



Polish Journal of Political Science Volume 10 Issue 2 Special Issue

Editorial Board

Clifford Angell Bates Jr., University of Warsaw
Stephen Brooks, University of Michigan
Michael Freeden, University of Nottingham, University of Oxford
Marzenna James, Princeton University
Angieszka Łukasik-Turecka, John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin
Agostino Massa, University of Genoa
Paolo Pombeni, University of Bologna
Bogdan Szlachta, Jagiellonian University in Krakow
Filip M. Szymański, Caridnal Stefan Wyszyński University in Warsaw
Andrea Zanini, University of Genoa
Tomasz Żyro, University of Warsaw

Editorial Team

Special Issue Editor

 ${\bf Piotr \, Sosnowski}, {\it University \, of \, Warsaw}$

Lead Editors

Chief editor: **Jarosław Szczepański**, *University of Warsaw* Secretary: **Błażej Bado**, *University of Warsaw*

Associate Editors

Katarzyna Gruszka, University of Warsaw Paulina Szczepańska, University of Warsaw

Graphic design of the journal

Krzysztof Trusz, Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw

Desktop publishing

Karolina Trusz

Language editor/Reviewing

Adam Petrėtis





All articles in the journal are peer-reviewed

The journal is published by the Interdisciplinary Research Center of the University of Warsaw "Identity – Dialogue – Security" (Interdyscyplinarne Centrum Badawcze Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego "Tożsamość – Dialog – Bezpieczeństwo")

Editorial address

Polish Journal of Political Science

Interdisciplinary Research Center of the University of Warsaw "Identity – Dialogue – Security"
Prosta 69, 00-838 Warsaw email: centrum.tozsamosc@uw.edu.pl

Warsaw 2024

eISSN 2391-3991 Original version: e-book Submit your paper: pjps@uw.edu.pl

DB ON ARSZANST

Polish Journal of Political Science is included in:













Table of Contents

Introduction to the Special Issue

4 Piotr Sosnowski

State Building and Political Culture in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

Articles

10 Mustafa Arıkan

Lifting Veil on Analyses of Political Fragmentations: A Critical Review of the "Cleavage Theses" in Iraqi Kurdistan Studies

44 Juan Carlos Castillo Quiñones

Nohemi Echeverria Vicente

(De)securitizing Kurdish Politics in Iraq? The Kurds in the Post-1991 Political Context

68 Kamal Chomani

Corruption and Kurdish Nationalism: A Case Study of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

96 Silvia-Lucretia Nicola

A Tale of Two States? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq Caught Between Conflict and Cooperation with Central Iraq (1991–2020)

127 Rebaz Jalal Ahmed Nanekeli

World Powers and the Fate of the Iraqi Kurds: Geopolitical Instability, the Emergence of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, and Its Survival



Piotr Sosnowski*

State Building and Political Culture in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq

DOI: 10.58183/pjps.02SI2024

he Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) represents a compelling case study in contemporary international and security studies. Since gaining de facto autonomy in 1991, it has developed its own political and security institutions, economy (especially after 2003), and governance practices. Its exceptional status – combining empirical independence with constitutionally guaranteed autonomy as a federal region within Iraq (since 2005) – makes it particularly valuable for examining its specific political culture and state-building processes within federal structures.

Traditional scholarship on Iraqi Kurdistan has primarily focused on great power politics and regional state dynamics, with particular attention to Kurdish independence movements and the policies of Saddam Hussein's regime¹ The perspective of the Iraqi Kurds, including their need for security and survival (both in terms of cultural distinctiveness and biological existence), was marginalized. The period from 1991 to 2004 received particular attention, as it shaped fundamental regional political dynamics, including the division of influence between the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).² However, this body of literature often overlooked Kurdish agency in their relations with external patrons.

Contemporary research has shifted toward new analytical directions, with a particular emphasis on patron-client relationships and Kurdish political agency.³ Recent studies highlight Kurdistan's sophisticated capacity to manage multiple international relationships simultaneously,⁴ while

* University of Warsaw, e-mail: p.sosnowski2@uw.edu.pl, https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5362-1378

- 1. Y. Voller, The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq, Routledge 2014; Y. Voller, Kurdish oil politics in Iraq: Contested sovereignty and unilateralism, "Middle East Policy", 2013, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 68–82; J. Harvey, G. Stansfield, Theorizing unrecognized states: sovereignty, secessionism, and political economy, in: Unrecognized states in the international system, eds. N. Caspersen, G. Stansfield, Routledge 2010, pp. 11–26.
- 2. D. Natali, The Kurds and the state: Evolving national identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, Syracuse University Press 2005; G.R.V. Stansfield, Iraqi Kurdistan: political development and emergent democracy, Routledge 2003.
- 3. K. Palani, et al., The Development of Kurdistan's de facto statehood: Kurdistan's September 2017 referendum for



also examining the implications of the 2017 independence referendum.⁵ The articles in this issue build on these developments, offering multidimensional analyses of Kurdish political dynamics, with a specific focus on the processes of power institutionalization and the internal mechanisms underpinning the formation of Kurdish de facto statehood.

