DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

IRAQI KURDISTAN'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AFTER THE 2021 ELECTIONS

Dr. Sardar Husin Aziz
June 2022

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Last October, Iraqis and Kurdish citizens voted to change the Iraqi government. The country is still without a government, and the political landscape became more fragile after Sadr's departure.

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This policy study provides an overview of the post-2021 Iraqi parliament early election landscape in Iraqi Kurdistan.

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It is difficult to understand the Iraqi Kurdistan political landscape without understanding the hazy domestic party politics. This study demonstrates the main parties core values with a brief background about the situation.

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INTRODUCTION

The early Iraqi parliamentary election in Iraqi Kurdistan Region has called into question many established facts and structures that have existed for decades. This policy study attempts to analyze the outcome of that election by evaluating the Kurdistan region's main political actors, namely the political parties. Despite the fact that the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) was the clear winner, there are numerous signs that the political landscape in the Region has shifted. This study depicts the main structures and worldviews of the political parties, as well as their electoral behaviors and relationships with their constituents. It assesses the main concerns of the key parties and potential challenges ahead.

2

THE EARLY IRAQI PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION

The early election was held in accordance with a new law: a single non-transferable vote (SNTV).[1] The new law increased the number of constituencies while also making them smaller in size. The new law was the result of a series of protests in the capital Baghdad and the southern provinces of Iraq against the ruling elites and a lack of services in 2019-2020. In the new law Iraq is divided into 83 electoral districts.[2] According to a former Iraqi MP Yousif M. Sadiq,[3] the constituency distribution was planned by Sadr, the KDP, and Halbusi. The new law's primary focus was district distribution. Political parties and groups that were well-organized, centralized, and whose support was concentrated in a specific geographic area would benefit from the new system.

When the election campaign began, there were two dominant schools of thought on the scene. The first saw the need to vote in the elections in the hope that the outcome would result in a serious and genuine change in the political scene. The second saw no point in taking part because the established parties and groups would win again. The majority of followers of the second school were known locally as "boycotters." This also applies to Iraqi Kurdistan. The Iraqi political system post-dictator is very much centered on the ghost of the previous dictator.

The presence of this ghost has resulted in a governing system that functions in such a way that power does not accumulate in the hands of one individual or group. This has resulted in the emergence of a distinct system known as muhasasa. As a result, it is not surprising that one of the protesters' main slogans was "No to muhasasa, no to political sectarianism."[4] When the election was held on

October 10th, 2021, some referred to it as the "Purple Revolution,"[5] but the new electoral system "promised to reward large, cohesive movements that precisely understood the distribution of their voters and could focus their votes within a district on a single candidate."[6]

As a result, the Sadrist Bloc, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), and al-Taqadum Mohammed Halbousi's National Progress Party were all expected to win. This also means that, for the first time, each component of Iraqi society's votes will be centered on a single personality/party. As a result, comprehending the complex world of personalities is more important than the parties.

1   The new parliamentary election law in Iraq
        https://moj.gov.iq/upload/pdf/4603.pdf

2   Al-Jaffal, Omer. 2021. Iraq's New Electoral Law: Old
        Powers Adapting to Change,
        https://cutt.ly/jK4HVcj

3   Phone interview with former MP Yousif M. Sadiq.

4   Ibrahim, Arwa, 2019. Muhasasa, the political system
        reviled by Iraqi protesters. https://cutt.ly/2K4H2T4

5   Munqith Dagher, 2021 Iraq's Purple Coup: A Truly Iraqi
        Electoral Surprise, Par Excellence, https://cutt.ly/7K4H5jG

6   Michael Knights, 2022. Playing the System: How
        Efficient Campaigning Decided Iraq's October 2021
        Election, KAS.   https://cutt.ly/LK4Juon

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FEDERAL PARLIAMENT ELECTION IN IRAQI KURDISTAN

There was no enthusiasm or widespread mobilization in Kurdistan when the election was held. A sizable number of voters, particularly in urban areas, boycotted the elections, a situation that calls the legitimacy of the government into question and makes dissatisfaction with the ruling elites unmistakable. The outcome, however, cemented the KDP's dominance in the Kurdistan region, with the party winning 31 seats. The New Generation Movement was another election winner, taking nine seats, up from five in 2018. The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) has reclaimed 17 seats.

The Gorran (Change) Movement, formerly the main opposition party, lost all five of its seats.
There are few, if any, differences between Iraqi Kurdistan's political parties. In almost every way, the two major political parties are gravitating toward each other. Other small and new parties are structurally similar to the old parties. They are all run by the leader for life.

