The Political Participation of Iraqi Immigrants in Malmö-Sweden

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to analyze the factors that encourage or discourage the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in their host country - Sweden. The study was conducted in Malmö city and data were gathered through ‘focus group interview’ that involved 12 Iraqi immigrants who are living in Malmö (residents non-citizens and naturalized). The participants represented a diverse sample since they belonged to multi-ethnic and religious minorities within the Iraqi community. Data were analyzed using qualitative method whereas the concepts of political integration, political participation, and belonging were applied as the theoretical framework.

The participants of the study assigned diverse meanings to political participation. According to the findings the factors that encourage or discourage Iraqi immigrants in political participation in Malmö, Sweden have various shapes. The results revealed that women are less likely to vote than men, and political participation decreases with the increase in income level, age, and education. On the other hand, the culmination of social and economic disadvantages can lead immigrants to have less desire to engage in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of political activities in Sweden.

Although Sweden has provided its immigrants with various political rights following the Treaty of Amsterdam (Council Tampere 1999) most of the participants criticized the Swedish government for not having a formal mechanism to educate them on their rights before and after the naturalization.

In sum, the findings of the current study imply that there is a negative impact on the political participation of immigrants by their past political experiences in non-democratic countries. All Iraqi participants of this study might have been affected by their previous political experiences in Iraq. It may have caused a trauma, which in turn has discouraged them in political participation even after moving to a democratic country such as Sweden.

Key Words: Political Participation, Political Integration, Immigrants.
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DEDICATION

To You, the late father;
To You, the great Mother;
To You, the best husband, Ihsan Al-Bader;
To You, the sweet child, Talia;
To You, the next baby;
You are my all in all!
# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EC</td>
<td>European Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eurostat</td>
<td>The Statistical Office of the European Communities</td>
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<td>ESC</td>
<td>Equality Security Community</td>
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<td>MIPEX</td>
<td>The Migrant Integration Policy Index</td>
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<td>SFI</td>
<td>Swedish For Immigrants</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees</td>
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<td>UNSCR</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council Resolution</td>
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<td>U.S.A</td>
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1. INTRODUCTION

The Treaty of Amsterdam (Council Tampere 1999) is determined to develop the European Union by addressing specific issues such as freedom, justice, and security in the region through implementation of full possibilities offered by it, placing it at the top of the EU’s political agenda (EC Communication, 2004, p.3). It has been discussed in the common European Immigration and Integration Policy on increasing participation among immigrants inside their ‘host’ societies, in multi-levels, culturally, socially, and politically. It has sent strong political messages to reaffirm the importance of this objective and has agreed on the policy orientations and priorities, which will make the area of freedom, security, and justice a reality. (European Parliament, 1999)

In the 20th century, the history of Europe was recognized by its significant social, political and economic changes as well as the construction of European society (European Commission, 2018). In the 21st century, the political trajectory of the EU members has mostly shifted towards the non-European immigration. (Parsons & Smeeding, 2006, p.1). Sweden as a member state of the EU has witnessed the most remarkable changes during the last fifty years. It has changed into a diverse multi-ethnic society, with growing numbers of citizens, whose roots are not Swedish. Sweden also extended municipal and provincial voting privileges to non-citizen residents three decades ago (Migrationsverket, 2018). It is expected that this procedure would increase political interest, influence, and self-esteem among immigrants. From the 80s till nowadays, Sweden has adopted a few systems for reception of asylum seekers. As a result, this transformation has offered many different opportunities as well as obstacles to Sweden. In this regard, it challenges Sweden to turn its liberal principles of equality of chances and fair play into reality. (Cerrotti, 2017)

In this study, Sweden was selected as a member of EU to investigate about practical implications of Tampere’s council-Amsterdam convention in 1999, particularly on the political level. This study analyzed the political integration of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden. Concurrently, the Iraqi minority was chosen for its being the second largest immigrant group in Sweden, where Iraqis number in Sweden has been estimated as 184,753 (Statistikdatabasen, 2018). Moreover, the study set out to explore the opinions of the Iraqi immigrants about their participation in the political process. The issues covered included their political knowledge and political values, interest, voter registration, electoral behavior (vote choice and turnout), as well as the other forms of political participation such as trust in political institutions, signing petitions and demonstrations, and satisfaction with the democratic system.
1.1. Aim and Research Question

This study has aimed to analyze the factors that encourage or discourage Iraqi immigrants (residents non-citizens and Swedish naturalized) in political participation in Malmö-Sweden. To fulfill this aim, the study was focused on Iraqi immigrants from various ethnic-religious backgrounds within the same Iraqi community as the target group for this investigation. Hence, this study has attempted to answer the following question:

- What are the reasons that encourage or discourage the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in their host country - Sweden?

To answer the research question, a focus group interview was conducted with the participation of 12 Iraqi immigrants (a micro-study) from various ethnic-religious minorities within the Iraqi community. All the participants are living in Malmö- Sweden, and they had come to Sweden as asylum seekers or as a spouse (family reunification). Concurrently, they have a permanent residency or Swedish citizenship. The concepts of political integration, political participation and belonging were defined and utilized as the theoretical framework of this study.

1.2 Delimitations

The study conducted has few delimitations. Firstly, it was conducted with only 12 Iraqi immigrants, and the focused group discussion lasted for only two hours. It was not sufficient for the researcher to observe and catch all the thoughts and experiences of participants. It would be better if it has been done through two longer meetings.

Secondly, due to limitations in time, the scope of the study was narrowed down to cover only one city, Malmö where the researcher lives and she could meet the participants in person. Therefore, the study did not cover the Iraqi immigrants in all cities in Sweden.

Thirdly, although the experimental group was adequate and relevant for a focus group interview, it may not be so when considered the social structure of the Iraqi community which has more than 15 ethnic-religious groups. This study involved only 12 Iraqis from 12 various ethnic-religious groups, while some of them were not represented (Roma/ Kawliya Iraqis, Black Iraqis, Jew Iraqis as ethnic groups, as well as the Baha’i religious group, were excluded). (Ulack, 2015; EPRS,2015)

Fourthly, this study attempted to investigate the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö-Sweden on a micro level based on the experiences of 12 participants. Therefore, it is not a macro level study.
Fifthly, the study attempted to look into Iraqis integration experiences from a political perspective. In the same way, it was assumed that the integration of migrants into their host societies at least consists of four basic dimensions concerning the social, cultural, economic and political. As numerous researches and articles are available on other types of integration in Sweden, this study focused on the political aspects only.

Sixthly, there is a lack of prior research studies on the same topic at (Malmö-Sweden) and on the same group (Iraqi immigrants). This indicates the need for future research involving all Iraqi immigrants in Sweden (living in big and small cities). Moreover, there is a need to revise methods for gathering data, (i.e., quantitative for at least 100 Iraqi immigrants and qualitative for at least 15 respondents to represent all ethnic-religious groups in the Iraqi community). Due to time constraints, this study adopted a qualitative approach, through conducting focus group interview which has not required an excessive amount of time to complete the theoretical framework, apply the methodology, and then gather and translate the results.

Seventhly, the researcher been an Iraqi woman the study may be considered as biased for selecting Iraqi minority group. However, it had a positive effect as the researcher is familiar with the participants’ background, language, culture, beliefs, social fabric, and political events they witnessed.

Lastly, it is expected that this study will shed new light into the integration field regarding Iraqi community in Sweden.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

This thesis consists of eight chapters, beginning with Chapter 01, which gives the introduction of the study. The next section that is consisting of Chapter 02 presents the contextual background of the study and illustrates a brief overview of Iraq, the Iraqi conflicts and Iraqi diaspora, and the historical background of Iraqi migration to Sweden. Next section, Chapter 03, discusses the previous scholarly studies on the same topic. Chapter 04, contains the description of the theoretical background of the thesis, those conclude in three concepts: the political integration, the political participation, and belonging. Chapter 05, describes the research method in few stages such as selection method of the research, sampling criteria & technique, the interviewing procedure, the role of the researcher, and ethical considerations. Up next in section, Chapter 06, shows the findings and analysis of the thesis. Besides, in Chapter 07, provides a conclusion of the study. Finally, Chapter 08 displays the literature and other sources.
2. CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND

In order to have a clear view of the political integration, political participation and belonging among Iraqi immigrants in Malmö- Sweden, it is essential to understand the context of how they were they live and where they came from. Accordingly, this chapter provides the reader with an overview of Iraq and its people. Furthermore, the conflicts and diaspora in Iraq are presented. Finally, the historical background of Iraqi migration to Sweden will be explained.

2.1. An Overview of Iraq

Iraq lies in Western Asia, bordered by Turkey to the north, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia to the south, Iran to the east, Jordan, and Syria to the west. The capital of Iraq is Baghdad. According to the latest UN's estimates on July 14, 2018, the current population of Iraq is 39,362,661 (Worldometers, 2018). Iraq is a home to diverse ethnic groups including Kurds, Arabs and Turkmens who are the three largest groups in the country and other minority groups such as Assyrians, Chaldeans, Armenians, Shabakis, Yazidis, Mandeans, Circassians, and Kawliya. Arabs ethnic group is approximately 75%-80%, Kurdish 15%-20%, Turkoman, Assyrian or other 5%. (ProCon.org., 2003). On religion, wise Iraq is varied and consists of Shi'a and Sunni Muslims (both Arab and Kurdish), Christians (including Chaldeans and Assyrians), Kurdish Yazidis, and Sabean Mandaeans. The percentages of religious groups can be shown as Muslim 97% (Shi'a 60%-65%, and Sunni 32%-37%), Christian and other 3%. The country's official religion is Islam. Although there are differences among Iraqi ethnic-religious groups, they share some common religious beliefs that all of them generally believe in Allah. (Cummins, 2003; European Parliamentary, 2015)

In accordance with the new Constitution of Iraq approved in 2004, both Arabic and Kurdish are the two official languages. Besides, the right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongues, such as Turkmen, Assyrian, and Armenian is guaranteed in government educational institutions, and any other language in private educational institutions shall be recognized as regional languages (Iraqi Constitution, 2004, p.3). Socially, the large kin groups are the fundamental social units which are recognized as having higher importance than ethnic, social class, and sectarian lines. Family loyalty is considered as an essential quality in the family, and they are mutually protective of each other (Every culture, 2014). Iraq has a vibrant cultural heritage and celebrates the achievements of its past civilizations of pre-Islamic times.
2.2. Iraq’s Conflicts and Diaspora

During the past fifty years, Iraq had faced many internal and external conflicts and the most ferocity period was during the Ba'ath Party when the authority gradually became under the control of Saddam Hussein. Various kinds of violations extend over the period of his presidency, which amounted to more than 24 years from 1979 to 2003. The crimes during his regime were against humanity and Iraqi people suffered immensely. The list included mass killings, torture, and assassination, most of which were carried out without formal or public trials. The crime committed spread to all segments of the Iraqi people between Shiites and Sunnis, Kurds and other minorities (International Justice, 2006). Internally, the Ba'athist regime led the Al-Anfal Campaign against Iraqi Kurds and killed about 200,000 people. Like the rest of the Iraqi people, Turkmen citizens were subjected to various forms of oppression and persecution under his regime. The number of those sentenced to death was thousands, and the number of those who were forcibly emigrated was 16,576. They were also deprived of the most fundamental rights of citizenship and fundamental human rights, including the right to national belonging. Their villages and towns were destroyed, and Arabs displaced instead of their original inhabitants after the forced emigration (Hardy, 2005). Externally, in 1980, Saddam declared war on Iran which ended in 1988. The economic and political fallout was immense. Besides, the war cost at least half a million peoples’ lives. (Fisk, 2006)

In early 1990 Iraq was accusing Kuwait of stealing Iraqi petroleum which resulted in Iraqi invasion of Kuwait (UNSC Resolution 660, 1990). Consequently, 28 countries led by the US in 1991, have launched an aerial bombardment on Iraq. As a result, one hundred and forty-thousand tons of munitions had showered down on the country, which equals seven times of Hiroshima bombs. About 30,000 Iraqi soldiers and a few thousands of Iraqi civilians were killed. (Powers, 2018)

As a punishment for Iraq invading Kuwait, the U.N. Security Council adopted Resolution 661 which implemented total mandatory economic sanctions against Iraq because Iraq invaded Kuwait. The sanction lasted from 1991 until 2003. (Powers, 2018)

There was a series of rebellions in northern and southern Iraq in the 1991 uprising. Participants of the uprising were a diverse mix of ethnic, religious and political affiliations, including military mutineers, Shia Arab Islamists, Kurdish nationalists, and far-left groups. Saddam's Sunni Arab-dominated Ba'ath Party regime managed to obtain control over the rebels again and primarily suppressed the rebellions in a brutal campaign conducted by his
loyalist forces. Tens of thousands of people died and, and nearly two million people were displaced. After the conflict, the Iraqi government intensified a systematically forced relocation of Marsh Arabs and the draining of the Marshes. Only, the Kurds could hold the Kurdish Autonomous Republic. (John, 2006; Fisk, 2006)

In 2003 after the U.S.A. invasion of Iraq, the UN High Commission for Refugees estimated that nearly two million Iraqis had fled Iraq as refugees while other resources claimed this number to be around 4–5 million. Besides, 2.7 million are internally displaced within the country. Hence, Iraqis became the third largest refugee population after the Afghans and the Palestinians. According to Joseph Sassoon said "It means that more than 15 % of Iraq's population has been displaced, one out of every six". (Woollacott, 2002; Sperl, 2007; Sassoon, 2010). By 2008, the continuous violence that unfolded after the US invasion in 2003 had made thousands of Iraqis displaced in and out of Iraq. The native Iraqis who were dispersed from their homeland to other countries is known as the Iraqi diaspora. Hence, various political or security situations throughout Iraq modern history. (Sassoon, 2010).

