

ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ

By

Tawfiq Rahman Hamad

THESIS

Submitted to

KDI School of Public Policy and Management

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Master of Public Policy

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# **ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Elections and democracy aren't anything new to advanced democracies, however they are entirely different experiences to people of the Kurdistan Region; they are a new phenomenon and cultural experience. The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) was established in 1992 through an election in which people chose representatives through voting in a secret poll. The first election in the Kurdistan Region was indeed a milestone that turned Kurds from revolutionary groups into political parties that call for a functional government that implements principles of democracy. For the first time in a long time, Kurds in the region were optimistic about the future of their government and the democratization process. Unfortunately only a couple of years after the first Kurdish elections, a civil war broke out between the two ruling Kurdish parties, which coupled with some failures by the ruling cabinet the first few years after the elections, changed people's enthusiasm and optimism towards the future of the KRG.

The liberation of Iraq in 2003 and the American pledge to turn Iraq into a democratic country in the Middle East where Kurds no longer had to live as second class citizens. The situation meant that it was imperative that the two main Kurdish political parties work closely together, as the resolution of their internal disputes was necessary in order to achieve more gains in Baghdad as a united bloc. These actions were part of the democratization process that the Kurds strived to be part of, and the

signing of the Washington Peace Agreement a few years prior to the liberation was crucial in helping establish the framework needed to end the conflicts between the two ruling Kurdish political parties.

Since 1992, three separate elections have been held in the Kurdistan Region. However, the fact that over 19 years there has only been three elections means that a lot more could have been done and achieved had it not been for those internal issues. During the time of the civil war and the resulting internal problems, from 1992 to 2005, meant that the region only enjoyed two elections. The emergence of civil society, free media, and opposition groups in the past few years has meant that more and more people have taken an interest in, as well as recognizing the official Kurdistan Region Government as the legitimate democratic government representative of the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Currently political parties along with the government claim that there is democracy in the Kurdistan Region, nevertheless, there are civil societies, NGO's and opposition groups can be heard debating the shortcomings and pitfalls of the democratization process in the region.

Therefore, this paper will study and analyze the democratization process in the Kurdistan Region by using one independent variable- elections. Did the elections in the previous years help in improving democracy in the Kurdistan Region? Will democracy take root in the Kurdistan Region? If the question is affirmative, what are the tangible outcomes on the ground?

**Dedicated to my family& friends**

**Razwan & Rawan**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Throughout the process of writing this thesis, I realized that I am very blessed to have the constant encouragement and understanding of a large number of people in my life. My deepest gratitude goes to all the faculty members of *KDI-School of Public Policy and Management* and enduring gratitude to Professor Kim Dong Yong, Professor Hun Joo Park, Professor Yong S. Lee and Professor Abraham Shragge, whose help made this paper possible. I would like to extend my deep gratitude to KOICA for their great support in Korea and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Academic Affairs and the library staff for their great support during my stay in Korea.

I would like to extend my gratitude to Minister Falah Mustafa Bakir, Head of the Department of Foreign Relations for his great support and encouragement as well as all of my current and former colleagues.

I also want to thank all of my Korean and international friends that I made at the KDI School, and will always cherish their friendship, loyalty and assistance.

Tawfiq Rahman Hamad

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## ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

<b>ADM</b>	Assyrian Democratic Movement
<b>BBC</b>	British Broadcasting Corporation
<b>BDP</b>	Bet nahrain Democratic Party
<b>CCS</b>	Chaldean Cultural Society
<b>CDUP</b>	Chaldean Democratic Union Party
<b>CSAPC</b>	Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council
<b>DNUK</b>	Democratic National Union of Kurdistan
<b>FMP</b>	Farmers Movement Party
<b>GMI</b>	Greater Middle East Initiative
<b>ICP</b>	Iraqi Communist Party
<b>IMK</b>	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
<b>INBP</b>	Iraqi National Brotherhood Party
<b>IHEC</b>	Iraqi High Electoral Commission
<b>IMK</b>	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
<b>IRG</b>	Iraqi Republican Group
<b>IUNF</b>	Iraqi Unity National Front
<b>KCP</b>	Kurdistan Conservative Party
<b>KDAP</b>	Kurdistan Democracy Attainment Party
<b>KDM</b>	Kurdistan Democrats Movement
<b>KDLP</b>	Kurdistan Democratic Labor Party
<b>KDP</b>	Kurdistan Democratic Party

<b>KIG</b>	Kurdistan Islamic Group
<b>KIU</b>	Kurdistan Islamic Union
<b>KNDA</b>	Kurdistan National Democratic Alliance
<b>KNM</b>	Kurdistan National Movement
<b>KPDM</b>	Kurdistan People's Democratic Movement
<b>KPDP</b>	Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party
<b>KRG</b>	Kurdistan Regional Government
<b>KSDP</b>	Kurdistan Socialist Democratic Party
<b>KTP</b>	Kurdistan Toilers Party
<b>NGO</b>	Non Governmental Organization
<b>PUK</b>	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
<b>PASOK</b>	Kurdish Socialist Party
<b>TDM</b>	Turkmen Democratic Movement
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>USA</b>	United States of America

# **Elections and Democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq**

**By Tawfiq Rahman Hamad**

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

After the First Gulf War in 1991, none of the western powers expected that the flight of more than two million people from Kurdistan, the northern territory of Iraq, would push the United Nation's Security Council to adopt resolution No.688 which led to the establishment of the autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government. Against this backdrop and with the encouragement of the United States as well as other western allies, the Kurdish people began to move forward with the idea of establishing a democratic system of governance.

Since then, the Kurdish people have held three rounds of parliamentary elections. Many, both in and out of the region, are curious about the experience of the Kurdish people with the idea of democracy (Qazzaz 2000). The world at large appears to be also interested in the experimentation of democracy in Kurdistan. The question of interest to the world, but particularly to the Kurdish people, is whether the idea of democracy will take root in the autonomous Kurdish region in Iraq.

There are several reasons people of the Kurdistan Region want democracy and many factors that are pushing the KRG to adopt the principles of democracy. Having lived under consecutive oppressive central governments for many decades, the Kurdish people strived to live under their own rules without having to be treated like second class citizens by politicians in Baghdad. If the history of the Kurdish people was to be examined, they either didn't have option to elect their representative freely, or when they were able to participate in the elections, they could only vote for a candidate they don't like or one that did not represent their will in the parliament. As a

result, Kurdish people were ready to sacrifice their lives for freedom and the chance to enjoy a prosperous life.

The Kurdistan Regional Government is working to adopt the principles of democracy but as we know democratization is a process that takes many years to implement. Even in the west, there are countries which decades after gaining democracy still go through political reforms to improve their democratization process. Why are elections important to the KRG? Does an election really change the policy and the performance of the government, or is it just an election without resulting in a proper and legitimate democracy? In the previous regime Kurdish people participated in elections and voting, however there was no democracy and only a totalitarian government. The previous regime was toppled because the majority of Iraqi people were tired of living under an authoritarian regime where they had no say in deciding who would govern them and how. This is why the implementation of a genuine democracy is paramount to the success of the Kurdistan Region as well as Iraq as a whole. The people living in the Kurdistan Region want to feel as if their voice counts and that is why the political parties continue to work to try and improve the quality of lives of the residents of the Kurdistan Region, and this can only be done through a democratic system that people believe in. If one was to look at the example of Korea after its liberation by the United States of America from the Japanese, Korea held elections and obtained a democratic government. It can be reasonably concluded that external factors helped the Koreans to build a democratic government. “Taiwan and Korea are two of the most democratic countries in the region, and their publics strongly reject authoritarian alternatives, yet these same publics also express relatively low support for “democracy” (Diamond, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to examine whether the idea of democracy is

likely to take root in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. In particular, I am interested in exploring what positive signs, if any, are emerging in Kurdish politics that give a measure of optimism that the Kurdish people will achieve and maintain democracy. As signs of progress, one must look at several indicators which political scientists generally regard as positive steps toward democracy (Downs 1997; Barber). The indicators that I have selected from my readings of political science literature, to examine in Kurdish politics are: (1) the participation of the Kurdish people in the electoral process, (2) freedom of choice as evidenced by electing their representative freely, (3) and the emergence of civil society and NGO groups. Given the fact that the idea of democracy is relatively new in Kurdish politics, a comprehensive assessment will need to be delayed. The measures selected in this study are but exploratory in nature, and the results, even if posted, provide no assurance that they indicate the sustainability of liberal democracy.

To analyze and discuss the above indicators, election data and other reports provided by international independent organizations in the region will be used.

The analysis of this thesis will be carried out at the macro level of democracy and it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the micro indicators of democracy.

This thesis is organized as follows; the first portion will look at the literature review and a brief history of the Kurdistan Region. The second part will address the hypothesis. The final portion will contain the explanation and analysis of the indicators of democracy, conclusion and recommendation.

## II. Literature Review

### a. Essence of a liberal democracy:

Democracy is a type of political system in which the system of governance is dictated by the will of majority rather than a select few. In other words, the majority of people are represented in parliament, congress or in whatever system of governance a country uses. Democracy as a word is derived from the Greek word (dēmokratía) means rule of the people which is divided into two parts (demos) people and (kratos) power (Kendi 2003.14).

