and defend the country led to the proliferation of paramilitary groups, each with its political and ideological vision for the post-conflict era.

The turning point came in June 2014 when PM Maliki set up a commission to assemble these militias under a unified paramilitary umbrella known as the Popular Mobilisation Forces/Units (PMF). The Iraqi Council of Representatives officially recognised their legal status in November 2016, showing them as an independent military formation within the Iraqi armed forces linked to the Commander-in-Chief (The Crisis Report, 2018, p.4).

Alongside the political recognition, the PMF received religious endorsement through a fatwa (religious decree) issued by Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf. The fatwa called upon able volunteers (mutatawieen) to exercise their 'duty to fight' (jihad al-kifah) by taking up arms to defend the holy shrines of the Shiites against the extremist ideologies of ISIS (BBC, 2014).

A prevalent misperception tends to oversimplify the PMF by categorising them uniformly under a single cohesive banner, a perception that significantly diverges from the actual complexity of the situation. The paramilitary framework, encompassing a broad spectrum of forces, is divided along religious and ethnic lines, encompassing distinct groups such as Sunnis, Shiites, Christians, and Yazidis, and further fragmented into Arab, Yazidi, Turkmen, Kakai factions, among others (Alami, 2018, p.16). The diverse identities within these groups give rise to varying ideological perspectives, political affiliations, and plenty of room for power struggle.

Comprising primarily Shiite fighters, later including Arab Sunni and minority groups, the PMF is an umbrella organisation with around 50,000 to 140,000 fighters (International Crisis Group (Report, 2018,p.1). Comprising of various factions, the PMF includes 66 Shiite, 43 Sunni, 6 Christian, 4 Yazidi, 2 Turkmen, 2 Shabak, and 1 Kakai factions. Among the Shiite PMF, approximately 44 factions align with Iran, often termed 'walaii' (allied with Wilayat Fakih, the guardianship of the jurist in Iran), while seven are under the Shiite Marjaiya, represented by Ayatollah Sistani (Al-Marashi, 2021). Alami (2018, p.12) states, "The Hashd following the Sistani Marjaiya is affiliated directly to the Ministry of Defence and has over

20,000 fighters." Mansour and Jabar (2017) estimate that smaller religious factions, such as the Arab Sunni fighters, reaching a maximum of 15,000, with Sunni brigades generally consisting of 300 to 1,000 fighters.[86]

Despite being part of the state's security apparatus by law, the PMF supports a semi-autonomous framework, operating independently from the official state security apparatus, thus creating a parallel armed group that challenges the state's monopoly over legitimate violence (EPIC, 2017).

Assessments from various international entities shed light on the dynamics surrounding the Hashd and its relationship with the Iraqi state. For instance, the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) (2019) underscores Iran's influence, stating that Iran, through militias affiliated with the Hashd, has impeded the Iraqi state from keeping a monopoly on the use of force. The Brussels-based International Crisis Group (ICG), drawing on extensive on-the-ground interviews with Hashd commanders, emphasises the enduring weakness of the Iraqi state, allowing the Hashd to challenge Baghdad's monopoly over the use of force. It notes that the prime minister's ambivalent approach contributes to the Hashd's resistance to relinquishing their uniforms, flags, and weapons (2018, p.1).

Foreign Policy, a prominent Washington DC-based publication, singles out Kataib Hezbollah, among several Iran-linked armed groups, as a significant challenge to Iraq's statehood aspirations, particularly about the monopoly over the use of force within its territory (Kittleson, 2020).

In an article, Al-Marashi (2021) delves into the internal dynamics of the Hashd, portraying it as a coalition of independent paramilitary groups that compete for resources, power, and popular support. This competition extends to both Iranian and Iraqi states and the quest for votes and political influence.

Calculli (2016) introduces the concept of the "securitisation of identities," highlighting how the Hashd, aligned with Iran and other factions, employ a transnational social process to mobilise Shi'a constituencies in Iraq. This mobilisation occurs despite potential policy differences that may challenge sectarian unity.

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[86] It is noteworthy to highlight that the breakdown of forces among the various Hashd factions is exceedingly difficult to decide in the absence of PMF official statistics.

Haddad's analysis (2018) delves into the evolution of the Hashd, transforming from a mobilisation against ISIS to a state institution. The inclusive nature of the Hashd is emphasised, projecting an image of diversity within a Shi'a-centric state-building framework. Haddad notes that non-Shi'a groups are included but must accept the Shi'a centrality in political and military affairs as key to participation.

These assessments collectively paint a nuanced picture of the Hashd, illustrating its complex relationship with Iran, its impact on Iraq's statehood aspirations, and its efforts to present itself as a diverse and inclusive force within the post-ISIS Iraqi landscape.

The *ad hoc* process that brought about the establishment of the Hashd has led to the creation of internal divisions, dispelling the notion that it is a cohesive Shiite movement or a single Iranian proxy. Some units within the Hashd have expressed a mutually beneficial relationship with Shi'a Iraqi nationalism, emphasising a connection that resists complete Iranian control over this collective body.

According to Al-Marashi, the Hashd experiences internal political rivalry and occasional armed conflicts within the various militias and the broader Iraqi Shi'a population. These tensions constitute the initial level of contention for Hashd's power, stemming from the umbrella nature of the organisation, resulting in conflicts with other militias (2021).

Since the expulsion of ISIS from Mosul in late 2017, the legitimacy of the Hashd as an institution has faced challenges, especially with the October 2019 protests. While the Hashd initially stood for a Shi'a mobilisation, the sustained protest movement appeared as an alternative grassroots Shi'a mobilisation, challenging the Hashd's core narrative. Subsequently, some Hashd factions' alliance with Iran became a liability to their nationalist credentials among Iraq's Arab Shi'a, leading to discontent within the Iraqi Shi'a clerical establishment. The 2021 elections highlighted public dissatisfaction with the Hashd and its Iranian links, resulting in a significant electoral defeat compared to their performance in 2018. Ultimately, the Hashd coalition comprises a variety of Shi'a actors seeking to legitimise and negotiate power among Iraqi Shi'a religious networks, rival Shi'a parliamentary parties, and the broader populace (Al-Marashi, 2021).

The PMF demonstrates decentralisation and convergence of conflicting ideologies, as noted by Al-Tamimi (2017). This classification broadly categorises them into three groups. The first two can be delineated by their influence from distinct Shiite 'sources of emulation' (Marja al-taqleed), while the third is Hezbi (with allegiance to parties) (International Crisis Group, 2018). The first group identifies as walai, signifying followers of the Iranian Wilayat Fakih, also known as Muqawim (resistant). The second Marjaiya PMF comprises groups financially supported by the endowments of Shi'a shrines, demonstrating loyalty to Ayatollah Sistani. Lastly, the Hezbi category includes groups such as Ammar al-Hakeem's National Wisdom Movement, which originated in 2017 from ISCI (Kadhim, 2017), and Saraya al-Salam (Alami, 2018, p.16).

Other possible classifications are used to distinguish these groups. Alami, 2018 for instance, uses three separate categories but divides them across diverging and often opposing views on various topics, such as the integrations of the PMF into the security apparatus, the participation of PMF leaders in the electoral process, and the transnational and ideological role of the PMF (p.18).

The diverse categorisation of the PMF's factions, encompassing their ideological foundations and affiliations, provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities within this paramilitary umbrella. Transitioning from this intricate categorisation, I will delve into the PMF's profound political implications, examining its role in regional and international controversies. Furthermore, the economic dimension unravels as I explore the financial dynamics of the PMF, shedding light on the limited oversight it receives from Iraqi authorities and the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). This multi-dimensional analysis is crucial for our exploration, aligning with Bourdieu's theory of capitals and fields to comprehend the intricate interplay of symbolic, political, and economic power within the PMF.

(1) Affiliation with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei:

This group closely aligns with Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, wielding considerable influence. The PMF pledges spiritual allegiance to Wilyat al-Faqih and Iranian Supreme Leader Ali

Khamenei, including various paramilitary organisations with historical ties and close coordination on foreign policy and security matters with Tehran. Notable, there are seven entities within this pro-Iran group. Five of these entities were born out of the split from the Mahdi Army (loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr). The connection extends to Iran's Quds Force of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Originating in Iraq's post-2003 security vacuum, the oldest group, the Badir Corps, emerged in 1982 as SCIRI's armed wing, while Kataeb Jund al-Imam was formed during the 1991 uprising against Saddam's regime in the south.

Al-Sadr's Mahdi Army emerged in 2003 to confront American forces but maintained its independence from Iran (Sayej, 2018, p. 112). Since the Islamic Republic could not integrate the Sadrist militia, it fostered splinter groups that relied on Iranian support (Mansour & Jabar, 2017, p. 8). Iran covertly backed these breakaway factions, termed 'Special Groups,' operating as diffuse, compartmentalised networks attacking U.S. forces in Iraq (IISS 2019).

Qais al-Khaz'ali led the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH) (League of the Righteous), formed in 2006, shifting from the Sadrist focus on anti-American Iraqi nationalism to align with the Iranian Shi'a 'resistance' movements. The Hizballah Brigades, formed in 2007 with Iranian support, was led by Abu Mahdi Muhandis, an Iraqi operative for the Quds Force (ICG 2018, p. 4). 'The Movement of the God-Fearing' (harakat al-nujaba) split from The League of the Righteous in 2013, led by Akram al-Ka'abi, remaining loyal to Iran but differing with Khaz'ali. Kata'ib Sayyid al-Shuhada split from the Hizballah Brigades in 2013. Another group, The Imam Ali Brigades (kata'ib imam 'Ali), brought the count to five Sadrist splinter groups after 2003, all claiming the mantle of the assassinated cleric Mohammad Sadiq al-Sadr. These factions legitimised their existence as Sadr abandoned violence after defeat by the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) and the U.S. in 2008, ordering the Mahdi Army's dismantlement and rebranding as a civil society organisation, 'the Peace Brigades' (sarayat al-salam) (Al-Marashi, 2013).

These five Sadrist splinter militias, including the Badr Organisation (formed in 1982 as the armed wing of the Supreme Council For the Islamic Revolution (SCIRI) and Kataeb Jund al-Imam the (Soldier of the

Imam Brigade 1991) of the marsh rebellion, formed a group of seven militias pledging spiritual allegiance to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei and the Islamic Republic's governance model, the 'rule of the theological jurist' (wilayat al-faqih). After the Hashd came into being, this faction was unofficially referred to as al-hashd al-wala'i, wala' being the root of the Arabic word wilayat, signifying notions of 'rulership' and 'loyalty,' an ad hoc reference to the seven militias' loyalty to Khamenei.

(2) Under the Influence of Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani in Najaf:

The second Shiite PMF faction includes several paramilitary groups that swear allegiance to Ayatollah Sistani. They were formed in the wake of Sistani's fatwa to defend Shiite holy sites.

Reflecting Ayatollah Ali Sistani's emphasis on protecting Shiite shrines, this group is based in Najaf.

Distinguished by names often referencing Imams or their burial places in Iraq.

Major groups in this category include The Imam Ali Fighting Division (firqat al-Imam Ali al-Qitaliya), Sarayat al-Ataba al-Abbasiya, Sarayat al-Ataba al-Huseiniya, Sarayat al-Ataba al-Alawiya, and Liwaa Ali-al-Akbar (Alami, 2018, pp.12-16).

(3) Led by Populist Cleric Muqtada al-Sadr:

The third PMF is known as Hashd Hezbi and includes factions falling under Ammar al-Hakeem, a former member of ISCI, or under al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam (this is according to Alami, 2018, p.18). Although not a Grand Ayatollah, Muqtada al-Sadr, with a significant urban poor support network inherited from his father, plays a pivotal role.

The principal group aligned with Muqtada al-Sadr is Saraya al-Salam (Peace Brigade), a revival of the disbanded Mahdi Army (JAM). The group comprises two Hashd Brigades, 313 and 314, notably active around shrines in Samarra (Crisis Group, 2018, p.4).

5.5.2 Political Prowess: The Expansion of the PMF

The rise of the PMF has been at the root of a regional and international controversy, with many experts labelling it an Iranian proxy that is allowing Tehran to consolidate its hold in Iraq. It is no secret that Iran's Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), has supervised military operations led by pro-Iran factions in Iraq, which often prioritised Iranian interests over Iraq's national interests (Alami, 2018, p.15).

However, this narrative is grossly reductive, as it does not consider the diversity of PMF forces, which embody various ethnic and sectarian agendas, and, more importantly, the wide ideological divisions existing within the dominant Shiite force.

The Hashd leadership exhibits a dual approach towards the state, aiming for recognition as a state-affiliated entity while maintaining an autonomous chain of command. Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, in February 2016, issued Office Order 91 (Roggio & Toumaj, 2016), which ruled that the PMF was a permanent and separate military formation that was a part of the Iraqi armed forces and under the control of the armed forces general commander. Their legal status, granted by the Iraqi Council of Representatives in November 2016, designates them as "an independent military formation as part of the Iraqi armed forces and linked to the command-in-chief" (Smith & Singer-Emery, 2019)

Although the law places them under the National Security Council (NSC), turning them into a state institution, they manage to preserve their autonomy. Their foray into politics safeguards and expands this autonomous space, enhances their influence, and acts as a precaution against potential attempts to bring them under state control.

The legal framework also ruled that PMF members could not engage in any political activities, which was an attempt by al-Abadi to sever the link between the PMF and their political parent organisation and block the participation of PMF leaders in the 2018 elections. Al-Abadi's attempt to abort the politicisation of the

PMF was nonetheless circumvented with the formation of the Fateh coalition, which included prominent members of the PMF who had resigned from the organisation prior to the elections.

Since their initial successes against ISIS in 2016, Hashd leaders have expressed their intention to participate in parliamentary and provincial elections. They established the Fatah Alliance to prepare for the May 12, 2018, parliamentary vote. Karim al-Nouri, a representative of the Hashd, justified their political ambitions by emphasising that "after the victory over ISIS, the Hashd's role will be to rebuild Iraq in all theatres" (Crisis Group interview with Karim al-Nouri, Baghdad, February 2018).

The involvement of paramilitary groups in the 2018 elections follows a precedent set by Badr and Asaeb Ahl al-Haq in the 2014 Council of Representatives elections. Both groups fielded candidates under new political wings: the Badr Corps transformed into the Badr Organisation, and Asaeb Ahl al-Haq adopted the name Sadiqoun. Similarly, in 2018, Ansar Allah presented the Honesty and Loyalty Movement, the Imam Ali Brigades introduced the Islamic Movement, Sayed al-Shuhada created the Victorious Bloc (Muntasiroun), and the Khorasani Brigades used the Vanguard (Tali'aa) as their electoral representatives. Within The Fatah Alliance, these factions successfully obtained 47 seats, positioning themselves as the second-largest bloc after the Sairoon bloc led by the Sadrist trend.

As the country's security focus diminished, these paramilitary groups diversified into political and economic activities. Multiple leaders from the PMF were actively involved, including Qais al-Khazali, who heads Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH); Hussein al-Kaabi, a prominent figure in Kata'ib Hezbollah; Hadi al-Amiri, the leader of the influential Badr Organisation; and Ahmad Assadi, the official spokesperson for the PMF (Alami, 2018, p.7). However, this does not imply an abandonment of their jihad responsibilities, as articulated during an interview at the Rafidan Conference in Baghdad. When questioned about the apparent quietness of AAH in their efforts to expel the Americans, Kais Al-Khazali responded,

> "*We perceive resistance as an ideology deeply rooted in our culture. It is ingrained in our values to defend the oppressed and confront oppressors; this is inherent in my nature.*"

Regarding the withdrawal of American forces, he emphasised, "We will never abandon this demand; praise be to Allah, our blood is still young, and our determination remains unwavering. Currently, our approach is more tactical, influenced by our assessment of the political landscape, which has kept us on standby." (Al-Rafidain Conference, 25-02-2024)

Khazali has also emphasised in previous interviews his intention to differentiate his current role from his involvement in armed resistance against the Americans and extremist groups such as ISIS. In one instance, he articulated,

"I aim to make a clear distinction between the representation of the political aspects of the PMF, which is deemed illegal and rejected by the Marji'iyya . We believe this approach is necessary to prevent potential mistakes. If we participate in the political process as representatives of the PMF, any errors would be attributed to the entire entity, potentially tarnishing its sanctity. It is imperative that we safeguard the integrity of this institution."
(Interview with Kais Al-Khazali, Iraqiya TV 2018)

He further emphasises the significance of his symbolic capital, stating,

"I've made it clear that we must distinguish between our personal history and the assertion of representing the PMF politically. While this differentiation may be challenging, individuals have the right to take pride in their personal backgrounds. For instance, Fateh's acknowledgement of their past and historical accomplishments should not blur the lines between political representation and armed opposition. Certain entities deliberately attribute victories, such as those under the Nasir bloc (led by Abadi), to bolster their political agendas. It is evident that they are referring to the triumphs of the PMF."

However, despite these distinctions offered by the likes of Khazali, the PMF participation in politics and government remains controversial in Iraq (and region), where leaders are viewed as proxies of Iran (Alami, 2018) pro-Sistani and pro-Sadrist view Iran's influence in post-2003 Iraq as an impediment to strengthening

the state (crisis report, 2018, p5 - it is also worth noting that all foreign intervention are considered an impediment to the Iraqi state if the state does not ask for their help)

Pro-Sadr and pro-Sistani oppose any political role for paramilitary groups. In contrast, some pro-Khamenei commanders switched to politics and stood in the May elections in 2018 and 2021 –widening their political scope.

Muqtada al-Sadr warned that allowing Hashd participation in elections would be detrimental to the political system. (Interview with Muqtada Al-Sadr, Al-Sharqiyah TV, Feb 24, 2020)

Noting Hashd's strength and political ambitions, Abadi asks, "How can a military outfit have a political opinion?" He proceeded to answer the question: "This does not happen in any part of the world. It is prohibited" (Al-Rashid TV, Interview with Haider Al-Abadi, Feb 15, 2021). This is despite 'pledging not to permit Hashd leaders to stand in the May 2018 elections. He was unable to impose his will, highlighting his, and indeed the state's, enduring weakness' *vis-à-vis* the Hashd.

5.5.3 Economic Encroachment

The PMF in Iraq receives limited oversight from the Iraqi state and the PMO regarding their financial resources. In the 2018 Iraqi budget, approximately 1,682,989,544 thousand dinars (equivalent to about USD 1.42 billion) were allocated to the PMF. Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis generally determine the allocation of funds, and according to Mansour and Jabar (2017), the PMO usually provides a lump sum to al-Muhandis, who decides on its distribution. Sources from the al-Sadr movement and the pro-Sistani movement noted that pro-Iranian groups often receive preferential treatment in resource allocation. Additionally, there are disparities in access to weapons among PMF divisions, with pro-Iranian paramilitary groups typically having better equipment. Most of the weapons in the PMF's possession were purchased from Iran using Iraqi government funds. The PMF also took control of an ISIS arsenal valued at over $3 billion (Alami, 2018).

The Hashd have attained a profile in the economic sphere, competing with the state to provide reconstruction and services to citizens, in effect, they are setting up an number of institutions parallel to the state. Their allocated federal budget in 2017 was 1.63 billion us dollars (Ibid).

The Hashd Commission (Hayat al-Hashed al-Shaabi) and its de facto administrator Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis (assassinated with the Quds Corp leader General Qasim Sulaimani on 3 January 2020 by U.S. drones near Baghdad airport) control the finances of the organisation which decides which fighters to pay from its annual budget. It tends to favour groups closer to Iran; although Muhandis was an Iraqi, he was a Quds Force Officer (Crisis Report, 2018).

The impact of this can be seen through Bourdieu's resource capital, where it becomes clear how such capital can impact the other groups around them. For Instance, the Sistani's call on volunteers to join the state security agencies, and not the paramilitaries groups tied to Iran, failed to heed- as the financial backing from Iran and the allocated resources for the Hashd proved to be tempting for the young fighters. The relationship between the Najaf marji'iyya and the Hashed leadership suffered as a result, were the representatives of the marji'iyya felt that the Hashed leadership hijacked Ayatollah Sistani's call for jehad to advance their political and economic goals (Crisis Report, 2018, p.4).

Sadr and his followers are noted for strongly opposing the pro-Khamenei paramilitary leaders and groups, some of whom they refer to as 'impudent militias' (*milishiyyat waqiha*). Sadrist officials have noted inconsistencies in salary disbursements, highlighting that they are not receiving their fair share from the Hashd commission. (Mansour & Jabar, 2017).[87]

5.6 Conclusion

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[87] However, a senior commander justified the salary discrepancy by claiming that the Sadrist have only 5,200 Hashd fighters while keeping another 20,000 fighters outside the umbrella organisation of the Hashd. In response, the Sadrist stated that they could not send more fighters to the Hashd because of the financial discrepancies and the commission's refusal to pay all of them

The current chapter aims to provide an overview of the development of Shi'a doctrinal beliefs and their relation to political authority and participation. As noted at the outset of this chapter, as my research developed, the significance of the hawza repeatedly began to emerge in discussions. Thus, a turn to the hawza and the historical socio-political development of the Shi'a block was necessary, given its central influence on the political viewpoints in the community.

However, this turn required a much wider discussion of the various factions (internal and external to Iraq) and situating their relationship. This was done for two reasons. The first was to provide the reader with a much-needed discussion of the complex intergroup relations within the Shi'a context of Iraq. Moreover, setting these groups up at this stage will benefit the next chapter when the findings are connected with the factions and divisions presented in this chapter.

As I tried to show in this chapter, situating the normative and practical context of the hawza, its role and impact on post-2003 Iraq, the various factions and divisions it has given rise to, and the controversy surrounding the adopted Mūhasasa system all help form the background from which the study's participants situate their thoughts and viewpoints. This was needed prior to presenting the data and discussion.

CHAPTER VI

UNRAVELLING SHI'A POWER DYNAMICS

6.1 Introduction

The current study explores the complex power dynamics within the Shi'a political sphere, particularly in post-2003 Iraq. It aims to provide valuable insights into power conflict, focusing on the pivotal role played by elite discourse in intra-Shi'a power struggles. It also investigates the substantial impact of the elite members of the Shi'a community on the political discourse and field dynamics. Furthermore, this study offers a comprehensive understanding of how various forms of capital, including cultural and symbolic, influence these processes significantly.

In Shi'a politics, the emergence of cultural, symbolic capital holds immense significance. This is because they function as the fundamental basis on which power dynamics are established, and they form the foundation for strategies employed by different social groups and classes within the Shi'a community. Thus, this chapter presents the key findings related to the various types of capital utilised by Shi'a factions. Moreover, the conflict strategies proposed by different political actors are also discussed in the chapter.

6.2 Theme 1: Cultural Capital of Shi'a House

It is crucial to understand the roles of cultural and symbolic capital to grasp the dynamics of power, influence, and identity across different sociopolitical contexts. This study applies Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, which is foundational in analysing social power dynamics. Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital includes the knowledge, skills, and education that individuals or organisations acquire within specific social contexts. This form of capital is primarily obtained through initial learning experiences and is subtly shaped by one's environment (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu also emphasises that knowledge encompasses how individuals perceive and comprehend the world, profoundly influenced by their cultural contexts. This process involves more than just acquiring information; it includes internalising cultural norms and practices that affect how individuals think, act, and interact within their societal settings (Bourdieu, 2000).

Building on the definition provided by Webb, Schirato, and Danaher, cultural capital is understood as the value derived from culturally sanctioned tastes, consumption habits, attributes, skills, and accolades. In educational settings, this can manifest as academic degrees, which serve as a form of cultural capital. Applying this concept to the Iraqi context, cultural capital could encompass factors like religious status, which hold significant social currency and influence within the community. This form of capital reflects an individual's religious knowledge and observance and their standing and respect within the religious community, thus playing a crucial role in social and political dynamics (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002, p. x).

In Shi'a politics, cultural capital assumes a unique and critical role in shaping the strategies and trajectories of individuals and groups. Within the Shi'a community, this capital extends beyond mere educational attainment to include a broader array of actors, such as political leaders and religious figures. These individuals leverage their cultural capital to interpret religious texts and establish credibility as protectors of the Shi'a community.

Expanding on this, those possessing such cultural capital are equipped to navigate effectively within the religious field. As discussed in Chapter 5, the religious field from a Shi'a perspective is increasingly merging with the political sphere. This convergence significantly impacts the political landscape, as religious figures use their earned respect and authority to strategically position themselves within this domain. This dynamic highlights how religious leaders utilise their established influence to shape political outcomes, illustrating the intricate interplay between cultural capital, religious authority, and political power in Iraq.

This chapter explores the trend among political entrepreneurs leveraging religious authority to consolidate their political power. It highlights a significant role reversal where politicians now rely heavily on religious texts and authority to fortify their positions, indicating a shift in power dynamics where religious legitimacy becomes essential in the political arena.

By aligning themselves with religious doctrines and leaders, these political figures not only enhance their credibility but also tap into the deep-seated religious sentiments of the populace. This alignment allows them to craft narratives that resonate with their constituents' cultural and spiritual expectations, thereby securing a stable and authoritative political foothold. This chapter delves into the interplay between religious influence and political manoeuvring, revealing how the sacred is skilfully woven into the secular to advance personal and party agendas.

Building on Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, this section further examines how political elites in Iraq use their cultural capital to navigate and manipulate the political field to their advantage, influenced by their habitus. Historically exiled by the previous regime, these politicians have developed a blend of armed resistance and religious narrative for mobilisation. Often reliant on the utility of collective memory of Shi'a victimhood to resonate with and galvanise their power base.

These manoeuvres exemplify the strategic use of cultural capital, particularly by employing Shi'a religious texts and doctrines to legitimise political authority and influence public opinion. By syncing their political agendas with the deeply embedded religious and historical narratives of the Shi'a community, these leaders not only consolidate and expand their influence but also transform personal and collective histories into powerful political assets. This ability underscores a profound link between cultural capital and political strategy, highlighting the complexity of political navigation in Iraq.

Bourdieu's concept of habitus suggests that individuals naturally perceive social inequalities through their upbringing and life experiences, initially developed from studies in less complex societies. In such settings, habitus reflects relatively homogeneous dispositions due to shared cultural and educational experiences.

However, the applicability of this concept to modern 'differentiated' societies has been questioned, as these societies feature diverse experiences and social contexts, making the homogeneity of habitus somewhat illusory (Arnholtz & Hammerslev 2013).

For Bourdieu, the state plays a critical role in modern societies due to its capacity to impose similar mental categories and homogeneous schemes of perception across a population, thereby establishing its power and influence. This often manifests through state mechanisms like the education system, which helps to normalise and reinforce the state's conceptualisation of society.

However, the situation in Iraq presents a stark contrast. Here, the state is deeply contested among various ethno-sectarian groups, and the habitus has evolved not through systematic state-led initiatives but through the interactions of political elites within a rentier state framework that rewards loyalty. This system, deeply rooted in the dynamics of a rentier state, rewards loyalty with access to public sector resources, perpetuating a cycle of dependency that reinforces the existing power hierarchies. In Iraq, the political landscape is marked by volatility and violence, and efforts to establish a new habitus through education or other state systems are largely absent.

The Iraqi state does not reflect Bourdieu's model of a state that moulds its citizens' dispositions through coherent, centralised policies. Instead, habitus in Iraq is shaped by the historical legacies of Shi'a opposition groups seeking power pre-2003 and the ongoing, complex conflicts among various actors post-2003. These dynamics have fostered a new habitus characterised not by a vision of state unity but by the ongoing conflicts between these actors.

The emerging themes from the data are further divided into two distinct subthemes, as indicated by the data findings: "Knowledge and Expertise" and "Shared Vision and Trust." These subthemes are explored in detail below.

6.2.1 Knowledge and Expertise
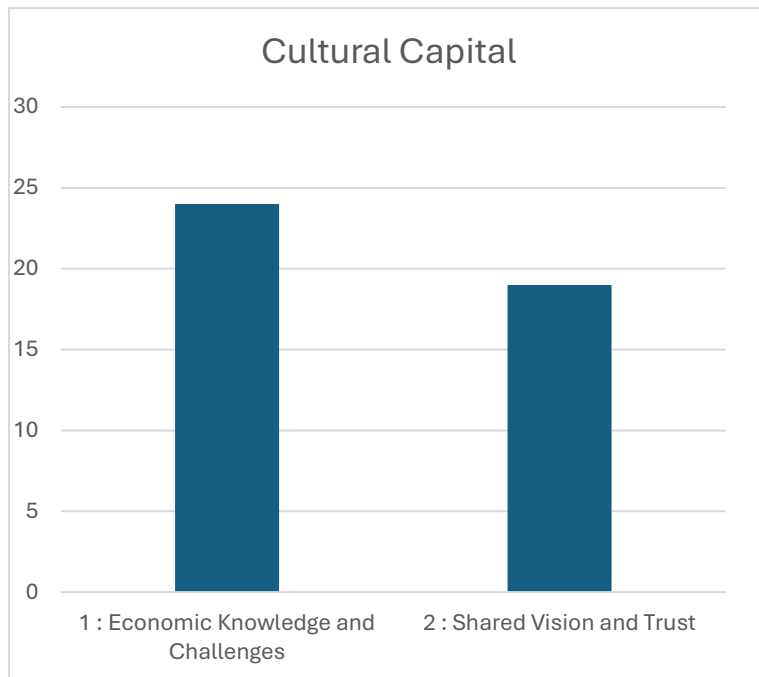
By using NVivo, I was able to produce occurring themes from the interviews I conducted. From the theme "cultural capital" I was able to identify two broad sub-themes: "economic knowledge and challenges" and "shared vision and trust." The graph shows these sub-themes by the number of references identified in each category. The first theme, "Economic Knowledge and Challenges,"

highlights the critical role of knowledge and comprehension of economic concepts in cultural capital. It emphasises the importance of understanding economic principles and awareness of the difficulties that affect socioeconomic dynamics. The second sub-theme, "Shared Vision and Trust," emphasises the necessity of establishing unity, collaboration, and mutual reliance within communities or groups. A higher score in this category reflects a need for a strong trust foundation and a shared understanding of the collective goals and aspirations. Both of these sub-themes are discussed in detail below.

