

**Mendel University in Brno**

**Faculty of Regional Development and International Studies**

**Main Issues in Democratization of  
Iraqi Kurdistan**

Bachelor Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This Bachelor Thesis deals with the Democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan. The main objective is to analyze the transformation process of the democratization since the Iraq's new constitution in 2005. This Thesis uses democracy definitions by scholars such as Robert Dahl and Terry Lynn Karl. The theory is applied to determine the primary framework and to provide a deeper insight in to the Iraqi Kurdistan region. Also, the Thesis incorporates the importance of the political parties to describe its relation towards the Kurdistan Region. The results show that the outgoings of the main issues relates to democracy changes in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. The findings further reveal significant events that explain the current situation in the region.

**Keywords:** the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Democracy, Democratization, the Kurdistan Regional Government, Political elites

## **Abstrakt**

Tato Bakalářská Práce pojednává o demokratizaci v Iráckém Kurdistanu. Hlavním cílem je analyzovat procesní změny demokratizace od vzniku nové ústavy roku 2005. Tato práce používá definice demokracie od odborníků jako Robert Dahl a Terry Lynn Karl. Tato teorie je použita, aby určila základní rámec a poskytla hlubší náhled na region Iráckého Kurdistanu. Práce také zahrnuje politický význam politických stran, aby popsala její vztah ke Kurdskému regionu. Výsledky ukazují, že hlavní problémy se vztahují na demokratické změny v regionu Iráckého Kurdistanu. Výzkum dále odhaluje důležité události, které vysvětlují současnou situaci v regionu.

**Klíčová slova:** Irácko-Kurdský Region, Demokracie, Demokratizace, Vláda Kurdského Regionu, Politické elity

## المخلص:

إن اطروحة البكالوريوس هذه تتناول الديمقراطية في كردستان العراق. والهدف الرئيسي هو تحليل عملية التحول الديمقراطي منذ ان وضع الدستور العراقي الجديد في عام 2005. في هذا العمل تم إستخدام تعريفات الديمقراطية التي وضعها علماء مثل روبرت داهل و.تيري لين كارل حيث تم تطبيق النظرية لتحديد الإطار الأساسي وتقديم رؤية أعمق إلى إقليم كردستان العراق. كما تتضمن الرسالة الأهمية السياسية للأحزاب السياسية لوصف علاقتها بإقليم كردستان. وتظهر النتائج أن القضايا الرئيسية تتعلق بالتغيرات الديمقراطية في إقليم كردستان العراق. وتكشف النتائج أيضا عن حصول أحداث هامة تفسر الحالة الراهنة في المنط.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Turkey)
AQI	Al-Qaeda in Iraq
BC	Before Christ
BPD	Barrels per day
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GOI	Government of Iraq
IDPs	Internally Displaced People
ISIS	Islamic State in Iraq and Syria
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDSP	Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party
KIU	Kurdistan Islamic Union
KNA	Kurdish National Assembly
KNK	Kurdistan National Congress
KRG	Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI	Kurdish Region of Iraq
MOH	Ministry of Health
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PKK	Kurdistan Workers' Party
PSA	production-sharing agreement
PUK	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD	Democratic Union Party
SOMO	Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States
VAT	Value Added Tax

# INTRODUCTION

Democracy is a pivotal characteristic of truly free and prospering societies. As such, this thesis aims to explore the theories of democracy and democratization with the perspective of the Kurdish Region of Iraq (KRI). 'Weak states', such as the KRI, have a weak economy, low levels of social services and high levels of corruption. Democratization in these countries is generally low level and reform is required. As such, it is important to understand democratization before being able to improve the democracy in the KRI and thereby improve it's standing in the world.

To understand what democracy is, how it is defined and how it develops (democratization), a literacy review will be conducted to assess research on democracy and democratization, and their importance and relevant parts will be discussed. Focus will then be on the recent historical events in Kurdistan that have increased democratization in the area, namely those from the elections in Kurdistan in 1992 with more focus on the events after the fall of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship and the Iraqi constitution of 2005 up until present day. Areas of interest will include corruption, micro- and macro-economic reasons, and externalities beyond the control of the Kurdish people in the region.

Kurdistan is neither a politically defined entity nor a state but an area of some 191,600km<sup>2</sup> straddling the boundaries of several countries, notably Turkey, Iran and Iraq. Within the area are some twenty-five million ethnic Kurds and globally at least 32 million, the Kurds probably represent the largest nation in the world to have been denied an independent state. For most of the twentieth century, the Kurds have fought to obtain greater autonomy within their different states, while retaining the ultimate vision of an independent Kurdistan. However, the problems they face differ from state to state and they have been unable to develop a cohesive approach. Within the area, Iraqi Kurdistan has for more than ten years acted as a de facto state. Located at the crossroads of the world, it is of compelling geopolitical interest and constitutes a key global flashpoint. It is surrounded by states which are actually or potentially hostile: Syria, Turkey, Iran and the remainder of Iraq. However, as a landlocked territory it is dependent upon the goodwill of neighbors for its communication system. It remains part of Iraq and is located on the headwaters of the major rivers but it is ethnically distinct. The political situation is as fascinating as the geographical.

Today, the Kurdish question is well known to the rest of the world. Kurds were one of the few nations in the Middle-East who publicly and entirely support the American efforts in Iraq.

Since the end of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship in 2003, Kurdistan region has faced many challenges to set up and strengthen a sustainable peace. According to the House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, UKs government policy report of 2014-15 on the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the Kurdistan Region is the best governed—and least dysfunctional—part of Iraq, with a developing democratic culture and relatively stable economy. It is professionally and effectively defended by its national guard, the Peshmerga, the Kurdish Peshmerga forces hold de facto control over the three Kurdish-Iraqi provinces and act as the army of the KRG.

This thesis will aim to identify, describe and explain the main events of democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan to discover what the main issues are to its impediment. A conclusion will follow, summarising the findings and then some recommendation for the continued democratization of Iraqi Kurdistan.

## **EMPIRICAL CONTEXT**

Kurdistan, (the land of the Kurds), is today divided between several states: north-western Iran, northern Iraq, north-eastern Syria, south-eastern Turkey, and small parts of Armenia. The Kurds compose one of the ancient nations of the Middle East (Mirza Imad, 2007).

The Kurds are the world's largest population without a state of their own. At least 32 million Kurds live in what they call Kurdistan: North Kurdistan in Iraq, South Kurdistan in Turkey, West Kurdistan in Syria, and East Kurdistan in Iran. Approximately five million Kurds reside in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and about one third of Kurds live outside Kurdistan.

The area of 'Kurdistan' covers about 190 000 km<sup>2</sup> in Turkey, 125 000 km<sup>2</sup> in Iran, 78 736 km<sup>2</sup> in Iraq (including disputed territories), and 12 000 km<sup>2</sup> in Syria. There are about 5 million Kurds in Iraq (not all of whom live in the KRI) and the population of the KRI (stated by the KRG at 5.2 million) also includes non-Kurds as well as refugees and internally displaced people IDPs especially around Kirkuk. There is also a substantial minority population of Arab and Turkoman, as well as a large refugee population of Syrians and Iraqis fleeing fighting between the regime of Bashar Al Assad and opposition groups, or escaping areas controlled by ISIS (the 'Islamic State of Iraq and Al- Sham [Syria]' or 'Da'esh', its Arabic acronym). Iran has 5–7.9 million Kurds, Turkey 12 million (or possibly up to 22.5 million), and Syria 2–2.5 million (Mills and Sen, 2016).

Spoken language varies in dialects of Kurdish and Farsi that is related to Indo-European language of which Kurmanji and Sorani are the main varieties within Iraqi Kurdistan, and these dialects are not easily mutually intelligible. The Kurdish sectarian majority is Sunni Muslim, with a Shi'ite minority (Mills and Sen, 2016). The Feyli Kurds are Shi'a, and live in both Iran and Iraq. There are also minorities of non-Islamic religions: Yezidis and the closely related Shabak, the Ahl-e Haqq, and some tens of thousands of Christians (Mills and Sen, 2016).

# **METHODOLOGY**

## **Thesis statement**

Firstly, the theoretical aspects of democracy and democratization will be reviewed to frame the thesis. Secondly, the analytical part will focus on a development of the region of Iraqi Kurdistan historically focusing on even affecting democratization, then expand on the main issues of democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan. Lastly, the Thesis will discuss some possible outcomes and some recommendations which may improve democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan.