“We live in a democratic age. Over the last century the world has been shaped by one trend above all others, that trend being ‘The rise of Democracy’”. (Zakaria 2003 p.13). Since its emergence in the City States in Greece, ‘democracy’ has taken root in many different forms and meanings. Larry Diamond wrote in (Journal of Democracy No.21) on the meaning of democracy and explains that over the past two decades, research vis-à-vis measuring public-opinion has become increasingly prominent and widely used in efforts to assess and explain the progress and prospects for democracy in Europe, Latin America, Asia, Africa, and most recently in the Middle East. By posing standardized questions to representative samples of voting-age people in various countries within cultural or geographic zone, regional “barometer” surveys have become sources of enlightening cross-country comparisons that shed light on how people view and support democracy. The meaning and definition of democracy differs from one country to another; two-thirds of Jordanians refer to freedom in defining democracy. In four Arab countries, more than 90 percent identify political rights or civil liberties as important for democracy (Diamond 2010 Vol. 21).

It is equally true that there are many kinds of democracies that can be measured along a scale ranging from the most steadfast liberal democracies to illiberal democracies. It is important to pose the question; what type of democracy do the people of the Kurdistan Region envision for themselves? It can be assumed that the Kurdish people are not in favor of an illiberal regime in which elections are used as an instrument to legitimize a dictatorial system similar to Saddam Hussein's former government. They strive to achieve a democratic government that is "run by the people, owned by the people, and for the people" (Lincoln, 1864).

The phrase "government of the people" means that sovereignty rests upon its people not the rulers. The phrase "government by people" means that the people elect their representatives periodically but regularly. The phrase "government for the people" means that the elected representatives and civil servants are working for the people: for their safety; for their welfare, and for their happiness. The government "by the people, of the people and for the people", as achieved by the founders of democracy in America, also refers to a limited government in which the government is constitutionally prohibited from reducing or eliminating the fundamental rights of people such as freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, freedom of pursuing ones happiness without due process. This limited government, then, protects the rights of a minority.

Schumpeter (1942) explains that in terms of classical doctrine of democracy, it is the people that will choose their representative via elections in order to arrive at political decisions that carry out the people's will as well as achieving what is commonly referred to as the 'common good'. At this point, one would question if the elected body will actually out the will of their 'people' or maintain and serve their own political agendas and interests in order to be re-elected in upcoming elections.



This thesis is about elections and democracy, along with its advocates that use the concept of democracy as a mechanism to establish legitimate competition that results in the election of a leader through a periodic vote by the general public. Dahl (1989) explains the theory of democracy by saying that no modern country meets the ideal of democracy as a theoretical utopia. To reach the ideal democracy, a country should meet the five following criteria:

1. Effective Participation-

Throughout the decision making process, citizens must have adequate and equal opportunity to express their preferences as the final outcome, to place questions on the agenda, and to express reasons for endorsing one rather than another.

2. Voting equality at the decisive stage-

Each citizen must be ensured an equal opportunity to express a choice that will be counted as equal in weight to the choice expressed by any other citizen.

3. Enlightened Understanding-

Each citizen must have adequate and equal opportunities for discovering and validating (within the time permitted by the need for a decision) the choice on the matter to be decided that would best serve the citizen's interests.

4. Control of the Agenda-

The demos (people) must have the exclusive opportunity to decide how matters are to be placed on the agenda of matters that are to be decided by means of the democratic process.

5. Inclusiveness:

Equality must extend to all citizens within the country. (Everyone has legitimate stake within the political process).

“[P]eople’s sovereignty is the basis upon which democratic decision-making takes place; and ‘the people’ are the addressees, or the constituents, of the political decision” (Axtmann, 2007 p.vi).

One could argue that the type of democracy that is flourishing in the Kurdistan Region is a consociational democracy. Kris Deschouwer states that ‘consociational democracy’ is a concept that was coined in the 1960s and that defines a specific type of political regime. The basis of consociational democracy is that there exists a consensus among the different stakeholders representing the society and who eventually will form the government. The Consociationalists argue that the consociation democracy is realistic, and are concerned about just and stable accommodations of differences amid communities.

The Consociationalists generally argue that they have a better model of democratic regime than majoritarians because in a consociation democracy more people than just those in the majority, may influence or control the executive and get effective voice. Consociational doesn’t eradicate opposition within communities. Consociational democracy is divided into three types, *Complete, Concurrent and Weak Consociational Democracy* (Noel 2005).

In complete consociational democracy, the representatives of all the different political parties are represented in the executive body. While in the concurrent consociational democracy, the key major player has representation in the executive body and each major key player has a strong support within its community. The concurrent is unlike the complete consociational democracy, it is only about half plus one support for its constituency.

In a weak consociational democracy, the representation has been completely elected, and the government has only the plurality from one or more specific group.

One should not misunderstand the points stated above, that a government has to be composed either by complete consociation or through a grand coalition. A government should have cross-community executive power sharing in which each group in society is represented with at least plurality levels of support within its group.

Democracy is no longer just a form of political system, it is now viewed more than its past definition since one can see and read many papers and research in regards to democracy in our daily life, education, freedom, liberties. We practice the values and ideals of democracy in different aspects of our lives. Without wanting to go into too much micro-level detail, when a number of family members wish to go to a restaurant, the final destination is usually reached upon by a democratic decision, i.e. respecting the will of the majority.

This study sets out whether the Kurdish people will be able to keep their newly found democracy. In light of the background and the basic theory of democracy, this thesis will also examine whether the Kurdish people will be able to develop a liberal democracy. As a first step, the level of participation of the Kurdish people in parliamentary and presidential elections will be examined.

## **b. Elections and Democracy:**

Elections and democracy refer to the representative democracy where people take part in elections to choose their representative for the parliament. Representative democracy is the opposite of direct democracy since people give power and responsibility to their representative to act on their behalf.

One can refer to former American president Abraham Lincoln when discussing election and democracy; he famously once said “Government by the people” because through elections, people will decide who will be the next president or members of Parliament. “The people participate primarily by choosing policymakers in competitive elections. Such elections are instruments of democracy to the degree that they give the people influence over policy making” (Powell, 2000). Although an election isn’t the only variable to measure democracy in any country around the world, one can make a solid argument that elections are one of the major underlying principles in which to measure democracy.

There are two visions in the electoral system (Powell 2000): majoritarian and proportional. He explains that in the majoritarian vision of citizen control, concentrated policy-making power is not unattractive. In fact, concentrated power is a must, but not enough for citizen control. If power is shared among officials, offices, and issues, then policymaking must be the result of complex discussion and debate amongst winners and losers, ins and outs. As a result of such distribution, retrospective responsibility can be difficult to pinpoint, and elections may bear only tenuous relations to the creation of successful policy groups. The directness and clarity of the connections that make this vision attractive depend on concentrated political power that citizens are able to control.

The proportional system views the language of elections as instruments of

citizen influence. This is often connected with detached policy-making power. In this vision, elections play less of a direct role in policy-making. The fundamental nature of the vision is that the election brings representative agents of all the different areas of society into the policy-making process. These agents can negotiate with each other in a flexible and accommodative way. Two important arguments underlie the claim of the proportional influence vision. They offer related but theoretically different reasons for spreading power amongst representatives of all groups (Powell 2000):

1. Elections can be tricky. The crossroads of party contributions, citizen choices, and election rules is not always very clear. Many forms of distortions may get involved between an actual citizen's preference and the final electoral accomplishment. The aggressive and passionate style of an election campaign may make it difficult to meet the needs of the true majority. As a result, using an election as a one-step tool for concentrating political power can be dangerous. It may be more practical to elect a parliament and let its members discuss and reach the most ideal policy.
2. A democratic state should not only consider and look at the needs of the electoral majority, but of all its citizens, during the policy making process. Even if when the issues have the full support of the majority, the needs of the minority should not be ignored. The most affective guarantee that the majority will take into consideration preferences of the minority is to give them some important policy-making power.

The supporters of the concentrated power (majoritarian) are more skeptical of the autonomy of elected representatives, are less worried about minorities, and more eager to see that the selected representatives are clearly held responsible to voters. Alternatively the supporters of dispersed power (minorities) are more suspicious of

majorities (in particular those created by elections), they are often less concerned about the power of policy-makers as long as citizens have had a role in selecting them, and are less worried about negotiated inaction(Powell 2000).

### **III. Background: Kurdistan Region**

This section is going to narrate and discuss the history of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. First, Kurds will be described as an ethnic group followed by a modern history of the Iraqi Kurds in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The modern history of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq could be divided into two stages, first from the independence of Iraq in 1932 to the establishment of the KRG in 1992. The second stage will be described from 1992 until the liberation process of Iraq by the USA its coalition partners in 2003.

#### **a. The Kurds and Kurdistan Region:**

Kurds are an ethnic group just like how Koreans, Japanese, Chinese, Arab and Turkish people are, and they live in the western part of Asia. The Kurds are an ancient race located today in five countries: east Iran (Persia), west Syria, north Turkey, south Iraq, and some parts of Soviet Armenia. The Kurds population is estimated to be approximately 30 million, yet there is only a modest amount of information available about them. The origin of the Kurds dates back to 6,000-4,500 BC. The Kurds name (Kardukhoi) encountered by Xenophon when retreating through Kurdistan with ten thousand Greek troops. The Kurds have their own land, language, customs tradition and culture (Douglas 2007).

