



Examining the
Significance of Civil
Society in
Augmenting and
Empowering Youth
within the Context
of Iraqi Kurdistan

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OUTLINE



Background of the study

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Definitions

Civil society is a term used to describe the sphere outside of the family, market, and state. (World Economic Forum,2013).

Youth The United Nations defines youth as all people between the ages of 15 and 24, for both sexes.

Iraqi Kurdistan, comprising five cities in the northern and eastern regions of Iraq, has endured decades of human rights violations, refugee crises, and resource scarcity.

Since the establishment of a parliamentary system and regional government through the first free elections in 1992, Iraqi Kurdistan has embarked on a journey of political, social, and economic rehabilitation. (Gunter, M. M. 1995)



Figure1: Iraqi Kurdistan map. Source: (www.GISreportsonline.com)

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In the life of any society and country, the youth are the dynamic of progress and continuous development of the areas of development of that country and society. From this perspective the more support and encouragement given to youth to achieve their goals and abilities by the political authorities and the private sector, the more progress is guaranteed. In Iraq Kurdistan, young people aged 15–29 make up 28% of the Kurdistan Region's population, suggesting that the youth population dynamic here will remain alive for at least the next two decades. The status of youth in Iraqi Kurdistan (IK) has seen several ups and downs throughout history. Kurdish youth have consistently joined the fight for freedom with unrelenting courage, enthusiasm, and audacity, and they have been and are represented in all spheres of Kurdish life.



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In this regard, the KRG, until 2014, has provided good opportunities for youth's participation in the political process in IK. Youth now have a good position in politics at the government and party levels, and most political parties have youth in leadership positions. However, this does not mean that the youth did not face challenges to the development of their abilities and were not prevented from participating in the political process. The research explores the challenges and opportunities faced by youth CSOs in Iraqi Kurdistan, particularly Examining the Significance of Civil Society in Augmenting and Empowering Youth within the Context of Iraqi Kurdistan

This research gap is addressed by the current study, which addresses the research problem by undertaking to examine Kurdish youth's participation in the political process in IK and highlight their strong and prominent position in the Kurdish community.



Figure 3: Political party impact on civil society.
<https://www.bing.com/images/search>

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

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- Beyond the formal dimension of equality manifest in governance institutions, since 2014, unemployment has become the biggest threat to the lives of Kurdish youth, and thousands of Kurdish youths have migrated to Europe for a better life.
- Despite the injustice, lack of equal opportunities for youth, financial crises, and legal, political, and social obstacles against youth, these factors can prevent youth from participating more effectively and broadly in the political process in IK. There is a lack of academic analysis to reflect the emerging trends of youth's involvement in the political process in IK or their socio-economic development more generally.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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1. What is the Role of the Civil Society in Augmenting and Empowering Youth within the Context of Iraqi Kurdistan?

2. How do youth civil society organizations contribute to the democratization and political process?

3. What are the challenges and opportunity faced by youth?

HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

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The particular speciality of any CSO does not axiomatically exclude it from broader political and social activities, but the work of youth and women's organisations was mainly limited to professional and political matters.



It is natural for CSOs to participate in political party activities, and we see that societies and organisations in IK reflected the historical needs of the Kurdish community to secure the legitimate rights of this stage of the Kurdish liberation movement to achieve their goals.



Al-Madini (1997, p. 68), argued that the majority of CSOs in Kurdistan essentially belong to political parties and work according to their directions and agendas, including in the service of the political opposition as well as of the governing parties.



According to Farhad (2021), was the Kurdistan Youth and Student Union established on February 18, 1953, which included a major role of women from its inception.

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Youth organisations and student associations are particularly cultivated by political factions as recruiting grounds for the continuance of political factions, and their budgets are provided by political parties with a view to ideological control (Medeni, 2017).

2

Medeni (2017) also considered that civil society developed in IK during the 1990s, following liberation from the clutches of the Ba'athists, and the establishment of local government.

3

Previously, civil society was limited to establishing unions and syndicates (e.g., for students, youth, and women), directly under the auspices and control of the Gol. Moreover, Medeni (2017) charted the gradual growth of CSOs from 1996 to 2003, contributing.

4

In addition, he focused on how most organisations in IK until the collapse of 2003, began to advocate rights for disadvantaged groups such as women, youth, and children.