## **Thesis Objective**

The Thesis objective is to theoretically incorporate the Kurdish case into the wider theory of democratization. More specifically, this research is devoted to the analysis of the ongoing process and searching for the main issues of democratization in Kurdistan. By understanding the barriers to democratization, this thesis hopes to reduce their negative influence on the benefits of democracy. As such, focus is on the negative aspects of the Iraqi Kurdistan democracy that are dragging democratization backwards, as opposed to the positive forces that are trying to pull democracy forward.

## **Methodology**

This Thesis applies a qualitative research approach gathering a collection of different literature research including academic publications (academic books and journals) for the theoretical and analytical, secondary data sources including journals, websites of official organizations, news reports, and articles that dealt with the regime change in Iraq and the development in Kurdistan and other internet sites containing valuable information.

## **Research question**

- *What have been the main issues since the start of recent democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan and how have these issues impacted and affected the democratization of Iraqi Kurdistan?*

## **Operational questions**

- *What are the main issues of the democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan?*

## **Hypothesis**

There are multiple and varied issues as to why Iraqi Kurdistan has not progressed further towards a truly democratic, due to both internal forces and external forces (externalities) but the majority will be within the reach of Iraqi Kurdistan and far less will be beyond the reach of the Kurdistan people.

# **1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

## **1.1 Democracy and Democratization**

### **1.1.1 Democracy**

Democracy is from the Greek word Demos (People) and Kratos (Rule) referred to the rule by the people, democracy today refers to the liberal representative one. Democracy as a legitimate political system has not always been conceived this way, this is a relatively new phenomenon in world politics. Today, in contradiction to monarchies and aristocracies, democracy entails a political community in which there is some form of political equality among the people. However, the concept of democracy is far from being one-voiced and there is much confusion about the meaning of both rule and people (Held 2006; Hag & Harrop 2001).

The way we define democracy is important because it says much about what we believe that a democratic political system should include and/or exclude.

### **1.1.2 – Definitions of Democracy**

Definitions of liberal democracy perhaps most famously articulated by scholars such as Robert Dahl (2006) and Terry Lynn Karl (1990).

Sartori (1987) says democratic characteristics can be found in all political systems, but the degree of democracy differs from system to system. He emphasizes that measuring the degrees of democracy comes after its definition. Schumpeter (1976) was the first to define democracy as an institutional arrangement that allows political leaders, as candidates, to compete for citizens' votes in regular elections in order to arrive at political positions. Sørensen (1991) convincingly argues that democracy is the result of interplay between structural conditions, economic, social, cultural, other conditions created historically, and the decisions taken by current political actors, because preconditions alone cannot predict whether the actors will structure democracy or not, but they can provide some information about what kind of outcome we can expect from the players.

Karl and Schmitter (1991) go further to argue that what have been considered as preconditions of democracy are in fact its outcomes. Thus, economic growth, higher levels of education, media exposure and even civic political culture should be treated as products of democratization efforts, rather than as prerequisites. Karl (1990) stresses

the significance that a minimalist definition of democracy should include the question of accountability that rulers have to the ruled through mechanisms of representation and the rule of law, and the civilian control over the military, that is a significant challenge to many new democracies in the developing countries. (Mirza Imad, 2007)

A middle-ranged definition, which is integrating theory and empirical research, of democracy developed by Dahl makes a distinction between democracies and non-democracies which allows us to measure the level of democracy. The definition provided by Dahl (1982; 1989) is the most used echoed within the study of democracy, with various other theories including additions or omissions to Dahl's theory.

For Dahl though, a political order is not classified as democracy – or polyarchy as he calls it – unless these seven institutions are present:

1. Elected officials; that political power is vested in elected officials.
2. Free and fair elections; that electing officials is conducted through periodically free and fair elections without resort to coercion.
3. Inclusive suffrage; that practically all adults have the right to vote in the election of officials.
4. Right to run for office; that practically all adults – with delimited age - have the right to run for elective offices.
5. Freedom of expression; that all citizens have the right of self-expression - including criticism of the government's policies on various topics - without fearing persecution.
6. Alternative information; that alternative information should be available and protected by law.
7. Associational autonomy; that citizens have the right to form relatively independent associations, including political parties and interest groups, as a manner of seeking their and other's rights.

Schmitter and Karl (1995) add two other points to Dahl's seven conditions:

8. Freedom of act; that elected officials have the right to exercise political power without being interrupted or interfered with by unelected officials, whether it is to be from the opposition or military generals.

9. Independence; that the government must be self-governing, and able to act independently of constraints imposed by some other overarching political system. Berg-Schlosser (2000) on the other hand describe this point as state formation and nation-building, which must be considered as prerequisites to any meaningful democratization, meaning that a form of stable political institutions must exist before being able to speak on behalf of the people, which is the main aim of democratization.

Robust definitions of democracy suggest that democracy can be defined as a governmental system in which virtually all citizens are entitled to participate in decision-making processes and in which elected decision makers are highly responsive to majority preferences. They also offer significant protection for civil liberties. Such systems rest on popular sovereignty, accountability of rulers, freedom, and the rule of law. More specifically, as Dahl writes, democratic systems are highly inclusive - as measured by the degree to which most of the population can participate in fair and free elections, run for office, elect leaders, and legally participate in public and political life - and allow for wide-ranging contestation of ideas (opposition), as seen in freedom of expression, access to alternative sources of information, organizational autonomy, and a vibrant political culture in which diverse ideas can be legally and peacefully debated.

A critical part of liberal democracy is that actual decision making is done by elected officials (and not by unelected leaders operating behind the scenes, for instance); there is horizontal accountability between officeholders and government institution and extensive protections for both group and individual freedoms.

## **1.2 Types of Democracy**

### **1.2.1 Federalism**

A federation or federal state is a political entity defined as a union of partially self-governing states or regions under a central (federal) government. A popular ‘broad’ definition of federalism is that of Daniel Elazar, which advocates three dominant political subcultures: moralistic (pursuit of common good), traditionalistic (protection of elite centred status quo), and individualistic (minimalist government with free-market values) (Elazar, 1966). There is also a ‘narrow’ differentiated definition of federalism following Wheare which forms the basis for much research –

*“By the federal principle I mean the method of dividing powers so that the general and regional governments are each, within a sphere, co-ordinate and independent”* (Wheare, 1946).

Law (2013) therefore identified two distinct federal structures; the federal state and the federal union of states. Law went on to describe how federal unions of states such as the EU have been previously ignored in research (2013), Iraq and Kurdistan, as such, would be classed as a federal state relationship.

However, I think the best description of Iraqi Kurdistan would be to identify it as a Federacy. A federacy is a political system in which an “otherwise unitary state develops a federal relationship” (Stepan, 1999) with some part of itself, in our case a territorially and ethnicity. O’Leary (2005) also describes a federacy in a federation as a semi-sovereign entity which would have a form of government that shares features of both a federation and a unitary state.

### **1.2.2 Parliamentarism and Presidentialism**

Parliamentarism means the executive branch of government (Prime Minister/President) derives its democratic legitimacy from its ability to command the legislative branch, i.e. parliament, but the executive branch is also accountable to that parliament. In a parliamentary system, the head of state (president) is usually a different person from the head of government (Prime Minister). This is in contrast to a presidential system, where the head of state is also often the head of government, and most importantly, the executive branch does not derive its democratic legitimacy from the legislature.

It is widely accepted today within the democratization literature that, dependant on the size of the political entity, democracy under parliamentarism lives longer than under presidentialism. Linz & Valenzuela (1994), Przeworski (1996) concluded in their comprehensive work that democracies are less likely to survive when they combine presidentialism with a fragmented party system. A fragmented party system is classified by the number of relevant parties and the degree of fragmentation or disunity between the parties (Sartori, 1976). Duverger (1980) describes the mixture of parliamentarism-presidentialism as a semi-presidentialism system. Combining presidentialism with a legislature branch that has no single party majority is a 'kiss of death' for such systems, they can only expect to survive 15 years. Presidential democracies in which a single party does have a legislative majority can expect to live 26 years (Cheibub et al. 1996).

Further, a presidentialism political system is more likely to produce immobilizing executive/legislative deadlock than either parliamentary systems or two-party presidentialism (Mainwaring, Scott P, 1990). Thus the deadlock can appear in separation of powers between the legislative and the executive branches and also within the executive, i.e. between the president and the Prime Minister (Protsyk 1997). Because of the separation of powers, presidential systems lack means of ensuring that the president will enjoy the support of a majority in parliament.

