This document has been prepared by the Country Research Section (CRS), Onshore Protection Branch of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Canberra, ACT.

The document does not purport to represent the views of the Department of Immigration and Citizenship on any matter with which it deals. The purpose of this paper is to assist decision makers in rapidly familiarising issues through a brief that has a specific focus on the Refugees Convention and other key human rights elements in the country of reference.

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Abbreviations

FGM - Female Genital Mutilation
KDP - Kurdistan Democratic Party
KRG - Kurdistan Regional Government
KRI - Kurdistan Region in Iraq
PUK - Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
UNAMI - United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq
UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Demographic context

Kurds constitute 15-20 percent of Iraq’s population (3.6 - 4.8 million people).¹ They do not form a homogenous group. The majority of Kurds are Sunni Muslims living in the northern region of the country in Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah which form the federal region of Kurdistan. They represent the ethnic majority in these three governorates² and also live in the disputed regions around Kirkuk and Mosul as well as in the capital city, Baghdad. Approximately 150,000 Kurds who have historically lived in the mountainous region along the Iraq-Iran border are Shi’a Muslims and are known as Faili Kurds. A further 650,000 Kurds are Yezidis (a synthesised religion) who mainly reside west of Mosul.³

Brief political history of the Kurdish Region of Iraq

Ever since Iraqi independence in 1932, Kurds have demanded some form of autonomy in the north of Iraq.⁴ Throughout the 1960s fighting persisted between Kurdish antigovernment militias and the Iraqi army.⁵ Successive Iraqi governments in an attempt to secure the oil rich and fertile region of the north and to suppress Kurdish nationalism employed an ‘Arabisation’ strategy which involved forcibly dispelling Kurds and other non Arabs and relocating landless Arabs to the region.⁶

In the late 1970s the largest Arabisation drive forcibly displaced approximately 250,000 Kurds from their homes.⁷ Systematic government action against Kurdish people was continued through the 70s to the 80s, when in 1988, Saddam Hussein used chemical warfare against Kurds in Halabja, killing an estimated 5,000 people.⁸ During the same period the government pursued genocide against the Kurdish people, in what was referred

¹ ‘World directory of minorities and indigenous people: Kurds,’ Minority Rights Group International, April 2008, CX224181
² ‘World directory of minorities and indigenous people: Kurds,’ Minority Rights Group International, April 2008, CX224181
³ ‘Yezidis’ Minority Rights Group International, April 2009, CX238457
⁶ ‘Claims in conflict: Reversing ethnic cleansing in northern Iraq,’ Human Rights Watch, August 2004, CISLIB 14056
⁷ ‘Claims in conflict: Reversing ethnic cleansing in northern Iraq,’ Human Rights Watch, August 2004, CISLIB 14056
to as the ‘Anfal’ campaign, killing around 180,000 Kurds and destroyed between 4,000 and 5,000 villages in Kurdistan.9

Since 1991 KRI, comprised of Dahuk, Erbil and Sulaymaniyah governorates, has been administered by the two main Kurdish political parties – Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).10 The two parties agreed to a joint power-sharing agreement but the agreement collapsed in 1994 with fighting between the parties and their militias, continuing until 1997. The KDP and PUK reconciled in 1998 but continued to each control separate geographical areas of KRI and maintained their own Peshmerga (militia) and Asayish (security) forces. Following the fall of Saddam Hussein with the US - led invasion of Iraq, the KDP and PUK signed the Kurdish Regional Government (KRG) Unification Agreement allowing for the merging of the two separate administrations in KRI.11

With the fall of Saddam Hussein, KRI has found more legitimacy as an autonomous region. The Constitution of Iraq introduced in 2005 ‘recognises the region of Kurdistan, along with its existing authorities, as a federal region,’12 which also allows the KRG to introduce new laws and amend existing Iraqi national legislation as they pertain to the KRI.13 Kurdish is recognised as one of the two national languages of Iraq (along with Arabic). Kurdish leader Jalal Talabani was appointed President of Iraq in 2005.14

