

The Impact of History School Curriculum on the Identity of Youth Living in Kurdistan

Marion Oudar

International Relations & Diplomacy Department, Ishik University, Erbil, Iraq

Email: marion.oudar@ishik.edu.iq

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Abstract

During the academic year 2015/2016, I was teaching Kurdology or more precisely I was asked to design a class that could be titled “The Kurds within world politics” to 1st year law students of Soran University in Soran, Iraqi Kurdistan. It was my first teaching position in Iraq and the first time I had to really dig into Kurdish history and Kurdish national movement. Over the course of this semester I experienced some unexpected challenges: some answers related to Kurdish nationalist movement I was getting from the students differed partly or mostly from the resources I was finding. Being aware of the many debates that are taking place in France related to school programs and will of politicians to design a school curriculum that would promote a common and uniting cultural background to preserve the unity of the French society following the terrorist attack of November 2015. This research paper is the result of my questioning toward Kurdish nationalist historical account as we can find in libraries in Europe and US and what Kurdish youth are being taught during their years of basic education and during their first year of University during their “Kurdology lecture” about Kurdish nationalism. Few months after KRG referendum for independence which resulted in the victory of the “YES” at 92.7% for a voter turnout of 72% (Rudaw, retrieved on 08/04/2018), and people of Kurdistan having to face the political consequences of such a vote (airport ban until end of March, handover of all customs and borders, etc.) it seems that some research on Kurdish youth identities and its relationship to the education system in particular and has never been more relevant.

Introduction

After few years of relative stability between 2005 and 2010, Iraq is once more the scene of religious, ethnic and political divisions. The fall of Saddam Hussein in 2003 was supposed to bring a new unity to the country. The 2005 constitution despite offering new guaranty of democratic practices via a strong division of power based on federal principles allowing all groups to make their voice heard did not deliver its promises. Almost 15 years later the country is still highly ethnically divided, the government lost control of large parts of its territory to a terrorist organization for more than 2 years and the Kurdish

region officially expressed its will for secession on the 25th of September 2017 (Rudaw, 27th of September 2017).

The construction of national identities is a long process, the core concept of nation itself was only defined in the late 18th and 19th centuries following the French Revolution. If the definition of a nation is not an easy process in a rather homogeneous country such as France or Britain, it becomes even harder in an ethnically and religiously diverse countries such as Iraq. One of the first political figure who underlined the difficulty of creating a sense of national unity among the people of Iraq was King Faisal I of Iraq shortly before his death in 1933: *“The Iraqi land lacks the most important element of social life, that is intellectual, national and religious unity; which is why this country is fragmented and divided”*, (AlHusseini, 1953).

Iraq’s borders did not make the process of national unity easier. Iraq’s borders are indeed rather new and have mostly been imposed by European powers after WWI and the Lausanne treaty of 1923 when France and Britain created protectorates in Iraq and Syria. The long process of creating a national unity between Iraqi people started under British mandate and took a turning point at the country’s independence in 1932. The elite that took power in 1933 after the death of King Faisal, influenced by the pan-arab movement, tried to impose to the whole territory an Iraqi identity based on Arab-Muslim-Sunni culture and tradition failing to take into account the diversity of the country. The Iraqi identity was built on the same idea as the Turkish identity and so inheriting its understanding of ethnic divisions and sectarian balance. (Saeed, 2014) Rivalry and clash of these identities, the coherence of the nation was only to be achieved through forced cultural unity and the suppression of religious and ethnic diversity. By reciprocity, forced assimilation increased national feelings of the oppressed groups creating more unity by being different than ever. Kurdish nationalism in particular spread from the elites to the larger population in reaction to such policies.¹ Since then, Kurdistan, and Iraqi Kurdistan in particular, have been victim of many conflict and death of civilian.

In 2005, when the Iraqi constitution gave a large degree of independence to its Kurdish part within a federal structure, it was seen as a victory after a long time struggle. The constitution recognizes Kurdish people as a group, Kurdish language as one of Iraq’s official languages and protects Kurdish

¹ Kurdish national movement will be developed further in the literary review.

culture and specificity.² Within this structure many power have been delegated to Kurdish authorities based in Erbil including the formulation of educational and instructional policy.³

This paper aims to analysis the role played by school curriculum and more precisely history curriculum in the construction of Kurdish identity and the strengthening of Kurdish national feelings within Iraq.

The first part of this paper is dedicated to explaining, within a literature review, the core concepts of this study: nation and nationalism, the political character of school curriculum and of teaching methods, and an historical account of Kurdish nationalism. The second part of this paper will present and analysis the data collected to measure young Kurdish knowledge of their history, their identity and position toward the independence of Kurdistan.