Relevant to this thesis, Iraq also did not desire a presidential system for the above reasons but also out of fears that such a system would be dominated by the Shiite population (Der-Hagopian, 2009). As such, Iraq, and the Kurdish region of Iraq both have a parliamentary system, but it this does not mean that the rule of the people is being implemented.

### **1.3 Democratization**

Democratization, on the other hand, helps us to understand how countries democratize and what kind of challenges the political groups meet in the transitional phase. Furthermore, democratization theories define the most relevant factors that impact the progress of democracy. There has been important advancement in the theoretical studies of democratization. For example, levels of socio-economic and cultural development in a society are no longer seen as preconditions for democracy, but rather as conditions that can restrict or enhance the choices available for the key actors. However, as Sørensen (1991) clarifies that it is the hard work of individuals and groups that make democratization possible, furthermore, that there is no defined measure of assured success.

#### **1.3.1 Definitions of Democratization**

Democratization as a term describes the entire process of regime change, from the end of the previous authoritarian regime to the establishment and rooting of new democracies (Mirza Imad, 2007). Democratization is multi-stage, meaning that it is composed of both the ‘transition phase’, which can lead to a new political democracy or just form a new form of authoritarian rule (O’Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1992), to liberal democracy and its subsequent consolidation phase’ (Pridham and Lewis 1996; Pridham 2000).

Robust definitions of democracy suggest that democracy can be defined as a governmental system in which virtually all citizens are entitled to participate in decision-making processes and in which elected decision makers are highly responsive to majority preferences. They also offer significant protection for civil liberties. Such systems rest on popular sovereignty, accountability of rulers, freedom, and the rule of law.

More specifically, as Dahl writes, democratic systems are highly inclusive - as measured by the degree to which most of the population can participate in fair and free elections, run for office, elect leaders, and legally participate in public and political life - and allow for wide-ranging contestation of ideas (opposition), as seen in freedom of expression, access to alternative sources of information, organizational autonomy, and a vibrant political culture in which diverse ideas can be legally and peacefully debated.

A critical part of liberal democracy is that actual decision making is done by elected officials (and not by unelected leaders operating behind the scenes, for instance); there is horizontal accountability between officeholders and government institution and extensive protections for both group and individual freedoms.

Democratization is best understood as a complex, long-term, dynamic, and open-ended process, which consists of progress towards a more rule-based, more consensual and more participatory type of politics (Whitehead 2002). It is the process of subjecting all interests to political competition (Przeworski 1988). Democratization is not without complexity, meaning that the political actors in transition from pre-existing nondemocratic conditions carry a great deal of historical baggage with them that also involves many false starts, misjudgments, detours, and unintended consequences. There is usually a wide disjunction between how participants and informed observers anticipate *ex ante* that the process will develop, and how it is seen to have transpired *ex post* (Whitehead 2002).

## **1.4 Important Stages of Democratization**

### **1.4.1 Democratic Transition**

Democratic transition refers to a decisive stage. It commences when a previous totalitarian or authoritarian system begins to collapse leading to a situation in which the democratic structures begin to become recognized and the political elites adjust their behaviour to liberal democratic practices. Transitions from certain authoritarian regimes can be uncertain. It could lead to a new political democracy or just a new form of authoritarian rule (O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986; Przeworski 1992).

Transition tasks involve, above all, negotiating the constitutional settlement and the rules of procedure for political competition, but also dismantling authoritarian agencies and abolishing laws unsuitable for democratic politics (Pridham and Lewis 1996; Przeworski 1988).

The significance of a transitional study relies on its legacy for the post-transitional regime and politics. Different modes of transition would have distinct consequences for the later stage (Munck & Leff 1997). Some have prevailed in the transition face, yet neglected to unite their majority rules system, because new democracies are by definition 'fragile democracies' in the sense that at first they are not formally constituted, elite loyalties are almost certainly not yet confirmed and may well be questioned, while the different political, societal, and perhaps financial insecurities inalienable in the transition process may appear to be overwhelming (Pridham & Lewis 1996; Carothers 2002).

In many of these new democracies, democratic elections co-exist with remnant authoritarian traditions, as arbitrary exercise of power, low regime performance and low trust in and support for the democratic system. Karl (1990), and later, Karl and Schmitter (2002) show that in the majority of cases, modes of transition to democracy have been driven from below by reformists not in (or at odds with) the previous ruling elite.

The most imminent characteristic of transition is uncertainty, which is related to the process of transition itself. Structural factors may help shape the process of transition, but could be insufficient to guide and predict the outcome. (Gill 2000).

The identity of the actors who bring about the transition process is crucial for defining the strategies they employ and the impact that this factor has on the shape of

the post-transitional regime and politics because it will affect the pattern of elite competition (Munck & Leff 1997). Democracy may not be their main objective, but rather a means to another end or a by-product of a struggle for other ends (Sørensen 1991).

O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986) believe that pacts can play an important role in any regime change based on gradual instalment rather than a rapid transition. These pacts are usually seen as a temporary solution found to hinder unwanted and unexpected outcomes, and as a start to more permanent arrangements for solving the conflicts. Some of these arrangements can later become laws or parts of laws for the state, or as standard operating procedures for different agencies entering in state's affairs.

#### **1.4.2 Democracy Consolidation**

To Linz (1990), a consolidated democracy is one in which none of the major political actors, parties, or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic processes to gain power, meaning that democracy must be seen as the only viable alternative (Mirza Imad, 2007)

Different scholars have different views on when a democracy is considered to be consolidated. While some scholars (Pridham and Lewis 1996; Beetham 1994) measure the consolidation by the longevity of democracy, that a democratic regime is consolidated if the democratic core institutions have existed for a certain number of years.

Others measure it through the so-called two-election test approach, known as the transfer-of-power test, in which a democratic regime is consolidated when the first democratically elected government is defeated in free and fair elections, and accepts the defeat. Then, the major political actors will accept the rules of the game (Boussard 2003).

When elections are free and fair, they provide government leaders with incentives to accommodate demands of the electorate through policy reforms; failure to do so can cost them at the polls and at the next election. The adoption of democratic institutions and the emergence of democratic norms help enable opposition groups to organize for collective action to express their preferences and their grievances. The opposition are free to pursue their interests through nonviolent forms of protest without fear of repression. There is also a substantial body of research to show a robust relationship between adoption of democratic institutions and improvements in a nation's human rights performance. This includes grievances that might otherwise incite violence or revolts.

Democracies can address these issues through nonviolent means in a democratic state because the leaders are subject to the discipline of the ballot box

Elections are a central feature in classifying political systems into democracies or non-democracies, they also give power to the people. This gives incentives to authoritarian regimes who would wish to manipulate the outcomes of elections so that it would appear their regime is more democratic or that they wish to limit the power of the people. They may do this through different tactics, for example;

- Reserved positions:

Authoritarian rulers may try to restrict the range of elective office through the use of reserved positions. By Schedler, some authoritarian regimes allow voters to fill subordinate positions of public authority, while keeping the core of power shut outside the electoral competitiveness (Schedler 2002). Valenzuela (1992) adds what he calls 'reserved domains' to indicate limitation of the jurisdiction of elective offices exercised by authoritarian elements to protect their interest from being affected by democratically elected authorities. Keep but reword

- Access denial:

Preventing opposition forces from promoting their political campaign messages by denying them a reasonable access to media and campaign resources that leads to fewer alternatives for voters to choose from (Schedler 2002). Zakaria (1997) used the term illiberal democracies to describe political regimes that routinely ignore constitutional limits on their power and deprive citizens of basic rights and freedoms.

Furthermore, non-democratic rulers may also resort to intimidation means against the opposition candidates and by exploiting the existing socioeconomic inequality to buy poor's votes by using state resources, though considering them as clients, or for the same reason resorting to electoral fraud. Yet, after being elected, authoritarian forces can put the elected individuals under their tutelage of removing them from their positions (Schedler 2002).

When no major political actor tries to overthrow the democratically elected government, and the government does not have to devote all their resources to fighting nondemocratic groups, when a majority of the population consider democracy to be the best political system to be ruled by, even in times when the performance of

the government is low when all parties in society learn to solve, and get used to solving, conflicts within the democratic rules and norms, democracy can be considered consolidated.

