**Digital and Political Transformation: A Perspective on the discourse of Iraqi Media System**

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the current nature of the Iraqi media system through the lens of two significant influences: the digitalization of global media and the country's political transformation in 2003. It discusses the important shifts in the digital environment and their reflection on the media discourse of media systems in their historical context. The concept of the media system, how historical studies of media systems evolved, and the stages of development of concepts and classifications that researchers have carried out for media systems in the world were reviewed. The paper also explored the problematic changes that are taking place in contemporary media systems due to the digital changes that have changed the close relationship between the media and political systems in societies. The analytical descriptive approach was used to gain an accurate and detailed understanding of the media system in Iraq. The paper concluded that the discourse of media system in Iraq was simultaneously associated with digital and political transformation when political change led to an openness to the new digital environment, but the features of this system at the micro-level are linked to the determinants of the turbulent political scene in Iraq that created a plurality of conflicting discourses enriched with a unique sort of political parallelism and political conflict-related interests.

Keywords: digitization, hybrid media system, media discourse, Iraqi media system, political transformation.

ملخص باللغة العربية

التحول الرقمي والسياسي: المنظور التحليلي لخطاب النظام الإعلامي في العراق

يتناول البحث الطبيعة الحالية للنظام الإعلامي العراقي من خلال عاملين مؤثرين مهمين: رقمنة الإعلام العالمي والتحول السياسي في البلاد في عام 2003. ويناقش التحولات المهمة في البيئة الرقمية وانعكاسها على الخطاب الإعلامي لوسائل الإعلام في سياقها التاريخي. تمت مراجعة مفهوم النظام الإعلامي ، وكيفية تطور الدراسات التاريخية لأنظمة الإعلام ، ومراحل تطور المفاهيم والتصنيفات التي قام بها الباحثون للأنظمة الإعلامية في العالم. كما درس البحث التغييرات التي تحدث في أنظمة الإعلام المعاصرة بسبب التغيرات الرقمية التي غيرت العلاقة الوثيقة بين وسائل الإعلام والأنظمة السياسية في المجتمعات. تم استخدام المنهج الوصفي التحليلي لغرض فهم دقيق ومفصل للنظام الاعلامي في العراق. وخلصت نتائج البحث إلى أن خطاب النظام الإعلامي في العراق ارتبط بشكل متزامن بالتحول الرقمي والسياسي عندما أدى التغيير السياسي إلى الانفتاح على البيئة الرقمية الجديدة ، لكن ميزات هذا النظام على المستوى الجزئي مرتبطة بمحددات المشهد السياسي المضطرب في العراق الذي أوجد تعددًا في الخطابات المتضاربة التي تتاثر بنوع من التوازي السياسي والمصالح السياسية المرتبطة بالصراع.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الرقمنة ، نظام الإعلام الهجين، الخطاب الإعلامي ، النظام الإعلامي العراقي ، التحول السياسي.

**Introduction**

Contemporary media systems are going through a transitional phase, in which the process of transferring, distributing, and consuming media materials, both at the national and international news levels, has changed as a result of the digital transformation witnessed in the world. In the midst of this transformation, the features of media policies have been determined according to the perspective of technological development, which has imposed changes in the structure and work of media institutions. In addition, the relationship between media systems and political systems is typically beyond question. According to literature in the fields of communication and political science, the media system and political system of any nation are closely related. Numerous theoretical and empirical studies by communication and media scientists refer to this relationship through terms such as media policy, political communication, and media democracy [[1]](#footnote-1). This relationship is obviously affected by any political change, as was the case in Iraq in 2003 when the radical transformation of the political system led to qualitative changes in the nature of the media system's work.

Iraq's media landscape has changed since the US invasion in 2003. It was forcibly transformed from a Baath Party-controlled context to a liberalized one in which hundreds of outlets compete for an audience and few independent voices struggle to avoid state and partisan pressures. In the past, there were only two newspapers, one broadcast station, and one satellite channel. Numerous media outlets are available now. [[2]](#footnote-2).