This special issue reflects broader theoretical shifts in the field, moving from fundamental questions about political divisions to examining the institutional processes and geopolitical conditions shaping the KRI's international position. The collected texts not only expand the empirical understanding of Kurdistan's specific case but also contribute to theoretical discussions on contemporary forms of sovereignty and governance in complex political environments.

The issue opens with the article "Lifting Veil on Analyses of Political Fragmentations: A Critical Review of the 'Cleavage Theses' in Iraqi Kurdistan Studies," which proposes a re-evaluation of research approaches in Iraqi Kurdistan studies by introducing a political party studies perspective. The author challenges the traditional view of political cleavages as a manifestation of backwardness, instead associating them with the processes of institutionalizing power. By critiquing "methodological nationalism" and proposing to view fragmentation as an integral part of the state-forming process, the article opens new avenues of research not only in Kurdish studies but also in the broader field of political party theory, hitherto focused on the Western world.

The article "(De)securitizing Kurdish Politics in Iraq? The Kurds in the Post-1991 Political" challenges the prevailing assumption in the literature about the unambiguously positive nature of the desecuritization process by introducing the concept of "(de)securitization" – a process in which securitization and desecuritization practices occur simultaneously. By revising the interpretation of the Copenhagen School's model of securitization and employing the concept of "splitting speech acts," the authors argue that these processes are not mutually exclusive or strictly consecutive phenomena. This approach provides a more nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between Iraqi Kurdistan, Iraq, and Turkey. Moreover, by challenging the normative assumption that desecuritization is inherently positive, and demonstrating how selective desecuritization can lead to the artificial division of the Kurdish community and the emergence of new forms of political violence, the article opens up new avenues of research into the dynamics of ethnic and territorial conflict.

independence, "Third World Quarterly", 2019, Vol. 40, Issue 12, pp. 2270–2288, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1619452.

- 4. K. Palani, Client Agency in a multiple patron setting: The case of Iraqi Kurdistan, "Territory, Politics, Governance", 2024, pp. 1–18, DOI: 10.1080/21622671.2024.2390526; P. Sosnowski, Path Dependence from Proxy Agent to De Facto State: A History of 'Strategic Exploitation' of the Kurds as a Context of the Iraqi Kurdistan Security Policy, "International Journal of Conflict and Violence", 2022, Vol. 16, pp. 1–13, DOI: 10.11576/ijcv-5688.
- 5. M. Charountaki, Non-state actors and change in foreign policy: the case of a self-determination referendum in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, "Cambridge Review of International Affairs", 2020, Vol. 33, Issue 3, pp. 385–409, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1663495; K. Palani, et al., The development of..., op. cit., pp. 2270–2288.
- 6. M. Arıkan, Lifting Veil on Analyses of Political Fragmentations: A Critical Review of the "Cleavage Theses" in Iraqi Kurdistan Studies, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 10–43, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0102SI2024.
- 7. J.C. Castillo Quiñones, N. Echeverria Vicente, (De)securitizing Kurdish Politics in Iraq? The Kurds in the Post-1991



The article "Corruption and Kurdish Nationalism: A Case Study of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq" examines the complex relationship between corruption and Kurdish nationalism in the KRI, challenging the dominant approach in the literature that predominantly emphasizes national identity. Through a combination of discourse analysis, in-depth interviews with key political actors, and the use of Kurdish-language sources, the author provides a critical perspective on how Kurdish parties (KDP and PUK) instrumentalize nationalism to legitimize corrupt practices. This study makes a significant contribution to understanding nationalism and corruption in post-conflict states by illustrating how national liberation movements evolve into clientelistic systems, thereby shedding light on the role of corrupt practices in the state-building process.

The article "A Tale of Two States? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq Caught Between Conflict and Cooperation with Central Iraq (1991-2020)" presents an innovative analysis of the relationship between the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) and the central government from 1991 to 2020, using Krasner's concept of sovereignty in three dimensions: internal, Westphalian, and international. The author challenges the prevailing notion in the literature of the antagonistic nature of the relationship between a state-seeking entity and the home state, introducing the term "want-to-be-states" and demonstrating the complex dynamics of cooperation and conflict using the KRI as an example. The relevance of the article extends beyond the case study of Kurdistan – the proposed analytical framework can be applied to the study of other instances of limited statehood, as evidenced by the rich empirical data gathered during fieldwork in 2019 and 2022. By critically approaching the theory of de facto states, the article develops this theory beyond the traditional dichotomy of international recognition, offering an in-depth analysis of the state-building process "from within," which significantly contributes to existing research in this area.

The article "World Powers and the Fate of the Kurds in Iraq. Geopolitical Instability and the Emergence and Survival of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region" offers an analysis of the influence of world powers on the status of Iraqi Kurdistan from the First World War to the present day. Introducing the novel tool for quantifying international relations, the author demonstrates how the decisions of the superpowers, both directly and through their influence on regional states, have shaped the geopolitical situation of the Iraqi Kurds. A key methodological contribution is the proposed model for systematically capturing complex geopolitical relations, using a stability index to visualize and systematize qualitative analysis. By assigning numerical values to different types of relations and considering both global (superpowers) and regional (neighboring states) levels, the model allows for

Political Context, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 44–67, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0202SI2024.