Problem statement

A group's representation of its past is often intimately connected with its identity, defining who "we are" and who "we are not" by opposition to who "they are" is a key feature of nation building. Studying what a generation remembers from its history classes can be a way to understand the construction of the national identity of a generation.

Research questions:

This research paper aims to reply to one fundamental question: Are school programs in KRG designed to promote a version of Kurdish nationalism that is promoting Kurdish independence from the Iraqi state? To reply to this fundamental question, it is important to reply to those sub questions:

Are Kurdish youth more aware of the history of Kurdish nationalism than Iraq's history?

Does school programs focus on a positive image of Kurdish history?

Do Kurdish youth support an independent Kurdistan?

How do Kurdish youth identify themselves within their country?

² Iraq 2005 constitution, Section 1 "Fundamental principles" article 4, first paragraph:

"First: The Arabic language and the Kurdish language are the two official languages of Iraq. The right of Iraqis to educate their children in their mother tongue, such as Turkmen, Syriac, and Armenian shall be guaranteed in government educational institutions in accordance with educational guidelines, or in any other language in private educational institutions."

³ Iraq Consitution 2005, Section 4 "Power of the Federal government" Article 114 paragraph 6:

"The following competencies shall be shared between the federal authorities and regional authorities: To formulate the public educational and instructional policy, in consultation with the regions and governorates that are not organized in a region."

Research objectives:

Getting an understanding/ a picture of young Iraqi Kurdish self-identification and measure their attachment to Kurdish nationalism.

Comparing University student knowledge of Kurdish nationalism with historical accounts of Kurdish national movements.

Measure Young Kurdish sense of belonging to the Kurdish nation versus Iraqi state.

Measure the role of school programs in the construction of young Kurdish identity.

Literature review

This study lay on few theoretical concepts: the idea that national feelings are a political and an historical construction developed by educated elites to unite political power and social interest and the major role of history school curriculum in spreading a “proper version of history” supporting and so spreading these national feelings.

In addition, an historical background of Kurdish nationalism is required to assess Kurdish youth knowledge of their past.

The concept of nation and nationalism

a. What's a nation?

Ernest Gellner in 1983 defined the nation as " *the general imposition of a high culture on society, where previously low cultures had taken up the lives of the majority, and in some cases the totality, of the population. It means the general diffusion of a school-mediated, academy supervised idiom, codified for the requirements of a reasonably precise bureaucratic and technological communication. It is the establishment of an anonymous impersonal society, with mutually sustainable atomised individuals, held together above all by a shared culture of this kind, in place of the previous complex structure of local groups, sustained by folk cultures reproduced locally and idiosyncratically by the micro-groups themselves.*"

b. The nation: primordialist versus constructionist theories

The concept of nation and nationalism is quite new compared to the imagery most people have of their long existing nation: French ancestors were the inhabitant of Gaulle, Italian ones were the Romans, etc. Most countries teach their children that they come from the heir of a nation that existed from all

times and that its roots can be tracked back to the antiquity. Yet, the idea of the nation itself comes out of the enlightenment and the French revolution which respectively trace back to the 16th and 18th century.

The formulation of concept of nation came from the idea that the only way for the political power to be detached from the person of the King relied on the creation of an abstract entity to which all the people living inside a united territory could refer to. And, once the idea of a nation appeared it had to be taught to the people that ought to compose it.

The study of nationalism opposes two major school of thought: Primordialist and Constructivist approaches.

According to primordialist, nations existed long before the apparition of the concept: the nation did not wait for the apparition of the word to exist rather the concept needed to be created to describe an old phenomena. Indeed, all people can go back in history to explain the roots and history of their people; “national ties are permanent identities” that cannot be denied or changed (Sekine Ozten, 2009). Their main arguments are based on the continuity of cultural factor over a territory such as religion, language, blood tie or folklore. All individuals feel a special relationship and attachment to its community.

By opposition constructionists defend the idea that nation is a modern idea cannot be applied to ancient time. According to them identities are not a fixed construct but a feeling that is subject to change even within one community. One could once connect with its village and then feel rather attached to its religious community or region. Without the development of the state as we know it today, the sense of belonging to a larger group, the nation, could not have occurred to the inhabitants of such diverse territories. Historical account from all countries teaches that in most cases “unity is always brutally established”(Ernest Renan, 1882). For example, the unity of France and its creation as a nation-state took place over centuries and witnessed many massacres such as the terror campaign and extermination of people from South of France in the 16th century to unify French language or the Saint Barthelemy massacre and other religious war to unify Catholic France. They argue that primordialist base their arguments on chosen historical narrative and that such national identities are the fruit of political elite’ reflections and then thought to the rest of the population. Indeed, such feelings can be very powerful to promote political agenda but if the questions had to be asked to people of those times most of them would have identified themselves as member of a city, a social class, a religion, a family or a tribe rather than a country or a nation.