This theme explores how political actors employ cultural capital within their discourse to establish their authority and gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. The concept of cultural capital incorporates numerous elements, such as skills, knowledge, and qualifications, which individuals can use to their advantage in a variety of contexts. Economic knowledge emerged as a particularly notable aspect of cultural capital in this study.

During the interviews, participants frequently highlighted the lack of knowledge and skills among groups associated with the political opposition to Saddam Hussein's autocratic regime. This scrutiny focused on their approach to governance and the observed deficiency in expertise due to their oppositional mindset.

This sentiment is echoed in Dr Haboubi's response to Shi'a rule in post-2003 Iraq as he reflects on the limitations of being distant from authority. He notes, "*When individuals or groups are removed from positions of power, they often fail to fully understand the complexities of governance, leading to imperfect decisions and perspectives.*"

Dr Haboubi also mentions: "*The longstanding belief that political Islam, once in power, would embody principles akin to those of Imam Ali, serving as exemplars of perfection.*" However, he acknowledges "*the reality that attaining authority involves navigating a framework of rules and balances, and many had faltered upon ascending to power.*" This critique suggests that the idealised vision of oppositional groups may not align with the practical challenges of governance.

Moreover, this problem, as highlighted by Dr Haboubi, extends to the issue of politicians failing to transition from their default settings of being in opposition to the new reality of being those in power. For example, Dr Mahmoud Al-Mashadani (2023) illustrates the prevailing oppositional mindset, stating,

> "*We lacked experience. When we assumed authority as the opposition, we approached it like demolition contractors - our entire lives were spent in opposition…our mindset was oppositional, seeking revenge rather than state-building. Despite the displacement of our scientists, the loss of our pilots, and the collapse of our security forces, we rejoiced in gaining authority. The Israelis and Americans took the state from us and handed us authority. It's akin to taking a valuable possession from a child and replacing it with a sweet - naturally, the child would be pleased. We were in a similar situation.*"

During my interview with the former Minister for Higher Education and a prominent figure within Da'wa, Mr Ali Al-Adeeb, he emphasised the 'destructive nature' of opposition groups, noting that *"opposition*

politicians often possess a culture of dismantling rather than building a state… this way of thinking, which the opposition had, cannot lead a state.." Moreover, when questioned about the objectives of the opposition and their alliances, even with non-Islamist groups, he responded:

> *"This alliance was formed to overthrow the regime, and that's the point we focused on. We didn't have any coordination on other issues. Yes, it was solely to support the Iraqi people in their uprising against Saddam's regime. We wanted to bring it down."*

My interview with Dr Sabah Al-Tamimi (Member of Parliament) highlighted a similar idea. She explains that:

> *"I always see Shi'a ideology as well-grounded. But that's not applicable to Shi'a leadership post-2003. It might have been effective before 2003 for changing something when Islamists felt victimised before 2003. But after 2003, the leadership has been mismanaged. There's no organisation, no direction, no oversight. The focus shifted to gaining money, enhancing leadership, promoting sectarianism, unfortunately."*

In my interview with Dr Mahmoud al-Askari, a lecturer at Baghdad University also noted that when it comes to "*discussing Shi'a politics, specifically after 2003, the general impression about those who have a say in Shi'a politics is that they still act in the same oppositional manner. It's as if they haven't truly become the leaders of the country."* Dr Al-Askari further elaborates, "*Until now, they haven't presented themselves as true statesmen. They have portrayed themselves as party figures, working for narrow sectarian interests instead of working for the greater good of the country."*

The described 'destructive and revengeful' approach, as outlined by figures such as Dr Mashadani and Al-Adeeb, prompted significant reflection from key actors like Ammar Al-Hakeem regarding his association with the inherited leadership of his uncle and father's leadership of SCIRI.

During our interview, Al-Hakeem emphasised the disparity and primary challenge facing the new era in Iraqi politics. As a young man himself, he invoked a *"...famous saying: Revolutions devour their own*

children," highlighting the differing needs between the revolutionary stage and the subsequent state-building phase. He went on to explain that:

> "*When the dictator falls, new requirements arise among the people. At one point, the goal was simply to liberate themselves from the dictator. After that, the goal becomes to build a stable society with services, reconstruction, construction, prosperity, and well-being for the people. In the new circumstance, they need someone who can provide them with comfort and prosperity.*"

In the above example, Al-Hakeem objectifies that the era of the revolutionaries has ended, and a new era of statesmen is required, those with the skills to build and pose the skills required for this new period. He further implies that some political forces find it challenging to shed their revolutionary identities and adapt to state-building demands. Al-Hakeem elaborates by saying that:

> "*During the long course of history, many revolutionaries are engrossed in the revolution and in challenging the tyrannical regime, leaving them with no chance to study and develop themselves in civil matters. They might be skilled rebels, but not necessarily adept at state-building or governing…This rebel fulfilled their previous aspirations, and today [people] seek someone who can fulfil their new aspirations, someone with the vision, experience, and capacity to build the state. As a result, those who lack these capabilities portray to the people that challenges persist. This is the crux of the problem …*"

With a similar opinion, Dr Sharistani also views administrative tasks as:

> "*A form of knowledge. For most of our colleagues in the opposition, the vast majority of them didn't have the chance to gain this knowledge. Most of them were distant from this issue. Before Ayatollah Khomeini, no one knew that they could take power. So, it's partially true. Most of those who came later, except for a few individuals, lacked administrative skills.*"

Dr Al-Timimi identifies the quota system as responsible for bringing in unqualified individuals lacking experience and expertise and placing them in government offices, often in high-ranking positions; she asserts that:

> *"Quotas are a major reason why these individuals came to power. I don't know them personally or their backgrounds. The majority of them... not all, but the majority resulted in this chaos. It's wasting money because it's not their field. If I can't knead and bake. What should I do then? Don't we need yeast? Don't we need proper mixing? Otherwise, the bread won't rise, and consequently, the bread will look like burnt stones. While the country needs something else. We've come out of wars and opened up to democracy. What do we need? We need successful management and constructive administration. We need to change the approach that has been forced upon us."*

Such views extracted from the interviews showcase the need for a new type of leader to correct the vacuum that has been created by an opposition group that lacked the knowledge and expertise necessary for the new challenge of nation and state building.

The themes emerging from the interviews bring forward various key points. The first is that the generation that opposed the regime served its purpose for a particular period, during which they utilised their skills in warfare to challenge a tyrannical regime. However, this new era in Iraqi history requires new figures to lead who possess the knowledge, skills, and expertise that the opposition leadership lacks.

As these revolutionaries transitioned from their revolutionary roles to positions of authority, they encountered fresh challenges. However, they used old methods by "*…continu[ing] to portray to the people that the challenges are still present. …*[they] *continue to live in the revolutionary state and [use] its slogans even after the dictatorship has fallen."* (Al-Hakeem, 2023).

In this case, the example of the Tishreen movement is frequently branded as Ba'athist or attributed to the influence of foreign Western powers attempting to undermine Shi'a authority. This branding reflects the

elites' reluctance to accept technocratic credentials at the cost of party loyalists simply to retain and gain more leverage within the contested fields.

In a tweet showcasing these views, Dr Haider Al-Barazanshi writes.

"The *October demonstrations were not an advanced civil move that sought to improve the situation and develop as they claim…they were exploited in a hostile way, which led to the chaos and destruction of government institutions and directing them towards achieving external agendas to undermine stability in Iraq and divert the course, and this fact can never be forgotten and denied. Today, the same ugly faces that work according to these agendas, and most of them outsiders to Iraq, want to return again in a soft way, the evil of the revolution"* (Twitter, 02-10-2023)

In my interview with Dr Mahmoud Al-Askari, such views are considered as still persisting when he confirms that:

"Yes, unfortunately, even today, the Shi'a majority seems to be living in a Saddam-era mentality. Secondary positions still dominate, and the Shi'a-populated regions still lack services. They lack attention, and this concern is about preserving their positions, their parties, and their personal seats. They seem to think in terms of gaining elections and enhancing their party's status in the Iraqi political landscape. Hence, the realisation of this maturity is lacking." (2023)

Al-Hakeem explains that the evolving aspirations of the population, particularly the younger generation, present a formidable hurdle. This younger demographic seeks leaders possessing the vision, experience, and capability to build a modern state capable of addressing contemporary challenges. This point is highlighted by Al-Hakeem (2023) when he acknowledges that:

"The state's role is not the same as the role of revolution. Each has its circumstances, commitments, and personnel. Some revolutionaries might become statesmen, while others

might not. Hence the saying, "Revolutions devour their own," meaning that after the success of the revolution, the revolutionary might not be suited to the task of state-building… They are skilled rebels but not necessarily skilled in state building or understanding how states are managed… Often, the rebel is not qualified to manage the state because he is not armed with the knowledge and understanding required for the new task and has not previously exercised this task."

The absence of knowledge and expertise in statecraft results in mismanagement of the state, stemming from the revolutionaries' constrained foresight driven by personal experiences and apprehensions towards others. Consequently, party leadership tended to prioritise loyalists over technocrats capable of effectively serving in public office. As viewed by Dr Al-Askari, who believes that [Shi'a leadership] "*thinking is often confined to very limited boundaries, with no significant strategic vision that extends beyond narrow gains, like electoral gains or enhancing their party's position in the Iraqi political arena.*"

However, many of these loyalists lack the necessary administrative proficiency, coupled with the mūhasasa logic, resulting in inefficiency and corruption within public institutions. For example, Dr Mahmoud Al-Askari stated:

"The U.S. introduced democracy quite abruptly, and the Iraqi society wasn't prepared for it. The American bureaucratic democracy was attempted here, but Iraq wasn't ready for it." (2023)

Political actors who participated in mūhasasa seemed to place party loyalty above the credentials and qualifications of government employees. Moreover, many individuals were appointed based on their political affiliation as opposed to their ability to govern effectively. Dr Al-Tamimi explains that:

"Quotas brought in individuals who were not fit for the positions. They brought in people just because they were Shi'a or Sunni, Kurdish or Turkmen, even if they were not qualified, even if it's not their field, even if they can't manage a ministry or a directorate, this person

is close to so and so, they say. It's become a principle. It's not about competency anymore."

*(*Dr Al-Timimi, 2023*)*

Similarly, in one of my interviews with former Oil minister Hussain Al-Sharistani (2023), he acknowledges that:

> *"Many of them came through their political blocs or parties, and this made them bound and indebted. The party demands from them, regardless of the issue of corruption. Let's take an example. If someone from the Da'wa Party assumes a certain ministry as a brother and a mujahid with a history like that, they may make him a general director at the very least. This means that the person's history and jihad within the Da'wa Party are the criteria the party adopts to nominate a general director for a specific department or ministry and not his qualification for the job."*

Dr. Al-Timimi emphasises that the issue goes beyond merely appointing unqualified individuals to positions. A prevailing mindset focuses on advancing party interests above all else, thus shaping a new habitus and doxa. This indicates that the prevailing mindset influences individual actions and contributes to shaping broader cultural and societal norms within the political sphere. This is evident in the formulation of election laws, where the priority has shifted from serving the people to negotiating power-sharing arrangements for personal gain. Dr Al-Timimi points out that:

> *"Instead of politicians being experienced in catering for the people, it has become about how to share and collaborate for their sake. And, of course, some pay money, and this is what the one who pays money does – If they pay money to be elected or gain a post, they must satisfy their party and collect the money they spent, as well as the profit."*

Furthermore, the significance of this aspect of cultural capital of knowledge and expertise becomes evident when considering its impact on the competence and effectiveness of governmental institutions. For instance, in my meeting with Dr Husham Al-Alawi, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Relations, he noted that the

foreign ministry lacked the requisite competence and language proficiency to fulfil their professional responsibilities. This observation highlights the importance of cultural capital, as these individuals may struggle to effectively communicate their country's interests in international forums, diminishing their ability to exert power and influence on the international stage.

> *"There's still a considerable number who lack the necessary expertise and language skills, and this hampers their ability to perform their jobs effectively. This reflects on the ministry's departments and our missions in performing their duties effectively compared to what we observe in other countries. Now, when you compare the level of our ministry's employees with countries with a rich diplomatic tradition, like Syria, Morocco, and some other European nations. Generally, about a quarter of our staff have the necessary expertise, skills, and languages, and they constitute a small proportion."* (Dr Hisham Al-Alawi, 2023)

The prevalence of untrained personnel is not confined to the Foreign Ministry but extends across various government departments. As per Bourdieu's view, this trend fosters a new habitus in employment practices, prioritising loyalty to political parties over qualifications and competence. Politicians frequently nominate individuals lacking requisite skills and experience, undermining the effectiveness of government institutions. This loyalty-driven habitus prioritises power and resource accumulation over state and nation-building, exacerbating corruption.

Such favouritism based on political loyalty rather than merit can significantly impact the efficiency of government entities. When positions are filled based on political allegiance rather than competence, it can lead to a lack of expertise within key roles, resulting in ineffective decision-making, poor policy implementation, and overall inefficiency in government operations.

Moreover, this perpetuation of the system can create a cycle of patronage, where loyalty to political parties becomes the primary criterion for advancement rather than performance or competence. This undermines

government institutions' integrity and fosters a corruption culture, as individuals prioritise political connections over the public good.

Ultimately, the emphasis on political loyalty over qualifications diminishes the overall quality of governance and impedes government entities' ability to serve the public's needs effectively. Addressing systemic issues related to recruitment practices is crucial to ensure that government institutions are staffed with individuals possessing the necessary skills and expertise to govern effectively.

> *"Institutions suffer from the phenomenon of not focusing on selecting the right person for the position. If the person doesn't have the experience and skills required for the role, it affects their job and the functioning of the embassy or mission. Adding to that, the deficiency is not just in the head of the mission but also among the majority of staff. Generally, more than half of your staff members don't possess the required experience and skills. So, even if you have a competent head who can benefit from the existing staff, it will be limited because the person has at least the minimum required experience, skills, and languages."* (Dr Hisham Al-Alawi, 2023)

To elaborate on the significance of cultural capital, Shi'a actors often draw parallels with the Kurdish experience to underscore the value of expertise in state-building that they lacked. For instance, in my interview with Dr Sami Al-Askari (current political Advisor to the Prime Minister), I noted the following claim:

> *"We in the opposition, both Islamic and non-Islamic, did not have anyone who was a legal expert, engaged with the state, or able to critique the state. The Kurds, in their conscious or unconscious feeling, intend to leave Iraq when writing the Constitution, so they think about how to put clauses that make this work easier for them."*

According to Dr Sami Al-Askari, "*In contrast to the Shi'a and other political factions, the Kurds showed exceptional levels of readiness and competence during the process of constitution-making.*"

This observation highlights the significant importance of cultural capital in the realm of politics, specifically in this particular setting when Kurdish political actors demonstrated a higher level of understanding of constitutional procedures, legal frameworks, and negotiation methods. One perspective to consider here is the Kurds' history of semi-autonomous rule since 1991, which has substantially prepared them for the challenges they faced later. The Kurds were able to develop the administrative and political skills necessary to navigate the complexities of post-2003 Iraq by largely administering themselves. This benefit allowed them to participate in intellectually informed discussions and actively articulate nuanced perspectives. The significance of cultural capital is evident in this context, as it demonstrates how the Kurdish faction's proficiency and understanding of constitutional issues granted them a clear advantage in political discussions, enabling them to negotiate the complex political environment to their favour in certain aspects.

This point is showcased by (Al-Askari) when he acknowledged in my interview that We [Shi'] relied on ourselves; *we don't have constitutional experts, but they made a contract with foreign American experts*. Indicating that despite their limitations in crafting the Constitution, they had the foresight to rely on subject matter experts to ensure their perceived strategic goals and objectives were inscribed through the Constitution.

Also,

> *"The Kurdish component was more prepared and possessed prior consultations. The issue doesn't solely lie in consultations. If we revisit the records of the constitution drafting and the discussions in the sensitive and disputed areas of its articles, which later led to disagreements and obstacles to the political process, such as the constitutional articles concerning natural resources, you would find clear and mature viewpoints that were presented during the drafting committee's work. In these discussions, there were well-thought-out and flexible approaches."* (Dr Bahr Al-Uloom, 2023)

These problems that have been identified by many of those I interviewed suggest that:

"Unless the Shi'a politician relies on [a] deep understanding of how to establish, manage, and build a state, understanding the political, economic, and social variables, and responds to the essential needs of the public, understands the new generations – unless this happens, state management cannot rely solely on the narrative of Shi'a victimhood. Continuing to manage the state as it is now is not sustainable. It's a policy of trial and error, constructing policies based on pressures and responses to those pressures. We hope that it remains balanced in its relations with others, maintains its sovereignty, and prevents interventions in its affairs, even from friendly parties." (Participant 3)

The provided reference also sheds light on the changing roles and obstacles faced by revolutionary elites in Iraq, particularly those who played pivotal roles in opposing oppressive regimes. As these revolutionaries transitioned from their revolutionary roles to positions of authority, they encountered fresh challenges. Notably, the evolving aspirations of the population, particularly the younger generation, present a formidable hurdle. This younger demographic seeks leaders possessing the vision, experience, and capability to build a modern state capable of addressing contemporary challenges.

This showcases that a significant portion of these revolutionary elites lacked these essential characteristics. In their efforts to maintain relevance and revitalise their hold on the symbolic capital, certain revolutionary figures in Iraq resort to revisiting outdated narratives and employing fear-based tactics, notably through warnings about the potential resurgence of the Ba'athist regime.

Consequently, a noteworthy challenge emerges within Iraq's political landscape, characterised by a generational conflict between the established revolutionary elites and the younger generation.

"This competition was not only about opportunities; it could also be related to vision. Even Imam Ali (peace be upon him) addresses parents, saying: "Your children are created for a time different from your time." The gap between the parent and the child is just one generation. This child is raised in the arms of their parent, their household, culture,

circumstances, yet they develop a different way of thinking than their parent's. Now, imagine generations within a society or within large political entities. This leads to differences in priorities and perspectives. The seasoned generation in the Supreme Council was sensitive to specific phenomena they considered detrimental, while the youth saw them as necessary. Differences in ambition, vision, priorities, and various issues arose between them." (Al-Hakeem 2023)

Here, Al-Hakeem proposed his view as a possible alternative when he describes the Shi'a political factions across four categories: contractors, amateurs, gamblers, and professionals, and he perceives his approach as being professional. Al-Hakeem's strategic utilisation of cultural capital, grounded in insights derived from data analysis and informed by Bourdieu's theory, underscores his pivotal role in empowering youth and reshaping Iraqi politics. By compiling data from the Ministry of Planning:

"I felt that we are facing a new reality and a different audience. This reading proved its validity when the Tishreen demonstrations started in 2019, which was a broad youth movement that almost overthrew the political system."

Through a deep understanding of societal trends gleaned from data provided by the Ministry of Planning, Al-Hakeem recognised a significant demographic shift towards a burgeoning younger generation. This insight fuelled his conviction to embrace these neglected youths, recognising their potential amid political and societal turmoil.

Al-Hakeem's vision clashes with the traditional mindset of the elder generation within the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI). As he elucidates, *"The clash was about opportunities, and it could also be about vision."* This conflict highlights the divergence between the seasoned leaders and the aspiring youth, emphasising the importance of generational perspectives and the cultural capital embedded within each group.

Drawing upon Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital, Al-Hakeem emphasises the importance of openness to the youth, stating, *"The young generation believes that it is important for our project to be correct, and our principles to be correct."* Here, he acknowledges the cultural capital inherent within the youth, challenging traditional norms and advocating for inclusivity and innovation in governance. Furthermore, disagreements started to arise when discussing ministerial appointments. The youth argue that the elders have monopolised opportunities for too long, asserting, *"Today is our chance to present something new."* Conversely, the elders contend that the young lack experience and advocate for their continued leadership to impart wisdom and guidance.

Furthermore, Al-Hakeem's decision to establish the Wisdom Movement represents a strategic divergence driven by a distinct approach to governance, as he articulates, *"The emergence of the Wisdom Movement was not the result of a political conflict but a difference in the approach and vision regarding embracing this broad segment of our people."* This decision showcases Al-Hakeem's commitment to his principles and demonstrates his astute understanding of cultural capital and its implications for political mobilisation.

In a move aligned with Bourdieu's framework, Sayid Ammar Al-Hakeem refrains from imposing his vision on the established leadership of the SCIRI, opting instead to establish a new organisation centred around youth empowerment and inclusivity. This unprecedented decision underscores Sayid Al-Hakeem's recognition of the cultural capital embedded within the youth and his strategic alignment with their aspirations, thereby challenging traditional power dynamics and reshaping the political landscape of Iraq. Sayid Al-Hakeem's reluctance to enforce his vision on the founders of the SCIRI reflects his principled approach and respect for their contributions. He states, *"I could have called for quick elections... leading to the election of a youthful generation and excluding the elders... lacked gallantry."* By choosing to hand over the Supreme Council and establish a new organisation with a fresh vision, Sayid Al-Hakeem pioneers an unprecedented model in Iraqi political history, emphasising the importance of respect and inclusivity within leadership transitions.

This approach demonstrates Sayid Al-Hakeem's commitment to his principles and sets a precedent for collaborative and forward-thinking governance practices in the region. Through his actions, Sayid Ammar Al-Hakeem exemplifies Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital in practice, leveraging his knowledge and understanding of societal trends to empower the youth and enact meaningful change in Iraqi politics.

Despite addressing different audiences and employing distinct strategies, both Sayid Ammar Al-Hakeem and Qais Al-Khasali can be seen as examples of political elites who embody a departure from entrenched power dynamics, signalling a broader shift in contemporary Iraqi politics toward more proactive and forward-thinking approaches.

In the context of contemporary Iraqi politics, the leader of Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq, Qais Al-Khasali, distinguishes himself from the older political class by asserting,

"There were individuals from 2003 that presented the first line of senior elites, and they are predominantly extinct from today's political environment." (Al-Iraqiyya TV, November 20, 2022)

This statement reflects his positioning as part of a new generation of political actors seeking to redefine the norms and values within the political field.

Furthermore, Al-Khasali acknowledges that:

> *"Most of what is left of the old class has concluded that there needs to be real change and actual work to provide real solutions by using new tools or approaches for the results to come out differently. I have felt this approach being proposed and adopted by many."*

He further emphasises his entry into the political arena in 2018 to underscore his status as a fresh and untainted figure in the years of previous political corruption. He notes, *"I entered the political environment from 2018,"* highlighting his relatively recent emergence onto the political scene and distancing himself from the entrenched political elites associated with the post-2003 era.

Al-Khasali's articulation of a new vision for Iraqi politics revolves around addressing key challenges such as maximising production and minimising corruption. He states, *"The Prime Minister has two primary challenges - to maximise production and minimise corruption."* By aligning himself with these goals and pledging full support to the Prime Minister, Al-Khasali positions himself as a proactive agent of change, seeking to exert influence and reshape the political landscape. This proactive stance is further underscored by his vision, which extends beyond mere economic support. He emphasises the importance of building alliances based on Iraqi state interests rather than narrow partisan agendas, stating, *"However, we will seek anyone who will benefit the Iraqi state within the current and future political environment"*.

The findings of this study indicate that cultural capital plays a significant role in shaping effective administration within the Shi'a political environment of post-2003 Iraq. The analysis of interviews and transcripts revealed that numerous political leaders strategically utilise this resource to emphasise the perceived lack of skills and experience among their opponents. This study's findings indicate that to gain influence or a competitive advantage within this particular setting, Shi'a political actors must make efforts to obtain and utilise cultural capital. This may entail acquiring hands-on experience in the field of state administration, comprehending the complexities of governance, and embracing a holistic approach to state management that transcends theoretical or theological ideologies. By doing so, they will be able to increase their capacity to govern effectively and be skilled at effectively tackling the various.

One key difficulty is trust, specifically how political parties can place their trust in individuals who may not have direct party allegiance but possess the competence essential for competent government. Moreover, it highlights the essential dilemma of shared vision, as Iraq seeks to balance loyalty with the imperative need for technocratic competence in addressing the evolving demands of its population.

6.2.2 Shared Vision and Trust

According to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, cultural capital comprises two fundamental dimensions. The first is embodied cultural capital, which contains the knowledge and skills acquired *via* educational processes and socialisation. The second dimension is objectified cultural capital, which pertains to cultural products and credentials. Within the framework proposed by Bourdieu, it becomes evident that the lack of a collective vision might be strongly associated with disparities in possessing embodied cultural capital. This implies that certain people or groups might lack the requisite educational foundation or expertise to effectively express a unified and coherent vision.

During the analysis of the interviews, the absence of a shared vision within the Shi'a group emerged as a recurrent theme. It was observed that political players frequently used this lack of vision to obtain a competitive advantage over their opponents. This highlights the strategic utilisation of the absence of a shared vision as a tool for gaining an edge in the political arena. Some of the references from their interviews are presented below.

The insightful commentary provided by the TV presenter hosting individuals from the Sadrist and Maliki camps offers a compelling glimpse into the stark contrast between the concerns voiced by the Iraqi populace and the focal points of their political representatives. Amidst the contradictory tones of political discourse, the fundamental needs of ordinary citizens remain absent from the forefront of policymakers' agendas, hindering the cultivation of a shared vision for the nation.

As the presenter points out in the volume of messages his programme receives,

> *"In these messages, I hardly find anything that asks me, for example, when would the Shi'a-on-Shi'a conflict for the state end? Who has the right to form a government? Who will be the next PM, and other similar types of questions?"*

This sentiment underscores the gaping chasm between the political elite and the general populace, laying bare the failure of political leaders to address the fundamental concerns impacting people's everyday lives and eroding trust in the political system.

Instead of being mired in the intricacies of political power struggles, the bulk of messages stemming from his audience members revolve around urgent socioeconomic challenges. Concerns over employment opportunities, access to education and healthcare, rampant corruption, and economic instability dominate the discourse, highlighting the need for policymakers to prioritise the welfare of the people in shaping a collective vision for the future.

Furthermore, the presenter underscores the potential for transcending the current political gridlock and envisages a pathway toward reconciliation. By advocating for prominent political figures such as Muqtada al-Sadr, Nouri al-Maliki, and Qais al-Khazali to set aside their differences, the presenter proposes a blueprint for national unity, thereby fostering trust and cooperation among diverse factions (Al Rabi'a TV, Interview by Mulla Talal, Nov 15th 2021).

In essence, the presenter's observations underscore the imperative for political leaders to prioritise the welfare of the populace and engage in constructive dialogue to address the prevalent issues plaguing Iraqi society.

Dr. Ibrahim Bahrul Uloom's observation serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges inherent in institution-building within the Shi'a political landscape, shedding light on a critical aspect that resonates with the broader theme of fostering a shared vision and trust in governance. He remarked,

> *"When it comes to institution-building, the Shi'a did not succeed in completing the establishment of institutions. Perhaps, if I go beyond this, they lack a vision for state-building. Their focus was more on grasping power."*

This sentiment is echoed by Qaith Al-Timimi in an interview when he raises pertinent questions about the persisting destruction in southern cities, the absence of development initiatives, and the continued internal

conflicts among the Shi'a. He questions, *"Why is it that the southern cities are still destroyed? Why do we only have photos of our martyrs on the streets and no development? How come the conflict is still ongoing amongst the Shi'a?"* Moreover, Al-Timimi highlights the lack of consensus in Shi'a visions regarding the concept of national sovereignty, emphasising their diversity and disagreement (Al Rabi'a TV, Interview by Mulla Talal, Nov 15th, 2021)

Similarly, Dr. Abd al-Razak underscores the necessity for agreement and shared objectives as prerequisites for meaningful dialogue and collaboration among competing factions. He explains*, "For them to sit at a table, there needs to be an agreement on what will be discussed. A topic will look at the shared similarities that can bring them together. There needs to be at least a project with a shared vision that could be implemented in stages."* (Ibid).

This point is illustrated in an interview with Kais Al-Khasali when he acknowledges his differences with Muqtada Al-Sadr, stating*:*

> *"Our disparities stem from varying approaches and conflict management styles, making it challenging to achieve harmony between us...while we acknowledge and respect these differences, we are also open to future collaboration whenever our visions align." (Khasali interview with Monte Carlo Doualiya, 06/04/2023*

This collective sentiment underscores the imperative of establishing common ground and fostering a shared vision among Shi'a political factions to address the pressing issues facing Iraqi society and pave the way for constructive dialogue and collaboration.

However, amidst these endeavours, a recurrent theme highlighted in media discourse involves the emergence of disputes whenever opposing factions come into the spotlight.

For instance, a televised show involving proponents of the Sadrist movement (Dr Munaf al-Musawi) and supporters of Maliki (Zuhair al-Chalabi) exemplifies this trend. In the exchange, Dr Munaf suggests that

certain political figures like Maliki should consider stepping down to address prevailing challenges. Dr Munaf advised,

> *"Look today, the people need to know what is happening... several politicians respected their legacies and history. I can name you, for example, from Dawa you have al-Jafari, Ali al-Adeeb, Waleed al-Hilli and other names pulled out from the political scene when they realised that they could not give anything new because they were in contact with the people and realised the failures of previous governments..."* (Al Rabi'a TV, Muna Sami July 19, 2022).