Conflict continues between the KRG and the central government of Iraq, in particular relating to the disputed territories bordering the KRI. The status of Kirkuk represents a major source of contention due to it being an oil rich area and Kurds claiming that the area is historically Kurdish.15 Kurdish leaders demand for the KRI to be extended to include parts of Nineveh, Diyala and Kirkuk governorates; however the central Iraqi government in Baghdad insists the KRI should not extend any further than the existing three governorates. The UN Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) is attempting to negotiate between the Iraqi central government and the KRG ‘to find a mutually-acceptable solution to the dispute over the future status of Kirkuk and other areas.’16 The United States administration views the dispute over Kirkuk and surrounds as one of the main concerns relating to the stability of Iraq.17

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10 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267
11 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267
12 ‘Iraqi Constitution,’ Government of Iraq, CISLIB 16461
13 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267
15 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267
16 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267
17 ‘Arab-Kurd tensions main driver of Iraq unrest: US general,’ Agence France Presse, 13 October 2009, CX235044
Security and Human Rights situation in the KRG

A range of sources indicate that KRI has been relatively safe in comparison to the rest of Iraq since the 2003 US-led invasion. Many Iraqis from central and southern regions have relocated to the KRI in pursuit of a peaceful life away from the regular bombings which occur in Baghdad and other areas.

There has been an increase in the number of non-governmental organisations active in promoting and protecting human rights in KRI and the region is regarded as more tolerant of ethnic and religious difference.

According to a September 2009 report by Amnesty International, the KRG has improved the human rights situation in KRI. In 2008 the KRG released hundreds of political detainees, expanded freedom of expression for the press, and strengthened women’s rights through legal amendments and bodies to prevent violence against women.

Although noting this range of positive steps, Amnesty International stresses human rights violations persist in KRI. In particular, the lack of accountability of the KRG’s internal security force - the Asayish - which is accused of torture and forced disappearances. The situation for women is also an issue which, although seeing noticeable improvements, continues to represent a significant problem in KRI.

Situation for Kurds in the disputed territories

The disputed territories are located between the three Kurdish Government controlled governorates and the rest of Iraq, extending from Sinjar in the eastern Ninewa governorate across to Diyala governorate. The region’s most contentious area is the oil rich region of Kirkuk.

The situation for minority groups who reside in the disputed territories is of concern to human rights organisations. The Kurdish government is accused of policies which put minorities in the region at risk. Focussing on the situation of a minority Kurdish group, the Yezidis are particularly vulnerable in the disputed territories. According to Human Rights Watch they, along with other minority groups in the area (Christians and Shabaks), have been suppressed and the KRG has attempted to destroy their community.

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20 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267 and USSD 2008 report
21 ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers,’ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, April 2009, CISLIB 17315
22 ‘Hope and Fear, Human rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ Amnesty International, September 2009, CISLIB 17267
23 ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers,’ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, April 2009, CISLIB 17315
Extremists have singled out minority groups in the disputed territories leaving them caught in the middle of the dispute between the central Iraqi government and the KRG for control of the region.

See separate section on Yezidis for more detailed information.

Women
Sources consulted indicate that although the situation for women in KRG has improved in recent years, they continue to be victims of violence and discrimination.

The Directorate for Combating Violence against Women judges that the majority of women in KRI are forced into marriage. While women’s freedom of movement continues to be limited due to social customs requiring women to have permission from their parents or family members.

Honour killings and female genital mutilation (FGM) remain significant problems in KRG.

‘Honour’ killings

‘Honour’ killings are usually carried out by members of a woman or girls’ family who murder their female relative allegedly in order to preserve family honour if she has the potential to bring shame to the family - for example falling pregnant out of wedlock or being accused of adultery.

‘Honour’ killings are documented as widespread in the KRG area. In November 2008 the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women declared that ‘honour’ killings are one of the main causes of unnatural death among women in the Kurdish region of Iraq. While the Human Rights report released for the first half of 2009 by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), declared that honour killings remained a ‘serious concern.’

A range of commentators agree that ‘honour’ killing in the KRI remains to be a major risk for women and in some cases the incidence of killings has risen in recent years.