- 8. K. Chomani, Corruption and Kurdish Nationalism: A Case Study of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 68–95, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0302SI2024.
- 9. S.L. Nicola, A Tale of Two States? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq Caught Between Conflict and Cooperation with Central Iraq (1991–2020), "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 96–126, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0402SI2024.

10. R.J.A. Nanekeli, World Powers and the Fate of the Iraqi Kurds: Geopolitical Instability, the Emergence of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, and Its Survival, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 127–147, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0502SI2024.



the graphical representation of long-term trends and the identification of turning points in the superpowers' policies towards autonomous regions. This opens up new methodological perspectives in the study of the influence of world powers on the formation of regional and sub-regional geopolitical arrangements.

The articles in this special issue represent a significant shift in studies on Iraqi Kurdistan, moving from traditional historical-political analyses toward more complex theoretical frameworks. The authors introduce new analytical tools – from the innovative perspective of political party studies, through a revisionist interpretation of securitization and de facto state theories, to the quantification of geopolitical relations. These approaches provide a deeper understanding of KRI exceptionalism while offering research instruments applicable to the analysis of other entities with ambiguous international status.¹¹

The selection of articles reflects contemporary trends in the social sciences, where increasing emphasis is placed on multilevel analysis of institutional processes. The authors challenge established theoretical assumptions, proposing more precise conceptualizations of the complex relationships between the KRI, its domestic context and dynamics, and its international environment. Particularly significant is their demonstration of how state-building processes are shaped by local political culture, with traditional social structures and modern political institutions mutually influencing one another.

Bibliography

Arıkan M., Lifting Veil on Analyses of Political Fragmentations: A Critical Review of the "Cleavage Theses" in Iraqi Kurdistan Studies, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 10–43, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0102SI2024.

Castillo Quiñones J.C., Echeverria Vicente N., (De) securitizing Kurdish Politics in Iraq? The Kurds in the Post-1991 Political Context, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 44–67, DOI: $\underline{10.58183/pps.0202SI2024}$.

 $\label{lem:charountakim.} \begin{tabular}{l} Charountaki M., Non-state actors and change in foreign policy: the case of a self-determination referendum in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, "Cambridge Review of International Affairs", 2020, Vol. 33, Issue 3, pp. 385–409, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1663495.$

11. In line with the appeal of the forerunner of de facto state studies, see: S. Pegg, Twenty Years of de facto State Studies: Progress, Problems, and Prospects, in: The Oxford encyclopedia of empirical international relations theory, ed. W.R. Thompson, Oxford University Press 2017, pp. 1–20.





Chomani K., Corruption and Kurdish Nationalism: A Case Study of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 68–95, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0302SI2024.

Harvey J., Stansfield G., Theorizing unrecognized states: sovereignty, secessionism, and political economy, in: Unrecognized states in the international system, eds. N. Caspersen, G. Stansfield, Routledge 2010, pp. 11–26.

Nanekeli R.J.A., World Powers and the Fate of the Iraqi Kurds: Geopolitical Instability, the Emergence of the Kurdistan Region in Iraq, and Its Survival, "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 127–147, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0502SI2024.

Natali D., The Kurds and the state: Evolving national identity in Iraq, Turkey, and Iran, Syracuse University Press 2005.

Nicola S.L., A Tale of Two States? The Kurdistan Region of Iraq Caught Between Conflict and Cooperation with Central Iraq (1991–2020), "Polish Journal of Political Science", 2024, Vol. 10, Issue 2 (Special Issue), pp. 96–126, DOI: 10.58183/pjps.0402SI2024.

Palani K., Client Agency in a multiple patron setting: The case of Iraqi Kurdistan, "Territory, Politics, Governance", 2024, pp. 1–18, DOI: 10.1080/21622671.2024.2390526.

Palani K., Khidir J., Dechesne M., Bakker E., *The Development of Kurdistan's de facto statehood: Kurdistan's September 2017 referendum for independence*, "Third World Quarterly", 2019, Vol. 40, Issue 12, pp. 2270–2288, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2019.1619452.

Pegg S., Twenty Years of de facto State Studies: Progress, Problems, and Prospects, in: The Oxford encyclopedia of empirical international relations theory, ed. W.R. Thompson, Oxford University Press 2017, pp. 1–20.

Sosnowski P., Path Dependence from Proxy Agent to De Facto State: A History of 'Strategic Exploitation' of the Kurds as a Context of the Iraqi Kurdistan Security Policy, "International Journal of Conflict and Violence", 2022, Vol. 16, pp. 1–13, DOI: 10.11576/ijcv-5688.

Stansfield G.R.V., Iraqi Kurdistan: political development and emergent democracy, Routledge 2003.



Voller Y., *Kurdish oil politics in Iraq: Contested sovereignty and unilateralism*, "Middle East Policy", 2013, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 68–82.

Voller Y., The Kurdish Liberation Movement in Iraq, Routledge 2014.