

Kurdish Political Parties: a critical overview

Abstract

This text intends to provide a general overview of the Kurdish political parties operating in the broader historical/geographical region of Kurdistan, namely the region which is densely populated by Kurds and divided between four neighboring countries of the Middle East: Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Syria. More precisely the paper gives a short outline of the Kurdish parties' historical background, their political ideals and platforms and their preferred means of political action. Finally, it sketches out their affiliations and partnerships but also their diversity in terms of both goals and tactics.

I. General information about the Kurds and Kurdistan

The real number of the Kurdish population is unknown since there has not been an independent census covering the whole area of Kurdistan. Its population is estimated to be 45-50 million people. It should be emphasized that Kurdistan has been the historical homeland not only of Kurds but also of Arabs, Assyrians, Armenians, Chaldeans and Turkmens.

As it will be mentioned in the following paragraphs, the largest parts of Kurdistan are: North and West (Turkish), East (Iranian), South (Iraqi) and Southwest (Syrian). The land of the Kurds, however, is not limited to the aforementioned states, but also includes the distant lands which appeared over time with the forced migrations of the Kurdish populations to the western and southwestern regions of the Turkish capital, to the northeastern regions of Iran, to Red Kurdistan/ Kurdistan Uzeyr between Armenia-Azerbaijan, to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. It should be emphasized that Kurdish political parties have a strong influence also in these remote Kurdish territories. According to the KCK education Committee, the entire area of Kurdistan is estimated at 550,000 km².¹

1. KCK Education Committee "The Geography Of Kurdistan."The source does not include the distant lands in its estimate of the geographical extent of Kurdistan.

The Kurdish society is multi-religious, multi-lingual, and multicultural . The language belongs to the family of Indo-European languages and specifically to the northwestern branch of the Iranian languages, and contains five dialects: northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), central Kurdish (Sorani), southern Kurdish (Kirmashani/Kalhuri), northwestern Kurdish (Dimilki-Zazaki) and southeastern Kurdish (Gorani /Lûri /Hawrami).²

According to Kurdish historiography, the Kurdish geographical area has been divided between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Empire with the Treaty of Kasr-i Sirin / Treaty of Zuhab, on May 17, 1639. After about three centuries of Ottoman and Safavid rule, the Ottoman side of the Kurdish regions was divided into three parts with the Treaty of Lausanne / Treaty of Lausanne, July 24, 1923, which demarcated the borders between Iraq, Syria and Turkey.

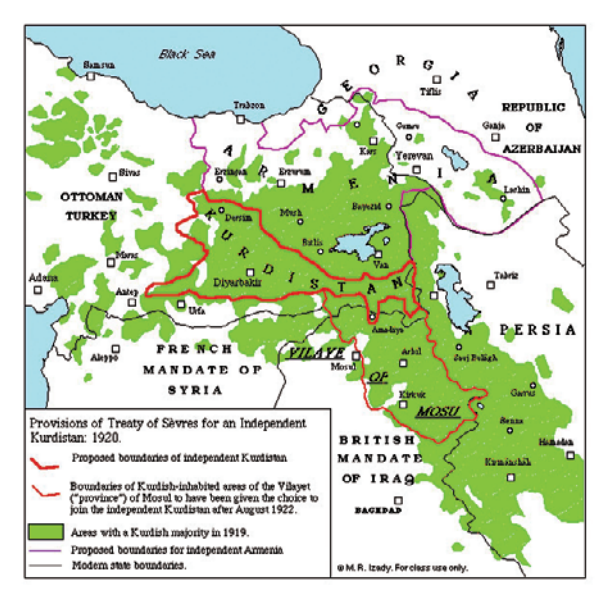


Figure 1: <https://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/kurdistan-maps-1232551498>

2. Sheyholislami, *The Kurds: History - Religion - Language - Politics*, p.31

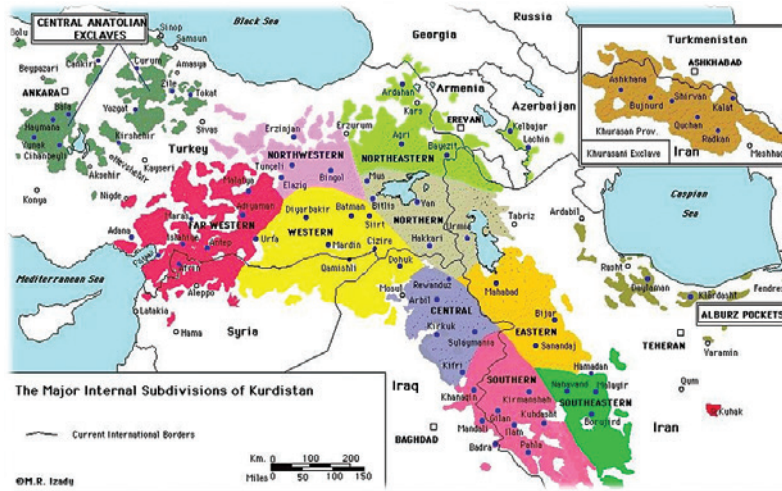


Figure 2: <https://www.institutkurde.org/en/info/kurdistan-maps-1232551498>

II. Kurdish Political discourse³

Generally, contemporary Kurdish political thought is represented by four different political formations. All of them operate throughout Kurdistan.