## **2 DEMOCRACY IN KURDISTAN**

### **2.1 Pre-Democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan**

In Iraqi Kurdistan, Kurds have been subject to the most brutal episodes of repression that they have experienced in any of the four nations a history of betrayal and abuse. On many occasions since 1920 the Kurds have tried to rebel from Iraq's regimes but were brutally suppressed. From chances and possibilities of being an independent country, as for the Treaty of Sevres, which emerged in 1920 after World War I from the Paris Peace Conference, envisaged the possibility of an independent Kurdistan in what is now Turkey and parts of Iraq. Kurdish autonomous state has been disputed because of predominate geopolitical conditions and the struggles of competing world powers (Bulloch & Morris 1993). That treaty was never put into effect. The regime changed in Iraq after a coup d'état that overthrew the Hashemite monarchy, carried out by Free Officers and led by the brigadier Abd al-Karim Qasim the July 14th 1958. Qasim declared the new regime to be a republic. To where in Turkey Kurds were denied language and cultural right and their existence, by Qasim adopting a pro-Atatürk policy, according to which he excluded any recognition of the Kurdish existence, banned any Kurdish political activity by ordering the closure of the KDP bureau on 24 September 1961 and prepared for military assault. The Kurds were able to exhaust both Qasim's militarily and political capabilities, and pushed his regime towards his final downfall. He finally could not deter Baathists threat who overthrow him in a new coup d'état on 8 February 1963 (McDowall 2004; Entessar 1992).

The establishment of the Kurdistan region dates back to the March 1970 autonomy agreement between the Kurdish opposition and the Iraqi government, following years of heavy fighting (Mills and Sen, 2016). The agreement, however, failed to be implemented and by 1974 northern Iraq plunged into another round of bloody conflict between the Kurds and the Arab-dominated government of Iraq. Mullah Mustafa Barzani who was a founding father of contemporary Kurdish nationalism. Who has negotiated an agreement with Saddam Hussein, included some important points, such as the right of local self-government, the education in Kurdish language, and participating in the central government (Bulloch & Morris 1993) but Baghdad reneged on its commitment.

To the end of Kurdish revolutions of Barzanis leadership, where the Ba'ath Party was free to implement the Autonomy Law and the policies of arabization continued (Stansfield 2003) in 1975.

Where the most ultimate crime that was committed by Saddam Hussein that became president in 1979 of Iraq, gave his cousin Ali Hassan Al-Majid, known as "Chemical Ali", the full authority to eradicate the Kurds. Which resulted in the deaths of 150,000– 200,000 Kurds, the forced relocation of tens of thousands more, and the destruction of over 4,000 Kurdish villages. On March 16, 1988 Iraqi forces dropped the chemical bombs to the city of Halabja. In Halabja mustard gas killed up to 5,000 Kurds on March 16, 1988. Approximately 182,000 Kurds were killed between 1987 and 1988 and Over 4,000 villages were destroyed. At least 5,000 civilians died in a matter of hours in what was the most devastating use of unconventional weapons against a civilian population since World War II (Anderson & Stansfield 2004).

## 2.2 Establishment of KRG

After the 1990–1991 Gulf War, in 1992, the major political movements of **KDP (Kurdistan Democratic Party)** and **PUK (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan)** benefited from an autonomous safe haven and established a de facto Kurdish Regional Government (KRG). The first free, fair and democratic parliamentary election in the history of Iraq was held in Kurdistan on the 19 May 1992. After decades of dictatorship, the people in Kurdistan were finally able to vote for their representatives and they did so, voter turnout was very high. By 15 July 1992, the regional election led to the formation of the first Kurdistan National Assembly and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The elections were an accumulation of a multitude of factors; an international UN embargo on Iraq in 1991 contributed to Saddam Hussein withdrawing his forces and his administration from parts of Iraqi Kurdistan, Saddam Hussein enforced an additional internal embargo on the region stopping food and fuel supplies, disconnected electrical power, restrictions on movement of people. Therefore, following a strong desire from the public the Kurdistan Front (a group of different political groups in Iraqi Kurdistan), decided to establish an administration to provide essential public services and to meet the needs of the people to hold a general election.

After the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq that toppled the Ba’th regime, the Kurdistan Region was touted as a kind of “democratic beacon” (Oredsson and Schmidt, 2004) for the country and, indeed, the region.

Iraq’s new constitution in 2005, divided Iraq into federal regions that will handle their own domestic affairs while the Baghdad central government dealt with the international affairs. The constitution recognized and incorporated the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) into the Iraqi governmental system, the KRG assumed governmental responsibility in the federal region of Iraqi Kurdistan offering a democratic framework within which Iraqi Kurd’s voices could be heard. As such, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) via the Iraqi Kurdistan Parliament shares legislative power with the federal authorities in various areas such as finance, energy, human rights, to name but a few. It is the only area in Iraq officially recognised internationally as an autonomous regional entity (BBC, 2017).

Today, the region is officially governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) whose capital is in Erbil. The well-established status of the KRG, the wide base of domestic legitimacy-accorded Kurdish leaders, the strategic and economic status of the region, and internal and external support for stability—in some ways serve as impediments or counterforces to democratization.

Kurdistan is a parliamentary democracy with its own regional Parliament (Kurdish National Assembly) that consists of 111 seats (as stipulated in Law No. 1 passed by the KNA in 1992). To ensure minorities are represented in the KRG, 11 seats have been allocated to represent the Assyrian, Armenian, and Turkmen minority communities in the KRG-administered provinces (Barwari, 2009). Elections for the Kurdistan National Assembly were held in 2005, 2009, and 2013 and were mostly viewed as fair, although some opposition figures claimed irregularities.

Parties put forth a variety of candidates from many different backgrounds, and all men and women over the age of 18 were eligible to vote. In the 2010 Iraqi national parliamentary elections, the three provinces governed by the KRG boasted the highest voter turnout in the country—about 80 percent in Duhok province; 76 percent in Erbil, and 73 percent in Sulaimaniya. Voter turnout in regional Kurdish elections for the KNA runs at between 70 and 80 percent (i.e., about 74 percent in 2013 and 78.5 percent in 2009).

Parliamentary seats have been shared by the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) the PUK, the Gorran party who have become the major opposition party since 2013, several major opposition groups, minority representatives from the region's Christian and Turkmen communities, and several dozen women parliamentarians. Masoud Barzani, was elected president in 2005, re-elected in 2009 and In August 2013 and then again in 2015, his presidency was extended for two years. The next Iraqi Kurdistan Parliamentary elections are due to take place in 2017.

### **2.3 The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and the Government of Iraq (GOI)**

Iraq is a federal parliamentary representative democratic republic, which was introduced gradually after the 2003 US invasion (Manfreda, 2014). It is made up of executive, legislative and judicial branches. It is a multi-party system where executive power is predominantly exercised by the Prime Minister of the Council of Ministers as the head of government, and to a lesser extent the President of Iraq. The current Prime Minister of Iraq is Haider al-Abadi, the current President is Muhammad Fuad Masum. Legislative power is vested in the Council of Representatives and the Federation Council.

The leaders of the new Iraq adopted federalism to prevent the disintegration of Iraqi territorial unity. Major advocates of this project were the Kurds who no longer trusted a unitary centralised government dominated by Arabs. Hence why in 1992, the Kurdish National Assembly decided to adopt a parliamentary federalism as the only accepted form of political system for them to stay within Iraq, without renouncing their right to have an independent state. It is arguably meant to follow the American model of presidency in which a president is to be directly elected, but simultaneous with the KNA election.

The Iraqi and Kurdish governments are both parliamentary systems of democratic governance. The formal system of the KRG is highly inclusive, it is clearly an electoral democracy, holding regular, contested, and relatively free elections. Among the parties, the spectrum of political perspectives is also broad, including communist parties, Islamist parties, and those representing a variety of socioeconomic platforms. Kurdish politicians believe that their exceptional geopolitical location has put them in a complex bargaining position and limited their options in deciding the future of Kurdistan both before and after the regime change in Iraq in 2003.

However, although inclusion in formal institutions and processes is high and contestation is wide ranging, it is not necessarily safe; nor does it necessarily translate into accountable, horizontal power sharing. Inclusive processes notwithstanding, in practice the KRG has often functioned more like a party-state: a regime in which state institutions have very little autonomy and in which party membership and status - and relations to the ruling families - play a significant role in determining employment and

promotions in government, civil service, universities, and other public and many private institutions.