2.3. Historical Background of Iraqi Migration to Sweden.

In the 80s, Sweden adopted a new system for the reception of asylum seekers. This was different to the previously regulated immigration of the 1960 and 1970s introduced by the labor market authorities. In 1985 the number of asylum seekers came from Iraq, Iran, Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and other countries. In the 90s, Sweden was one of several states to participate in a joint action, under the leadership of UNHCR, to receive more refugees (migrationsverket, 2018). Since 2000, Sweden has relatively relaxed asylum and immigration policies combined with a healthy economy (Turula, 2017). From 2010 - 2016, Sweden had developed its immigration policy and provided the immigrants with a lot of new rights (migrationsverket, 2018). This has contributed to 67 percent growth in the foreign-born population. Today Sweden’s foreign-born population is nearly 1.7 million and Iraqi immigrants are considered the second most prominent community is living in Sweden. (Turula, 2017).

The Iraqi influx has increased dramatically as a result of series of wars or conflicts Iraq was involved. Iraqi immigrants in Sweden have come in five distinct waves of migration. The first wave occurred when Iraqis were fleeing the ruling of the Ba’ath Party during 1968–1978. The second wave was between 1980-1988 during Iraq-Iran war. The third wave was between 1991–1999 and they came with families as a result of the economic siege. The fourth wave occurred after the U.S.A. invasion in 2003. The size of this population has been increasing to
be double from 2002 to 2009. The last wave is with ‘refugees crises’ which started at the end of 2015, UNHCR spokeswoman Astrid Stort said "The deteriorating situation in Iraq which is on the brink of a civil war" is the main reason for the rising number of refugees in Europe. In this context, Iraqis are choosing to flee to Sweden more than to other countries because it is known for liberal asylum policies in the last years. (AFP, 2006; Statistikdatabasen, 2018; Workpermit, 2007)

Figure (1): Iraqi-born individuals in Sweden by years (Statistikdatabasen, 2018).

Figure (2): Country of birth of foreign-born residents in Sweden in 2001.

In addition to what has been mentioned above, In 2013, about 20.4 million third-country nationals were living in the EU, amounting to 4% of the total population (MEMO/15/4544). The number of asylum seekers was already on a sharp rise, before rising to 627,000 in 2014 (Eurostat Database, 2016; Vasileva, 2011). Ninety percent of the asylum applications were lodged in just 10 Member States (MEMO/15/4544): Sweden has registered the highest mark (34%).
Moreover, the Migrant Integration Policy Index (MIPEX), depended on several indicators to measure immigrant integration policies in 28 countries and Sweden was one of them. These indicators included labor market integration, political rights, long-term residency and rights of family reunification, access to nationality, non-discrimination policies and public opinion according to the overall ranking by the Migration Policy Group in 2006, Sweden has scored the highest which was of 88 out of 100 points. It has had higher points than many other states (Wiesbrock, 2011, p.57; Astrom, 2013). This, by itself, makes Sweden stands in contrast to the other countries’ practices of efficiency in segregating various categories of immigrants and refugees by specific predetermined criteria. (SCB, 2018; Council of Europe, 1999, p.27)

Political participation is exercised in many ways. Electoral participation can be said to be the most fundamental and at the same time the least demanding way of affecting the distribution of resources in society. When foreign citizens got the right to vote in a local election in 1975, it was an indication that Swedish community had accepted the principle that not only Swedish citizens may participate in the political decision-making process, also have the right to do so. Despite the efforts of the Swedish government in treating foreign nationals equally, but their participation in voting had fallen from 60 percent in 1976, the first year foreign residents could vote in municipal elections, to a mere 35 percent participation in municipal elections of 1998. According to the statistics, this tendency of lower participation is seen in all voter groups for foreign nationals in municipal elections, i.e., the involvement of Iraqi citizens in Sweden’s elections was 42 % in 1991 where it was decreased to 26% in 1998. (Bevelander & Spång, 2017 p.53)

It is obvious from many sources that the voter participation had dropped and all Iraqi immigrant groups had shown a decline in voting from the first elections in 1976 to the 1998 votings. However, different immigrant groups from other countries had displayed significant differences in voter participation. The nationals of several countries had shown the highest participation levels, while citizens of other groups with low participation levels included Iraqi. (Bevelander & Spång, 2017, p.48-50)
3. PREVIOUS RESEARCHES

As it has been already mentioned in the early part of the introduction, the EU has witnessed the most significant social changes during the last fifty years. Sweden is a member state, has changed into a diverse multi-ethnic society, due to growing numbers of citizens whose roots are not Swedish. As a result, the subject of integration among immigrants inside their ‘host’ societies, in multi-levels, culturally, socially, and politically has become an important topic within scholarly articles and researches. Regarding the case of immigrants, most articles dedicated to having studied immigrants integration in the receiving country. On the other hands, few articles have concentrated on Iraqi minority in Sweden as their main subject. However, no scholars in this area of research have focused on the case of political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö. This section of the thesis discusses some previous researches involve various indicators of political participation. This may function as a key to the analysis of political participation of Iraqi minority and their motivations to increase or decrease their political participation in Malmö-Sweden as a host society.

In 2007, research was conducted by Bevelander and Pendakur; which was focussed on minorities, social capital, and voting. They have used the 2002 wave of (ESC) survey to measure the relationship between personal characteristics which can be viewed in (sex, age, education, and household type), work characteristics, social capital attributes such as (belonging, trust in government, civic awareness and interaction with others), ethnic characteristics like (ethnic origin, religion, and voting behaviour. It has been found out that the social capital is essential for voting outcomes of immigrants and ethnic minorities in Canada. It has also concluded that the combination of socio-demographic and social capital attributes mostly overrides the influence of immigration and ethnicity. Their study suggested that it not be the minority attributes that impact voting behavior, but personal characteristics such as age, level of schooling and level of civic engagement are the factors that affect voting behavior, both provincial and federal. (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2007)

Öhrvall (2006) in his research suggested that political participation also increases with age and higher educational level in Sweden. Before this study, Järnbert and Öhrvall (2003) have identified the same variables as influencing the voting behavior of individuals. For Jones 1998, Cho 1999, and Ramakrishnan 2005 noted that the positive relationship between education and voting is weaker among first-generation immigrants than it is for later generations, but is nevertheless statistically significant. Jones, also pointed out that the weaker relationship
between education and voting among first-generation immigrants is most likely due to the fact most of them have attained their college degrees outside the U.S.A. (Jones, 1998)

Similarly, Cho observed that immigrants who educated abroad are less likely to vote than those educated in the U.S.A. (Cho, 1999; Ramakrishnan, 2005). Jones referred to the reason that the content of civic education learned in another country might transfer imperfectly to the political system of the U.S.A. (Jones, 1998). Also, Uhlaner et al.,1989; Cho, 1999; & Ramakrishnan, 2005 observed in their studies that voting among immigrants is affected by their ability to speak English in the U.S.A. for its being as a host country.

Within the same context, Bevelander and Pendakur(2008), have done a study to investigate the determinants of voting within the bounds of the context of social inclusion by comparing immigrants and their descendants as well as native citizens in Sweden. They noted that after controlling for demographic, contextual characteristics and socio-economic, getting citizenship makes a real difference to the odds of voting, therefore; it was identified as a reliable indicator of social inclusion. Also, the immigrants who obtain citizenship are far more likely to vote than those who do not (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2008). Similar to Bevelander’s & Pendakur ’s previous approach, the acquisition of citizenship (thus, naturalization) can be taken as a measure of inclusion, and it may form a real impact on peoples’ willingness to engage in societal decisions, such as voting ( Burchardt et al. 2002). Öhrvall (2006) agreed with the other researchers that citizenship acquisition might be significant in the decision to vote.

In the studies conducted by White et al. (2006) and Uhlaner et al. (1989) it was concluded that; as the length of residency increases in the USA, the voting probability of immigrants also increases. Bevelander and Pendakur (2008) also came up with the same result that some of the immigrants’ probability of voting might be influenced by the number of years of residency in the host country (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2008).

In the same regard, Bäck and Soininen, referred by their early 1990s study of the political participation of resident non-citizens and naturalized Swedish citizens to show how some other factors might stimulate the groups’ members to increase or decrease their participation in Swedish municipal elections (Bäck and Soininen,1998,p.38). Hence, they concluded, “[n]either proximity to the Swedish political system (Finnish and Danish voters compared with Chilean or Iranian voters) nor the national groups’ length of stay in Sweden (earlier waves of immigration compared with arrivals in the 1980s``. As well as the type of migration (labor or
Besides, the state of birth may make a difference, i.e., immigrants those born in Sweden with immigrant parents and American immigrants are more likely to vote than immigrants who come from other countries such as from Asia. (Bevelander & Pendakur, 2008)

Bilodeau also pointed out that the culmination of social and economic disadvantages can lead immigrants to be less desire to engage in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of the political activities in host countries (Bilodeau, 2008). Öhrvall (2006) has suggested another evidence that employed are more likely to vote than unemployed, as well as the voting participation increases with income.

On the other side, the gender differences have also been considered as an indicator of voting behavior. Beauregard (2004) pointed out that there is a difference in political participation (i.e., voting) between genders as observed a lower desire to participate among women. Another example of the lower political participation of women refers to the strongly related concept of political engagement, stating that women reveal lower levels of interests in politics; have lower levels of political efficacy; and are less knowledgeable about politics. Öhrvall, in contrast, asserted that women are more likely to participate politically than men (Öhrvall, 2006).

Ramakrishnan (2005) did not focus on demographic and socio-economic factors but provided arguments asserting that immigrants to the U.S.A. who come from countries with non-democratic regimes are less likely to vote than immigrants from democratic nations. A similar result was found in studies of immigrants to Canada and Australia by Bilodeau in 2008. The researchers stated there is an effect from the past experiences of democracy for immigrants and it has an impact on the rate of voting.

Additionally, Junn (1999) concluded that immigrants might be less likely to participate in "system-directed" activities such as voting, but they are as perfect as the native-born to participate in "direct" political activities such as protest (Ramakrishnan & Espenshade, 2001, p.871).

In 2001, Ramakrishnan and Espenshade did a study on voter turnout and minority status in the U.S.A. The results were that the minorities have lower voting behavior and differences in voting probability is not always decreased from one generation to another. (Ramakrishnan & Spenshade, 2001, p.870)
Research conducted by Eeva Lotta Johansson has discussed the concept of political and social participation of immigrants in Sweden. According to her, although Sweden has provided the immigrants who had resided more than three years the right to be elected and to vote in local and regional elections since 1976 the right to vote has not been exercised to the extent that was inspected (Johansson, 1999, p.101). In the same context, Rahman and Dilara conducted a study dealing with immigrants’ political participation in Sweden and the Netherlands. The scholars have observed a low level of political participation of immigrants in Sweden compared to the Netherlands. This study confirmed that Swedish immigrants have a lower participation rate in the political sphere, at least to a certain extent than its counterparts the Dutch immigrants. It was also argued that contextual factors could influence an actor’s motivations in integration-oriented action, and similarly, it highlighted the necessity of enlargement of the actor-context model. (Rahman and Dilara, 2007)

Overall, the vast majority of scholars have focused on voting participation and voter turnout as an indicator of the political participation. Many of them have concentrated on the demographic and socio-economic factors. Thus, most of the researchers have neglected the effect of the previous political experiences in immigrants' home country (directly or indirectly). Also, no scholars have dedicated their researches on the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in the host community-Sweden. Thus, this current research attempted to contribute to the studies conducted on Iraqi immigrants’ and their political participation in Malmö. Furthermore, it intends to bring up arguments on alternative characteristics that prevent or motivate this minority to be integrated politically, and the emerging justifications and discourses behind the reasons of discouraging or encouraging them towards the political participation in Sweden as a host country.
4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The central concepts of this study are discussed in this chapter; political integration as the fundamental concept and the subsections involve ‘political participation’ and ‘belonging’ along with some definitions of the basic terms. Accordingly, this chapter provides a discussion and an overview of some essential theoretical constructs that need to be included in the overall research design.

4.1. Political Integration

The existing connection of the concepts of ‘integration’ as a general term and ‘political integration,’ as a particular term, would be explained in this section. The term of ‘integration’ can be defined as a social process involving interaction between the migrants and the host individuals. Castles and Miller refer to the integration as the process of an immigrant becoming part of the receiving community and nation. They also indicate that the society’s support relies on the desired integration result (Castles & Miller, 2009, p. 245-6). In the same context, the integration means the qualitative increase of participation of minority members in systems of the social interaction and relations within the majority society. (Bernard, 1973, p. 87)

According to Schunk (2014) integration starts after the immigrant arrives in the host country (affecting the country, the natives, and the immigrants). He suggests using the term ‘integration’ as a general concept that refers “to the (interdependent) relations between persons (or groups). It, therefore, concerns immigrants and natives. The main requirement to fulfill integration is that individual accepts, and in turn is accepted by the host society and has equal opportunities in the society (Schunk, 2014, p11). In other words, the integration is the process by which immigrants become accepted into society, both as individuals and as groups. In turn, this definition of integration is intentionally left open, because the particular requirements for acceptance by a receiving society vary significantly from country to country. The openness of this definition also reflects the fact that the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors-immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities. Hence, for both individuals and groups, the integration process is long-term by nature (Penninx, 2003).

Consequently, the term integration could be understood from multi-angles, and it could be viewed in various senses. There are different manifestations of the term ‘integration.’. The integration could be interpreted as social integration, cultural integration, integration in a
political sense. This thesis examines the concept of political integration which is a sub-category in the broader category of integration in a political sense. Hence, this categorizing of the integration as a term is based on the relationship which the term combines with different disciplines of the social living, and with various scientific fields (Ilievski, 2015, p.2).

Accordingly, integration in a political sense and political integration are relating to the social sciences in the broader sense, and marginally to the political and economic sciences. The meaning of integration in a political sense could be identified by uniting, organizing, and unifying in a group of two or more than two units. In turn, it represents ‘centralization’ (Hoppe, 2007, p.109). In the same dimension and according to Ilievski, it can be understood as uniting and centralization (Ilievski, 2015, p.12). The central aspect in this integration activity is the process of delegating the autonomy of the political units to the new formed political society. (Ilievski, 2015, p.2)

According to Marshall (1950) political integration refers to a system that all members, including immigrants, have access to political rights and resources that are considered reasonable in the legislative community members, which characterize a politically integrated society. The author then suggests a politically integrated individual as one person with the power and resources to participate in the political community on the same conditions as other citizens. The concept of political integration is thus both normatively and socially designed and somewhat broader than political participation, which, however, is the most explicit manifestational expression of political integration - and that as are illustrated in this chapter (Bevelander, 2008, p.144-5)

Concurrently, the next section discusses the concept of political participation as an aid in answering the research question.