II.1 - The K.C.K. Kurdistan Communities Group - Unity of Kurdistan Communities. They are based in the Zagros / Kandila Mountains, which form the Iran-Iraq border.

II.2 - The P.D.K. System (Kurdistan Democratic Party). Its base is located in the city of Erbil / Iraqi Kurdistan.

II.3 – The Y.N.K. System (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan). It is based in the city of Sulaimani / Iraqi Kurdistan.

II.4 - Other parties throughout Kurdistan, such as the individual Islamic, left, right, democratic parties.

II.1 System of K.C.K.

The K.C.K. cooperates with three Kurdish organizations:

II.1.a K.N.K. National Congress of Kurdistan

II.1.b KONGRA GEL / Congress of the Kurdish People

II.1.c K.C.K. / Kurdistan Communities Group - Unity of Kurdistan Communities.

3. Cheterian, *The War Report 2017. Kurdish Military Formations In Middle Eastern Battlefields*, p.2-8.; Wuthrich, *Kurdish Nationalist Organizations, Neighboring States, and Ideological Distance*, pp. 85-112.

II.1.a K.N.K. Kurdistan National Congress / National Congress of Kurdistan



- It is founded in 1999 in Amsterdam, in the Netherlands. Its headquarters are in Brussels.
- It represents all Kurdish forces in all parts of Kurdistan and the Kurds of the Diaspora.
- It perceives Kurdistan as an International Colony in the Middle East.⁴
- It operates under the co-chairing formula (female-male) and it consists of 250 + 50 members. Depending on the situation the number of members varies the lowest number being 250 and the highest 300 (250+50). The number of women participants at KNK is not clear but “The Congress recognizes the social reality of Kurds and Kurdistan, and supports and implements the principle of positive discrimination towards women’s participation in all its activities, projects and organizations”⁵
- Every part of Kurdistan is represented in it.

II.1.b KONGRA GEL Congress of the Kurdish People



- It was founded in 2003 in the guerrilla areas, in the Qandil / Iraq Mountains.
- It serves as the Legislative Body of the KCK.

4. Kurdistan National Congress, “Convention. The Colonial Occupied Status of Kurdistan”.

5. *According to Election of 18-19-20th October 2019*, the members of the Kurdistan National Congress are 309 and there is *The Committee for Women in The Organs of the Congress*. For more information consult: Kurdistan National Congress, “Members”, <http://www.kongrakurdistan.eu/en/members/>

- It consists of 140 people.
- It recognizes Kurdistan as a whole and its decisions apply to all the four parts of Kurdistan.

II.1.c. KCK –Koma Civakên Kurdistan - Unity of Communities of Kurdistan



It was founded in 2005 and is based on the KCK Agreement.⁶

- It operates as an informal State and consists of legislative-executive and judicial authorities.
- It supports a Social-Ecological-Democratic Confederate structure for all of Kurdistan.
- It considers the theory of the nation-state outdated for the Kurds.
- It supports the Democratic Confederation with all the peoples of the region within the principle of the Democratic Nation.
- It is based on the free expression of Gender identity and ecological life.
- It is against male domination in society, fights for women's freedom and implements the theory of Jineolojî in any level of its structure.
- It is NOT a State, it does not support the concept of the classical state but the free-equal citizenship of the KCK.
- Every Kurd is a natural member of the KCK system. Except for children, every person can consciously participate in the activities of the KCK before adhering to the KCK Agreement.

6. For the KCK Contract see: Serxwebun, "Koma Komalên Kurdistan Sözlüşmesi". pp.18- 20.

II.2 - Axis of the P.D.K. System Kurdistan Democratic Party



The P.D.K. (Kurdistan Democratic Party) was founded on August 16, 1946 in the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in Eastern Kurdistan-Iran.

- Ideologically it is considered a left-wing, social democratic party.
- It supports Kurdish nationalism and populism.
- It belongs to the framework of the social democratic parties.
- It proposes the free market economy for the whole of Kurdistan.
- It operates as a federal state entity in Iraq.
- It has its own army, its own police, and in northern Iraq it is under the complete control of the Party.
- The first president of the Party was Mustafa Barzani and the Barzani family has been holding the party's presidency in Iraq ever since.⁷
- The name, the principles and the political line of the Party remained the same, apart from a few changes caused by the socio-political transformations which took place in the region.
- It is the main parliamentary party of the Kurdistan Regional Government (K.R.G.) of the Federal Republic of Iraq. It functions as a state entity, something that is rather exceptional for Kurds.
- The influence of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in other parts of Kurdistan was largely due to its historical significance and the lack of other powerful Kurdish parties in the period in which it operated (1950s-1980s).
- Similar parties have been established in the four parts of Kurdistan under the same name and with the same political program, such as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Turkey, Kurdistan Democratic Party of Syria and Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran.

7. KDP, "Derbarê Partiya Demokrata Kurdistanê" (About the Kurdistan Democratic Party), <https://www.kdp.info/p/p.aspx?p=15&l=16&s=040100&r=365>

- Apart from the PDK of northern Kurdistan (Turkey), all other PDK parties have armed branches.