5

Gharib (2022), who is a head of the Metro Centre for the Protection of Journalists Rights, indicated that the CSOs have played a significant role in the development of the democratic process and the development of IK as a de facto state, and in developing a common policy to protect human rights and freedom of expression.

LITERATURE REVIEW

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Some Kurdish authors have narrated the historical role of Kurdish youth in Kurdish political life (Auni, 2021; Medeni, 2017; Taheri, 2007; Ari, 2019). During the early decades of the 20th century, youth in Iraqi Kurdistan started to engage in activities. Some authors remarked on the notably active role of youth in Kurdish society (Auni, 2021), such as Taheri (2007), who reported that the first association was the Kurdistan Independence Society, established in July 1922, led by the former Ottoman officer and writer Mustafa Pasha Yamolki.

Several authors have done research on civil society and the situation of civil society in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, Such as, Medeni, Ari Rafiq,Auni , and Taheri.

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- **Kurdish youth in Iraq were highly active in the fight for Kurdish rights, but prior to 1991, this did not extend to any form of gender-specific agenda; instead, they were primarily concerned with securing national rights for the Kurdish people in general and not with the particular issues of youth. Al-Madini (1997, p. 68) argued that the majority of CSOs in Kurdistan essentially belong to political parties and work according to their directions and agendas, including in the service of the political opposition as well as of the governing parties. Youth organisations and student associations are particularly cultivated by political factions as recruiting grounds for the continuance of political factions, and their budgets are provided by political parties with a view to ideological control (Medeni, 2017).**

However, most studies of youth in Kurdistan have not adapted a particular theoretical approach and have merely narrated historical development and major milestones. Ari (2019) wrote a book about the civil society organisation Fifth Power in the Kurdistan Region. He generally discusses civil society, points to the emergence of civil society organisations in the Kurdistan Region and explains the preconditions of civil society and the obstacles facing civil society in the Kurdistan Region. Despite their significant participation in the political process in IK, youth continue to face challenges including political obstacles, unemployment, the economic crisis, and corruption, which have not been explored in commensurate depth. Furthermore, the political situation of youth under the shadow of the KRG and their political participation per se have not been analysed, thus this study contributes to identifying unemployment, political as well as cultural barriers (tribal and religious), and socio-economic challenges to the development of youth's political movements.

The study aims to fill the gaps in the existing literature by conducting an in-depth and critical analysis of the role of CSOs in Iraqi Kurdistan and their influence on political decision-making processes. By incorporating a historical perspective, empirical evidence, and a comprehensive review of relevant literature, the thesis will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of civil society dynamics in Iraqi Kurdistan and its impact on political governance.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

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This study is significant due to its scientific and practical importance, it reveals the theoretical basis of Examining the Significance of Civil Society in Augmenting and Empowering Youth within the Context of Iraqi Kurdistan, as well as the vital role of youth CSOs in the Iraqi Kurdish community.

This study examines the significance of civil society in augmenting and empowering youth within the context of Iraqi Kurdistan. With the increase in the number of civil society organisations working on youth issues, the problems of young people have decreased, although their abilities have not been sufficiently developed.

Civil society is an independent and broadly organised area that, along with organising the lives of citizens and limiting government interference, is also a strong link between the state and citizens. Civil society is a space beyond the realm of the family, the state, the family, business, trade, and the buying and selling of goods. If we consider the family as the area of private life, we can consider the government as the area of law enforcement and authority, and the market sector as the area of the economy. Between these areas, there remains a gap, called the civil area, the public area, or civil society. In short, the work of civil society organisations can be summarised as follows:

The main theme of civil society organisations and institutions in all democratic countries is to serve the citizens, not their personal pockets and interests. Citizens and public interests have always been the focus of their activities, paying attention, defending their fundamental and public rights, and achieving the true concept of citizenship rights, far from raising big and shiny slogans, illusions, and politics. (Shorsh, 2019).

Civil society organisations are all organisations that are organised and authorised to work in the Kurdistan Region according to the law, with the aim of promoting and raising awareness in the fields of monitoring, activities, development, and the different abilities and skills of young people. (Chia,2012). Some CSOs in the KRG are continually active through their projects in collaboration with international organisations, such as the Public Aid Organisation (PAO), which has also played a key role in opening educational courses for refugees as well as in the field of legal education in Erbil Province (Kurgosk Camp). In the same way, the Civilization Development Organisation (CDO) has played a key role in opening job training courses for state employees and providing jobs for young people in Sulaymaniyah city. The People's Development Organisation (PDO) has played a key role in protecting women's rights and empowering them in Sulaymaniyah city. (Chato,2022).