4.1.1. Political Participation:

Whatever the definition of integration applied, it is commonly agreed that the integration of migrants into their host societies at least has four basic dimensions concerning the social, cultural, economic and political role migrants play in their new community. Anybody will usually recognize the first three dimensions as necessary fields of integration. However, the fourth one, known the role migrants play in political life which it very dramatically depends on whether the host government admits political participation or even grants voting rights. In turn, the political dimension of integration is often rejected as irrelevant by states disliking the idea
of granting political rights to migrants who have a foreign passport (Council of Europe, 1999, p. 9). Despite these restrictions, the political participation of migrants should be taken into consideration when evaluating their integration, because the political life reveals an integral part of an individual's life. Besides, the political participation itself also comprises more than the right to vote or the right to be elected for political office. It also includes the right to express a person's opinions and beliefs. Moreover, the political participation covers the establishment of associations or the membership in political parties. (ibid)

According to its definition from somewhat restrictive understandings, Vebra is a founder of the contemporary discipline of comparative politics, claims that through the political participation, we point to those legal acts by private citizens that are less or more directly aimed at influencing a selection of government personnel and/or the actions that they take. (Verba, 1978, p. 46; Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2)

In turn, it can be described from broad perspective referring to it as “a categorical term for citizen power” or to all activities aiming to influence existing power structures. In the same way, Conway defined the political participation as “those activities of citizens that attempt to influence the structure of the government, the selection of government authorities, or the policies of a government.” (Conway, 1985, p. 2). It would still endure within the framework suggested by Verba but incorporate a broader share of the citizenry’s potential political actions.

A few decades before, the ‘political participation,’ was associated with individual motivations and convictions. In the same context, Sidney Verba confirms the fact that ‘individual motivation’ to political participation does not ‘involve preferences for politics beneficial to some group of which one is a member.’ (Verba, 1978). While the politics within the EU and the western community at present, frequently being influenced by ethnic minorities, lobbies, gender and other forms of ‘issue politics,’ political participation which did not exist long ago according to the author, seen as ‘issue neutral.’ In other words stemming out of ‘civic attitudes,’ or a ‘sense of civic obligation,’ which involves on duty to vote. (Milbrath L. et al., 1977, p. 49)

In this regard, Verba assumed that the principal motivation to participate in political activities would be predominately individual and depends on his scope and objectives. However, the most contemporary scholars tend to oppose these claims. Fowler and Kam (2007), for example, strive to include the factor of possible interest on benefits or other forms of self-interest in the course of modeling possible involvement of individuals in political participation. According to their opinion, social identification, which is based on the “desire to improve the welfare of particular
groups in society, possibly at the expense of other groups.” (Fowler and Kam, 2007, p.813), was as likely to motivate potential political actors to engage in relevant activities, as would their self-interest or even a sense of altruism. Consequently, “social identifiers,” as these authors prefer to call this category of actors, may be assumed to be increasingly group-motivated in their relation with broader political processes.

Hay (2007) suggested a phenomenon to test whether the term “political participation” does or does not apply. According to Hay’s distinction, each type of political participation can be divided into “political” or “non-political” activities depending on whether the activists are primarily motivated by political or by nonpolitical aims or intentions, respectively (Hay, 2007, p.74–5). For instance, people can attend a demonstration, not for its purpose, i.e., they may go there by chance to find a partner for the weekend or to cast a vote to help some acquaintance get elected. In this regard, Downs excluded casting a vote for party B instead of the preferred party A from his concept of “rational behavior.” For further illustration, if someone as a voter prevents his wife from voting for the particular candidate B since it is more valuable to him having A win instead. This creates a non-political alternative for those who prefer Party B but vote for A to avoid further domestic conflicts. Hence, forms of non-political participation such as these provide a compelling case for the study of political participation and democracy. (Jan W., 2016)

Melanie Manion claims that the voter turnout is considered a significant indicator of political participation, but it cannot stand as a single indicator by itself. Many factors, other than the genuine interest, can contribute to a high voting rate, as she said (Manion, 1996, p. 742). In this respect, Boang He has employed a particular approach to measuring the level of participation, which combines subjective and objective factors. Besides, it includes not only voter activities, but their attitudes towards and knowledge of elections, too. In the author’s view, both categories are necessary for measuring political participation efficiently. Therefore, the level of voter turnout is affected by the various factors such as: (local governments, economic factors, committees, and informal organizations and institutions (He, 2006, p.232-3). The author pointed out that informal organizations and institutions such as factions and kinship networks play a significant role in stimulating voters to vote for his/her ‘man.’ Those whom their vote based on relative relations or factional lines are called ‘face ticket.’ In other words, their vote goes to those with whom they have a good ‘guanxi’ in a specific party (He, 2006, p.233).
Moreover, since many political, economic and societal dimensions contribute to voting behavior, subjective factors such as voters’ belief in democratic values are by themselves not sufficient to explain voting or non-voting behavior (He, 2006, p.234). While the subjective knowledge and attitudes do influence people’s voting behavior where personal attitudes towards elections are vital in determining their political participation behavior. (He, 2006, p.235)

Nevertheless, several issues correlated with individual knowledge and voting behavior had been identified. For instance, there is a high probability that specific respondents may overestimate their knowledge levels. In the same context, not many citizens have a high level of knowledge of electoral laws. This situation is not restricted to a specific area or a country but familiar to the whole world.

To recognize the disadvantages and advantages of using subjective knowledge, Baogang He has used seven variables as indicators of political participation. These indicators involved; i) casting a vote, ii) engaging in public debate over the choice of candidates, iii) self-registering as voters, iv) participating in the selection process, v) filing complaints to officials about the violation of rights, vi) voters’ attitudes toward elections, their attitudes toward candidates, and vii) their understanding of the electoral law. He suggests that using all those variables instead of a single one will be beneficial in reducing the level of measurement error (He, 2006, p.235). Furthermore, he adds that the high voter turn out is not automatically recognized as a criterion for success for political participation. (ibid)

Political participation involves a full degree of both electoral and non-electoral activities that are as a rule associated with a group’s participation in national political life. In this respect, Hochschild and Mollenkopf confirm that various phenomena of political participation would address the dual processes of involvement of immigrants as actors in respective political systems and these systems’ responsiveness to their appropriate concerns and grievances. The authors also mention that the political participation implies that immigrants become involved in the respective political system. For instance, they would act as “representatives, advocates, protestors, litigants, or activists,” with the influence of political system playing the role of a primary factor of change in their fundamental political roles (Hochschild & Mollenkopf, 2009, p.17). It is an approach related to political participation that may enable the broadest interpretation of the phenomena of immigrants’ political activities in the developed nations.

It is worthwhile to refer in this context, some other opinions on the political participation of immigrant communities need to be referred to in this context. Zapata-Barrero et al. confirm the
need to perceive the political participation of immigrants. Whether in the forms of “voting or running for elections” or engaging in “demonstrations, protests, hunger strikes, or boycotts” (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2013, p. 2), as constituting one of four key pillars of immigrants’ incorporation into the social fabric of their host nations.

Hence, leaving the political participation out of consideration would imply neglecting essential facets of migrants' integration. It occurs rather often that another important factor is not taken into account when the integration of migrants has discussed. The host society with its value system as well as its general attitudes concerning the presence of migrants from the background of migrants' integration. Integration does not function as a one-way-street leaving the responsibility on the shoulders of the migrants alone. Nevertheless, it is a social process involving both sides, the host society, and the migrants themselves. Opinions, behavioral patterns, and attitudes in the host society can determine the integration process since they can strongly influence the migrants' integration attempts. (Council of Europe, 1999, p. 10)

This section of the thesis introduced the political participation as well as discussed the forms of motivations as either encouraging or discouraging factors in the political participation of immigrants in the receiving country. Besides, it also highlighted some scholars’ opinions on political or non-political participation. These ideas provide a comprehensive view of the meaning of political participation. It also allows considering ‘belonging’ as a complementary concept to reflect the meaning of political integration.

4.1.2. Concept of Belonging

``... a human being needs to feel at home in to maintain her/his mental health, in other words, s/he needs to belong to something, to identify and be identified by her/his peers, to recognize and be recognized, to have certain relationships, and to be part of a greater whole that welcomes and protects her/him. Belonging to something, beyond decentralizing from egocentric omnipotence, nurtures a sense of pleasure and communion, since human beings cannot respond alone to their existential issues.``. (Gomes, 2002, p. 36)

The feeling of belonging is distinguished by the need to establish links that become significant and necessary for an individual’s overall development. It emerges from the person’s experience and interaction with the world. (Peter et al., 2015, p. 95)
In general usage of belonging may have two broad meanings. The first meaning is spatial. It defines belonging as the attachment to a specific place. The location also can be varied in scale and size, from the home to the country. Moreover, the term ‘belonging’ can be distinguished from the scene of individuals, groups, or particular places. In turn, the second meaning is social which defines the concept of ‘belonging’ as the attachment to a particular social group. The social group can be diverse in size and scale from the family/local community to the nation/transnational community. (Gilmartin, 2017)

According to Erickson’s definition, which is based on formal and informal organizations, belonging is an individual’s participation and belonging to an identified group of mutual recognition among its members. Belonging includes communitarian relations, references constructs, guidelines values, behavior, and distribution of powers that are inherent to the community belonging. (Erickson, 1987; Moscovici, 2009).

Yuval-Davis (2006) conceptualizes belonging by describing three levels of understanding of the concept of ‘belonging.’ The first level presents the concept of belonging by examining social positions, identification processes, emotional bonds, and ethical and political values. The second level focuses on belonging policies and how they integrate into various plans and projects of individuals that live in society, i.e., citizenship right and participatory actions. This level shows the status right in a belonging group. The third level explores belonging mechanics structure in political, cultural, social, and religious projects comprising specific characteristics of an individual.

In the same way, Bagnall (2009) adds that the measure to reflect a subject’s belonging depth appears in the forms of social association and organization with the communities experienced by the individuals. Therefore, when an individual belongs to a particular group, s/he becomes an identified member of the community as a whole and still supposes her/his belonging to that culture.

Regarding the notion of belonging, Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart (2013) confirm that it as subjective, derived from a reciprocal relationship developed from shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics. As a result, the satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and belonging favors emotional engagement and motivation. (Peter et al., 2015, p.96)

John Powell & Stephen Menendian, distinguish between two concepts (othering and belonging). Regarding ‘othering’ processes marginalize people based on perceived group differences, while ‘belonging’ implies the privileges of membership in a community, including
the concern and care of other members. According to the authors, “belonging means more than just being seen. Belonging entails having an important voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of social and cultural structures. Belonging means have the right to contribute to, and make demands on, society and political institutions.” (Powell & Menendian, 2016, p.10)

As Bevelander indicates, citizenship acquisition can be seen as a measure of inclusion and belonging because it is a reflection of an immigrant’s willingness to be part of the larger host society. Furthermore, it appears that citizenship does have a real and significant impact on people’s willingness to participate politically, i.e., in the electoral process. (Bevelander, 2008, p.19). Blackledge, in turn, points out that being a naturalized by the receiving country does not mean or even guarantee acceptance as a fellow citizen by members of the national majority group (Blackledge, 2005). Stubbergard adds that although ‘naturalization’ occurs through a formal document indicating that the person has become a citizen, he or she may be excluded in reality. (Stubbergard, 2010)

All these three concepts that were discussed within the theoretical framework will support the analysis and addressing the research question of the current study.
5. METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

As this study is based on qualitative data analysis, focus group interview was used as the method of data collection. Focus group interviews are now being used with increasing frequency in various studies, mainly to access areas not amenable to quantitative methods or where depth, insight, and understanding of particular phenomena are required (P. Gill et al., 2008). This study adopts an inductive approach since it began with a question, then seeking to answer it by the help of the theories that are developed in the course of the data analysis ( 6 and Bellamy, 2012). Besides, this study depends on the philosophical assumption of social constructivism, which argues that meanings are “constructed by individuals as they involve in the world they are interpreting.” A constructivist study focuses on ‘the context’ in which the individuals live in, and attempts to interpret and understand their experiences and the process in which they are shaped through the individuals’ perspectives (Creswell, 2002). Additionally, this study involves socially constructed concepts such as political integration, political participation, and belonging.

This chapter discusses the research design, with an explanation of the methods utilized to answer the research question. It also involves a detailed description of the sampling criteria and sampling technique as well as an illustration of the interviewing procedure. Finally, it discusses the role of the researcher and ethical considerations during the research process.

5.1. Qualitative Method (Focus Group Interview)

Primarily and by definition, qualitative research is designed to “investigate the quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003). Therefore, the qualitative interviews differ significantly from those used in quantitative research. The qualitative research interviews endeavor to appreciate the world from the respondents’ perspectives and to explore the significance of people’s experiences (Kvale, 1996). Different types of interviews are used in qualitative research and which type to be used in particular research depends on what the researcher wants to get out of the interview (Bell, 2006). This study used Focus group interviews to retrieve information from the respondents.