Iraqi media reflects the state's and key political actors' narratives and is utilized for control and violence. (Kaisy,2020). Post-invasion media-political relations was changed. The American Provisional Governor promptly liquidated all media organizations and staff. He issued Order No. 6 to replace the Ministry of Information with the Iraqi Media Network (IMN) in June 2003. The Coalition Provision Authority (CPA) wanted the IMN to be independent, honest, and professional like the BBC, but the IMN started to hold government positions because its president and board members were appointed by the government or governing party and based on a sectarian criterion. 2021). Thus, the CPA media pluralization effort ignored Iraqi sociopolitical context and history. Most Iraqis see the media as propaganda after 45 years of multifaceted dictatorship (1958–2003). 2021). Despite Iraq's constitution providing free speech and expression, media is restricted and laws overlap. Radio, TV, print, and satellite are government-controlled. Powerful players dominate online news. Government, political parties, and other powerful institutions spend significant sums to promote misinformation online and further their political objectives.

Iraq has established organizations to control the media, such as the Communications and Media Commission of Iraq (CMC), which was established in 2004. The CMC performs similar duties to the UK's Office of Communication (OfCom) or the American Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The CMC is an organization created to serve as an independent regulatory body for Iraq's communication sectors, which include radio, telecommunications, wireless internet, satellite and terrestrial television, and radio. The 2005 Constitution states that the CMC is governed by the Iraqi parliament[[3]](#footnote-3). In this regard, some journalists and media practitioners interviewed pointed out some characteristics of the Iraqi media authorities. They alleged that the CMC lacked impartiality in its work due to the numerous closures of satellite channels and media outlets that were deemed to be in opposition to government officials or political parties. The CMC's rules, such as the prohibition on "spreading sectarian, racial, and religious sedition information," appear to be subject to a sort of "look the other way" attitude, according to Sa;ad Ibrahim of the Newsroom Social Network. (personal communication, 7 October 2022).

In the field of press and media freedom in particular, the Iraqi legislator did not adopt strategic laws to control the pace of journalistic work, but rather relied on the principle of referral in information crimes, and on separate legal articles overlapping with the Iraqi Penal Code of 1969. Articles of the penal code from 1969 that criminalize libel, defamation, the disclosure of state secrets, and the dissemination of 'false news' are still in effect and continue to restrict the press. These provisions establish severe penalties for press-related offenses, including fines and up to seven years in prison for those who insult the legislature, the government, or public authorities.[[4]](#footnote-4) Additionally, according to the Director of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory (JFO) Hadi Gallo Mareithe , the CMC issued ambiguous guidelines for how the media should cover national events as part of the war against the Islamic State (ISIS) in 2014." These guidelines are still active. Only positive news stories were to be disseminated, and stories that did not comply with the moral and patriotic order required for the war on terror were prohibited".