The Iraqi Kurds currently live in the northern part of Iraq adjacent to the Turkish, Iranian and Syrian borders. Iraqi Kurds number around six million, and due to the non-implementation of a national census in Iraq as well as issues facing the territories disputed by the federal Iraqi government and the KRG, there are no official figures to show the exact percentage of Kurds in relation to the total population of Iraq. The Kurds are spread out in and around the governorates of Erbil, Sulaimaniah, Dohuk, Kirkuk and some parts of Mosul and Salahaddin (Draft Constitution of Kurdistan Region).

## 1. Kurdistan Region before 1992:

Prior to the independence of Iraq in 1932, most Kurdish gatherings were in the circle of tribes and very few were academic or educated associations. The tribal leaders played an important role in the Kurdish history because the head of a tribe could always direct his followers in the direction of any action toward any group. “For number of centuries the Shaykhs belonging to one of the Sufi or dervish orders, or *tariqas*, had been influential in Kurdish society, as they were in much of the region, particularly with the Turkoman and Kurdish tribes”(McDowall,2004). Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji was a prominent figure where under the British Mandate; he played an important role in the struggle for Kurdish rights. Another important figure was Mullah Mustafa Barzani, a supporter of Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji. The name Mullah Mustafa Barzani, from the mid 1930s until his death in 1979, was synonymous with the Kurdish struggle for liberation.

All Iraqi governments in the past have understood the intentions and the objectives of the Kurdish movement, so they have always in their early days of gaining power, admitted and acknowledged Kurdish rights. When Brigadier Abdul Karim Qassim took power in 1958, in the provisional constitution Article III “Arabs and Kurds are partners in the Homeland, and their national rights are recognized within the Iraqi entity”. This showed that Qassim’s government was working to resolve the issue of the Kurds in Iraq; however this attempt did not last long when war once again broke out between the central government and the Kurdish political actors. Qassim’s government was overthrown by the Baathist party in February 1963 which enabled the Kurds to being negotiations with a new Iraqi government. In 1970 the Iraqi government and the Kurdish leadership signed an agreement which gave



Kurdish autonomy of self rule and allowed them to participate in the central government; Kurdish language became the official language in the Kurdish area. However in 1974, the Iraqi government signed an agreement with the Shah of Iran in Algeria to stop the Kurdish revolution and in return, the Iraqi government gave up some of its rights in the Persian Gulf to Iran.

## **2. Kurdistan Region Political System after 1992:**

The Kurdistan Region is a federated region in Iraq. Its main institutions are the Kurdistan Regional Government, the Kurdistan Region Presidency, and the Kurdistan National Parliament. As stipulated in the Iraqi's federal constitution article No.117, Kurdistan's institution exercises legislative and executive authority in many areas, including allocating the regional budget, policing security, provision of education and healthcare, natural resources management and infrastructure development. The political system of the Kurdistan Region consists of the following bodies:

### **A. Kurdistan Regional Government-KRG:**

The Kurdistan Regional Government exercise executive power according to the laws enacted by the Kurdistan parliament and Iraqi constitution. Kurdistan Regional Government is a coalitional government formed by the participation of several political parties, reflecting the diversity of the region's people, are Kurds, Turkmen, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Syriac, Yezidis and others living together in a harmony and tolerance (Bapir 2010).

The sixth cabinet of the KRG is mainly made up of members of the Kurdistan List coalition and some other parliamentary blocks who won the regions parliamentary elections in July 2009. The participation of the political parties in the government depends on their political agenda of the parties that have gained the most

votes. It depends on whether they wish to work as part of the government or work in opposition in the parliament to increase their support for future elections. Usually political parties that have different ideologies participate in coalitional governments, for example the sixth cabinet was formed by KDP, PUK, IMK, representative of the Chaldean Syriac Assyrians, Turkmen, communists and socialists. The KRG is based in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region. It administers the governorates of Erbil, Sulaimaniah and Dohuk. See ([www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org)).

### **B. Kurdistan Region Presidency:**

The presidency of the Kurdistan Region is a political, administrative, and legal institution that was promulgated by the Kurdistan Parliament in 2005 under law no.1, article no.1. The president of the Kurdistan Region has the highest executive authority in the Kurdistan Region. The president is elected by secret ballot in a popular vote every four years and can stand for election for a second term.

According to the law of the presidency of the Kurdistan Region, the President of the Region will have a deputy “Vice President”. Vice President assists the president in his or her duties and in the President’s absence is acting President. The President may delegate some of his power to the vice president.

At national and international levels, the president represents the people of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, oversees relations between the Region and the Iraqi federal authorities, and represents the people of the Kurdistan Region at Iraqi’s Political Council which includes the Iraqi President, the two Iraqi vice presidents, the Iraqi Prime Minister, and the speaker of the Iraqi Parliament.

The law set out the relationship between the Presidency of the Kurdistan

Region and the Prime Minister of KRG. All applications for special appointment and promotions will be submitted to the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region. After the President's approval and through Regional Decrees, the applications will be returned to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers.

The law also stipulates the relationship between the Presidency of the Kurdistan Region and the Presidency of the Kurdistan Parliament. Any laws passed by the Kurdistan Parliament must be ratified by the President before they are enacted. The President has the power to return any law passed by the parliament for further debate. This must be done within ten days of the passage of the law. The decision of the parliament after referral is final. (See also [www.krp.org](http://www.krp.org))

### **C. Kurdistan Parliament:**

The parliament of the Kurdistan Region is the Kurdistan Region's democratically directly elected by the people. The Kurdistan Parliament is a unicameral chamber which has three main functions. The functions are:

- To examine proposals for new laws;
- To scrutinize government policy and administration;
- To debate the major issues of the day.

The founding principles of the Kurdistan Parliament are liberty, pluralism, accountability, transparent and the representation of all peoples in the Kurdistan Region. There are 111 seats in the Kurdistan Parliament and the representation ratio of women should be at least 25%. The members of the Kurdistan Parliament represent different political parties and ethnic groups including Turkmen, Chaldean Assyrian Syriac, and Yezidis (Bapir 2010).

The Kurdistan Parliament was established in May 19<sup>th</sup> 1992, in the first election after the withdrawal of the administrative offices by the previous Iraqi

regime. Elections for the parliament are to be held at least every four years and are based on a closed party list proportional representation system. The election law of the Kurdistan Region was amended on February 2009 to increase inclusiveness of all groups. The minimum age of parliamentary candidates was lowered from 30 years to 25. The legal minimum quota of women MPs was increased from 25 percent to 30 percent of the legislature. Also, the reserved seats of the minorities were increased to five seats for both Turkmen's and Assyrians Syriac Chaldeans. Anyone aged 18 years or over who is a citizen of the Kurdistan Region and is on the electoral register is eligible to vote in a direct, universal and secret ballot (Kurdistan Parliament).

Under article 121, the power has been given in the Iraqi constitution of the Kurdistan Parliament to debate and legislate on a wide range of policy areas, such as health, education, environmental issues, agriculture, housing trade, industry, investment, natural resource management and security.

Also according to the Iraqi constitution article 141, all the legislation enacted by the Kurdistan Parliament since 1992 shall remain and enforce the decisions issued by the KRG, including court decisions and contracts, shall be considered valid unless they are amended or annulled pursuant to the laws of the Kurdistan Region by the competent entity in the region, provided that they don't contradict with the constitution. See (Bapir, 2010) & [www.krg.org](http://www.krg.org)

### **b. Democracy in the Kurdistan Region:**

As a result of democracy in the Kurdistan Region being fairly recent, it is difficult to compare it with other emerging democratic states in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a new phenomenon, democracy in Kurdistan is worth studying because a democratic system of government is unfolding, albeit slowly.

There is no a specific date to indicate the emergence of democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, nevertheless, one could mention the forming of political parties and societies in the past. The political parties established prior to 1946 like *Komalay Zhianaway Kurd*, *Hizbi Rizgary* and *Hizby Hiwa* did not use the term ‘democracy’ in their names. The formation of the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic party in 1946 saw the first use of the term in the name of a Kurdish political party. Since then, ‘democracy’ has been used in the titles and the programs of many political parties (Hama Amin 2008).

There has been a Kurdish state and small kingdoms throughout Kurdish history, but none have been established through elections. One must clearly state two important points that are related to the formation of a democratic government of KRG in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq; Security Council Resolution No.688, and the Iraqi government’s withdrawal of administrative offices from the Kurdish region. As Yildiz (2006, 47) points out, “The Iraqi government has recently [1991] carried out an unprecedented measure, namely the withdrawal of its administrative units and personnel from Kurdistan, thereby creating a unique administrative and legislative vacuum”. Kurdish politicians at that time kept a close eye on the situation and studied it carefully to determine how they might fill the vacuum without alarming their neighboring countries.

All neighbors, for their own self-centered reasons, were concerned about the breakup of the state of Iraq. Because the Kurdish people are one of the largest ethnic groups in the region without statehood, the neighboring countries watched the process nervously. The reason for this was due to the fact that the establishment of a new Kurdish state would change the balance of power in the whole Middle East. For this reason, the world superpowers also stressed the importance of the territorial integrity and unity of Iraq. As Elden and Williams (2008, p.408) stated, “The territorial integrity was understood to mean ... the maintenance of the existing borders and territorial settlement of Iraq and the region more generally.”