Even if the debate between both school of thoughts is not over, the study of the evolution of national feelings makes rather support the idea that the nation is a constructed idea rather than a natural one and that a nation can be built through diverse mechanism such as “building a common cultural structure, complete with history and traditions, all the way to material structures like national military services and physically connecting the country through transportation projects and the like.”(Saeed, 2014).

c. Is Kurdish a civic or ethnic nation?

Kurdish people are recognized as a nation by many observers all around the world on the same ground that Quebecois, Scottish or Irish are recognized as a nation for many it is an ethnic nation. Kurdish people differentiate themselves first and foremost from the Arabs living around them on ethnical ground. However, the increase focus on Kurdish common ethnical identity underlined the many differences and conflicts Kurdish people have among themselves. Iraqi Kurdistan witnessed the “brother wars” in 1994 where the Kurmaci speaking north and the Sorani speaking region in the South fought each other. In Turkey, Kurdish speaking the Zaza dialect started differentiating themselves from the rest of Kurdish and defining themselves as belong to a different nation (Van Bruinessen, 2006).

This factors are supporting the theory that Kurdish nation would be much closer to the idea of civic nationalism than it could seem on the first glance, raising the question of who is a Kurd, is there fixed criteria to define who is and who is not Kurdish? Languages, religion, factors that unite most ethnic nations actually divide the Kurds.

Therefore we can conclude that Kurdish nationalism is a real product of the modern age which was built from above from the ruling elites and intellectual in Kurdish society (Ozten, 2009). Some linguist such as D.N Mackenzy supported this idea through linguistic analyzes and comparison of the different Kurdish and Iranian dialect reaching the conclusion that no distinction or common features can base Kurdish “common origin or a basic cultural unity” through language. (Mackenzy quoted in Van Bruinessen, 2006). It looks highly similar to the civic French nationalism when only 12 to 13% of people living inside French territory were speaking French at the time of the French revolution in 1789. These original diversities have been widen as Kurdish people were divided between 4 different national states at the beginning of the 20th century. Separate history and different governmental policies and attitude toward them made the Kurds of each country more heterogeneous than before.

In such a diverse context and as for most civic nation, the adoption of national symbols such as a flag or a national anthem, the protection of dialects and language over other languages and education play a key role in ensuring that all citizens develop patriotic feelings. This process has been particularly

accelerated by the recent urbanization of the region mixing diverse population and erasing some of the differences as many abandoned the language or accent of the village to adopt the official state language once in the city (Van Bruinessen, 2006). In addition, the spread of the radio and television spread the use of a standardized language and accent.

In the view of the anthropologist Fredrik Barth “it is the maintenance of a boundary between peoples rather than a specific cultural content that makes a certain collection of people into an ethnic group”. It is this approach and strategy that is currently being used by Kurdish nationalist to keep themselves different from the other group present in their country.

“The questions whether the Kurds constitute a nation and who is included in that national cannot be answered objectively. Every possible answer to these questions constitutes a political program.” (Van Bruinessen, 2006). Which identity, among the alternative available, a person chooses to emphasize will depend much on political and economic circumstances.

2.2 The design of History school curriculum is political

a. “History is told by winners”

The way we learn history is not neutral, the way history is written is not neutral, we could even say that history always pick a side in what and how we should remember a specific events. As Ernest Renan said in 1882 “ Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential actor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality.”⁴

History telling cannot be neutral as it is told by either an eye witness having his point of view on the event or a remote analyst who himself had to get information from other people and sources that are more or less trustful. Therefore, students should be taught in the optic that history can actually be told and interpreted in different ways.

b. History school programs as the way to construct national identity and patriotic feelings

Nowadays, school curriculum and education policies are the monopoly of the state. Each state design its school curriculum according to what it considers as the most important for the next generation of citizen to know. School book provide official knowledge a society wants its children to acquire – facts, figures, dates, seminal events (Williams, 2014: vii). So education’s role is not only to give knowledge, it is to create a sense of unity between the different group of the population, whatever city you come