Conversely, Zuhair contends that accountability should be determined through legal channels, cautioning against premature judgments outside the judicial purview. Zuhair defended,

> *"The courts are responsible for deciding who is corrupt, and you and I cannot decide who is responsible outside of the judicial boundaries."* He further emphasised, *"Everybody is corrupt and has corruption files against them... members of political groups lead these, and they all have corruption, and everyone is represented in the political process, which means everyone is corrupt"* (Ibid).

In reaction, Dr Munaf advocated for decisive measures against corruption and ineffective governance, expressing,

> *"We implore Allah to shield us from turmoil... we trust that the discerning individuals of our nation can address this predicament and oust those responsible for destabilising Iraq... we cannot overlook the atrocities of Spyker, nor the widespread corruption."*(Ibid).

The reference to Spyker is a direct condemnation towards Maliki in which more than 1500 young Iraqi cadets were executed by members of ISIS to which the Sadrist held Maliki accountable. Ultimately, the exchange between proponents and detractors reflects the deep-seated tensions and divergent narratives that

pervade Iraqi politics. The confrontation underscores the challenges of fostering unity and common purpose amid entrenched factionalism and distrust.

Navigating the complex terrain of Iraqi politics has posed a longstanding challenge in fostering trust and unity among Shi'a groups. For instance, Muqtada al-Sadr's damning portrayal of politicians as corrupt individuals luxuriating in the International Zone (IZ), shielded from accountability and openly engaging in corruption, underscores the deep-rooted issues plaguing the political landscape. His blunt assertion to "throw them all in the trash can" epitomises the frustration and disillusionment felt by many within Iraqi society. (Sadr Interview, 2022). Muqtada al-Sadr's observations highlight the pervasive distrust among Shi'a factions. He asserts, *"The lack of trust among politicians has extended a political system that I see as corrupt*." Additionally, he laments the difficulty in *"moving beyond mūhasasa and ending corruption,"* attributing this challenge to widespread doubts about his intentions. According to him, critics frequently accuse him of seeking to seize power for personal gain (Ibid).

His sentiment is echoed by former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi, who bluntly characterises the monopolisation of state power and manipulation of political structures through sectarian quotas as traits akin to criminal gangs rather than honourable political practices.

> *"Forgive me for stating that the monopolisation of state power and the manipulation of political structures through sectarian quotas, as well as the inheritance of resources through generations, are traits of criminal gangs rather than those of an esteemed political class deserving of respect for its role and principles." While honesty may be uncomfortable at times, it reflects the harsh reality of our present political landscape."* (AUIS, Sulaymaniyah Conference, Sep 2023).

Moreover, Muqtada al-Sadr's reflections on the deep-seated distrust within the competing Shi'a factions also resonate with Dr Askari's historical perspective. Dr Askari notes that the lack of unity within the Shi'a

community is deeply ingrained, dating back through history. As he elucidates, *"The Shiites have never been united. This division among Shiites is old."* He further exemplifies this division, stating:

> *"For example, when you enter the shrine of Imam Ali, there are four or five group prayers. Everyone prays separately; no one agrees to combine them into one prayer. To this day, if you go to the shrine of Imam Kazim (in Baghdad) or any other place, this is one of the manifestations. The movement of Muhammad Sadiq Al-Sadr has heightened the Shiite conflict. Public statements against Al-Hakeem are now more pronounced, and the same goes for the other faction. Followers of Muhammad Al-Sadr are against the followers of Al-Hakeem, and vice versa." He continues to say that the flaws or divisions in the doctrine, where the position is doctrinal, are not just about leadership or authority. When we reach the ground, we are fundamentally divided. This means that you are biased; you have a problem with al-Hakeem. Politically, the Da'wa is one thing, and the Supreme Council is another. The Council worked as much as it could to undermine the Da'wa. Muqtada [al-Sadr] has a problem with al-Hakeem and then a problem with the Da'wa; these are divisions whose roots are not today or in 2003 but precede that."*

This historical context underscores the enduring challenges of fostering unity and trust among Shi'a factions. Further insights from Dr Bahrul Uloom's interview shed light on the complexities and hurdles encountered in this pursuit.

Dr Bahrul Uloom reflects on the pivotal year of 2010, marking it as a starting point for political developments. He recalls Prime Minister Maliki's reluctance to join the Shi'a alliance, a decision influenced by his victory in the provincial council elections of 2009. This divergence in political strategies hindered efforts towards coalition-building, setting the stage for subsequent challenges:

"In the year 2010, we considered it a starting point... Prime Minister Maliki rejected joining the alliance... influenced by his victory in the provincial council elections 2009, leading him to believe he could win parliamentary elections without the National Alliance."

Dr Bahrul Uloom pointed out that during the second term of Prime Minister Maliki in 2011-2012, attempts to gather political leadership for dialogue were met with reluctance. Dr. Bahrul Uloom recalls this period, stating, "We asked the political leaderships to gather at one table, but they did not respond." This lack of responsiveness underscores the initial hurdles in fostering dialogue and collaboration among political factions.

Amidst these challenges, efforts were made to formulate a cohesive program within the National Alliance. "*For the first time, we relied on the professional cadre within Iraq to formulate the program... this collaborative process spanned two months of meetings that included parties and experts."* The collaborative process involved extensive consultations over two months, engaging the expertise of around one hundred Iraqi specialists. Despite these efforts, merging the coalition's program with the government's program faced minimal interaction and ultimately dissipated.

During the Bahar al-Uloom forum for productive dialogue, various political leaders, including Mr. Hakim and Dr. Adel Abdul-Mahdi, expressed differing perspectives on the existence of a cohesive vision. Mr Abdul-Mahdi's statement*, "We don't have a project. When we have a project, we'll unite; otherwise, we'll waste away,"* underscores the importance of a shared vision in fostering unity and trust among political factions. This lack of a unified vision suggests potential disparities in embodied cultural capital among these leaders, as they may lack the educational foundation or expertise necessary to articulate a coherent vision for the nation. Similarly, the acknowledgement that "*We have a project, but we don't have a campaign specialised in it*" reflects a disconnect between overarching goals and practical implementation strategies. Dr. al-Jalabi's comparison of Iraq's problem as he sees it: *"Our problem in Iraq is like a car whose essence is money."* stating, *"Corruption will bring us down"* (Dr Ibrahim Bahrul Uloom interview, 2023). In sharing these recollections, Dr Bahrul Uloom explains that:

"What I'm trying to say is that we have different diagnoses of the crisis despite the validity

of all these differences. However, how will they be prioritised?"

Dr. Bahrul Uloom's insights reveal the challenges associated with integrating diverse perspectives and achieving consensus within the National Alliance. He notes, "*We formed a committee composed of five individuals... They were not represented as party names, but rather by their individual names*." Despite efforts to depersonalise the process and prioritise national interests over partisan agendas, the failure to sustain momentum for the National Reconciliation paper suggests entrenched mistrust and competition among political factions. Dr Bahrul Uloom's observation that *"particular problems and competition between leaderships started to arise"* underscores the influence of power struggles and divergent priorities on Shi'a political cohesion.

In my interview with former Minister Al-Adeeb on why there seem to be divisions within the ranks of the Shi'a elites, he states, *"They are quarrelling overpower and privileges; this is the reason...no strategic vision?"* he continues to say that:

"Certainly, there's no strategic vision; otherwise, everyone would believe in it. You see, the

Ba'ath Party system is based on a strategic understanding that even if they defected, they

still talk about the same idea. They talk about the same idea, whether for or against

Saddam. But he believed in the Ba'ath Party theory believed that he was part of the Arab

world. I don't know how it works. At this time, we don't know what they want (political

parties)."

Despite differing perspectives on the crisis, Dr Bahrul Uloom emphasises a brief period of unity among Shi'a political forces in response to the existential threat posed by ISIS. He notes, *"The Shi'a political forces united under a unified vision for Iraq's governance after ISIS when the challenge was existential."* This moment of unity underscores the potential for consensus-building in times of external threats, highlighting the role of shared challenges in fostering political cohesion.

Former Minister Ali al-Adeeb's interview provides valuable insights into the challenges within Iraqi politics, particularly the absence of a clear vision among its leaders, demonstrating how cultural capital is intertwined with the discourse on the absence of a Shi'a state-building vision. Mr Al-Adeeb states bluntly, "*The primary issue is the absence of a Shi'a vision for state-building.*" This assertion carries the weight of cultural capital because it involves an in-depth knowledge of political ideologies, governance structures, and administration.

Participant 3 identifies the lack of a vision and emphasises that anyone who claims otherwise is mistaken, implying authority and subject matter expertise.

> *"There's no plan or practical vision for building a state: constructing state structures, managing foreign relations, preserving the country's sovereignty, managing the differences between parties, and handling relationships between the components. It's a lack of vision. Instead, it's a set of notions, sometimes naive notions. This aspect of Iraqi politics was not driven by an engineered, readable vision." (Participant 3)*

This lack of vision, according to Ali Al-Adeeb, opens the gates for foreign intervention as he explains that:

> *"If you don't have a common vision or plan, they will compete. The Iraqi opposition or Iraqi rulers are striving to please foreign powers to stay in power. This leads to concessions… dividing the people into factions. Some are called the resistance, and some are called moderates."*

This sentiment underscores the detrimental effects of political fragmentation and external influence on Iraq's governance, highlighting the perils of prioritising power over national interests. Furthermore, Al-Adeeb points to the Kurds as a contrasting example, noting,

> *"They unified their vision despite their differences. They insist on their demand without changing it. [as for Shi'a] Our demands are not clear."*

This acknowledgement underscores the importance of unity and clarity in defining and pursuing national objectives, a quality lacking in Iraq's Shi'a political landscape. Central to Al-Adeeb's analysis is the issue of Iraq's ambiguous national identity and direction. He laments,

> *"We need to establish Iraq's identity; our identity is still not clear. What is our national identity? An Islamic identity?" This existential question reflects the underlying uncertainty and lack of consensus among Iraqi leaders regarding the nation's core values and aspirations."*

Furthermore, Al-Adeeb draws attention to the detrimental impact of the focus on power politics at the expense of nation-building, stating,

> *"So, the country is stuck. Until now, we don't even have oil experts, can you believe it?"*

Al-Adeeb's admission underscores the urgent need for a shift in priorities and to unite over a common objective, which he highlights as having a cohesive national identity and direction to guide the country toward stability and prosperity.

In a recent interview with Dr Hanan Al-Fatlawi, regarding the proposed changes to the election laws by some of the Shi'a leadership, she criticises these elements of the Co-ordination Framework, describing them as having "short-sightedness." She explains that the push to change the election laws at this stage,

> *"Can only be understood as a way of besieging the Prime Minister Sudani just in case he might think of entering the elections. You see, unfortunately, this is the problem with some of our leaders; they have short-sightedness. Rather, they only see as far as their footsteps. They cannot see beyond that or into the future."(interview with Dr Hanan Al-Fatlawi, 2024)*

The lack of shared vision and trust is attributed to the lack of 'seriousness' from the political parties towards a common goal, Dr Al-Alawi explains.

"There's also a lack of effectiveness in programs. As you know, political parties and institutions usually have annual plans and strategies. Many times, we don't have these plans, and even if we do, they are treated as mere paperwork. There's a lack of seriousness in making these programs realistic and implementable. These programs also face challenges due to limited resources and inadequate follow-up mechanisms" (Dr. Al-Alawi, 2023).

It was also found that certain politicians hold the perception that some political groups lack the commitment to improve the people's well-being, instead seeking power to protect their interests. In this context, cultural capital emerges as a differentiating factor, exemplified by a vision for societal improvement and a constant dedication to achieving that vision.

"Many individuals enter the political and social arena for personal reasons. They see benefits in being part of these institutions, whether it is at the party, parliamentary, or governmental level. The institution they are a part of doesn't invest much in developing their skills or providing the necessary tools for successful work, like well-designed programs, draft laws, policies, or annual plans. Therefore, these individuals lack the necessary skills. Often, their entry into the political field is not driven by having a vision or a program they want to implement. Instead, they seek personal benefits and interests."
(Dr Al-Alawi, 2023)

In examining the divisions within Shi'a groups in Iraq, it becomes evident that the fragmentation extends beyond inter-bloc dynamics and permeates within individual parties. Insights from my interview with Dr. Sami Al-Askari shed light on the multifaceted reasons behind these internal divisions.

Firstly, the struggle for leadership emerges as a primary catalyst for division within parties. Using the Islamic Da'wa Party as an example, Dr Al-Askari illustrates how figures like al-Abadi and al-Maliki vie for leadership positions, each seeking to assert dominance within the party. This competition for leadership

exacerbates internal rifts and inhibits cohesive decision-making: "*It's divided because al-Abadi wants to lead, al-Maliki wants to remain the leader, and even a third person would want to be a leader.*"

Secondly, differences in ideological inclinations contribute to internal divisions. Dr Sami Al-Askari highlights how figures like *"al-Abadi present themselves as more liberal and Western-leaning",* contrasting with the entrenched positions of leaders like al-Maliki, "*influenced by his backgrounds in Syria and Iran.*" These ideological disparities shape political behaviour and further deepen internal divisions within parties.

Moreover, personal backgrounds and experiences play a significant role in exacerbating factionalism within parties. Dr Al-Askari illustrates that *"Also, al-Abadi's background, having lived in Britain, his Ph.D. expertise, and proficiency in English, distinguish him from traditional figures in the Da'wa Party, especially al-Maliki"* contributing to internal rifts and divergent leadership aspirations.

Furthermore, the issue of leadership fragmentation within parties is compounded by the emergence of splinter factions. Dr. Al-Askari notes that numerous factions have split from the Da'wa Party, highlighting the pervasive nature of internal divisions within Shi'a movements: "*The fragmentation within the movement itself is evident. Several factions have split from it, as many as five factions or more.*

The same pattern of division is observed within other Shi'a factions, such as the Sadrist movement, where rivalry between leaders like Muqtada al-Sadr and Qais al-Khazali exacerbates internal strife. Dr Al-Askari attributes these divisions to individual selfishness, wherein leaders prioritise personal interests over collective unity, perpetuating factionalism and hindering cohesive action.

> "*The same applies to other Shi'a factions. For instance, the Sadrist movement, led by Muqtada al-Sadr, is divided due to the rivalry between him and Qais al-Khazali. This is a natural outcome of individual selfishness. Anyone who thinks only about their interests and aims to be the sole leader ends up contributing to these divisions.*"

Additionally, differences in orientations contribute to internal divisions within movements like the Sadrist movement, where varying attitudes towards Iran influence leadership dynamics. While al-Sadr maintains a distance from Iran, figures like Qais al-Khazali align closely with Iranian interests, further complicating intra-party dynamics and exacerbating divisions:

> "*Also, the orientations have differed. This means even within the Sadrist movement there are divisions. Muqtada al-Sadr, for instance, is not very inclined towards aligning closely with Iran, while Qais presents himself as a proxy of Iran, an agent of Iran, and associates himself with his militia. This results in certain benefits where each one positions themselves as a leader.*"

In essence, the divisions within Shi'a groups in Iraq are not only a result of inter-bloc rivalries but also stem from deep-seated internal dynamics within individual parties. These divisions, driven by struggles for leadership, ideological differences, personal backgrounds, and orientations towards external actors, underscore the challenges of achieving cohesion and unity within Iraq's Shi'a political landscape. The study's findings support the notion that Shi'a political actors in Iraq face significant challenges and limitations in their political behaviour and decision-making capacities. And that the primary division, as Dr Sami Al-Askari perceives, is not across religious dimensions but rather the

> "*The dispute is political, about power, the type of governance, and the vision for managing the state. You think that there should be no Mahdi Army, and so on, while the other believes the Mahdi Army is essential, and so on. You think it is in our interest to come to terms with the Americans until they withdraw, while the other says we must fight them. These are the details that disagreements are based on.*"

These are further fleshed out in the next chapter. Is the current political division based on religious dimensions or a political vision for the state?

6.3 Theme 2: Symbolic Capital

According to Bourdieu (1979), symbolic capital, which covers prestige, recognition, and symbolic authority, holds significant influence within social hierarchies and cultural legitimacy under the sociological paradigm. In the realm of Shi'a politics, it acquires a prominent position in creating power dynamics, exerting influence, and establishing cultural legitimacy. Symbolic capital encompasses various components, including prestige, acknowledgement, and symbolic power. Based on the insights shared by the participants, this specific issue can be subdivided into three key themes: the influence of religious authorities, political positioning and reputation, and the role of religion.

The theme of "symbolic capital" investigates the numerous factors contributing to the development of symbolic power in a given situation. This theme is divided into three sub-themes, each focusing on a different component of symbolic capital. "Political Positioning and Reputation" discusses the strategic
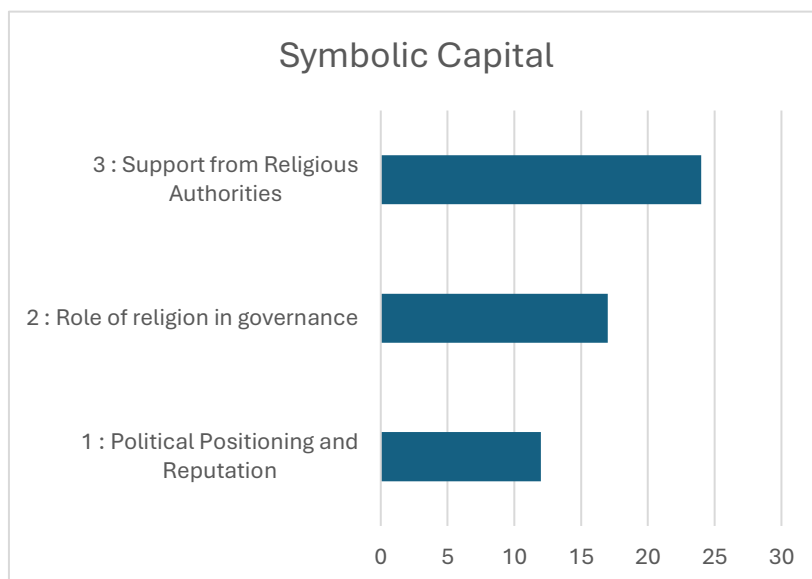
positioning of individuals or entities in the political landscape and their reputation. "Role of Religion in Governance" emphasises the influence of religion on governance practices and policies, highlighting the centrality of religious considerations within the broader discourse on symbolic capital, whereas "Support from Religious Authorities" explores the influential role that religious leaders and organisations play in providing legitimacy and credibility to individuals or entities within the political contect. All of these themes are discussed in detail below.

6.3.1 Role of Religious Authorities

In the political context of the Shi'a, religious figures and authorities, particularly the Marja'iya, act as pillars of the community's symbolic capital. They are viewed as the utmost moral and spiritual leaders whose endorsements and pronouncements carry immense prestige and authority, impacting political decisions and alliances. They are acknowledged as the custodians of religious doctrine and hold significant status and power, influencing political decisions and alliances. In the references provided, the speaker discusses numerous occurrences wherein religious authority plays a pivotal role in guiding political behaviour and organising the population.

1.3.2 Fatwas and Religious Proclamations

Within Shi'a politics, the presence of esteemed religious figures such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani is pivotal in mobilising the community and providing guidance for political conduct. The provided references highlight the assertion of authority and influence by leaders. This is exemplified by the issuance of fatwas and the unwavering stances of influential Islamic Shi'a leaders, as described in the cited sources. These fatwas are viewed as powerful manifestations of symbolic authority, shaping and directing the political behaviour of the Shi'a community.

> *"Grand Ayatollah Sistani issued his fatwa about the importance of participating in elections or the necessity of conducting elections to write the Constitution. The National Assembly emphasised the necessity of participating in elections for every man and woman. These fatwas are available; some are remembered from books, and some are available on the internet."* (Dr Sharistani, 2023)

The above reference highlights the fatwa issued by Grand Ayatollah Sistani, which emphasises the significance of engaging in electoral processes and the imperative nature of conducting elections to draft a constitution. This is a notable example of the substantial impact of symbolic capital within Shi'a politics.

His position as a respected religious figure gives his words enormous moral and spiritual weight. The issuance of this fatwa by Ayatollah Sistani resulted in transforming the act of political engagement into a religious obligation, thereby appealing to the religious sensibilities of the Shi'a community.

> *"Another example of the Supreme Religious Authority's thinking was in the 2005 elections when the National Coalition won 128 seats and elected a collective leadership consisting of 21 figures, each representing seven MPs."* (Dr Bahru Uloom, 2023)

In another instance, as indicated by other participants, it becomes evident that Grand Ayatollah Sistani is a crucial source of symbolic capital. In addition to emphasising the need to engage in electoral processes, the religious leadership also underscores the importance of constitutional amendments and expresses explicit support for democratic practices. The endorsement of Sistani holds significant status and power, serving as a representation of his symbolic capital within the Shi'a community. By portraying political involvement as a religious duty, he effectively mobilised individuals to actively exercise their civil rights. This moral instruction surpassed mere political discourse, giving Shi'a citizens a sense of duty and responsibility. The issuance of this fatwa serves as a guiding principle for the political behaviour of the Shi'a community, emphasising the significance of active involvement in civic affairs and political participation.

> *"All the representatives of the Marja'iya everywhere instructed people to vote for these candidates. They did and gained the majority, 109 seats and then 55 seats, which had the symbol of a candle. This is a direct involvement; they formed the committee, selected the candidates, and urged people to participate in the elections. Especially in rural areas, it was stressed that if you didn't vote, your wife would become haram on you; it was taken to this extreme."* (Dr Sami Al-Askari, 2023)

The findings suggest that Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani's role in encouraging electoral participation within the Shi'a community extends beyond mere influence. The cited references show that he also holds political

leaders accountable for their actions and decisions related to the electoral process, emphasising the significance of inclusivity.

> *"Another example of the Supreme Religious Authority's thinking was in the 2005 elections when the National Coalition won 128 seats and elected a collective leadership consisting of 21 figures, with each figure representing seven MPs. The National Alliance began planning its alliances, and we decided to visit Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani because he encouraged people to participate in the parliamentary elections. We went to see him, and he received us, but he wasn't as usual. His demeanour was somewhat stern, implying that the Sunnis did not participate with you and almost saying your government is like a lame man. Then he started advising us. What I remember from his words is: 'If a governor in Anbar oppresses the people of Anbar, it's your responsibility to defend them.'"* (Dr Bahrul Uloom, 2023)

Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani's stern demeanour toward political leaders who failed to secure Sunni participation in the 2005 elections is evidence of his dedication to political accountability. Through this action, he highlights the accountability of these leaders and emphasises the moral and ethical aspects of political behaviour within the Shi'a community. The above act effectively demonstrates how religious figures exert influence in the realm of politics by leveraging their symbolic capital. In this scenario, the utilisation of Ayatollah al-Sistani's symbolic power serves as a mechanism for promoting a collective obligation and ethical accountability within the realm of politics. His ability to call out those who fail to meet the community's expectations exemplifies the influence of symbolic capital on political behaviour while showcasing its ability to insert pressure and guide communities to align with the proposed views.

The findings further underscore the significance of religious authority in the context of terrorism over the years 2014 and 2018. The observation was made that when political leaders and parties could not mobilise people to address ISIS led-terrorism, the pronouncements of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani served to unify the entire nation in pursuit of a common objective, to safeguard the Iraqi state and its people from the extremist

ISIS group. The cited examples demonstrate religious leaders' utilisation of symbolic capital to foster unity and mobilise the Shi'a community towards common goals.

> *"The political forces failed to mobilise the streets to confront terrorism. Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani's fatwa in the Al-Kifah Al-Kufi role played a decisive role in mobilising the people through his call on June 10, 2014. The highest religious authority unified Iraq. He said, 'We need volunteers to protect Iraq from ISIS,' and Iraq rose up as one. It's noteworthy that the idea that occurred in 1914 recurred in 2014."* (Dr Bahrul Uloom, 2023)

The reference to Ayatollah al-Sistani's issued fatwa in 2014 is another example of the influential capacity of religious authorities in terms of mobilisation. Amidst the rising ISIS threats, his appeal for individuals to offer their services as a means of safeguarding Iraq served to consolidate the nation. The issuance of this fatwa served as a focal point, demonstrating the capacity of religious authorities to mobilise the Shi'a community during periods of turmoil.

Furthermore, the research findings also suggest the presence of an additional problem that arose during the period of heightened terrorism. The Shi'a-Shi'a infighting emerged as a new danger resulting from the internal conflicts of political factions. The findings indicate that the conflict could have escalated further, resulting in a divided Shi'a community and a weakened government. Still, the religious authority, Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani, played a crucial role in controlling this intra-Shi'a conflict.

> *"I wish for Iraq and its new experience to come to an end. The Shi'a-led government faced challenges, including the regional referendum and the threat of ISIS terrorism. These challenges were overcome, and another threat emerged in the form of Shi'a-Shi'a infighting in the summer of 2018. This was also overcome thanks to the wisdom of the higher religious authority, and this victory should have its price. Importantly, leaders did not capitalise on their victories against ISIS. Despite their unity against ISIS, after the*

victory, problems emerged among the Shi'a factions, and Shi'a-Shi'a infighting almost escalated if it weren't for the role of the religious authority." (Bahrul Uloom 2023)

The central role played by Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani in 2018's Shi'a inner conflict demonstrates the importance of their symbolic capital and moral authority in facilitating the unification of the Shi'a factions and guiding them toward a process of reconciliation. Not only did this intervention prevent the conflict from escalating, but it also ensured that the Shi'a community remained unified and focused on common objectives and stability. It exemplifies how religious authorities are crucial in resolving internal conflicts and maintaining solidarity within the Shi'a political landscape.

1.3.3   Role of Religion

This theme sheds light on the significance of religion as a symbolic form of power within the Shi'a political framework in Iraq. According to Bourdieu's theoretical framework, symbolic capital is intricately linked to religious identity. The references underscore the importance of Islam in the political landscape of the nation, serving as both a legislative foundation and a guiding principle for governance. But, at the same time, a source of contention, for example, Dr Sabah Al-Timimi (2023), highlights that:

> "*I stated that I'm a Shi'a, but I'm a civil person. Alright? A pure liberal. I believe that my perception, and my conviction are that a person's sect, religion, and beliefs are personal matters. They should be practised individually and privately. But using them to oppress an entire population here is what I refer to as sectarianism.*" (Al-Timimi, 2023)

This dilemma also extends within political parties. Such conflicting views on the identity of the party were apparent. SCIRI, for example, experienced internal divisions stemming from differing perspectives on maintaining its religious identity while appealing to a broader audience. Amaar-Al-Hakeem's efforts to empower youth and broaden the party's political agenda clashed with the traditional views held by elder founding members. This disagreement in approach ultimately led Hakeem to relinquish his ties with SCIRI and establish the Wisdom Movement. As Hakeem himself stated, *"The emergence of the Wisdom Movement*

was not the result of a political conflict but a difference in the approach and vision regarding embracing this broad segment of our people."(2023).

Furthermore, Dr Al-Askari sees that:

> "*The project of an Islamic state has been shelved…Because the reality cannot bear it. First, not all Shiites are Islamists; there are secular Shiites. Even the Islamists do not fully agree today. The Shiite political scene shows two main powers, the current Sadrist and the Da'wa Party, differing in many matters. No one among them has a current goal to form an Islamic state or government because the principles of Da'wa were written in a different environment, not realising the depth of the problems within Iraq, the depth of the real division inside Iraq.*" (Dr Al-Askari, 2023)

This theme highlights the interconnection between religious and political symbols. One such example is given below.

> "*From a constitutional aspect, Islam is the source of legislation. From a judicial perspective, most of our laws fall under the haram halal category, prohibited and permissible, meaning they fall under sharia law*. "(Faiq Al-Shaikh Ali, 2018)

The study's findings indicate a significant focus on the relationship between religion and politics in the realm of Iraqi politics. The mentioned references provide valuable insights into the interplay between religion and symbolic capital within the Shi'a political context. The cited source indicates that corruption is a prevalent problem in Iraq, and it links this issue to the American occupation. The speaker uses a religious reference from Surah Al-Qalam to emphasise the negative effects of excessive prosperity and self-sufficiency. By framing the issue of corruption in religious terms, he seeks support by appealing to religious principles. In this instance, symbolic capital derives from the capacity to employ religious justifications to address political issues.

> *"It is worth mentioning that corruption is the prevailing issue in Iraq, and the root of corruption is the presence of the American occupation, which has created this problem in the country by raising high salaries for ministers and special positions. As it's well known, immense wealth attracts unscrupulous interests, as highlighted in Surah Al-Qalam: "But no! Man exceeds all bounds. He thinks he is self-sufficient. But your return is to your Lord."*
> (Qur'an 68:6-8) (Iranian Ambassador. 2023)

In another interview, one of the political leaders emphasised the need to maintain a balance between Islamic principles and democratic values when drafting the Iraqi Constitution. This demonstrates the importance of religion in political discourse. It reflects their effort to draft a constitution that respects the nation's religious identity while embracing democratic government. In this instance, symbolic capital is associated with navigating the relationship between religion and democracy while preserving the Shi'a community's distinct identity.