The youth organisations and all organisations are social and administrative units that aim to serve the youth, develop the abilities and talents of young people, and carry out activities that serve to develop the abilities of young people. It is worth mentioning that the history of the emergence of youth organisations goes back to European countries in the late eighteenth century.

Organisations operating in the youth sector in IK can be divided into three main types:

1. **Youth student civil society organisations affiliated with ruling political parties:** Their interests are focused on political gain. These associations are representatives of their respective political parties, and they receive all or most of their funds from their political parties. These organisations, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Youth Union and the Kurdistan Youth Freedom Organisation, seek to respond to the challenges of young people by providing services and facilities to build their skills through free lectures, workshops, learning materials, school field trips, student halls, etc. However, as their ultimate goal is of a political nature, they are limited in their outreach. No matter how broad their reach is, they never reach society as a whole. Their main purpose is not to serve the youth, but these organisations were created by political parties to serve their own agenda.

2. Youth student civil society organisations affiliated with opposition political parties: Such as the United Students and Youth Organisation, the Kurdistan Students Organisation, and the Sardam Youth Organisation, these organisations are not supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government but belong to the opposition parties and are supported by these parties.

3. Independent civil society organisations: They are interested primarily in the youth development sector. such as CDO, PAO, PFO, and Ruwanga are registered as non-governmental organisations targeting only young people, and there are others who are working in different fields targeting various sectors, including the youth. Within this spectrum, there are also NGOs that are connected to certain parties or carry the ideologies of a certain political party. However, these NGOs are more independent. They are typically funded by international organizations. (Medeni,2022).

Since the establishment of the Kurdish Scientific Association in 1926, the Kurdish youth have been instrumental in various organizations in Iraq, advocating for freedom, and racial, ethnic, and religious equality. The formation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Iraqi Kurdistan (IK) is linked to the liberation struggle that began under the monarchy in 1926. The birth of civil society work coincides with the birth of the KRI's young generation, who view civil society as a key player in political and development work. The younger generation, however, is more focused on political and development work, recognizing their role in addressing societal issues. Despite this, the majority of the youth wait for the government and international organizations to act on their behalf, forgetting that they are part of the challenges and should be part of the solution.

Since 2014, due to budget cuts by the Iraqi government, (Gulpy,2021), widespread corruption, injustice and lack of equal opportunities, youth have faced several challenges that hinder the development of youth abilities and their participation in the political process, including unemployment, financial crisis and obstacles. Legal, political and social actions are taken against youth. as described below.

Unemployment

Since 2014, the Kurdistan Region has experienced unemployment due to major public sector crises and problems. Over 50,000 graduates from universities and colleges are rarely employed, and the private sector's weakness has made it difficult for young people to find suitable job opportunities. Some graduates find jobs in the private sector, while others run small projects. The weakening education process and mental health issues among youth are also significant issues in Kurdish society. The unemployment rate varies across provinces, and the Kurdistan Regional Government has not effectively utilized the potential of the youth for economic and social development.

Economic crisis

In 2014, all youth organizations in the Kurdistan Region, including political parties and civil society organizations, received financial assistance from the Kurdistan Regional Government. However, most organizations have not transitioned from local work to international coordination, relying on donations. The Kurdistan Regional Government and political parties have struggled to establish contacts with international donor organizations. This economic independence has affected the main tasks of youth work, such as promoting youth goals, recognizing and developing their abilities, formulating strategies for organizing social and political education, strengthening relationships with political authorities, and supporting the legislature in drafting advanced laws.

Political obstacle

The Kurdish political party, originating from the Eastern world, faces challenges in modernizing and practising modern values. The Kurds have been forced to resort to armed revolution and violence due to oppression and the unwillingness of the Iraqi government to recognize their rights. This division of youth by political parties has negatively impacted the development and freedom of youth organizations. Despite the existence of civil society organizations like Ruwanga and CDO, these organizations have not achieved independence and are controlled by political parties. The fragmentation of society's associations and organizations after the 1990s civil war has led to the formation of unions of various professions. The dominance of political parties in political power has not allowed civil society organizations to gain full freedom. Many youth CSOs in IK are hierarchical, reflecting the influence of political parties on their formation and attempts to co-opt them into party alignments. Some organizations are created for the benefit of political parties and their supporters, preventing them from influencing political decisions.