A person of note in Iraqi politics is Nouri al-Maliki of the Dawa Islamic Party, he was prime minister in of the Iraqi government from 2006 until 2014. Maliki favoured Shiites, who constitute about 55 percent of Iraq's population, ignoring the interests of Sunnis (20 percent), Kurds (20 percent), and other minorities (5 percent). Maliki made efforts to alienate the Kurds; contesting Kurdistan's ownership of natural resources and their rights to export oil and gas, the role of the Peshmerga and excluded them from U.S. military assistance programs, status of disputed territories, and delayed federal government's payment obligations. He took steps to consolidate power in his office by purging Iraq's professional officers from the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), bringing security forces and militias under his direct control, and giving free reign to Shiite militias ("Popular Mobilization Forces").

The judiciary is weak in Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan and has little institutional autonomy. There is evidence that it favours and appears by and large to be an extension of the political elite, in that it appears to give beneficial outcomes and ignores complaints of opponents (Sowell, 2013). In September of 2013 the Supreme Court of Iraq struck down a law reforming the Judicial High Court (Sowell, 2013), this is a major issue. If the judiciary is not truly independent, democracy is at a greater risk of reverting back to authoritarian rule, Schmitter and Karl (1995) did point out that independence of the governance structure (of which the judiciary is a part) from overarching political will is an important factor of a democracy.

Ordinary people, human rights activists, and international observers have regularly criticized the KRG for its lack of political or business accountability and for the influence of the two major parties in virtually all business, educational, and political decision-making institutions. Political freedoms and civil rights (including, for example, religious freedoms) have been considerably greater than in the rest of Iraq, but the KRG has come under both domestic and international criticism for restrictions on civil liberties, torture at the hands of Asayish security forces, and harassment and attacks on media outlets and journalists.

Overall, the relationship the KRG has with the GOI is tenuous at best. As has been described above, there are issues with trust and discrimination against ethnic minorities

as well as tainted institutions but as can be seen above, the democratic process is well under way, now it will need to be seen if it continues to develop or disintegrates into another authoritarian system.

## **2.4 Kurdistan Political Parties**

### **2.4.1 The Kurdistan Democratic Party**

The Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) was founded on August 16, 1946. It is not an exaggeration to say that the foundation of the KDP introduced innovation into the Kurdish political life and has had the biggest impact on its development. It resulted in the increasing Kurdish nationalist outlook that appeared in Iraq in the consequence of World War I. The new KDP held its first congress in Baghdad on 16 August 1946. The circumstances that helped the establishment of the KDP was a combination of tribal militancy, the development of an urban Kurdish intelligence that promoted the Kurdish nationalism, and the particular role that Mulla Mustafa Barzani and the Barzani tribe played (Stansfield 2003). In general, the KDP is more tribal and conservative, and has its base in the governorates of Erbil (Hewlêr in Kurdish) and Dohuk. Politically the KDP has drawn closer to Turkey, and in particular to the AK Party (AKP) of President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The KDP has made several calls for outright independence. (Mills and Sen, 2016).

The KDP has been the ruling party of the Kurdistan Regional Government since 2005 in the first election following the US invasion in 2003, and the following elections 2009 and 2013. In 2013, the term of President Masoud Barzani was extended for a further two years until August 2015 and then again until the next election in 2017.

### **2.4.2 The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan**

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was formed on 1 June 1975 in Damascus, Syria. Jalal Talabani, a founding member of the PUK has clashed politically with important members of the KDP over the previous decades, formed the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) with other prominent Kurdish leaders in 1975. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) has been led by former Iraqi president Jalal Talabani until he suffered a stroke in December 2012. The PUK professed a more leftist, less tribal political outlook than the KDP. In general the PUK is more urban and socialist oriented and is centered in the southern KRI in the Sulaymaniyah (Slemani) governorate, as well as in Kirkuk. (Mills and Sen, 2016).

The PUK has historically been closer to the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party) in Turkey (which has waged a long insurgent campaign against the government in Ankara) and to the PKK's affiliate the PYD (Democratic Union Party) in Syria. (Mills

and Sen, 2016). The PUK has also been more in favour than the KDP of remaining within a federal Iraq (Mills and Sen, 2016).

The new PUK was under the leadership of Jalal Talabani. Obviously, blaming the Barzanis and the KDP for failure, the PUK wanted to demonstrate that it is the only viable alternative to the KDP to lead the Kurdish nationalist movement. However, the formation of the PUK introduced a new balance in the Kurdish party politics spectrum that had and continues to have its major impact on the shaping of the self-ruled Kurdistan (Liam & Stansfield 2004).

### **2.4.3 Gorran: The Change Movement**

The KDP and PUK duopoly had not faced a serious electoral challenge from the smaller opposition parties up until the 2013 elections, it was only with the formation of the Gorran party, or “Movement for Change” that this first occurred (Romano David, 2014).

Nashirwan Mustafa who was a commander of the Peshmerga forces for 22 years, is now a leader of Gorran, which is a liberal and reformist Kurdish political party in KRI (Rodi Hevian, 2013). Gorran was founded in 2009 through an internal division within the PUK leadership (Hiltermann, 2010), it is now the main opposition to the ruling two-party coalition of the KDP and PUK, which governs the KRG (Rodi Hevian, 2013). Its platform calls for the elimination of corruption, for a democratic constitution, and for a more equitable distribution of wealth in the Kurdistan Region (Romano David, 2014). Gorran has a lot of influence thanks to its KNN television channel; a radio station, Denge Gorran; and publishing a daily newspaper, Rozhnam. In the Kurdistan National Congress (KNK) in Brussels where Gorran has also its membership. (Rodi Hevian, 2013).

In the regional elections in Kurdistan in the 2009 for the KNA, where Gorran participated, Gorran won 25 of 111 seat of Kurdish Parliament, 22 percent of the total votes in KRI becoming second after the KDP and that was shortly after its formation (Romano David, 2014). The party is mostly popular among Kurdish young generation and retired Peshmergas, with many former KDP and PUK members, who are against the domination of the two-party rule (Rodi Hevian, 2013).

In June 2015, the Gorran party, along with the PUK refused to extend the tenure of the president (a member of the ) for a further two years. In October 2015, protests by government workers demanding unpaid salaries escalated into attacks across the KRI on

KDP offices. The Gorran Party was blamed by The KDP, Gorran ministers and parliamentarians from Erbil have been expelled from the KDP controlled parts of the KRI. (Mills and Sen, 2016).

#### **2.4.4 Other Political Parties**

##### **The Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party: KDSP**

There was a pro- Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) movement in Turkey which spread to the KRI with the creation of The Kurdistan Democratic Solution Party (KDSP) in 2002. It wished to become the opposition to the KDP via gaining the support of women and young people due to its dedication to the women's rights and feminism. With the leader of KDSP Diyar Garib, who supports the right to self-determination and autonomous Kurdish government inside the existing states (Rodi Hevian, 2013). In 2008 the party convened congresses that took place in Kirkuk. In the 2009 KRG elections, KDSP was banned from participating and its offices were shut down by Barzani's KDP, but the party still remained to function (Rodi Hevian, 2013).

##### **The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU)**

The establishment in 1994 of The Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU) in KRI by a religious group of Kurds, which were influenced by Salahuddin Bahaadin. A Muslim Brotherhood association, KIU's objective is the formation of an Islamic state in Iraq that would consolidate the standards of Western-style democracy. The party supports free trade, investment as well as freedom of the press that is applicable with Shari'a law and it stands against corruption and bureaucracy. Moreover, KIU promotes women's rights. Its elaboration in charity work brings many of its supporters from rural areas and students, it is one of the most influential Islamic movements throughout KRI. (Rodi Hevian, 2013)

The KIU is referring to itself as solving issues such as society's political, social, economic, and cultural from an Islamic perspective. The KUI was blamed for attacking stores and various hotels that were dispose of alcohol, by unnamed group of people, on December 2, 2011, in Zakho (Rodi Hevian, 2013). Concerning to these attacks, members of the KDP burned down KIU's offices across the Kurdish region (Rodi Hevian, 2013).

### **3 MAIN ISSUES IN IRAQI KURDISTAN**

Up to this point I have completed a review of the literature and theories and aspects of democracy, and also provided a basis for understanding the current and historical situation of Iraqi Kurdistan. I shall now attempt to draw from both of these sources to identify the main reasons why the democratization of Iraqi Kurdistan has not progressed further and the main impediments to its future progression.

In the previous section on Democracy in Kurdistan (see section 2), I have tried to describe the landmark events that have progressed Iraqi Kurdistan to become a more democratic region, but this does not mean that democracy in Kurdistan has been easy. Challenges such as attacks on the area by Turkey, rows over oil, flooding, independence plans, ISIS and constitutional reform.