III. The Kurdish Political Parties in Kurdistan and in the Diaspora

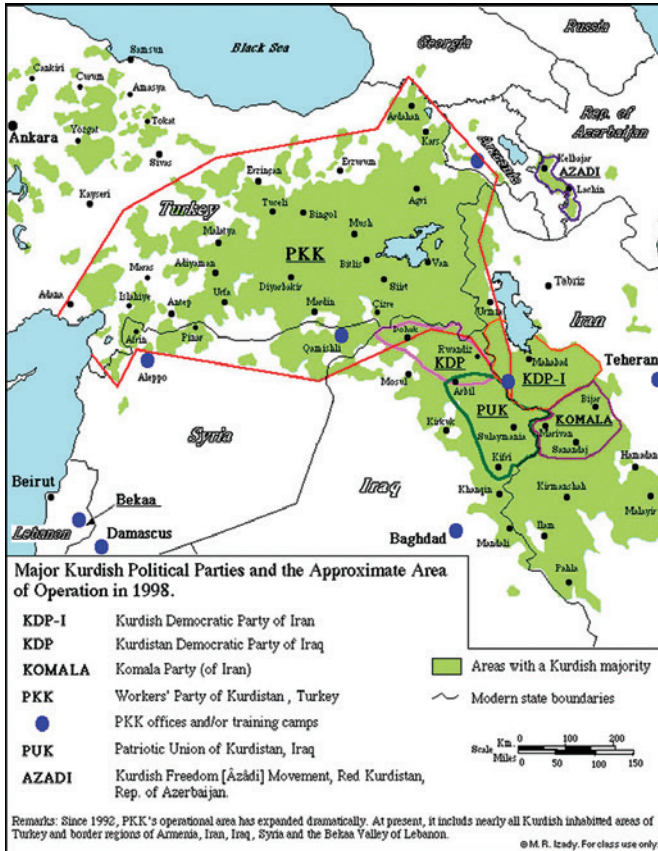


Figure 3: <https://www.institutkurde.org/info/cartes-du-kurdistan-1232550963>

III. 1. EASTERN KURDISTAN - IRAN

General information:

Kurds live throughout Iran but the largest part of their population is located in northwestern Iran, on the borders of Iraq and Turkey, in the provinces of Kurdistan / Kermanshah / Ilam and in western Azerbaijan. This wider region known as Rojhilatî Kurdistan (Eastern Kurdistan) is estimated at about 175,000 km². Its Kurdish population is estimated at about 12-15 million. This number includes the Kurds of

the north Khorasan province (northeastern Iran) in which Kurds make up approximately 50% of the region's population. The languages spoken are the various dialects of the Kurdish language (Sorani, Kurmanji, Hevrami, Kelhori, Luri), but also Farsi and Leki as well. There isn't a single eastern Kurdish religion, but different branches of the Islamic tradition are represented in the region, such as Sunni, Shia and Alevi. On the other hand, the ancient historical religions of the Kurds (Yaresani, Zoroastrianism) are the dominant religions mainly in the Kermanshah region, in southern eastern Kurdistan.⁸

Kurdish-government tensions in Iran have a long history of many centuries. However, in focusing on its recent history one can begin with Reza Khan's (later Reza Shah Pahlavi) backlash against the Kurds in 1922. He recaptured control over the lands that Kurdish leaders had gained since 1918 and dealt ruthlessly with the Kurdish leaders. Once again, after the abdication of Reza Shah in 1941, some Kurdish leaders reasserted themselves and spread their control in western Iran. The Kurds even declared the Mahabad Kurdish Republic in January 1946, but it only lasted 11 months and the Iranian government recaptured Mahabad and eliminated the Kurdish leaders involved. The period after 1946 saw the decline in Kurdish fortunes, the co-optation of the Kurdish tribal leadership and the downgrading of the political power base of Kurdish landowners through the land reforms of the 1960s.⁹

Despite the existence of the province of Kurdistan, both the use of Kurdish language and the political-educational organization of the Kurds are prohibited within Iran. That is why there is not a single legitimate Kurdish party in the country.

III.1.a Eastern Kurdistan (Iran) Kurdish armed parties¹⁰

In Eastern Kurdistan-Iran there are 5 (five) important Kurdish armed parties representing three distinct political trends:¹¹

- i. The conservative, aristocratic and patriotic parties: D.K.K.I.(IKDP), D.K.K.-I (KDP-I)¹² and P.A.K.
- ii. The party that supports a strictly marxist and dogmatic socialist approach: Komala.

8. For further information on Kurdish language in Iran consult: BFA Staatendokumentation, *The Kurds: History - Religion - Language - Politics*pp.41-43.

9. Minority Rights Group International, "Iran: Kurds", <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-4/>.






10. BFA Staatendokumentation, *The Kurds: History - Religion - Language - Politics*, pp. 162-183

11. MERIA, *The Main Kurdish Political Parties in Iran, Iraq, Syria and Turkey: A Research Guide*, pp.2-4

12. These two parties (D.K.K.I and D.K.K.-I.) merged in 2022. <https://www.rudaw.net/turkish/kurdistan/2108202213>

iii. The parties that support the democratic Confederation of the peoples of the (wider) region: PJAK,¹³ and the social movement – KODAR (The Free and Democratic Society of East Kurdistan). Compared with the other parties of eastern Kurdistan-Iran, the political participation and social liberation of women are very important for KODAR.¹⁴

The Basic Kurdish Parties of Eastern Kurdistan (Western Iran)

Parties	 IKDP	 Komala	 PJAK	 KDP-I	 PAK
Establishment	1945	1967	1999	2006	1991
Target	Autonomy	Socialist Autonomy	Democratic Confederation (Independent Kurdistan - Free Iran)	Autonomy	Independence from Iran
Political party/ Military Branch	Party - IKDP Pesmerga, ¹⁵ The Eagles of Zagros (Militia type)	Party-Komale, Peshmerga	Party-PJAK, YRK-YPRK, KODAR and KJAR ¹⁶	Party - KDP-I, Peshmerga	Unclear separation of military and political structure. The name of the military branch of Party is Free Eagles of East Kurdistan

13. PJAK, "The road map of KODAR is modern and non-discriminatory", <https://pjak.eu/en/the-road-map-of-kodar-is-modern-and-non-discriminatory/>.