This political influence on the media system in Iraq was accompanied by a widespread introduction of digital communication technology. In the years following 2003, technological advancements, increased access to the internet, and mobile telecommunications spread widely. According to Internet World Stats, the number of internet users in Iraq increased from 7.1% in 2012 to 71.9% in 2022. with 30,029,700 Facebook users in January 2022.[[5]](#footnote-5) So, media professionals in Iraq are concerned about the increasing use of social media and digital news, which has an impact on their work. Smaller privately funded media are emphasizing feature-driven or narrative-based content, making them less likely to attract large or consistent audiences as social media dominates the news on the internet. Iraqi Journalists reported that their salaries were dependent on their social media presence, limiting their ability to concentrate on journalism[[6]](#footnote-6). It is the evolution of communication that necessitates a shift in the journalist's perception of their role and daily work routine. The journalist's role, which previously included gathering information, responding to feedback, and promoting their work, has undergone significant change.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Perspectives have dominated research on the evolution of the Iraqi media system and its interactions with the political arena. Ahmed Al-Raw (2012) provided an overview of the Iraqi media and the significant milestones in the history of the various Iraqi media channels. His research centered on the history of Iraqi mass media and its development according to the nature of the media and the political climate of each era. Price, Monroe, et al. (2007) categorized the media development in Iraq into stages during prewar and postwar, with each stage characterized by aspects of evolving media policy and new media forms on the ground. They discovered at least two areas of concern: the development of a competitive broadcast market and the establishment of a domestic regulatory agency. The first entails establishing an administrative structure for licensing and content regulation, as well as the expansion of non-state entities. The second entails determining what kind of institutions should arise from the ashes of the former state monopoly. According to their research, it is erroneous to consider the Saddam era to have been completely devoid of voices, political differences, journalistic capacity and infrastructure, and creative sources for the post-war process. Aida Al-Kaisy (2021) examines the dominant disinformation narratives in the discourse of the Iraqi media system. It includes an analysis of the statements, agents, motivations, and effects of the widespread dissemination of disinformation in Iraqi political media. Hana Noor Al-Deen (2006) investigates the changes and challenges confronting Iraqi media. The research covered three major epochs. Period I (Prior 1958) is concerned with the monarchy; Period II (1958 - 2003) is concerned with the media under strict discipline; and Period III (2003 to Present) is concerned with the media following the overthrow of the Saddam Hussein ruling. It concluded that the Iraqi media transitioned quickly and sharply from dictatorial regime to free-for-all media and that the situation continues to evolve with various types on interventions. Because the situation in Iraq is still developing, it is impossible to predict what the future holds. Upon questioning the interviewees about the various types of political interventions, the responses were entirely negative and can be categorized as follows: The legislation and legal regulations that are interpreted and applied negatively against freedom of expression and have led to the arrest of journalists for flimsy reasons, the threats and intimidation practiced against journalists by pro-partisan interest groups, and the ideology of the institution and its affiliation with parties that prevent the publication of any criticism that contradicts its policy and agenda.

Most of these studies presented different visions of the media system in Iraq as a country in the process of democratic transition, with a focus on forms of political and partisan interference in the media environment. The emerging media systems in new democratic countries is characterized with state-media relations, political parallelism and new hybrid types of political communication. Political parallelism appears to be the norm rather than the exception in the majority of new democracies. It seems to become problematic when partisanship goes beyond advocating for a particular political issue and includes defamation and hatefulness of political adversaries.[[8]](#footnote-8). As Hollifi eld, Jillson (2014) suggested that new democracies do not adhere to the same pattern of transformation and have varying degrees of success in consolidating the new democratic order. In this regard, they presented three main paths of democratization in new democracies that can be applied to the Iraqi situation: the transition from communist oligarchy as in Eastern Europe, the transition from military and dictatorship as in Latin America, and the transition from and one-party dictatorship: both in the context of statism and rapid modernization in East Asia, and in the context of imperfect nation-building in and ethnic fragmentation in Africa.

Dictatorship or Military-ruled media as in the last two pathways and its contexts were censored as in any autocratic regime. Unlike communism, military dictatorships used censorship to suppress opposing views, while propaganda to re-educate the masses played a minor role, if any. Military dictatorships have no ideology beyond retaining power, which limits the media's role. Fear and public quiescence secured power, not popular support. This state-centered industrialization project included the media. Their influence was to validate and focus on promoting government actions. [[9]](#footnote-9)

In the light of the above, the current research sheds light on the Iraqi media system as a variable influenced by both digitalization and the internal factor of political transformation, which has witnessed profound changes. To comprehend the impact of these two dimensions on the Iraqi media system, the author first develops a thorough understanding of the historical development of media systems throughout the world, as well as the technological influences that play a role in the evolving environment of media systems globally. The analytical descriptive approach was used to investigate the Iraqi media system because it is a research methodology that helps in reaching an accurate and comprehensive understanding that leads to anticipating future policies and procedures.[[10]](#footnote-10). Interviews are also conducted to gain insight into the journalists' perceptions of the difficulties currently facing the Iraqi media landscape, political parallelism, the effects of political transformation, media pluralism, and the journalists' perspectives on political and technological changes. Journalists' perspectives on how digital and political transformations affect Iraqi media systems are highly essential because they play an active role in shaping the media landscape and its future. Participants must include both respondents and informants, and the nature of the response may be based on opinions or facts, respectively. The interviews included eight journalists from various Iraqi media outlets. Interviews are conducted both in person and via email during a period of a month from September15 to October15. Furthermore, as a continuing second method, the researcher conducted a review of relevant literature as well as official documents and recent media reports. The information gathered was analyzed thematically and was sufficient for a thorough investigation.