⁴ Ernest Renan, “What is a Nation?”, text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882,

from, whatever the profession of your parents is, your social and cultural background, each individual will have a common set of knowledge. Creating unity in multicultural and diverse state can be quiet hard and challenging for the state. How do you include and create a sense of unity for all the component of your society? How do you make sure that 2nd generation immigrant feel as included as native born? All of those challenging questions are to be answered by social sciences curriculum and more precisely history curriculum related to the telling of the nation history. Politization of school curriculum as part of the nation-state project is widely practiced the world over (Moyo, 2014). Indeed, history textbook frame the facts, figures, dates and events in a larger, generally implicit, narrative that describes how things were, what happened, and how they came to be the way they are now (Williams, 2014: vii). History curriculum are part of the “Grand narrative” of each country build by ideologue (Ahonen, 2007) based on the idea that the transmission of a positive story about the national past will inculcate in young people a sense of loyalty to the state, a reassuring and positive sense of identity and belonging (Haydn, 2012). Politicians attempt to use education in general and history curriculum in particular as a mean of promoting values and behaviors associated with their ideological preferences. (Balls, 1990)

In addition to promoting a positive picture of the national history, the way history is being taught may have a strong influence on how it is received by students. Indeed, the way a story is told may be as much important as what is actually told. One of the major characters of traditional teaching or lecturer centered teaching methods does not allow for questioning and critics from the students. In this context, the historical curriculum will be received by the students as “factually correct, and not subject to controversies of interpretation” (Haydn, 2012). Traditional methods of teaching history support the idea that history should be a “received” subject where the teacher transmits facts and knowledge that have to be remember and assimilated not as a matter of discussion and interpretation that should promote intellectual autonomy and critical thinking. (Husbands, 1996)

The debate between the benefit of “traditional history” teachings and “new history” based on a more discussed version of history appears in most country during the last decades. It looks like politicians are divided on the questions of which skills is the most important: patriotism or critical thinking. For example in Britain over the past decade, the 1970 education reform became widely criticized by politicians of all political party including Tony Blair and Gordon Brown, for not teaching enough “Britishness” and national pride and that the youth knew nothing about their national past (Haydn, 2012).

Most of the time the debate between traditional and new history curriculum and teaching methods emerge from events threatening the national identity and social cohesion of a country such as terrorist

attacks. When the national feel endangered from the inside, the best way to correct it seems to make sure that from a young age, children are taught to love their country above everything else.

The 2008 education reform in KRG

Yet, in practice, education methods in middle school and High school in Kurdistan still highly emphasize on memorization rather than reflection. The design of end of high school graduating exam based on multiple choice question do not allow the construction of an individual reflection based on acquired knowledge but rather the repetition of memorized information.

Finally, all Kurdish Iraqi students are being given the same basic knowledge of Kurdish history in college. Indeed, all students from all departments and Colleges but take over their 1st year of University a topic called “Kurdology”.

2.3 Kurdish national movement

Kurdish nationalism and Kurdish pride is widely spread in today’s Kurdish society. The below historical account is only a short version of Kurdish nationalist history and further detailed can be found in the articles listed in the references.

The premise of Kurdish nationalism

Even though the concept of nation is quite recent, it is possible to find regularly the mention of Kurdish people in historical documents as early as the 16th century. Kurdish people were mentioned in few treaties signed between the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Empiresuch as the Treaty of Amasya in 1555, the treaty of Zuhab in 1639, the treaty of Kurdan in 1746⁵ or the treaty of Erzurum in 1823. At that time, the word Kurdish is used to refer to the people living in the Zagros Mountain at the junction of the two empire whose main language was neither Turkish, Arabic nor Persian. So before any other factor, the main common point between all Kurdish people is related to their mountainous environment and the fact that this relative isolation from the people of the plain resulted on the development of a different language. The name “Kurd” originates from middle Persian ‘kwrt” which means “nomad” or “tent dweller” it was then transported to Arabic as “kurd” during the first century after Islam to refer to a variety of pastoral, nomad people.

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- ⁵*“From this period, on the side of Baghdad and Kurdistan no interference is to take place, nor with any Districts of the Divisions of Kurdistan within the boundaries, is the Persian government to intermeddle, or authorize any acts of molestation, or to assume any authority over the present or former possessors of those countries”*

The 16th century is often mentioned as a turning point of Kurdish nationalism as for the first time texts (poems, books, historical account) are written in Kurdish. It still seems clear from the point of view of those famous authors such as Sharaf Khan Bidlisi or Ahmadi Khani, that the word Kurd only refers to an heterogeneous group of people united by their pastoral way of life but do not include “the non-tribal peasants and townsmen living in the same area (...) many of whom spoke Kurdish dialects as their first language” (Van Bruinessen, 2006). Furthermore at least one “Arabic-speaking tribe, the Mahallami, considered itself as Kurdish and was considered as such by other Kurds” (Sykes, 1908). And Medieval Arabic authors occasionally used the qualification of “Arab Kurd” to speak about nomadic Arabic speaking groups.