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Socially

The adherence to old traditions and a lack of democracy have led to a closed society, causing youth dissatisfaction. The financial crisis has led to divorce and deteriorating marriages, reducing confidence in the future. Lack of community supervision and traditionalism hinder the development of young people's abilities. In a hopeful society, individuals are broken, and rebellious, and look for solutions outside themselves. They work tirelessly and are productive.

Legal Restrictions

KRG law grants more power to the executive than the legislative branch, making Parliament weak in holding the government accountable. This weakness prevents the activities of Youth CSOs, as they must obtain permits before demonstrations can be held. KRG NGO Law No. 1 of 2011 simplified registration and funding processes for CSOs, but sometimes independence is denied on legal grounds. Independent activists were punished under Iraqi Penal Code No. 111 of 1969 or Law No. 2, Article 6, for illegal use of communication devices in 2008.

Migration

Migration is a significant issue for young people in South Kurdistan, driven by factors such as oppression, UN sanctions, war, and poverty. After a significant decrease in migration in 2005, the threat of ISIS and budget cuts by Baghdad in 2014 led to a resurgence of migration. Unofficial figures suggest that 27,000 young people, primarily from Iraqi Kurdistan, will cross into Europe in 2020. This migration, primarily driven by personal embarrassment, has significant consequences for both the origin and residence countries. The main reasons for youth migration in Iraqi Kurdistan include corruption, youth unemployment, inequality, and political instability.

INITIATIVES AND STRATEGIES BY CIVIL SOCIETY: EMPOWERING KURDISH YOUTH

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International organizations like UNDP and Norwegian People's Aid (NPA) are major supporters of civil society in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan, creating programs for local NGOs. The post-2003 phase aimed to develop youth capacities for active participation in society. However, many activities failed to address the problems adequately due to a lack of analysis and an unclear vision of how to support democratic development in Iraq.



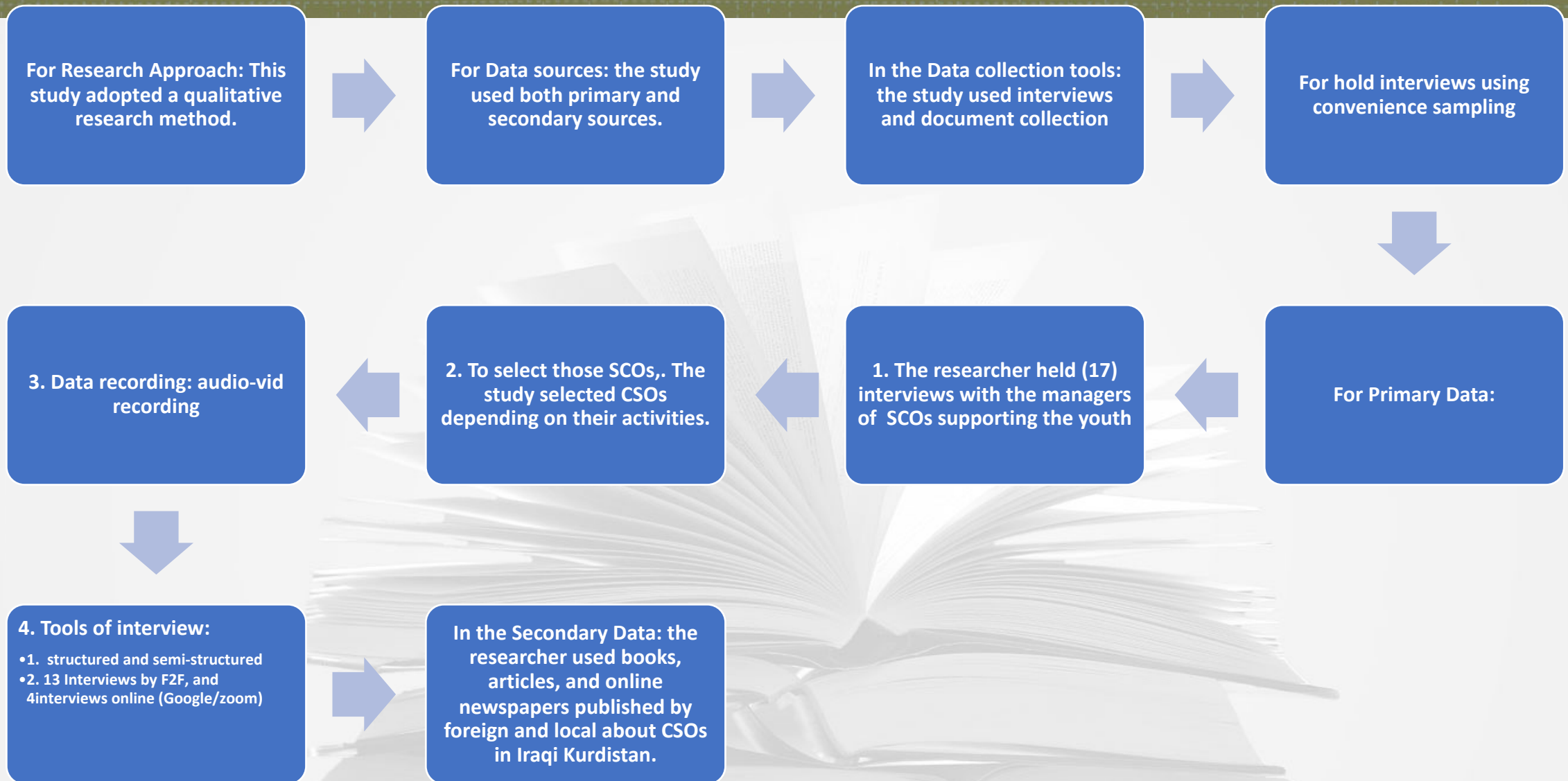
International Organizations for Youth CSOs focus on raising awareness, empowerment, peacebuilding, advocacy campaigns, and communication with decision-makers. Raising awareness programs address issues related to democratic governing, electoral education, civic participation, unemployment, and political engagement. Empowerment and capacity-building programs focus on transforming information into action and motivating young people to act based on their learning. Peacebuilding programs involve young people in the process of spreading tolerance. Advocacy campaigns mobilize youth to advocate for youth concerns at various levels.