People around the world understand the significance of the electoral process as a vital step towards the establishment of a modern democracy. A regular and periodic free election by which to select the leaders is sine qua non requirement of a liberal democracy.

The first election of the Kurdistan Region took place on May 19, 1992. This election can be interpreted as the first significant step that the Kurdish people took towards establishing an autonomous democratic system of government in the larger Iraq. The participation of people in the election of 1992 may be interpreted as the planting of the first seeds for democracy in the Kurdistan Region. In large part, it was thanks to the promotion of democracy by the U.S.A. and its coalition allies and the establishment of no-fly zones in the north of Iraq that allowed the Kurds to be free from the dictatorial reign of Saddam Hussein about twelve years before the rest of Iraq. The Kurdish people rejoiced at the prospect of establishing a democratic regime in the region.

After the terrorist attacks of September the 11th on the world trade centers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington D.C., the United States of America

declared the start of a war on terror, naming Iran, Iraq and North Korea as the axis of evil, supportive of the terrorist groups that intend to harm the west and the United States in particular. This brought the regime of Saddam Hussein back into the world spotlight after being ignored for the large part of a decade. The U.S. also had previously black-listed Saddam Hussein for his violation of human rights, his war on Kuwait and other crimes he had committed. After the terror attacks on the United States, many western powers started to worry about Saddam Hussein's regime and whether or not it possessed weapons of mass destruction. During that time, the United States was working on the project of promoting democracy in the Middle East under the slogan the Greater Middle East Initiative (GMI).

A point of encouragement to focus on is when U.S. policy makers were promoting the idea of regime change in Iraq; they touted the success found in Kurdish democracy as an example of what can be accomplished in Iraq as a whole. In his article in the Wall Street Journal, Masoud Barzani, President of the Kurdistan Region said, "I am proud that the Kurdistan Region is both model and a gateway for the rest of Iraq" (Wall Street Journal 2008).

Until 1992 when the Kurdish people went to the polls, the Iraqi people were forced to vote for Saddam Hussein. As BBC (2002), reported "Iraqi officials say President Saddam Hussein has won 100% support in a referendum on whether he should rule for another seven years".

One can be certain that when the Kurdish people went to the polls in 1992, they elected their political leaders freely. But many, both inside and outside the region, were not sure whether the Kurdish people will be able to sustain and keep the democracy they had only recently obtained stable. The question on many people's minds was what would happen if another political or regional crisis erupted.

Owing to the geopolitical situation of the Kurdistan Region in the Middle East and the neighboring countries, the possibility of a crisis cannot be ruled out. The success or failures of democracy in Kurdistan has a direct effect on the Kurdish minorities in the neighboring countries. “[T]he neighboring states in which the Kurds live,” Gunter (2008) observes, “Kurdish autonomy [presents] a threat to their own territorial integrity”. Others express their skepticism about Kurdish democracy because of its Islamic tradition. They argue that Islam may not allow the people to switch their total allegiance from the Islamic political order to a representative government.

In their article about the election in the Kurdistan Region, Bengio and Kirmanji in July 2009, stated that the Kurdish people have a decade more of experience with democracy than their counterparts in Iraq, As Bengio and Kirmanji fear, and one can agree, neighboring countries and the rest of the country want to bring the Kurdish people back into a situation where they are without autonomy and treated like second class citizens. However, many people agree with the statement that there should be improvements in the status of Kurds after suffering and being denied their rights for a long period of time. Also, one should look at the way in which the Kurdish leadership manages the process of democracy, are they building a strong democracy that could serve as an example to be adopted by other parts of Iraq?



#### **IV. Hypothesis and Research Method**

Elections and Democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is a case study to discuss and analyze the emergence and process of democratization in the region. A case study “gives an opportunity for one aspect of a problem to be studied in some depth within a limited time scale” (Bell, 199). The time scale of this study looks at the process from the establishment of KRG in 1992 until the elections of 2009. As Gareth Stansfield acknowledges, it is not easy to analyze the contemporary political system of Iraqi Kurdistan in theoretical terms. He explains that in order to understand the rapid development taking place in the Kurdistan Region one has to look at the past (Stansfield 2003). Therefore, in order to answer the research question of whether democracy is taking root in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq or not, this thesis will discuss both the time scale of the study and the relevant historical events that have led to the realities within this time scale.

To measure the scale of democratic process in Kurdistan, one has to use other supporting variables which can be referred to as enabling factors and limited factors. The enabling factors are those which facilitate the process of democratization, i.e. the change of political regime in Iraq, American promotion of democracy in Iraq and the Middle East, and people’s will. On the other hand, the limited factors are those which slow down the process of democratization, such as Islam, Kurdish culture and traditions. Both lists of enabling and limited factors could be increased to include many other aspects.

Another important point in research is data collection. As a researcher, one usually faces difficulties in selecting the most precise and relevant data among those available due to the legitimacy and dependability (Bell 1999). Bell explained that whatever process is chosen for selecting data, it should be examined very critically to

judge to what degree is reliable and valid. Reliability is the extent to which a test or formula produces similar outcome under constant conditions on all occasions. One of the principles of doing research and writing a thesis is the validity and reliability of data. For this thesis, election data that is valid and reliable because it has been ratified by the parliament was used.

In conclusion, all academic papers are based on hypothesis and research questions to further develop the issue and analyze it. Hypothesis is “a tentative proposition which is subject to verification through investigation. It may also be seen as the guide to the researcher in that depicts and describes the method to be followed in studying the problem. In many cases hypothesis are hunches that the researcher has in regards to the existence of relationship between variables” (Bell, 1999). The free, democratic and competitive elections in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are evidence of democratic growth or viability. The elections are the engine of producing and educating a democratic society. The results of elections are the variables used to test our hypothesis.

## **V. Result of the Study and Analysis**

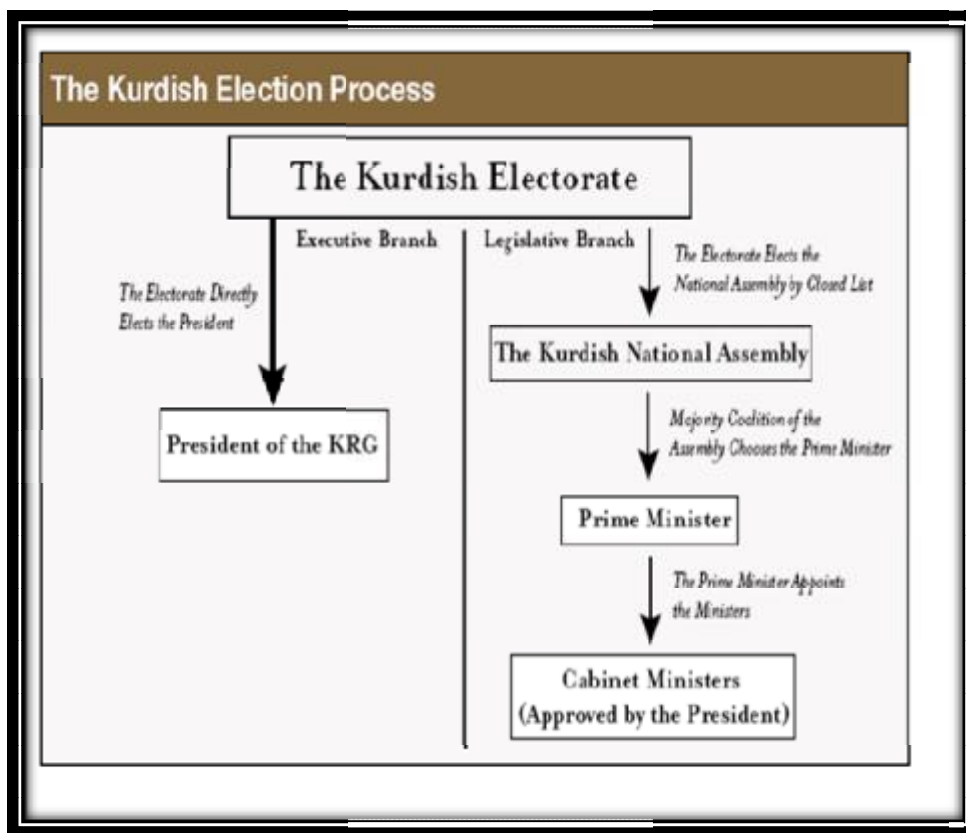
### **a. Parliamentary Elections:**

“The central procedure of democracy is the selection of leaders through competitive elections by the people they govern”. (Huntington1991, p. 6). Huntington focuses on a positive correlation between elections and democracy because he believes that the basic measure of the democratic index in any country is the regular implementation of an election process, and the transformation of government and handover of power between losers and winners. This section is going to present the result and analysis of the study that indicates the emergence of democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. As Liz and Stepan argue, free elections are seen as the necessary sufficient conditions of democracy (1996, p.4).

The important decision that the Kurdish leadership took in 1992 after the liberation of the Kurdish area was holding elections and implementing the seeds of democracy by referring to the idea of a government by the people, owned by the people, and for the people. Why, one could ask, did the Kurdish leadership not form an interim government? Why did they prefer holding an election for the formation of a government? So analyzing the elections of the Kurdistan Region is the main element of starting democracy.