> *"The Constitution was drafted by Iraqi hands, aligning with what we believed. We are a nation with a unique identity, and we cherish this uniqueness. However, our demands are to uphold human rights and the people's freedom. Simultaneously, we believe in preserving the tenets of Islam. This is why Article 3 of the Constitution was included to balance these two fundamental issues. This might be one of the crucial matters in the region: to have a distinctive constitution that safeguards societal specificity. We succeeded in establishing this, and here we discuss the principle. The conversation can expand into how to preserve this balance. We have a clear uniqueness: we believe in the tenets of Islam while also believing in democracy as a means to achieve governance. This has been the foundation."*
> (Dr Bahrul Uloom, 2023)

The above reference points to a critical observation made by Dr Hamoudi during the interview, where he criticises Islamist political actors in Iraq for not effectively implementing Islamist principles in the country's governance. He pointed out that the term "Islamist" has taken on a distinct meaning in the

Iraqi context. He emphasises that many Iraqi Islamist politicians have been in politics for decades without actively striving to establish an Islamic state. Instead, they have focused on preserving secular legal frameworks and existing laws, which implies that the term "Islamist" in Iraq no longer has the traditional connotation of advocating for the implementation of Islamic principles of government.

> *"I asked al-Maliki in my book, The Ember of Governance, you can read it, there is a phrase of utmost significance. I asked him, 'You've been talking about the Islamic system for 60 years; what have you achieved from it during your two terms as Prime Minister?' He replied, "I'm proud that during my time as Prime Minister, no non-Islamic law passed from my office." This phrase is very important; it's key. It means he didn't aim to pass Islamic laws, he didn't aim to modify the Personal Status Law, for instance, and he didn't seek to amend the existing legislation, which is clearly against Islam. He didn't aim for change, there's no vision. The most important thing is that there's no foundation, no popular support for an Islamic system."* (Dr Hamoudi, 2023).

Moreover, it has been observed that a substantial number of political figures use religious references in their speeches to emphasise the central role that Islam plays in defining the political system of the country. In the reference below, Faiq al-Shaikh Ali, a political leader, greatly emphasises the religious aspect of government. This citation emphasises that most of the nation's laws and regulations are based on Islamic teachings and principles. By emphasising Islam as the primary source of legislation, he emphasises the significant influence of religion in shaping the nation's governance.

> *"From a realist point of view, our politicians, from day till dawn, reference the marji'iyya, what they say or what the fatwa is; therefore, the reference for these politicians is religious and not political. This is said with my full respect for religious institutions. However, they are concerned with religious affairs and laws, not political ones. They (politicians) reference religion whilst speaking about politics."* (Faiq Al-Shaikh Ali, 2018)

While many individuals highlight the importance of religion in shaping the governance of a nation, others advocate for ending the practice of utilising religion for political gain. In the cited source, the separation of religion and politics is advocated as a means of establishing a civil state. This highlights the significance of safeguarding religion and its symbols from exploitation for political purposes.

> *"The majority of the people are Muslims, and even non-muslims must respect this fact and respect each other's religious authorities. Such a non-Muslim must respect the Muslim religious authority, and the Muslim must respect the Christian religious authority. We have no such issue on such a basis. However, to implicate or plunge it into politics is a grave mistake."* (Faiq al-Shaikh Ali)

In the following reference, Nouri al-Maliki (2013) discusses the targeting of Friday prayers and its potential to ignite sectarian tensions. The reference emphasises the symbolic value of safeguarding religious rituals. It is noteworthy to consider the underlying political motives behind Maliki's discourse. By invoking the Ba'athist threat and highlighting the continued attempts to disrupt 'our rituals', Maliki not only underscores the historical animosity but also perpetuates a sense of fear. This fear serves as fuel for maintaining his grip on power, as it reinforces the perception of external threats and the need for a strong leadership to counter them. Thus, while addressing the Ba'athist link, it is crucial to acknowledge its role in perpetuating a narrative of victimisation that bolsters Maliki's authority.

Furthermore, it was observed that some politicians disapprove of using religious symbolism and figures in politics, particularly the Marji'ya. Examples include Dr. Sabah Al-Timimi and Faik Al-Shaikh Ali, who advocate for the separation of state and religion. Al-Timimi expressed her views, stating,

> *"I'm a Shia, but I'm a civil person. Alright? A pure liberal. I believe that my perception, and my conviction are that a person's sect, religion, and beliefs are personal matters. They should be practised individually and privately."* (Al-Timimi)

Similarly, Al-Shaikh Ali emphasised the importance of division between religion and politics, asserting,

"The most crucial point we champion is the division between religion and politics. Do not use religion or religious slogans about why you are participating in politics. This is so we protect religion and the symbols of religion. We do this so we can build a state of institutions. Not a state of slogans, religious symbols, or religious rituals. There is respect for all customs and traditions of our Iraqi society, but we do not bring it into politics."

(Faiq Al-Shaikh Ali, 2018).

In the Shi'a political context, where religion and politics are frequently intertwined, symbolic capital assumes a special significance. In regions with a predominant Shi'a population, such as Iraq and Iran, religious leaders and institutions, such as the marji'iyya (Shi'a religious authority), hold enormous symbolic capital. As they issue fatwas and guidance on a number of societal and political issues, their influence extends beyond religious matters into the realm of politics. Politicians who align themselves with these religious authorities can acquire symbolic capital by demonstrating their dedication to religious values and principles, which resonate strongly with Shi'a voters. Nonetheless, a delicate balance must be struck, as excessive religious rhetoric in politics risks alienating secular or non-Muslim sections of the population. Consequently, successfully navigating the intersection of religion and politics in the Shi'a political context is a crucial strategy for building and leveraging symbolic capital.

6.4. Conclusion

This chapter presented a comprehensive set of findings into the complex and dynamic power dynamics within the Shi'a political sphere in post-2003 Iraq, highlighting the crucial roles played by cultural and symbolic capital. This intricate analysis helps underscore the importance of elite discourse in shaping intra-Shi'a power struggles, revealing how these forms of capital serve as essential tools for political manoeuvring and influence.

Building on Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework, the chapter helps situate how cultural capital, encompassing knowledge, skills, education, and religious status, is leveraged by political actors to establish

authority and strategic advantage. The strategic use of cultural capital enables leaders to resonate with their constituencies' cultural and spiritual expectations, thereby fortifying their political foothold.

One significant theme that emerged concerned the lack of essential administrative skills and governance expertise among many post-2003 Shi'a political leaders who transitioned from opposition roles. This deficiency hinders effective state-building and contributes to corruption and inefficiency within governmental institutions. The chapter strongly advocates for a new generation of leaders who possess the necessary technical expertise and strategic vision to address contemporary challenges.

The absence of a cohesive vision and the pervasive mistrust among Shi'a factions are significant obstacles to political coherence and effective governance. The analysis reveals how political actors exploit these deficiencies to gain competitive edges, underscoring the importance of fostering trust and developing a unified vision. These are crucial elements for sustaining political stability and advancing national interests in the Shi'a political sphere.

Finally, the chapter significantly highlights the pivotal role of symbolic capital, particularly that associated with religious figures such as Grand Ayatollah Sistani. His pronouncements and fatwas serve as moral and spiritual guidance and powerful tools for political mobilisation and accountability. Religious leaders' strategic deployment of symbolic capital mobilises the Shi'a community, unifying it in times of crisis and steering political outcomes.

CHAPTER VII

FOREIGN INTERVENTION, COERCIVE CAPITAL, AND MOVING FORWARD

7.1 Introduction
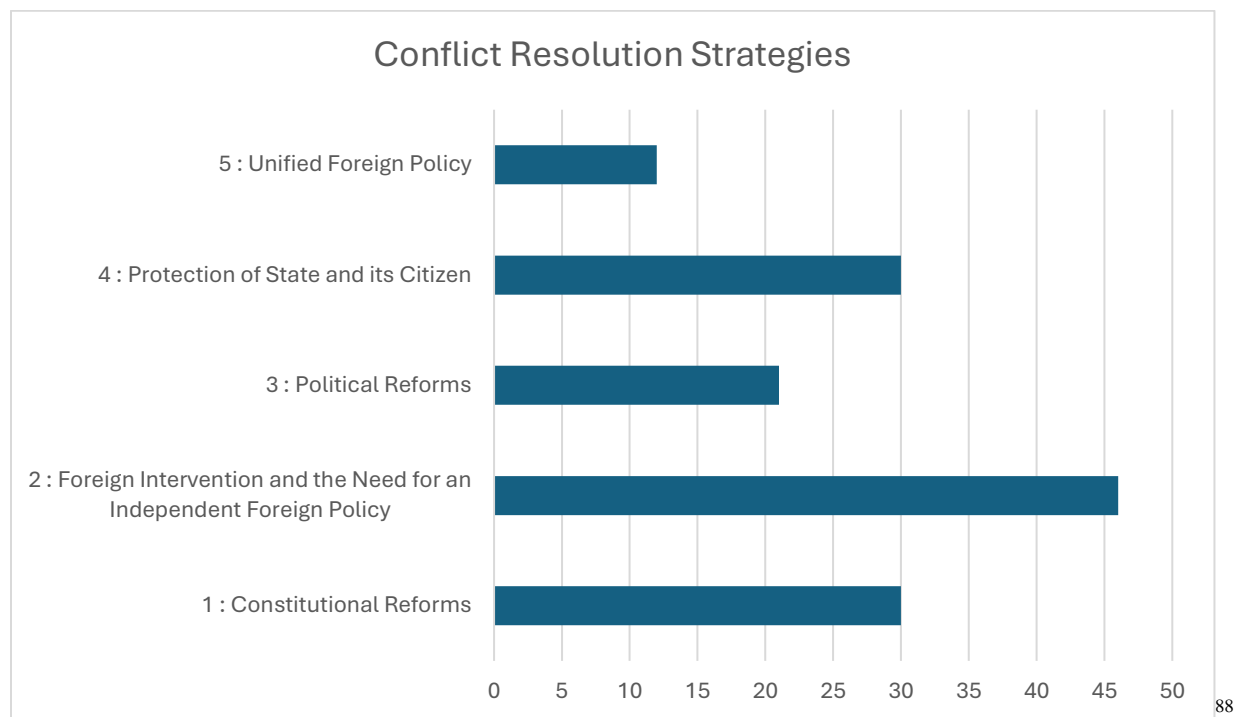
In the previous chapter, I focused on presenting the findings and forwarding a general discussion concerning the utilisation of cultural and symbolic capital by a number of key figures and groups within the Shi'a community. As I argued, within Shi'a politics, cultural capital plays a unique role in shaping the strategies and trajectories of individuals and groups, as well as an explanation for the perceived political institutional

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[88] The "Conflict Resolution Strategies" theme encompasses various approaches for resolving disputes within communities or states. These strategies aim to foster peace, stability, and collaboration among nations. The graph depicts five major sub-themes, each indicating a different approach. The scores across these sub-themes highlight the significance of constitutional reforms, foreign involvement, political reforms, state protection, and unified foreign policy in conflict resolution. All of these themes are explained in detail

failures in Iraq. For example, the majority of the interviewees noted the misalignment of perceived elements as expertise and knowledge or trust and vision, as well as the exercise of religious authority (via fatwas, etc.) for swaying participation in politics and governance. Part of the usefulness of the analysis in the previous chapter is that it helped shed additional insights into the important conditions that have further created a competitive political field whereby former actors are now re-strategising in light of a new emerging Shi'a youth who are voicing their dissatisfaction with the Muhasasa and calling for change.

While the previous chapter highlighted themes that focused on the conditions that contribute to undermining Iraqi politics, the current chapter highlights three other themes that emerged from the data dealing with foreign intervention, coercive capital, and insights toward resolutions and potential ways of moving forward. With respect to foreign intervention, understanding power dynamics and relations within the region requires a more nuanced engagement with external powers and influences on Iraq that further shape and inform the power relations within the Shi'a community. This is because there is no full agreement over the interventions, their cause, and potential resolution. However, a second sub-theme to emerge under foreign intervention focused on the need for clearer and more unified foreign policy in Iraq that could reduce tension between Iraq and its neighbouring states and reduce the ease by which foreign powers can fund groups (PMF) in Iraq. Moreover, as the data will show, the PMF's role and characterisation have been central to making greater sense of Sadr's strategy in Iraq since at least 2018.

Coercive capital (Bourdieu, 1986), on the other hand, emerges from the discussion of both the PMF and Sadr. Sadr's emergence in Iraq since 2003 has been well documented (e.g., Etherington, 2005; Cordesman, 2007; Al Kabaisi, 2013; Taha, 2019; Mansour & D'Cruze, 2022; Dodge, 2022). In particular, the evolution and changes in his strategy have been of particular interest. His strategy has greatly interested scholars and analysts over the past few years (Al-Mawlawi, 2022; Rubin, 2022; Falk, 2021; Dodge, 2022). As Mansour and D'Cruze (2022) point out in their recent report on Sadr, he 'has been an enigmatic leader claiming many identities, shifting from insurgent militia leader to reformist protest leader, and from election winner and

government coalition builder to revolutionary.' (p. 3) He also has a history of a willingness to overhaul his entire strategy if necessary, as he did, for example, in 2007 when he reached out to Sunni leaders to build a potential coalition (Raghavan, 2007).

I elected to focus more on Sadr for two main reasons. First, his case captures a more illustrative instance of coercive capital that blends an instance of physical and symbolic manipulation. Second, given that this project is heavily interested in the notion of coercive capital (and cultural and symbolic), focusing on data relating to his strategy and use of capital (via Bourdieu's framework) can contribute to understanding Sadr's behaviour as well as contribute to growing literature and assessments of his strategy.

Since at least 2018, Sadr has been characterised for his attempt to 'rebrand' himself (Bruton, 2018; Ibrahim, 2018; Georgy & Rasheed, 2022). While his rebranded strategy primarily focuses on his narrative about the PMF, it helps outline Sadr's general approach and strategy. Doing so helps situate the data presented later in this chapter. Concerning his current approach, it is difficult to engage or discuss Sadr's narrative without situating it concerning the PMF and how he is able to juxtapose himself regarding the PMF. The PMF is central to Sadr's employed narrative that positions himself as a nationalist who serves the interest of all Iraqis. Focusing on the data and themes that emerge from Sadr's interviews and public statements since 2018 helps shed more light on understanding how his strategic blend of coercive and symbolic capital further shifts the power dynamics in post-2003 Iraq.

Early after 2003, Sadr initially invoked a crucial distinction between the 'nativist' Iraqi Shi'a and those returning exiles for political and socio-economic dominance over the Shi'a population and, by extension, the future of Iraq. Within this context, Sadr (and his support network) view and position themselves as belonging to those who remained in Iraq and bore the brunt of Saddam Hussein's brutal tactics. In contrast, the Hakeems (and other similar individuals) represented those anti-Saddam Iraqi Shi'a of the 'commercial

middle class' who had managed to go into exile and are only returning now in an attempt to take control of the country and its Shi'a majority.

Sadr's early strategy was clearly grounded in relying on his distinction for criticising the senior clerics in Iraq given their political quietism and emphasising that the influential cleric Ali al-Sistani was not an Iraqi native (but born in Iran). This partly implied that their differences were fundamentally political and related to resource allocation and national identity. Existing animosity towards the returning Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) hierarchy also shaped Sadr's early strategic and confrontational stance towards the establishment.

As noted by some scholars, Sadr's inherited legacy, deeply rooted in a nationalist perspective, established the foundation for his strategy, allowing him to seize control over the raw power of young Shi'a men (Cordesman & Ramos, 2008; Abouaoun, 2011). This early strategy capitalised on his anti-U.S. rhetoric and a claim of independence from the occupying powers, in contrast to SCIRI and Da'wa.

To mobilise the underprivileged demographic, Sadr deployed a narrative of guardianship and saviour of the Shi'a population (Cordesman, 2007). The Mahdi Army, he once asserted, was established "for the sake of enjoying what is right and forbidding what is wrong; second, to combat corruption and terrorism in Iraq by peaceful means; and third, to protect holy places, religious authorities, and leaders whomever they may be." This public articulation positioned the Mahdi Army as protectors of the Shi'a faith and Iraqi sovereignty and implicitly challenged the new government's legitimacy, thus accruing symbolic capital.

Furthermore, Sadr framed the situation in Iraq as one that cannot be stabilised except when power is returned to the Iraqi people. This paved the way for the importance of having an armed faction that can conduct the necessary violence needed to return Iraq to its people. When Shi'a groups and actors advised him to disband his militia, he invoked the Mahdi rhetoric, stating, 'I cannot dismantle it, because it is not I

who commands it [Jayish al-Mahdi] but the Mahdi, i.e., the hidden Imam.' (Fazlhashemi, 2021; Mohseni & Sagha, 2022).

Exploring Sadr's evolving strategy within Iraq and the Shi'a community, his manipulation of coercive and symbolic capital is thus a large part of this chapter. It is crucial to explore his place within the shifting dynamics in the Shi'a community and the employment of his most recent strategy. As Mansour and D'Cruze (2022) contend, 'Sadr has pursued a strategy of 'controlled instability', seeking to expedite political destabilisation, not to reform or bring down the political system, but to bolster his own political power within the dominant Shia apportionment of the Iraqi state.' (p. 4). This chapter sheds light on this strategy and how Sadr uses capital in its pursuit.

The chapter ends by exploring a final theme concerning potential solutions and strategies for charting a path forward. This theme was not tied to any particular figure or strategy but rather emerged from several interviewees regarding what they perceived as necessary for nation-building and establishing shared governance. As a result, these themes revolved around developing a more unified foreign policy, establishing clear political and constitutional reforms to combat foreign interferences, and undermining the Muhasasa system.

7.2: Theme 3: Foreign Intervention: Cause, Impact, and Iranian Viewpoints

Another major theme that emerged from the data was foreign intervention. This theme was central in a number of ways as it helped highlight how contributors understood external powers and influences concerning the role they played in the destabilisation of the Iraqi state. This section highlights the perceptions of the impact and possible causes of external interventions in Iraq from the collected data. Moreover, given the near consensus among contributors that Iran has played a key role in interfering (positively or negatively) in Iraqi politics and governance, It serves to include the data collected from my

interview with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq Mohammad Kazem Al-Sadeq on Iran's views on intervention and source of conflict in Iraq.

Beginning with foreign intervention, the majority of contributors noted the long history of intervention from neighbouring states (Iran, Turkey, etc.) as well as the United States in further shaping Iraqi politics and Shi'a dynamics. As the findings showed, several contributors repeatedly noted how the presence of international and military forces continued to trigger further the power dynamics within the political landscape of Iraq. They also noted that these interventions have only further contributed to growing factionalism, sectarianism, and political fragmentation within the country. Among these voices is Al-Sadr, who stated that;

> *"The Americans need to leave. They've brought about destruction and problems with Iran.*
> *The security situation isn't better with them, so what's the point? If the Iraqi army isn't*
> *good, then neither are they."* (Interview with Muqtada Al-Sadr, Sharqiyya TV, Feb 24,
> 2020)

Dr Sharistani echoed a similar concern over the triggering element of the arrival of international forces and the expansion of Iranian interests into the region post-2003, stating that:

> *The reference to Islamic movements, especially those with ties to Iran, entering Iraq post-*
> *2003 and eventually adopting independent trajectories is a valid observation. The arrival*
> *of international forces, as exemplified by the presence of a large number of soldiers and*
> *the appointment of a civilian governor, triggered various reactions and power struggles*
> *that influenced the post-Saddam Iraqi political landscape.* (Interview with Sharistani,
> 2023)

The influence of foreign actors in Iraq also came up during my interview with Dr Mahmoud Al-Askari. In our conversation, we delved into the intricate dynamics of the growing use of coercion and its proliferation within the Iraqi socio-political environment, particularly focusing on its utilisation by various factions and

its implications on power dynamics. Dr Al-Askari's response emphasised the pervasive influence of external actors, especially Iran, in shaping Iraqi politics, remarking;

> *"For the majority of Iraqi groups, including the Shia. Even when we use labels, it's apparent. For example, with the Islamic Da'wa Party, many of its leaders, especially within Maliki's faction, still have an Iranian allegiance. Many Shi'a political parties were originally armed factions that transformed into political parties. Their loyalty to Iran is absolute.*

> *Groups like the Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq and the Kata'ib Hezbollah, which entered the political arena, are unconditionally loyal to Iran. The influence of the Supreme Islamic Council has waned, but their loyalty remains with Iran. Badr is known for its ties as well, and its leaders too. Their allegiance extends even to religious matters. They consider Ayatollah Khamenei to be their spiritual guide. Despite the reverence for Ayatollah Sistani within the popular sphere, the actual allegiance lies with Ayatollah Khamenei."*

Other contributors, most notably Dr Tahir, stated that the continued intervention by Iran and the maintenance of an unstable Iraq fell squarely within Iran's interest in maintaining a relatively weak neighbouring state. As Dr Tahir put it,

> *"it's not in the interest of the Islamic Republic of Iran to have a strong Iraq. Strong in the sense of competition because they don't want a repetition of the Saddam Hussein experience in this country. Their concerns are of a security nature…. For instance, they're resisting the idea of Iraq having an army that aligns with the West, meaning the United States and NATO becoming part of a Western military apparatus. They want to dilute the military power. Hence, they support the existence of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) as an independent institution."* (Interview With Dr Tahir, 2023)

As outlined in Chapter 5, the PMF holds a peculiar position within Iraq as it functions independently while growing more powerful and gaining political capital within the state (e.g., entering elections). As a result, they are viewed by many, including Dr Tahrir, Al-Abadi, the Marji'iyya, and Sadr, as very much akin to a foreign intervening force due to the external support they receive and their perceived negative impact on the state. However, no state's military force should be independent of the state. Al-Abadi rhetorically asks, '*"How can a military outfit have a political opinion?"* then goes on to state, "*This does not happen in any part of the world. It is prohibited."* The same notion is echoed by Sadr when he was asked about the armed groups targeting the Tishreen protestors, stating that;

> *"Not just the armed forces, because some suggest there is a third party involved... Yes, they might be the ones with the red caps."*

Sadr clearly holds the PMF as a force with external backing that undermines Iraqi sovereignty as well as works against the interests of Iraqis.

However, not all contributors agree with the above characterisation of the PMF. In an interview with Kais Al-Khazali, he shifted the onus back to the Shi'a community concerning the role of the PMF. He clarifies that being part of the largest ethnic and sectarian group in Iraq, they (the Shi'a factions) are the ones who are responsible for the ongoing debates and for determining the strategy and role of Shi'a in Iraq. As such, they are responsible for identifying the future of the PMF in Iraq and what role it ought to play. Al-Khazali asserts that:

> *"We cannot replicate the role of the IRG in Iraq because its philosophy is based on its direct link to the wali al-Faqih and not to the president; also, the Najaf Marji'iyya does not support such a route. As for the Lebanese model, they are a minority in Lebanon, and their model is used to safeguard them, this is not the case in Iraq. The Shi'a in Iraq are the majority, and as such, it is only logical that the adopted and right approach to work inside Iraq is of a strong state, a strong, resistant state, and a capable state, and any strategy*

outside of this approach is wrong and will not benefit the Iraqi state." (Monte Carlo Doualiya, Interview with Qais Al-Khazali, April 07, 2023).

Despite Khazali's assertion that the Shi'a community holds the ultimate responsibility for defining the role of the PMF in Iraq and the necessity of integrating armed groups into the state apparatus, there appears to be a distinction drawn between the state's coercive power and the role of armed resistance. In a recent interview where he was questioned about the armed resistance and their apparent inaction regarding American presence in the country, Khazali maintained that:

"*We will never abandon this demand (withdrawal of American Forces); praise be to Allah, our blood is still young, and our determination remains unwavering. Currently, our approach is more tactical, influenced by our assessment of the political landscape, which has kept us on standby."* (Interview with Al-Khazali, Al-Rafidain Conference, February 25, 2024)

Other contributors focused on the conditions which they believed made external meddling more easily possible in the first place, citing that the country's politicians are a large part of the problem given the relative ease with which many of them can be bought over through donations and similar promises. This was highlighted by Dr Al-Tamimi, who, speaking from experience and her observations during her time in Parliament, explained:

"*The ease with which external forces infiltrate our legislative body. Unfortunately, some deputies resort to seeking support from outside sources instead of relying on internal resources. This includes Shiite and Sunni representatives, who are actively seeking financial backing and empowerment from foreign entities. What's alarming is that neighbouring countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Turkey are readily involved in funding and supporting these politicians, often with little regard for controlling their*

influence on Iraq's internal decisions. This is evident in critical matters such as the Faw

Port and water management issues." (Interview with Dr Al-Tamimi, 2023).

In my data from my interview with the Iranian Ambassador to Iraq, he was firm in rearticulating that the Islamic Republic advocates for every region to determine its own fate. He stated,

> *"The Islamic Republic holds the view that every region in the world should determine its*
>
> *own fate. Therefore, the entry of a state thousands of kilometres away through military*
>
> *force and blatant interference in the country's affairs is unacceptable."*

Furthermore, the Ambassador emphasised the consequences of such intervention, highlighting the devastation left behind for the Iraqi people and the infringement upon Iraq's sovereignty and constitutional rights. He expressed,

> *"They left behind destruction and devastation for the Iraqi people and intervened in all*
>
> *aspects of the state, which constitutes an international violation, not to mention a violation*
>
> *of the Iraqi constitution."*

The Ambassador pointed to the fall of Adil Abd al-Mahdi's government amid the Tishreen protests as evidence of external manipulation. He provided context, stating,

> *"Dr Adel Abdul-Mahdi, the former Prime Minister, was a man who aimed to work and*
>
> *build the country. He sought two main goals in his early days: cooperation with Chinese*
>
> *institutions and signing a contract with Siemens, a company specialised in energy, to*
>
> *address the electricity crisis. However, his government fell on the pretext of punishment*
>
> *for his non-compliance with what the U.S. occupation wanted, particularly related to*
>
> *Siemens and the Chinese agreement."*

In response to allegations of Iran's role in undermining the democratic process in Iraq, the Ambassador strongly refuted such claims, asserting that they stem from a misguided perspective towards the Islamic Republic of Iran. He emphasised Iran's historical support for Iraq's political process, stating,

"It was among the first to support the political process in Iraq and provided backing to the participating parties in the electoral process."

Moreover, he highlighted Iran's positive relations with all segments of the Iraqi communities as well as exerting efforts to create a conducive environment for political dialogue and elections, stating,

"The Islamic Republic has friendly relations with all segments of the Iraqi people and active political parties, whether Sunni, Shia, Christian, or others. It has been instrumental in creating a suitable environment for strengthening relations and bonds between parties. It actively encourages holding elections, promotes public awareness about participating in parliamentary elections, and maintains the momentum of the political process."

The Ambassador also offered first-hand insights into what he perceives as Iran's pivotal role in supporting Iraq during the rise of ISIS. He recounted how, upon hearing news of Mosul's fall to terrorists, Qassem Soleimani swiftly responded, stating, *"We need to stay in constant communication, and we need to decide what to do."*

Soleimani's arrival in Iraq marked a turning point, with the Ambassador recalling,

"At 11:00 PM, the plane landed at Baghdad International Airport with Hajj Qassem Soleimani on board. I was there to receive him at the airport."

Soleimani's commitment extended beyond mere presence; he immediately engaged in strategic planning, mobilising militant groups to protect critical areas like Samarra. The Ambassador emphasised, *"This is just a brief account of the presence and commitment of the Islamic Republic to defend Iraq and its sanctities."*

Additionally, the Ambassador shared an encounter highlighting the recognition of Qassem Soleimani's leadership even by adversaries. He recalled a conversation between Prime Minister Al-Abadi and President Obama, where the latter acknowledged Soleimani's frontline leadership. President Obama remarked to Al-Abadi,

> *"Soleimani is our enemy, but we respect that enemy because he leads from the front lines. We see him in Mosul, Kurdistan, Syria, Lebanon, and Baghdad. He moves around the clock, and as his forces advance, he is there."*

The Ambassador attributed these accusations to aggressive actions by the U.S. occupation, aiming to tarnish Iran's image and deflect accountability from themselves. He cited a statement from a professor at the University of Mustansiriya, praising it as a testament to the deep historical and social connections between Iran and Iraq. According to the Ambassador, the professor said, *"Those who talk about Iranian intervention in Iraq are merely referring to the convergence of two societies. This signifies the convergence of ideologies, social interactions, and historical connections."*

Through his remarks, the Iranian Ambassador sought to dispel the narrative surrounding Iran's negative role in Iraq, telling me that:

> *"Hence, these accusations do not align with reality. They are nothing more than the enemy's attempt to deflect blame onto the Islamic Republic of Iran so they do not hold themselves accountable… the attempt to tarnish the image of the Islamic Republic is, in fact, an aggressive act by the U.S. occupation."*

The Ambassador's portrayal of Iran's role contrasts sharply with his view of the American intervention, asserting that the *occupation did not provide anything substantial for Iraq's tangible development. They ruled the country for a long period and still interfere in Iraq's affairs."*

As he went on to then state,

> *"These are only a few of the repercussions of the U.S. occupation of Iraq. Despite Iraq being rich in natural resources and human potential, it remains devastated due to the American occupation."*

I highlight these statements as the Ambassador's portrayal of Iran's role underscores the challenges Iraq has faced in its democratic journey, contrasting sharply with the view that contributors expressed during discussions. The Ambassador both displaces Iran's role in the region and deflects the cause back on the American occupation as being the primary vehicle for instability of Iraqi politics.