CSOs like PAO, PFO, KEDO, Ruwanga, and the Civilization Development Organisation (CDO) have strong ties with international organizations and sources of funding. They have assisted refugees fleeing the war against terrorist groups and have worked in areas such as gender equality, youth project cooperation, human rights protection, and environmental protection. International organizations like the Joint Crisis Coordination Centre (JCC), Spark of the Netherlands, and the NPA have played a role in changing the way Youth CSOs work by opening courses in these fields.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

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DATA ANALYSIS

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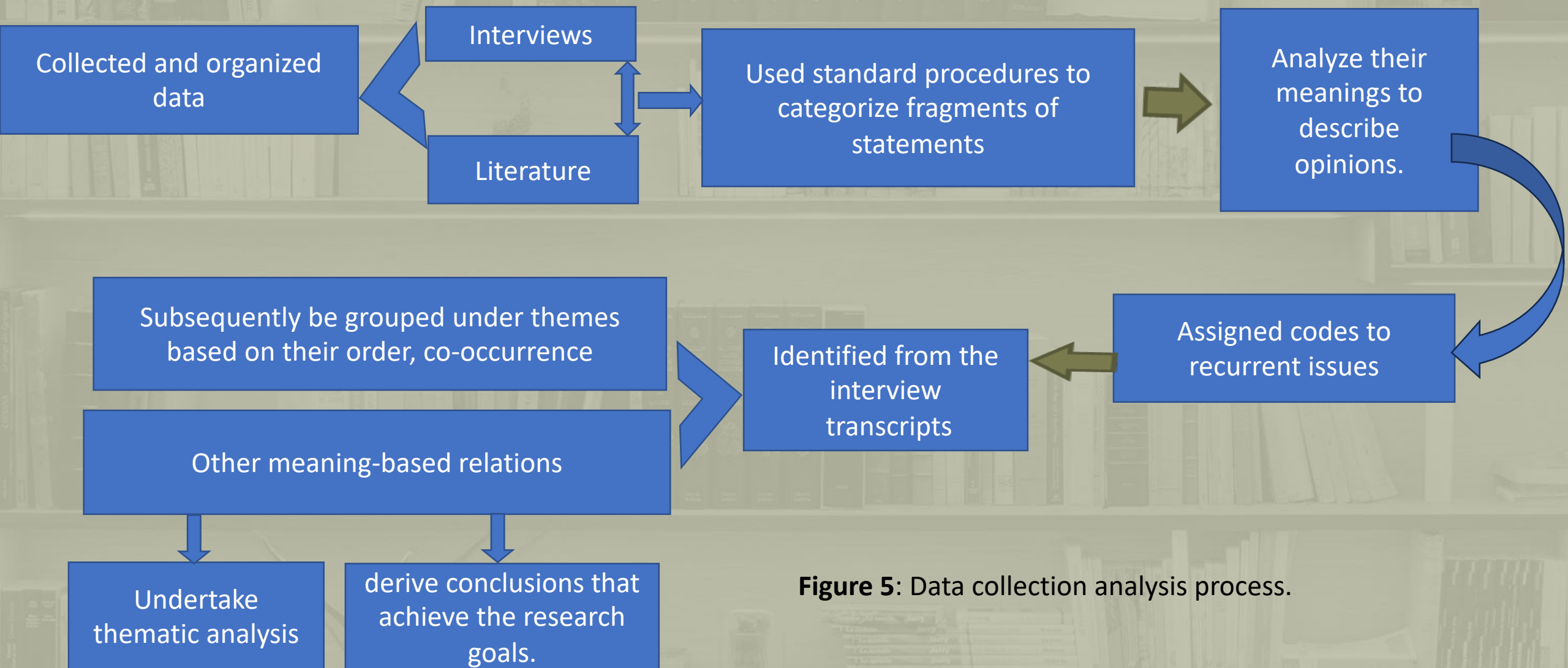