14. KODAR, "Final Resolution of The Second Congress of the Free and Democratic Society of East Kurdistan (KODAR)," <https://kodar.info/en/2016/11/06/final-resolution-of-the-second-congress-of-the-free-and-democratic-society-of-east-kurdistan-kodar/>.

15. The KDP's and PUK's partisan attitude is particularly manifested in the security sector. From the very beginning "Peshmerga", the armed – the armed units of KDP and PUK that were formed to resist the central government in Baghdad, played a very important role in the history of Iraqi-Kurdistan. The Peshmerga - which used guerrilla tactics in the 1980's - transformed into a more regular military force after the withdrawal of the Iraqi forces from the area of the "Save

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Type of Organization	Strict hierarchy	Strict hierarchy	Democratic centralism	Strict hierarchy	Strict hierarchy
City-Mountain (guerrilla struggle)	Mountain guerrilla	Mountain guerrilla	Mountain and city guerrilla	Mountain guerrilla	Mountain guerrilla
Rival forces / target forces	Regular army, forces located on national borders	Regular army, forces located on national borders	Regular army, forces located on national borders	Regular army, forces located on national borders	Regular army, forces located on national borders
Areas of Action	Urmiye, Xoy, Merivan, Serdesht, Usnu, Osvaniye	Serdesht, Merivan	Maku, Serdesht, Merivan, Senendec, Piranshehir, Kirmanshan, Ciwanro, Hوران	Serdesht	Senendec
Political activity abroad	Political activity in Europe	Low political activity in Europe	Multi-leveled political activity in Europe	Low political activity in Europe	-
Strategy	Armed struggle, mass mobilization	Armed struggle, mass mobilization and ideological propaganda	Armed struggle, mass mobilization, alliances with other Kurdish organizations and ideological propaganda	Armed struggle	Armed struggle

Haven" in 1991. They were further professionalized by the US after the fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003. Still, the Peshmerga forces of the two parties were separated from each other, although there have been frequent attempts to unify them in one professional army. In 2009 the KDP and the PUK created the Ministry of Peshmerga Affairs whose aim was to centralize administrative tasks and establish joint KDP-PUK brigades commanded by officers graduated from a military academy. BFA Staatendokumentation, The Kurds: History - Religion - Language - Politics, pp.149

16. For further information on KJAR consult: KJAR, "Official Website", <https://kjar.online/en/>

III. 2. NORTHERN KURDISTAN – TURKEY

General information

Kurds live in all parts of Turkey, however they are concentrated mainly in eastern and southeastern Turkey, near the borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria. Today, most estimates suggest that between 15 and 20 per cent of the Turkish population is Kurdish.¹⁷ The main Kurdish cities of Northern Kurdistan which are populated by Kurds at 75-80% are: Hakkari, Van, Mardin, Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Urfa, Siirt, Bingöl, Ağrı, Tunceli, Malatya. The cities with less than 70-75% Kurdish population are: Adiyaman, Gaziantep, Elazığ, Erzurum, Sivas, Kahramanmaraş. The number of Turkish citizens of Kurdish origin is estimated at 25-30 million. The area of Northern Kurdistan is estimated at approximately 250,000 km² and thus remains the largest of all the four constituent parts of Kurdistan.

The languages¹⁸ spoken in northern Kurdistan are two dialects of the Kurdish language (Kurmanji and Kirmancki (Zazaki=Dimilki) and Turkish. The Kurdish language is not officially banned in public but its use could result to several penalties, stretching from marginalization to imprisonment. For example, Kurdish, with its two dialects (Kurmanji and Kirmancki/Zazaki=Dimilki), has been allowed as an optional language in secondary education since 2012, however in practice teachers have not been appointed, classrooms have not been provided, parents have been discouraged to choose the course for their children, etc.¹⁹

There are several religions in the region. The vast majority of the Kurds are Sunnis (Hanefi and Shafii), followed by Alevis and Yazidis. Although there was a large number of Christians (Chaldeans, Assyrians, Catholics, Armenians, Orthodox) during the last century, the Christian community today is significantly small.

III. 2.a The Kurdish organizations in Turkey

The first party that strongly supported Kurdish right, was the Association for the Rise of Kurdistan, founded in 1909 in Istanbul.²⁰ Since the founding of the Turkish state (1923), although every Kurdish citizen can take part in almost all socio-political-religious organizations in Turkey, no collective Kurdish identity has been officially rec-

17. Minority Rights Group International, "Turkey: Kurds," <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-2/>

18. Haig, Öpengin,. "Kurmanji Kurdish in Turkey: structure, varieties, and status", https://www.academia.edu/17650650/Kurmanji_in_Turkey_structure_varieties_and_status

19. Öpengin, "The History of Kurdish and the Development of Literary Kurmanji", pp.603-633.