For the purpose of determining the dimensions of studying the subject, the research seeks to answer the following broad questions:

1. - What is the historical context of media system classifications and their relationship to the political and digitization variables?
2. In light of the aforementioned variables, what are the most significant characteristics and effects of the political transition on the Iraqi media system?

**A brief overview of the global media system topology**

Numerous political, social, and economic factors influence the operating environment of a media system. Given the contentious relationship between media and politics and its connection to freedom, objectivity, independence, etc., the political factor emerges as a key factor in defining the characteristics and dimensions of this concept. The media system influences the role of the media in society and their relationship to political systems. The State's media system consists of all media organized or operating within its political and social structure[[11]](#footnote-11). The media system's roots are in the country's social and political environment, which is influenced by power structures. [[12]](#footnote-12).

Denis McQuail notes in his book (Theory of Mass Communication) that there are concerns regarding the organization of the media system and its work environment within societies. These include freedom of publication, diversity in forms and channels of communication, support for maintaining law and order and state security, and support for democracy [[13]](#footnote-13). As the global media and communication environment continues to develop, new variables are emerging that complicate the process of openness and the ways in which it interacts with other systems or factors outside the system's community. Advances in communication have made it possible to access the output of any media system, regardless of political geography[[14]](#footnote-14) .

Fred Seibert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm wrote the four Theories of Journalism in 1956, providing a typology of the media's role in society. The authors' taxonomy relied on prevailing political models of the time, the Cold War, and the world's division into two camps[[15]](#footnote-15).

In the 1970s and 1980s, other researchers supplemented these theories due to their inflexibility, lack of time, and Western nature[[16]](#footnote-16). They failed because they focused more on society than media. The media quickly adapted to new circumstances when a dictatorship fell, for example. These theories haven't kept up with the media, technology, and time[[17]](#footnote-17) **.** These theories then prompted new classifications. Authoritarian and social authoritarian theories support using the press to achieve state goals. Liberal, social liberal, and central social theories limit state censorship and emphasize media liberalism.

Denis McQuail added a category for the four theories in the 1980s. He added two new theories: the democratic participation theory, which criticizes media owned by big bureaucracies or commercial institutions for citizens' lack of participation in exercising their right to communicate, and the development theory, which emphasizes using the media in issues of development and national unity in developing societies. William Hackton in the 1980s added two theories: the theory of development and the theory of revolutionary, which its role challenges the monolithic ideological power. Robert Picard's R. B. Picard Rating added Dennis McQuill's Democratic Socialism Theory [[18]](#footnote-18) .

In spite of the numerous classifications that media and communication scientists have developed for media systems, it is evident that they all stem primarily from the relationship between the media and the nature of political systems Denis McQuail suggests structural and organizational links between media and political systems. In each country, the political system establishes laws, regulations, and policies to guarantee rights and freedoms and to consolidate commitments and determinants, even in the most liberal media systems, as well as at the level of behavior, which refers generally to working methods at the organizational level, including methods of selecting and producing content, editorial policy decision-making, market policy, and relations with government[[19]](#footnote-19) **.**

Media systems were categorized in 2004 by Hallin & Mancini. Their comparative study excluded the rest of the world because they used a methodology that was based on the Western systems that were the most comparable to one another and on their accurate knowledge of those systems, which reduced the analytical scope and the number of variables the analyst would have to deal with if they studied systems outside of these geographic areas that they did not have a thorough understanding of.[[20]](#footnote-20) .