According to Anderson (1990), “a focus group is a group comprised of individuals with certain characteristics who focus discussions on a given issue or topic” (Anderson, 1990). Hence, this method provides better opportunities to generate information and to share knowledge among the participants and the researcher for a better understanding of the research topic (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990).
Many reasons push the researcher to choose the focus group interviews as the method of data collection. Firstly, it may be a valuable research tool when the researcher lacks substantial information on a specific topic, and a focus group interview can provide “a detailed and rich set of data about perceptions, feelings, impressions, and thoughts of people in their own words.” (Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). The second reason is that the focus groups are predominantly beneficial when a researcher intends to discover the people’s understanding and experiences of the causes and issues behind their specific pattern of thinking. Thirdly, the method is suitable for examining problems sensitive to the particular population and obtaining relevant information from them. Additionally, using focus groups is common to give the opportunity to marginalized segments of society e.g. minorities, women, for exposing their thoughts and feelings about their problems and needs. (Kitzinger, 1995)

As a result, this method has the advantage of enabling the researcher to obtain as much information as possible within a short period. The method is flexible, and it has the added advantage of having a high face validity, which means it can measures what it is intended to measure. When discussing participants’ experiences, they can give each other support and inspiration. It also provides “a more natural environment than that of the individual interview because the participants are influenced and influencing by others- just as they are in real life” (Casey and Krueger, 2000). In the same context, it aims at collecting and capturing high-quality of real-life data in a social setting (Patton, 2002). The dynamics of the group usually brings out sufficient information about the topic that may not have been expected by the researcher or emerged from individual interviews. It also provides the opportunity for the researcher to study group interaction. (Olsson et al., 2007)

The data derived from focus groups primarily helps to understand a specific problem from the point of the participants’ views of the research. (Khan and Manderson, 1992). Additionally, the focus group interviews will help the researcher to investigate this issue since this method seeks to produce outcomes not reached by tools of quantification or statistical procedures (Crossman, 2018). Finally, it can generate quick results with minimum cost.

However, the focus group discussions are not without disadvantages. The researcher may be guided too much in the discussion by one or several dominant group members. This could have the consequence of making it difficult for the interviewer to be neutral (Olsson et al., 2007). Another problem is that the documentation of what is happening can be challenging. The interviewer may find it difficult to both keep the path of what is said and who says it. Also, the
interviewer must keep in sight of body language (Trost, 2010). Besides, a basic idea with focus groups is that participants are involved in the same situation. (Olsson et al., 2007).

Utilizing focus groups in qualitative research helps the researcher in capturing people’s contemporary responses in the context of face-to-face interactions as well as focusing strategically on interview prompts (Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013). The focus group is used mainly to gather information related to emotions, reactions, opinions and prior experience of different situations (Olsson et al., 2007). Interviewees can provide an insight into people’s opinions, experiences, attitudes, feelings, aspirations, values, and biographies (May, 2001). Thus, this study, which is qualitative demands conducting a focus group interview to collect data on the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö-Sweden.

To achieve this objective 12 Iraqi immigrants were selected as representatives of Iraqi immigrants living in Malmö, Sweden. It was not an easy task to persuade them to participate in a face to face discussion. The researcher previously contacted 10 Iraqi immigrants, but they were so scared to reveal their opinions on political participation and refused to participate in the study. The next challenge was to gather all the participants in one meeting at the same time. It was not easy for the participants to attend this meeting since most of them were working and prefer to visit their relatives during the weekends. Thus, it was much difficult to persuade them to attend the meeting at the same time in one specific location.

Trost also emphasizes the importance of focus group interviews and points out that memory is an essential part of qualitative interviews. According to him, neither notes nor recordings can completely replace the impression the researcher gets at the actual interview. Certain things that are seen or heard during the interview can be extremely valuable in the analysis of data (Trost, 2010). In this study, it was decided to supplement the audio recordings by taking notes. The notes were made in order to make it convenient to summarize the essential comments.

As discussed earlier in this section, this method was used to have a full view of the situation of the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö-Sweden. The interview gave the participants and the researcher an opportunity to discuss all concerns and doubts regarding this study.

5.2. Sampling Criteria

This study focuses on Iraqis (both gender) due to researcher’s interest as an Iraqi woman who is familiar with their experiences and feelings in Sweden. Malmö was chosen since Sweden’s
foreign-born citizens are mostly concentrated in the biggest cities, and almost a third of Malmö´s population had been born abroad; thus the proportion of Iraqi minority is much higher in it (SCB,2018). Besides, it facilitated to conduct the study with less time and effort. The target group is Iraqi immigrants who arrived in Sweden in different periods since the aim of this study requires investigating of Iraqis who have a Swedish permanent residency or Swedish citizenship. For this purpose, 12 Iraqi immigrants were selected by the researcher, and they were met at a single meeting which lasted for two hours. As they were all residing in Malmö, the task was made convenient for the researcher to meet all of them face to face at one single meeting.

Regarding the techniques that may be utilized in the focus group interview, Rice and Ezzy suggest that focus group interviews may be held in the mother tongue of the subjects (Rice and Ezzy,1999). Thus, the researcher attempted to restrict the sample to the Iraqis who can speak the Arabic language, so the interview was held in the Arabic language, in particular, the Iraqi Arabic dialect, since it is the mother tongue of the target group as well as the researcher.

Gray et al. (2007), argue that there is no assurance that the participants are the representatives of the population, specified for the purposely sampling. Although this disadvantage is taken into consideration, the researcher believes that this way of sampling the participants fits into the features of this study.

5.2.1. Sampling Technique

According to Creswell, the interviewer chooses the participants purposefully to maximize information (Creswell, 2014). Accordingly, the participants for this study were selected depending on the social network and those who met the sampling criteria and were willing to participate in the study. Additionally, the sampling method facilitated choosing the targeted group. Snowball sampling/chain sampling method was used in this study, and it enabled to access new contacts provided by previous respondents. However, the sample was purposely selected to include diverse characteristics to ensure variation in gender, professional, educational, social and ethnic-religious backgrounds. This sampling approach is beneficial for this research since it ensured both homogeneity and heterogeneity in the group construction. (Morgan, 1997)
The researcher contacted many friends at first and the presidents of Iraqi associations in Malmö, and through them, the right sample with specific characteristics for the research was reached. The selected individuals are likely to participate in good arguments, and most of them did not know each other. Moreover, they have various characteristics such as deviations in age, gender, social and marital statuses, religious-ethnic backgrounds, educational background, and also different generations.

5.3. The Interviewing Procedure

Several necessary steps were followed when conducting the focus group interview, from preparation to data analysis. In this regard, to make interviewees feel comfortable, it is essential to select a suitable and safe place for the interview (Olsson & Sörensen, 2007). Furthermore, the location of the meeting and the time should be decided because of the convenience of the participants. The researcher should also be ensured that the place is interference free (Dilshad et al., 2013). Accordingly, a location including a hall was selected for the meeting to enable all members to see each other.

As mentioned previously, the focus group interview was selected as the method of collecting data in this study. Bulmer (2004) concludes that well-established questions will be a tool within social research for acquiring information on social characteristics of the participants, their past and current behavior, their standards of behavior, beliefs, attitudes, and reasons for specific actions concerning the topic under investigation. Accordingly, few questions were developed to ask of the participants, and depending on how the discussion was going, furthermore, questions would follow. Thus, the focus group interview was conducted on a friendly basis.

At the beginning of the meeting, the participants were welcomed, and the objective of the study was explained to them. The selected 12 participants were brought into a room, and they were invited to engage in a guided discussion of a topic. According to the general guidelines suggested by Rice and Ezzy that an average duration of a focus group is two hours (Rice & Ezzy, 1999). So, the focus group lasted for two hours in one session during a weekend, which provided sufficient time to cover the five sub-questions for discussion. Before starting the conversation, the participants filled out the questionnaires that included few (descriptive) questions. The session was recorded with the consent of the participants after explaining that the recording was only for the use of the researcher. It was assured to them that the recording would be deleted when the related notes are taken down. Hence, their permission to record the discussion provided the opportunity to pay more attention and to observe their body language,
facial expressions and to keep eye contact with them. Weiss suggests to keep control over the interview process and shift the conversation gradually back to the topic of the research if it deviates from the topic (Weiss, 1994). For this reason, I gave all the participants a chance to answer the questions. The participants were comfortable and relaxed throughout the conversation, and there was no need to interrupt them during the discussion.

5.4. Role of the Researcher

Many researchers assert themselves to highlight the importance of the role of the researcher in qualitative studies. In this context, Jan Trost, who discusses the critical role played by the interviewer in a group interview states that the researcher must provide a sense of togetherness in the group as well as s/he must manage the group in a way that everyone gets an opportunity to speak. (Trost 2010). What is essential to keep in the researcher’s mind is to create a cooperative climate. The researcher should feel comfortable to speak what is on her or his mind and to speak to the point. (Olsson and Sörensen, 2007) . Throughout this focus group discussion, the researcher remained open, kept eye contact, signaled approval by nodding to maintain interaction with participants. They were encouraged to speak by active listening and not commenting on their opinions, and if necessary, by elaborating on aspects relevant to the research question.

Likewise, the researcher’s ‘personal properties’ are essential components that will determine how they “conceptualize the study and engage with it” (Maxwell, 2002). In this study, the researcher’s personal properties such as the ethnic background, values, customs, beliefs, and experiences, language (dialects and accents), knowledge of different Iraqi religious-ethnics groups played a significant role. It would have a considerable impact on the study as what is written in the thesis is a reflection of what has been interpreted by the researcher of what is being said during the discussion, and are based on these properties (Maxwell, 2002). Therefore, the researcher decided to take the role of an observer in this study as she was aware of the subjectivity that she might bring to the research and master it, ultimately leading it to control the result of this study.

Creswell also states that the researcher’s background and history have a significant impact on what s/he hears and how s/he interprets it (Creswell, 2007). In the same regard, Miller and Glassner (2011) argue that if the researcher has similarities with the target group under the study
or has lived their life experiences to some extent, it will be beneficial in understanding them and making legitimate claims.

Accordingly, the researcher of this study attempted to share her life experiences with the target group as she is also an Iraqi immigrant woman residing in Malmö-Sweden for four years. Furthermore, she herself has witnessed many internal and external conflicts while she was living in Iraq for 36 years. Also, she has been affected negatively by the political regime in Iraq, a non-democratic nation, and has a full understanding of the political parties and how their members are affected in contemporary periods. Compared to Sweden, Iraq is a country with entirely different norms, habits, beliefs, culture, and norms, and while living in Sweden, the researcher has gained knowledge on subjects such as political participation and belonging.

Hence, the research in this study had full understanding and information about the Iraqi people who participated in the study. Furthermore, without having this full view, it would have been difficult to go for in-depth discussions on the issues participants brought up. Finally, during the interview, the participants were feeling comfortable enough to express themselves, and they could offer a deep insight into the study.

5.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethics are the standard to distinguish between what is wrong or right in the researching process by creating moral boundaries that will inform us whether we behave in acceptable or unacceptable ways (Resnik, 2015). All processes of the research should be conducted according to ethical considerations which involve “honesty, social responsibility, objectivity, confidentiality, non-discrimination,” concurrently will always be recognized during this research (ibid). Thus, it was ensured that this research adheres to the ethical guideline of qualitative research throughout the process.

Vedung describes three conditions needed for implementation of a focus group to be successful. These are; understanding, ability, and willingness (Vedung, 1998). During the interviews and observation of this study, it was perceived that the participants had reached these conditions. All the participants received full details of the nature of this study, the risks involved, and the opportunities to ask questions at the beginning of the interview. Moreover, the participants in advance were contacted and informed of the purpose of the research in order to give them an opportunity to decide whether they have a willingness to participate in it or withdraw.
The aim of the research is explained to key contact people who introduced the researcher to the participants, so all of the attendants were notified about the primary objective of the meeting. Besides, the aim of the study was explained again at the beginning of the meeting to ensure that everyone has a good understanding of the interview. Furthermore, the participants were informed that they have joined voluntary and they would not receive any financial benefits as a result of their participating in the research. Thus they had a clear view of the research procedures before starting the conversation.

The researcher should assure a satisfactory level of privacy and protection, so all the information about anonymity and confidentiality was explained. This made them assured that their names, their records, and their conversations would remain confidential and preserved; e.i, no names, no social security numbers were taken. They were further assured that alternative names would be used instead of their real names. Moreover, it was declared that the recording of the conversation would be deleted after completion of this study (Bryman, 2012; Silverman, 2011).

The interviews were conducted in the comfortable, transparent, and neutral environment. The participants also had the right to answer the question whenever they feel relaxed. All of these ethical rules were taken into consideration during this study.
6. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

6.1. Participants’ Profiles

Finding interviewees for a focus group is an essential aspect of research. May suggests that it is important to consider the background of the interviewees in order to provide a more objective picture of the research (May, 2011). This section shows the participants’ profiles and information about them.

The number of the participants of this study was twelve people (men and women) living in different parts of Malmö city in Sweden. All of them were gathered at the same meeting which was a face-to-face interview with open-ended questions. In this study, the participants were arranged into three groups based on their age; the first group involved participants who are more than 65 years of age, the second group consisted of those who are 50 - 64 years, and the participants of the third group were aged 24 - 49 years. Their characteristics are given below (names given here are not their real names).

Group (1):

Harith: is 66 years old. His ethnic of origin is Assyrian, and his religion is Christian/Catholic. He came to Sweden as a refugee since 1992. He had a master and Ph.D. degree in (Mining Engineering) from Iraq. He is retired now.

Saman: is 66 years old. His ethnic of origin is Arab, and his religion is Mandaean/Sabian. He came to Sweden as a refugee since 1998. He had a bachelor degree in (Petroleum engineering and drilling) from Iraq. He is retired now.

Ja’qoob: is 70 years old. His ethnic of origin is Chaldean, and his religion is Christian/Catholic. He came to Sweden as a refugee since 1992. He had completed a high school from Iraq. He is retired now.

Waleed: is 66 years old. His ethnic of origin is Kurdish (Shabak), and his religion is Muslim/Sunni. He came to Sweden as a refugee since 1984. He had a bachelor in the economy from Iraq and master degree in economy from Russia. He is retired now.

Group(2):

Nawal: is 59 years old. Her ethnic of origin is Arab, and her religion is Muslim/Shia. She came to Sweden as a refugee in 1989. She had a bachelor in(chemistry engineering) from Iraq and master degree in the same specialization from Russia. She works/full time now.

Maryam: is 56 years old. Her ethnic of origin is Circassian, and her religion is Christian/Orthodox. She came to Sweden as a refugee in 2003. She had a preparatory school from Iraq. She is working partly now.