20. Issi, *Οθωμανική Αυτοκρατορία και Κουρδικός Εθνικισμός* [Ottoman Empire and Kurdish Nationalism], pp.419

ognized.²¹ Up to 2010, no legitimate Kurdish party has been allowed to be established in Turkey. The first legal parties appeared during the first period of the AKP's rule in Turkey.²²

Seven Kurdish political movements, associations and parties have released a joint declaration and announced that they have formed an alliance for the local elections on March 31, 2019. They have decided to act under the name Cooperation of Kurdistan / Kurdistanî İttifak.

The political entities partaking in the alliance are: Kurdistan Islamic Movement (**AZADÎ**), Democratic Regions Party (**DBP**), Revolutionary Democratic Kurdish Association (**DDKD**), Peoples' Democratic Party (**HDP**), Human and Freedom Party (**PIA**), Partîya Komunîsta Kurdistan (**KKP**), Platforma Demokrata Kurdistan (**PDK**) and Partîya Demokrata Kurdistanê -Türkiye (**PDK-T**). These parties will enter the local elections under the umbrella of HDP.²³

The political organization of Kurds in Turkey, has followed three main directions :

- 1- Democratic Society Congress (Demokratik Toplum Kongresi / DTK)
- 2- Independent Kurdish parties and/or pro-PDK organizations
- 3- Religious Party HUDA-PAR (Free Cause Party)

III.2.a.1 DTK / Demokratik Toplum Kongresi - Democratic Society Congress



It was founded in October 30, 2007 in Diyarbakir.

- It is the top umbrella organization for almost all Kurdish socio-political organizations.
- It is a set of organizations that operate within the framework of the Democratic Society Movement, within northern Kurdistan.
- It is considered the future parliament of the Kurds of northern Kurdistan.

21. Issi, "Ιστορική εξέλιξη των Κουρδικών Πολιτικών Οργανώσεων του Κουρδιστάν. Η Περίπτωση του Βορείου Κουρδιστάν/Τουρκία"[Historical development of the Kurdish Political Organizations of Kurdistan -The Case of Northern Kurdistan/Turkey-],

22. Karakoc, . Ozen, . "Kurdish Public Opinion in Turkey Cultural and Political Demands of the 'Kurdish Street'" pp.30-34

23. Bianet, "7 Kurdish Parties Form Alliance for Local Elections", <https://bianet.org/english/politics/204214-7-kurdish-parties-form-alliance-for-local-elections>.

- It has declared the Democratic Autonomy of the Kurds of northern Kurdistan on July 14, 2011.
- It considers Kurdistan as a single entity and supports the Confederate Republic, like the KCK, for the whole of Kurdistan.²⁴

The Kurdish parliamentary parties in north Kurdistan

The legal presence of Kurdish organizations dates back to the student associations of the 1960s and to the first appearance of Kurdish press mainly from the 1950s. The strong presence of Kurdish claims in a legitimate democratic political context, appears mainly after 1991, with the founding of the People's Workers Party/Halkların Emek Partisi - H.E.P. As soon as the trial of the closure of the H.E.P. began, the Democracy Party/Demokrasi Partisi - D.E.P. was established. The legitimate Kurdish democratic parties faced real constraints when their organizations were banned and their members arrested. Due to these administrative acts of the Turkish judiciary and executive authorities, the Kurds have always been preparing another organization as a "parallel existence". The Kurds immediately launched a new organization when an existing one was forced to close. The legitimate Kurdish parties that either took part or attempted to take part in Turkish elections are presented below.

The Kurdish parliamentary parties of northern Kurdistan-Turkey (2022)

NAME	TURKISH INITIALS	ESTABLISHMENT	CLOSURE
WORKING PARTY OF THE PEOPLE - HALKLARIN EMEK PARTİSİ	HEP	7.07.1990	14.07.1993
FREEDOM AND DEMOCRACY PARTY - ÖZGÜRLÜK VE DEMOKRASİ PARTİSİ	ÖZDEP	19.10.1992	23.11.1993
DEMOCRACY PARTY - DEMOKRASİ PARTİSİ	DEP	21.06.1991	16.06.1994
PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY PARTY - HALKIN DEMOKRASİ PARTİSİ	HADEP	11.05.1994	13.03.2003
DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE PARTY - DEMOKRATİK HALK PARTİSİ	DEHAP	1997	2005
DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY PARTY - DEMOKRATİK TOPLUM PARTİSİ-	DTP	09.11.2005	11.12.2009
PEACE AND DEMOCRACY PARTY - BARIŞ VE DEMOKRASİ PARTİSİ-	BDP	02.05.2008	11.07.2014

24. Wikipedia, Democratic Society Congress, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Democratic_Society_Congress.

NAME	TURKISH INITIALS	ESTABLISHMENT	CLOSURE
PEOPLES' DEMOCRATIC PARTY – HALKLAR- IN DEMOKRATİK PARTİSİ	HDP	15.10.2012	---
DEMOCRATIC REGIONS PARTY – DEMOKRA- TİK BÖLGELER PARTİSİ	DBP	11.07.2014	---

III.2.a.2- Independent Kurdish parties and/or pro-PDK organizations

These are independent political parties with different political claims for the Kurds, such as autonomy, independence, etc. Their common characteristics include the continuation of the former Kurdish illegal organizations operating between the 1960s and the 1980s. In time, they disappeared or continued their political course as legitimate parties as soon as their leaders returned from Europe. They usually act as a single entity and their political programme is close to the programme of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan in Iraq. The most notable among them are the Freedom Party/Azadî Partisi, the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Turkey/Kürdistan Demokrat Partisi-Türkiye (PDK-T), the Socialist Party of Kurdistan/Kürdistan Sosyalist Partisi (PSK), the Party of Law and Freedom/Hak ve Özgürlükler Partisi (HAK-PAR) and the New Start/Despêka Nû.