The authors of "Comparing Media Systems" examined the regular relationships between political structures and mass media in order to develop concepts and hypotheses regarding the reciprocal relationships or shared existence of the key variables governing the relationship between media and political systems. Their exploratory and primary research was conducted fifty years after Seibert and his colleagues' four theories on journalism. The study recommended that theories become more compatible with contemporary systems. Three media system models are proposed by the authors, including " North Atlantic or Liberal model", "The Mediterranean" or "multipolar" model and Nord-Central European or democratic. Each model predominates in various nations and regions, but its prevalence is primarily determined by the political system.[[21]](#footnote-21).Their study also identified four major dimensions that characterize the media systems they examined; these serve as indicators or criteria for the study of media systems in relation to each country's political system. These dimensions are::

1- Developing the market for media: the extent and nature of the development of media markets, with a focus on newspapers and the mass circulation of the press.

2- Political parallelism: refers to the nature of the connections between political parties and the media and, more generally, the degree to which the media reflect political divisions.

3- Professional journalism: refers to the level of development of professional journalism.

4. The state's role: the extent and nature of the government's involvement in the media.

However, there have been numerous attempts to theorize about media systems outside the "Western" world, and these efforts are still in their infancy. In recent years, significant strides have been made in evolving typologies of media systems, and a vast amount of comparative research is starting to appear in which these typologies play a crucial role.[[22]](#footnote-22). Digital media may follow or disrupt existing patterns of difference among media systems. In this regard, Hallin and Mancini noted three options: New media may be shaped by current media system contexts, reproducing prevailing interactions. They may develop according to communications technology or institutional rationale independent of current media systems, disrupting prevailing patterns and possibly reducing media system differences. They may also develop differently in various media system contexts, but in discontinuous ways.[[23]](#footnote-23).

**Digital transformation and media systems**

The world's media has changed, affecting normative media theories and models used to diagnose media systems. These changes were caused by many factors. Digital transformation and the proliferation of electronic media are reevaluating media systems, making it difficult to establish a normative framework for a national media outside of its geographical and local context [[24]](#footnote-24).

Digital media has led to hybridization of media systems around the world. A hybrid media system combines old and new media logic. In a hybrid media or communication system, different forms of media integrate, benefit, and learn from each other. This system is shown in how news is produced, distributed, and used, and when other media shape the media agenda. It emphasizes traditional news media, digital media, and online political dialogue.[[25]](#footnote-25) .

Hybridization is particularly evident in political communication, where actors use traditional and social media. In hybrid media campaigns, social media can influence or bypass traditional media by sharing and contributing to traditional online media content. A hybrid media system favors parties and candidates who master the regime's methods. Obama's 2008 and Trump's 2016 presidential victories are attributed to hybrid media [[26]](#footnote-26).

Hybrid media rejects "old" and "new" labels. It shows how old and new media logic overlap, combine, and evolve. Hybrid thinking is useful for studying how political actors, the public, and the media interact, undermining old media categories and regulatory boundaries with policies and regulations, and removing gatekeeping barriers and simple differences between information producers and consumers. The spread and democratization of communication technologies make hybrid media the norm [[27]](#footnote-27).

In a hybrid media system, there is no distinction between traditional media and new media. Interaction, complementarity, and cooperation characterize the hybrid media systems in the United States and the United Kingdom [[28]](#footnote-28).

Traditional media's monopoly in the local public arena is almost historic, and its content production resources are shrinking. Under the digital transformation, some of this media power has been transferred to the public using social media platforms for communication, distribution, and discussion of public issues, and new platforms for direct communication between political actors and forces with the recipient have been developed [[29]](#footnote-29).

Chadwick, the hybrid media system theorist, argues that hybridization deals with the complex interrelationship between old and new communication forces, as the world is always transitioning from old to new [[30]](#footnote-30). Information and communication technology (ICT), which facilitated the transmission of information through various communication channels, has helped collective organizing and media changes. ICTs have affected media systems' main components and dimensions and increased the role of non-elitist politics. This has increased the Fifth Authority's ability to influence media systems, as shown by rising citizen participation in the media content industry. First, citizens are increasingly active in influencing the regulation of media systems and their components through grassroots initiatives and individual bottom-up demands. Second, citizen involvement in media production is changing the news industry, agenda-setting, and crowd-oriented news organizations.[[31]](#footnote-31).