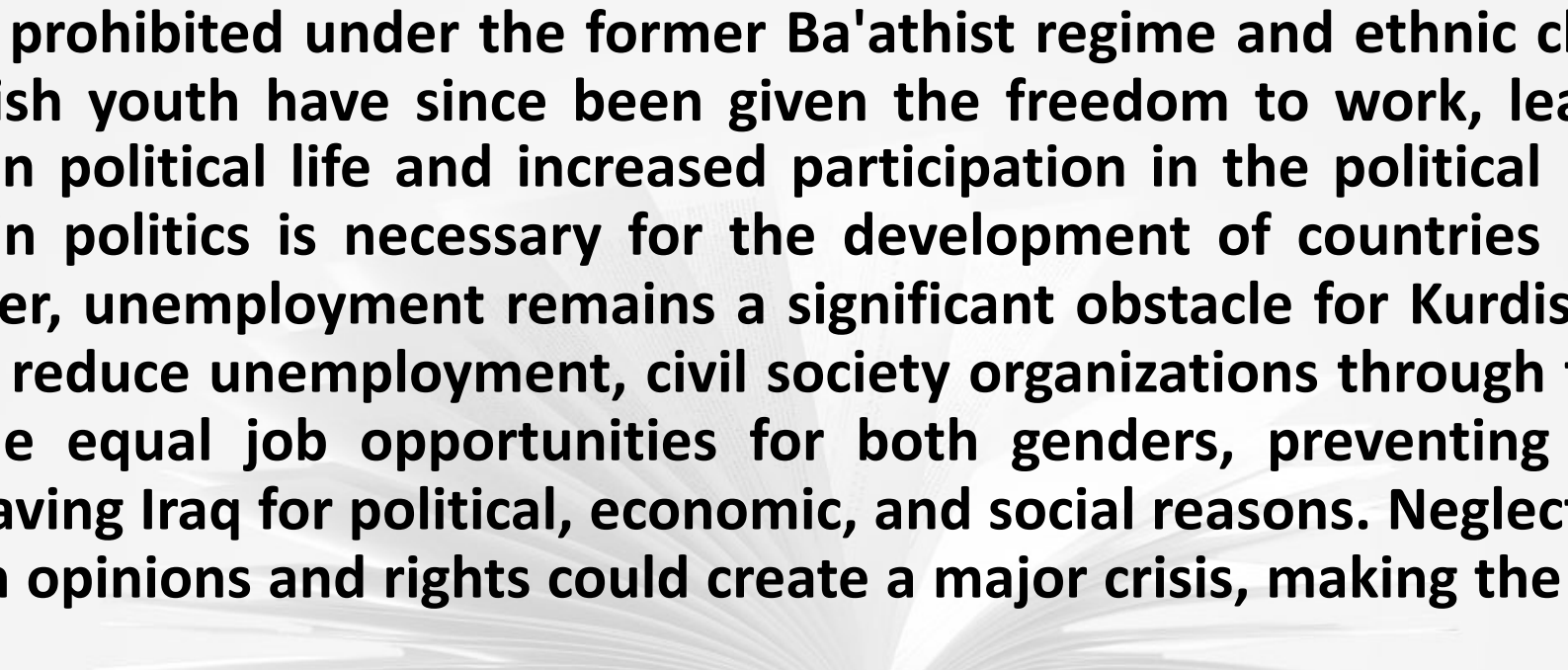


Figure 5: Data collection analysis process.

The Iraqi Kurdish community is a young, semi-high-growth society, with a significant influence on politics and other sectors. Youth organizations raise awareness about their rights and freedoms, but some are influenced by secular and Islamic political parties. Kurdish nationalism motivates youth to engage in political life without changing patriarchal ties. Most Kurdish youth organizations are supported by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), which provides absolute equality for both men and women, including free education in educational institutions.



Despite being prohibited under the former Ba'athist regime and ethnic cleansing policies, Kurdish youth have since been given the freedom to work, leading to their growth in political life and increased participation in the political process. Participation in politics is necessary for the development of countries and the world. However, unemployment remains a significant obstacle for Kurdish youth after 2014. To reduce unemployment, civil society organizations through the KRG should provide equal job opportunities for both genders, preventing Kurdish youth from leaving Iraq for political, economic, and social reasons. Neglecting and ignoring youth opinions and rights could create a major crisis, making the country a frozen stone



The Youth has participated in the establishment of more CSOs in Iraqi Kurdistan have been political in nature from 1921 until 1991 these organisations have survived despite repression by successive Iraqi regimes.



Youth CSOs have contributed to the democratization and political process through proposals and pressure on the KRG and Parliament, leading to the enactment of good laws and the participation of youth in the government and becoming a member of parliament in IK.



Youth organisations rely on the KRG, political parties, international organizations, and donors for financial aid, which has a negative impact on the working of the CSOs

- CSOs supporting Youth and Youth organisations have impacts on Augmenting and Empowering Youth within the Context of Iraqi Kurdistan in IK, but their impacts vary according to their humanitarian and financial capacity, working methods, geography boundaries, and level of relationships at home and abroad.



