

# Iraqi Kurdistan

## Iraqi Kurdistan

(Kurdish) هه‌ریمی کوردستان, Herêmi Kurdistan  
(Arabic) إقليم كردستان العراق



Flag



Coat of arms

**Anthem:** *Ey Reqîb*

(English: "Hey Guardian")




Location of Iraqi Kurdistan (dark green) within Iraq

### **Capital**

(and largest city)

Arbil

 36°11′N 44°00′E﻿ / ﻿36.183°N 44°E﻿ / 36.183; 44

**Official language(s)**

Kurdish, Arabic<sup>[1]</sup>

**Other languages**

Neo-Aramaic

**Demonym**

Iraqi,<sup>[2]</sup>

**Government**

Parliamentary Democracy

- **President**

Massoud Barzani

- **Prime Minister** Barham Salih

**Formation of Autonomous Region** Iraqi Kurdistan

- Autonomy accord agreement signed March 11, 1970

- Gained *de facto* independence October, 1991

- KRG established July 4, 1992

- The TAL recognized the autonomy of the KRG. January 30, 2005

**Area**

- Total 40,643 km<sup>2</sup>  
15,692 sq mi

**Population**

- 2010 estimate 4,690,939<sup>[3]</sup>

**Currency** Iraqi dinar is the official currency. (IQD)

**Time zone** GMT+3

**Drives on the** Right

**Internet TLD** .iq

**Calling code** +964

**Iraqi Kurdistan** or **Kurdistan Region** (Kurdish: هەرێمی کوردستان, *Herêmi Kurdistan*; Arabic: إقليم كردستان العراق, *Iqlīm Kurdistān*) is an autonomous region of Iraq.<sup>[4]</sup> It borders Iran to the east, Turkey to the north, Syria to the west and the rest of Iraq to the south. The regional capital is Arbil, known in Kurdish as *Hewlêr*. The region is officially governed by the Kurdistan Regional Government.

The establishment of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq dates back to the March 1970 autonomy agreement between the Kurdish opposition and the Iraqi government after years of heavy fighting. The Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s and the Anfal genocide campaign of the Iraqi army devastated the population and nature of Iraqi Kurdistan. Following

the 1991 uprising of the Iraqi people against Saddam Hussein, many Kurds were forced to flee the country to become refugees in bordering regions of Iran and Turkey. A northern no-fly zone was established following the First Gulf War in 1991 to facilitate the return of Kurdish refugees. As Kurds continued to fight government troops, Iraqi forces finally left Kurdistan in October 1991, leaving the region to function *de facto* independently; however, neither of the two major Kurdish parties had at any time declared independence and Iraqi Kurdistan continues to view itself as an integral part of a united Iraq but one in which it administers its own affairs. The 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent political changes led to the ratification of a new Constitution of Iraq in 2005. The new Iraqi constitution defines Iraqi Kurdistan as a federal entity of Iraq, and establishes Arabic and Kurdish as Iraq's joint official languages.

Iraqi Kurdistan is a parliamentary democracy with a regional assembly that consists of 111 seats.<sup>[5]</sup> The current president is Masoud Barzani, who was initially elected in 2005 and re-elected in 2009. The three governorates of Duhok, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah comprise around 40,000 square kilometres (15,000 sq mi) and have a population of around 4 million.<sup>[6]</sup>

## Etymology

The name Kurdistan literally means *Land of the Kurds*. In the Iraqi Constitution, it is referred to as *Kurdistan Region*.<sup>[7]</sup> The full name of the government is "Kurdistan Regional Government" (abbrev: KRG). Kurds also refer to the region as *Kurdistana Başûr* (South Kurdistan) or *Başûrî Kurdistan* (Southern Kurdistan or South of Kurdistan) referring to its geographical location within the whole of the greater Kurdistan region. During the Baath Party administration in the 1970s and 1980s, the region was called the "Kurdish Autonomous Region".

## History

### Pre-Islamic Period

In prehistoric times the region was home to a Neanderthal culture such as has been found at the Shanidar Cave. The region was host to the Jarmo culture circa 7000 BC. The earliest neolithic site in Assyria is at Tell Hassuna, the centre of the *Hassuna culture*, circa 6000 BC. The region was inhabited by the northern branch of the Akkadians, later known as Assyrians, and also to some degree by Hurrians. It was ruled by the Akkadian Empire from 2334 BC until 2154 BC. Assyrian kings are attested from the 23rd century BC according to the Assyrian King List, and Assyrian city-states such as Ashur and Ekallatum started appearing in the region from the mid 21st century BC. Prior to the rule of king Ushpia circa 2030 BC, the city of Ashur appears to have been a regional administrative center of the Akkadian Empire, implicated by Nuzi tablets,<sup>[8]</sup> subject to their fellow Akkadian Sargon and his successors.<sup>[9]</sup> Large cities were built by the Assyrians, including Ashur, Nineveh, Guzana, Arrapkha, Imgur-Enlil (Balawat), Shubat-Enlil and Kalhu (Calah/Nimrud). One of the major Assyrian cities in the area, Arbil (Arba-Ilu), was noted for its distinctive cult of Ishtar,<sup>[10]</sup> and the city was called "the Lady of Ishtar" by its Assyrian inhabitants.<sup>[11]</sup> The Assyrians ruled the region from the 21st century BC. The region was known as Assyria, and was the center of various Assyrian empires (particularly during the periods 1813-1754 BC, 1385-1076 BC and the Neo Assyrian Empire of 911-608 BC. Between 612 and 605 BC the Assyrian empire fell, and it passed to the neo-Babylonians and later became part of the Athura Satrap within the Achaemenian Empire from 539 to 332 BC, where it was known as Athura, the Achaemenid name for Assyria.<sup>[12][13]</sup> The region fell to Alexander The Great in 332 BC, and was thereafter ruled by the Greek Seleucid Empire until the mid 2nd century BC (and was renamed Syria, a Greek corruption of Assyria), when it fell to Mithridates I of Parthia. The Assyrian semi-independent kingdom of Adiabene was centred in Arbil in the first Christian centuries.<sup>[14][15][16][17]</sup> Later, the