Sameem: is 64 years old. His ethnic of origin is Kurdish, and his religion is Yezidi. He came to Sweden as a refugee since 1994. He had graduated from preparatory from Iraq. He is working full-time now.
Zahraá: is 55 years old. Her ethnic of origin is Arab, and her religion is Muslim/Shia. She came to Sweden as a refugee in 1993. She had completed her primary education in Iraq. She works as a trainee/part-time. Her third grandfather is *Persian(Ajam), so her family was excluded from Iraq in 1980.

* In the 1980s, Saddam deported Shia Iraqis of Iranian ancestry (Ajam). Iraqis (Ajam) are Iraqi citizens of Persian Iranian national background or descent. Most of them went to Iran, and the others preferred to reside in other countries since they believe they are Iraqis. (Aboulenein, 2018)

Group (3):

Soran: is 49 years old. His ethnic of origin is Kurdish (Kaka'i), and his religion is Muslim/Sunni. He came to Sweden by reunification since 2015. He had completed a secondary school. He is working now, but part-time

Hanaá: is 44 years old. Her ethnic of origin is Turkmen, and her religion is Christian/Armenian. She came to Sweden as a refugee in 2003. She had a diploma of (Oil engineering institute) from Iraq. She works full-time. She has witnessed *Arabization period.

* In 1980, Saddam's government thousands of Iraqi Turkmen were relocated from their traditional homelands in northern Iraq and replaced by Arabs, to Arabize the region. Additionally, Iraqi Turkmen villages and towns were destroyed to make way for Arab migrants, who were promised free land and financial incentives. This process was known as n'Arabization. After 2003, the governor (Al-Barazani) practiced ‘Kurdization’ to take Turkmen areas to Kurdistan instead of Arab. (Shikhani, 2017)

Elaaf: is 24 years old. Her ethnic of origin is Arab, and her religion is Muslim/Shia. Her parents are immigrants who had come to Sweden as refugees, while she was born and brought up in Sweden as a citizen. She has a preparatory from Sweden. She is studying now.

Widad: is 34 years old. Her ethnic of origin is Arab, and her religion is Muslim/Shia. She is (*Bidoon) and came to Sweden as a refugee since 2014. She had completed a secondary school in Kuwait. She is studying SFI now.

* Bidoon, is a grouping of nomadic Arab peoples who have historically inhabited the desert regions. The word bidoon comes from the Arabic badawi, which means "desert dweller." Moreover, in Arabic means (without nationality). Many of them are descended from parents who did not get passports, may be because they did not understand their importance. Most of them are excluded from Kuwait and authorities consider them illegal immigrants since Kuwaiti government claims that their origin from Saudi Arabia or Iraq. After 1990, Kuwait sent back 125,000 bidoons to Iraq, and the others stayed in Kuwait but live in miserable situation. (IACIG, 2016,p.4; Blitz and Lynch, 2009,p.86; Beaugrand, 2011,p.228)

6.2. Analysis and Findings

According to Olsson et al. (2007), the information in the analysis section must be processed to make the research results understandable and usable. Besides, processing of the data should be structured and put together under this section. Thus, depending on the research question, this section illustrates the analysis of findings based on the theoretical framework within three concepts (political integration, political participation, and belonging) and the previous researches that have been conducted on the similar topic.
This study had aimed to analyze the reasons that encourage or discourage the political participation of Iraqi immigrants both (naturalized and residents non-citizens) in Malmö-Sweden. The analyses of this study were inspired from two parts: data analysis using the questionnaires as well as the discussion analysis of the participants’ responses through the focus group interview.

At the beginning of the meeting, the participants answered the questionnaires that included few detailed questions (listed in the appendix). These questions attempted to show the impacts of several indicators of measuring the political participation, i.e., voting of Iraqi immigrants through their residency in Malmö-Sweden. Through the questionnaires, several characteristics, such as the personal characteristics (age, gender, education, and the current employment status), marital status, years of residency, the legal situation in Sweden and type of their migration were captured. Besides, it covered ethnic features (ethnic origin, religion, and place of birth), social capital attributes (such as belonging, trust in government, civic awareness and interaction with others), and memberships in ethnic associations, humanitarian organizations or political parties, and so on.

The analyses also used the information retrieved in the discussion that occurred in the focus group interactions. The content of the conversation has examined its particular implications for the research question. The conversations are considered as action happening among actors (Potter, 1996). Thus, the conversation analysis is based on the attempt to describe people’s methods for producing orderly social interaction (ibid). Besides, the conversation analysis can help the researcher in getting access to the construction of meaning and social action being performed by the group participants (Barbour, 2007, p. 37). Hence, the conversation analysis offers a range of tools for analyzing interaction among the participants in focus groups.

The open questions in questionnaires were followed by a discussion to answer the central research question, which was based on the aim of the research. The discussion that emerged during the focus group interview with regards to political participation of Iraqi immigrants in the Malmö-Sweden leads to the division of findings into five themes. They are in accordance with the participants' discussion of five analytical questions (listed in the appendix): i) the meaning of political participation, ii) motivations for political participation, iii) reasons for non-participation, iv) effects of prior political experience and v) information sources on immigrants’ political rights in Sweden. All these categories are discussed in the following extracts in details depending on the participants’ perspectives.
1. The Meaning of the Political Participation:

Meaning of political participation has already been discussed in the literature. Some researchers have provided several valid definitions of the term “political participation.” Verba claims that the political participation points to those legal acts by private citizens that are less or more directly aimed at influencing a selection of government personnel and the actions that they take (Verba, 1978, p. 46; Verba & Nie, 1972, p. 2). In turn, it can be described from abroad approaches referring to it as “a categorical term for citizen power” or to all activities aiming to influence existing power structures. In the same way, Melanie’s Manion claims that the voting in an election is not the only indicator to measure political participation (Manion, 1996). In other words, the political participation itself also comprises more than the right to be elected or the right to vote to political office. It also includes the right to express a person's opinions and beliefs. Furthermore, it covers the membership in political parties or associations (Community Relation, p.9). Thus, there are several definitions of political participation among the scholars.

Likewise, the Iraqi immigrants who participated in this research also have diverse meanings for political participation. They expressed their views towards the concept as follows:

“Political participation refers to many issues such as voting, protest, public consultations, writing a letter to a public official, signing a petition, donating money to a cause, participation in volunteering campaign. Also, being an activist or belong to a certain political party or organization, engage an official public position, occupying a building in the act of protest can also be political participation. Finally, it involves on the right of expression opinion.”

Most of the participants focused on the right to express the opinion. As well as, the political participation may be involved in social engagements in many occasions by helping people who are in need during the crisis or wartime. Ja’qoob, agreed with what has been said by his colleagues:

“It implies that a person has the right to express his opinion as well as the right to vote. Besides, participating in different activities to serve the needy people, i.e., volunteering in a campaign to help disabled or people who need special protection.”

Relatively, Hochschild and Mollenkopf (2009) point out that political participation involves a full degree of both electoral and non-electoral activities that are associated with a group’s participation in national political life (2009, p. 17). Respondents of this study; Nawal, Soran,
and Sameem further asserted that voting in the election is not the only indicator of political participation, but they can measure it by many other indicators.

As Nawal said: “many indicators may refer to the political participation, i.e., the oath in front of the judge if someone witnesses a crime to ensure the security for the society, voluntary participation in campaigns to assist the needy people, additionally voting in the elections and participation in the protest.” Soran [raises his hand to participate] “It means participating in a campaign volunteers to help who are in need.”[ he stops, and Sameem completes] “It implies voting in the elections, donating money to help specific groups, express opinion, and writing a petition or complain on behalf of the people in the same area to be sent to the public consultations to solve the problems.”

Waleed defined the political participation in Sweden as aiming to improve the group welfare by his statement:

“It refers to create prosperity, welfare, and justice among people. It can be fulfilled when a person has a freedom to express his/her opinion and to have a good standard of livelihood”.

He further adds that the concept itself differs from one place to another, i.e., in Iraq (as a country that has a non-democratic regime), the political participation can be understood as the struggle against dictatorship, while in Sweden, the political participation can be recognized by the welfare and social justice. So, the concept cannot be understood in the same way in all countries. In other words, the idea and the aim of the political participation will be different from democratic to non-democratic countries.

In the same way, Sameem added that the voting in a democratic atmosphere is considered as the most basic and essential shape of political participation. Hence, the level of participation can be seen as an indicator of how well democracy is faring. He has also observed that the quality of electoral participation in Sweden cannot be compared to other non-democratic countries like his country of origin-Iraq.

Besides, Zapata-Barrero et al. (2013), confirm the need to perceive the political participation of immigrants, whether in the forms of “voting or running for elections” or engaging in “demonstrations, protests, hunger strikes, or boycotts.” Hochschild and Mollenkopf (2009) confirm that ‘various phenomena of political participation would appear as the dual processes of involvement of immigrants as actors in respective political systems and these systems’ responsiveness to their appropriate concerns and grievances.’ Furthermore, Junn(1999) concludes that immigrants might be less likely to participate in ‘system-directed’ activities such as voting, but they are as active as the native-born to participate in ‘direct’ political activities.
such as protests (Ramakrishnan and Espenshade, 2001). The authors mention that the political participation of immigrants supposes that immigrants become involved in the respective political system. For instance, protestors, representatives, advocates, litigants, or activists, with the influence of political system play the role of a primary factor of change in their fundamental political roles (2009, p.17).

Harith, in this context, added:

`` I believe that the political participation involves on engament through the peaceful demonstrations related to different issues i.e, I stand by the Palestinian issue, support people in Iraq, the celebrations in special days such as (Labor Day, 1 May), attending political seminars to listen only, and participate in the elections sometimes``.

As a result, many participants believe that participation in demonstrations is considered as an indicator of political participation. Many of the respondents have participated in such activities in reality. Harith illustrates his point of view: “the person must participate in demonstrations since it is a vital indicator to reveal the political participation.” He added that Sweden is a democratic country that provides its citizens with excellent opportunities to participate politically, and he hopes that Iraq will be like Sweden in the future, will deal with its people in justice, move away from sectarian parties and discrimination based on race, religion, and nationalism.

According to Gomes’ (2002) view .. a human being needs to feel at home ..to belong to something, to identify and be identified by her/his peers, to recognize and be recognized, to have certain relationships, and to be part of a greater whole that protects and welcomes her/him”. The main point to fulfill integration is whether an individual accepts it, and in turn is accepted, and whether it has equal opportunities in society (Schunk, 2014). Castles and Miller (2009) refer to integration as the process of an immigrant becoming part of the receiving community and nation.

Widad participating in the discussion, expressed that political participation is a feeling of belonging and her opinion is similar to the authors; she pointed out to the concept by the following:

`` the political participation occurs when the person lives in a specific place and has official documents to recognize and be recognized as a human being. As well as the political participation can be fulfilled when the government grants the individual the right to live in dignity and encourage individuals to contribute to the activities around them in a democratic atmosphere.``
For distinction of political activity, Hay (2007), asserts that each type of political participation can be divided into “political” or “non-political” activities depending on whether the activists are primarily motivated by political or by non-political motives or intentions. Downs explained casting a vote for party B instead of the preferred party A from his concept of “rational behavior.”

Sameem indicated his experience with distinction among political activities in the host society. He mentioned a particular event happened when his wife attended the first election with him. The wife voted to a specific candidate who was favored by her husband to avoid creating domestic disputes. He expressed his reaction:

“For me, I encourage and vote the ‘vänster party’ when we arrived in Sweden my wife voted to my favored party without knowing what the party goals are. She thought this behavior would make me happier and she voted to satisfy me...[he laughs], I did not like this action since this would not be considered real political participation for her. After that, I decided to explain to her the ideology and goals of all the Swedish parties. Then, my wife had a full conviction about the party that she wants to vote”.

In the same context, Waleed believes that each person has to vote without been forced, i.e., he does not force his sons to participate politically or move away from the politics. Instead, he discusses with his family through permanent debates about the policies and programs of the Swedish parties to have a full conviction about their goals.

Hana’s opinion towards the true political participation was the same when she went to vote with her husband in Sweden, she voted to a specific party. Before going there, they discussed in advance about the pros and cons of each party. Her husband usually may persuade her, and sometimes she convinces him, but without forcing each other.

Hence, the participants acknowledge that the political participation has many indicators and they discussed these indicators according to their perspectives; hence, they have excellent views about the meaning of the political participation.

2. Motivations for Political Participation

Based on the discussion that emerged during the focus group interview considering the Iraqi immigrants’ motivations for political participation in Sweden, the motivations may have various shapes. For example, some of the participants believe in necessity in political
participation (a sacred duty), encouragements by religious community, family, friends, believe that voting is a democratic (right and responsibility), being attracted and vote for a specific party that they trust would address a specific issue (e.g., protection of immigrants’ rights or increase social welfare). Hence, different motivations were behind the political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö, and this section explains them.

All the researchers assert that voting in the election is an indicator of political participation. Milbrath L. et al. (1977), argue that voting in the election is stemming out of ‘civic attitudes’ or a ‘sense of civic obligation,’ which involves on duty to vote. According to Powell and Menendian (2016), “belonging entails having an important voice and the opportunity to participate in the design of cultural and social structures; it means having the right to contribute to, and make demands on society and political institutions.” Some of the participants in this study believe in the necessity of political participation since they consider it as a sacred duty as well as believe that voting represents a democratic (right and responsibility).

For example, Hanaá and Elaaf had the same opinion:

“I participate in the election since I believe that an individual must use her/his rights granted by the state to vote the appropriate people”.

Regarding the notion of belonging, Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart (2013) confirm that it as subjective, and belonging favors emotional engagement and motivation (Peter et al., 2015, p.96). According to the authors, “belonging means more than just being seen”. Another motivation for political participation of Iraqi immigrants is as a result of the encouragement. Zahraá stated that sometimes the religious community encourages the immigrants to vote to specific Swedish party which has a specific issue (e.g., protection of immigrants’ rights), she said:

“ I voted to the social democratic party since the religious community that I belong to it, has encouraged me to vote to(social democracy party), because it defends the rights of migrants. However I do not like politics, but the only thing that I can encourage my children to do it in Sweden is to participate in elections and to support parties which defend of rights of immigrants and seek of fulfilling justice and non-discrimination principles.”.