Since 1992, there have been a number of changes in the election laws of the Kurdistan Region. Currently the voters, besides electing their representative to the parliament, also directly elect the president.

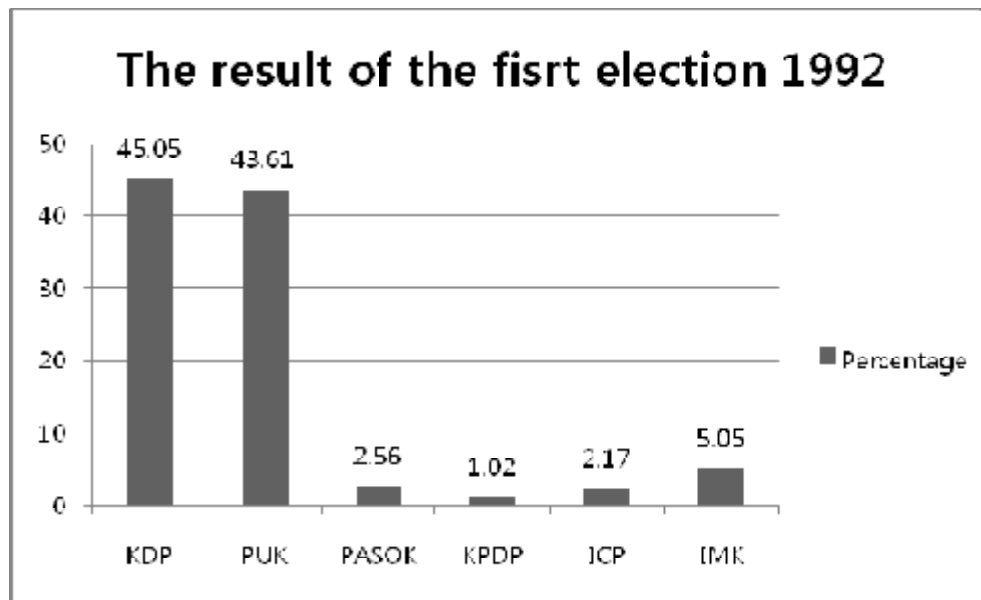
Chart 1 Election Process in the Kurdistan Region



Source: Institute for the Study of War, James Danly, 2009

The election in the Kurdistan Region is currently based on a single-member district and a closed list. The voters in the three provinces of Erbil, Dohuk and Sulaimanyaih will vote for the list, and not the candidate. After the announcement of the final results by the High Electoral Commission, the President will ask the largest bloc in the parliament to nominate their candidate for Prime Minister. The President will ask the Prime Minister to form his cabinet and submit it to the parliament for approval.

Chart 2. Results of the 1992 Parliamentary Election



Source: Iraqi Kurdistan, Political Development and Emergent of Democracy (Stansfield, 2003,p 201).

As one can see, the results in Chart 2 show the outcome of the 1992 election among the political parties was divided between the two major parties. The election results show that no single party could form the government without a coalition. The voters in the first election of the 1992 were divided between two political parties, KDP and PUK. Many would like to investigate the reasons that push the Kurdish people to be divided between two political parties. “Tribal relations also play a significant role in determining people's political allegiance and the emotional bond many citizens have with the 'heroic leaders' that freed them from a tyrant-like Saddam Hussein should not be marginalized” (RNW 2009). From the beginning of the 1990s until now, people have had very strong tribal influence on each other. The second point is that the Kurdish people or the voters at that time had a strong nationalist and

revolutionary view, similar to Maoist and Guevara, where they believed that the two leading political parties were the symbols of freedom and were the liberators of the region. (Raswl 2009).

In a telephone conversation with Mr. Ahmad (University Lecturer), he explained that the Kurdish people in the elections of 1992 did not have the experience in the election process. Mr. Ahmad argues that in the past Iraqis, including the Kurdish people only had the opportunity to vote for one 'leader' and the voters lacked deep knowledge of the democratic process of elections and the significance of their votes.

The election of 1992 was the first experience for both Kurdish people and the political parties that represent them. The two leading political parties, Kurdistan Democratic Party- (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan- (PUK) agreed on forming a coalitional government based on what they named or was known later as the 'fifty –fifty cabinet'. They divided all the cabinet posts among themselves, and the smaller parties due to proportional representation were unsuccessful in getting seats in the parliament and participating in the administration (Raswl 2009).

Both PUK and KDP, the two major political parties, made the decision to form a coalition fifty –fifty government in order to avoid a civil war and prevent destabilization in the early stage of building a legitimize government. The outcome of the fifty-fifty system cabinet proved that the division power in half was a wrong decision since a civil war broke out, despite the aim of the government to unite the people and the region rather than divide it.

Although having suffered a civil war and two economic embargoes in the 1990s, the result of the second election in 2005 showed that the Kurdish people were starting to learn about participating in the political process. People began to

understand the role of the political parties in the government, the failures of the government related to the ruling party and the success of the government in providing basic services and economic development is also related to the ruling party. Even the differences between the 1992 and 2005 election campaigns can be noticed. This process as whole could be considered a learning curve, moving from a pre-elementary school of democracy to an elementary school through learning the basics of political process and governance.

“Despite the KDP and PUK fighting, Iraqi Kurdistan became relatively prosperous through the 13 percent Iraqi oil money revenue allowed by the United Nations and the no-fly zone protection” (Dewhurst 2006,p.9). Even though the Kurdish people suffered from a civil war and economic embargo, under the Oil for Food Program the Kurdistan region experienced some progress and achieved a basic interest of standard living.

According to the law, elections should be held on regularly, every four years. The first election was held in 1992, so the second term election should have been held in 1996 and the third in 2000. However, the second elections of Kurdistan were held in 2005 and the gap between the first election and the second was nearly thirteen years, against the principles of democracy. This gap is related to the fifty-fifty government that led to the breakout of the civil war. It is strongly argued that the idea of becoming an opposition group and working outside the government was something entirely new at that time for the participating political parties, who were not ready to stay outside of the government. The division of power between KDP and PUK to make everybody happy was erroneous.

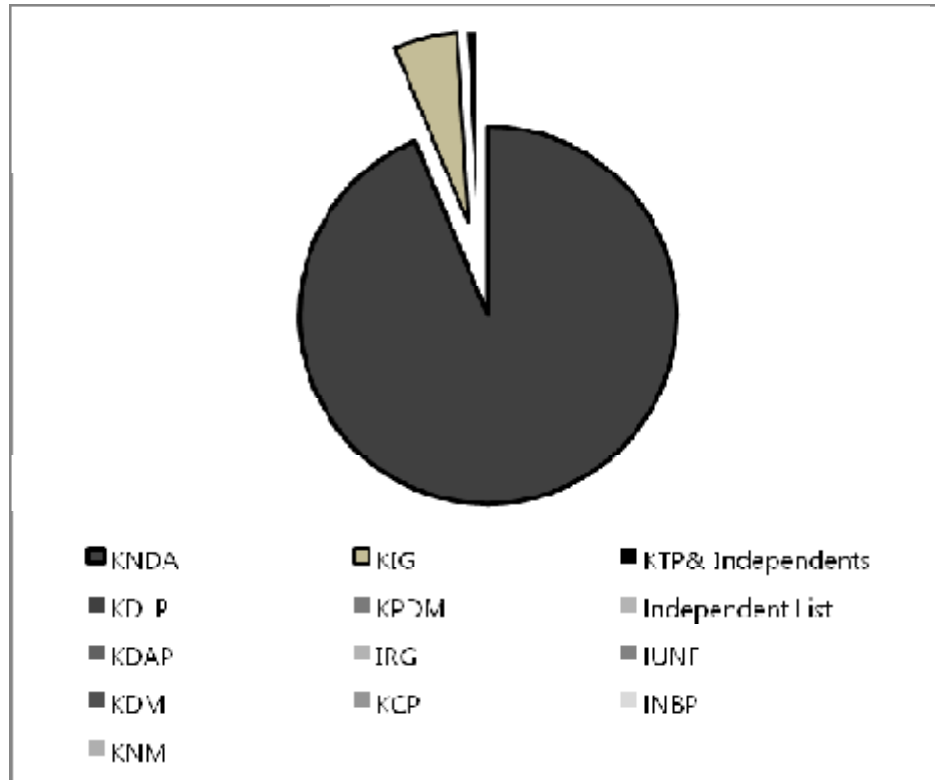
The second (2005) Parliamentary election, was completely different from the first election, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The number of newly emerged

political parties with different programs to better the Kurdistan Region was significantly higher than the previous election. The 2005 Kurdish election coincided with the first Iraqi National Parliamentary Election, allowing the Kurdish political parties to form a grand coalition, named the Kurdistan Alliance, for both the Kurdistan and Iraqi Parliamentary elections. The formation of the coalition was based on defending Kurdish rights in the Iraqi parliament and having a unified position on a number of issues which included successfully being part of and voting to implement a new constitution for the whole of Iraq that was and is still meant to see Iraq function as a federal, democratic and pluralistic state.