References:
28 ‘Security and Human Rights Issues in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and South/Central Iraq (S/C Iraq),’ Danish Immigration Service, Danish Refugee Council and Landinfo, July 2009, CISLIB 17665
29 ‘Security and Human Rights Issues in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and South/Central Iraq (S/C Iraq),’ Danish Immigration Service, Danish Refugee Council and Landinfo, July 2009, CISLIB 17665
30 ‘Globe interview with a Kurdish feminist,’ Kurdish Globe, 19 June 2009, CX228640
31 ‘Violence against Iraqi women continues unabated, says UN expert,’ UNHCR, 25 November 2008, CX233070
the most recent United States Department of State Human Rights Report for Iraq, honour killings were reported as widespread in the KRG area during 2008.34

A round up of local Kurdish Media reports on honour based violence and killings collected by Kurdish Women’s Rights Watch for the period of May to December 2008, lists approximately 50 murders, and many more burnings and suicides.35 The KRG reported 528 honour killings in 2007, which human rights groups consider to be a modest estimate. The Erbil Hospital reported 154 honour killings in Erbil governorate between January and November 2008.36

The Iraqi Penal Code treats ‘honour’ killings more leniently than other murders. In KRI, public debate regarding ‘honour’ killings has emerged between the KRG, religious leaders and in the media, and while the KRG has pledged to prosecute ‘honour’ killings, according to the UNHCR most cases go unpunished.37

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is also referred to as Female Genital Cutting (FGC) or female circumcision. It is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO) as ‘procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genitalia or other injury to the female genital organs whether for cultural, religious or other non therapeutic reasons.’ There are often severe ongoing health problems caused by FGM and it can result in death.38

According to the Shafi’i school of Sunni Islam to which the majority of Kurds belong, circumcision is compulsory for men and women.39

More than 60 percent of women in all three Governorates of Iraqi Kurdistan have been circumcised, according to a study conducted by WADI the German NGO.40 The same statistics showed that 98% of women living in 54 villages in Raniya and Qalat Dazei districts in the area of Bishdar in the Sulaimaniya governorate have undergone FGM.41 The highest rates are found in Grmyan, a mostly rural region that runs along the Iranian border.42 The practice is also found in urban areas.43

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35 ‘Roundup of media reports on honour-based violence and violent incidents involving women in Iraqi Kurdistan Region, May-December 2008,’ Kurdish Women's Rights Watch, 22 August 2009, CX23055
37 ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers,’ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, April 2009, C1SLIB 17315
38 ‘World health organization fact sheet number 24: female genital mutilation,’ June 2000, CX170972
39 ‘An end to female genital cutting?’ , Time, 4 January 2008, CX230574
40 ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers, April 2009’, UNHCR, April 2009, CIS17315
42 ‘Combating female circumcision’, Institute for War and Peace Reporting, 3 June 2009, CX227616
43 ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Iraqi Asylum-Seekers,’ United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, April 2009, C1SLIB 17315

DIAC-IN-CONFIDENCE
Female Genital Mutilation is not illegal in Iraq.\(^44\) A draft law was submitted to the Kurdish National Assembly in 2007; however it is yet to be passed.\(^45\)

Please refer to the CRS Issues paper prepared in July 2009, ‘Female Genital Mutilation in The Middle East and North Africa’ – Iraq section which focuses on FGM in KRG area in more detail.\(^46\)

**Services and laws protecting women in KRG areas**

Since the 1990s shelters for women at risk of violence have been established in the KRG area by women’s organisations and the government.\(^47\) Shelters and protection centres for women are located in Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Kirkuk, Dahuk and Mosul.\(^48\) A shelter in Erbil, another in Dahuk and one in Sulaymaniyah are run by KRG.\(^49\) However, according to the United States Human Rights report, space at shelters is limited and victims of domestic violence receive no substantive assistance from the government.\(^50\) In May 2008, Asuda, a women’s shelter in Sulaymaniyah was attacked by gunmen seriously wounding one of the women staying there.\(^51\)

After the attack at the Asuda shelter, the KRG Violence Against Women Commission which is under the supervision of the Prime Minister, created directorates to monitor violence against women. Other specialised women’s bodies have been established to address violence against women – including in the police force.\(^52\) UNAMI notes the directorates have a small budget which limits their capacity.\(^53\) Amnesty International also points out that although the establishment of the directorates and gender training for police is positive; some police officers are still ‘unwilling or unable’ to respond to violence against women.\(^54\) Furthermore, AI’s survey data compared to police reports highlights the under-reporting of such crimes\(^55\) and despite changes in legislation, many perpetrators go unpunished.\(^56\)

In 2008 the Kurdistan parliament passed amendments to the Personal Status Law to enhance women’s rights, including restrictions of polygamy. The Kurdistan Parliament’s women’s committee has also drafted a law on family violence to facilitate judicial