7.3 Theme 4: PMF, Sadr, and Coercive Capital

The next central theme to emerge from the data is coercive capital and its utilisation in terms of shifting power dynamics within the Shi'a community. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the use of coercion (physical and symbolic) as a means of promoting various political agendas has been widespread since 2003. However, it is difficult to disentangle any discussion of Sadr and coercive capital from the PMF. This is because Sadr's narrative is one that positions him in opposition to the PMF. They are outsiders to Iraq, while he is an insider. They serve the interests of foreign powers; he has Iraq's interest at heart. His narrative aims to delegitimise the PMF's power and usurp the coercive powers in his favour. This will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. My goal in this section is to situate the findings concerning the problem the PMF raises so that I can further present the findings relating to Sadr's use of coercive capital for shifting the power dynamics in his favour.

7.3.1 PMF and Coercion

Unsurprisingly, the findings revealed that one of the primary challenges facing Iraq lies in the existence of armed groups within the country. These groups are generally associated with political parties and operate independently of state control. The data revealed that the majority of the contributors shared concerns over

those militant groups as they pose a great risk to internal stability and potential conflict. Moreover, the lack of governance over these factions threatens the emergence of other similar groups.

> *"We can't have every household with machine guns or grenades because I am affiliated with a certain faction without commitment or restrictions. This is real chaos, not just for families but for society. A country won't be an institution when every cleric and civilian is armed. My aspiration is to build a state of institutions. A state is not built through weapons; it's built through knowledge, through pens, through books, through reading, through development, through minds."* (Interview with Dr Sabah Al-Timimi, 2023)

It is difficult to separate the role of the PMF from the broader discussion of coercion and the need for stronger policies from what is seen as the implementing foreign agendas by Iran and other proxy states. For example, Dr Al-Askari highlighted political parties' instrumentalisation of armed factions in advancing their agendas and consolidating power. He elaborated,

> *"These political parties, through the armed factions, are trying to impose their [foreign] agendas, hegemony, and control over everything, including finances and more."*

For Al-Askari, there is no doubt that armed groups have utilised the PMF as a means of shaping political outcomes and exerting influence over state affairs. He explains that the PMF (and similar factions) have become indispensable in leveraging political advantage and consolidating power within the executive branch. As Al-Askari put it,

> *"They believe that whoever possesses weapons has a better chance of gaining political advantages, of gaining power within the executive authority, for instance. So, for example, the Kata'ib, the Asa'ib, and many others, each having their own armed factions, wield power through their weapons."*

This reported observation illuminates the associated relationship between armed capabilities and political influence, where militias affiliated with specific political factions are strategically deployed to ensure the protection of government officials. For instance, Dr Al-Askari noted that the following example;

> *"When they assume executive positions, they have their militias protect them. For instance, the Minister of Education has Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq militia protecting him. The Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Ahmed al-Asadi, might be associated with Kata'ib Hezbollah. Each of these factions with their weapons exerts power."*

Ghaith Al-Tamimi also sheds light on the utility of coercive capital and how it is used to silence opposition voices, stating that:

> *"There is an important point- practically if they wanted to 'open' to the opposition, what do you think is the process? They would send someone to you, meet you, and pay you off. They would ask you to stop speaking about the issues they don't like and tell you to be a good boy. If you don't, then… that is their mechanism."* (Interview with Ghaith al-Tamimi, Altaghier TV, October 30, 2022)

Some contributors denied this claim, including Kais Al-Khazali, who insists that the role of such factions as political actors differs substantially from their role as military opposition against foreign invaders. He maintains that their political journey differs from their jihadi objectives.

> *"From an official perspective, we have announced our position clearly and explicitly... We say from the offset that the PMF has no relation to our mistakes because we are now claiming an independent political party…. What I want to concentrate on is to distinguish between the representation of the political aspects of the PMF is illegal and refused by the Marji'iyya , and we believe this to be correct because we will surely fall into committing mistakes. So, if we enter the process as representatives of the PMF then all mistakes will*

be attributed to the PMF, and God forbid it could reduce from its sanctity of this entity. We have to protect this."

Moreover, in his responses, Dr Al-Askari shed light on the paradoxical nature of the PMF, stating,

"The Popular Mobilization Forces, which consist of various brigades, battalions, and factions, are a strange entity. They are neither purely a popular movement nor an official military force. So, they hold onto their weapons and are not willing to let go of them because they believe that their existence is tied to their weapons. Without weapons, they think they would vanish. It's ironic that they now lead the state, yet they possess weapons that are not under the control of the state. This is a significant paradox…they seem to be saying that they have their own armed strength that can rival official state institutions. This became evident when there was a confrontation between Moqtada al-Sadr's Saraya al-Salam and these political parties. Moqtada al-Sadr realised that these parties also have significant armed capabilities. This realisation likely prompted him to withdraw, understanding that he's facing another formidable force."

As noted by Al-Askari, the ability to generalise or pinpoint the specified nature of the PMF is difficult, to say the least. They occupy a complex, multifaceted role that is dualistic and paradoxical in that it is both a state-sponsored entity and a vehicle for political manoeuvring. Moreover, there is a genuine worry that the PMF will continue to run as an independent entity autonomous of the state and its goals. Al-Askari even points out the paradoxical nature of leading the state via coercive control but with weapons that do not belong to the state.

7.3.2 Theme 4: Sadr and Coercive Capital

The sub-theme to emerge under this category from the data concerns coercive capital and its utilisation concerning shifting power dynamics within the Shi'a community. As noted at the outset of this chapter, the use of coercion (physical and symbolic) as a means of promoting various political interests has been

widespread since 2003. This section focuses on Al-Sadr and outlines how he uses symbolic and physical coercion to promote his vision and shape Shi'a dynamics. This can be seen in several findings that capture Sadr's ability to manoeuvre himself and align himself when needed with the view of others to gain more political grounds. In this section, I highlight four ways that Sadr's coercive capital is utilised.

The first finding is tied to Sadr's character and how he presents himself as someone always willing to adapt to changing circumstances. This is evident in at least two findings. For example, I found a number of passages where he heavily emphasises the need to maintain firmness when someone within his ranks continues but that this willingness always depends on the circumstances of the seriousness of the mistake and Sadr's own patience. As he explicitly states,

> *"In other instances, if they make a mistake, I bring it to their attention once or twice, five times, ten times, based on my patience and the seriousness of the mistake. But if they persist...we will become firmer."* (Interview with Muqtada Al-Sadr, Sharqiyya TV, Feb 24, 2020)

I also found passages where he emphasises the willingness to completely change in character if the situation and circumstances call for it. Sadr is apt at strategically altering himself as a means to both show strength and command in the face of challenges. As he stated in another interview,

> *"When that is in danger [reputation], in that instance, I change from being the caring, patient father figure to someone with more seriousness."*

The second way that Sadr utilises coercive strategies is by further positioning himself as one who can rightly deliver justice to wronged Iraqis. By doing so, he simultaneously asserts his authority to impose punishment and the legitimacy (or right) to do so in the name of safeguarding the Iraqi population. He states he is willing to employ coercive means to enforce social norms and uphold order. For example, when speaking about the innocent Iraqis killed during peaceful protests, Sadr states:

"*I mean those [PMF] who shot innocent people and killed them while they were peacefully protesting. These individuals must be brought to justice.*" (Interview with Muqtada Al-Sadr, Sharqiyya TV, Feb 24, 2020)

This brings us to the third way, which invokes Sadr's ability to discredit the PMF by way of emphasising that their actions are contrary to Iraqi interests while also positioning himself as one who can deliver justice for those wronged. In the same interview, he emphasised that he is better positioned to rectify wrongs than the political elites. As he states,

"*It's expected that the political elites would resort to such measures (violence) because they are corrupt… these are like my sons (protestors). I know how to seek revenge. I won't just tweet about it; I'll take action.*" (Ibid).

The action, however, is to serve the Iraqi public and interest and not any one person or group. If force is to be used, it is to be governed by the state and serve the people's interests. Al-Abadi echoes this sentiment, acknowledging that:

"*Even in my time, there were such issues as protests, but we managed to contain them because we opposed the heavy-handed method when dealing with the citizens. However, at the same time, we were firm against those who targeted our forces. Our strategy is that our forces must be used to protect the state, not the ruler. This was very clear: I did not want our security forces to defend me. I did not want it to defend the ruler or government but to defend the state and motherland. We wanted to protect private, public and state possessions. We interacted with protestors and gave them water*". (Interview with Haider Al-Abadi, Al-Rasheed TV, February 16, 2021)

Like Al-Abadi, Sadr's own view promotes the notion that there is no need for an external power to assist the state with its needs. Instead, Sadr positions himself as the vanguard of Iraqi nationalism and says that we are capable of defending ourselves without the need for foreign assistance. This is most evident in Sadr's

expressed readiness to confront threats, such as the resurgence of ISIS, even if doing so requires a bringing back of the Mahdi Army to deter threats to the state. This shows his ability to wield coercive capital, when necessary, to assert dominance and negotiate his position within Iraq's political dynamics. Sadr confidently asserts, *"Let them come, and you'll see what we'll do to them."*

Finally, there is something to be said about Sadr's ability to reinforce the notion that coercive instruments should be restricted to the states (so as to limit PMF's use of coercive means). It is important to note that Sadr's restriction on others being able to control arms could be understood as a tool to serve his political ambitions. This is because it limits others from having the ability to control arms, thus bringing all arms under the control of the state. By limiting the coercive power of other factions and bringing it under state control, Sadr gains a political advantage. With a broader electoral base and greater support than his rivals, as demonstrated in the past two parliamentary cycles, Sadr aims to secure the most seats. This would enable his political party to assume control of the Prime Minister's Office. Once in power, Sadr can gradually diminish the political influence of his opponents.

Sadr has used this strategy in the past. During the 2021 elections, he called for a government formation based on the majority rather than muhasasa. This enabled him to sideline most of his Shi'a political opponents and instead partner with Kurdish and Sunni Arab parties to form the majority in Parliament. Adopting this approach presented a direct challenge to Sadr's Shia counterparts, who opposed it because it diminished their chances of participating in government formation and consequently removed them from positions of power. As a result, the Iraqi government underwent its longest stalemate to date, which resulted in armed clashes outside the Green Zone. Only later did Sadr voluntarily withdraw his supporters and surrender the government to the Coordination framework.

This is evident in a notable exchange where Sadr articulates his stance on restricting coercive instruments to state control and even said he was willing to lead by example. This is his way of aligning himself with the national interest of Iraq. As Sadr stated,

"Yes, that's very important. I'm happy to lead on this; I'm ready to start with myself... When we get this government, we'll collect all weapons outside of government control, militias, and everyone not under government authority."

Sadr's strategic approach seems to be one where he can secure the political landscape by removing the physical coercion element of the PMF – which is their primary vehicle for their power and seep the authority in his favour. He is explicit about this, placing himself as someone who can be in control of the group, a group whose mandate is not grounded in Walai*i* (meaning a group whose allegiances are to outsiders such as Iran), by stating that:

"What distinguishes the Blue Caps is its leadership; they have a leader (referring to himself). But with others, we don't know where their orders come from and who controls them."

These four characteristics are central to understanding how Sadr utilises coercive capital to promote his ends and shift the power dynamics within the Shi'a community. They will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter when the four main themes (cultural, symbolic, coercive, and foreign intervention) are discussed.

This section aimed to highlight the elements in Sadr's blending of his symbolic authority and willingness to use physical coercion when necessary to maintain his power. As one Sadrist recently put it,

"He [Sadr] often acts in consideration of the overall benefit of the people over political benefit…Sadr always attempts to preserve the blood of the people" (Al Rabiaa TV interview, Zuhair al-Chalabi, July 19, 2022)

7.4 Charting Paths to Stability: Insights and Resolutions

7.4.1 Unified Foreign Policy

The final theme from the data deals with findings relating to resolutions and what participants thought were necessary for moving forward. Under this category, important insights were provided by the contributors and participants on what they perceived as necessary means to chart a path to greater government stability.

While discussing the challenges posed by the fragmented political setup, contributors highlighted the need for a strong foreign policy as a crucial strategy to rectify the current situation in Iraq. They also emphasised the need to adopt a united vision and goal that pulls together the various political factions towards a primary objective, which can result in a reduction in the reliance on and intervention of foreign states. Moreover, the contributors stressed that the country cannot move forward independently unless it has regional stability and a strong foreign policy.

In their discussion of the geopolitical situation in Iraq, contributors stressed that Iraq is strategically surrounded and influenced by the interests of three crucial countries in its surroundings. Its interest lies in avoiding potential conflict with them. They stressed a holistic strategy that calls for a balanced relationship with each of them, which is essential to maintaining the stability and sovereignty of the country. As Dr Bahrul Uloom put it:

> *"Iraq is a vital region, we have a triangle with one side being Iran, the other Turkey, and the third being Arab. These three challenges have placed the system of governance in a challenge to achieve balance and to preserve the weight of this triangle through a centre within it."* (Interview with Dr Bahrul Uloom, 2023)

Moreover, the contributors also noted the need to engage with neighbouring countries in a positive diplomatic relationship, as having a positive relationship is crucial not only for Iraq's internal stability but also for fostering collaborative efforts on a regional level. Furthermore, the utilisation of a country's land by other states for their agenda was also criticised during the study. It was implied that the use of Iraq's

land by foreign countries for their hidden agendas is a threat to the country's sovereignty, which emphasised the need for a mutual and balanced relationship that Iraq must maintain to secure its stability. This was highlighted by Ghaith Al-Timimi in an interview when he stated:

> *"They must ensure that Iraq is not used as a pawn in the hands of foreign agendas. If the Americans are supporting groups closely aligned with Iran, be careful, as they want to threaten Saudi Arabia and the Gulf for their stance on the increasing oil output they rejected. We cannot be that country used to threaten neighbouring countries. We need to have stability and close relationships with all our regional neighbours."* (Interview with Ghaith al-Tamimi, Altaghier TV, October 30, 2022*)*

The contributors emphasised that Iraq's government must maintain a strong stance on its foreign relationship. That is, they should strive for a compatible and mutual relationship with their allies based on mutual interest and work together on shared interests, such as energy and other sectors, that would benefit both the Iraqi and American states. They stressed the need to be respectful of Iraq's sovereignty by acknowledging it as an independent and self-governing nation.

> *"Daesh was supported by regional states with billions of dollars. They knew they were evil forces but wanted to use them to unsettle a regional power, and the idea was that after that mission had been achieved, they will deal with these evil powers. But these evil powers utilised these resources, and their evil spread beyond their control.*" (Interview with Haider Al-Abadi, Al-Iraqiyah TV, September 16, 2014)

7.4.2 Constitutional Reforms

One of the solutions that emerged during the discussion as a solution to political conflicts was the implementation of constitutional amendments. Many contributors identified it as a crucial proposition for

Iraq's political landscape. The majority of the contributors, including both political figures and experts, stressed the need for the active participation of all parties in the process of constitutional amendments. They highlighted how the current system creates challenges for the progress of the country, reinforcing the role of the constitutional amendments that can play a crucial role in improving Iraq's political future.

"Amending or implementing the constitution would be better for Iraq." (Dr Sabah Al-Timimi, 2023)

Furthermore, it was also observed that many political figures initiated the process of proposing changes to the constitutions, but their efforts met with limited success. Dr Al-Hakeem, who was one of the prominent political figures, also advocated for a constitutional change to address the political situation in Iraq. His approach to reforms stands out as inclusive and unbiased and devoid of any party affiliation, sectarian interests, or political gains. The analysis revealed that his proposal emphasised "citizenship" as the fundamental unit of society instead of "component", as Dr Bahrul Uloom expressed.

> *"He addressed federalism positively, focused on both wings of the legislative authority—the Council of Representatives and the Council of Union—and fairly distributed natural resources, underscoring the vision for a more equitable and inclusive political framework."* (Interview with Dr Bahrul Uloom, 2023)

Nevertheless, the proposed constitution could not succeed because the parties lacked a shared vision. In terms of the Iraqi political system, the data revealed that the parties need to collaborate to have a comprehensive and shared vision focusing on stability, law enforcement, respect for dignity, equal job opportunities, and better economic conditions to amend the constitution together.

> *"Building upon this broad and comprehensive vision of the political system, we need to agree on the Constitution. The Constitution will become the foundation for many of these laws, systems, and changes we implement, in addition to the construction of our*

democratic institutions." (Interview with Dr Hisham Al-Alawi, 2023)

There was also a pattern during the analysis where political figures disapproved of the current constitution. It was observed that the political figures and experts believe that the constitution, which was written twenty years ago in different circumstances, does not accurately resonate with the evolving complex situation of Iraq. They expressed the need for constitutional reforms because, according to them, the constitution cannot provide a solution to the problems Iraq is experiencing. One of the contributors pointed out:

> *"The constitution was drafted in an atmosphere of apprehension and fear, and these conditions dictated the inclusion of details that later became constraints on the political system."* (Interview with Amar Al-Hakeem, 2023)

While discussing the need for constitutional amendments, contributors also discussed examples of other established democratic countries with strong and clearer constitutions. A comparison of the Constitution of Iraq and South Africa, for instance, is shared by Dr Al-Alawi as he explains:

> *"The South African Constitution is much clearer in many aspects. It has chosen a presidential system. The distribution of power and authority between local governments and the federal government is clear and without overlap. The number of parties is limited, fewer than the parties operating in Iraq. The African National Congress had a majority in their parliaments for twenty-eight years. Forming governments and implementing policies, the process of changing the constitution in South Africa was relatively easier when you compare it to the Iraqi Constitution. You can notice the differences and their effects on how things evolved in 2005 compared to South Africa."* (Interview with Dr Hisham Al Alawi, 2023)

This comparison helps highlight the challenges and potential benefits associated with constitutional reforms in Iraq.

7.4.3 Political Reforms

Another important theme that emerged during the analysis, having the potential to resolve the challenges that Iraq is facing, was the political reforms. The majority of the contributors believed that the restoration of Iraq's sovereignty depends on a multifaceted approach that includes political, legislative, societal, economic, constitutional, educational, and cultural reforms. In the context of the nation's stability and sustained development, educational reforms were deemed the most critical of these initiatives, according to the majority of the speakers. The contributors emphasised that educational reforms and broader political reforms are intricately intertwined as both are critical for the nation's progress and development.

> *"I have become convinced that even if someone from the farthest corner of the Earth were to become the leader of Iraq, as long as they develop individuals and the community, starting with education, healthcare, and services, they are welcome. What have these people done for us?"* (Interview with Dr Sabah Al-Timimi, 2023)

Al-Hakeem emphasised that 56% of the population of Iraq consists of children under the age of 15, thereby highlighting the critical nature of investing in educational reforms.

> *"Today, we put our faith in the young people. Seventy per cent are under thirty years of age, and around ninety per cent are under fifty years of age, half the population were born after the fall of the dictatorship. Seventy per cent of our people do not have any memory of the past and has no apprehensions and fears of the past (which most Shi'a politicians have).*

This is the general reality of the Iraqi people. Those are our hopes for now and the future;

we need to give them the role and opportunity." (Interview with Ammar Al-Hakeem, 2023)

While discussing the reforms, the contributors also drew attention to the Muhāsasa system, which, for some, they consider to be the underlying cause of the majority of the issues. The contributors expressed that the appointment of incompetent individuals to critical positions is a consequence of the quota or Muhāsasa system. Because these individuals lack the qualifications for the positions they hold, they frequently fail to produce results. The contributors noted that while it does guarantee a proportional representation of the major ethnic and sectarian groups (e.g., Shi'a Arabs, Sunni Arabs, and Kurds), it occasionally appoints individuals solely based on their sect affiliation without regard to their qualifications or competency for the position. Dr Sharistani recalls that:

"I remember Barham Salih (who held many posts among its senior post is the President of

Iraq) saying to me, "Quotas have penetrated so deep it is extended to the worker level. For

example, a worker from the Kurdistan Democratic Party who serves tea wanted to employ

another worker to serve tea, but this time from the opposing political group. This situation

emerged in Kurdistan and in our case." (Interview with Dr Sharistani, 2023)

As stated by the contributors, the political reforms comprise a range of strategies to address the challenges and obstacles of the current political system. The contributors shared that there is a need for political blocs to actively participate in building the state, which includes the evaluation and the reassessment of systems, such as the quota system, to ensure they serve the intended purpose of fostering inclusivity without any bias.

"In general, fundamental reforms are needed to overcome the failures of this experience. The

political blocs should not remain stagnant, but they should show genuine determination to build

the state. We are optimistic about Iraq's future. Some of the current challenges are necessary growing pains rather than choices." (Interview with Dr Bahrul Uloom, 2023)

In contrast, Muqtada Al-Sadr, echoing the sentiments of the contributors, strongly opposes the continuation of the sectarian quota system, stressing its detrimental effects on Iraq's stability and progress. He adamantly insists on ending of Muhāsasa declaring, *"We must end ' Muhāsasa.' Iraq won't stabilise with Muhāsasa."* Al-Sadr's unwavering stance against Muhāsasa extends to his political aspirations, as he has made it a condition for his return to politics, asserting, *"I said no to Muhāsasa. I'll stay on this path until death."*

Moreover, he challenges Kurdish politicians to break free from Muhāsasa's grip, urging them, *"Enough with Muhāsasa. It's time to move beyond it."* Through such positions, Al-Sadr articulates his firm commitment to what he sees as reform and his vision for a unified, inclusive Iraq.

7.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to present data and findings and briefly discuss three other major themes that emerged from the data. These help us further understand the power dynamics and relations within the Shi'a community. The first dealt with foreign intervention and what many contributors viewed as an external power heavily undermining the Iraqi goal of state-building and governing. The second was a focus on the unique utilisation of coercive capital by Al-Sadr in his aim to assert himself as a legitimate authority within Iraq and its protector. The last theme dealt with discussions relating to the need for more unified foreign policies, political reform, and constitutional reform.

Chapter VIII. CONCLUSION

Introduction

Returning full circle, it is time to take stock of the previous chapters before forwarding a few conclusions to this project. This project initially began with a general interest in understanding the power relations within the Iraqi Shi'a community post-2003. I was largely motivated by Toby Dodge's writings on the subject and the use of Bourdieu's framework for analysing the Iraqi context. I saw the value in approaching the context from a standpoint that accounted for the complexities and dynamics of power in Iraqi society, particularly in the context of state formation, conflict, and political violence. Dodge's approach offers a robust interdisciplinary analysis that combines political science with sociological theory to unpack the intricate mechanisms of power, authority, and social structures in Iraq.

It was more useful to draw on Bourdieu's key concepts—habitus, field, and capital—to dissect the political and social structures in Iraq. I thought this was especially true given the fragmentation of the Iraqi state and its competing interest groups. From my own experience and background experience in Iraq, I could see how concepts could be instrumental in understanding how power operates and is maintained within Iraqi society. In his 2019 article, *Muhasasa Ta'ifiya and its Others: Domination and contestation in Iraq's political field*, Dodge outlined his rationale for electing to draw on Bourdieu's approach in his analysis of Iraq, noting its uniqueness but also the fact that Iraq's political field is still in its early emergence since 2003. As Dodge notes, the 'Lebanese system took more than 180 years to impose its disciplinary power across society. The Iraqi system, by contrast, was violently and exogenously imposed 16 years ago and has been subject to sustained contestation ever since.' (pp. 38-39). Its contestation and evolving habitus fit Bourdieu's approach, which views the political field as a space where political actors and parties utilise capital in their struggle for domination.

But I also saw limitations to Dodge's approach. The most glaring of which was that Dodge's analysis can sometimes struggle to account for rapid and transformative political changes, such as those seen during the Arab Spring or the rise and fall of ISIS. Bourdieu's concepts, typically applied to more stable contexts, could fall short of fully capturing the fluidity and immediacy of such disruptions. Finally, Dodge doesn't always account for local variations. Iraq's diverse regional, ethnic, and sectarian divisions mean that political dynamics can vary significantly across different areas and within groups. Dodge's use of Bourdieu may sometimes risk overlooking more nuanced regional specifics by focusing on broader structural patterns, thus missing out on localised dynamics.

For example, in his most recent paper, 'Iraq, Consociationalism and the Incoherence of the State' (2024), Dodge rehashes some of his prior arguments and offers new critiques of the consociationalism model implemented in Iraq. It is Dodge's view that the model has paradoxically contributed to the incoherence and dysfunctionality of the Iraqi state rather than its strengthening. The framework has led to further fragmentation and incoherence of the Iraqi state.

Part of Dodge's argument here (and elsewhere, see Dodge 2019, 2019a) is that the consociational model, by institutionalising ethno-sectarian identities, has entrenched sectarianism rather than mitigating it. In short, there is an overemphasis on sectarian division. His institutional focus has transformed fluid social identities into rigid political categories, fuelling division instead of fostering unity. This has further led to institutional weakness and administrative fragmentation, creating greater inefficiency, corruption, and lack of coherent governance. He argues that the consociational approach has created a political environment where cooperation is often transactional and opportunistic rather than based on genuine consensus-building. This has perpetuated a cycle of instability and conflict, as political factions are constantly manoeuvring for greater power and resources.

However, I found that Dodge's discussion still lacked a focus on the shift in Iraq and changing circumstances. The wider role of the Shia's historical and religious development (as well as social,

economic, etc.) are central to unpacking our understanding of the violence and military conflict in the region (Mundy, 2019). While comparative approaches offer insight into Iraq's situation, they face their own limitations given the uniqueness of the Middle East region (Mundy, 2019). A more engaged account should look to offer a more comprehensive account of the groups in Iraq. In response, I sought to address this gap in this project by taking more seriously the intra-group power relations within the Shi'a community. This required a wider unpacking of the historical and theological development of the group and the role of the Murajiyya in Iraq's shifting political dynamics. The fluidity of Iraq's political situation has moved away from predominantly sectarian violence and more toward the power dynamics among the elites within each community (Shi'a, Sunni, and Kurd).

This project was an attempt to better elucidate these intra-relations and their impact on the political field in Iraq. As a result, in Chapter 1, I first set up the nature of the project and its adopted framework for investigating Shi'a dynamics. On the one hand, there is a generic element to the project insofar as which group to focus on and attempt to better understand the power relations within the group (e.g., Kurd or Sunni groups). On the other hand, the Shi'a block is the more influential in the political field in Iraq at this time. A focus on the Shi'a and the power dynamics within the group has a substantial impact on the state and its future. In Chapter 2, I turned to a broader theoretical engagement with power-sharing models and the notion of power itself and its place within Bourdieu's analysis. As I argued in Chapter 2 (and Chapter 3), my choice of Bourdieu was grounded in the uniqueness of Iraq's situation and its heavily contested political field. There is also a growing interest among some scholars looking to apply Bourdieu to Iraq (and the Middle East more generally). This includes Coboz (2019) work on 'scholarly capital' in contemporary Shi'ism. In his work, Coboz conceptualises the *marja'iyya'* using Bourdieu's symbolic capital to examine how scholarly capital is defined by religious scholars. The current project is a contribution to this emerging area of study. In Chapter 4, I highlighted the methodology of the project. However, before getting to the data, Chapter 5 was introduced as a necessary exposition of the theological and political background that forms the backdrop of the development of the current situation in Iraq with the rise of protests and undertaking of

the PMF. The PMF also present a unique situation in Iraq insofar as their relation to the Iraqi state but also to neighbouring Iran. Given that a large part of Bourdieu's work focuses on trying to understand the political field and its nonseverance, i.e. a struggle for the monopoly on the legitimate use of violence by whoever dominates, the PMF adopt a unique position within the framework as they both fit and do not fit the description. A major part of Chapter 5 (and this project) was tracing the development and relative position of the PMF within the power struggle in Iraq and its role in influencing how major actors, such as Sadr, utilise their capital. Finally, Chapters 6 and 7 focused on presenting the findings and data from the study. The data offered some important insights into understanding the Shi'a dynamics and approach to the contested political field in Iraq.

8.1: Shifting Dynamics: An Overview

Post-2003 Iraq has grappled with intergroup conflicts along sectarian and ethnic lines for decades, with many studies and focus reports emerging on the Shi'a, Sunni Arab, and Kurdish communities and the interplay of their relationship (Cordesman, 2023). Even as this project progressed, dynamics within the wider Shi'a community continued to shift in substantial ways, leading to significant growth in reports and academic literature on the Shi'a communities in Iraq (Marashi, 2021; Haddad, 2022; Al-Mawlawi, 2023; Alaadin, 2023; Mansour, 2023; Dodge, 2024). Yet, the primary focus of this project has remained the same. The goal remains centred on further understanding the intra dynamics of Shi'a groups, as the majority faction, and the power relations occurring within the community. In essence, what distinguishes Shi'a politics is its multipolar nature. Unlike a monolithic structure, no single figure can assert leadership over the Shi'a community, whether within the Coordination Framework or more broadly. With Iraq no longer facing existential threats from external forces like the Islamic State group or Kurdish secessionism, political leaders are now vying for leadership within their respective ethno-religious and ethno-sectarian groups (Alshamary, 2022).

Moreover, understanding these power dynamics and relations remains crucial for effective conflict resolution and sustainable peace. It is also important to understand the shifting power dynamics within the Shi'a community and the sources of capital utilised by various groups toward achieving their goals. Recall that the political landscape of Iraq has undergone a significant transformation since 2018, marked by a discernible shift from identity-based debates to themes of reform and change that resonate with the populace (Ardovini & O'Driscoll, 2022). This change is palpable in the language employed during election campaigns. The dynamics of power struggles have expanded to include intra-group conflicts among various factions (Hodge & Gopal, 2020; Ali et al., 2020; Alaaldin, 2023; Veen et al., 2017).