The 20th century, the century of nationalism

The 20th century can be qualified as the century of nations. Many new countries have been created over this century raising drastically the number of country from 57 in 1914 to 196 today. From the President Wilson 14th points to the UN charter adopted in 1948 or Stalin political thought all raised the issue of nations’ right to self-determination and independence.

Nationalist ideas reached Kurdish elites by the end of the 19th century. In 1898, the first news paper in Kurdish language was published in Cairo by a group of Kurdish people in exile (Gunter, 2013). Some, such as Hakan Ozogly, even demonstrate that nationalist ideas actually only reach Kurdish elite with the fall of the Ottoman Empire as Kurdish notable were looking for a new identity (Ozogly quoted in Gunter, 2013) “Kurdish nationalism appeared to be the only viable choice for Kurds in the absence of a functioning ideology such as Ottomanism.”(Orzogly, 2004).

The victory of the ally in 1914 and the fall of the Ottoman Empire opened doors for a Kurdish state to be created in the aftermath of World War I. The treaty of Versailles concluding the war clearly mentioned the creation of a Kurdish State in the Zagros Mountain cancelling the Sykes-Picot agreement made by the French and English 2 years before in 1916 dividing the region into 2 protectorates. This promise was repeated within the Sevres treaty of 1920 by promising “local autonomy for Kurdish area” in article 62 and “independence from Turkey” in article 64.

Yet, the post war circumstances changed very rapidly. By 1922, Ataturk had restored Turkish pride and political strength on the international sphere by winning the Greco-Turkish war (1919-1922). “Ironically enough with considerable Kurdish help as the Turks played well on the theme of Islamic Unity” (Gunter, 2008). This new balance of power allowed Ataturk to obtain the renegotiation of the Sevres Treaty and the signature of a new treaty in 1923: The Lausanne Treaty. This new treaty, while recognizing the new Turkish state, did no longer mention any kind of autonomy for Kurdish people.

And Ataturk declaration of a secular new Turkish State in 1925 led to the first of the 3 great Kurdish revolt. Sheikh Said rebellion was both religious and nationalist. (Gunter, 2008). This rebellion resulted in a politic of Turkisation based on the model of the Russification implemented by Alexander III and Nicholas II in the Russian Empire. (Gunter, 2004). Turkey was to become a nation without diversity so everything that related to a Kurdish identity such as language, clothes, and names had to be removed. This treated also resulted in the creation of a third entity under British protectorate: Iraq. By opposition to the Turkish and Iranian states who inherited from their prestigious ancestors that were the Ottoman and Safavid empires, Iraq curved out of those two empire to include very distinctive people religiously and ethnically as in addition to the Kurdish/Arabic divided, Iraq also hosted a Sunni/Shiite divide.

Kurdish nationalist mass movement: 1960s -1970s

Kurdish national mass movement corresponds and resembles the “ethnic revival” that witnessed many European states over the 1960s and 1970s such as the Basque and Calatan in Spain or the Scottish in Britain. The 1970s are marked by the ascension of Mulla Mustafa Barzani as leader of the Kurdish nationalist movement. Indeed, after a decade in exile in Russia from 1947 to 1958, Mustafa Barzani came at his highest level of influence declaring Kurdish autonomy under his rule in the March Manifesto of 1970. Internal tension especially with Ibrahim Ahmed and his son in law Jalal Talabani led to his defeat in 1975.

As a result his son Massoud Barzani took the leadership of the PDK party while Jalal Talabani was becoming head of the PUK.

Saddam Hussein Anfal campaign to the Second Gulf war 2003

Kurdish national movements in Iraq have been repressed since the creation of Iraq. As the British repressed Sheikh Mahmud rebellion in 1931, Saddam Hussein repressed Kurdish national movement many times during his regime. The worst repression happened in 1987-88 with the Anfal campaign and the attack with chemical gaz on the city of Halabja on March 16th 1988.

The first Gulf war (1990-1991), led to another Kurdish uprising in March 1991. As the uprising failed, repression against Kurdish people pushed the international community to implement a no-fly zone on Kurdistan to stop the bloodshed. The de facto independent Kurdish state that emerged from this unique setting witnessed a bloody civil war between the two political forces PUK and PDK from 1994-1998. The cease fire obtained by the US through a conciliation of Massoud Barzani and Jalal Talabin in September 1998, allowed prosperity to grow in the Kurdish region.

The fall of Saddam Hussein and the adoption of the 2005 Iraqi constitution aimed at ensuring Kurdish representativeness within Iraq.

Content of the “Kurdology” lecture

All students whatever their department must study during their first year of university a subject called “Kurdology”. As per its title this lecture aims at teaching all young people living in Kurdistan Kurdish history independently of their background and field of study. This lecture is taught in Kurdish even in private Universities whose language of education may be English.