The Kurdish rights enshrined in the new Iraqi constitution were the most important to the people of the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistan Alliance given the disregard for Kurdish rights by successive centralized governments in Baghdad. The new constitution approved the Kurdistan Regional Government and its regional authorities, the Kurdish language would become an official language beside Arabic, and Iraq would be a decentralized federal country, with its rich oil and natural resources belonging to all the Iraqi people.

### Chart 3. Results of the 2005 Parliamentary Election



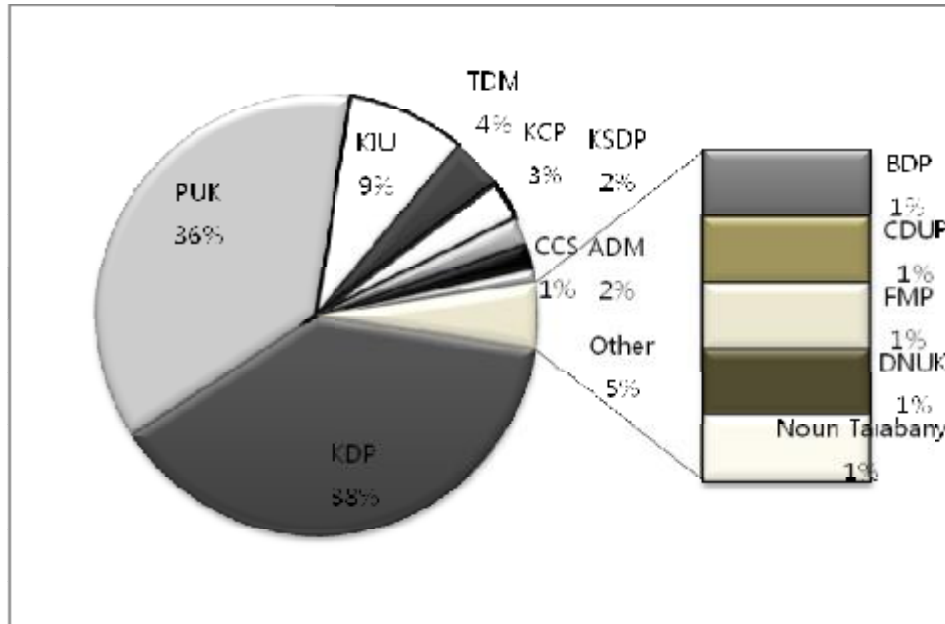


Source: Kurdistan Parliament

Chart 3 shows that the Kurdistan National Democratic Alliance was allocated 104 seats among 111 seats. They formed a grand coalition government including all the parties representing the different ethnic groups and political entities. This was to create a consensus between the major political parties and opposition groups in order to guarantee the majority of the results and make sure that all the voters can find a group inside the coalition they could supported. Another factor behind the formation of the Kurdistan National Democratic Alliance was to help push towards a unification of the two Kurdistan Regional Government administrations.

The Kurdistan National Democratic Alliance included most of the major political players in the region from the different ethnic, religious and ideological backgrounds. The seats were divided between them according to their power and popularity:

Chart 4. Breakdown of the Kurdistan National Democratic Alliance

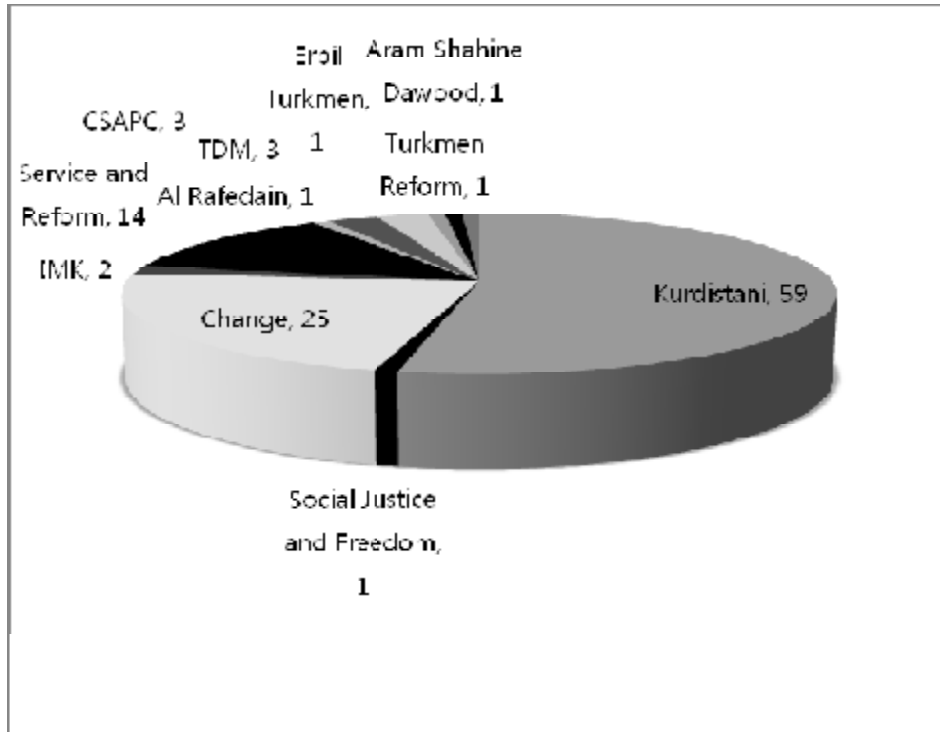


Source: Kurdistan Parliament

The third (2009) parliamentary election, was held on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2009. The election was delayed for roughly two months as the Iraqi government was not ready to cover the expenditures needed to hold the Kurdistan Region's election. Furthermore, the IHEC informed the Kurdistan Parliament that due to the short period of time to the designated date they were not ready to prepare the staff and logistics required for holding a successful election (Kurdistan Parliament 2009).

The International High Electoral Commission informed the KRG that they will be able complete the preparations and hold the election after July 20<sup>th</sup> 2010. The president of the Kurdistan Region on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2010, declared the election will be held on July 25<sup>th</sup> 2010 and asked the parliament to amend the law regarding the president and to give the right to the Kurdish people to elect the president directly, and not through their representatives in the parliament (Kurdistan Parliament 2009).

Chart 5. Results of the 2009 Parliamentary Election



Source: Kurdistan Parliament

The result of the 2009 parliamentary election was a turning point in the short history of Kurdish self-governance in Iraq when compared with the two previous elections. In the previous elections, a majority of voters were supporting the two major political parties as seen in the first 1992 election voting process. It is believed it was because voters were following who their relatives and neighbors in deciding who to vote for.

The election in 2005 was a little different because of the increase in new political parties and the division of power and seats in the parliament. However, one could say that the 2009 election changed the whole composition of the legislative body. “[T]he results of last month's election [ July 2009] show that the PUK and KDP alliance received only 57% of the total votes – a dramatic decline from the previous election in 2005, when they won more than 85%”( Alaaldin,2009). The above results show that after the liberation process of Iraq and 13 years of self governance, one can

witness the growth of democracy in the Kurdistan Region through the results of those 2009 elections and transferring the authority from one group to another peacefully.

The third election results changed the balance of power in Kurdistan with the emergence of Gorran (Change List) which was successful in receiving 25 seats in the parliament. “Gorran’s success, the fact that so many people stood up to the dominant party, is proof that democratic politics is taking root in parts of Iraq”(Barkey,2009).

The term of “many people stood up to the dominant party” shows the decline in voting and thinking as a group, instead people chose to vote based on their own personal preferences given their increase in knowledge thanks to the democratization process that had begun in 1992 in the Kurdistan Region. In the 2009 elections, one could find that within the same family, different members voted for different parties while in 1992 the whole family was usually supporting and voting for the same party. One of the principles of the democracy is to be able to freely decide who you want to vote for irrespective of whom your friends, family members and colleagues may want you to vote for. The opposition in the parliament will work to make sure that the voice of their constituency has been taken into consideration during the political process. The existence of a healthy and vibrant opposition in any parliament or government is an essential part of ensuring a successful democratic process.

The term “democratic politics is taking root in parts of Iraq” is the core research question of this study. It is clear that with the recent results in elections as well as the newly emerged opposition groups, democracy is taking root in the Kurdistan Region. The key difference between the opposition in the 2009 election and the previous one was that in 2009 the opposition parties had the choice to either participate in government or to stay outside the government.

In previous years, the opposing parties were not working actively in evaluating the government's performance as they were a part of the government. Participating in the government means the participant will also be accountable for the shortcomings. Some of the political parties in the Kurdistan Region Government were criticizing the government while they were part of the administration. The other political parties always remind them of any success or failures and said success or failures belong to all the stakeholders forming the administration.