Furthermore, in a recent article, Haddad (2022) goes so far as to contend that the reality of Shi'a rule in Iraq no longer faces sect-coded existential threats, as it once did. This departure from identity politics is illustrated by the Tishreen protests, led by Iraq's predominantly Shi'a youth, against the Shi'a government and signalling a change in domestic dynamics (Jabar, 2018). Haddad's analysis of electoral trends highlights the declining relevance and trust of the electorate in Shi'a Islamist parties. This trend, coupled with the fragmentation of these Shi'a political entities, has contributed to the mounting complexity of the Iraqi political and social environment (2022).

Despite these signs of a shift from sectarian politics, contrasting views suggest that deep-seated sectarian divisions continue to influence Iraqi society profoundly. The perspective offered in my interview with Al-Askari underscores that the challenge extends beyond the political corridors and is systemic within the society itself. He points out the unsuccessful efforts by former Prime Ministers Nouri al-Maliki and Haider Al-Abadi, who, despite attempts to appeal to broader constituencies beyond their sectarian bases, failed to garner significant support from other sects. According to Al-Askari, these instances demonstrated that the sectarian mindset is not just a political manoeuvre but a pervasive societal issue embedded deeply within the Iraqi community. Thus, while political discourse may show signs of evolving, the foundational societal structures remain divided along sectarian lines, indicating a complex interplay between emerging political narratives and enduring social realities.

Aside from the internal dimension, external influences (notably Iran and the United States) remain a fixture in any analysis of the space and various exercised powers. Iraq has long been a focal point of geopolitical interests. Iranian interference in Iraq's internal affairs has been seen to be pervasive (some groups do not share that sentiment- rather see them as strong allies) since the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime in 2003. As previously surveyed in Chapter 5, Iran's support for certain Shiite groups, such as the Nouri Al-Maliki's State of Law, Badr Organisation, and Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq (AAH), have strengthened political, military, and economic connections between Tehran and Baghdad. As discussed in Chapter 5, these Shiite factions, often seen as Iranian proxies, have significantly influenced Iraq's political scene, sparking worries about external interference and sectarian bias.

Moreover, Iran's backing of (some) Shiite militias, notably within the ranks of the PMF, has further exacerbated sectarian tensions and fuelled instability in Iraq (Cordesman, 2023; Dodge, 2024), but most notably, these voices have come from Shi'a groups such as Sadr and Shi'a religious authority such as Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani. The proliferation of Iranian-backed militias has also complicated security dynamics, contributing to a fragmented and volatile environment in Iraq. Former Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi warned against such interference and attempted to establish legal boundaries to restrain militia leaders from entering politics (see, for example, chapter 5.5.2, 'Political Prowess: The Expansion of the PMF').

As for the United States' involvement in Iraq, its military and foreign policy presence remained a contentious issue since the 2003 invasion, with many of the participants highlighting the limits of the power-sharing model institute in Iraq. While initially aimed at overthrowing Saddam Hussein's regime and promoting democracy, the prolonged US occupation and continued influence on Iraqi political and economic policies (Indeed, the Muhāsasa system and the dissolution of the armed forces by Paul Bremer are perceived as major policies implemented by the US (Cordesman, 2023; Rubaii, 2019). Moreover, the awarding of Iraqi state contracts to European competitors like Siemens Energy instead of American firms such as General Electric (GE) (Ellichipuram, 2018), coupled with the China deal (Mortada, 2023), which

some research participants saw as the tipping point for the US, are further illustrations of foreign interference in Iraqi affairs. Iraqi proxies of Iran viewed American involvement in the Tishreen protests as shaping an anti-Iran narrative to such an extent that, during the 2021 elections, political parties aimed to distance themselves from Iran) have generated mixed reactions among Iraqi factions. Shiite groups, in particular, have expressed distrust and resentment towards the US presence, viewing it as a continuation of foreign intervention and an obstacle to Iraqi sovereignty. This will be discussed further in the analysis below.

Finally, the US military presence has also exacerbated internal divisions among Shiite factions, as competing groups vie for influence and control in post-Saddam Iraq. This intra-Shiite rivalry has hindered efforts to establish cohesive governance structures and contributed to political fragmentation. Moreover, the US presence has strained relations between Shiite, Kurdish, and Sunni political groups over whether to allow the US to remain a sort of guarantor to curb Iranian aspirations and a means of securing their interests in the region (Palani, 2020; Kaplan, 2021).

Foreign involvement in Iraq, characterised by Iranian interference and the continued US presence (other regional actors, including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and various Arab states), exert influence in Iraq. However, the emphasis on Iran and the United States is due to their status as the two primary opposing forces, with their regional rivalry shaping Iraqi internal politics significantly. As adversaries, Iran and the US wield considerable influence, making their involvement central to understanding the dynamics of Iraqi politics), generates a complex and contentious issue with profound implications for Iraq's stability and regional dynamics (Wahab, 2024; Moonakal, 2024; Hadad H 2024). The alliances formed between certain Shiite groups and Iran raise concerns about foreign influence and exacerbation of sectarian tensions, while the US presence fosters distrust and disunity among Shiite factions. Moving forward, efforts to mitigate foreign interference and promote national reconciliation must prioritise Iraq's sovereignty, inclusivity, and long-term stability.

Iraq's political landscape has undergone significant transformations since 2018. That year's parliamentary elections saw Sadr's Sairoon Alliance emerge as the largest bloc. However, the formation of a government post-election was mired by lengthy negotiations and political deadlock. Fast forward to the 2022 parliamentary elections, and a notable shift in dynamics was observed, with the Al-Fateh Alliance, led by Hadi al-Amiri, and the State of Law Coalition, headed by former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, securing considerable seats and altering the political balance.

Notably, Iraq experienced widespread anti-government protests in late 2019, driven by grievances over corruption, unemployment, and inadequate public services. These protests ultimately led to the resignation of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi in November 2019. Following Abdul Mahdi's resignation, Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a former intelligence chief, was appointed prime minister in May 2020.

However, former issues persist, particularly in security challenges particularly. The country continues to grapple with the presence of ISIS remnants and sporadic outbreaks of violence. The security situation in Iraq has significantly impacted political dynamics and governance, making it a battleground for regional and international influence, particularly between the United States and Iran. Balancing these competing interests presents a significant challenge for Iraqi policymakers.

While talks of constitutional reforms focusing on power-sharing arrangements, decentralisation, and electoral laws have continued, their materialisation appears less likely. In conclusion, Iraq's political landscape remains complex and challenging, with ongoing security concerns and competing regional and international interests shaping the country's governance and political dynamics.

This necessitates constructive engagement with regional actors, a commitment to dialogue and diplomacy, and a comprehensive approach to addressing the root causes of conflict in Iraq. By acknowledging and actively addressing these challenges, Borrell, the Vice-President of the European Commission, proposes that Iraq has the potential to serve as a pivotal force for regional stability, positioning itself as the 'cornerstone' of the region. (Borrell, 2021). That being said, Alshamary suggests that foreign influence in

Iraq is seemingly diminishing, leading to a newfound optimism. Iraqi politicians are now seen as internalising their issues and working towards crafting domestic solutions to their problems. Alshamary noted,

> *"From the U.S. side, interventions in Iraq have really lessened over time. I do think both Iran and the United States are distracted more than usual during this particular government formation cycle—more than in previous government formation cycles. I think that is a good thing, ultimately, because it's going to let Iraqis hash out their problems by themselves. And what we're seeing right now is the Shi`a hash out their problems by themselves"* (Alshamary, 2022).

This perspective, suggesting a reduction in foreign intervention, is also shared by Iraqi leaders, including Muqtada al-Sadr, Qais al-Khazali, Ammar Al-Hakeem, and others.

While political elites and academics observe a noticeable decline in foreign interventions, a new, younger political class is emerging, complementing the maturation of more seasoned politicians who initially took the reigns post-2003. Despite their numerous missteps in the early years following the fall of Saddam's regime, these veteran politicians have now become well-established and experienced qualities they initially lacked. This learning and growth were highlighted in interviews I conducted, such as with the PM advisor Al-Askari, who noted that Shi'a politicians, among others, are increasingly relying on their own insights to determine what is best for the country. However, Al-Askari underscores the importance of integrating this emerging class with the established figures to ensure that newer politicians can learn from the historical errors of their predecessors. This blending is crucial for forging a more effective political process that aligns with the needs of Iraqi citizens. As these factors align—reduced foreign influence, the rise of a dynamic younger political cohort, and the accrued wisdom of the older political class—herald a promising future marked by a more mature, aware, and evolving Iraqi political landscape.

Nevertheless, the tension that this has generated in this new space cannot be overlooked. The dominance of larger Shi'a parties in Iraq's political arena and their use of various types of capital (as discussed below) against smaller Shi'a groups relegated them to the periphery of decision-making processes. They hindered their ability to advocate for their interests. These smaller groups (such as the ones born out of the Tishreen protest among the most significant is Imtidad, or Al-Bayt al-Watani, see Alkhdary, 2022) often lack the resources and political clout to compete effectively with larger parties, leaving them vulnerable to marginalisation and neglect. My interview with Shaikh Humam Hamoudi (2023) underscored this observation, who now heads SCIRI and chaired the Committee that drafted the Iraqi constitution. He acknowledged the limited choices available to the electorate, noting that while younger, emerging groups appear on the political scene, they struggle to sustain their presence and compete effectively against the more established, well-resourced, and often heavily armed groups in Iraq. Consequently, the same faces or political factions tend to re-emerge, maintaining a status quo that is difficult to disrupt.

As a result, some Shi'a groups face limited access to government resources, public services, and opportunities for political representation. This exacerbates existing socio-economic disparities and perpetuates cycles of poverty and exclusion within the Shi'a community. Finally, marginalised Shi'a groups' frustrations with their lack of representation and voice in government contribute to social unrest and protests, as witnessed in cities like Basra and Najaf and discussed by a number of participants.

The PMF further compounds these factors. As well documented now, the paramilitary groups affiliated with Shi'a factions have played a prominent role in Iraq's post-2003, exerting influence through military, political, and social means (Al-Marashi, 2023). Operating outside the state's control, these groups have raised concerns about accountability, rule of law, and sectarian tensions. Moreover, divergent views within the Shi'a community regarding the role of paramilitary groups reflect broader debates over Iraqi sovereignty, regional influence, and national security (Redaelli, 2018)

One of the primary concerns associated with paramilitary groups is their operation outside the state's control, undermining government authority and institutional legitimacy (Loidolt, 2019). The proliferation

of armed militias complicates efforts to establish effective security sector governance and undermines the rule of law.

Calls for the disarmament and dissolution of paramilitary groups have been voiced by segments of the Shi'a community, as well as by civil society organisations and international actors (Egel et al., 2023). Advocates for demobilisation argue that integrating paramilitary fighters into the formal security forces and dismantling independent militias are essential steps towards consolidating state authority and promoting national unity. However, such efforts face resistance from factions that benefit from the status quo and perceive paramilitary groups as vital assets in safeguarding their interests. As noted below, coercive capital remains the primary source of influence and adopted methods of the various PMF factions.

However, the role of paramilitary groups in Iraq is closely intertwined with broader regional dynamics, particularly Iran's ambitions for influence and expansionism. Tehran has cultivated close ties with certain Shi'a factions and paramilitary leaders, providing them with financial, military, and ideological support. For Iran, leveraging paramilitary groups serves multiple objectives, including countering US influence, projecting regional power, and advancing its geopolitical interests (Moonakal, 2024).

Some Shi'a factions in Iraq, aligned with Iran's agenda, view paramilitary groups as essential tools for promoting Iranian expansionism and confronting perceived external threats (Wehrey, 2009). These factions prioritise loyalty to Tehran over Iraqi sovereignty, exacerbating tensions within the Shi'a community and fuelling suspicions among other ethno-sectarian groups. Additionally, Iranian-backed paramilitary groups have been accused of engaging in proxy warfare in neighbouring countries, further complicating regional security dynamics (Maloney, 2024).

There is no doubt that the proliferation of paramilitary groups linked to Shi'a factions in Iraq poses significant challenges to the power-sharing model, security, and constitutional building. The PMF and its proliferation were among the primary subjects discussed in Chapter 5 (see Appendix X). While some advocate for their disarmament and integration into state institutions to enhance accountability and the rule

of law, others see them as essential assets for advancing regional interests, particularly Iranian expansionism. Understanding the forms of power exercised by the PMF is crucial for resolving the power tensions and promoting a concerted effort to strengthen state authority and promote inclusive governance. Moreover, as noted by a number of participants (and further discussed below), actors must refrain from exploiting Iraq's internal divisions for geopolitical gains and prioritise dialogue and cooperation to foster stability and prosperity in the region.

Aside from PMF and power relations within the Shi'a community, there is concern with Shi'a group policies against corruption and mismanagement in Iraq Muhāsasa. In a state already plagued by widespread corruption and sectarian power struggles, the Shi'a majority wields significant influence. However, public resentment and disappointment persist due to the unequal distribution of resources.

On the one hand, Iraq has long struggled with corruption and mismanagement, undermining its socio-economic development and political stability (Mansour, 2021). Sectarian power struggles, particularly among the Shi'a majority, have exacerbated these issues, leading to unequal distribution of resources and widespread public resentment. Understanding the policies of Shi'a groups towards tackling corruption and mismanagement becomes imperative. It is also a major point of contention among participants in the study and their view of how corruption is instituted.

As noted in Chapter 5, several Shi'a political parties have positioned themselves as anti-corruption advocates. However, even initiatives aimed at combating corruption are often viewed as attempts to undermine political adversaries. This dynamic was evident during the tenure of the Mustafa al-Kadhimi government. The government led by al-Kadhimi undertook several initiatives to combat corruption, including establishing specialised anti-corruption courts and prosecuting high-profile corrupt officials. Furthermore, the party has advocated for transparency in government procurement and budgetary processes to curb embezzlement and graft. These initiatives align with international best practices for anti-corruption measures and signal a commitment to good governance and accountability. However, these measures were seen by others (mainly Iran-backed groups) as measures to delegitimise some groups and that Kadhimi was

executing foreign interests that primarily stand to benefit the US (Alaaldin, 2021). Kadhimi has also been accused of handing information to the Americans and might have played a role in the assassination of Sulaimani (Byman, 2020).

Similarly, the Sadrist Movement has strongly opposed corruption within the Iraqi government. Al-Sadr's followers have organised mass protests demanding an end to corruption and dismissing corrupt officials. The movement has also called for greater accountability mechanisms, such as independent oversight bodies, to monitor government activities and ensure integrity in public institutions.

While Shi'a factions have endeavoured to combat corruption, substantial challenges persist. As highlighted by certain participants, corrupt networks have permeated every level of state institutions, reaching even the most junior positions, as noted in my interview with Ibrahim Bahrul Uloom in 2023. Coupled with sectarian rivalries, implementing anti-corruption measures has made it difficult. Furthermore, the politicisation of the fight against corruption has made it less effective, with rival factions using accusations of corruption for their own political gain. Additionally, some argue that a lack of institutional capacity and legal frameworks hinders the implementation of anti-corruption measures.

8.2. Project Framework and Contribution

This project was interested in better understanding the capital the various factions utilised. Iraq's social and political field maintains a peculiar position between being a state (dawla) and a non-state (la dawla). As a result, its political field is more widely contested and comprised of key actors and figures looking to dominate the contested space. If the space is to be better understood, managed, and negotiated, its actors and their tools will need to be better understood. This chapter returns to the central research questions motivating this project. It offers a discussion of the Shi'a dynamics that emerged from the study and presented in the previous two chapters. The total of 24 in-depth interviews and the translation of 10 televised interviews with influential political elites help yield a more informative understanding of the contested space within the Shi'a political field in post-2003 Iraq. In particular, the data helps reveal important insight

into the power dynamics within the Shi'a community and how various individuals and groups utilise different types of capital to maintain control within the political space. Exploring and understanding these relations can also help us better understand some challenges faced by the consociational democratic model adopted in Iraq. This is ultimately because these groups (and their respective viewpoints as discussed in Chapter 5) play a significant role in shaping the power dynamics, where their insights illuminate the intricate web of power relations among Shi'a groups and their Kurdish and Arab Sunni counterparts. Alshamary highlights significant flaws in the adopted consociational system and its failures in serving the populace. However, she prompts us to consider the viability of alternatives and whether they would genuinely improve the lives of all.

A notable instance is the Kurdistan Democratic Party's (KDP) initial alliance with Muqtada al-Sadr in his pursuit of a majority government. The KDP's stance shifted when al-Sadr withdrew, leading them to engage more openly with other factions. The KDP's diminishing enthusiasm for al-Sadr stemmed from his discussions about amending the Iraqi constitution. For the Kurds, the constitution offers unprecedented protection and political rights, including autonomy, resources, representation, and recognition of their language. These provisions are pivotal for Kurdish interests, prompting them to distance themselves from the ongoing Shi`a political tension. Alshamary suggests that al-Sadr's persistent calls for constitutional change may further alienate his former allies, underscoring the profound impact of political narratives on societal representation and cohesion in Iraq. Furthermore, this is considered a "*very high level,*" held up to an "*almost elite level view of politics—because it really impacts how political leaders want to see their people presented in society and represented in Iraq broadly."* (Alshamary, 2022).

Other scholars have an even wider analysis, pointing out that the social contract in Iraq itself continues to fail. In their article "The Failure of the Social Contract in Iraq: Iraqi Perspectives," Ardovini and O'Driscoll (2022) analyse the breakdown of the social contract in Iraq from the perspective of Iraqi citizens, highlighting the historical, political, and social factors leading to its continued failure. While they aim to

shed light on the public frustration with the Iraqi government, their analysis also sheds light on the conditions that further open up the Iraqi political field for the actors vying for power within it.

Historically, the colonial state-building project influenced the development of state-society relations in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, including Iraq (Mundy, 2019). This project heavily influenced the processes of state formation, the construction of national identities, and citizenship notions. Consequently, establishing states in the region was negotiated based on preexisting social structures characterised by tribal and ethno-sectarian affiliations. This often led to social contracts based on a network of patronage and kin relations (Massad, 2001; Salame, 2013).

As a result, Ardovini and O'Driscoll (2022) go on to argue that the social contract came to be defined by the state's redistributive role, mainly embedded in welfare systems and guarantees of employment in the public sector. These processes emphasised the state's social and economic obligations while downplaying citizens' political rights and representation. Essentially, the social contract was based on the tacit exchange of welfare for loyalty.

As Beblawi and Luciani (2016), these conditions allowed ruling elites to maintain power by leveraging informal political and economic networks to build alliances, manage opposition, and ensure continuous support. This historical dynamic can be traced back to the colonial era, dating back to the formation of nations in the 1920s. From the outset, the Iraqi state developed independently from Iraqi society, creating a large gap between the two. Thus, the state was perceived as a prize to be won, further entrenching ethno-sectarian competition between groups for control over resources.

Consequently, the state rested on fragmented authority, historically shared with self-governing clans and tribes. This led to ethno-sectarian divisions dominating all aspects of domestic politics, resulting in a lack of overarching citizenship and national identity. This is further evidenced by the repeated failures to uphold basic components of the social contract for large parts of the population.

During the Ba'ath regime, the social contract was shaped by the regime's exclusionary rentier state model, exchanging welfare and socioeconomic services for loyalty and political compliance. The regime also relied on tribal relations to construct Iraqi identity and citizenship.

As we know now, the 2003 invasion, grounded in the liberal peace agenda, focused heavily on elites, largely ignoring the population's needs (Costantini & O'Driscoll, 2023). As Costantini and O'Driscoll argue, the external support empowered elites to consolidate their power at the expense of the social contract. The centralised state was replaced with an ethno-sectarian power-sharing model (Muhasasa), underscoring the fault lines of Iraqi identity. Government formation became contingent on grand elite bargains and compromises, often neglecting the broader interests of the population. This has formed the basis of the contested social contract today.

So, it is not much of a surprise that today's Iraqi political system is characterised by widespread corruption, regional interference, and the growing presence of multiple non-state actors undermining state authority. Moreover, this sort of political landscape and field has opened up the Bourdieusian analysis. In his latest scholarly publication, Dodge (2024) delves into the impact of consociational settlements on the state, using Iraq as a case study. Dodge heavily scrutinises the consociational theory's comprehension of the state's role in power-sharing arrangements in deeply divided societies. Dodge posits that consociationalism frequently relies on a neo-Weberian model of the state, which assumes the existence of coherent state institutions that can be shared among different communal elites. However, this assumption overlooks the intricacies of state institutions and their susceptibility to manipulation by communal elites, a particularly evident phenomenon in Iraq.

Furthermore, Dodge critiques Eurocentric state theories that tend to draw unfavourable comparisons between states in the Global South and their European counterparts. Drawing on postcolonial theory and the works of renowned scholars such as Mann, Jessop, and Bourdieu, he proposes a universal state model applicable across all regions. This model conceives the state as a series of competitive fields, namely bureaucratic, political, coercive, and economic, rather than a single entity.

With Iraq as a case study, Dodge focuses on how an informal consociational settlement, established after the 2003 invasion and regime change, has affected the state's institutional coherence, leading to an incoherent state. Despite being labelled as consociational, Iraq's arrangement is viewed as informal, with power distributed among ethno-sectarian communities. This setup has resulted in a deeply incoherent state riddled with corruption.

As Dodge rightly argues, Iraq's consociational settlement has shifted power away from autonomous state institutions and towards political parties, particularly in the bureaucratic field. This shift has allowed political elites to manipulate state resources for their own benefit, thus undermining the state's autonomy and coherence. The consociational model faces significant challenges in Iraq's ongoing political field.

Following Ardovini, O'Driscoll, Dodge, and others, the use of Pierre Bourdieu's theoretical framework was central to the interpretation of the complexities embedded in the data. The synthesis of Pierre Bourdieu's sociological framework with the objectives of this dissertation offers a powerful lens through which to analyse and understand the complexities of power dynamics within the Shi'a political field. Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus, which encompasses notions of habitus, capital, and field, provides a theoretical foundation that resonates deeply with the three central objectives of this study: analysing power conflicts, examining historical legacies, and understanding power relations within the Shi'a political field.

First and foremost, Bourdieu's framework facilitated a nuanced analysis of power conflicts within the Shi'a field by illuminating the underlying mechanisms through which power is produced, contested, and negotiated. While other studies have applied Bourdieu's framework to Iraq more broadly and the dynamics across its three core groups (Sunnis, Shi'a, and Kurds, see Dodge 2018 and 2024; Nair, 2024), this project focuses exclusively on the Shi'a community, bringing a Bourdieusian analysis to a relatively understudied area. Rather than focus on the wider dynamics within Iraq and the interaction across groups, this project shifts to hone in on the specifics within the Shi'a community as a means of untangling the inner relations that contribute to undermining state-building goals. Moreover, by dissecting the role of elitist discourse in intra-Shi'a power struggles, Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic and cultural capital shed light on the

behaviours and views of the elite, showing how specific actions, beliefs, narratives, and framings are deployed strategically to assert or challenge dominant power structures (e.g., Sadr's strategic use of coercive and symbolic capital). Moreover, Bourdieu's notion of habitus, which refers to the internalised dispositions and embodied practices shaped by social structures, offered insights into how power conflicts are not merely the result of individual actions but are deeply embedded within the social and cultural fabric of the Shi'a community.

Secondly, Bourdieu's framework enhanced the understanding of the impact of historical legacies on Shi'a political discourse and field dynamics, which were discussed in Chapter 5. In this context, Bourdieu's emphasis on the interplay between structure and agency allows us to investigate how historical narratives have shaped interactions and power relations among different social groups and classes within the Shi'a community. By tracing the trajectory of historical legacies in Chapter 5 from the early Islamic period to contemporary Iraqi politics, Bourdieu's framework allowed us to unpack the layers of meaning and significance embedded within the historical development of the Shi'a community and its current dynamics.

Lastly, Bourdieu's framework offered a position to develop a more comprehensive understanding of power relations within the Shi'a political field by highlighting the various forms of capital mobilised to influence these dynamics. In addition to cultural and symbolic capital, Bourdieu's conceptualisation of symbolic and coercive capital allowed us to take up the multifaceted ways in which power is accrued, maintained, and contested within the Shi'a field by various individuals and groups.

In what follows, I re-situate the central objectives and questions underlying this project. I then situate my discussion of the data in light of the three central research questions grounding this project. I use these questions (first stated in Chapter 1) to help guide the focus and interpretation of the findings. Upon resituating the central research questions, I then address each, drawing on the findings reported in the previous two chapters.

8.3. Project Objectives and Central Questions

It is worth recalling the fundamental questions posed at the inception of this research journey, which became imperative as I delved into the analysis. Three overarching inquiries guided this exploration. The first research question pertains to the production of power conflict within the Shi'a political field and the role that elitist discourse played in (de)legitimising specific actions, beliefs, or narratives. Addressing this question, I delved into the manifestations of power conflict within the Shi'a political field, unpacking it under the theme of "Cultural Capital." Here, I unveiled the nuances of knowledge, shared vision, and trust within Shi'a factions. Additionally, I analysed how symbolic capital, as defined by Bourdieu, operated within elitist discourse, influencing power dynamics and shaping the narrative of conflict legitimacy.

The second research question pertains to how historical legacies shaped interactions and power relations within the Shi'a political discourse and how cultural and symbolic capital were mobilised among different social groups and classes to influence these dynamics in post-2003 Iraq. Turning our attention to this question, I investigated the impact of historical legacies on power relations within the Shi'a political discourse. This impact of historical legacies on power relations was explored under the theme of "Symbolic Capital." Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital became instrumental in understanding how shared knowledge and expertise shaped the interpretation of historical events among different social groups. Furthermore, I examined the mobilisation of symbolic capital, particularly through religious authorities and symbols, in influencing the dynamics of power within the post-2003 Iraqi context.

The third research question pertains to the underlying structures and dynamics of power relations within the Shi'a political field in post-2003 Iraq and how different forms of capital, including symbolic and cultural, were mobilised to shape these relations. The exploration of underlying structures of power relations within the Shi'a political field was organised under the theme of "Conflict Resolution Strategies." By exploring the dynamics of different forms of capital, ranging from cultural to symbolic, I aimed to unravel how these elements contributed to the positioning of actors within this social field. Additionally, habitus's role in

guiding political actors' strategies, as they accumulated and deployed various forms of capital, became a focal point in understanding the complex power landscape in post-2003 Iraq.

8.4. Manifestation of Power Conflict

As stated in Chapter 1, this project is interested in addressing a central question: How does the ongoing power conflict within the Shi'a political field manifest? What role does elite discourse play in shaping these dynamics, in (de)legitimising specific actions, beliefs, and narratives?

There is no dispute that a complex interplay of competing interests, ideologies, and factions has characterised the Shi'a political field in post-2003 Iraq. Power conflicts arising from tensions between different Shi'a political parties, religious authorities, and societal groups are manifested in a variety of ways, each vying for influence and control over key resources and institutions. The dynamics of these power conflicts are intricately linked to the role played by elitist discourse, which serves as a mechanism for (de)legitimising specific actions, beliefs, or narratives.

Elitist discourse, emanating from influential religious scholars, political leaders, and other elite actors within the Shi'a community, plays a crucial role in shaping the dynamics of power conflict. As the findings helped highlight, through the strategic deployment of religious rhetoric, historical narratives, and ideological frameworks, elites (e.g. Sadr) seek to assert their dominance and influence over the Shi'a political field while marginalising dissenting voices and alternative interpretations. This is achieved by legitimising certain actions or policies by framing them within the context of his religious status or in terms of the national interest, simultaneously delegitimising others as antithetical to the state (Mansour & D'Cruz, 2022)

Moreover, elitist discourse operates through various channels, including religious sermons, media outlets, and political practices, thereby shaping public opinion and influencing the trajectory of power conflicts within the Shi'a community. In some cases, by monopolising access to authoritative sources of knowledge

and controlling the means of communication, elites exercise considerable influence over the narratives and discourses circulating within Shi'a society, perpetuating existing power structures and hierarchies.

8.5. Sadr and Capital

The data in the last chapter highlights a number of tactical and strategic manoeuvres adopted by Sadr in positioning himself through the use of his symbolic and coercive clout in the region. As Mansour and D'Cruz (2022) note, 'al-Sadr has been an enigmatic leader claiming many identities, shifting from insurgent militia leader to reformist protest leader. . .' (p. 3). To better situate my discussion of Sadr and the data, it is important to highlight some of the current circumstances in Iraq since 2021.

As I argued in Chapters 1 and 5, al-Sadr has rooted in a nationalist perspective inherited from his father, laid the groundwork for his strategy, capitalising on anti-U.S. sentiments and asserting independence from occupying forces, a stance distinct from SCIRI and Da'wa (Shanahan, 2004, p. 95; Mansour & D'Cruz, 2022).

By examining Sadr's manoeuvres through Bourdieu's notions of coercive and symbolic capital, the data helps reveal additional insight into his strategic engagement with Iraq's intricate political and religious dynamics. In this role, Sadr's intentional clashes with other Shi'a factions and coalition forces were strategic on his part, aimed at rallying support, expanding his network, and securing financial backing. This calculated approach countered the well-funded Islamist and politically savvy exiled groups like SCIRI, enabling Sadr to carve out a distinctive position in the socio-political landscape.

Sadr focused on mobilising the underprivileged, a constituency established by his late father, primarily comprising the impoverished urban Shi'a majority residing in what is now Sadr City in Baghdad. These marginalised young Shi'a men, deeply devoted to Sadr and his father's legacy, formed the backbone of his support, demonstrating unwavering loyalty even without explicit explanations or incentives (Hashim, 2006, p. 255).