Most Kurdology lecture is divided into 4 parts. The first part deals about Kurdish history. It includes the study of major political figure attached to the Kurdish nationalist narrative such as Sharaf Khan, Salahaddin and Mustafa Barzani,

The second part is about geography of Kurdistan and how it related to the Kurdish nation. It speaks about tribes, language, Kurdish culture, religion, importance of the agriculture and feelings attached to the Kurdish identity.

The third part focuses on Kurdish language, its origin and how it developed.

The last part and longest is about Kurdish literature including poems, songs, epics, mythology, proverbs and jokes. It explains in details the different source of Kurdish literature inspiration such as love, wisdom, and the heart quoting different Kurdish poem writer and analysis them. This part as well focuses on the idea that Kurdish literature highly participated in the construction of the Kurdish nation.

Therefore, over the course of 2 semesters all students of Kurdish universities learn a curriculum designed to include all the elements of the official narrative of Kurdish nationalism.

IV Methodology

The questionnaire has been designed with the aim of measuring 3 main factors:

Students historical knowledge related to Kurdish history in comparison to their knowledge related to Iraqi history

Student personal feeling related their identity as a citizens.

Students' attitude toward Kurdish claim for independence for Iraqi and more largely to the creation of a state including all Kurdish people (Great Kurdistan)

4.1 Rationale behind the choice of those factors:

As demonstrated in the literature review, history school curriculum is one of the major component of creating a sense of unity, identity and patriotism. Thus, the measure of Kurdish youth knowledge about history will validate or not hypothesis that school curriculum and methods of teaching history influence student's historical knowledge and their way of approaching historical facts. Once the level of historical knowledge has been assessed so as to measure the validity of idea that nowadays most Kurdish youth will introduce themselves and recognize themselves as Kurdish before any other kind of identity either in term of nationality (Iraqi) or religion (Muslim, Christian or Yazidi). Finally, self-identity should impact Kurdish Youth position toward independence of their region.

4.2 Construction of the questionnaire:

The questionnaire consists on 4 parts:

A demographical part consisting on questions with options

A part consisting of 14 questions related of Kurdish and Iraqi history aiming at measuring the historical knowledge of the respondent.

A part consisting of 12 questions related to the respondent's self –identity. This part of the questionnaire has been adapted from other questionnaires designed to measure identity including the European Values Study of 2008, the Euro barometer as well as the research conducted by Bettina Westle in 2014 on *How to Measure or not to Measure National and European Identity*.

A part of 11 questions related to the respondent position toward Kurdish independence and the future of Iraq. This part of the questionnaire was as well adapted from the European Values Study of 2008 and Euro barometer.

4.3. Collection of the data

The data have been collected via an anonymous online questionnaire using google form. Questions were in both Kurdish and English to ensure large participation among students from different universities and English level.

4.4 Limitation of the study:

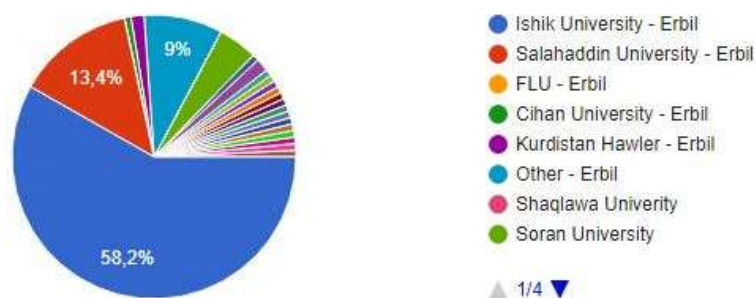
The online questionnaire received 138 responses but only 132 people answered all questions. It is the aim of the research to conduct this research of Kurdistan and try to receive more reply to the

questionnaire and then update the findings if required. In addition, the online distribution of the questionnaire did not allow the research to discard the 5 questionnaires that were not filled entirely.

As the research is a lecturer in Ishik University, the questionnaire was largely filled by Ishik students. 58.2% of the respondent study at Ishik University. As Ishik University is a private University whose fees are quite high, students come from Kurdish wealthy families or thanks to the scholarship given to martyr families. Thus the over representation of Ishik student may alter the representativeness of the survey and limit generalization to all Kurdish youth.

Place of undergraduate study

134 réponses



In the future the researcher would like to conduct this research with a larger number of students studying in public universities than in private universities so as to be more representative of the composition of the Kurdish society.