region was incorporated by the Romans as the Roman Assyria province but shortly retaken by the Sassanids who established the Satrap of Assuristan (Sassanid Assyria) in it until the Arab Islamic conquest. The region became a center of the Assyrian Church of the East and a flourishing Syriac literary tradition during Sassanid rule.<sup>[18][19][20]</sup>

## Islamic Period



Kurdish Independent Kingdoms and Autonomous Principalities circa 1835.

The region was conquered by Arab Muslims in the mid 7th century AD, Assyria was dissolved as a geo-political entity (although Assyrians remain in the area to this day), and the area made part of the Muslim Arab Rashiduns, Umayyads, and later the Abbasid Caliphates, before becoming part of various Turkic, and Mongol emirates. And after the Ottomans gained power in the region starting from the sixteenth century, the area today known as Iraqi Kurdistan became formerly ruled by three principalities of Baban, Badinan and Soran. In 1831, direct Ottoman rule was imposed, which lasted until World War I when the Ottomans were defeated by the British; afterwards the influence increased in the region after the First World War.

## Kurdish revolts under British control

During World War I the British and French divided Western Asia in the Sykes-Picot Agreement. The Treaty of Sèvres, which was ratified in the Treaty of Lausanne, led to the advent of modern Western Asia and the modern Republic of Turkey. The League of Nations granted France mandates over Syria and Lebanon and granted the United Kingdom mandates over Palestine (which then consisted of two autonomous regions: Palestine and Transjordan) and what was to become Iraq. Parts of the Ottoman Empire on the Arabian Peninsula became parts of what are today Saudi Arabia and Yemen.

On December 1, 1918, during a meeting in Sulaymaniyah with Colonel Arnold Wilson, the Acting Civil Commissioner for Mesopotamia, Kurdish leaders called for British support for a united and independent Kurdistan under British protection. Between 1919 and 1922, Shaikh Mahmud Barzanji, an influential Kurdish leader based in Sulaymaniyah, formed a Kurdish government and led two revolts against the British rule. It took the British authorities two years to put down his uprisings. The first revolt began on May 22, 1919 with the arrest of British officials in Sulaymaniyah and it quickly spread to Mosul and Arbil. The British employed aerial bombardments, artillery, ground attacks by Anglo-Indian troops and Assyrian Levies, and on one occasion, chemical gas, in an attempt to quell the uprising.<sup>[21]</sup> Then the British exiled Mahmoud to India. In July 1920, 62 tribal leaders of the region called for the independence of Kurdistan under a British mandate. The objection of the British to Kurdish self-rule sprang from the fear that success of an independent Kurdish area would tempt the two Arab areas of

Baghdad and Basra to follow suit, hence endangering the direct British control over all Mesopotamia. In 1922, Britain restored Shaikh Mahmoud to power, hoping that he would organize the Kurds to act as a buffer against the Turks, who had territorial claims over Mosul and Kirkuk. Shaikh Mahmoud declared a Kurdish Kingdom with himself as king, though later he agreed to limited autonomy within the new state of Iraq. In 1930, following the announcement of the admission of Iraq to the League of Nations, Shaikh Mahmoud started a third uprising which was suppressed with British air and ground forces.<sup>[22][23]</sup>

By 1927, the Barzani clan had become vocal supporters of Kurdish rights in Iraq. In 1929, the Barzani demanded the formation of a Kurdish province in northern Iraq. Emboldened by these demands, in 1931 Kurdish notables petitioned the League of Nations to set up an independent Kurdish government. Under pressure from the Iraqi government and the British, the most influential leader of the clan, Mustafa Barzani was forced into exile in Iran in 1945. Later he moved to the Soviet Union after the collapse of the Republic of Mahabad in 1946.<sup>[24][25]</sup>

## **[edit]** Barzani Revolt 1960–1970

**Iraq**



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*Main article: First Kurdish Iraqi War*