The narrative that the data helps show is one where Sadr has crafted an approach grounded in rhetoric of resistance against corruption and foreign influence, resonating with the experiences and aspirations of his supporters (and Iraqis in general). By framing the U.S. as aligned with Iraq's foreign adversaries (e.g. Israel), he effectively labelled returning exiles collaborating with Americans as part of a nefarious plot, consolidating his support base by providing a common enemy to rally against.

However, as Mansour and D'Cruz (2022) note, Sadr has shifted his identity when necessary and best fit his goals. This is also evident in the data and series of interviews where Sadr continuously shifted his approach in response to shifting circumstances and outcomes. This is also captured in his articulation of jihad militarily and ideologically, aligning it with the perceived ideological war against Islam, thereby appealing to widespread sentiments among Iraqi Arabs, Sunni, and Shi'a alike, further strengthening his appeal and support (Mansour & D'Cruz, 2022, p. 18)

Sadr even strategically invokes the Mahdi (the Hidden Imam in Shi'a Islam) to lend further spiritual legitimacy and authority to his Mahdi Army, aligning it both as protectors of the faith and defender of Iraqi sovereignty, implicitly challenging the legitimacy of the new government and accruing symbolic capital.

These instances, as discussed in the new report on Sadr (2022) and as discussed in the data findings, help bring to light a wider understanding of Sadr's strategic accumulation of various forms of capital. This allows him to establish a significant presence in Iraq's political and religious spheres, challenging established authorities and negotiating a political space for himself and his followers within the new political landscape.

It also greatly shifts the dynamics within the Shi'a community, garnishing the sort of State (dawla) and anti-state (la-dawla) political rhetoric that has come to occupy centre stage in Iraq's political discussions. Notably, the heart of the ongoing conflict in Iraq is characterised differently by various scholars. For example, Mawlawi (2022) posits that it revolves around the very essence of the Iraqi state. He argues that it is not simply a dichotomy between those who support the state and those who oppose it. Rather, it

represents a clash of contrasting visions regarding the identity of Iraq's statehood—a battle of competing ideologies.

For Mawlawi (2022), these differing perspectives hinge on several key factors, including the role of religion in governance, which regional alliances should be prioritised, and how state power ought to be structured (Al-Taie, 2020)

As noted in Chapter 5, during the October 2021 elections (and Tishreen protests in October 2019, see Salem 2019), political parties centred their campaigns on portraying themselves as proponents of the state, advocating for a restoration of order. This electoral focus underscores the significance of the discursive struggle surrounding the political narrative adopted by various actors and factions.

Terms such as '*la-dawla*' (anti-state) have become pivotal in this discourse, often used to castigate Shi'a paramilitary groups and political parties perceived to be aligned with Iran (Al-Dulaimi, 2020; Anbar, 2020) This selective labelling implies that these Shia Islamist groups, with ties to Iran, are actively working against the interests of the Iraqi state, thus insinuating disloyalty to the nation (Al-Jaffal, 2022; See also Dodge 2024).

This political rhetoric (State and anti-state) does. However, it helps show the pressing necessity for a more nuanced and balanced dialogue concerning how Iraq's diverse array of Shi'a Islamist groups perceive the Iraqi state and their role within it (Mawlawi, 2022). It is imperative to distinguish between the varying ideological and political perspectives among Iraqi Shi'a Islamists—to understand who they are, what principles they uphold, and how they envisage their relationship with the state (Ibid).

Care must be exercised when employing discursive frameworks that could potentially deepen societal divisions and undermine Iraq's fragile social cohesion. Shi'a communities have endured unfounded accusations of disloyalty to Iraq, often being unjustly labelled as proxies of Iran and antagonistic toward the state.

Hence, whenever Shi'a Iraqis engage in political discourse, particularly within religious contexts, there exists a risk of misrepresentation and distortion. It is essential to recognise that ethno-sectarian narratives cannot be outright dismissed in a nation scarred by historical injustices rooted in ethnic and sectarian divisions. Indeed, responses to such persecution may naturally manifest through ethnic and sectarian channels.

However, it is equally crucial to acknowledge that the prominence of identity politics diminishes when structural power imbalances and historical injustices are effectively addressed (Mawlawi, 2022). Moving forward, a more comprehensive understanding of Iraq's complex social dynamics and a commitment to addressing underlying grievances are indispensable for fostering genuine unity and progress.

In one of the most comprehensive reports covering Sadr and his strategy to date, authors Mansour and Robin-D'Cruz (2022) argue that Sadr has long adhered to a strategy of 'controlled instability,' strategically destabilising the political system at crucial junctures to amass popular support and enhance his political influence. They suggest that understanding his audience is the key to understanding Sadr's influence. Following the October 2021 election, Sadr took a more radical approach by intensifying efforts to disrupt the already fractured Shia Islamist elite. In essence, he aimed to reshape Shia Islamist power dynamics, transitioning from a focus on Shia-centricity to a Sadr-centric framework.

His pursuit of a 'majority' government involved forging alliances with Sunni and Kurdish factions, leading to the formation of the Tripartite Alliance and the marginalisation of influential Shia Islamist actors and parties. This departure from the norm of political inclusivity, which had previously stabilised Iraq's elite competition, challenged the entrenched Shia-centric vision of the state within Iraq's political landscape (Mansour & D'Cruz, 2022, p. 6). Sadr's defiance of the established political order and the ensuing resistance from the SCF precipitated a new political crisis in Iraq. Unlike his previous tendencies to compromise, his unwavering stance in the face of pressure signalled a shift in his role as a guarantor of the political system, prompting reassessment.

Understanding Sadrist politics requires moving beyond simplistic dichotomies such as pro-/anti-Iran or pro-/anti-reform, as his movement embodies multiple identities. These identities encompass militant insurgency, religious activism, governance, and oppositional protest. Since formally engaging in the political process in 2005, the Sadrists have navigated these roles within a strategy of controlled instability. This strategy involves strategically destabilising the system to gain leverage while adhering to fundamental political norms.

The underlying rationale of controlled instability provides insight into Sadr's actions from a long-term perspective. The Sadrists gained financial resources through favourable contracts by exerting de facto control over ministries like health and electricity, albeit with uneven distribution within the movement (Mansour & D'Cruz, 2022, p. 9). However, rather than championing a reformist agenda, Sadr's objective seemed to be to precipitate a crisis within the 'Shi'a House,' maintaining pressure on the SCF to either accommodate him in government formation or risk internal fragmentation. In this strategic manoeuvring, the Sadrists aimed to reshape the Shi'a political landscape in their favour. While this, in itself, is hardly novel, what has not been extensively taken up prior is how Sadr continuously uses his coercive and symbolic capital to manoeuvre himself within the political landscape. This project aimed to contribute to understanding the political field of Iraq and its political actors within the Shi'a community.

8.6. Limits to the Study and Future Research

This research project, "Analysing Contemporary Shi'a Political Landscape in Post-2003 Iraq: A Bourdieusian Perspective on Power Dynamics," has provided significant insights into Iraq's political community's intricate power dynamics. However, like any academic endeavour, this study encountered several limitations that impacted the breadth and depth of the findings, suggesting directions for future research.

8.6.1 Limitations

One of the primary constraints was the inability to conduct fieldwork in Iraq. Security concerns and ethical considerations stipulated by Middlesex University prohibited travel to the region. This limitation was significant as it restricted direct face-to-face interaction with participants, which could have enriched the data through more dynamic and spontaneous exchanges. Face-to-face interviews often yield richer, more nuanced insights into political behaviour and personal experiences, which are sometimes sanitised in more formal or distant communication settings like phone or online interviews.

Furthermore, interviewing Iraqi political elites presented its own set of challenges. The political sensitivity surrounding their roles and the potential repercussions of their disclosures meant that their responses were often guarded and, at times, deliberately vague. This lack of openness was a notable barrier to gathering detailed, candid insights into these individuals' political strategies and personal viewpoints. When attempts were made to delve deeper or clarify ambiguous responses, participants frequently diverted the conversation, avoiding direct answers to sensitive questions.

Contrastingly, interviews with experts rather than active politicians tended to yield more open and detailed discussions. Experts were generally more willing to candidly criticise and discuss corruption and political manoeuvres. This difference highlighted the tension between political preservation and academic analysis, emphasising the complex nature of gathering data within politically charged environments.

8.6.2 Future Research and Project Contributions

Given these constraints, future research should aim to incorporate a more diversified approach to data collection. Expanding the participant pool to include political elites, experts, and members of civil society could provide a more holistic view of the political landscape. Civil society members often experience the direct consequences of political decisions and may offer insights that differ substantially from those of political elites. Additionally, as suggested by Amamr Al-Hakeem in the study, a renewed social contract

points to a potential area of research that could explore the evolving expectations and relationships between the public and political leaders.

Moreover, the study's focus on qualitative insights could be complemented by quantitative methods in future research. Accessing and analysing data from specific government ministries, such as Health or Oil, would allow for a more precise measurement of how social, economic, or cultural capital is utilised within these domains. This approach requires in-country research, possibly facilitated by collaborations with local academic institutions or non-governmental organisations that could navigate the administrative and security challenges more effectively.

Investigating internal power dynamics within specific political groups, such as the Da'wa Party split between factions led by Maliki and Abadi, could also reveal how capital is strategically employed to consolidate power or challenge rivals. Such a focused study could serve as a pilot, establishing methodologies and relationships that could be expanded to broader projects.

Finally, there is room for reflecting on some of this project's key accomplishments and extended goals. It began with an inquiry about the nature of Iraqi discourse post-20003 and the various factors shaping Iraqi political and social discourse.

On the one hand, this project helped further develop Bourdieu's framework in a relatively new region. There is now an added taxonomy of power dynamics within the Iraqi Shi'a community and its internal dynamics. These marked a valuable contribution by focusing on intra-group dynamics within a specific faction. Secondly, the data collected and analysed in this project offers a more detailed picture of the social realities in Iraq, especially since 2018. In particular, Chapters 6 and 7 presented findings from in-depth interviews and translated political discourse, thereby providing substantive data to explore power dynamics in the Shi'a community. This data underpinned the analysis of how capital is utilised within the political field.

Another contribution is the insight this project helped me in terms of understanding power shifts. The project helped to identify significant shifts in Iraq's political dynamics post-2018 —politically and religiously —including the rise of new political narratives focusing on reform rather than identity and a more Sadr-centric focus, reshaping the Shi'a political landscape. Finally, from a strictly theoretical standpoint, the project helped with identifying further implications and applications of Bourdieu's framework. Although effective in analysing capital utilisation, the limitations of Bourdieu's framework were highlighted, given the fragmented nature of the Iraqi state and the vacuum of power that first began in 2003. There are other important benefits to Bourdieu's framework with respect to other intersectional identity markers, especially those that look more closely at the dual (or more) roles of various figures within the Shi'a community in Iraq.
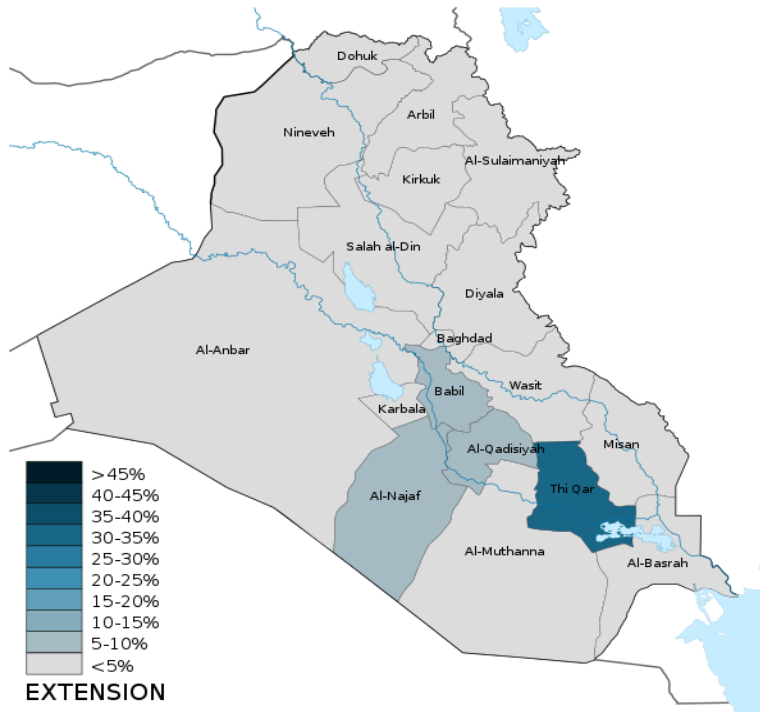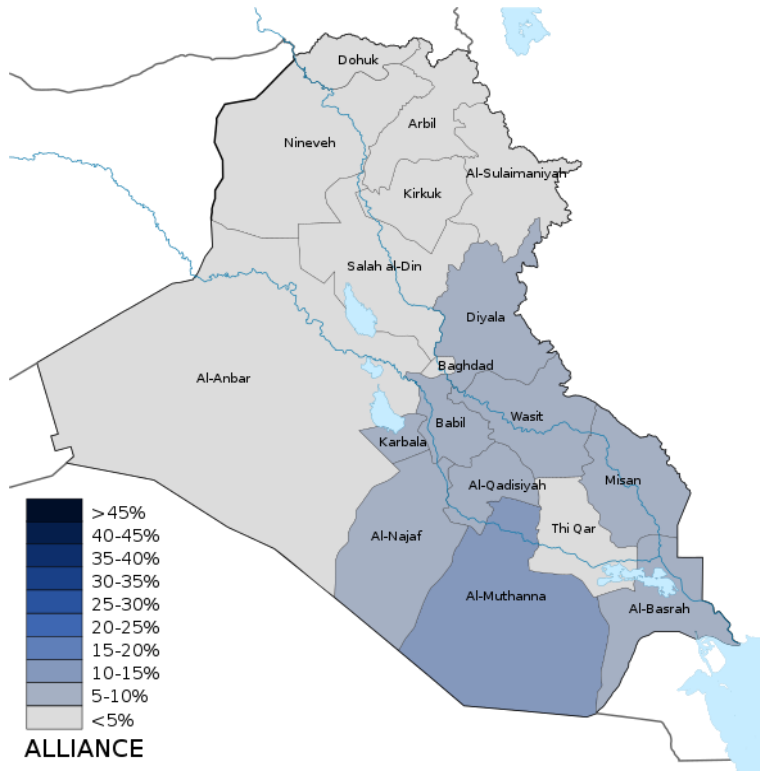
APPENDICIES

APPENDIX 1: Regional Maps of Iraq

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LAW

CONQUEST

ALLIANCE

EXTENSION
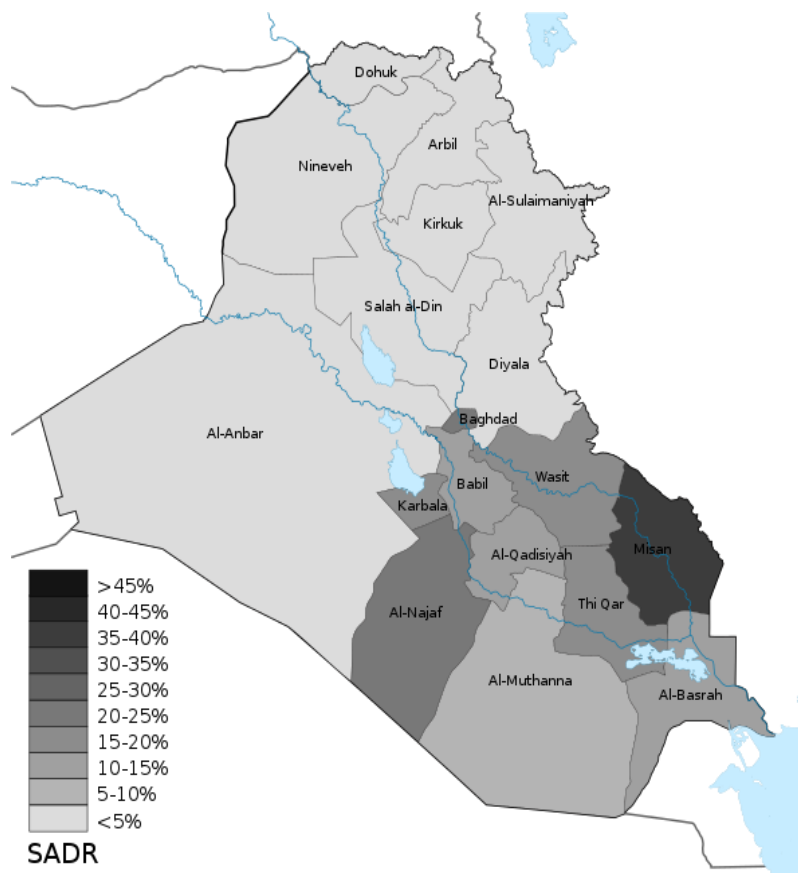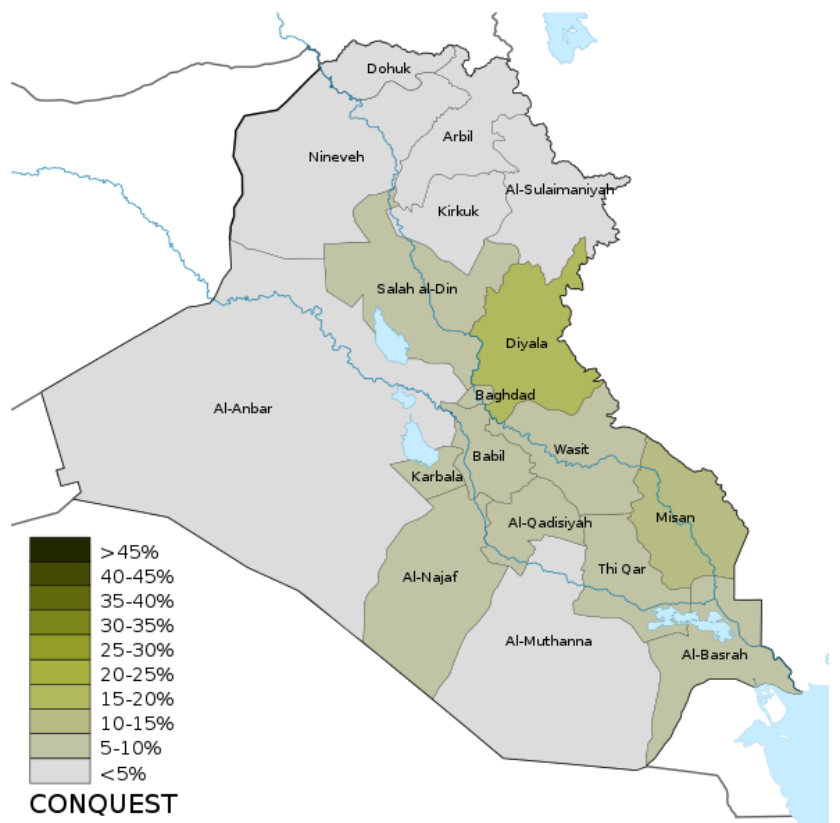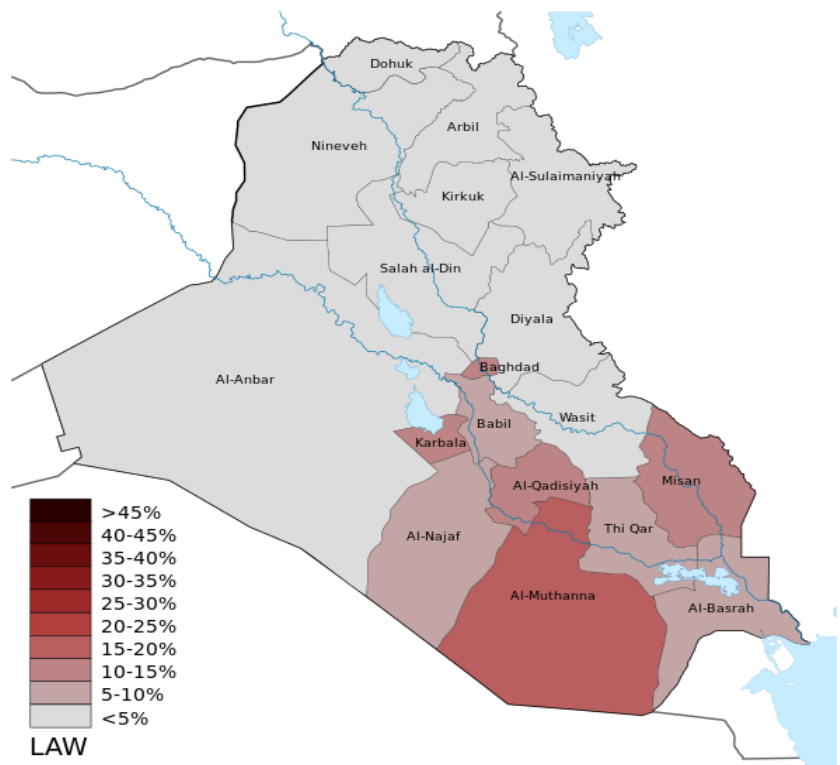
APPENDIX 2: 2021 Iraqi parliamentary election
Source: Rudaw IHEC

Below are data provided by IHEC. It's important to note that only the primary Shi'a political parties are included in this dataset, as there are other competing parties involved. Therefore, the data may not provide a comprehensive reflection of the elections, focusing primarily on those parties considered large or prominent within this research. For a more comprehensive understanding and data on these elections, please refer to IHEC. Understanding the distribution of parliamentary seats is crucial within Bourdieu's theory because it reflects the distribution of political capital among different groups and parties. This distribution of capital influences power dynamics within the political field, shaping interactions and outcomes. Moreover, analysing this distribution can provide a visual map of the areas of contestation. Further research can delve into how these areas are contested and through which means or capital, offering insights into the strategies and tactics employed by different actors.

Table 1 identifies the main Shi'a political alliances and blocs that entered the 2021 Parliamentary elections in Iraq.

Political Entity	Description
Sadrist Movement	An Iraqi Shi'a Islamic national movement and political party led by Muqtada al-Sadr. It emerged as the largest political party in the October 2021 Iraqi parliamentary election, securing 73 seats in Parliament. However, in June 2022, during the 2022 Iraqi political crisis, Muqtada al-Sadr's bloc resigned from parliament.
State of Law Coalition	A political coalition formed for the 2009 Iraqi governorate elections by the Prime Minister of Iraq at the time, Nouri al-Maliki, of the Islamic Dawa Party. It emphasized the improved security situation achieved through operations of the Iraqi Security Forces. Due to disagreements with other parties, it ran independently in subsequent elections.
Fatah Alliance	A political coalition formed to contest the 2018 general election, consisting mainly of groups involved in the Popular Mobilization Forces. Led by Hadi Al-Amiri, it played a significant role in the fight against ISIS. The coalition won seats in Parliament and is associated with the Al-Abbas Shrine in Karbala. It aims to merge secular civil and Islamic values.
Ishraqat Kanoon	An Islamic political party in Iraq that contested the 2021 parliamentary election for the first time, winning 6 seats. Associated with the Al-Abbas Shrine in Karbala, it attempts to merge secular civil and Islamic values, reflecting its ties to the Najaf clergy. It emphasizes a blend of civil activism and Islamic principles.
Alliance of Nation State Forces	An alliance primarily between The Victory Alliance and The National Wisdom Movement, formed to contest the 2018 general election. Led by former Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi and Ammar al-Hakim, respectively, the alliance aims to promote Muslim democratic principles and address national issues.
Emtidad Movement	A political party formed to contest the 2021 parliamentary election, emerging from the 2019–2021 Iraqi protests. Founded by civil activist Alaa Al Rikabi, it seeks to provide an alternative to existing political parties accused of corruption and sectarianism. The movement's platform is centered on addressing systemic issues and promoting youth participation in governance.

Table 2 displays the distribution of overall parliamentary seats among the primary Shi'a parties.

Party	Leader	%	Seats	+/−
Sadrist Movement	Muqtada al-Sadr	10.00	73	+19
State of Law	Nouri al-Maliki	5.67	33	+8
Fatah	Hadi al-Amiri	5.23	17	−31
Emtidad	Alaa al-Rikabi	3.38	9	New
Alliance of Nation State Forces	Haider al-Abadi	4.06	4	−38

Below are tables that displays the distribution of parliamentary seats in individual governorates.

Baghdad Governorate

Sadrist Movement	314,748	21.44	27	+10
State of Law Coalition	166,125	11.31	13	+4
Fatah Alliance	72,987	4.97	3	—7
Ishraqat Kanon	20,281	1.38	1	–
Alliance of Nation State Forces	64,815	4.41	0	—8

Babil Governorate

Party		Votes	%	Seats	+/−
	State Of Law	35,597	6.78	3	+1
	Sadrist Movement	59,589	11.34	2	−2
	Fatah Alliance	43,522	8.29	2	−2
	Emtidad Movement	39,338	7.49	2	–
	Ishraq Kanoon	22,159	4.22	2	–
	Alliance of Nation State Forces	48,484	9.23	0	−3

Basrah Governorate

Party		Votes	%	Seats	+/−
	Sadrist Movement	78,657	12.33	9	+4
	Tasmim Alliance	108,044	16.94	5	–
	Fatah Alliance	45,189	7.08	3	−3
	State of Law Coalition	41,594	6.52	1	−3
	Alliance of Nation State Forces	36,104	5.66	1	−4

Diyala Governorate

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/–
Azem Alliance	94,926	19.75	4	–
Al-Takadum movement	68,268	14.20	4	–
Fatah Alliance	72,685	15.12	3	0
Alliance of Nation State Forces	27,393	5.70	0	−1
State of Law Coalition	23,367	4.86	0	0
Independents	83,965	17.47	2	–

Karbala Governorate

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/–
Sadrist Movement	51,005	17.35	4	+1
State of Law Coalition	34,267	11.66	2	0
Ishraq Kanoon	27,359	9.31	2	–
Alliance of Nation State Forces	16,639	5.66	1	−1
Fatah Alliance	21,532	7.32	0	−3

Maysan Governorate

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/−
Sadrist Movement	105,275	38.76	7	+2
State of Law Coalition	32,639	12.02	2	+1
Fatah Alliance	27,667	10.19	0	−2
Alliance of Nation State Forces	18,680	6.88	0	−1

Muthana Governorate

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/−
State of Law Coalition	31,691	15.79	3	+2
Sadrist Movement	17,665	8.80	2	0
Alliance of Nation State Forces	28,389	14.14	1	0
Fatah Alliance	6,681	3.33	0	−2

Najaf Governorate

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/−
Sadrist Movement	68,140	20.16	5	+1

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/−
Stae of Law Coalition	29,170	8.63	2	+1
Emtidad Movement	30,494	9.02	1	–
Alliance of Nation State Forces	28,689	8.49	0	−3
Fatah Alliance	21,612	6.39	0	−3

Al-Qadisiyyah Governorate

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/−
Sadrist Movement	33,406	10.75	3	0
State of Law Coalition	31,515	10.15	2	+1
Fatah Alliance	29,193	9.40	2	−1
Ishraq Kanoon	16,880	5.43	1	–
Emtidad Movement	15,726	5.06	1	–
Alliance of Nation State Forces	23,083	7.43	0	−2

Wasit Governorate

Party		Votes	%	Seats	+/–
	Sadrist Movement	56,364	16.20	5	+2
	Alliance of Nation State Forces	18,627	5.35	1	−1
	Fatah Alliance	17,584	5.05	1	−1
	State of Law Coalition	16,250	4.67	1	0

Appendix 3: Codes

Name	Description	Files	References
Accountability		7	12
Accusations of politicization		2	4
Acknowledgement of mistakes		1	3
Against foreign intervention		5	11
Allegations against the Islamic Republic		1	5
Appointments on the basis of party loyalty		1	3
Attempts to connect with voters emotionally		4	7
Attraction to followers		1	1
Avoiding armed factions		1	1
Blaming political leadership		2	2
Call for mutual respect		1	1
Challenges		1	1
Challenges in implementation		1	1
Change of approach		1	1
Citizenship		2	2
Civil state		2	3
Coalition		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Commitment to democratic values over party values		3	8
Conflict resolution strategies		0	0
Balanced foreign relation		1	1
Commitment		1	2
Continuous engagement		2	2
Constitutional change		3	5
Cooperation and constructive engagement		6	10
Democratic		3	4
Fight against oppressive regime		2	5
Foreign models		1	1
Governance skills		2	2
Inclusivity		6	7
Internal relations		1	1
Legal retribution		1	1
PMF's transition from a military entity to a political		1	2
Respecting human rights		1	1
Connection with the people		2	6
Conservative ideology		1	1
Constitutional amendments		2	3
Continued interference		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Cooperation and support from neighbouring countries		1	1
Corruption		4	6
Criticising political system		5	6
Crises and instability		1	1
Critical perspective on Iraqi politics		1	1
Criticism on previous governments		2	2
Criticising sects		2	3
Critique of Foreign Military Intervention		1	4
Critique of the evolution of Shia leadership		1	1
Criticising the govt for their lack of intervention		2	3
Criticising other party		6	9
Critique of sectarian and muhasasa		2	2
Cultural and religious sensitivity		3	3
Deep sense of responsibility and a desire to improve the lives of the people.		1	1
Defamation		1	1
Defence		1	1
Democracy		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Desire for good advisors		1	1
Dissatisfaction with the Muhasa system		1	1
Distance from labelling		3	4
Economic strategy		5	7
Educational reforms		2	2
Electoral reforms		1	1
Exploiting the sacrifices of martyrs for political agenda	Bourdieu's theory of practice can help analyse how such symbolic associations are used in the political field.	1	1
External relation and alliance		1	1
Fairness and effectiveness of the recent elections		1	1
Field dynamics (control and influence)		0	0
Attribution of success		1	1
Character assassination		1	1
Intent to reveal information		1	1
Leaked		1	1
Manipulation of religious matters		1	1
Need for cooperation		1	2
Negative media propaganda		1	1
Role of religion		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Security and counter terrorism		1	1
Strong commitment to constitutional principles and governance.		1	1
Foreign Policy Shift		1	1
Fragmentation within Shia Political Groups		1	1
Generational Differences		1	3
Historical heritage with Shia community	It suggests that Muqtada al-Sadr has a unique claim to this heritage, while others like Khazali may have emerged from the same ideological cloth but cannot challenge Sadr's leadership	1	1
Historical legacy		3	4
Historical references		5	17
History of betrayal		2	3
Ideological vs. Realistic Views		1	1
Ideology of Resisting the Occupier		1	1
Imbalanced govt		1	1
Impact of external factors		0	0
Impact on Iraq's sovereignty		1	1
Implementation		2	3
Independence of MPs		1	3
Influenced by Islamic perspective		1	3