V Findings

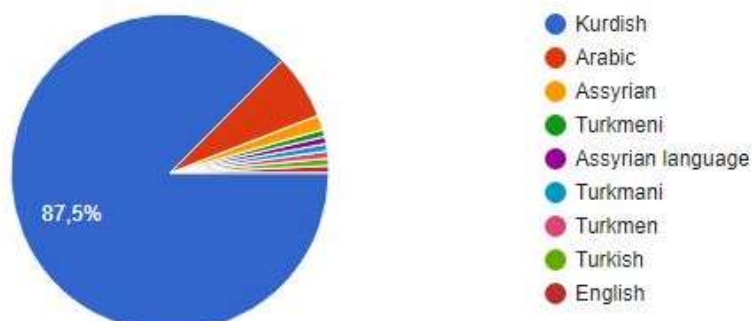
Demographic data

Among the respondent 54.3% were female and 45.7% were male. All respondent are aged between 18 to 30 years old, 92% have done most of their primary education in Kurdistan and 85.4% attended the lecture Kurdology during their 1st year of University.

Concerning their family background, Kurdish is the mother tongue of 87.5% of them and Arabic for 6.6%. The rest of the respondent's mother tongue is Assyrian, Turkmen, Turkish and English.

Mother tongue

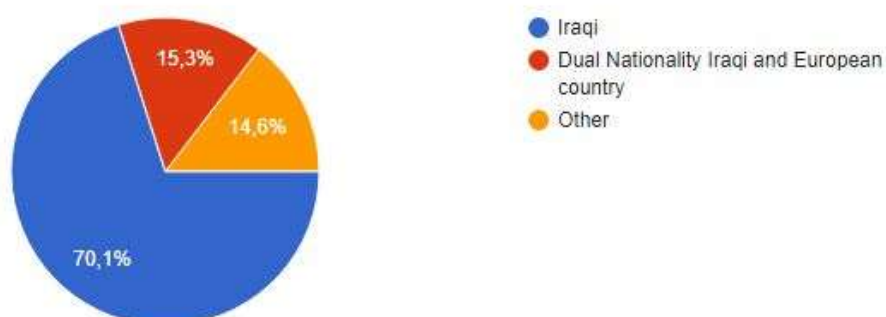
136 réponses



In addition, only 70.1% are only Iraqi national 15.3% are bi national Iraqi and a European nationality and 14.6% are from another nationality.

Nationality

137 réponses



Findings concerning Kurdish youth knowledge of Iraqi history

As mentioned in the methodology section, this part of the questionnaire aimed at getting information concerning Kurdish youth knowledge of their own history and finding out which element of their history was left out by the history curriculum.

In addition this part aimed at knowing if the debate about the construction of Kurdish national identity was mentioned in the classroom or if Kurdish history was taught as an exact science that does not leave room for debate. For example, the figure of Ahmadi Khani can be presented in two ways; either as an

early example of Kurdish poet, precursor of modern Kurdish nationalism in the 17th century or as a poet writing in Kurdish language with no political goal attached to it as Martin Van Bruissen argues that “neither the political nor socio-economic prerequisites existed in the 17th century Kurdistan for any notion of the nation to exist because tribes were the main collectivity with which Kurds identified.” (Van Bruissen in Gunter, 2004).

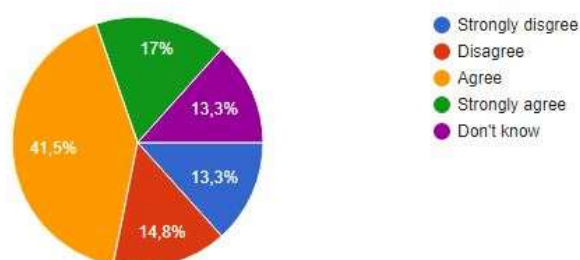
Kurdish youth have some misconception about events that could question the narrative of a old Kurdish nation.

As the content of the Kurdology lecture suggested, Kurdish youth share the feeling that Kurdish people shared national feeling from all times and that all Kurdish people fought for Kurdish autonomy and independence.

To the statement “from all times Kurdish people have supported national feelings” 41.5% of the respondent agree and 17% strongly agree. Therefore a large majority of Kurdish youth consider that Kurdistan is an ethnic nation and that Kurdish people always identified themselves as Kurds.

From all time Kurdish people have supported national feelings

135 réponses



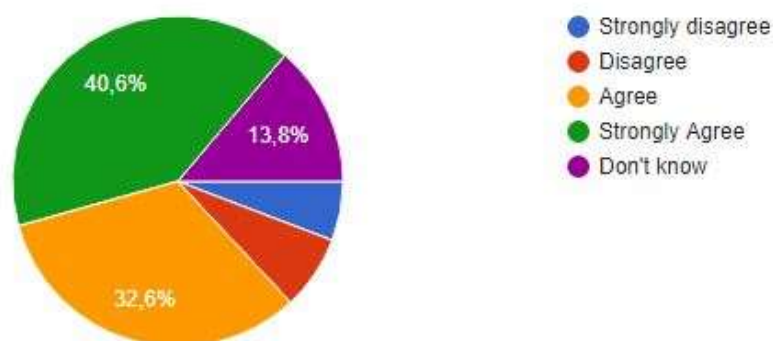
In addition, students of the debate that may exist about famous Kurdish writers.