In the same context, the encouragement may be from the family itself or friends, Nawal expressed her opinion:

“my sons attended Swedish schools, and they encouraged me to vote in the election since it is a duty”. [Sameem completes]“ I voted in the election because my friend encouraged and convinced me to do that”.

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Erickson argues that belonging based on the formal and informal organizations in which the individual participates to belong to an identified group of mutual recognition among its members. It also includes communitarian relations, references constructs, guidelines values, behavior, and distribution of powers that are inherent to the community belonging. (Erickson, 1987; Moscovici, 2009). In the same context, Vebra confirms the political participation does not ‘involve preferences for politics beneficial to some group of which one is a member.’ (Verba, 1978, p. 11).

In this study, most of the participants vote to those they trust that would be elected. The participants have particular motivation to vote for Swedish political parties such as Social Democratic party and Vänster party. They vote to a particular party which addresses a specific issue (e.g., protection of immigrants’ rights). In this regard, Nawal stated her opinion: “In the election, I am attracted towards the party that has a particular case, for example defending the rights of migrants, and seeks to spread democracy, justice, and non-discrimination such as Social Democratic party). Therefore, this party encourages me to participate in the election”.

This indicates that some of the political participation is not stemming from the belief of necessity to participate in the election as a right and responsibility. Instead, it reveals that those immigrants vote to a specific Swedish party, i.e., Social Democratic party because they are afraid of few Swedish parties which are against immigrants. It shows that Iraqi immigrants are afraid of their future in Sweden if those parties become a decision-maker.

In the same way, the meaning of integration in a political sense could be identified by uniting, organizing, and unifying in a group of two or more than two units. In turn, it represents “centralization” (Hoppe, 2007, p.109). In the same dimension and according to Ilievski, it can be understood as uniting and centralization. (Ilievski, 2015, p.12). The central aspect in this integration activity is that the process of delegating the autonomy of the political units to the new formed political society. (Nikola Lj. Ilievski,p.2)

The participants who had been members of the Iraqi Communist Party vote to the ‘Vänster party’ because they believe both parties have the same goals. According to Fowler’s and Kam’s opinion, social identification is based on the “desire to improve the welfare of certain groups in society.” It was as likely to motivate potential political actors to engage in relevant activities, as would their self-interest or even a sense of altruism (Fowler and Kam, 2007). Waleed is a participant, who reflected the similar notion of the authors, which asserted that political participation in Sweden with the aim to improve group welfare. Regarding this point, Waleed,
Sameem, Saman, Harith, and Ja’qoob said: ‘We vote to the (vänster party) which has similar ideas to the Communist Party that we were active members in it when we were in Iraq.’

Another motivation for increasing vote in the election is the citizenship acquisition. According to what Bevelander (2008) claimed, citizenship acquisition could be seen as a measure of inclusion and belonging because it is a reflection of an immigrant’s willingness to participate politically. Bevelander and Pendakur(2008), noted that after controlling for demographic, contextual characteristics and socio-economic factors, getting citizenship might make a real difference to the odds of voting, therefore; it is a reliable indicator of social inclusion. Moreover, the immigrants who obtain citizenship are far more likely to vote than those who do not.

Similar to Bevelander’s and Pendakur’s previous approach, voting can be seen as constituting an indicator of inclusion(ibid). Besides, acquisition of citizenship (thus, naturalization) can be taken as a measure of inclusion, and it may form a real impact on people's willingness to engage in societal decisions, such as voting (Burchardt et al. 2002). In this study, all of the respondents’ responses confirm that their non-participation politically before naturalization since they did not know that they can vote before it; thus the naturalization does not represent the main motivation to increase the rate of their political participation as Bevelander’s and Burchardt’s et al. claims. Accordingly, it can be understood that the relationship between naturalization and political participation is weak since acquiring citizenship is not the real motive behind increasing political participation, i.e., voting of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden.

For instance, Widad said:

‘‘I have a permanent residency, but I did not participate in the elections because I did not know that the non-citizen has the right to vote.... I thought that all rights would be available after the naturalization’’.

Nawal mentioned that she had been living in Sweden since 1989, but she had not heard that she has the right to vote before naturalization. Thus, she had participated in elections only after naturalization. All other participants declared that they did not know that they can vote in elections through the residency.

Relatively, many researchers (White et al., 2006; Järnbert and Öhrvall 2003; Johansson, 1999, and Uhlaner et al.1989), have asserted the willingness of political participation increases with the time immigrants staying in Sweden. As for the respondents of this study, the period they have lived in Sweden varied from 34 years to 4 years as Waleed (male) - 34 years, Nawal (female) - 29 years, Harith and Jaaqoob (males) - 26 years, Zahraa(female) - 25 years, Sameem
According to the participants’ responses, they do not agree with the above conclusion given by researchers. Instead, their responses confirmed that political participation does not depend on the number of years of residency. i.e., voting in the election does not increase if the immigrants stay the longer time in the host country. The result agrees with Bevelander and Pendakur (2008) who stated that only some of the immigrants might be influenced by the number of years of residency in the host country. However, even non-citizens born in Sweden have a substantially lower probability of voting (Bevelander and Pendakur, 2008).

Schunk (2014) states that integration begins after the immigrant arrives in the host country (affecting the country, the natives, and the immigrants). For example, Harith said:

“I came to Sweden 26 years ago, but I have voted after naturalization three times only. However; I was an active member of a political party in Iraq for 15 years, but I became not free to participate politically in Sweden.”

In the case of the legal situation of the participants in Sweden and the type of their migration, Bäck and Soininen (1998) have suggested that the type of migration (refugee or labor) seems to be an unequivocal predictor of an immigrants group's political behavior, i.e., voting.

In this study 10 out of 12 participants were naturalized Swedish citizens, while the remaining 2 have a permanent residency. Furthermore, 11 out of 12 respondents had come to Sweden as asylum-seekers (refugees), while one of them had come as a spouse (family-reunification). In the case of Iraqi immigrants who had come to Sweden as political refugees, they did not care about political participation; instead, they attempt to be far away from political issues since they had faced difficult times in their country of origin as a result of their political engagements. Hence, they did not participate in any elections through their residency although they have had a right to vote, as well as some of them, do not care about the demonstration activities that may be organized by Iraqi immigrants in Sweden.

When considered the effect of educational background on political participation, Öhrvall (2006) in his research, indicates some evidence that political participation increases with the increase in educational level in Sweden.

According to the participants of this study, one female of 12 respondents had an only primary education while two respondents (a male and a female) had a secondary school. Two males and two females had a preparatory education. Others had university education whereas one female
and one male had bachelor degrees, two others (a male and a female) had master degrees, and one male had a Ph.D. Their responses do not indicate a significant relationship between political participation and education level. In turn, the result is similar to what has been suggested by some other researchers (Jones, 1998; Cho, 1999; Ramakrishnan, 2005), that there is only a weak relationship between the education level and increase in voting. Thus, obtaining a higher educational level does not always motivate Iraqi immigrants to participate politically in Malmö-Sweden.

In the same way, Cho (1999) during his research in U.S.A reveals that the immigrants who are educated abroad are less likely to vote than immigrants who educated in the United States (Cho, 1999; Ramakrishnan, 2005). Likewise, the results of the current study also show that Iraqi immigrants educated abroad (in Arabic countries) are less likely to participate in voting than immigrants educated in Sweden. Thus, political participation may increase in case the immigrants getting their education from Swedish schools.

Overall, Bevelander and Pendakur (2007), in their research, focused on how the level of age, level of schooling, and civic engagement effect on the level of political participation. In this point, the study could reveal that social capital attributes are essential for political participation outcomes of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden. It can also be concluded that the combination of socio-demographic and social capital attributes are most like to override the influence of ethnicity. Thus the result agrees with their suggestion regarding the effect of social capital. Another outcome of the study is similar to Bevelander’s and Pendakur’s (2007), claim that there is no evidence to assert that ethnic association would contribute to political insulation. This current study also concluded that ethnic associations in Malmö do not offer better conditions for more political participation. Although all the Iraqi participants in this study belong to diverse ethnic associations or civic organizations, it does not influence their political participation.

### 3. Reasons for Non-Political Participation

There are variety of reasons behind non-political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö-Sweden such as; lack of encouragement (from friends, associations or family), language difficulties (not comprehensive information whether the elections are accessible in their native language-Arabic), time constraints, prevention of belonging into two political parties, no information that non-citizens are allowed to vote in local/regional election. Besides, lack of personal interest (no political issue that of important to them, do not believe in democracy),
trauma from previous experiences that causes fear of participation, being old or lack of health
discourage some immigrants to participate politically.

Ramakrishnan and Espenshade (2001) conducted a study on voter turnout and minority status
in the U.S.A. The results were that the minorities have lower voting behavior and differences
in voting probability is not always decreased from one generation to another. Within the same
context, Bevelander and Pendakur argued in 2007, that it is not the minority attributes that
influence political participation, i.e., voting. Research conducted by Rahman and Dilara (2007),
deals with immigrants’ political participation in Sweden, and they observed a low level of
political participation of immigrants in Sweden. According to the result of this study, Iraqi
immigrants as a minority have lower voting behavior, so it agrees with previous studies.

The reasons behind the low participation of Iraqi minority in Sweden are discussed below.

**Language Difficulties:**

Uhlaner et al. (1989) argue that voting among immigrants is affected by their capacity to speak
the language of the host country. Respondents’ feedback in the current study confirms that
language challenge prevents them from understanding their political rights in Sweden and the
political parties’ goals as well. In this regard, lack of language skills of the receiving country
negatively affects the political integration of immigrants. Lower language skills of participants
can lead to lower communication. They, instead, prefer to avoid talking about something if they
do not have a comprehensive view of it. At this point, the participants who do not have Swedish
language proficiency are isolated since the new language prevents them to be integrated with
the rest in the host community, for example, Widad said:

“For me, the difficulties of language is the main reason for not participating politically” [Soran
nods his head, and Maryam completes] “if I want to vote in the election, I need a tool for
communication which is the Swedish language to discuss with Swedish citizens about the
parties’ aims. I would also like to read about my political rights, but lack Swedish language
proficiency does not encourage me to read, understand or even to be included in Swedish society [she sighs].. in this case, how can I participate in the election?”.

**No Information About Their Political Rights in Sweden**

The responsibility for integration rest not with one particular group, but rather with many
actors-immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities. (Rinus
Penninx, 2003). Boaing He (2006) suggested a similar concept, i.e., the level of participation
combines with subjective and objective factors which include the voter’s attitudes and knowledge of elections. (He, 2006). Eeva Lotta Johansson mentioned that, although Sweden has provided the immigrants who had resided more than three years the right to vote and be elected in local and regional elections since 1976, her research results reveal that the right to vote has not been exercised to the extent that was expected and the voting rate has become lower (Johansson, 1999).

In case of Iraqi immigrants, their knowledge about their political rights is weak since the Swedish government as a host country does not pay adequate attention towards educating the newcomers politically. In this regard, Maryam said:

"The schools that I studied did not focus on increasing my awareness as an immigrant about my political rights in Sweden. There are no specific lectures in the school for educating the newcomers about their political rights in the host country."

Widad expressed her opinion, too:

"I believe the schools, especially for the newcomers (SFI) are supposed to devote lectures per a week about the political rights of the residents before and after naturalization, as well as giving an overview of the programs and ideologies of the political parties in Sweden; hence the immigrants will be encouraged to participate politically. I try to improve my Swedish to know more about the political and civil rights of my children in Sweden since Sweden does not pay attention towards informing the immigrants of their rights politically."

Ja’qoob [raises his hand to add something]: "I have a comment on the policy of Sweden as a host country towards immigrants. For instance in SFI, the school did not devote specific lectures to the political education, which contributed to the lack of knowledge of immigrants of their political rights before and after naturalization."

In this case, the participants criticize the policy of the Swedish government since they were not provided with full information about their political rights when they came to Sweden as newcomers. This is considered as a problem in the policy in Sweden that contributes to non-interaction and isolation of the immigrants politically. Similarly, the participants declared that no one informed them that non-citizens have the right to vote in the election. Waleed expressed his view towards the above issues:

"Although the Swedish government attempts to do its best to include the immigrants socially, culturally, economically and politically, the immigrants still blame the process. For instance, it grants the non-citizen a right to vote, but do not educate the newcomers about the goals of the Swedish political parties or their political rights as well. Guaranteeing the immigrants special rights is important, but educate them about their rights is more important."

Overall, all the groups' members except Elaaf (who born in Sweden), said:
we participated in the election after naturalization only, all of us did not know that non-citizens have a right to vote.

Prevention of Belonging into Two Political Parties:

Bagnall (2009) states that a subject’s belonging depth is reflected in the forms of social association and organization with the communities. Therefore, when an individual belongs to a particular group, s/he becomes an identified member of the community as a whole and supposes her/his belonging to that culture. In regard, the responsibility for integration rests on both individuals and groups. Thus the integration process is long-term by nature (Penninx, 2003). Mary Gilmartin refers to ‘belonging’ as the attachment to a particular social group. The social group can be diverse in size and scale from the family/local community to the nation/transnational community. (Gilmartin, 2017). In this regard, Saman said:

“When I was in Iraq I joined the Communist Party; as a result, I faced many troubles in Saddam’s time, so I decided to flee to Sweden. When I came here, I did not withdraw my membership there. The rules in the communist party do not allow its members to join another party, so I preferred to stay in my party without thinking about any other Swedish political parties.”.

Lack of Personal Interest in Political Participation:

According to Powell and Menendian (2016), belonging implies that the immigrants have the right to contribute to and make demands on society and political institutions. In the case of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden however, they know they have a right, but they do not have individual interest to participate politically. In the same concept of belonging, Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart (2013) confirm political participation as subjective, derived from a reciprocal relationship developed from shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics. As a result, the satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and belonging favors emotional engagement and motivation (Peter et al., 2015). According to the authors, “belonging means more than just being seen.” However, a few decades before, political participation was associated with individual motivations and convictions (Verba, 1978).