\(^{46}\) Available under CISPAPERS- 2009- Global Information

\(^{47}\) ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267

\(^{48}\) [http://www.wadinet.de/projekte/newiraq/women/shelters.htm](http://www.wadinet.de/projekte/newiraq/women/shelters.htm)


\(^{52}\) ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267


\(^{54}\) ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267

\(^{55}\) ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267

procedures against perpetrators and allow for protection of women at risk. As mentioned above, a draft law was submitted to the KRG outlawing FGM has not yet been passed and the KRG have spoken out about ‘honour’ killings but most perpetrators continue to go unpunished.

Religious minorities among Kurds

Faili Kurds

Faili Kurds primarily adhere to the Shi’a branch of Islam (Note: the majority of Kurds are Sunni). Faili Kurds have lived in Iraq since the days of the Ottoman Empire and inhabit the area along the Iran-Iraq border as well as parts of Baghdad. They faced expulsion for being "Iranians" throughout Iraq's modern history but especially in the 1970s and again at the beginning of the Iran-Iraq war (1980-1988), when the Ba’ath regime of Iraq expelled large numbers of Failis to Iran and stripped them of their Iraqi nationality. Estimates of the number of Failis expelled to Iran vary from 200,000 to 300,000.

Treatment

According to the UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Iraq released in April 2009, Faili Kurds may be targeted by Sunni militias due to being Shi’a. A Minority Rights Group report from September 2009 notes that Faili Kurds’ religion and ethnicity make their community the target of ‘violent human rights violations’ (no specific examples are given however).

The post in Baghdad notes that the authorities have issued identity cards of a different colour than regular identity cards to Faili Kurds who have returned from Iran thus providing a basis for possible discrimination. Furthermore it is highlighted that without a nationality certificate it is difficult to access basic services such as health care, education, employment and freedom of movement is limited.
Faili Kurd mosques were targeted by suicide bombers in November 2005, killing more than 90 people. In July 2007 a café known to be frequented by Faili Kurds was attacked with 105 people killed as a result.

A Baghdad post cable response from June 2004 notes that Faili Kurds may be targeted by non-state agents on their return to Iraq if they try to reclaim property taken from them when they were deported. The struggle to reclaim property remains an issue for returning Faili Kurds.

**Citizenship/Nationality Rights of returnee Faili Kurds**

The Iraqi Constitution introduced in October 2005 states that anyone who is born to an Iraqi father or to an Iraqi mother shall be considered an Iraqi and anyone who had his citizenship withdrawn shall have the right to demand its reinstatement. Nationality is regulated by the Iraqi Nationality Law of 2006. Article 17 repeals Decree no. 666 which was issued in 1980 by the Revolutionary Council of the Ba’ath regime which charged Faili Kurds with ‘disloyalty to the motherland, people and the supreme national and social goals of the Revolution.’ The 2006 Nationality Law restores citizenship to all Iraqis who were affected by the decree and any Iraqi whose citizenship was revoked based on political, religious, racist or sectarian grounds.

A cable response received from the DFAT Baghdad post in November 2009 reiterates UNHCR advice of May 2008 that reacquiring nationality for Faili Kurds returning from Iran is a ‘long and complicated’ process. A local newspaper article in May 2009 reported that the Iraqi ministry of Immigration and Immigrants restored Iraqi citizenship cards to more than 3500 Iraqi citizens who had returned from Iran, the majority of which were Faili Kurds.

According to UNHCR advice from 2008, an applicant for Iraqi citizenship ‘needs to provide the nationality certificate of their father, brother, paternal grandfather or uncle. If this is not possible, the nationality officer will record the testimony and confirmation of the applicant’s clan members to verify information and documents provided by the

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67. ‘Situation of the Faili Kurds,’ *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade*, 1 June 2004, CX95548.
68. ‘Iraq panel tries to right Saddam’s land grabs,’ *Agence France Presse*, 3 March 2009, CX221892.
75. ‘CIS Request No. IRQ9881/ Emerging caseload of Faili Kurds and Bedouins,’ *Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)*, 13 November 2009 CX236340.
applicant.’ In 2005, the UNHCR highlighted the case of Faili Kurds and that they may be unable to provide the necessary documents due to being stripped of all documentation when deported from Iraq. It is noted that some local authorities have established ways to review such cases however there are continuing difficulties due to a lack of staff and training of staff and limited access to legislation. The 2008 advice from UNHCR also highlights that people who had their citizenship revoked and do not have documents to prove their status are required to apply in person in Baghdad ‘thus incurring financial costs and security risks due to transportation costs and the unstable security situation in Central Iraq.’