The World Wide Web, the Internet, and new and social media are altering the relationships among individuals, the media, the government, and society. In the wake of an increasingly complex media environment, the philosophical assumptions underlying certain normative media theories and media impact theories must be reexamined where new models are required in light of current realities[[32]](#footnote-32).

In contemporary media systems, the masses and opinion leaders influence media discourse when the public produces resources that affect newsmakers and ultimately alter the patterns of the news industry, as well as indirectly the attitudes of political actors. The blurring of the lines between mass communication and communication between individuals in the new digital environment is an important change promoted by the digital age[[33]](#footnote-33). Despite these significant factors, some continue to believe that the state is the most common unit for comparing media systems. In reality, nation-states continue to play a crucial role in media management, and local actors continue to shape the central dynamics of media policies, despite the fact that media technologies and platforms enable global media content flows.[[34]](#footnote-34).

**Iraq's media landscape: historical and political course**

Iraq is a multi-party system with a federal parliamentary representative government. It is a relatively small nation with a lengthy history dating back more than five thousand years. It is distinguished by the presence of a variety of racial, ethnic, sectarian, and national groups. Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, Assyrians, and others make up the Iraqi population, while Islam (Sunni and Shi'a), Christianity, and others make up the religious makeup. Arabic is the country's official language, while Kurdish is the primary language in Kurdish areas. Other languages such as Turkish, Assyrian, and Armenian exist there**.[[35]](#footnote-35).**

The first official newspaper published in Baghdad marked the beginnings of the media in Iraq. In 1869, during the Ottoman rule of Iraq, the first issue of Al-Zawra' was published. soon after, in 1885, Al-Mosul, a weekly newspaper, began publication in Mosul. The Al-Basra weekly newspaper first appeared in Basra in 1889. After the fall of the Ottoman Empire at the end of World War I, these newspapers continued to publish until the British occupation in 1917. British occupants controlled the Iraqi press. They did this by acquiring public and private publishing houses. All Ottoman-era newspapers were closed and new ones started.[[36]](#footnote-36) During this time, newspapers flourished and published anti-British content. Several political parties were founded then. These parties used the partisan press to express political and reform ideologies. Thus, the media were relatively independent.[[37]](#footnote-37). The Iraqi government conducted the first experimental radio broadcast on 22 March 1932. The television service began in 1954, during a manufactured and commercial goods exhibition in Baghdad when the British BAY Company erected a mobile television station. [[38]](#footnote-38).

The Iraqi monarchy was overthrown by a revolution in July 1958. It signified the beginning of republican rule in Iraq, which also marked the end of the British presence in the country. Numerous newspapers representing various political and racial groups of society were published. But when the Ba'ath party took power in 1968, the government seized control of the media. The party's official newspaper, Al-Thawra, was established as its mouthpiece. Saddam Hussein ascended to the throne of Iraq in 1979, and he completely monopolized the media during his reign (1979-2003).[[39]](#footnote-39).

An Iraqi Internet-based television channel debuted in 1998. Nobody had equal access to Internet services. They were legally under the control of the Iraqi government at the time and subject to strict security measures. Furthermore, international sanctions imposed following Iraq's occupation of Kuwait in 1991 rendered the infrastructure unfit for this service. There were 45,000 subscribers out of a total population of 24 million Iraqis.[[40]](#footnote-40).

From 1969 to 2003, Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime imposed severe restrictions on the media. The Iraqi News Agency served as the government's sole television news network. Five additional daily newspapers and four radio stations provided censored information to the Iraqi people. Every other form of media was forbidden. Any violation of the restrictions on the limited press was punishable by imprisonment, torture, or death. Consequently, during these years, numerous journalists fled or went into hiding.[[41]](#footnote-41). It can be noted that in the light of the political conditions that Iraq has faced throughout its modern history, the hegemony of successive Iraqi governments continues to impact the functioning and perspective of the media. Ethnic and religious diversity has become an important factor in determining the nature of the media system and its functions in society within the framework of the state's interests as will be described in broader context below.