#### **3.1 Politics**

Corruption and lack of transparency are especially acute in countries with extractive industries such as Iraqi Kurdistan, as they rely heavily on these natural resources as a primary source of revenue (Soderberg, 2015). This can be shown in a 2010 survey by the International Republican Institute (Romano David, 2014) of 1,000 adults in the Kurdistan region that found that a quarter thought government corruption was the region's single worst problem. Almost 90 percent of respondents in both the Sulaimaniya and Erbil provinces agreed that corruption was a serious problem. On 31 January 2011 (Romano David, 2014) in a public letter the Office of Kurdistan Regional Presidency commented that corruption is a serious issue and that it needs to be challenged (Romano David, 2014).

Steps to address corruption and transparency, including establishing the Office of Governance and Integrity in February 2010, are viewed positively by international agencies, governments, and international corporations (Kirkpatrick, Grant, 2009). As such, they have a favorable effect on both the KRG's business and diplomatic relations.

### **3.1.1 Corruption**

Although Kurdistan's leaders are on record as opposing corruption and patrimonialism, because Iraqi Kurdistan lacks a constitution, the political elite "can exercise unchecked, arbitrary power" (Qadir, 2007). This has allowed the political elite to consolidate their power via nepotism (Karadag, Roy, 2010) or by dispersing resources in exchange for loyalty (Ahmed, 2017). Other examples of corruption in Kurdistan include pre-election agreements, abuse of public resources and political patronage. Another example of corruption in the KRG is the public sector payroll; it includes employees who do not show up for work or who do not even exist, the salary structure is also bloated with 19 categories of "allowances" (Al-Qarawee, Harith Hasan, 2014).

Highlighting the severity of corruption and the attitudes of some of the political elites towards recognising corruption in Kurdistan, in December of 2013 a magazine editor and reporter investigating corruption cases in the KRG was gunned down, his death was the third since 2008 of writers who was critical of the establishment and/or the ruling elite families (Ahmed, 2017). A number of high-profile officials in the KRG have been charged with corruption, including the former mayor of Suleimani (Pring, Coralie, 2015). Despite this however, a 2012 poll showed that 88 percent of respondents were critical of government efforts to combat corruption (Pring, Coralie, 2015).

### **3.1.2 Politics - KGP v GOI – Discrimination of minorities**

One particular factor that has caused much concern, has been that of the Prime Minister of Iraq between 2016 and 2014, Nouri al-Maliki. Maliki alienated the Kurds by contesting Kurdistan's ownership of natural resources, Kurdistan's right to export new oil and gas, the role of the Peshmerga, and the status of disputed territories (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015). He delayed the federal government's obligations, and excluded Peshmerga from U.S. military assistance programs (Fine, Glenn A., 2016). Due in large proportion to his actions, the Kurds have lost faith in Baghdad's ability to protect their interests and have sought independence again (Pring, Coralie, 2015).

### **3.1.3 Politics – KDP v PUK**

Iraqi Kurdistan is governed by the two most dominant political parties the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) whose seat is in Erbil and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) with residency in Sulaymaniyah (MacDiarmid, 2015). As (traditionally) the two largest and most important parties, the KDP and the PUK have been the key

players in the politics of Kurdistan increasing their authority in many ways, such as; using their role in the nationalist struggle, extensive powers of patronage, paramilitary forces, and close international allies to perpetuate their authority (Levitsky, Steven R., and Lucan A. Way, 2012).

*“On May 19, 1992, the Kurdish parties held elections resulting in a coalition between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan Party (PUK). Their alliance broke down in 1994 because of disputes about property ownership and revenue embezzlement at the lucrative Ibrahim Khalil-Habur customs post on the Turkish border. The resulting civil war killed or displaced thousands and caused a partition of territory between the PUK and KDP”* (Qadir, 2007).

By the elections that took place in Kurdistan on January 30, 2006, the KDP and PUK “ran on the same list” which in a proportional representative democracy means they did not compete against each other (Qadir, 2007), the list, and therefore to a certain extent the result, was pre-determined. Thus, they divided power according to a pre-election agreement creating a “unified, albeit inactive, parliament” (Qadir, 2007). The merger of the KPD and PUK in 2006 characterized a duopoly in which the political elite of the two parties have “monopolized telecommunications, construction, and trade” (Qadir, 2007). Real decision making has often been done by party elites, behind closed doors, and not by elected committees or members of parliament (Romano David, 2014).

However, the KDP and PUK may have come “together to form a government“, but the opposing parties “never fully merged“(MacDiarmid, 2015). Important institutions, including the Peshmerga and large parts of finance, remain under the control of the KDP. Token gestures including ministerial positions were given to the PUK, and later the Gorran party but it was clear the real power remained vested in the KDP (MacDiarmid, 2015).

A report in 2012 stated that “Jalal Talabani has distanced himself from Kurdistan Regional president Masud Barzani” (Abdulla, 2012). To highlight this animosity, in 2015 there was a power struggle between the KDP and PUK over the next presidency, resulting in the government not being able to operate and so pay its employees. This accumulated in roadblocks in Sulaymaniyah with “hundreds of striking civil servants demanding their unpaid salaries” because many of them had not been paid in three months (MacDiarmid, 2015).

The relationship the KDP has with the other political parties is also of much concern, the leader of the PUK is reportedly a very “unreliable ally for the KDP” and the KDP believe the PUK and it’s leader “lacks communication skills” (Abdulla, 2012). KDP relations with the new political party is also tense, resorting to twitter the chairman of the Kurdistan National Security Council, member of the KDP, wrote "This was a deliberate plan by Gorran activists to incite hatred and violence." (MacDiarmid, 2015) The KRG president and leader of the KDP dismissed four Gorran ministers from the cabinet (MacDiarmid, 2015).

A resident political analyst of Iraqi Kurdistan noted political parties’ attention was not on the needs of their constituents, but were instead acting as if they owned the cities (MacDiarmid, 2015). This issue on presidency alone has threatened to split the only region in Iraq that is seen as a stable force (MacDiarmid, 2015) highlighting how fragile the democracy in Iraqi Kurdistan actually is.

#### **3.1.4 Political Elite – Corruption and Nepotism**

Nepotism is very widespread through the KRI region, with more than forty ministers of parliament, who receive large salaries, grants and benefits, offer and accept patronage to and from the political elite. In the Kurdistan Regional Government these are prime ministers, president, foreign ministers that are the relatives of the political leaders in power (Qadir, 2007). For the ones who have no relatives in power, they must have a long record of submission to the Barzani or Talabani families to be it possible to become a minister (Qadir, 2007).

This patronage politics has spoiled the welfare state as it has been used by the political elite to support relatives by giving that government contracts paying excessive amounts for minimal work (Clark, 2008). As such, government funding and expenditure should be made available to the public and the contents of which should be scrutinized at length and any irregularities investigated to the fullest extent.

#### **3.1.5 The fight against Corruption**

In 2011 Gorran party led the first protests mainly in Sulaymaniya, that were demanding political, social, and economic reforms as well as an end to uncontrollable corruption and nepotism. According to BBC, Gorran has called for "an end to monopoly control of power." (Rodi Hevian, 2013)

One supporter was not so far off the mark when he enthusiastically summed up Gorran's impact as follows: Leaders became more careful in not misusing government resources because Gorran can be found in every corner of this region. Ministries were being interrogated before the Kurdistan parliament. The corruption file was released and Facebook became a big voice of the younger generation. People became aware, and everyone knew what was going on behind the curtain. The equation had changed since the appearance of the Change Movement (Romano David, 2014).

There has also been concern about where government funds are truly spent, for example in 2015, the ruling KDP party couldn't pay its public sector workers, but other political parties said there were funds available (MacDiarmid, 2015). Local trust for the government was dissipating with particular regard to where the funding was actually being directed by the political elite (MacDiarmid, 2015).

## **3.2 Economics**

The KRI is in a weaker position than many other rentier states. It does not have control over its main source of revenues – depending either on unreliable transfers from Baghdad or, more recently, on oil exports through Turkey that are subject to legal, security, and political vagaries. KRI didn't have the time to build up the financial reserves in a sovereign wealth fund, as other oil exporters and it has accrued substantial debt. As a non-sovereign entity, it is also limited in other options such as international borrowing or issuing currency (Mills, and Sen, 2016). According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, Iraqi Kurdistan struggles with its human capital, labour market, conditions for financing, and infrastructure. Unlike most unrecognized states, which tend to be relatively poor, the KRG enjoys significant resources in the form of funds from Baghdad and lucrative contracts in the construction and energy sectors: even in the 1990s the aid regime in place made the KRG a distributive rather than extractive state, and its capacity to distribute or redistribute wealth has increased exponentially in the last decade.