Youth face several obstacles, including unemployment, financial crisis and obstacles Legal, political and social actions are taken against youth. Also, CSOs supporting Youth should stay away from political parties and not become the implementers of political agendas. This is suitable for the answer to question number 3

RECOMMENDATIONS

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1. Politically, interference by political parties in the internal affairs of civil society organisations should be eliminated, and these organisations should be given full freedom of work and activities, and equal opportunities should be provided for youth to develop their abilities and talents in civil society organisations.

2. Financially and economically, unemployment is the biggest obstacle facing youth in Iraqi Kurdistan. To reduce unemployment, the KRG should provide equal employment opportunities for both genders, which will increase youth reliance on their administrative, political, and economic skills. Also, try to link the needs of society to the work and activities of the youth in such a way as to provide jobs for them.

3. The migration of Kurdish youth is increasing due to unemployment, politics, and neglect. To limit this migration, the Kurdistan Regional Government and the private sector should assist young people in establishing small projects so that they can become self-reliant. Opening vocational courses in a way that provides suitable job opportunities for young people.

4. Research on youth problems by civil society organisations to find appropriate solutions in a way that serves to develop youth abilities, conduct seminars and research on youth problems, and enhance the educational and scientific capacity of youth.

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5. Socially, Domestic violence is the most common kind of violence experienced by young girls worldwide. The causes and effects of domestic violence must thus be taken into account when discussing girls' and women's political engagement.

6. In terms of education, it is crucial for both male and female youth to increase their understanding and their skill sets through training and educational programmes. Training and education programmes should be established to address the needs and requirements of young girls, particularly those from disadvantaged segments of society (e.g., rural girls). To satisfy the needs of women who have little or no exposure to education, such programmes are necessary.