It should be emphasized that in recent years, at least for the last decade, these organizations and parties have been cooperating under the umbrella of the Kurdistan Cooperation/Kurdistani İttifak. Although this cooperation is not limited to the parliamentary and local elections but expands also to other areas such as the joint celebration of the Kurdish national holiday Newroz, it could be argued that the main goal of the cooperation is electoral.

III.2.a.3- HUDA-PAR (Free Cause Party) - Religious Party

It was founded in 2013 in Diyarbakir. According to its statute, it is a Turkish party that operates in the Kurdish regions of Turkey. It is considered a continuation of the Turkish Hezbollah organization and basically supports the political discourse of the A.K.P. Within the Kurdish political spectrum, it is situated on the right and supports the Muslim Brotherhood. It extremely opposes K.C.K., supporting the unity of Kurds under Islam. In the 2018 elections it secured 0.31% (157,000 votes).²⁵

III. 2.b The Basic Illegal Kurdish Armed Forces of Northern Kurdistan (Turkey)

Although the names of the organizations are constantly changing they all operate within Turkey, either in Kurdish areas only or outside Kurdish areas only. Some of

25. Huda Par, "Party Programme," https://hudapar.org/files/uploads/file/file_fc094d8eb8.pdf.

these organizations operate in Turkish cities, some are mountain guerrilla units and some operate both in mountainous and urban areas. They all recognize Abdullah Ocalan as their president or honorary president. The most prominent are:

III.2.b.1

P.K.K. (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan/Kurdistan Working Party)– P.A.J.K. (Partîya Azadiya Jin a Kurdistan/Kurdistan Women’s Liberation Party)

The P.K.K. was founded in 1978 in the district of Diyarbakir.²⁶ Abdullah Ocalan was elected president, but after Ocalan’s arrest the party has been operating under the co-presidency system (one man and one woman). The initial ideological discourse of the P.K.K. was Marxism-Leninism to be later transformed to the Democratic Confederation,²⁷ the political discourse influenced by liberal socialism.

The P.K.K. consists of two equal parties in terms of gender: P.K.K. and P.A.J.K. Both parties are organized and operate separately in all parts of Kurdistan but they act in unity whenever the circumstances demand it. It is a *modus operandi* unique in the world that aims at the liberation of the female sex from the male, capitalist, family and racial domination. Each of their sub-organizations in all parts of Kurdistan follows the line of the K.C.K..

H.P.G. (Hêzên Parastina Gel – People’s Defense Forces, men’s army) and Y.J.A.-STAR (Yekineyên Jinên Azad – STAR/Free Women’s Units, women’s army) operate within them.

III.2.b.2

H.B.D.H / Halkların Birleşik Devrimci Hareketi – United People’s Revolutionary Movement (male guerrilla units) and **H.B.D.H.-K / Halkların Birleşik Devrimci Hareketi-Kadın** - United People’s Revolutionary Movement-Women (female guerrilla units).

It is a movement that has been created with the unison of the nine far-left Turkish organizations and the PKK. They operate mainly in Turkish cities and are the main force of the International Revolutionary Battalions of Western Kurdistan/Syria.²⁸

26. PKK, “Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) Executive Committee 34th anniversary of the founding To Our People and Public Opinion”, <https://pkk-online.com/en/index.php/boeluemler/pkk-tarihi/82-34th-anniversary-of-kurdistan-workers-party>

27. Nûcan, “Demokratik Konfederalizm” [Democratic Confederation], <https://pkk-online.com/tr/index.php/boeluemler/akademi/443-demokratik-konfederalizm-2>,

28. UK Home Office, “Country Policy and Information Note Turkey: Kurdistan workers party (PKK)”, pp.16.

III.2.b.3

There are three other Kurdish armed organizations within Turkey, apart from the P.K.K., which recognize Abdullah Ocalan as their honorary leader, and there are frequent movements of PKK members to these organizations.

III.2.b.3.a Yekîneyên Parastina Gel / Civil Defense Units (YPS) were established on 10 January 2015, during clashes between Turkish repression forces (police, army, gendarmerie and paramilitary organizations) with the Kurdish youth organization Y.D.G.-H./ Yurtsever Devrimci Gençlik Hareketi - Patriotic Revolutionary Youth Movement. The Y.P.S. are the natural continuation of Y.D.G.-H. and they are mainly active in the Kurdish cities of Turkey.²⁹

III.2.b.3.b Teyrênbazên Azadîya Kurdistan/Kurdistan Freedom Fighters (T.A.K.) According to it, its founding members came from the P.K.K. and represented the party's radical branch. Considering the P.K.K. as reformist and rather passive towards the Turkish state, it was established as a new highly aggressive, patriotic, armed organization in 2004 that has been active in Turkish cities.³⁰