**Yezidis/Yazidi**

Yezidis adhere to a 4,000 year old religion based on ‘Maluk Ta’us’ – the Peacock Angel. One cannot become a Yezidi but is born into the community, and intermarriage with non-Yezidis and religious conversion are not permitted.

There are wide discrepancies in sources’ estimates of the Yezidi population, with numbers ranging from 300,000 (said to be a decrease from an original 500,000) to 650,000. Most Yezidis reside in the northern Dohuk, Ninewa and Sulaymaniyah governorates. They are concentrated in Jabal Sinjar, 150 kilometres west of Mosul and some in Shakyh Adi where the Yezidis’ most holy shrine is found.

**Treatment**

Yezidis have a long history of religious persecution. Radical and moderate Muslims as well as Christians consider Yezidis to be devil worshippers and infidels because the peacock angel at the centre of their religion is interpreted as the devil.

They have been singled out by Islamic extremists in Mosul who have distributed leaflets calling for the death of all Yezidis. Some reports suggest that because of violent attacks against Yezidis, since 2007 all Yezidis in Mosul have fled the area.

According to Minority Rights Group International, since the invasion of Iraq by coalition forces in March 2003, Yezidis have experienced ‘increased persecution.’

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77 ‘Statelessness: many Iraqis stripped of their nationality and ethnicity face difficulties in obtaining documentation,’ *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre*, 2004-2008, CX234143
79 ‘The Yezidis of Iraq say Kurds oppressing them and forcing them to flee,’ *Azzaman*, 17 April 2008 CX202456
80 Yezidis, Minority Rights Group International (MRG), April 2009, CX238457
82 ‘Yezidis’ *Minority Rights Group International*, April 2009, CX238457
83 ‘On Vulnerable Ground Violence against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province’s Disputed Territories,’ *Human Rights Watch*, November 2009, CISLIB 18019
84 ‘On Vulnerable Ground Violence against Minority Communities in Nineveh Province’s Disputed Territories,’ *Human Rights Watch*, November 2009, CISLIB 18019
86 ‘Minorities in Iraq: the Other Victims,’ *The Centre for International Governance Innovation*, January 2009, CISLIB 17236
Suspected Al Qaeda militants forced 23 Yezidi men from a bus and executed them in April 2007.88

In August 2007 militants launched a targeted attack on Yezidi villages in Sinjar district, Ninewa province killing around between 300 to 500 people, wounding 700 and destroying almost 400 homes.89 This represented the most devastating attack against a minority group since the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003.90

In December 2008, seven members of a Yezidi family were shot by suspect Al Qaeda militants, while a car bomb killed a number of people in the mainly Yezidis town of Sinjar in the same month.91

In August 2009 suicide bombers targeted a café in Sinjar city, killing at least 21 people. Yezidis saw this as an attack against their community and in an attempt to protect their villages, established sand barriers to prevent against further bombings.92

Yezidis living outside of the KRG area are noted as being doubly discriminated against for being Yezidi and Kurdish.93

Sources indicate that Yezidis are not protected by the Iraqi or Kurdistan Regional Governments. UNAMI in its most recent Human Right Report for Iraq recorded attacks against Yezidi villages around Sinjar, west of Mosul by the Peshmerga, the armed forces of the KRG during 2009.94 According to the US International Freedom of Religion Report for October 2009, many Yezidis towns in Ninewa are in the disputed areas and thus have poor access to basic services. Those living north of Mosul claimed the KRG took their property with no compensation.

It is reported that many Yezidis have fled to Syria and Jordan and those who still live in the country fear travelling outside of Yezidi communities.95 Yezidi farmers are losing their livelihoods because they do not feel safe to travel to sell their goods while the
groups’ freedom of religion is restricted due to fear of attack if they perform religious ceremonies.96

**Political opinion**

The Asayish is the internal security/intelligence agency of both the KDP and the PUK in KRI.97 According to Amnesty International, the Asayish acts with ‘virtual impunity,’ arbitrarily arresting individuals and holding them incommunicado.98 Some arrests appear to be politically motivated.