From the typological perspective, the political parties can be divided into three types: personality parties, family parties, and dynastic parties. Many characteristics are shared by these types of parties.

The findings revealed that the simple binarism of the class divide, or the secular–religious conflict, which is associated with Left–Right politics, has given way to more nuanced accounts of individualistic focus in terms of economic gains, social security, basic services, and jobs. The traditional civil war divide is also blurring, particularly among young people. Gender, values, issue and environment-based identities, on the other hand, have yet to emerge.

4

THE KURDISTAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (KDP): THE QUEST FOR A MONOPOLY

The KDP in the last election was calling for "building a stronger Kurdistan" and "for more benefits for Kurdistan, vote for [KDP]."**(7)** This act of assimilating the party (KDP) and Kurdistan is the only way to understand the KDP's way of conducting politics locally, nationally, and to a certain extent, regionally. The KDP regards itself as more than a political party; they are actually representing the Kurdish nation. As further confirmation of this, Masoud Barzani, the leader of the party and main political figure in Iraqi Kurdistan, tries to be recognized as "marja'"**(8)** within the polity of Kurdistan. The concept of marja' is new to the Kurdish political lexicon. It is borrowed from Arabic, with a special (Shia) theological meaning and indicates that person or institution as the source of reference. Marja' emerged in the 19th century.

Accordingly, Masaud Barzani and the Barzani family, by extension, are the sources of emulation within the political sphere of Iraqi Kurdistan. Consequently, Barzani wants to be the person who has the final say on every decision and event within Iraqi Kurdistan politics. Similar to Shia marja' this position is not a democratic position and, in the case of Barzani, it is not epistemological but rather political. Above all, the KDP controls the KRI's pillars of power: the presidency, executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In this vein, the KDP insisted on holding the referendum in 2017, despite internal, regional, and international pressure. The KDP's goal in holding the referendum was to become the champion of Kurdish nationalism and the Kurdish dream of having a state. These are all different forms of capital that service the party in various ways to claim representation, legitimacy, ownership, and inheritance of different narratives, worldviews, and ideologies. The last election served this strategy in many ways.

7   Quoted in: Mera Jasm Bakr, 2021. Kurdish Parties in Iraq's Upcoming Federal Elections: New Electoral Law and Parties' Strategies. https://cutt.ly/FK4LwVu

8   https://www.diplomaticmagazine.net/politics/2334

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WHY DID THE KDP PREVAIL?

As a family party, the KDP has a centralized structure. The circle of decision makers is clear and no party member is able to contest or challenge it. This has provided a stable and clear chain of command in the party; a feature other Kurdish parties lack and wish to mimic. These characteristics provide the party with a high level of internal discipline and institutional capacity, allowing it to capitalize on the new electoral system more effectively than other parties. Other factors that enabled the KDP to benefit more from the new electoral law are listed below:

- Law turnout: The record low turnout played into the KDP's hands.[9] The party gained close to 700.000 votes.[10] The majority of these are part of the vast network of complex salary receivers who are part of government apparatuses, party organizations, businessmen, media companies, and others. Because of this plethora of different apparatuses, the KDP was able to secure the turnout of its loyal voters while other parties were not.

- The KDP was a disciplined and centralized organization with a clear view of its voters and their geographic locations. This information helped the party to plan and organize better than other political entities.

- Lack of strong factionalism: Unlike other parties, the KDP does not suffer from strong factionalism. Factionalism impacts the campaign and the quality of the candidates negatively in many ways.

The KDP's steady increase in seats, not necessarily votes, led the latter to believe that they could become the de facto rulers of Kurdistan, reducing the role and positions of others to that of junior partner, as a politburo member told the author, the PUK never had majority in the KRG since 1992 and it is time to accept that[11]. This move will not be

without difficulties, as it became apparent in the race for the Iraqi presidential post. However, it is the real fact that has shaped the region's politics over the last three decades. As a result, the two major parties failed to develop common interests and trust in the region's governance.

The quest for hegemony pervades all aspects of identity, territorial, economic, and regional relations. Prior to the election, the Kurdish Democratic Party (KDP) emphasized Kurdish nationalism and the pursuit of Kurdish independence, as it became apparent through the 2017 referendum.

Following the election, the KDP set its sights on Iraq's presidency. To achieve this goal, the party formed a coalition with Sunni groups and the largest Shia group, Muqtada Sadr. So far, this goal has clashed with the PUK, other pro-Iranian groups, and Iran as a dominant regional power in Iraq, making it difficult, if not impossible.