Name	Description	Files	References
Initiatives to address sectarian politics		1	1
Interest-Driven Alliances		1	1
Internal disagreements		3	4
International influence		10	26
International relations		2	2
Investment in the people		1	1
Islamic revolution or principle		1	1
Lack of administrative skills in Shia		2	5
Lack of comprehensive program		2	2
Lack of Economic Growth		1	4
Lack of engagement and intervention		1	1
Lack of expertise in diplomats		3	6
Lack of governance		2	2
Lack of shared vision		5	10
Lack of State Control		1	1
Lack of strategy		1	1
Lack of trust of people		2	2
Language tone		16	51
Anger		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Confident		2	2
Use of data to back their claim		3	3
Use of examples		14	30
Use of metaphors		1	1
Use of rhetoric		7	13
Leadership		4	6
Legacy emergence of resistance force		1	1
Legal reforms		2	4
Legislation and control		2	2
Legislative gaps		2	3
Limited experience in Shia leaders		2	2
Local perspective or experience in shaping political discourse		2	2
Managing public image- not affiliated with PMF		2	8
Media manipulation		2	5
Motivate individuals		1	1
Multiplication of Political Factions		1	1
Narrative of resistance		1	2
Narrative of Shia Victimhood		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
National identity		4	7
National security		2	3
Negative perception		1	1
Negative perception of a political figure		1	1
Non sectarian		4	6
Personal benefits		4	10
Political exploitation of religion		1	3
Political interference		1	1
Political movements		1	3
Political reform		1	2
Political stability		1	1
Potential for Political Collapse		1	1
Potential for revolt		1	1
Power dynamics		0	0
Control and reorganization of armed groups		4	6
Influence of political blocs		1	1
Power gain or struggle		0	0
Blame attribution		2	2
Political rivalry and accusations		2	3
Religious references		9	10

Name	Description	Files	References
Presidential system		1	1
Prioritise national interest		1	2
Prioritise the benefit of people		5	8
Promotion of Sectarianism		1	2
Protection of state and citizens		1	1
Protests		1	1
Public demand for an inclusive and representative system		1	1
Quota- Sectarian quota- Muhasasa		2	10
Reconciliation process		2	6
Reference to Past Practices		1	1
Reforms		7	8
Regional politics		3	3
Regional stability		7	8
Religious		5	10
Respect for inclusivity and diversity		1	2
Respect for legacy		1	1
Respecting Individual Identities		1	1
Revolution		1	1

Name	Description	Files	References
Rhetorical strategy	employs a rhetorical strategy of positioning themselves as a reasonable and principled actor. They emphasize their commitment to constitutional governance and criticise others for allegedly breaching the constitution.	1	1
Role of framework forces		1	1
Role or religious authority		4	14
Sacrifice		1	1
Sectarian incitement by particular groups		2	2
Sectarianism and terrorism		2	5
Sectarian rivalry		3	11
Security and counter terrorism		2	5
Shared vision		1	1
Shia representation		2	2
Shift in power dynamics		1	1
Shift in principle		1	1
Shift in relation or external influence		1	1
Social harmony		1	3
Social inequality		1	1
Social welfare		3	3
Sovereignty		2	3
Stability		2	2
Strategic efforts		2	2

Name	Description	Files	References
Strategic or cautious approach		5	5
Symbolic value	Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power pertains to the ability to shape perceptions, beliefs, and meanings in society. In the statement, there's an acknowledgment of the symbolic power of the Tishreen movement and the October protests. These movements have mobilised symbolic power by challenging the legitimacy of the government and pushing for political and economic reforms.	5	9
Systematic approach to address corruption		1	1
Tactics to influence voters.		1	2
Terrorism		1	1
Timing of political actions		1	2
Transparency and accountability		3	5
Unified Foreign policy		2	5
Unified national identity		1	1
Unity and patriotic calls		4	5
Unity and Patriotism		3	3
Youth engagement		1	4

Approaches to Accountability and Governance	Accountability Accusations of politicisation Acknowledgement of mistakes	

	Appointments on the basis of party loyalty Blaming political leadership Challenges Challenges in implementation Change of approach Commitment to democratic values over party values Conflict resolution strategies Continuity of engagement Cooperation and constructive engagement Democratic Fight against oppressive regimes Governance skills Inclusivity Legal retribution PMU's transition from a military entity to a political one Respecting human rights	
Foreign Relations and International Engagement	Against foreign intervention Allegations against the Islamic Republic Balanced foreign relations Cooperation and support from neighbouring countries Constitutional change Cooperation and constructive engagement Continued interference Foreign models	
Political Dynamics and Strategies	Appointments on the basis of party loyalty Attraction to followers Avoiding armed factions Call for mutual respect Citizenship Civil state Coalition Conservative ideology Constitutional amendments Corruption Connection with the people	
Power Dynamics:	Power gain or struggle Control and reorganization of armed groups Influence of political blocs Blame attribution Political rivalry and accusations	

	Shift in power dynamics Shift in principle Shift in relation or external influence	
Role of Capital	Role of religion Economic strategy Educational reforms Media manipulation Use of data to back their claim Use of examples Use of metaphors Use of rhetoric Legacy emergence of resistance force Historical references	
Consolidation or Fragmentation	Fragmentation within Shia Political Groups Generational Differences Lack of shared vision Multiplication of Political Factions Lack of strategy Potential for Political Collapse Potential for revolt Reconciliation process Sectarianism and terrorism Shift in power dynamics Shift in principle	
External Influences	Against foreign intervention Impact of external factors International influence International relations Negative perception Political interference Regional politics Shift in relation or external influence	

Appendix 4: Sample Interview Questions (Arabic)

_**رسالة الدكتوراه للطالب حيدر الخطيب**

جامعة لندن

عنوان البحث:

"الملاحة في مجالات السلطة: عدسة بورديو نحو العلاقات السلطوية للشيعة العراقيين بعد عام 2003*

* كيف تعرف الاسلام الشيعي السياسي؟ ومن يمثله؟

* هل كانت هناك رؤية سياسية اجتماعية لبناء الدولة العراقية ما بعد صدام ؟

* ما هو الدور الذي لعبته دول المنطقة في رسم خريطة السياسة العراقية الجديدة ؟

* ما هي القضايا الرئيسية التي واجهتها الدولة الجديدة التي عرقلت بناءها؟

* من المسؤول عن عرقلة بناء الدولة و انتشار الفساد الاداري والمالي ؟

* ما هو انسب نظام سياسي لبناء الدولة العراقية ؟

* ما هي اسباب تفكيك الكتل الشيعية ، وما نوع الصراع الداخلي بين هذه الكتل؟

* ما هي دوافع الاحزاب السياسية من اقتناء السلاح ؟

ما هو دور المرجعية الدينية في النجف الأشرف في استقرار الوضع السياسي في العراق

* ما هي خلاصة تجربة العملية السياسية للعشرين سنة الماضية ؟

Appendix 4- Iraqi Shi'a Political and Armed Factions

Source- Part 2: Pro-Iran Militias in Iraq | The Iran Primer (usip.org); Mapping Militants | FSI (stanford.edu); Understanding Iraq's Coordination Framework - Al-Monitor: Independent, trusted coverage of the Middle East; Shiite rivalries could break Iraq's deceptive calm in 2023 | Brookings; The fragmentation of Shi'a, Kurdish and Sunni politics in Iraq | Iraq's adolescent democracy (clingendael.org); The Logic of Intra-Shi'a Violence in Iraq (tcf.org)

Badr Organisation (formerly known as the Badr Brigade)

Aspect	Details
Formation	Founded in 1982 in Iran as the Badr Brigade to fight Saddam Hussein. Moved back to Iraq in 2003 and integrated into the government. Joined the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in 2014.
Activities	Fought occasional battles with U.S. forces (2003-2011). Engaged in sectarian strife with Sunni rivals. Coordinated with American military advisers against ISIS (2014-2017) as part of the PMF. Affiliated with several PMF brigades.
Ideology	Aligns with Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei. Seeks to expand Shiite power in Iraqi security forces and elections. Aims to contain Sunni movements.
Doctrine and Goals	Full authority to Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei. Works closely with Qassem Soleimani, the commander of the IRGC's Qods Force. Seeks Shiite power expansion.
Leadership	Hadi al Amiri has been the commander since 2003. Also served as Minister of Transportation. Maintains close ties with Tehran. Potential candidate for Iraq's prime minister.
Military	Militia established in Iran in the early 1980s, fought against Saddam. Received ongoing support from Iran. Initially vowed to disarm but engaged in sectarian attacks on Sunnis (2004-2006). One of the largest

Aspect	Details
	wings of the PMF (2014-present). Played a crucial role in battles in Tikrit, Fallujah, and Mosul.
Political Wing	Originally part of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Rebranded as the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq in 2007. Split from ISCI in 2012 over ties with Iran. Emerged as a prominent political party in 2014. Won 22 seats in the 2018 elections and joined the ruling coalition government. Announced the Fatah Coalition in 2018, aligning with Iran-backed Shiite movements.
Current Status	Continues to play a significant role in Iraqi politics. Affiliated with various PMF brigades. Maintains ties with Iran's leadership.

Kataib Hezbollah

Aspect	Details
Formation	Established in 2004 as the 45th brigade of the PMF. Formed by uniting five small armed groups in 2007. Designated a terrorist organisation by the U.S. State Department in 2009.
Activities	Initially targeted U.S.-led coalition forces (2004-2011). Sent fighters to defend the Assad regime in Syria after the 2011 U.S. withdrawal. Joined the PMF to fight ISIS in 2014. Continued operations in both Iraq and Syria.
Ideology	Aims to establish an Islamic government based on the principle of velayat-e faqih, using Iran as a model. Seeks "radical changes" within Iraq's constitution. Affiliated with Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei.
Doctrine and Goals	Identifies with Iran's ideology. Looks to Supreme Leader Khamenei as a spiritual guide. Works to bring "radical changes" within Iraq's

Aspect	Details
	constitutional framework. Strongly opposes the influence of Baathists, the U.S., and Sunni groups, including ISIS.
Leadership	Led by Abu Mahdi al Muhandis since its founding in 2004. Muhandis has a long history with Iran, having fought alongside Iranian forces during the Iran-Iraq War. He has close ties with Qassem Soleimani and played a significant role in various Shiite militias.
Military	Membership size has been secretive, estimates range from 400 to 30,000 fighters. Participated in major operations against ISIS in Ramadi, Karmah, Amerli, Mosul, and Tal Afar. Involved in rocket attacks on the K1 military base and storming the U.S. embassy compound in Baghdad, leading to U.S. airstrikes.
Political Wing	Not affiliated with a political party. In 2018, announced that its members would not participate in the parliamentary election.

Asaib Ahl al Haq

Aspect	Details
Formation	Founded in Iraq in 2006, an off-shoot of Muqtada al Sadr's Mahdi Army. Initially equipped, funded, and trained by the IRGC Qods Force, with support from Lebanese Hezbollah. Joined the PMF in 2014, becoming one of its largest militias.
Activities	Engaged in over 6,000 attacks on U.S. and coalition forces (2006-2011). Fought alongside Hezbollah in Syria to support the Assad regime. Joined the PMF as the 41st, 42nd, and 43rd brigades in 2014. Operated political offices, religious schools, and social services in Iraq. Launched al Ahed TV. Participated in parliamentary elections.
Ideology	Initially created to fight the U.S. military presence. Rebranded as a "nationalist Islamic resistance movement" post-2011. Advocates a political system based on velayat-e faqih, aligning with Iran's Supreme

Aspect	Details
	Leader Khamenei. Embraces the ideology of revolutionary clerics, citing early radical Shiite clerics in Iraq.
Doctrine and Goals	Advocates a political system based on velayat-e faqih, aligning with Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei. Accepts the full authority of Khamenei and embraces the ideology of revolutionary clerics. Views Iran and Hezbollah positively, naming them supporters and acknowledging sacrifices. Considers Israel, the United States, and Saudi Arabia as enemies of Iraq.
Leadership	Led by Qais al Khazali, a former student of Grand Ayatollah Mohammed Sadiq al Sadr. Recruited by the IRGC Qods Force in 2006. Arrested by U.S. forces in 2007 for an attack on an Iraqi government compound. Released in 2010 in exchange for a British hostage. Maintains close ties with Iran, including personal relations with IRGC Qods Force commander Soleimani.
Military	Refused to surrender weapons after the 2011 U.S. withdrawal. Played a pivotal role in fighting ISIS, participating in various battles. Willing to accept U.S. air strikes and military presence under Iraqi supervision during the ISIS conflict.
Political Wing	Established political offices, religious schools, and social services. Formed political bloc al Sadiqoon, participating in the 2014 parliamentary elections. Continued political involvement, including joining the Fatah Coalition in 2018. Won at least 13 seats in the 2018 parliamentary elections as part of the Fatah Coalition.

Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba

Aspect	Details
Formation	Formed in 2013 as an offshoot of Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH) and Kataib Hezbollah (KH). Initially created to support the Assad regime in Syria. Expanded its mission to fight ISIS in 2014 and became the PMF's 12th brigade.
Doctrine and Goals	Aims to defend "the homeland and holy sites, especially in Syria and Iraq," from "forces of evil and takfiri terrorism." Believes in velayat-e faqih, accepting Khamenei as the highest authority. Willing to follow any order from Khamenei, including overthrowing the Iraqi government or fighting alongside Houthi rebels in Yemen. Espouses anti-Western and anti-Israeli views.
Leadership	Sheikh Akram al Kaabi, a cleric, has been the leader since 2013. Involved in multiple militias since 2003, including Asaib Ahl al Haq (AAH). Maintains close ties with Tehran and has received training and support from Iran. Soleimani has been a key advisor to HHN.
Military	Claims to have 9,000 fighters divided into at least three contingents, operating in Iraq and Syria. Fought alongside Iranian and Lebanese Hezbollah forces in Syria since 2013. Operated in Aleppo with about 3,000 fighters in 2016. Claims to have a unit, the "Golan Liberation Brigade," formed in 2017 to capture the Golan Heights from Israel. Active in Iraq against ISIS as part of the PMF. Involved in coordinating operations with other militias and Iranian leadership.
Political Views	Not tied to an active political party.

Imam Ali Brigades

Aspect	Details
Formation	Established in June 2014, operating primarily in Iraq. Joined the PMF as the 40th brigade within months of creation. Fought in various locations, including Amerli, Tuz, Diyala, Mosul, and Tikrit. Dispatched fighters to Syria.
Activities	Trained in Iran and with Hezbollah in Lebanon. Accused of brutality against ISIS fighters, including torture, murder, and setting people afire. Formed a militia of 300 Syriac Christians in December 2014. Coordinated with PMF and General Soleimani in battles against ISIS.
Doctrine and Goals	Named after Imam Ali, recognising Iran's supreme leader's absolute authority. Deployed fighters to protect Shiite shrines and mosques in Syria. Advocates "mercy, tolerance, and courage." Embraces Sharia law and features a three-part series on "jihad of the soul." Logo resembles IRGC, Hezbollah, and Asaib Ahl al Haq emblems.
Leadership	Secretary General: Shebl al Zaidi (since 2014), originally a Sadrist movement follower and Mahdi Army commander. Co-founder: Abu Mahdi al Muhandis, later PMF deputy commander. Commander: Ayyub Faleh Hassan al Rubaie (Abu Azrael), known as "Iraq's Rambo." Trained in Iran, Lebanon, and Iraq. Disavowed by KIA in 2017 after controversial remarks.
Military	Collaborated with Iranian-backed militias in major operations against ISIS in Iraq and Syria. Fought alongside Badr Organisation, Asaib Ahl al Haq, Kataib Hezbollah, and Harakat Hezbollah al Nujaba. Strategically significant in the battle to liberate Mosul.
Political Wing	Initially claimed not to enter politics or participate in elections (December 2017). Later established the Professionals for Reconstruction Party to compete in the May 2018 elections, joining the Fatah Coalition.

Kataib Sayyad al Shuhada

Aspect	Details
Formation	Established in May 2013 to fight alongside the Assad regime in Syria. Expanded operations to Iraq in 2014, joining the PMF as the 14th Brigade. Estimated to have more than 2,000 fighters by 2017.
Activities	Actively fought against ISIS in northern Salahuddin province since 2014. Engaged in battles in Anbar and Nineveh provinces. Participated in the 2015 Tikrit offensive. Coordinated militarily with Shiite PMF militias, including Badr Organisation and Kataib Hezbollah.
Ideology	Supports velayat-e faqih and embraces the full authority of Iran's supreme leader. Has an ambitious regional agenda, aiming to liberate Jerusalem and counter "Zionist and Western" entities. Strongly opposes Saudi Arabia. Aims to protect Shiite shrines and mosques globally, particularly committed to the Zaynab Shrine in Damascus, Syria.
Doctrine and Goals	Promotes velayat-e faqih. Seeks to expand Shiite power and protect Shiite shrines worldwide. Has an outspoken stance against Saudi Arabia.
Leadership	Abu Ala al Walai is the current Secretary General. Co-founder Abu Mustafa al Sheibani was a former leader and was designated as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist by the U.S. Treasury Department. Falih Khazali, a former Secretary General, is a notable figure and spokesperson.
Military	Participated in operations in Nineveh, Salahuddin, and Anbar provinces against ISIS. Fought in the 2015 Tikrit offensive. Accused the United States of bombing its forces along the Iraq-Syria border in 2017. Active in southern suburbs of Damascus in Syria. Coordinated with Hezbollah and IRGC.
Political Wing	Opened more than a dozen political offices in various Iraqi cities. Falih Khazali ran for parliament in Basra in 2014 and was elected. KSS was part of a new political coalition in 2017, led by the Badr Organisation, to compete in elections. Took one seat in the Fatah Coalition in 2018 elections.

Saraya al Salam

Aspect	Details
Formation	Formed by Muqtada Sadr in June 2014 to counter ISIS. Many fighters were previously part of Sadr's Mahdi Army. Makes up the PMF's 313th and 314th brigades.
Relationship with Iran	Had a rocky relationship with Iran. Sadr fled to Iran in 2007 to avoid arrest, ordered Mahdi Army to suspend operations in 2008, and grew critical of Iran by 2016. The group reportedly self-funded through mosque donations after Tehran cut off much support.
Doctrine and Goals	Espouses a nationalist vision, emphasising unity across sects, ethnicities, and classes. Advocates incorporating all PMF militias into the Iraqi army. Does not view Khamenei as its spiritual leader. Opposes foreign intervention in Iraq and Iraqi involvement in other countries, differing from Iran and some Shiite militias. Hostile towards the U.S., the U.K., and Israel.
Leadership	Muqtada Sadr is the founder and a powerful figure in Iraq. Sheikh Kadhim al Issawi is the military commander. Sadr has tested Tehran's patience by criticising Iran and engaging with regional rivals like Saudi Arabia.
Military	Claimed over 100,000 volunteers but lacked funds and equipment. Registered 3,000 fighters with the PMF, estimated to have an additional 15,000 outside the PMF. Deployed against ISIS, played a key role in stopping the ISIS advance, and had a presence in various regions. Called on militias to disarm after ISIS defeat.

Aspect	Details
Political Wing	Sadrist Movement, founded in 2003, initially a social movement. Played a significant role in Iraqi elections. Sadrists secured seats in various elections, and in 2018, Sadr adopted a bold strategy, forming alliances beyond pro-Iran militias, even allying with the Iraqi Communist Party. Tehran expressed concerns about this move.

Appendix 5- Summary of the Developing Phases of Shi'a Thought

- **Phase 1: The School's Formative Period**

- 385 AH / 995 AD: Birth of Shaykh Tusi in Tous, Khorasan.

- 408 AH / 1017-8 AD: Tusi moves to Baghdad, possibly due to difficult circumstances in Khorasan.

- 408 AH / 1017-8 AD: Caliph Al-Qadir Abu'l-Abbas blames clerics for sectarian conflicts in Baghdad.

- After 408 AH / 1017-8 AD: Tusi joins lessons in Shafi'i jurisprudence before devoting himself to the school of Abu Abd Allah ibn al-Mu'allim (al-Shaykh al-Mufid) and Sharif Murtada.

- 436 AH / 1044 AD: Tusi leads the Twelver school after the passing of Sharif Murtada.

- 447 AH / 1055 AD: Power shifts to the Turkic Seljuks, leading to renewed turmoil between Sunnis and Shi'ites.

- 448 AH / 1056-7 AD: Tusi decides to emigrate within Iraq, settling in the vicinity of Imam Ali's resting place in al-Ghari (Najaf).

- 460 AH / 1067 AD: Tusi dies in Najaf after 12 years of residence.

- 448-460 AH / 1056-1067 AD: Tusi's scholarly activity in Najaf, limited to a small council, and the establishment of a hawza for boys.

- 515 AH / 1121-2 AD: Tusi's son, Abu Ali al-Hasan ibn Muhammad, becomes a leading figure after his father.

- Circa 575-600 AH / 1179-1204 AD: The Najaf Hawza remains relatively isolated with limited scholarly activity and interaction.

- After 600 AH / 1204 AD: The Hillah Hawza emerges with students returning from Najaf and becomes independent.

- 7th to 9th Centuries AH / 13th to 15th Centuries AD: The Hillah Hawza remains at the forefront of Shi'ite religious studies.

- Prominent Issues:

- Migration to Baghdad: Tusi's move to Baghdad from Khorasan, possibly influenced by political and religious turmoil.

- Turmoil in Baghdad: Sectarian conflicts, violence, and political unrest during the rule of Caliph Al-Qadir Abu'l-Abbas and later the Turkic Seljuks.

- Emigration to Najaf: Tusi's decision to move to Najaf due to ongoing unrest in Baghdad.

- Scholarly Isolation in Najaf: Limited scholarly activity in Najaf, with Tusi's hawza primarily focused on basic education for boys.

- Hillah Hawza Emergence: The rise of the Hillah Hawza as a significant center of Shi'itereligious studies, surpassing Najaf in prominence.

- **Phase 2: Consolidation**

- Early 9th Century AH (15th Century AD):

  o Al-Fadil al-Miqdad al-Suyuri (d. 826 AH / 1423-4 AD) and Ibn Fahd al-Hilli (d. 841 AH / 1437-8 AD) bring scholarly activity back to Najaf.

  o Ali ibn Hilal al-Jaza'iri (d. 937 AH / 1530-1 AD) emerges as a key figure, studying under Shaykh Ali al-Karaki and Shaykh Ibrahim al-Qatifi.

- 907 AH / 1501 AD:

  o Establishment of the Safavid state impacts the role of Najaf Hawza.

  o Interest in religious cities grows for proselytization.

  o Clerics gain importance in state ideology and politics.

- 909 AH / 1504-5 AD:

  o Shaykh Ali al-Karaki arrives in Iraq with Safavid support.

  o Baghdad falls to Safavid forces in 914 AH / 1509 AD.

  o Al-Karaki meets Safavid Shah Ismail I.

- 916 AH / 1510 AD:

  o Al-Karaki accompanies Shah Ismail I on a military campaign against Herat.

  o Receives financial support from Safavid state for promoting Shi'ism and building the Hawza.

- 920 AH / 1514-5 AD:

  o Al-Karaki returns to Iraq, devotes himself to teaching and writing.

  o Disagreements with Prince Ghyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki.

  o Al-Karaki's zeal for Shari'a and conflicts lead to his return to Iraq.

- 930 AH / 1523-4 AD:

  o Al-Karaki returns to Najaf, spends his final days there, and passes away in 940 AH / 1534 AD.

- After 937 AH / 1530-1 AD:

  o Al-Jaza'iri, along with al-Miqdad al-Suyuri and Ibn Fahd al-Hilli, study intermittently in Najaf.

  o Safavid impact on Najaf Hawza continues, with varying reactions among Shi'itejurists.

- End of the 10th Century AH (16th Century AD):

  - Al-Astarabadi avoids politics, reluctant to cooperate with the Safavids.

  - Najaf becomes isolated from political influence.

  - Al-Astarabadi moves to Mecca and dies there in 1028 AH / 1618-9 AD.

- Prominent Issues:

- Safavid Influence: The Safavid state's impact on Najaf Hawza leads to political and intellectual divisions among Shi'itejurists.

- Political Role: Najaf Hawza's relationship with politics becomes more pronounced, attracting attention and scholars.

- Shi'iteTradition Awakening: The Safavids' promotion of Shi'ism leads to an awakening of the Shi'itetradition, sparking debates and critical ideas.

- Boycott of Safavid Authority: Some scholars, like al-Ardabili and al-Astarabadi, boycott Safavid authority, leading to a period of dormancy in Najaf.

- **Phase 3: Iraqification**

- Late 17th Century - Early 18th Century AD:

  - Intellectual Shifts: The Safavid sultans grumble about the dominance of jurists represented by Shaykh Ali al-Karaki. This leads to a political game of balance to prevent one faction from monopolizing power.

  - Competing Currents: Three competing currents emerge - mujtahid jurists, traditionist or muhaddith jurists, and illuminationist philosophers.

  - Safavid Political Dynamics: Competition between Shaykh al-Karaki and Prince Ghiyath al-Din Dashtaki during the founding stage of the Safavid state.

  - Akhbari School: The decline of mujtahid jurists results in the rise of the Akhbari school, emphasizing the restoration of Hadith compilations.

- Late 17th Century - Early 18th Century (Continued):

  - Intellectual Division: The political division becomes an intellectual one over the understanding of the legacy of Twelverism and its relationship to politics and other sciences.

  - Safavid Safeguarding Shi'ism: Safavids pursue policies to promote Shi'iteculture, empower clerics, and build Shari'a schools.

- Late 17th Century - Early 18th Century (Continued):

- o Role of Shaykh Ali al-Karaki: Shaykh Ali al-Karaki's relationship with Safavid authorities generates strong reactions in religious circles.

- o Disputes and Exile: Disagreements between al-Karaki and Ghiyath al-Din Dashtaki lead to conflicts and al-Karaki's return to Iraq.

- o Impact of Safavid State: The Safavid state's financial support draws attention to Najaf, encouraging study there.

- o Shi'iteJurists' Split: Shi'itejurists in Najaf are split in their stance on the Safavid state's use of religion in political disputes.

- Late 17th Century - Early 18th Century (Continued):

  - o Spread of Hadith and Reports: The current boycotting the Safavid state eventually succeeds in spreading Hadith and reports.

  - o Awakening of Shi'iteTradition: Shi'itetradition calls for boycotting sultans as usurpers of the post belonging exclusively to the infallible Imam.

- Late 17th Century - Early 18th Century (Continued):

  - o Decline of Akhbari School: Al-Wahid al-Bihbahani's campaign leads to the decline of the Akhbari school, marking a new phase of competition between currents.

- Mid-18th Century:

  - o Leadership Shift in Najaf: Mohammad Mahdi Bahr al-Ulum and Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita' play pivotal roles in reestablishing and growing the Hawza in Najaf.

  - o Roles of Bahr al-Ulum and Ghita': Bahr al-Ulum adopts a unique approach to managing religious affairs, assigning key functions to his close pupils.

- Late 18th Century - Early 19th Century:

  - o Continued Growth: Ja'far Kashif al-Ghita', a pupil of al-Wahid al-Bihbahani and Bahr al-Ulum, continues their work, opening religious schools and raising a generation of high-level jurists.

  - o Political and Religious Influence: Najaf Hawza plays important roles in politics, issuing fatwas against foreign forces and mediating between regional states.

  - o Financial and Religious Centralization: Shi'itecommunities increasingly turn to Najaf for religious decisions, and financial contributions are sent to the marji'.

- Mid-19th Century:

  - o Legacy of Shaykh Murtada al-Ansari: Shaykh Murtada al-Ansari's leadership results in the Najaf Hawza gaining recognition and financial support from Shi'itecommunities.

- Prominent Issues:

- Intellectual Shifts: Competing currents emerge, and political dynamics shape the intellectual landscape of Najaf.

- Political Balancing Act: Safavid authorities balance the power of competing religious factions to prevent monopolization.

- Rise of Akhbari School: The decline of mujtahid jurists leads to the rise of the Akhbari school emphasising the restoration of Hadith compilations.

- Political and Religious Roles: Najaf Hawza actively engages in politics, issuing fatwas, mediating between states, and safeguarding Shi'ism.

- Centralisation of Authority: The leadership of Bahr al-Ulum and Ghita' leads to the centralisation of religious authority and financial contributions in Najaf.

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