III.2.b.3.c Înisiyatîfa Zarokên Agir / The Children of Fire. It did not emanate from any central organization but from the independent guerrilla units operating in all Turkish cities; their main method of action is to attack economic, touristic, military and political targets.³¹

III. 3. SOUTH KURDISTAN - IRAQ

III. 3.a General information

It is the third largest part of Kurdistan and is located in the northern part of the Iraqi state. Although Kurds make up around 15-20 per cent of Iraq's population, they do not form a homogenous whole (see Iran, Turkey, Syria).³² South Kurdistan extends approximately over 98,000 km². The population of the area is officially 5.884.000 people.³³

29. UK Home Office, "Country Policy and Information Note Turkey: Kurdistan workers party (PKK)", pp.17.

30. UK Home Office, "Country Policy and Information Note Turkey: Kurdistan workers party (PKK)", pp.17-19

31. Yılmaz, . "Claiming and Glorifying Environmental Terrorism Online: The Case of PKK's 'Children of Fire Initiative'" <https://web.archive.org/web/20201215165224/https://gnet-research.org/2020/12/15/claiming-and-glorifying-environmental-terrorism-online-the-case-of-pkks-children-of-fire-initiative/>.

32. Minority Rights Group International, "Iraq: Kurds", <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/kurds-3/>.

33. "Irak Planlama Bakanlığı, Kürdistan Bölgesi'nin nüfusunu açıkladı", [Iraqi Ministry of Planning announced the population of the Kurdistan Region], <https://m.nerinaazad1.com/tr/news/>

- There have been in the past many Kurdish demands for free self-government, such as an attempt to establish the Kurdish Kingdom under the leadership of Sheikh Mahmoud Berzenji in 1918-19, in 1921-24 and in 1932, the establishment of the Autonomous Kurdish Government between 1970-1974, and the establishment of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG-1992) which still exists today.

In September 2017 a referendum was held regarding Kurdish independence from Iraq. 92% of Iraqi Kurds voted in favor of independence.³⁴

- The Regional Government of Kurdistan (KRG- Kurdistan Regional Government) is officially recognized by the Iraqi Constitution. It has its own army (Peshmerga), that forms part of the Iraqi national army, its own parliament and its own budget. Foreign policy, though, is dictated by the confederate central government of Iraq.
- Education is in Kurdish (Sorani-Kurmanji/Behdini) at all levels, while Arabic is also used.
- South Kurdistan is practically split between the forces of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK) in the north and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (YNK) in the south. The KRG controls the Ministry of Peshmerga, the Police and the Secret Police (Parastin for PDK and Zanyari/Zaniari for PUK). For the last 10 years, mainly because of the advance of ISIS, the PKK descended from the mountains and has been participating in the political and military forces of South Kurdistan (Iraq)
- Today, the PKK guerrillas are mainly located in the Zagros Mountains (known as Qandil), in Mehmur, in the nearby areas of Sengal/Sincar. It exerts political influence on two unarmed movements (the Azadi Movement and the P.Ç.D.K.) in the KRG region and two armed Yazidi organizations (Y.B.Ş. - Y.J.Ş.) in the greater Sengal area.
- As of 23 April 2021, clashes between PKK and Turkish forces (+ PDK Iraq) continue in the wider mountainous areas of northern Iraq, right on the border between Iraq and Turkey. Turkish forces have invaded the area for about 30-40 km, causing both environmental and political disasters.
- Turkey's increasing attacks against PKK targets inside Iraq has escalated tensions between the KDP and the PKK, resulting in deadly clashes between Iraqi Peshmerga forces and PKK militants during 2021. Fear of escalating violence has prompted the KRG to set up more bases in the KRI, to prevent PKK fighters from entering

kurdistan/bashur/irak-planlama-bakanligi-kurdistan-bolgesinin-nufusunu-acikladi. For general information about the population of Kurdistan Region in Iraq consult: Izady, *Bir El Kitabı Kürtler*, pp.214-227.

34. Chulov, "More than 92% of voters in Iraqi Kurdistan back independence", <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/27/over-92-of-iraqs-kurds-vote-for-independence>.

towns and villages and to avoid Turkish airstrikes against populated areas. Rights group Christian Peacemaker Teams, cited by Aljazeera in December 2020, stated that the Turkish shelling and air raids have resulted in the killings of almost 100 civilians and the evacuation of 400 villages, in the past five years.³⁵

III. 3.b The main parliamentary parties of South Kurdistan (Iraq)³⁶

- P.D.K. (Partîya Dêmkokrata Kurdistan - Kurdistan Democratic Party)
- Y.N.K. (Yekîtîya Niştîmanê Kurdistan- Patriotic Union of Kurdistan)
- GORAN- Movement for Change. A liberal, reformist party which was created after the split of the Y.N.K.
- YEKGURTÎ. Islamic, in the moderate political discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood
- KOMEL. Islamic, in the more conservative discourse of the Muslim Brotherhood
- NEWEÎ NUE – New generation. This is a new party of YNK + Goran MPs
- Communist Movement of Kurdistan.
- The Socialist Democratic Party In Kurdistan (Partî Sosyalistî Demokratî Kurdistan)
- P.Ç.D.K. (Partîya Çarenûsîya Dêmkokratê Kurdistan - Democratic Solution of Kurdistan Party). It is the only pro-KCK parliamentary party.