After the military coup by Abdul Karim Qasim in 1958, Mustafa Barzani was invited by Qasim to return from exile, where he was greeted with a hero's welcome. As part of the deal arranged between Qasim and Barzani, Qasim had promised to give the Kurds regional autonomy in return for Barzani's support for his policies. Meanwhile, during 1959–1960, Barzani became the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), which was granted legal status in 1960. By early 1960, it became apparent that Qasim would not follow through with his promise of regional autonomy. As a result, the KDP began to agitate for regional autonomy. In the face of growing Kurdish dissent, as well as Barzani's personal power, Qasim began to incite the Barzanis historical enemies, the *Baradost* and *Zebari* tribes, which led to inter-tribal warfare throughout 1960 and early 1961. By February 1961, Barzani had successfully defeated the pro-government forces and consolidated his position as leader of the Kurds. At this point, Barzani ordered his forces to occupy and expel government officials from all Kurdish territory. This was not received well in Baghdad, and as a result, Qasim began to prepare for a military offensive against the north to return government control of the region. Meanwhile, in June 1961, the KDP issued a detailed ultimatum to Qasim outlining Kurdish grievances and demanded rectification. Qasim ignored the Kurdish demands and continued his planning for war. It was not until September 10, when an Iraqi army column was ambushed by a group of Kurds, that the Kurdish revolt truly began. In response to the attack, Qasim lashed out and ordered the Iraqi Air Force to indiscriminately bomb Kurdish villages, which ultimately served to rally the entire Kurdish population to Barzani's standard. Due to Qasim's profound distrust of the Iraqi Army, which he purposely failed to adequately arm (in fact, Qasim implemented a policy of ammunition rationing), Qasim's government was not able to subdue the insurrection. This stalemate irritated powerful factions within the military and is said to be one of the main reasons behind the Ba'athist coup against Qasim in February 1963. In November 1963, after considerable infighting amongst the civilian and military wings of the Ba'athists, they were ousted by Abdul Salam Arif in a coup. Then, after another failed offensive, Arif declared a ceasefire in February 1964 which provoked a split among Kurdish urban radicals on one hand and Peshmerga (Freedom fighters) forces led by Barzani on the other. Barzani agreed to the ceasefire and fired the radicals from the party. Following the unexpected death of Arif, where upon he was replaced by his brother, Abdul Rahman Arif, the Iraqi government launched a last-ditch effort to defeat the Kurds. This campaign failed in May 1966, when Barzani forces thoroughly defeated the Iraqi Army at the Battle of Mount Handrin, near Rawanduz. At this battle, it was said that the Kurds slaughtered an entire brigade.<sup>[26]</sup> Recognizing the futility of continuing this campaign, Rahman Arif announced a 12-point peace program in June 1966, which was not implemented due to the overthrow of Rahman Arif in a 1968 coup by the Baath Party. The Ba'ath government started a campaign to end the Kurdish insurrection, which stalled in 1969. This can be partly attributed to the internal power struggle in Baghdad and also tensions with Iran. Moreover, the Soviet Union pressured the Iraqis to come to terms with Barzani. A peace plan was announced in March 1970 and provided for broader Kurdish autonomy. The plan also gave Kurds representation in government bodies, to be implemented in four years.<sup>[27]</sup> Despite this, the Iraqi government embarked on an Arabization program in the oil rich regions of Kirkuk and Khanaqin in the same period.<sup>[28]</sup> In the following years, Baghdad government overcame its internal divisions and concluded a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in April 1972 and ended its isolation within the Arab world. On the other hand, Kurds remained dependent on the Iranian military support and could do little to strengthen their forces.

## **Second Kurdish Iraqi War and Algiers agreement**

*Main article: Second Kurdish Iraqi War*

In 1973, the U.S. made a secret agreement with the Shah of Iran to begin covertly funding Kurdish rebels against Bagdad in through the Central Intelligence Agency and in collaboration with Mossad, both of which would be active in the country through the launch of the Iraqi invasion and into the present.<sup>[29]</sup> By 1974, the Iraqi government retaliated with a new offensive against the Kurds and pushed them close to the border with Iran. Iraq informed Tehran that it was willing to satisfy other Iranian demands in return for an end to its aid to the Kurds. With mediation by Algerian President Houari Boumédiène, Iran and Iraq reached a comprehensive settlement in March 1975 known as the *Algiers Pact*. The agreement left the Kurds helpless and Tehran cut supplies to the

Kurdish movement. Barzani went to Iran with many of his supporters. Others surrendered en masse and the rebellion ended after a few days. As a result Iraqi government extended its control over the northern region after 15 years and in order to secure its influence, started an Arabization program by moving Arabs to the vicinity of oil fields in Kurdistan, particularly the ones around Kirkuk.<sup>[30]</sup> The repressive measures carried out by the government against the Kurds after the Algiers agreement led to renewed clashes between the Iraqi Army and Kurdish guerrillas in 1977. In 1978 and 1979, 600 Kurdish villages were burned down and around 200,000 Kurds were deported to the other parts of the country.<sup>[31]</sup>

## **Iran–Iraq War and Anfal Campaign**

*See also: Kurdish Rebellion of 1983*

During the Iran–Iraq War, the Iraqi government again implemented anti-Kurdish policies and a *de facto* civil war broke out. Iraq was widely condemned by the international community, but was never seriously punished for oppressive measures, including the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds,<sup>[32]</sup> which resulted in thousands of deaths. (See Halabja poison gas attack.)

The Al-Anfal Campaign constituted a systematic genocide of the Kurdish people in Iraq. The first wave of the plan was carried out in 1982 when 8,000 Barzanis were arrested and their remains were returned to Kurdistan in 2008. The second and more extensive and widespread wave began from March 29, 1987 until April 23, 1989, when the Iraqi army under the command of Ali Hassan al-Majid carried out a genocidal campaign against the Kurds, characterized by the following human rights violations: The widespread use of chemical weapons, the wholesale destruction of some 2,000 villages, and slaughter of around 50,000 rural Kurds, by the most conservative estimates. The large Kurdish town of Qala Dizeh (population 70,000) was completely destroyed by the Iraqi army. The campaign also included Arabization of Kirkuk, a program to drive Kurds and other ethnic groups out of the oil-rich city and replace them with Arab settlers from central and southern Iraq.<sup>[33]</sup>

## **Massacre of Iraqi Kurdish People by PMOI**

*Further information: 1991 uprisings in Iraq*

On July 13, 2003, *New York Times* published an article that in 1991 when Saddam Hussein used the People's Mujahedin of Iran (Mujahedin-e Khalq, PMOI or MEK or MKO) and its tanks as advance forces to crush the Iraqi Kurdish people in the north and the Iraqi Shia people in the south, Maryam Rajavi as then leader of PMOI's army forces commanded:

“ Take the Kurds under your tanks, and save your bullets for the Iranian Revolutionary Guards.”<sup>[34]</sup> ”

On December 14, 2006, *Time Magazine* published an article about PMOI and reported: "By the mid-1980s, the group (PMOI) had cozied up to Saddam Hussein, who provided them with funds and a compound, Camp Ashraf, north of Baghdad. The U.S. government has accused the group of helping Saddam brutally put down Iraqi Kurdish people in the early 1990s, and of launching numerous attacks inside Iran."<sup>[35]</sup>

## **[edit] After the Persian Gulf War**



 KDP and PUK controlled areas of Kurdistan after the Kurdish Civil War

Regional autonomy had originally been established in 1970 with the creation of the *Kurdish Autonomous Region* following the agreement of an Autonomy Accord between the government of Iraq and leaders of the Iraqi Kurdish community. A Legislative Assembly was established and Arbil became the capital of the new entity which lay in Northern Iraq, encompassing the Kurdish authorities of Erbil, Dahuk and Sulaymaniyah. The one-party rule which had dominated Iraq however meant that the new assembly was an overall component of Baghdad's central government; the Kurdish authority was installed by Baghdad and no multi-party system had been inaugurated in Iraqi Kurdistan, and as such the local population enjoyed no particular democratic freedom denied to the rest of the country. Things began to change after the 1991 uprising against Saddam Hussein following the end of the Persian Gulf War. United Nations Security Council Resolution 688 gave birth to a *safe haven* following international concern for the safety of Kurdish refugees. The US and British government established a No Fly Zone over a large part of northern Iraq<sup>[36]</sup> (see Operation Provide Comfort), however, it left out Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk and other important Kurdish populated regions. Bloody clashes between Iraqi forces and Kurdish troops continued and, after an uneasy and shaky balance of power was reached, the Iraqi government fully withdrew its military and other personnel from the region in October 1991 allowing Iraqi Kurdistan to function de facto independently. The region was to be ruled by the two principal Kurdish parties; the KDP and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The region also has its own flag and national anthem.

At the same time, Iraq imposed an economic blockade over the region, reducing its oil and food supplies.<sup>[37]</sup> Elections held in June 1992 produced an inconclusive outcome, with the assembly divided almost equally between the two main parties and their allies. During this period, the Kurds were subjected to a double embargo: one imposed by the United Nations on Iraq and one imposed by Saddam Hussein on their region. The severe economic hardships caused by the embargoes, fueled tensions between the two dominant political parties; the KDP the PUK over control of trade routes and resources.<sup>[38]</sup> Relations between the PUK and the KDP started to become dangerously strained from September 1993 after rounds of amalgamations occurred between parties.<sup>[39]</sup> This led to internecine and intra-Kurdish conflict and warfare between 1994 and 1996. After 1996, 13% of the Iraqi oil sales were allocated for Iraqi Kurdistan and this led to a relative prosperity in the region.<sup>[40]</sup> Saddam had established an oil smuggling route through territory controlled by the KDP, with the active involvement of senior Barzani family members. The taxation of this trade at the crossing point between Saddam's territory and Kurdish controlled territory and then into Turkey, along with associated service revenue, meant that who ever controlled Dohuk and Zakho had the potential to earn several million dollars a week.<sup>[41]</sup> Direct United States mediation led the two parties to a formal ceasefire in Washington Agreement in September 1998. It is also argued that the Oil for Food Program from 1997 onward had an important effect on cessation of hostilities.<sup>[42]</sup>

## **After the 2003 US-led invasion**





Construction of new hotels and Mosques. Since 2003, Sulaymaniyah and other cities of Iraqi Kurdistan have seen an economic boom.

Iraqi Kurds played an important role in the 2nd Gulf War. Kurdish parties joined forces against the Iraqi government during the war in Spring 2003. Kurdish military forces, known as peshmerga, played a key role in the overthrow of the Iraqi government,<sup>[43]</sup> however Kurds have been reluctant to send troops into Baghdad since, preferring not to be dragged into the sectarian struggle that so dominates much of Iraq.<sup>[44]</sup> The Iraqi Kurds may be seen in two ways. The first and the most common way is to view the Kurds as victims, both of the central government in Iraq and of neighboring powers - particularly Turkey. The second opposing position is to see them as an agent provocateur, acting as proxy forces for states opposed to the incumbent Iraqi regime.<sup>[45]</sup> This polarised notion of their status may be too simple, when one considers that there are opposing agendas within Iraqi Kurdistan with regard to issues such as the relationship with Turkey, nationalist aspirations and relations globally.<sup>[46]</sup>

PUK-leader Jalal Talabani was elected President of the new Iraqi administration, while KDP leader Massoud Barzani is President of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG).

Since the downfall of the regime of Saddam Hussein, the relations between the KRG and Turkey have been in flux. Tensions marked a high stage in late February 2008 when Turkey unilaterally took military action against the PKK which at times uses the northern Iraq region as a base for militant activities against Turkey. The incursion which lasted 8 days could have involved the armed forces of Kurdistan into a broader regional war. However, relations have been improved since then, and Turkey now has the largest share of foreign investment in Kurdistan.