The Asayish have arrested journalists, protesters, those who speak out against the two major parties and members of opposition Islamic parties.99 Criticism of the two main Kurdish political parties can be met with both arrest and torture.100 They are often kept in undisclosed detention centres controlled by the KDP or PUK.101

Individuals suspected of terrorist links are often held for periods lasting up to several years without charge or trial and with limited evidence against them. Detainees held by the Asayish have limited access to legal representation and have been reportedly tortured while detained.102 There are reports that suspects are taken to undisclosed detention centres and family members are unable to visit them.103 Amnesty International reported on a case in which a man and his 60 year old mother were detained and tortured for being suspects of a bomb attack. A court acquitted them but the Asayish continued to detain them.104

There are allegations that the KDP and PUK prevent the employment of non-party citizens, and that courts in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) governorates favour party members.105

See Freedom of Expression for more details.

**Freedom of Expression**

According to Amnesty International, despite the recent proliferation of newspapers, television and radio stations in KRI, and there officially being no censorship, the majority of media outlets do not criticise the KRG, Asayish or the main two political parties due to fear of reprisals.106

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97 ‘Kurdish security chief acknowledges violations,’ *Niqash*, 15 July 2009 CX230057
99 “Human rights violated in Iraq’s Kurdish north”, *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 10 July 2007
100 ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267
101 ‘Security and Human Rights Issues in Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI), and South/Central Iraq (S/C Iraq),’ *Danish Immigration Service, Danish Refugee Council and Landinfo*, July 2009, CISLIB 17665
106 ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267
Criticism is met with arrest, beatings and harassment by the Asayish and other security agencies and newspapers have been sued by the KRG and political representatives of the two major political parties.  

Although a press law was passed in September 2008 to end imprisonment for press-related offences, journalists are still targeted and arrested. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, an estimated 60 Kurdish journalists were killed, threatened, attacked or taken to court in the first half of 2008.

Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders and other agencies report on a range of incidents which display the continuing lack of freedom of expression in KRI.

In July 2008 a journalist who had criticised the two Kurdish political parties of corruption and nepotism was shot dead outside his home.

In December 2008, a doctor was sentenced to six months in prison in the Kurdish city Erbil for writing an article about homosexuality in an independent newspaper.

In April 2009, local Kurdish media reported the 5 day detention of a man who, on a local television station, had criticised the government for not implementing promises of basic services it had made.

In February 2009, the head of a local television station was detained for two weeks for making ‘defamatory’ comments (details of his comments were not provided). Also in February 2009, a number of journalists were reported to have received prison sentences for criticising the KRG.

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107 ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267
108 ‘Hope and Fear: Human Rights in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq,’ April 2009, CISLIB 17267
111 ‘Doctor jailed in Kurdistan for writing about homosexuality,’ Reporters sans Frontières, CX215869
112 ‘KRG citizen imprisoned for criticizing Government,’ Kurdish Aspect, 5 April, 2009, CX223875
113 ‘TV journalist arrested for second time in two months,’ Reporters sans Frontières, 3 March 2009, CX221942
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United Kingdom Home Office, ‘UK Home Office Kurdistan Regional Government Area of Iraq, 16 September 2009, CISNET


Distribution map of Ethno religious groups and major tribes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Estimated Population</th>
<th>Also Found In</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arabs</td>
<td>16 to 20 million</td>
<td>Throughout North Africa and the Middle East, Iran</td>
<td>65-80 percent Shia, 20-30 percent Sunni, less than 5 percent Christian</td>
<td>Arabic (Iraqi dialect)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurds</td>
<td>3.6 to 4.8 million</td>
<td>Turkey, Iran, Syria, Armenia, Georgia, Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Mostly Sunni, Shia, and Yazidi minority</td>
<td>Kurdish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkomans</td>
<td>300,000 to 800,000</td>
<td>Related to other Turkic peoples in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan</td>
<td>Primarily Sunni</td>
<td>South Azeri Turkish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>As many as 1 million</td>
<td>Mostly Christians, Iranians, and other groups found in the Middle East</td>
<td>At least 50 percent Christian; Shias, Sunnis, and members of other religions account for the balance</td>
<td>Mostly Arabic, some Persian and other languages</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>