Back in 2018 The KDP nominated Fouad Hussain Barzani's chief of staff to become the president of Iraq. Many in Baghdad saw this as a denigration of Iraq and the president's symbolic position. Therefore, some among the Iraqi political elite told the KDP that they had to nominate a candidate from their family to become President of Iraq. To address this, the KDP nominated Hoshyar Zebari, Masoud Barzani's uncle. The latter held several high-level positions in the Iraqi government before being investigated and dismissed as finance minister in a no-confidence vote in the Iraqi parliament in September 2016[12]. Against this backdrop, and in accordance with Article 68, the nominees should have "a good reputation and political experience,

known for their integrity, uprightness, fairness, and loyalty to the homeland. The Iraqi Federal Supreme Court has ruled against the nomination of Zebari.

On an ideological level, following the election, the KDP shifted toward Iraqi nationalism discourse in order to

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9   AlJazeera, 2021. Vote count underway in Iraq after record low turnout. https://cutt.ly/aK4L88t

10   Draw Media 2021. https://cutt.ly/9K4ZwH1

11   Interview with Mahmood Muhammed.

12   https://cutt.ly/UK4Zduj

accommodate the new circumstances and gain support from Iraqi Arab streets. The KDP hopes to gain additional support from Turkey by challenging Iran. That hasn't turned out to be so simple. Turkey has increased its focus on Iraq, but unlike in the past, it is attempting to bring other groups, particularly Sunnis, into its orbit. As a result, the KDP is now just one of many players, albeit the most important one.

In this regard, the KDP has shifted its focus from oil to gas, claiming that it can supply gas to Turkey and even Europe[13]. So far, this appears to be a fantasy rather than a reality. After being linked to the latest Iranian rocket attack on Erbil, the gas export has become a regional issue. However, every piece of evidence suggests that the KRI will not be able to export gas anytime soon.

Gas will further deteriorate the PUK-KDP relationship, as some top PUK cadres are pushing for the gas not to be exported. KDP has proven to be resilient in the past, particularly within the KRI. Despite the fact that its foray into Iraqi politics may prove to be a risky venture; especially facing a well-established regional power like Iran in Iraq.

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13   https://cutt.ly/wK4ZxCA

6

THE EVER-DIVERGING PUK

In the Iraqi National Parliament election, the PUK was in a coalition with the Change Movement (Gorran). The two share the same constituencies. The PUK seats decreased and Gorran seats nullified. The PUK entered the election after a tumultuous period of internal squabbling that negatively affected the image and power of the party. The weakening of both the PUK and Gorran played into the hands of the KDP. It has set the premise for a new form of relationship between the two main parties in the region. As a KDP, we are in negotiation and competition[14] with the PUK, simultaneously, said a politburo member of the KDP (voice of America). This hybrid relationship is new. This is especially exemplified in the current struggle of both parties to put their candidates in the seat of the presidency of Iraq. The presidency, like Lebanon, is by convention held by a member of the Iraqi Kurds, and the PUK has taken that seat for the last 16 years. Hence, by convention, the seat is for the PUK.

The PUK's demise whet the KDP's appetite for transforming its relationship with the party from a division of power and a fifty-fifty relationship into hegemony. This put the PUK at a crossroads either to accept the new status or to challenge the KDP's ambition. The upper echelons of the PUK have always relied on sources of power other than grassroots organizing and voters. The party maintains its grip on the wide geographical area called the Green Zone and has a loyal armed branch of peshmerga, known as the 70 Forces. For these reasons, some members of the party have stated that their power depends not only on their votes but rather on their history of struggle and the Peshmerga: "It does not make a difference whether we win one seat or one hundred."[15] Prior to the last election, the PUK went through a number of critical junctures. In 2019[16], the party organized its 4th Congress. It was crucial in many ways: first, it was the first post-Talabani congress. Second, in the Congress, members of the old guard lost their positions and new blood emerged. Third, the newly elevated

members were primarily from the Talabani family, hence, it was the Congress when the PUK became a family party. The broader Talabani family dominated the party's top echelons. Fourth, the seeds of family feuding were sown in Congress when Lahur Shekh Gangy received more votes than Talabni's son Bafel.