## Politics

*Main article: Kurdistan Regional Government*

Since 1992, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has been based in Arbil. The KRG has a parliament, elected by popular vote, called the Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly, and a cabinet composed of the KDP, the PUK and their allies (Iraqi Communist Party, the Socialist Party of Kurdistan etc.). Structurally and officially, the two parties exhibit few differences from each other. Both of their international organizations are similar and both have a similar structure of authority. Nechirvan Idris Barzani, Masoud's nephew, was prime minister of the KRG from 1999–2009, including presiding over the first KDP-PUK unified cabinet from 2006–2009. Masrour, Masoud's son, is now in the Political Bureau. Nechirvan, as Prime Minister, spearheaded unprecedented social and economic reforms, including attention to violence against women, improvements in infrastructure, and a focus on the private sector and foreign investment. He has also been at the forefront of the rapprochement with Turkey and the active development of oil and gas fields in the Region. According to Bruinessen, the traditional structure of Kurdish social and political organization was inherently tribal, with a tribe being a socio-political unit with distinct territorial limits and membership based on kinship. Tribal power is widespread in Arbil and Dahuk. And one must

recognize the cultural differences between Arbil and Sulaymaniyah to understand the political nature of the region.<sup>[47]</sup>

After the 2003 Invasion of Iraq Kurdish politicians were represented in the Iraqi governing council. On January 30, 2005 three elections were held in the region: 1) for Transitional National Assembly of Iraq 2) for Iraqi Kurdistan National Assembly and 3) for provincial councils.<sup>[48]</sup> The Law of Administration for the State of Iraq for the Transitional Period recognized the autonomy of the Kurdistan Regional Government during the interim between "full sovereignty" and the adoption of a permanent constitution.

The Kurdistan Regional Government has constitutionally recognised authority over the provinces of Arbil, Dahuk, and Sulaymaniyah.

## Elections



This section **does not cite any references or sources**. Please help improve this section by adding citations to reliable sources. Unsourced material may be challenged and removed. *(September 2009)*

*See also: Iraqi Kurdistan legislative election, 2005 and Iraqi Kurdistan legislative election, 2009*

Elections for the Kurdistan National Assembly are held every four years. The latest elections for the parliament of Kurdistan were held on 25 July 2009. The leading political alliance was the Kurdistani List which consisted of the two main political parties, PUK and PDK, and which won 59 seats. The new less popular competing movement, the Gorran List ("Gorran" means "change" in Kurdish) headed by Nawshirwan Mustafa won 25 seats, a quarter of all parliamentary seats. The Gorran List had a strong showing in the city of Sulaymaniyah and the Sulaymaniyah governorate, which was previously considered PUK's stronghold. The Reform List, consisting of 4 parties, won 13 seats. In addition, the Islamic movement won 2 seats and 11 seats were reserved for minority parties Turkmen (5 seats), Assyrians (5 seats) and Armenians (1 seat).

In the Presidential election Masoud Barzani was appointed President and won another term in 2009 by gaining 70% of votes. Dr. Kamal Miraudeli came second with approximately 30% of votes.

Elections for the governorate councils are held every four years. Each council consists of 41 members. The last governorate council election of Kurdistan was held in 2009.

## Foreign relations

The Kurdistan Region is allowed to have oversight, to some degree, of its own foreign relations without referring to Baghdad.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

Iraqi Kurdistan houses numerous consulates, embassy offices, trade offices and honorary consulates of countries that want to increase their influence and have better ties with the Kurdistan Regional Government.<sup>[49]</sup> As of October 2010 there were 20 diplomatic representations in the Region, including Turkey.

The representative of the Kurdistan Regional Government to the United States is the youngest son of Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, Qubad Talabani. The KRG's high representative to the United Kingdom is Bayan Sami Abdul-Rahman, daughter of Sami Abdul-Rahman who was killed in a terrorist attack on 1 February 2004.<sup>[50]</sup>

## Human Rights

## Media

Human Rights Watch reported that journalists in Iraqi Kurdistan who criticize the regional government have faced substantial violence, threats, and lawsuits in recent months, and some have fled the country,<sup>[51]</sup>

## Violence against women

Human Rights Watch reported that Female genital cutting is practiced mainly by Kurds in Iraqi Kurdistan, reportedly 60% percent of Kurdish women population have undergone this procedure, although the KRG claimed that the figures are exaggerated. Girls and women receive conflicting and inaccurate messages from public officials on its consequences.<sup>[52]</sup> The Kurdistan parliament in 2008 passed a draft law outlawing the practice, but the ministerial decree necessary to implement it, expected in February 2009, was cancelled<sup>[53]</sup>.

As reported to the Centre for Islamic Pluralism by the non-governmental organization Stop FGM in Kurdistan, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in northern Iraq, on 25 November, officially admitted the wide prevalence in the territory of female genital mutilation (FGM). Recognition by the KRG of the frequency of this custom among Kurds came during a conference program commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.<sup>[54]</sup>

On 27 November 2010, the Kurdish government officially admitted to violence against women in Kurdistan and began taking serious measures.<sup>[55]</sup> 21 June 2011 The Family Violence Bill was approved by the Kurdistan Parliament, it includes several provisions criminalizing the practice<sup>[56]</sup>

## Religious tolerance in Kurdistan

British lawmaker Robert Halfon sees Kurdistan as a more progressive Muslim region than the other Muslim countries in the Middle East.<sup>[57]</sup> The region has populations of Assyrian Christians, Yazidi, Yarsan, Mandean and Shabak faiths.

## Minority rights in Kurdistan

Although the Kurdish regional parliament has officially recognised other minorities such as Assyrians, Turkmen, Arabs, Armenians, Mandean, Shabaks and Yezidis, there have been multiple accusations of attempts to "kurdify" them. The Assyrians have reported Kurdish officials reluctance in rebuilding Assyrian villages in their region while constructing more settlements for the Kurds affected during the Anfal campaign.<sup>[58]</sup> After his visit to the region, the Dutch politician Joël Voordewind noted that the positions reserved for minorities in the Kurdish parliament where appointed by Kurds as the Assyrians for example had no possibility to nominate their own candidates.<sup>[59]</sup>

The Kurdish regional government have been accused of trying to kurdify other regions such as the Assyrian Nineveh plains and Kirkuk by providing financial support for Kurds who want to settle in those areas.<sup>[60][61]</sup>

## Economy

The Kurdistan region's economy is dominated by the oil industry, agriculture and tourism.<sup>[62][63]</sup> Due to relative peace in the region it has a more developed economy in comparison to other parts of Iraq.