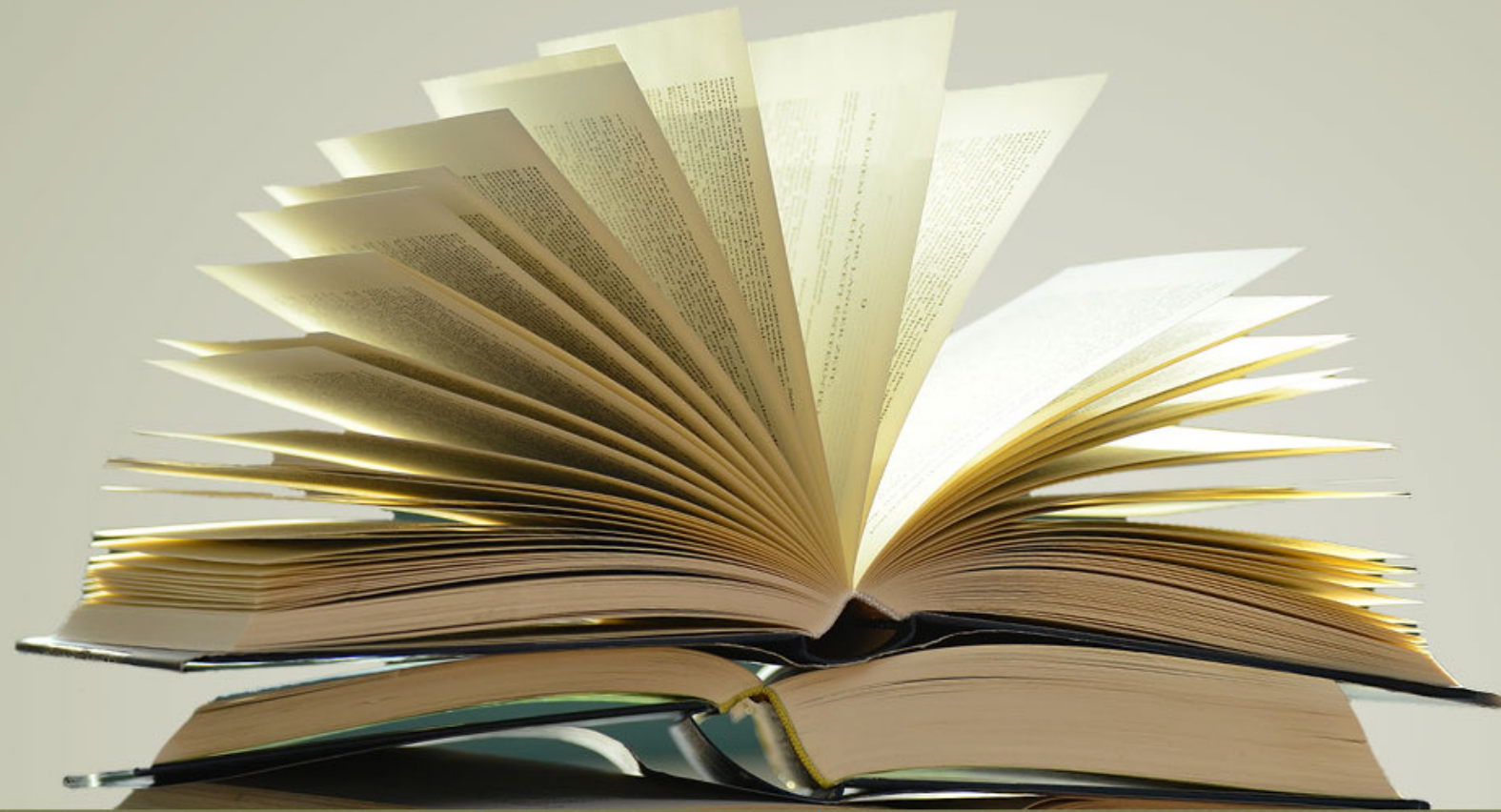
7. In terms of administration, it is crucial that all institutions, including the state, family, and society, cater to the particular requirements of youth. These include closing educational inequalities, redefining gender roles and the distribution of labour, and combating prejudiced views. Also, the creation of institutions in order to engage youth organisations' potential and capacities as democratic and equitable development venues for progress in IK.

8. Legally, although the Iraqi Kurdistan parliament has passed several good laws to support youth's participation in the political process, new laws should be enacted to protect and fulfil all youth's political, economic, and social demands.

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Thank You