In general, the PUK intends to maintain an equal stance with the KDP. To that end, the PUK has begun a process both within and outside the party. Domestically, the party is increasingly concentrating power in the hands of Bafel Talabani. As the party is unable to organize a party conference or plenum the PUK is in the process of organizing a PUK forum[17] to face the current dilemmas and challenges. "This forum is a patriotic call to discuss and evaluate the current PUK status in order to revitalize political, and social discourse and improve the PUK worldview", writes Qubad Talabani[18]. A clear statement hints that the PUK suffers in these areas.

The PUK is opposing the KDP on multiple fronts, both in the KRG and in Baghdad as it is exemplified in the presidency seat, which PUK regards it as its share. Economically, the PUK is attempting to further control income within its zone in order to bargain with the KDP within the KRG. According to a source close to the party's upper echelons, the PUK will advocate for more equal income and a share of the pie.

While the PUK lost a number of seats in the election, it still controls the armed group and its sphere of influence. The second generation has a strong influence on both the KDP and the PUK. This fact suggests that these new leaders may find it difficult to compromise as they strive to prove themselves and build charisma.

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14   https://cutt.ly/IK4XUbv

15   https://cutt.ly/BK4XZ4C

16   https://cutt.ly/eK4B64U

17   https://knwe.org/?p=148570

18   https://forum.kurdpuk.org/ku/qsakaran/

7

THE NEW GENERATION

The New Generation movement emerged during the 2017 referendum. It was the only group that campaigned against holding the referendum under the banner "no for now."[19] Later on, Shaswar Abdulwahid, an investor and businessman who owns a powerful media company called NRT, founded the movement with a group of others.

In the election the New Generation understood and played the system; they stood with only one candidate in each constituency in which they participated. They promoted their logo (a shining bulb) rather than the names and bios of their candidates. Having a powerful media company and omnipresent NRT TV played a vital role in the movement's success. In many constituencies, people struggled to know the name of the candidate: in Kalar (a constituency in the KRI south), for instance. This was in stark contrast to the spirit of the new electoral law, which aimed to address the electorate's call for greater transparency and to bridge the gap between representatives and grassroots activists.

 The novelty of the movement, its media impact, its name [New Generation], and its fiery rhetoric against the established parties indicate that the movement has gained protest votes, but struggles to be a viable alternative, especially after the demise of the Gorran movement.

In the age of political anger, voters chose New Generation candidates due to a widespread dissatisfaction and distrust with the current political elites. Because of a number of structural weaknesses, the movement will not impose real pressure on the two established parties, the PUK and the KDP.

Despite trying hard to be different, the movement shares many similarities with the other political parties. It is primarily a one-man band. This centrality of one figure sets the stage for other features such as personality politics, family involvement, blurring the line between private and public, and a lack of internal democracy. To a degree, if the leader disappears, the movement will disappear also. There is a blurring of the line between business interests and politics, particularly with

increasing family involvement, for example, the New Generation leader's sister, Srwa Abdulwahid, is the party leader in the Iraqi Parliament.

The new movement represents an emerging trend within Kurdistan and Iraqi political parties, a trend of post-traditional party politics and, more significantly, post-representation politics. It has all the features of the post-representation crisis and the emergence of resonance-based politics. In this case, it is no longer the job of the political party, leader, or organization to seek members, followers, or believers, whom in turn they could represent. They could represent "them" in an active/passive relationship because the ability of the singular voice to be heard was so difficult that it was easy for politicians to speak and act on behalf of others without fear that those "others" would somehow find their own voice.[20] This is appearing to be more feasible and appealing in the age of 24-hour TV and social media. In Iraqi Kurdistan, Facebook is replacing the traditional public sphere in many areas.

Shaswar Abdulwahid's long-term goal is to 'destabilize the KDP-PUK hegemony[21]'. On the other hand, the movement is a personalistic movement, and as such, the movement's primary goal is to serve its leader. From a Weberian standpoint, he is the result of a specific period of collective anxiety in society. It is easier for a personality with material and technical capacity to emerge at this time.

In many ways, his movement resembles traditional political parties. However, he stressed during the interview[22] that this would only be a short-term strategy to build the movement. While he has commercial and personal interests, his movement lacks a clear worldview or ideology. He is pro-market and pro-privatization, believing that privatization will result in better and faster services.