Prior to the removal of Saddam Hussein, the Kurdistan Regional Government received approximately 13% of the revenues from Iraq's Oil-for-Food Program. By the time of the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, the program had

disbursed \$8.35 billion to the KRG. Iraqi Kurdistan's food security allowed for substantially more of the funds to be spent on development projects than in the rest of Iraq. By the program's end in 2003 \$4 billion of the KRG's oil-for-food funds remained unspent.

Following the removal of Saddam Hussein's administration and the subsequent violence, the three provinces fully under the Kurdistan Regional Government's control were the only three in Iraq to be ranked "secure" by the US military. The relative security and stability of the region has allowed the KRG to sign a number of investment contracts with foreign companies. In 2006, the first new oil well since the invasion of Iraq was drilled in the Kurdistan region by the Norwegian energy company DNO. Initial indications are that the oil field contains at least 100 million barrels (16,000,000 m<sup>3</sup>) of oil and will be pumping 5,000 bbl/d (790 m<sup>3</sup>/d) by early 2007. The KRG has signed exploration agreements with several other oil companies, including Canada's Western Oil Sands and the UK's Sterling Energy and Gulf Keystone Petroleum.<sup>[citation needed]</sup>

The stability of the Kurdistan region has allowed it to achieve a higher level of development than other regions in Iraq. In 2004, the per capita income was 25% higher than in the rest of Iraq. The government continues to receive a portion of the revenue from Iraq's oil exports, and the government will soon implement a unified foreign investment law. The KRG also has plans to build a media city in Arbil and free trade zones near the borders of Turkey and Iran.

Since 2003, the stronger economy of Iraqi Kurdistan has attracted around 20,000 workers from other parts of Iraq.<sup>[64]</sup> According to Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, since 2003 the number of millionaires in the Kurdish city of Silêmani has increased from 12 to 2000, reflecting the financial and economic growth of the region.<sup>[65]</sup>

Iraqi Kurdistan currently has the lowest poverty rates in Iraq.<sup>[66]</sup> According to the KRG website, not a single coalition soldier has died nor a single foreigner been kidnapped since the 2003 invasion of Iraq in areas administered by the KRG.<sup>[67]</sup>

## Infrastructure and transport

Due to the devastation of the campaigns of the Iraqi army under Saddam Hussein and other former Iraqi regimes, the Kurdistan Region's infrastructure was never able to modernize. After the 1991 safe-haven was established, the Kurdistan Regional Government began with projects to reconstruct the Kurdistan Region. Since then, of all the 4,500 villages that were destroyed by Saddam Husseins' regime, 65% has been reconstructed by the KRG.<sup>[67]</sup> Further, since the removal of the previous regime in 2003, the KRG has been able to scale up its service delivery and infrastructure, which has been changed the economic landscape of the region and facilitated a number of investment projects.

## Mobility



Front view of Erbil International Airport under construction in 2008

Iraqi Kurdistan can be reached by land and air. By land, Iraqi Kurdistan can be reached most easily by Turkey through the Habur Border Gate which is the only border gate between Kurdistan and Turkey. This border gate can

be reached by bus or taxi from airports in Turkey as close as the Mardin or Diyarbakir airports, as well as from Istanbul or Ankara. Iraqi Kurdistan has two border gates with Iran, the Haji Omaran border gate and the Bashmeg border gate near the city of Sulaymaniyah. Iraqi Kurdistan has also a border gate with Syria known as the Faysh Khabur border gate.<sup>[68]</sup> From within Iraq, Kurdistan Region can be reached by land from multiple roads.

Iraqi Kurdistan has opened its doors to the international world by opening two international airports. Erbil International Airport and Sulaimaniyah International Airport, which both operate flights to Middle Eastern and European destinations. The KRG spent millions of dollars on the airports to attract international carriers, and currently Austrian Airlines, Lufthansa, Etihad, Royal Jordanian, Gulf Air, Middle East Airlines, Atlas Jet, and Fly Dubai all service the Region. There are at least 2 military airfields in Iraqi Kurdistan.<sup>[69]</sup>

## Geography and climate

The Kurdistan Region is largely mountainous, with the highest point being a 3,611 m (11,847 ft) point known locally as Cheekah Dar (black tent). The mountains are part of the larger Zagros mountain range which is present in Iran as well. There are many rivers flowing and running through mountains of the region making it distinguished by its fertile lands, plentiful water, picturesque nature. The Great Zab and the Little Zab flow from the east to the west in the region. The Tigris river enters Iraq from the Kurdistan Region after flowing from Turkey.

The mountainous nature of Iraqi Kurdistan, the difference of temperatures in its various parts, and its wealth of waters, make Kurdistan a land of agriculture and tourism. In addition to various minerals, oil in particular, which for a long time was being extracted via pipeline only in Kurdistan Region through Iraq. The largest lake in the region is Lake Dukan. In addition, there are several smaller lakes such as the Duhok Lake.

In the western and southern parts of the Kurdistan Region, the area is not as mountainous as the east. It is rolling hills and sometimes plains that make up the area. The area however is greener than the rest of Iraq.