III. 4. SOUTH WESTERN KURDISTAN (SYRIA)³⁷

III. 4.a General Information

- It is considered the smallest part of Kurdistan. Its area was estimated at 28,000 km² but under the recent circumstances (2014 onwards) the area has reached 1/3 of Syria.
- The population of the area is estimated at about 3 million. The majority are Sunni Muslims and alienated Yazidis. Early Yazidis in Syria declare themselves followers of Zoroastrianism /Zerdeşt.

35. EUAA, "Iraq - Security Situation", https://coi.euaa.europa.eu/administration/easo/PLib/2022_02_EUAA_COI_Report_Iraq_Security_situation.pdf,47.

36. For further information on Kurdish parties in Iraq consult: BFA Staatendokumentation, *The Kurds: History - Religion - Language – Politics*, <https://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html>, pp. 140-161; MERIA, *The Main Kurdish Political Parties In Iran, Iraq, Syria, And Turkey: A Research Guide*, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/meria/v17i2/f_0029656_23971.pdf,4-7

37. For further information on Kurdish parties in Syria consult MERIA, *The Main Kurdish Political Parties In Iran, Iraq, Syria, And Turkey: A Research Guide*, https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/meria/v17i2/f_0029656_23971.pdf, 7-10 and BFA Staatendokumentation, *The Kurds: History - Religion - Language - Politics* <https://www.refworld.org/docid/568cf9924.html>, 112-139

4.b Kurdish Political Parties in Syria

The Kurds in the region were under the political influence of PDK until PKK's establishment within Turkey. The first Kurdish party, the Syrian Kurdish Democratic Party, was founded in 1957. Until the Arab Spring there were three political trends in Rojava:³⁸

a) Axis PDK-Iraq (Syrian Kurdish Patriotic Front), b) Axis Y.N.K. (Syrian Kurdish Democratic Union), c) Axis K.C.K. (P.Y.D.-Democratic Unity Party).³⁹

- Today (2022) there are two 30 different political formations which operate under the umbrella of the following two main political organizations:⁴⁰
 - o E.N.K.S. Enîya Netewîya Kurdîstana Sûrî- National Front of Syrian Kurdistan
 - o TEV-DEM Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk - Movement for a Democratic Society.

III. 4.a 1. E.N.K.S. or National Front of Syrian Kurdistan (established in 2011 in Erbil).⁴¹



- It represents the ideas of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan-Iraq. Until recently, it was recognized by the Turkish and Syrian states as the political representative of the Syrian Kurds.
- It claims that the Sun Peshmerga located in South Kurdistan is its military unit.
- It supports Kurdish Nationalism and Autonomy from the Syrian State.

III. 4.a 2. TEV-DEM Movement for Democratic Society (founded in 2011).⁴²



- It is a key coalition of the Syrian Democratic Council (Meclîsa Suriya Demokratîk - Democratic Syrian Assembly).

38. Halhalli, *Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations*, 39-42

39. Wietse van den Berge, „Syrian Kurdish Political Activism: A Social Movement Theory Perspective”, *Middle East-Topics & Arguments*, 2015.

40. Halhalli, „Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations”, 40



41. Halhalli, „Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations”, 40-41

42. Halhalli, „Kurdish Political Parties in Syria: Past Struggles and Future Expectations”, 40-41

- The Syrian Democratic Council is the parliament of the Autonomous Administration of Northern and Eastern Syria.
- It recognizes KCK and keeps a distance from KRG.
- It operates under the co-presidency system (one woman-one man).
- TEV-DEM promotes the federal system for Syria.
- Apart from the Democratic Union Party PYD, the following parties are member of TEV-DEM: Partiya Aştiya Demokratîk Kurdi li Sûriyeyê (Peace and Democracy Party of Kurdish Syria), Partiya Kumonîst a Kurdistanê (Communist Party of Kurdistan), Kombuna Niştimanî Kurdistanî (National Assembly of Kurdistan), Partiya YekitiyaLîbralî ya Kurdistanî (Liberal Union Party of Kurdistan), Partiya Demokratîk Kurdistanî li Sûriyeyê (Kurdistan Democrati Party in Syria).⁴³

DIASPORA


Kurdish political organizations of the diaspora emerged in the late 1970s mainly in Europe and USA/Canada but were further developed after the 1980 military coup in Turkey. The first organization is KOMKAR and was followed by other organizations from different parts of Kurdistan. Today there are three pillars of organizations active in the Diaspora.

	<p>KOMKAR Yekitiya Komelên Kurdistan li Elmanya, 1979- Union of Kurdistan Associations in Germany.</p> <p>It is the first organization of the Kurds of Northern Kurdistan/Turkey and operates under the auspices of the Socialist Party of Kurdistan.⁴⁴</p>
	<p>K.C.D.K.-E. Congress of Kurdish Democratic Associations-Europe. It is a large Kurdish organization and operates under the auspices of the K.C.K.⁴⁵</p>

43. Jongerden and Knapp, "Communal Democracy: The Social Contract and Confederalism in Rojava," 103

44. Başer, Diasporada Türk-Kürt Sorunu, pp.38-53

45. "European Kurdish Democratic Societies Congress", <https://kcdk-e.com/>.

	<p>K.R.G. Kurdistan Regional Government. These are the offices of the Kurdish Government of Iraq and work to promote the rights of the Kurdish population in the area. Their offices function as a gathering center for the diaspora Kurds in countries such as USA, Great Britain, Sweden.</p>
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