19   https://cutt.ly/hK4Nn7E

20   Simon Tormey 2015. The End of Representative Politics. Polity   Press.

21   https://cutt.ly/eK4NIAd

22   Author interview with Shaswar Abdulwahid

8

KURDISTAN'S PLIGHT OF INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES

The prime motive of the new electoral law was to make space for new faces in Parliament outside the hegemony of the dominant elites. This was primarily aimed at local activists with limited resources and spatial influence. While the outcome in the southern part of Iraq was better than the rest, in Kurdistan, no independent candidate managed to secure a seat, even those who re-elected themselves.[23]

Ghalib M. Ali summarized the reasons for failure as "lack of resources, no access to media outlets, and low turnout."[24] In general, the idea of standing as an independent in election has become possible as a result of the new law and, more significantly, the new media. We could classify the candidates into two categories: those who had defected from their parties, mainly the former MPs, and those who had no clear political connection.

The former MPs had many advantages, and maybe as a result, also miscalculations and illusions. Their advantages were that they were already known, had a considerable number of followers on social media, and money.

When I posed a question on my Facebook account, "Why did no independent candidates succeed in Kurdistan?" Respondents were suspicious of how genuine the independents were. This point was similarly raised by Marsin Alshamary[25] in the rest of Iraq.

Among respondents' other points were "they should make space for someone else," with this point especially targeting those who seek re-election. There is a widespread view among the population in Iraqi Kurdistan that no one should re-elect him or herself a second time. This view signifies that public posts, among them MPs, are seen as opportunities, should not be limited to one sector of society. In addition to these factors, the role of social media

is often a double-edged sword. Social media, especially Facebook, was the main communication platform between these former MPs who were seeking re-election and their targeted constituencies.

It appears that social media was a viable medium for communication, especially for radical and provocative messages, but it did not translate into votes. The huge number of followers on Facebook convinced these MPs that their seats were secure. This proved not to be the case when it came to the ballot vote. There appears to have been a big gap between social media commitment (virtual) and actual voting. The independents were challenged by the mainstream political parties, especially their former political parties. The main independent candidates believe there was a sort of pact among the main political parties in Kurdistan to deny any independent candidates the right to win a seat in order to prevent a new venue for political actors that might create a parallel to party politics. These are especially critical points considering that the party is central to the governmentality of the region. The party monopolizes society and systems. "Party monopolization of politics, government, and society limited the extent to which an independent (non-party-based affiliation) public service could emerge. Civil servants' loyalty to the political elite and parties remained critical."[26]

This change will require a mindset shift among Iraqis themselves. Through various conversations, I realized that many Iraqis see the independents as not fully independent but rather as shadows of the established traditional party echelons. Many also argue that in such a volatile political landscape as Iraq's a single MP who is truly independent will be crushed. These pre-established views are part of the legacy of the reign of powerful and authoritarian rulers in thecountry.

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23   Iraqi Elections 2021: Independents and New Political Parties   https://cutt.ly/bK4NS3s

24   Former Iraqi MP Ghalib M. Ali (interviewed)

25   https://cutt.ly/IK4N67t

26   Muslih Irwani 2014. Post-conflict Iraqi Kurdistan Region: The Case of 'Social Safety Net' and 'Rights and Privileges to Families of Martyrs and Genocide Survivors' After   2001. https://cutt.ly/YK4MvZN

9

GORRAN'S FINAL DAYS

Former PUK second man Nawsherwan Mustafa founded the Change or Gorran Movement in 2009. His meteoric rise represented not only a shift in the political landscape, but also, in many ways, a paradigm shift in the Region's polity. Many new aspects of KRI politics were introduced by the movement. Being an armed peaceful opposition and not taking part in government was a significant change. The Movement resurrected the Parliament from a rubber stamp institution into an active arena of polity. Unlike the other major political parties, the Change Movement has no military wing, a peculiar feature in today's Iraqi politics. Instead of an armed group, the media was used to connect, mobilize, and pressure the system. The movement possessed a number of other dual-edged characteristics, the most notable of which was the presence of a charismatic leader. Nawsherwan Mustaf was charismatic, with a long history of activism and intellectualism and has been at the heart of the Region's politics for several decades. His figure aided the movement's meteoric rise but became a barrier in the face of the movement's transition from a charisma-based movement into an institutional movement. As Panebianco[27] emphasizes, a charismatic leader can be useful in the early stages of "party-building." A charismatic leader, on the other hand, will have a negative impact on party institutionalization in the long run. When Mustafa died in 2017, the movement lacked a charismatic leader to take his place. According to Weber,[28] "the charismatic leader is unique. He is distinguished from other men by being endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at the very least uniquely exceptional powers or qualities."