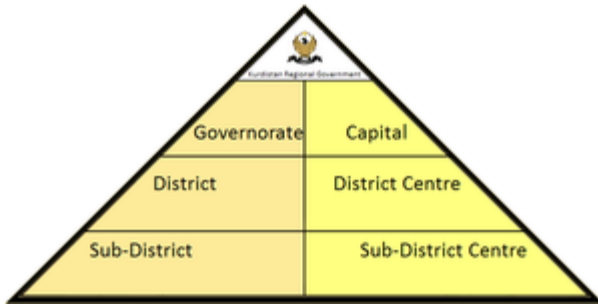
The term "Northern Iraq" is a bit of a geographical ambiguity in usage. "North" typically refers to the Kurdistan Region. "Center" and "South" or "Center-South" when individually referring to the other areas of Iraq or the rest of the country that is not the Kurdistan Region. Most media sources continually refer to "North" and "Northern Iraq" as anywhere north of Baghdad.

Climate data for Arbil

Month	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
<b>Average high °C (°F)</b>	6 (43)	8 (46)	14 (57)	18 (64)	25 (77)	31 (88)	35 (95)	32 (90)	28 (82)	21 (70)	14 (57)	8 (46)	20.0 (68.0)
<b>Average low °C (°F)</b>	1 (34)	3 (37)	7 (45)	11 (52)	17 (63)	20 (68)	25 (77)	24 (75)	20 (68)	15 (59)	8 (46)	3 (37)	12.8 (55.1)
<b>Rainfall mm (inches)</b>	66 (2.6)	66 (2.6)	60 (2.36)	27 (1.06)	6 (0.24)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	9 (0.35)	57 (2.24)	78 (3.07)	369 (14.53)
<b>Avg. rainy days</b>	10	9	12	8	5	3	1	2	1	6	7	11	75

Source: <sup>[70]</sup>

## Administrative divisions



The levels of the administrative divisions of Kurdistan

Iraqi Kurdistan is divided into three governorates (*Parêzge* in Kurdish). The governorates of Duhok, Erbil and Sulaymaniya form the Kurdistan Region. Each of these governorates is divided into districts with a total of 26 districts. Each district is divided into sub-districts. Governorates have a capital city, while districts and sub-districts have *district centers*. Points of disagreement exist between the Iraqi government and the Kurdish regional government about certain territories outside of Iraqi Kurdistan.

- Governorates of Iraqi Kurdistan:

1. Sulaymaniyah (Silêmanî)
2. Erbil (Hewlêr)
3. Dahuk (Duhok)

## Cities

The Kurdistan Region has an increasing urban population with still a significant rural population. The following list is an incomplete list of the largest cities within the three governorates which are currently de jure and de facto under control of the Kurdistan Regional Government.



The capital city of Arbil

The 9 largest cities in Iraqi Kurdistan

City	Population	Governorate
<u>Hewlêr</u>	1,293,839	<u>Erbil Governorate</u>
<u>Silêmanî</u>	1,190,251	<u>Sulaymaniya Governorate</u>
<u>Dihok</u>	950,000	<u>Duhok Governorate</u>
<u>Zaxo</u>	336,129	<u>Duhok Governorate</u>



The 9 largest cities in Iraqi Kurdistan

City	Population	Governorate
<u>Kelar</u>	226,000	<u>Sulaymaniya Governorate</u>
<u>Rewandiz</u>	102,399	<u>Erbil Governorate</u>
<u>Helebce</u>	110,824	<u>Sulaymaniya Governorate</u>
<u>Sêmêl</u>	100,995	<u>Duhok Governorate</u>
<u>Ranye</u>	130,257	<u>Sulaymaniya Governorate</u>

- Population data from World Gazetteer 2009 estimates
- Population data not verifiable

## Demographics

*Further information: [Iraqi people](#) and [Kurdish people](#)*

Due to the absence of a proper population census, the exact population of Iraqi Kurdistan as well as the rest of Iraq is unknown, but the Kurdish government has recently started to publish better population figures. By 2009, Iraq had an estimated population of around 30 million as estimated by the [International Monetary Fund](#). Within the three governorates of [Duhok](#), [Arbil](#) and [Sulaymaniyah](#) the population is 4,864,000<sup>[71]</sup> Iraqi Kurdistan has a young population with an estimated 40% of the population being under the age of 15.

The ethno-linguistic make-up of Iraqi Kurdistan is diverse and includes [Kurds](#), [Arabs](#), [Assyrians](#), [Turkmens](#), [Armenians](#), [Shabaks](#), [Yezidis](#), [Roma](#), [Circassians](#) and [Mandaeans](#).

### Language

The Kurdistan Region's official languages are [Kurdish](#) and [Arabic](#).<sup>[72]</sup> Kurdish is the most widely spoken language and Arabic is also widely spoken and understood.<sup>[72]</sup> The two main dialects of Kurdish are [Sorani](#) and [Kurmanji](#).

[Assyrian Neo-Aramaic](#), [Mandaic Neo-Aramaic](#), [Armenian](#) and [Turkmani](#) are also spoken by their respective communities.<sup>[72]</sup>

### Religion

Iraqi Kurdistan has a diverse religious population. The dominant religion is [Islam](#), adhered to by the majority of its inhabitants. These include Kurds, Iraqi Turkmen, and Arabs, belonging mostly to the [Sunni](#) branch of Islam. [Christianity](#), is adhered to by [Assyrian](#) and [Armenian](#) peoples (as well as by a few Kurds and Turkmen), and [Yezidism](#) make up a significant minority. [Yarsan](#), [Mandean](#) and [Shabaki](#) religions are also followed.