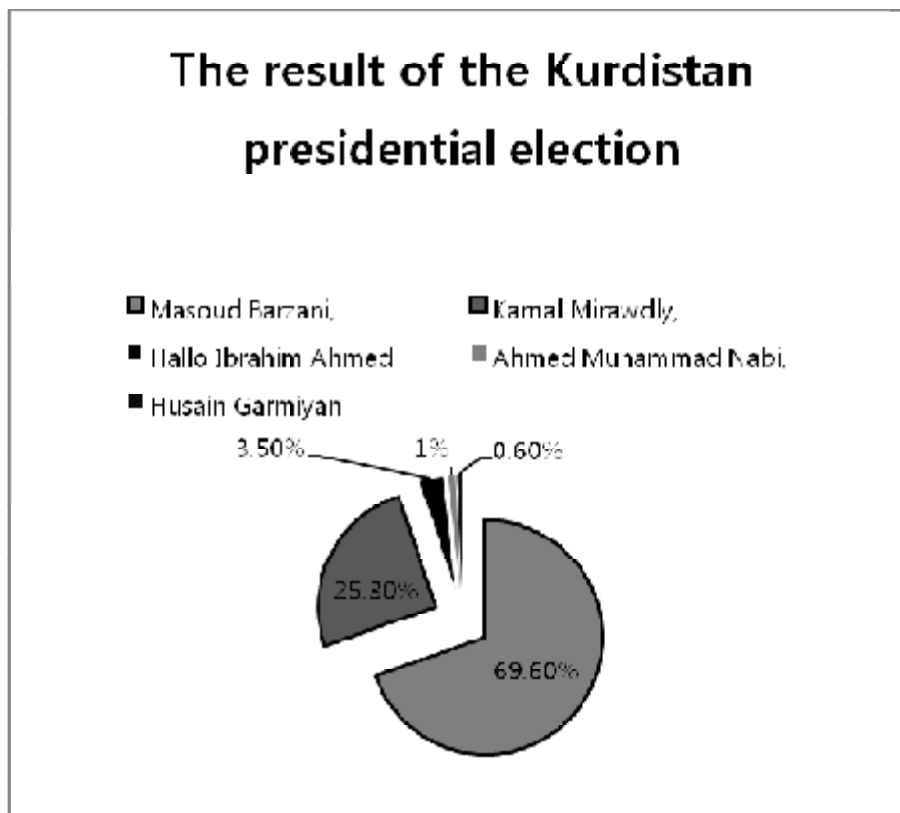
Election results in a representative democracy addresses the exchange cycle that goes on between voters, parliaments, governments and ministries using a very soft malleable currency which is subject to interpretation and reinterpretation. It is as if one is trying to explain activity in a barter economy where trades involve only promises and credits. Parties have different bundles of these on offers. Voters have to decide which has the most items of value, weighting items from an individual point of view. In the case of political representation not only do different people have different considerations in mind when they make a valuation, they are evaluating proposals to deliver largely intangible, non divisible benefits (McDonald and Budge 2005).

In the 2009 Kurdistan Parliamentary election the voters used the soft money 'Vote' in exchange with the offers proposed by the political parties in the election campaign and they interpreted and reinterpreted these said offers to compare the cost and the benefit in participating and voting in these elections.

**b. Presidential Election:**

Another signal indicative of democracy in the Kurdistan Region is the change in the manner in which the President of the Kurdistan Region is elected. In the last election, the president was elected directly by people. The presidency is the highest executive office, established in 2005 by the Kurdistan Parliament's law of the presidency of the Kurdistan Region (Kurdistan Parliament 2005). In 2009, the Kurdish people directly elected their president through a secret ballot. There were five candidates running for the presidency of the Kurdistan region, and the winner, Masoud Barzani, received a majority vote, more precisely, 69.60% of the vote.

Chart 6. Results of 2009 Kurdistan Region Presidential Election



Source: Kurdistan Parliament

Additionally, it could be observed that the election results indicate the level of Kurdish people participating in the political process. In the parliamentary election of

2009 about 80% of the eligible voters participated in the election and a much diversified result was seen. One cannot ignore the internal obstacles facing the democratization process in the Kurdistan Region, including the lack of democratic culture and respecting opposite ideas. Alongside internal factors; there are also external ones like the direct and indirect intervention from neighboring countries to slowdown the process and depict a negative picture of the development. “[T]he states in which the Kurds live greatly fear Kurdish autonomy as a threat to their territorial integrity” (Gunter, 2008). Typically the Kurdish regions in those countries are poorest; so any economic development will be seen as the first step of secession and will have a direct impact on their internal affairs.

Figure 2. The dark area showing the spread of the Kurdish people in Iraq, Turkey, Iran and Syria



Source: Jack Campin

### Discussion:

Although the election data has shown as an indication that the Kurdish people may be able to sustain a democratic system of government, it is important to point out that the elections have been far from perfect.

Barzinji in *Iraqi Kurdistan Region Elections between Theory and Practice* addressed the shortcomings that faced the first election in 1992 such as having to make it a closed list electoral process, proportional representation, weak preliminary preparation and the lack of secret voting. The adopting of the closed list method of electing your political representatives in May 1992 forced voters to vote for the list and not the candidates themselves. The closed lists increased the distance between Kurdish voters and the candidate, in another words the relation between the constituents and their representatives. Voters were electing a list which could consist of around 100 candidates that would have been designated by the political parties. The preliminary preparation for the election was not adequate; there was no registration process of the voters prior to the election. The 1992 parliamentary election was comparable to a festival and lacked the privacy of who voted for whom. After the voters cast their vote, some came out from their electoral stations shouting and repeating the name of the political party which they voted for.

However, the second and the third parliamentary elections of Kurdistan were more organized logistically and technically. Even the results were very different from each other.

The Kurdish people are looking at the past with fear, their present situation as fragile and their future as an unknown. As a result, Kurds are always seeking to have a unified voice and putting their homes in order. In analyzing the election results, especially the election results of 2005, one could read what they are aiming to reach a



consensus. When people discuss democracy, it is understood that they will express their ideas and may have different opinions from each other. Kurdish people want to have democracy, and the elections are one instrument in achieving and showing the outside world that not only do they have a democratic process but are keen on improving it. There is a kind of agreement in Kurdish democracy, often referred to by political scientists as consociational democracy.

The beginning of this section looked at the elections in the Kurdistan Region from 1992 to 2009. One could easily read and analyze the differences in the results using one of these terms or another. After the election of 1992, the government was formed mainly by the two major political parties, KDP and PUK; they also included some other political parties but the majority of the members of the cabinet were from KDP and PUK. One cannot say it was an undemocratic government, but can claim that it was a consociational democracy.

As Brendan O'Leary explains, the consociational democracy can also be defined by Lijphart as a government by elite cartel to turn a democracy with a fragmented political culture into a stable democracy.

The term "fragmented political culture into a stable democracy" means to maintain the political unity of a country. In the Kurdistan Region of Iraq in 1992, there was a power vacuum and the election results showed no clear winner; so the consensus among the political parties was the best option. There was an electoral threshold in 1992. According to election law, if a party does not receive 7% of the votes, then no seat would be awarded in parliament. Due to this threshold effect, some political parties were excluded from representation in the executive and legislature body. In most election laws or electoral systems, there are some logical or formal thresholds that candidates or/and parties should achieve in order to win representation.

The consociational executive may have formal rules that create their threshold of electoral support and legislative representation that push parties to achieve a certain percentage of votes to win parliamentary seats.

Here is an analysis of the Kurdistan Region's election result of 2009 and the formation of the government. Not all the political parties who received seats in the parliament participated in the formation of the government. This does not suggest that the Kurdistan Region has an undemocratic government because it did not represent all the blocs in parliament. But if one was to look at the confidence vote that the cabinet got in the parliament, it was plurality and those parliamentary blocs supported the government enjoying high levels of support from their constituency.

Consociational practices might also exist without the involvement or the representation of one or more ethnic or political groups that are demographically, electorally, or politically important. There are two types of such consociations:

First, a dominant coalition excludes another group from participating in a government on purpose. This is called control-consociation for the governing group who in turn exercise control over the dominated.

The second type is when a group or political entity have given opportunity or offered seats in the government but have preferred to stay outside of the cabinet as political opposition; this is called self-exclusion.

If one looks at the process of KRG's formation in 2009; the Kurdistan List, or primarily the KDP and PUK, were working to make a grand coalition government which included all the political parties, however some political parties refused to participate in the government. They preferred to stay outside of the government and work in opposition. This could not be counted as preventing political parties in participating in government as it was a process referred to as self-exclusion. See also

*(From Power sharing to Democracy,2005, Edited by Sid Noel)*

In the conclusion we will analyze some of the enabling factors which can help make the process of democratization more successful and faster, including the presence of American forces in Iraq, economic development and exposure to the outside world. There are many other determinants to measure the level or the progress of democracy as Rober J. Barro at Harvard University states, such as health indicators, upper-level schooling, inequality of income and schooling, ethnolinguistic fractionalization, the rule of law, colonial history, religion, and civil liberties.

One of the enabling factors of democracy in the Kurdistan Region was the commitment and the presence of American troops in Iraq. The Greater Middle East Initiative by the United States of America was to promote the idea of democracy in the Middle East. The liberation process of Iraq spread the idea of democracy in a totalitarian country. “One of President George W. Bush’s stated reasons for starting the war in Iraq was to bring democracy to that country” (Epstin etal 2007). Kurdistan Region, as a part Iraq, was also included in the U.S.A.’s program of promoting democracy. According to the Freedom House report in 2003, Kurdistan’s civil liberties rating improved from 5 to 4 due to changes in the methodology survey and the political rights scored 5. The Freedom House arranged the countries on a scale of 1-7, with 1 representing the highest level of freedom and 7 representing the lowest level of freedom. Also the Freedom House’s 2010 report on Iraq indicated that journalists operate more freely in the Kurdish Region (Freedom House 2003).