In this study, the responses asserted that the reasons for the low political participation of Iraqi immigrants are related to lack of their interest which may arise due to few causes. For instance, they do not care about politics and no political issue is essential for them, party politics is not essential for them to, trauma from previous experiences made them afraid of participation,
being old or lack of health does not encourage some immigrants to participate politically. Finally, the employment status also may decrease the immigrants’ political participation. Nawal expressed her opinion:

“I consider that non-political participation in the host country does not affect the process of social integration for the immigrants.” [Soran nods and adds] “For me, I do not care about political participation since I do not consider it as a necessity for immigrants to be integrated with the rest Swedish society. Instead, my fundamental goal when I came to Sweden is to live in peace and divide the time between my family and work only [he smiles]… now, I do not like to participate politically, and instead, I listen to political news and the security situation in Iraq only”. [Elaaf raises her hand to say something] “I do not agree with anyone who considers that political participation is not an important part of the process of social integration, especially for the immigrants.”

Hanáá asserted that not everyone has the desire to participate politically or even hear the political news. The lack of political participation among Iraqi immigrants reveals that those people have no self-interest to search in the political field, Hanaá said:

“I did not even think about the meaning of political participation, and if my children ask me one day, I will say that ‘I do not know anything about politics, or even do not want to think about it. I will not encourage my children to engage in political issues in the future since I fear the politics’”.

Widad talked about another personal reason stemming from the family that does not care about political issues. She considers the style of education inside the family itself, and lack of encouragement inside it may lead to a lack of its members’ interest in the future. For example:

“I do not have any political participation anywhere, and my family as well was not used to share the political debates in our daily discussions when I grew up. I and all my brothers and sisters do not care about politics, the political parties or even their goals regardless we live in a democratic or a non-democratic country. My father created the fear of politics in ourselves”.

Some of the participants confirmed that they had lost the individual interest and motivation even though they became Swedish naturalized and have full political rights as citizens. Nawal said:

“Nevertheless I was a very active member of the Communist Party in Iraq, I changed my mind and interest to continue in political action when I arrived in Sweden. I have lost the incentive to go on. I think the nature of Swedish life makes time not sufficient enough to deal with something like politics”.

Harith analyzed Nawal’s lack of personal motivation by his statement:
“Iraqi immigrants who had previous political experiences, their goal was to change the political regime in Iraq. The same people changed their minds when they arrived in Sweden, despite their opportunities and democracy atmosphere, they lost their previous political willingness and potential motivation to go on. They changed their ideas because the nature of life is different in Sweden. Thus, the political participation has not become an essential part of the political integration, as they had previously believed”.

Although Öhrvall (2006) brings out some evidence that the political participation increases with age and employment, the results of the study do not agree with his suggestion. Even though there was a difference among the ages of participants, there was no significant difference in their willingness towards political participation, i.e., there is no clear indicator that refers to increase in voting in elections or participation in demonstrations when the immigrants become an elder. Moreover, the respondents indicated that being elderly is considered as an obstacle that prevents them from becoming interested in political matters since their health may not encourage them to do so. Harith further asserted this by the following:

‘’I became an old man, and my health & the life’s troubles do not encourage me to go on in the political sphere; however, I had prior political experiences in Iraq, but I rejected an idea to join any party again.’’

Regarding the employment status of the participants, Öhrvall (2006) presents some evidence that employed are more likely to vote than unemployed, or the political participation may also increase with income. In this study, 3 of 12 respondents were employed, and their work was permanent and full-time. Also, 3 of 12 were employed but part-time. Also, 4 of 12 were retired and depend on social benefits. Finally, 2 of 20 were students. The results of this study are opposite to Öhrvall claims that employment increases the rate of political participation.

The responses also assert that Iraqis employed in Sweden who get higher income will be engaged in further increasing their earnings. Likewise, Iraqi immigrants who do not have work, do not care about the political engagements. So, Iraqis employed in Sweden do not have a desire to participate politically, and their justification for it is that time constraints prevent them from having a spare a time to search in political issues or even collect some information about the political parties' goals or programs since they work or study.

Bevelander and Pendakur(2008), observed that the state of birth might make a difference in political participation, i.e., immigrants those born in Sweden with immigrant parents and American immigrants are more likely to vote than immigrants who come from other countries.
such as from Asia. In the current study, 10 of 12 respondents had been born in Iraq, whereas one female had been born in Sweden, and another female had been born in Kuwait. The result of the study agrees with Bevelander’s, and Pendakur’s claim that state of birth may make a difference, as Elaaf who had been born in Sweden with immigrant parents is more likely to vote more than immigrants were born in other countries (non-democratic states) such Iraq or Kuwait.

Beauregard (2014), who considered gender as an indicator of political participation points out that there is a difference in political participation (voting in elections) among genders due to lower desire to participate among women. A second explanation refers to the strongly related concept of political engagement, stating that women reveal lower levels of interests in politics; have lower levels of political efficacy; and are less knowledgeable about politics. (Beauregard, 2014). The present study involved both genders, (6 males and 6 females) and it was attempted to sum up if there is a difference in the rate of political participation based on gender. The results confirm Beauregard’s suggestion of gender differences in political participation (i.e., voting in the election) due to a lower desire among women in participating. In turn, it does not agree with what Öhrvall (2006), who argues that women are more likely to vote than men.

Bilodeau (2008) argues that the culmination of social and economic disadvantages can lead immigrants to have less desire to engage in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of the political activities in Sweden(Bilodeau, 2008; Ramakrishnan, 2005). Widad explained that the life in the European countries as challenging because the day is spent on work or study. Soran commented with the following:

“They do not know anything about the candidates of Swedish political parties, just watching their pictures hanging everywhere [other participants listen carefully, and she goes on] how I can vote for a certain party that I do not know anything about? If I want to search and know some information about these parties, I need time. In Sweden, the limited time prevents the immigrants from participating politically, i.e., I spend eight hours in work and study, then the rest of the day devoted to my children, so no time for politics”.

According to the participants’ feedbacks, marital status and employment do not make the political participation easy. In this study, marital status was as the following: one female of 12 respondents, was single, another female was divorced, one male was a widow, five males, and four females were married. The study's result indicates a similarity with what has been noticed by Bilodeau and Ramakrishnan in their researches. For instance, the Iraqi married women do not think of political participation since they have to engage in the domestic chores; hence those
immigrants women do not have time to be embedded in the political field (both genders claim the time is just for the work and the family). Additionally, the Iraqis who are widowed or divorced do not care about increasing their political participation since their responsibilities had increased after the divorce or death of the partner. Thus there are no significant indicators to confirm differences in political participation following the marital status or employment of the immigrants. In turn, lack of time is highlighted as a reason that causes a lack of personal interest in political participation.

Harith, Sameem, and Hanaá believe the Iraqis participation relates in subjective factors in the first rank and the language difficulties are not the essential reason, Harith said:

“I think the problem is not in the policy of the host country - Sweden - because if the immigrants want to know their political rights, they can research about by themselves. So the reason is subjective and deals with the psychological structure of the Iraqi person”. Sameem [agrees] “I believe that the reason for decreasing Iraqi immigrants’ participation in politics depends on the personality of the Iraqi itself. I also think Swedish policy is not a reason since Sweden has a democratic atmosphere which helps the immigrants to ask about their political rights whenever they like, so if the Iraqi immigrants want to participate politically, they will find all the doors are open, but Iraqis themselves do not have a real willingness to go on in political issues”.

Hanaá added that many immigrants consider language difficulties as the primary challenge that prevents them from understanding the programs and policies of parties. In this regard, she said:

“I believe that language problem may be taken into consideration, but as a secondary rank. If the immigrants have a political interest, they can access a version of any information in their native language-Arabic including their political rights as well as any information about the parties’ programs via websites”.

According to the participants’ views, it reveals that Iraqi immigrants in Sweden do not have an individual interest in political participation and do not tend towards learning political issues. Most of them do not care about the political issues for many personal reasons, and most of them consider that political participation is not an essential part of their integration in Sweden.

On the other side, many researchers argue that ‘naturalization’ implies merely the formal document that certifies the person has become a citizen, but the person may be excluded in reality (Bevelander, 2008; Stbbergard, 2010; Blackledge,2005). At this point, Maryam expresses her view:

“I am self-segregated and afraid of politics. Concurrently, I do not have a willingness to participate [she stops a moment and then she keeps talking]. when I obtained the citizenship, I
did not think about the political participation at all since I did not want to participate neither before nor after naturalization”.

Considering all the responses, the figure below shows the overall reasons for non-participation politically. The first bar shows a lack of information on that non-citizens can vote during their residency. The second bar represents people who have a trauma (even direct or indirect) due to prior political experiences in the country of origin, which effect on their political participation in Sweden. Thirdly, Swedish language difficulties prevent them from having a comprehensive view of the political rights in the host country. The fourth bar represents those who do not have a self-interest (do not care about the politics at all). Lack of encouragement from the family or friends and so on is displayed in the fifth bar, and the sixth bar shows those who have time constraints especially the participants who work and women who are busy with their domestic chores and kids. Finally, the last bar represents participants who do not believe in democracy; although they live in a democratic country.

Figure (3): Reasons for non-political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Sweden

4. Effects of the Perior Political Experince

Ramakrishnan (2005), does not concentrate on demographic and socio-economic factors in his study but provides an argument asserting that immigrants who come to the USA from countries with non-democratic regimes are less likely to vote than immigrants coming from democratic countries. A similar result was found in studies on immigrants to Canada and Australia by Bilodeau in 2008. The authors highlight the effect of past experiences of democracy on immigrants and its impact on the rate and quality of political participation, i.e., voting (Ramakrishnan, 2005; Bilodeau, 2008).
In the current study, the participants were asked about their previous political experiences in their country of origin—Iraq and whether those political experiences have motivated them to continue being engaged with politics in the host country—Sweden. Some of the participants described in detail their stories which reveal how they were directly affected by their political participation, while others described their indirect political experiences (as experienced by their relatives). Thus, their prior political experiences are divided into two categories (direct prior political experiences and indirect prior political experiences) and illustrated as follows.

**Direct Prior Political Experience:**

Different reasons such as the trauma of prior political experience in the home country can be the main reason to avoid being engaged in political issues even they move to a democratic country. Some researchers (Ramakrishnan, 2005; Bilodeau, 2008), refer to it in their studies that concentrated on the effect of past experiences of democracy by immigrants and its impact on the rate and quality of political participation, i.e., voting. Besides, their arguments asserted the high impact of non-democratic regimes on the immigrants even after they move to democratic countries. (ibid)

For example, Harith who is a participant in the current study stated that his previous political experience was not normal at all. It had begun when he was 15 years old, after joining the Communist Party in Iraq. The Iraqi government has begun to harass members of the Party that Harith belongs to. Consequently, his family had to flee from their home in Mosul to Baghdad due to assassinations, imprisonment, and torture, especially for those who are not Muslims like him (Christian). After Harith’s arrest and detention for more than two years, he went out and completed his studies and did not think to leave Iraq despite what he had to face. When he came to Sweden, he believed that his stay in Sweden would be a short period, but the same political regime stayed in Iraq for a long time. Finally, he was forced to live far away from his family for more than 26 years. As a result of his severe experience, he decided to avoid belonging to any party, instead advises his daughters to work voluntarily in civil society organizations. Thus, no one of his children has joined a political party, which makes him happy. He expressed his feeling:

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‘If one of my family members wants to participate politically in a non-democratic country, I will never encourage her/him, and I will do my best to prevent them from reaching there since they will go to the hell’.
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In the same context, Ja’qoob added:

"My previous experience was not an incentive for me to continue political activities in the new country. I spent fifteen years of hard political work in Iraq [he sighs]. So I do not advise my loved ones to enter the political arena. Despite the availability of political and civil rights in Sweden, I do not motivate anyone.[He stops talking suddenly]. I will not decide to re-join any political party again; instead, I work as a volunteer in five local non-governmental associations to help the disabled people”.

Ja’qoob also had political experience in the past and said:

"I think the political work only brings fatigue and negatively affects the individual's relationship with his family[he sighs]. Thus, I hate the word 'politics' because my country of origin- Iraq- is not democratic and I had faced all types of torture, jails, and exclusion when I was there.[he stops for a while and keeps talking], so I came to Sweden and decided to leave the politics completely”.

Saman in this context commented, too:

"I was arrested and jailed twice in Iraq as a result of my joining to the Iraqi Communist Party which was against Ba'ath party at that time. So, I left Iraq many years ago after having a hard political experience in."

"For me, I prevent my children moving away from political work if they want since they are Swedish naturalized citizens, but I attempt to advise without forcing them to join or leave the political participation."

Sameem said: "My previous experience in Iraq was very harsh and I was imprisoned and tortured for several years because of my membership in the Communist Party and I am a Yezidi. I was opposite of the Ba’ath Party. As a result of the prior experience, I did not want to go in the way of politics again, and I prevented my family members and friends from belonging to any political party in the nondemocratic countries since they will expose themselves to danger”.

"It is not surprising that the Yezidi community has no politically active women in Sweden, especially in Malmö, because the last humanity catastrophe of Yazidis in Iraq in 2014 made them afraid of politics and they no longer believe people around them”, he added.

In the same way, Soran talked about his previous political activity in his country of origin:

"After the separation of Kurdistan in 1991, I became a soldier [peshmerga] since I believed in political participation. In the same year, the fight between Talabani’s and Barzani’s (Kurds Parties) began and lasted for nearly seven years, many of Kurds died as a result. Then, I knew that there are no real political and noble goals to serve the community, all the political parties are fighting for money and their private interests. Thus, I decided to withdraw from the army and pay more attention to my family only.[he stops for a moment]. My family members or any person I love, if they decide to participate politically, I will advise them to avoid participating especially, if they participate in a country like Iraq. The conduct of political parties there is complicated and wrong -particularly for females”. 
Waleed added that if one of his children wants to participate politically in non-democratic countries such as Iraq, he will do his best to advise her/him to avoid going there. Since the Iraqi regulations are harsh and bloody, Waleed fears that they will face the torture and marginalization that he witnessed before.