### Immigration

Since the overthrow of the regime of [Saddam Hussein](#) in 2003, Iraqi Kurdistan has witnessed massive immigration from Arab parts of Iraq (particularly from Kurds, Assyrians, Armenians, Mandaeans,

Shabaks and Roma) as well as from South Asia. Because of the stability and security, Kurdistan has witnessed non-Kurdish or non-Iraqi immigrants.

Widespread economic activity between Iraqi Kurdistan and Turkey has given the opportunity for Turks to seek jobs in Iraqi Kurdistan. A Kurdish newspaper based in the Kurdish capital estimates that around 50,000 Turks are now living in Kurdistan.<sup>[73]</sup> Reports about immigrants from Bangladesh, India and Pakistan have been published as well.

## Culture

*Main articles: Iraqi culture and Kurdish culture*

Kurdish culture is a group of distinctive cultural traits practiced by Kurdish people. The Kurdish culture is a legacy from the various ancient peoples who shaped modern Kurds and their society, but primarily Iranic. Among their neighbours, the Kurdish culture is closest to Iranian culture. For example they celebrate Newroz as the new year day, which is celebrated on March 21. It is the first day of the month of Xakelêwe in Kurdish calendar and the first day of spring.<sup>[74]</sup> Other peoples such as Assyrians, Armenians, Arabs, Yazidis, Shabaks and Mandaeans have their own distinctive cultures.

## Music

*Main articles: Iraqi music and Kurdish music*

Traditionally, there are three types of Kurdish classical performers - storytellers (çîrokbêj), minstrels (stranbêj) and bards (dengbêj). There was no specific music related to the Kurdish princely courts, and instead, music performed in night gatherings (şevbihêrk) is considered classical. Several musical forms are found in this genre. Many songs are epic in nature, such as the popular lawiks which are heroic ballads recounting the tales of Kurdish heroes of the past like Saladin. Heyrans are love ballads usually expressing the melancholy of separation and unfulfilled love. Lawje is a form of religious music and Payizoks are songs performed specifically in autumn. Love songs, dance music, wedding and other celebratory songs (dîlok/narînk), erotic poetry and work songs are also popular.

## Military

*Main article: Peshmerga*

Peshmerga is the term used by Kurds to refer to armed Kurdish fighters, they have been labelled by some as freedom fighters. Literally meaning "those who face death" (pêş front + merg death *e* is) the peshmerga forces of Kurdistan have been around since the advent of the Kurdish independence movement in the early 1920s, following the collapse of the Ottoman and Qajar empires which had jointly ruled over the area known today as Kurdistan.

The Peshmerga fought alongside the US Army and the coalition in the northern front during Operation Iraqi Freedom. During the following years, the Peshmerga played a vital role in security for Kurdistan and other parts of Iraq. Not a single coalition soldier or foreigner has been killed, wounded or kidnapped in Kurdistan since the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Peshmerga have also been deployed in Baghdad and al-Anbar governorate for anti-terror operations.



The Kurdistan Region is allowed to have its own army under the Iraqi constitution and the central Iraqi army is not allowed to enter the Kurdistan Region by law.

## Education

Before the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government, primary and secondary education was almost entirely taught in Arabic. Higher education was always taught in Arabic. This however changed with the establishment of the Kurdistan autonomous region. The first international school, the International School of ChouEIFat opened its branch in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2006. Other international schools have opened and British International Schools in Kurdistan is the latest with a planned opening in Suleimaniah in September 2011.

Iraqi Kurdistan's official universities are listed below, followed by their English acronym (if commonly used), internet domain, establishment date and latest data about the number of students.

<b>Institute</b>	<b>Internet Domain</b>	<b>Est. Date</b>	<b>Students</b>
<u>Salahaddin University (SU)</u>	<a href="http://www.suh-edu.com">http://www.suh-edu.com</a>	1968	7,048 (2006)
<u>University of Sulaimani (US)</u>	<a href="http://www.univsul.org/">http://www.univsul.org/</a>	1968	(3,067) (2006)
<u>University of Dohuk</u>	<a href="http://www.uod.ac">www.uod.ac</a>	1992	1,689 (2006)
<u>University of Koya (KU)</u>	<a href="http://www.koyauniversity.org">www.koyauniversity.org</a>	2003	(?) (2006)
<u>University of Kurdistan</u>	<a href="http://www.ukh.ac">www.ukh.ac</a>	2006	400 (2006)
<u>American University of Iraq - Sulaimani</u>	<a href="http://www.auiis.org">www.auiis.org</a>	2007	50 (2007)
<u>Hawler Medical University (HMU)</u>	<a href="http://www.hawlermu.org">www.hawlermu.org</a>	2006	(?) (2006)
<u>Business &amp; Management University (BMU)</u>	<a href="http://www.bmu-me.net">www.bmu-me.net</a>	2007	(?) (2007)
<u>SABIS University</u>	<a href="http://www.sabisuniversity.net">www.sabisuniversity.net</a>	2009	(?) (2009)
<u>Cihan University</u>	<a href="http://www.cihanuniversity.org">www.cihanuniversity.org</a>	?	(?)
<u>British Royal University</u>	<a href="http://www.broyalu.com">www.broyalu.com</a>	?	(?)
<u>Hawler Private University for Science and Technology</u>	<a href="http://hpust.com">hpust.com</a>	?	(?)
<u>Ishik University</u>	<a href="http://www.ishikuniversity.net">www.ishikuniversity.net</a>	?	(?)
<u>Soran University</u>	<a href="http://www.soranu.com">www.soranu.com</a>	2009	2200 (2009)
<u>Newroz University</u>	?	?	(?)
<u>Human Development University</u>	?	?	(?)