**Parallelism and pluralism in media system in Iraq**

Conditions resulting from the political transition in Iraq imposed characteristics that continue to define the Iraqi media system. Several studies examined the democratic transition from a political communication perspective. Some tell how the media helped build solid democracies. Others describe democratization advances but also point to factors that hinder mature democratic practices in political communication. The third group of studies explores the persistence of old regime practices and cultural profiles, which perpetuate a corrupt or authoritarian new order or both. In all cases, a society's democratization success or failure is measured by its ability to meet western democratic standards, especially the fourth estate ideal.[[42]](#footnote-42).

The Iraqi media system can be viewed as a hybrid of the pre-transition and post-transition media systems. This scene depicted a negative pluralism due to a clear trend in the structure of the Iraqi media system toward political, sectarian, and ethnic blocs. When pluralism originates from such scene, it has negative consequences. Iraq's media pluralism permits sectarian and ethnic political factions to construct formidable print, radio, and television empires.

This "democratic" pluralism in a country afflicted by unilateralism in the media decision is still based on various political interventions in the media's agenda, which necessitates addressing the concept of political parallelism which refers to several phenomena, amongst which are recognizable media-politics patterns in a given society; convergent agendas, worldviews, and organizational ties between certain media outlets and political parties, groups, or tendencies and a political communication system defined by a strong connection between media and political groups[[43]](#footnote-43).

Parallelism was prevalent for much of the 20th century when institutionalized social groups shaped social, political, and cultural aspects and the media system. Throughout most democratic corporatist media systems, there are parallels between newspapers and political parties in content, staff affiliations, and audience partisanship..[[44]](#footnote-44). Political parties generally rely on the media to increase positive publicity and decrease negative reputation among the public at large. Parties specifically need to impact the media on a variety of issues, including their party platform, reputation, and also how current political issues are presented.[[45]](#footnote-45). Beyond the west, parallelism is rare. It makes sense only under two conditions: the competitive political system with clear political cleavages that can be reproduced by the media; and the stable enough relationship between both the media and political agents to recognize general patterns. In all cases, political parallelism assumes a high degree of stability in political cleavages and media behavior, enough to identify consistent alignments. Also, media behavior is evaluated based on how much it reflects party lines rather than acting as independent political agents.[[46]](#footnote-46). But the case in Iraq is different, it is observable that the media in Iraq behaves as a variable that is influenced by various forms of partisan and political interference. Almost every Iraqi newspaper or media channel is supported by a political or religious entity, resulting in an environment where trustworthiness is frequently in question. [[47]](#footnote-47).

Studies on the nature of the media system and its practical and functional dimensions in countries have identified some trends in the nature of the media system and its practical and functional dimensions. Some of them are linked to potential obstacles to any democratic transition, while others adopt a hybrid of the old and new regimes, retaining the political influence of the old regimes [[48]](#footnote-48). Some theories about the democratic transition process were based on categorizing political regimes and the nature of their interactions with the media [[49]](#footnote-49). According to the data of the analytical description shown above, the current reality of the media system in Iraq exhibits a similar procedural nature in aspects related to the political interference of the state and parties on the flow of content since 2003. This perception was founded on causal relationships and correlations between, on the one hand, the dominance of political interests over the media and, on the other, the reality of journalistic work in an environment governed by conflicts and turmoil, which would limit freedoms and the transmission of information to the public in accordance with the standards of free media systems. A survey conducted by the Press Freedom Advocacy Association in Iraq(PAA) in 2019 comprised 385 journalists about the main common challenges the Iraqi journalists face showed that (71%) answered that they and their institutions are subjected to political pressure to alter their broadcasted messages and content, (61%) suffered arrests and detention, (45%) of their institutions faced threats of closure, and (70%) faced coverage and duty obstruction (Press Freedom Advocacy, 2019 ).The results of another survey conducted by the Organization of Empowering Women in the Media revealed that 91 percent of Iraqi female journalists face difficulty in obtaining information, which hinders their work and constitutes a major challenge to the profession. The results of the questionnaire, in which 100 Iraqi Arab and Kurdish journalists working in written, visual and audio media and social media participated, showed that government agencies got the highest percentage in refraining from giving information, which is 51%, followed by security sources with 28%, and partisan authorities ranked third in refraining from giving information. Giving information to female journalists by 9%, followed by unofficial armed bodies with 8%.(Iraq Media House, 2022)