### **3.2.1 Economic Infrastructure**

Smuggling and illicit economic activity were normal during the period of double sanctions imposed by the UN on Iraq and by Baghdad on the KRI between 1992 and 2003. Though these sanctions have since been removed, the concentration of power, nepotism, and patronage gave rise to a widespread perception that connections are needed to conduct business, and that corruption is sanctioned by elites. There have been highly publicized incidents involving reports of corruption affecting oil companies operating in the KRG have further damaged its reputation.

The decade following 2003 saw dynamic double-digit economic growth in the KRI (Mills and Sen, 2016). According to the Economist Intelligence Unit, the KRI ranked high on market opportunities, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) policy, and macroeconomic environment. Between 2005 and 2014 according to the Mills publication the KRI sustained in a good level of security enjoyed strong economic growth and development, unlike the rest of Iraq state. KRI has made huge progress in oil and gas exploration by signing and implementing exports and development deals with international companies (Mills and Sen, 2016).

### **3.2.2 Internal Tax and Investment**

The KRG has a friendly tax environment comprising of low corporate tax (15%) and personal income taxes (5%), tax exemptions for companies with production-sharing agreements (PSA's) in the hydrocarbons sector, and no VAT. Its Regional Investment Law No. 4 (2006) was progressive, allowing foreign investors to own land and hold majority positions in joint ventures. As of February 2014, 2,830 foreign companies (predominantly from Turkey) were registered in the Kurdish Region of Iraq. These conditions all helped to encourage international trade and investment in the Kurdish Region of Iraq.

### **3.2.3 Banking Sector**

Iraq's 2005 constitution did not grant fiscal and financial regulatory independence to the KRI's central bank. Therefore, Baghdad effectively controls the KRG's financial policy. Kurdistan-based banks rely on the National Bank of Iraq. As such, Kurdistan lacks a banking culture and a meaningful financial infrastructure.

Banks in Kurdistan are an extension of Kurdistan's cash-based economy and therefore they have a limited offering of products and services. Despite the high economic growth in the KRG between 2003 and 2014, little progress was reflected in the development of the banking sector and as such Iraqi Kurdistan's ability to access capital markets remains rudimentary. Banks primarily focus on executing payments for government employees rather than commercial financing, small business lending, or retail credit. They are reluctant to lend to businesses which is a barrier to growth of small and medium sized enterprises. Most banks have no electronic banking functions, limiting their integration into the global financial system and Automatic Teller Machines (ATMs) are rare. The recent budget dispute with Baghdad revealed the KRG's financial vulnerability, and the lack of liquidity of banks, this resulted in the KRG's inability to pay the salaries of its employees.

A strong, reliable, and regulated banking system provides a sense of security and confidence that further encourages commerce. Cards and mobile banking services could complement more traditional forms of banking, reducing cost and transaction speed.

### 3.3 Externalities

#### 3.3.1 Government of Iraq

Beginning in 2004, the government of Iraq agreed the KRG was constitutionally guaranteed a share of the national budget, which was set by a process of haggling (not codified in the Constitution) at 17 per cent, after the deduction of ‘sovereign expenses’ (foreign affairs, military, and so on), in line with the estimated share of the KRI in Iraq’s total population. Each month to the KRG, “this amounted to about \$1.1 billion per month, plus additional payments for supporting the Peshmerga military” (Mills and Sen, 2016). However, by the end of Maliki’s government in 2014, the Kurds argued that they actually received only 11–13 per cent due to inflation of the ‘sovereign expenses’.

In spite of this, from 2005 the KRG was able to make great progress in developing its infrastructure, administrative structures, and the standard of living of its people (Mills and Sen, 2016). This was because Iraq’s oil revenues were rising with production and global oil prices, the addition of some of its own direct oil earnings, fees, and customs duties, as well as attracting substantial foreign direct investment

However, in February 2014, the government of Iraq suspended payments to the KRG due partly in reprisal for the KRG’s export of oil from new fields but largely to its own economic crisis with the GOI blaming low oil prices, war with ISIS and a “*humanitarian crisis, and lacked even the funds to pay public salaries*” (MacDiarmid, 2015).

Due to this Iraqi Kurdistan’s economy went into recession in 2014. Other factors contributing to the recession was depressed energy prices and the collapse of investor confidence due to the invasion of ISIS. The KRG experienced a 70 percent reduction of its revenues in 2014; civil servants, numbering about 1.2 million or 70 percent of the work force, were not paid for months. In September of 2014, Haider al-Abadi replaced Maliki as prime minister. Despite the leadership change and Abadi’s efforts at reform, the Kurds have lost faith in Baghdad’s ability to protect their interests.

### **3.3.2 IDPs (Internally Displaced Persons)**

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) fleeing ISIS arrive in Kurdistan on a daily basis (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015). As of June 2015, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported that 8.2 million people in Iraq require immediate humanitarian support. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) has experienced several waves of IDPs (MERI, 2015). The first wave came in 2006 and 2007. It comprised Christians and Arabs fleeing Iraq's sectarian bloodletting, especially in Baghdad. The second wave fled Syria's civil war between 2011 and 2014. Of the 247,000 Syrian refugees who crossed Iraq's border, 242,000 ended up in Kurdistan and the third wave consisted of Iraqis displaced when ISIS invaded in June 2014 Mosul, Iraq's second largest city, that caused the arrival of 180,000 Iraqis and increased the number up to 500,000 (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015). 3 million IDPs and 254,215 refugees. Of these, 1,610,000 IDPs and refugees reside in the KRI. As of February 2015, the World Bank estimated the cost of stabilizing the refugee and IDP situation in Kurdistan at \$1.4 billion (World Bank, 2015)

Refugees and IDPs have come to Iraqi Kurdistan in waves over the past decade. Displaced people need employment, schooling for children as well they require protection, shelter, sustenance, water, and sanitation. Public health issues challenges for The KRG Ministry of Health (MOH), which has struggled to assist the growing number of IDPs (Soderberg, Nancy E., and David L. Phillips, 2015). Since January 2015, some 946,000 Iraqi IDPs (157,000 families) have settled in the KRI. The most vulnerable are young children, pregnant women, women, and girls, who were used as sexual slaves and raped, or forced into marriage, who are susceptible to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and elderly from single households (Soderberg, Nancy E., and David L. Phillips, 2015). Yazidi men and boys were executed and women were forced to watch beheadings of their family members. Many IDPs have been traumatized by ISIS atrocities, and require psychosocial counselling. Winter conditions intensified problems for IDPs, increasing infectious diseases and the risk of death (Soderberg, Nancy E., and David L. Phillips, 2015).

Displaced people are presence in the Duhok province, followed by Erbil, Sulaimaniya and Kirkuk. (MERI, 2015).

These events were characterised by a policy of “open borders” by the KRG. On humanitarian grounds, these waves of displaced people were allowed to enter the Kurdistan region, although some security checks were in place that prevented, for instance, individual male adults to enter. Both Syrian refugees, essentially of Kurdish origin, and IDPs were granted the right to stay in the KRI and the freedom to find a work (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015).

Establishment of camps and facilities necessary for the Syrian refugees, by the NGOs and international community with help of the Kurdish Government were held effectively. On the contrary, the arrival of IDPs from the Mosul area has been less effectively managed, due to a cooperation of lack of unified strategy, tough restrictions on public budget, and issues with land availability for the camps (MERI, 2015).

The KRG Ministry of Health (MOH) has struggled to assist the growing number of IDPs (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015). In 2014, Saudi Arabia made a one-time voluntary contribution of \$500 million to the OCHA (OCHA, 2015). The World Health Organization (WHO) provided more than \$17 million of medicines and medical supplies directly to the KRG’s MOH. The WHO also worked with KRI-based health care providers to offer polio vaccinations to displaced persons (WHO, 2015).

The United States has not provided humanitarian assistance directly to the GOI or the KRG, mostly by the UN and other international and non-governmental organizations; it is, however, the global leader in responding to the humanitarian crises in Iraq and Syria (MERI, 2015). Since the start of the Syria crisis The United States has provided more than \$4 billion in aid, assisted 250 000 Syrian refugees in Iraq with more than \$183 million, and since the start of fiscal year 2014 assisted the Iraqis with more than \$416 million (World Bank, 2015). The UN humanitarian response has been directed out of Erbil since the fall of Mosul in 2014. UN reports indicate that programs are concentrated in the KRI, where organizations have greater access.