This was true of Mustafa in many ways, and it contributed to the movement's inability to transition from charisma to institution. The movement began its downward spiral immediately after the death of its charismatic leader, and in the most recent 2021 election, it reached rock bottom by failing to gain any seats. The death of Gorran is closely associated with the KRI's hope crisis. When people saw that the traditional parties were beyond change and that they were here to stay, they saw in Gorran a hope for change that would pressure the old elites to change their behavior. The constituency saw a possibility and hoped for it without much rationalization. During Gorran's heyday, crises were seen as a source of hope. Gorran's close association with hope and his failure to deliver change contributed to further disenchantment with politics and made political apathy endemic.

There is little hope for Gorran to reemerge. Their participation with other parties in government and internal conflicts within the party has resulted in huge a trust deficit among their supporters. The KRI region will long for an opposition party that can mobilize and inspire. In the era of urban politics and rentier economics, it is hard to see any charisma.

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27 Panebianco, A. (1988). Political parties: Organization and power. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

28 Agnes Horvath 2013 Modernism and Charisma, Palgrave Macmillan.

10

CONCLUSIONS

The 2021 election occurred at a specific point in time in national, regional, and international contexts. The Shia political system is divided into three factions: Sardists, pro-Iranian Coordination Framework, and independents.

To avoid the difficulties, it had with the central government in the past, the KDP formed a coalition with the Sadr movement after changing its direction and discourse. The two main Sunni groups joined the coalition to ensure that it represented all Iraqi components. As a result, there is a majority in parliament, but not enough to pass the president. Iran is dissatisfied with the coalition and is pressuring each component of the coalition to change its stance.

According to an insider, Iran told the KDP echelon that Iraq is on par with the rest of the world in terms of strategic importance to Iran. Iran cannot, therefore, allow Iraq to leave its sphere of influence. This attitude has become more entrenched as a result of repeated US calls for withdrawal and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Iran charges the KDP with interfering in the Shia-Shia conflict, which the KDP denies.

The PUK is aligning with Iran to counterbalance the KDP, as one would expect from the KRG's divided polity. So far, Iran and its allies have taken a number of steps, including a decision by the Federal Supreme Court against Iraqi Kurdistan's independent oil sector.

As expected, the KDP took advantage of the new law to strengthen its position, gaining more seats. With roughly half of the Kurdish seats won, the KDP intended to be more active in Bagdad, arguing that they either want the presidency or that the president should have their approval. To accomplish this, the KDP formed a coalition with the Sadr bloc and the main two Sunni parties led by Halbusi and Khanjar to form a majority government and end the pattern of consensus democracy. Both the handing over of the presidency and majority government were opposed by the PUK.

In general, political parties in Kurdistan are becoming more personalistic and family-based. Each major personality has a small fiefdom comprised of private media apparatus such as television, newspapers, or think tanks, as well as, for some, a university. Annually, a number of forums are organized in the Region. Each forum is an event to celebrate and give space to a particular personality. It is a modern form of ritual.

11

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Political parties should develop institutions and internal democracy. International communities and international organizations could help in informing, guiding parties institutionalization and internal democracy.

- The current model of dealing with Baghdad is used to keep the struggle within the KRI going. With such a relationship, the center becomes a participant in Kurdistan Region politics. Following this pattern will be detrimental to both Kurdistan and the central government.

- The democratic pattern of the KRI is a hybrid of majoritarian and consensual democracy. As a result of the model, the opposition's roles and impact have been reduced. If the political system is either majoritarian or consensual, it will benefit both the system and the people it governs.

- The KRI polity necessitates non-partisan space for civil society, non-governmental organizations, and other actors to address issues rather than parties and personality clashes.

- Populism is on the rise as a result of underlying causes such as rising inequality, waning ties to established traditional parties, and economic grievances, these causes require better treatment.

- The KRI electoral law must be amended, and the KRI parliament must be reformed to serve as a link between the government, the electoral system, and society.

IRAQI KURDISTAN'S POLITICAL LANDSCAPE AFTER THE 2021 ELECTIONS

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This policy analysis evaluates the most recent Iraqi parliamentary election in Iraqi Kurdistan, which was marked with a low turnout, highlighting the growing schism between political elites and society. This demonstrates the decline in political trust, which is essential for the survival of any political regime.

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The latest Iraqi parliamentary elections included many new features, such as the new electoral law, the new actors, and the strong presence of independents. As expected, the KDP used the new law to strengthen its position.

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The KDP has gained more seats in the elections, and intended to be more active in Baghdad. Also, it has formed a coalition with the Sadr bloc and the main two Sunni parties led by Halbusi and Khanjar to form a majority government and end the pattern of consensus democracy.

https://iraq.fes.de