On the other hand the limited factors that affect the democratization process are culture, traditions and religion. “Democracy in the non western societies could be understood as a kind of transplanted set of institutions and beliefs from the West”

(Shin 2000). Eastern people generally consider democracy as a regime or an idea imposed by the West. If democracy faces difficulties in emerging in eastern societies the case is even more difficult when these eastern societies are made up of predominantly Muslim populations. The majority of people in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq are Muslims and follow the traditions of Islam, and in addition to following the traditions of Islam, a large part of Kurdish society was and some parts still are a tribal in nature, with their own norms and traditions. The above factors and the difficulties that they can bring make implementing the seeds of democracy a more complicated process.

## **VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **A. Summary and Conclusion:**

Despite the shortcomings the pitfalls faced during the election process in Kurdistan Region of Iraq, it should still be acknowledged as a success. A little over twenty years ago, Saddam Hussein's army in its attempts to crush the 1991 revolution, caused hundreds of thousands of families to escape to the mountains along with destroying so much of the infrastructure. To be able to advance this much in a little over two decades speaks volumes for the future of the democratic process. The first election in 1992 was just a starting point and had been commended by some international NGO's as a fair and democratic process (Center of Studies and Central Research 1996). The differences and the progress from the 1992 election to the 2005 and then the 2009 parliamentary election have been discussed and analyzed. The voting pattern among the population has changed over time proving that the democratic process is moving in the right direction.

The increase in the competitive nature between the different political parties involved in the election process, as well as the emergence of new political parties shows that democratization is progressing in the region. Most of the administrative bodies that have power and authority to rule over the people of the Kurdistan Region have been formed as a result of the electoral process. One of the important changes seen with the development of the Kurdistan Region's politics is the manner in which the President of the Kurdistan Region is now directly elected by the people.

The emergence of the democratic process in the Kurdistan Region since its establishment in 1992 has also been looked at. The democratic process has been passed through many difficult situations, from the economic embargo to the civil war

that split the region into two separate administrations, has also been examined. In the past few years, the Kurdish people have found out that the best model of governance is having a democratic government elected 'by people for the people'. When people elect their representatives to parliament and to the government, they do so with the hope and intent that those elected representatives have the best interests of their constituencies at heart. The election results of 2009 showed that the political landscape of the Kurdistan Region had shifted dramatically. The coalitions formed were diversified and different, and included both large and small political parties which resulted in the new composition of parliamentary blocs. Although the main focus was on the participation of people in the elections to reflect the progress of democracy, there are many other indicators to measure democracy, such as freedom of expression, freedom of speech and human rights. If one tries to gauge the importance of all the indicators, it would require a lot more time as well as efforts especially in regards to collecting data and research. Election data to identify the topic on one indicator was used.

“The chief distinction of electoralism as routinization is that it opens up a vista for some checks and balances through the entry of opposition to parliament” (Sadiki 2009, p.83). The 2009 election proved that the results of elections in the Kurdistan Region is not the same every four years and is not under the influence of any single ruling party.

In the past several years, however, there has been a great deal of public disputes and demonstrations in the Kurdistan Region about freedom of the press, freedom of expression and daily basic services which encouraged national and foreign observers to study and analyze the quality and process of democracy in the region. “If democracy was going to be difficult to apply anywhere in the Middle East, Iraq would

be high on the list ... since its liberation from tyranny, the “new” democratic Iraq, a perceived success on paper, struggles to plant real seeds of comfort and assurance of a future where its many communities and sects can truly flourish in one place” (Ismaeel 2009).

In conclusion, although there are many obstacles facing the process of democratization in the Kurdistan Region in the fields of politics, society and economy, there are many other indicators which makes one believe there is light at the end of the tunnel. Some of these factors are not only related to the Kurdistan Region but cover all the countries around the globe especially in the Middle East. Iraq and Kurdistan Region as a part of Iraq, is also affected by the wave of development, what is called the Third Wave of Democratization (Huntington).

Globalization is one of the factors which makes the whole world seem like a small village and borders do not prevent globalization. The tools used to fasten this process include the progress in social media, communication tools, and even satellite channels. The political elites in the developing countries realize the effect of this wave of democracy and they cannot ignore it. It can be recalled that during the Cold War period, when people were divided between communist and democratic countries, people in the communist countries to some extent were isolated from the outside world. Kurdish people and their political elite, to a good extent, have been affected by the development of democracy, values of human rights and liberty. Having information about the value and development of democracy and educating people regarding the culture of democracy is a departure and progress from the classic culture of the closed society, and should be considered as one of the important steps in the transition process of democracy.

Another point that should be considered is the new generation in the

Kurdistan Region. They have not experienced the wars or lived under a dictatorial regime; the new generation has been exposed to new technology, media and the rapid development happening all across the world. The new generation is the engine of the democratic process in the region. One can see how the new generations, and by that I mean the youth, in both Tunisia and Egypt have managed to overthrow the totalitarian regimes that had been ruling them for more than thirty years. For this reason, the political system should be dynamic and change according to the globalization.

Media also plays an important role; after the liberation process of Iraq, hundreds of newspapers, magazines, TV channels and civil society organization made the process of democratization in Kurdish society faster through criticizing, monitoring the government's actions and proposing ideas about the current situation in the Kurdistan region.

Also the multi-party system in the Kurdistan Region has led to the emergence of opposition parties. This is another clear indicator supporting the democratization process because opposition parties have stayed outside of the cabinet and monitor the agenda of the government. The economic development has a great impact on the democratization process because the standard of living of the citizens has changed and improved from the time economic sanctions on Iraq.

Elections are a signal of democracy if they are held regularly, fairly, competitively and without delay. It will be a routine that people participate in order to elect their representative and finally will become part of the culture thereby strengthening the democratic process. The emergence of laws based on respecting human rights, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, free media, multi-party and the rule of law is a clear step towards the right direction in the democratization process.



**c. Recommendations:**

Recommendations for the election process in the Kurdistan Region to be more competitive and democratic would be the following:

1. After long period of self-governance and building democratic institution, the elections in the Kurdistan Region should be done through an open list process. This open list creates a communication line between citizens and their representatives in the parliament.
2. The Kurdistan Region can be divided into multiple districts because sometimes people cannot meet their representative or coordinate with him/her due to the large number of the community they represent.

Democracy is a subjective term and topic with wide implications, and hence cannot be covered in a single research paper. Even if one narrows down the subject to make it more specific, they will still face either dealing with macro or micro indicators. Democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq is a new subject and a fertile research field. This presents a good opportunity for researchers in the fields of political science, development studies and human rights to study and analyze a 'budding' democratic society. The following points are proposed subjects for further studies:

1. The behavior of Kurdish voters in the parliamentary elections of 1992 and 2005.
2. The election agenda of the political parties and its affect on the voters decisions.
3. The percentage of educated voters who can read and write.
4. The micro indicators of democracy in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

## Appendices

Table 1 Election Results of Kurdistan Region in 1992

No.	Name of Political Entity	Percentage
1.	Kurdistan Democratic Party-KDP	45.05
2.	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan-PUK	43.61
3.	Kurdish Socialist Party-PASOK	2.56
4.	Kurdistan Popular Democratic Party-KPDP	1.02
5.	Iraqi Communist Party-ICP	2.17
6.	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan-IMK	5.05

Source: Stansfield, 2003,p 201

Table 2. Election Results of Kurdistan Region in 2005

No.	Political Blocks	percentage	No. Seats
1.	Kurdistan National Democratic Alliance	89.55%	104
2.	Kurdistan Islamic Group	4.86%	6
3.	Kurdistan Toilers Party and Independents	1.17%	1
4.	Kurdistan Democratic Labor Party	0.67%	0
5.	Kurdistan People's Democratic Movement	0.62%	0
6.	Independent List	0.59%	0
7.	Kurdistan Democracy Attainment Party	0.52%	0
8.	Iraqi Republican Group	0.54%	0
9.	Iraqi Unity National Front	0.47%	0
10.	Kurdistan Democrats Movement	0.38%	0
11.	Kurdistan Conservative Party	0.31%	0
12.	Iraqi National Brotherhood Party	0.20%	0
13.	Kurdistan National Movement	0.12%	0
Total		100%	111

Source: Parliament of the Kurdistan Region

Table 3 The political parties who got seats in the Kurdistan Parliament in 2009

Registration Number of List	Political Entity	No. Votes	No. Seats
54	Kurdistani List	1.076.370	59
55	Social Justice and Freedom List	15.028	1
57	Change List	445.024	25
58	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan	27.147	2
59	Service and Reform List	240.842	14
67	Al Rafedain List	5.690	1
68	Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council	10.595	3
69	Turkmen Democratic Movement	18.464	3
70	Erbil Turkmen List	3.906	1
72	Turkmen Reform List	7.077	1
74	Aram Shahine Dawood	4.198	1

Source: Parliament of the Kurdistan Region

Table 4. Candidates for the Kurdistan Region President

Name of Candidate	Percentage	No. Votes
Masoud Barzani,	69.60%	1266397
Kamal Mirawdly,	25.30%	460323
Hallo Ibrahim Ahmed	3.50%	63377
Ahmed Muhammad Nabi,	1%	18890
Husain Garmiyan	0.60%	10665

Source: Parliament of the Kurdistan Region

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