Reflecting donor fatigue, donors pressed Iraq to move from an emergency phase to a post-conflict stabilization phase (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015). As a consequence, all facilities and services provided are still temporary or inexistent (MERI, 2015). The recovery plan represents an opportunity for the Kurds to deepen cooperation with the international community and to develop direct relations with donors. (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015).

Iraqi Kurdistan's population has grown 28 percent, creating social tensions. (Soderberg, Nancy E, 2015). The KRG makes every effort for the contribution to provide support, transportation, and protection for 1.6 million refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), who have come to find sanctuary in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (MERI, 2015).

### **3.3.3 Oil**

As mentioned earlier (see section 6.3.1), in February 2014, the government of Iraq suspended payments to the KRG in part in reprisal for the KRG's export of oil from new fields. In December 2014, the Government of Iraq (GOI) and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) reached the Baghdad-Erbil Agreement, in which the GOI agreed to pay the KRG the previously promised 17% of the federal budget (minus allowed federal deductions) to the KRG in exchange for a total of 550,000 barrels per day (BPD) of Kurdish oil. This was then to be sold by Iraq's State Oil Marketing Organization (SOMO) (Topal, 2014).

In December 2014, after the change of the previous regime under Nouri al-Maliki, the KRG and the federal government of Iraq under the new Prime Minister Al 'Abadi reached an agreement for the KRG to receive 17 per cent of the federal budget (minus allowed federal deductions) (Mills and Sen, 2016) (see section 3.2 for economic details). In return, the KRG was to export 550,000 BPD of oil through its own pipeline system consisting of 250,000 BPD of 'Kurdish' oil, and 300,000 BPD of oil produced from Kirkuk and surrounding fields (Abbas, 2017). At this time, the GOI's "Kirkuk–Ceyhan pipeline was entirely inoperable due to the activities of ISIS" (Mills and Sen, 2016) for which the solution was to be the use of the KRG's to export the Kirkuk oil (Mills and Sen, 2016).

However, the agreement never came to complete fruition, the KRG were never able to export the agreed quantities of oil saying that the 550,000 BPD figure was an average over the year and at the time they were drastically increasing production (Mills and Sen, 2016). But, at the same time as claiming this, they were also exporting their own oil independently, "outside the remit of the agreement" (Mills and Sen, 2016). The GOI on the other hand failed to make full payments as it was enduring a severe liquidity crisis due to the falling price of oil and the costs of the war against ISIS (Mills and Sen, 2016).

The GOI blamed the KRG's failure to export the agreed amount of oil for the GOI's inability to pay the agreed amount of funds (Mills and Sen, 2016).

The Kurdistan Regional Government requires more than \$700m a month to pay public sector workers, after the Baghdad agreement fell through to provide 550,000 BPD to the GOI for federal funding (MacDiarmid, 2015) it was unclear how the KRG was going to be able to function. The KRG's budget shortfall was compounded by the downturn in world oil prices in November 2014. The KRG's overall budget had been \$13 billion in 2013, with a budget deficit of \$1 billion. The deficit was \$6 .5 billion in 2014, and is estimated at \$12 .5 billion for 2015.

Iraqi Kurdistan possesses considerable energy reserves, substantial levels of actual production, and even greater prospects for future output. In the medium to long-term, Iraqi Kurdistan should enjoy a considerable stream of export-generated revenues, enabling stability and providing the means for state-building. The KRG's principal economic and financial problem is how best to monetize its oil and gas resources, but this is hampered by a restriction of information within the oil industry and lack of trust which inhibits the the industry operating efficiently (MacDiarmid, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

To conclude, this thesis firstly presented the theoretical framework to feature the most important concepts for the analytical research. The author uses democracy definitions by scholars such as Robert Dahl and Terry Lynn Karl and determines democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan Region as a primary method for the analysis. The results show that democratization in the Iraqi Kurdistan from 1992 to 2017 is still under democratization process. Secondly, this thesis describes the analytical part, examines the democracy process and explains the major democracy changes in Iraqi Kurdistan Region since the end of Saddam Husseins dictatorship up to present 2017. Thirdly, the thesis underlines the importance of the social, economic and political factors and their impact on democratization of Iraqi Kurdistan. Lastly, the thesis gives the recommendations and considers the main results which affect democratic situation.

The thesis research question aims to answer what have been the main issues since the start of recent democratization in Iraqi Kurdistan and how have these issues influenced and has its impact on the democratization of Iraqi Kurdistan. The thesis finds the main events that shifted the political, social and economic spectrum as well as the external and internal factors. Especially, the thesis emphasizes the creation of a new constitution, which led to democratization processes and the formation of federal state with distribution of Kurdistan Regional Government and Government of Iraq. Furthermore, the duo poly of two major parties KDP and the PUK have been the key players in the politics of Kurdistan increasing their authority in many ways, such as; using their role in the nationalist struggle, extensive powers of patronage, paramilitary forces, and close international allies to maintain their authority.

The thesis identifies the main reasons why the democratization of Iraqi Kurdistan has not progressed further and the main impediments to its future progression. This was done via description of the landmark events that have progressed Iraqi Kurdistan to become a more democratic region facing many challenges. These included the economic reasons such as government funding, wars and oil. The political landscape of the KRG parties, interaction between the KRG and GOI, and maybe most significantly the actions of the political elite.

Firstly, the political parties and political elite are not encouraging the participation of the regular citizen, the KDP for example are seen as tribal. The political parties

emphasizes the issue of corruption, but there is a concern that there will be more violent protests as opposed to the peaceful demonstrations, which are required to create a system of participation.

Next, there have been many micro- and macro- economic reasons that have impeded the progress of further democracy, from a business perspective there have been oil-price shocks, which have sent the region into recession, curtailing investments and causing public sector workers to be unpaid for months which incited protests and road blocks which unfortunately became violent. There is also a lot of potential for the development of other economies.

Finally, the continuing war with ISIS is causing a drain on not just the economy but on the well-being of the Kurdish people. Tensions amongst the people have been rising as the burden increases every day. The question is whether this will unify the people of Kurdistan into a stronger democracy, or will it result in its disintegration into a new authoritarian rule?

To summarize; the main issues included externalities such as oil price shocks to the economy and budget, the war with ISIS and its political and economic repercussions, and finally, which I believe to be the most important, the internal governance of the KRG should be made more transparent and accountable. The apparent waste of public funds has meant the public interest seems to have become second to the interest of the political elites via, for example, excessive government contracts. There has been a large public resentment towards corruption in the politics of the KRG, many parties, notably the Gorran party, have emphasized a change is required. However, this should not be achieved by violence, only peaceful change will bring about a democratic society where people can hold and express opinions and beliefs without the fear of punishment. If change is implemented by the force of violent means, it is not as meaningful as when it is discussed and agreed by the many or the betterment of all, not the few.

## RECOMMENDATION

This work has examined some main important issues that Kurdistan Regional Government is struggling with the most. As for that I would like to simply recommend some options that could be used for the KRG to ensure sustainable development of its region.

Recommendation that I would like to mention are:

1. Is to stabilize the political tensions between political parties by implementing and promoting human rights for individuals, linguistic, religious, ethnic rights for the local autonomy. Enforcing the rule of law with increased judiciary power, suing the corrupt public officials and offering public service with anti-corruption requirements and implicit rules, particularly on government contracting.
2. Publish information on government spending and oil revenues. Pay state employee salaries and give food allowances to IDPs in the KRG, just as it does to Iraqis under ISIS occupation. This will help to reduce corruption in government, it's message and meaning needs to be protected and proliferated, that corruption will not stand and the people are entitled to their rights.
3. Infrastructure needs to be vastly improved in Iraqi Kurdistan. This includes, but is not limited to, transport networks and telecommunications. For an economy to thrive there must be investment and with the digital age's revolution now a memory, digital commerce such as internet banking and computer programing are going to be a critical investment for the Kurdish region of Iraq to step into the a truly democratic society.
4. Oil should be in the hands of the public sector, so that the benefits are not hoarded by the few, but are of a benefit to the many. The banking sector for instance could help to promote entrepreneurship by facilitating loans or if finances could be done electronically, business efficiency would increase, therefore, investment in infrastructure and communications should be a priority for business development

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