Nawal expressed her feeling by the following:

“My previous political experience made me sad for everyone seriously thinks in politics, neglects her/his family because of it.”

Overall, many of the participants were members of the Communist Party who were against Arab Baáth Party. The communist members were arrested, imprisoned, persecuted by the previous Iraqi regime. As a result, these types of suffering made them moving away from political participation. The reaction of the political regime in Iraq made them unbelieving of political participation everywhere and preferred being isolated from politics. It is not surprising, and they advise their family members to avoid joining any political party especially in non-democratic countries as Iraq.

**Indirect Prior Political Experience:**

Peter asserts that belonging emerges from the person’s experience and interaction with the world. (Peter et al.). Regarding the notion of belonging, Mahar, Cobigo, and Stuart (2013) confirm that it as subjective derives from a reciprocal relationship developed from shared experiences, beliefs, or personal characteristics. As a result, the satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and belonging favors emotional engagement (Peter et al., 2015). Likewise, some researchers mention that the political participation of immigrants determines how immigrants become involved in the respective political system. (Hochschild and Mollenkopf, 2009; Zapata-Barrero et al., 2013)

In this study, Iraqis’ political experiences in their home country prevented them from interacting politically in the host country. They did not become involved and refused to be since their shared political experiences and beliefs are associated with their motivations and convictions. However, some of the participants lost the motivation, not because of their prior political participation in their country of origin, but their relatives' sufferings who had previous political participation against the non-democratic regime in Iraq. Their personal feelings made them
isolated and created a barrier against their integration politically. Their responses explained this issue in depth.

Some participants in this study had no previous political participation in Iraq, but they had relatives who were affected by unhumanitarian punishments and killed for their political participation against Saddam's regime. As a result, several participants were affected indirectly. In this regard Maryam said:

“My younger brother aged twenty years was killed in Iraq because of his opinions against the dictator regime, and I lost my loved ones for the same reason. After all my sufferings and loss of my loved people, how can I think on political issues again?"[she stops and cries] .. "I dislike political issues at all.’’

[Zahraá seems sad and says].. ‘I hate to participate politically.’

Moderator: “Can you explain the reasons behind your hatred towards political participation, please?’’, Zahra´a expressed her feeling as:

“Although, my family and I did not participate in any political activity against Saddam's regime, we affected by it indirectly. When the Iraq-Iran war began in 1980, we were forcibly deported to Iran. The reason behind that was my third grandfather had been born in Iran, so we had to relocate immediately according to the hard Baàth Party rules of that time”. [She emitted a long deep audible breath expressive of sadness and completed]. “What happened to me, and my loved ones in the past does not encourage me to participate politically. If my sons ask me to belong to a certain party, I would not be happy at all since I still remember the tragedy and torture my family had to face. Finally, I hate all the political regimes since I do not believe in democracy”.

She added that they witnessed miserable times since they were forced to move from place to place without seeing their loved ones. Thus, her previous sufferings prevent her from thinking on political issues again. In the same way, Elaaf described her opinion:

“ I do not belong to any political party or even think to join in the future. Even though, I am a Swedish citizen from birth and have a fully comprehensive view of my political rights, knowing my mother's suffering does not encourage me to participate politically”.

Her mother’s brother was suspected of belonging to an Islamic party against the Ba´ath Party during Saddam's regime in 1981, the Iraqi security forces arrested and imprisoned him. Moreover, the political regime executed her mother’s bother, all of their possessions were taken and forcibly displaced her mother’s family. Then the family fled to a neighboring country. As a result of these bitter experiences her mother has a deep sorrow throughout her life, so Elaaf decided to move away from politics in general.
Hanaá expressed her feelings, although she and her husband do not have any direct past political experience, what has happened to Turkmen (their relatives) in Iraq made them hate politics. In this regard, she said:

“Our previous experience in Iraq as Turkoman nationals has made us move away from politics. When we were in Iraq, in the wartime, Saddam treated us as first-class citizens to send our sons to be killed in the war. In peacetime, he considered us as second-class citizens. As a result of discrimination based on ethnicity and race that we faced in Iraq, I do not want to be a member of a political party, neither in the past nor the future”.

Maryam added: “I and most of the Iraqi Circassian minority (Christian), before and after our emigration, do not care about politics because it brings troubles. We believe that the main reason for increasing problems around the world is the ‘politics.’ So we decided to live without problems that is why we came to Sweden as refugees to live with our children in peace”.

At this point, the moderator’s opening question was aimed at helping the group consider the preliminary objective of the focus group discussion and therefore the participants were requested to elaborate on preliminary findings. Zahraá and Maryam provided insight into other people’s expectations that they do not like to involve in political issues. The reason behind that comes from the challenges they experienced in their youth when they were living in Iraq. This dialogue leads to a pause followed by a change of direction from the moderator. This extract is interesting because it seems that participants do not follow the discussion path if they felt not secure to say something. Maryam and Zahraá seemed not willing to discuss political issues which were obvious by their replies.

It is evident through this discussion that prior indirect political experiences in non-democratic countries have a negative impact on the rate of political participation of immigrants. It may be a strong psychological reason to discourage people from participating politically since those immigrants lost their family members who were against the political regime in non-democratic countries. As a result, even if they move to democratic countries will lack self-interest in politics, since the sufferings of their relatives discourage them from political participation again in the future. Overall, the result of this study agrees with the suggestions made by Bilodeau (2008) and Ramakrishnan (2005) that the effect of the past experiences where people had been negatively affected, has a negative impact on the rate of political participation in the receiving country even if the host country is a democratic state. Thus, they also prevent their family members and relatives from participating politically since they believe the ‘politics’ will destroy everything positive.
It is not surprising that the previous studies in different contexts do not focus more on the relationship between the weak political participation of immigrants and their direct or indirect dilemma in their country of origin, especially when the immigrants are from non-democratic countries.

5. **Information About the Political Rights in Sweden:**

According to Marshall (1950), the political integration means all members, including immigrants, characterize a politically integrated society, as well as enable them to access their political rights and resources that are considered reasonable in the legislative community members.

The author then suggests a politically integrated individual as one person with the power and resources to participate in the political community on the same conditions as other citizens (Bevelander, 2008). Furthermore, the responsibility for integration rests not with one particular group, but rather with many actors-immigrants themselves, the host government, institutions, and communities. (Penninx, 2003).

It is important, in this context, to know how the immigrants obtain the resources involving full information about their political rights in Sweden. The participants mentioned different resources, for example, Nawal said:

``my information regarding my political rights has increased by dependence on myself, watching T.V., and my son’’[Soran completes] ‘’my eldest son discusses me every day and tries to explain me the aims of the Swedish parties’’.

Nawal and Soran added that their eldest sons discuss with them various political topics since their children attended Swedish schools that inform them about their political rights as citizens. Ja’qoob depended on himself to know his political rights, and watching the political news on television, searching via the internet and attending seminars.

Harith and Saman said:

``We have gained information by our friends(Iraqi immigrants from the first generation), reading of parties’ programs, attending various seminars and lectures in various associations.’’. While Elaaf got the information about her political rights from the school:

``For me, the school is the main resource because I live in Sweden since my birth, so there were special lectures and courses about civic and political rights in Swedenin the school.’’.

Zahraā has got information from another resource, she explained:
'I have known about some of my political rights through attending seminars and lectures in religious places and associations.'

In conclusion, Harith said:

“I believe that everyone must be aware towards her/his political and civil rights in the place where s/he lives and elsewhere.”

Nevertheless, the problem associated with using personal knowledge items is that there is a probability that specific respondents may overestimate their knowledge levels.

In the same context, Baogang He explains that only a minority of citizens have a high level of knowledge on electoral laws, and this is uniform around the world, not restricted to a specific area (He, 2006).

In the present study, most of the Iraqi immigrants have weak information about their political rights. On the other hand, some participants have full information about their political rights in Sweden due to their self-interest of getting more information about this field, while the others did not get more information since they consider political participation is not a necessary aspect in their integration process in Sweden.

7. CONCLUSION

This thesis aimed to analyze the factors that encourage or discourage Iraqi immigrants (resident non-citizens and Swedish naturalized) from the political participation in Malmö-Sweden. The study concentrated on the Iraqi immigrants’ perspectives, beliefs, opinions, and experiences about their political participation in their host country. This study provides an account of how this minority understand and define political participation, motivations for participation, reasons for non-participation, effects of their prior political experiences, and information sources of their political rights in Sweden.

Two parts inspire the analysis of this study: data analysis through questionnaires and analysis of information derived through participants’ responses during the focus group discussion.

Overall, the participants’ responses show that they assign diverse meanings to the political participation and value it in regards to the sense of political integration, and belonging.
In the literature, Öhrvall (2006) suggests that employed are more likely to vote than unemployed, women more than men, and political participation increases with income, age, and educational level in Sweden.

According to the present study, Iraqis employed in Sweden do not have a desire to participate politically, and their justification is that time constraints prevent them from being engaged with political issues. Besides, the results of this study do not agree with Öhrvall’s claim, and the outcomes confirm that men are more likely to vote than women, and the political participation also decreases with income, age, and higher educational level in Sweden. Moreover, it is confirmed that the culmination of social and economic disadvantages can lead immigrants to have less desire to engage in both institutionalized and non-institutionalized forms of political activities in Sweden.

According to Burchardt et al. (2002); Öhrvall (2006), acquisition of citizenship can have a real impact on people's willingness to engage in societal decisions, i.e., the decision to vote. Moreover, the long residency in the host country also may increase the political participation of immigrants. The results of the current study show, all the participants did not vote before getting the citizenship because they did not know that non-citizen has a right to vote. Therefore, their participation in elections after acquiring the citizenship is not an indicator of increasing their willingness to participate politically, but because they lacked the necessary information about their political rights through residency period. Hence, most of the participants criticized the Swedish government for not educating them through specific lectures in SFI schools on their political rights before and after naturalization.

Following the Treaty of Amsterdam (Council Tampere 1999) Sweden attempts to increase immigrants’ political participation, and in reality, has provided the immigrants with many political rights. In this context, the Iraqi immigrants mentioned that it is an excellent thing that Sweden provides its newcomers with political rights, but the most important thing is to educate and inform those immigrants about these rights in details when they arrive in Sweden.

According to the findings of this study, the factors that encourage Iraqi immigrants for political participation in Malmö-Sweden may have various shapes. For instance, some of the participants believe in necessity in political participation a sacred duty, get encouraged by others that they are closely associated with (religious community, family, friends). Also, they consider the voting is a democratic right and responsibility, or they get attracted to a specific party that
addresses a specific issue (e.g., protection of immigrants’ rights or desire to improve the welfare of particular groups in society).

Likewise, there are different reasons behind non-political participation of Iraqi immigrants in Malmö-Sweden. They consist of; lack of encouragement (by friends, associations or family), prevention of belonging two parties, language difficulties (comprehensive information about the elections are not accessible in their native language-Arabic), time constraints, not having information that non-citizens are allowed to vote in the local/regional election). Besides, lack of personal interest (no political issue is essential for them, do not believe in democracy, trauma from previous experiences that causes fear of participation), being old or lack of health does not encourage some immigrants to participate politically.

Results of this study highlighted the negative impact of the trauma from the past political experiences in non-democratic countries, as suggested by Bilodeau (2008) and Ramakrishnan (2005). The findings revealed that all Iraqi participants might be affected directly or indirectly by the previous political experiences in Iraq and this caused a dilemma to discourage them from participating politically even the host country is a democratic state. At the same time, most of the participants who witnessed a difficult time in Iraq, prevent their family members and relatives of political participation since they believe the political issues may destroy everything.

There is a lack of literature where the researchers focus more on the relationship between the political participation of immigrants in the host country and the dilemma experienced by them in their country of origin, especially in non-democratic countries. Besides, there are no previous studies that emphasize on negative effect on Iraqi immigrants who did not have direct experiences of political participation against the political regime, nevertheless affected indirectly by their relatives’ past experiences.

Furthermore, the Iraqi immigrants have got information about their political rights in Sweden through various resources such as school, friends, self-dependence, T.V., associations or club, religious places, family, specific courses, or early/first-generation immigrants.

In conclusion, it can be viewed that the Iraqi minority has low political participation and the most prominent reason for this behavior is associated with lack of individual motivations, and personal characteristics, beliefs, and convictions.
8: LITERATURE and OTHER SOURCES

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9. APPENDIX:

QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS OF THE FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW.

1. What is a respondent’s age?
2. What is your place of birth?
3. To which religious-ethnic minority do you belong?
4. What is your marital status?
5. What is your current employment status?
6. What is your educational background?
7. What is your legal situation in Sweden?
8. What is a type of your migration?
9. What is your duration of residency in Sweden?
10. If so, when did you acquire citizenship?
11. Did you have full information about your political rights when you were a non-citizen in Sweden?
12. Do you have full information about your political rights as a Swedish naturalised citizen?
13. Which elections (Local and National) did you vote in?
14. Are you a member in ethnic association or humanitarian organisation?
15. If yes, Does your membership motivate your participation politically?
16. Are you a member in a political party in Sweden? If yes, for how long you have been a member?
17. If not, would you be interested in becoming a member of a political party?
18. Have you had prior political experience?
19. If yes, (where, specify): home country or elsewhere.
20. Do you have any comments you would like to make?

THE ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS INVOLVED THE FOLLOWING:

Interview Question 1- According to your view, what does the political participation mean?

Interview Question 2- If you voted in election in (residency and citizenship), what are your motivations for participation?.

Interview Question 3-If you did not participate, what are your reasons for non-participation?
Interview Question 4- (If you have a prior political experience), has your previous political engagements motivated you to continue being engaged with politics in your new country? Motivated by whom?

Interview Question 5- How did you get information about your political rights in Sweden?