In a personal interview, October 2, 2022, A. Samir, the deputy manager of an Iraqi media house, confirmed that the majority of media channels are politicized and biased as a result of the constant political pressure exerted by the various political powers to manipulate media content in support of their own interests. He indicated that his institution, which is an independent Iraqi institution established by a group of Iraqi journalists, academics, and law makers, has monitored the media phenomena in Iraq this year, and that the levels of violations and obstacles against media work in Iraq are not decreasing and no steps have been taken to eliminate them.

**Conclusion**

Since the emergence of normative theories in 1956, media systems have received a great deal of attention in the field of comparative studies that seek to explain the nature of how media systems function in different countries. The literature of this research direction served as a methodological foundation for understanding global variables that influence the media system in any country. The shape of the political system upon which these studies are based is one of the most influential factors in determining the relationship between media systems and political systems. Then, the world witnessed significant changes in the global media environment as a result of the digital revolution and technological advancement, which had a significant impact on the work of media systems and media policy. On the basis of this foundation within the framework of the political transition perspective in countries and the technological perspective in the media environment, the dimensions of significant developments that determine the shape of media system in Iraq is presented in light of these two significant perspectives:

From the view of countries in democratic transition: The democratic transition that Iraq experienced after 2003 had a profound impact on the discourse of media system, allowing for a broad margin of media freedom and political and media pluralism. It was a sudden shift, roughly equivalent to Hollifield's classification of dictatorial regimes or one-party systems in contexts similar to the transformation of regimes in African and Latin American countries. [[50]](#footnote-50) This transition in these types of countries and political systems is characterized by negative characteristics and consequences that vary between them. It has been demonstrated that, despite the political transition, the media system discourse retains the characteristics of the old media system and its traditional relationship with the political system, which is evident in countries undergoing democratic transition. Different types of interventions and staff affiliations, as well as the emergence of political forces and groups attempting to impose their presence on the media discourse agenda, determine the political parallelism in the Iraqi media environment. This indicates the intensity of political parallelism, which is the norm in democratic transition countries.[[51]](#footnote-51).

In terms of technology and digital transformation, it was linked to the political transformation in Iraq after 2003, the emergence of hundreds of media channels and newspapers, the expansion of Internet service, and the increased use of social media, which serves as a major source for the dissemination and exchange of media materials among Iraqis. The media has tended to diversify in digital forms of public communication, relying on hybrid media that combines old and new forms of providing information and news. The media in Iraq benefited from the spread of new communication technology in Iraq after 2003. They used social media platforms and mobile journalism apps to spread their media materials and reach the public, as well as the modernization of infrastructure for digital integration in their institutions. It can be concluded thatthe modern media system in Iraq is comprised of many significant strands: political conflict-related and interest- related actions regarding media policy, the significant growth of faction-related and parties broadcast and journalism networks after the war, the efforts by competing internal interests to influence the media environment, interventions by pressure groups and political parties throughout the media environment. Currently, distinctive ethno-sectarian and political groups or media personalities dominate the Iraqi media discourse landscape. Ethno-political groups in Iraq have access to print, radio, and television media, which are amassing influence in the media discourse. Iraqi Kurdish, Turkmen, Arab Sunni, and Arab Shi'a factions each have their own means of communicating with their respective ethno-religious constituencies in Iraq and abroad. This splitting along sectarian, ethnic, and ideological lines could be viewed as a reflection of the pluralism regarded as desirable in the majority of media landscapes. In spite of this, it is evident that Iraq's politicians and sectarian groups tend to view the media as a tactical instrument, obligated to support the government, the parties, or the groups that sponsor them. Sectarian divisions are potentially troubling in a society where violence together across ethnic and religious lines is on the rise, and Iraq appears to be progressing rapidly in this direction. The media closely associated with political organizations do not necessarily adhere to the principles of a free press espoused or adopted by their organizations.

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