In addition, students of the debate that may exist about famous Kurdish writers.

There is almost no debate among the respondent about the identity of figures such as Salahaddin or Qazi Mohammed as 40.6% of the respondent “strongly agree” and 32.6% “agree” that they were Kurdish and cannot be considered as Turkish or Arabic.

Salahaddin, Qazi Mohammed and other great Kurdish figure of the past knew they were pure Kurdish and not Turkish or Arabic

138 réponses



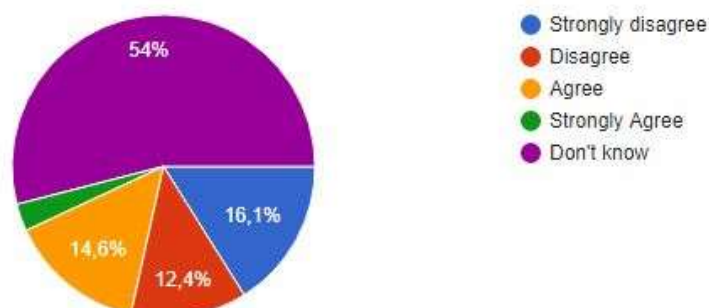
This confirms the idea that Kurdish history curriculum in schools and the lecture Kurdology do not mention historical debates about famous figures. It goes hand in hand with political will to promote one official version of history as in many other countries.

Kurdish youth are not aware of some important part of their region's history

The majority of students are unaware of some important historical events that could undermine the unity of the Kurdish nation such as the fact that Arabic and Kurdish shepherd were called Kurdish as long as they lived in the Zagros Mountain. As 54% of the respondent "don't know", 16.1% "strongly disagree" and 12.4% "disagree" to the statement "The word Kurdish was as well used to speak about Arabic shepherd living in the mountains".

The word Kurdish was as well used to speak about Arabic shepherd living in the mountains.

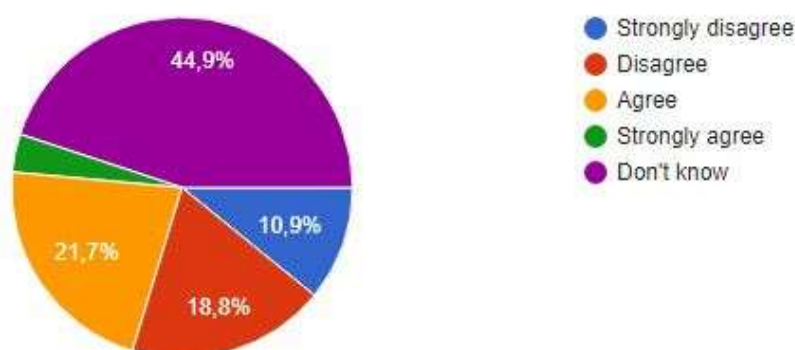
137 réponses



Students are as well unaware of the divisions that were among the elite about how to achieve independence and how some of them supported Ataturk in the creation of the Turkish state as they felt it had more chance of succeeding than trusting the European power. Indeed, to the statement “Kurdish nationalist supported Ataturk in the creation of a Turkish state” 44.9% of the respondent “don’t know” while 10.9% “strongly disagree” and 21.7% “agree”.

Kurdish nationalist supported Ataturk in the creation of a Turkish state

138 réponses

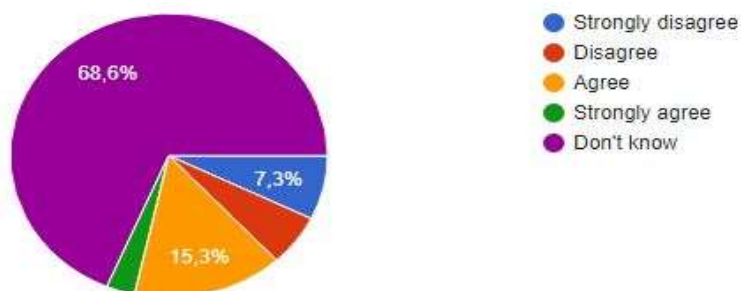


In addition, while students spend a lot of time studying Kurdish literature in their Kurdology lesson; they are unaware as much about the debate concerning major Kurdish writers identity as they are

unaware of the fact that before the 16th century Kurdish people were writing in Arabic, Turkish or Persian and it remained the language of writing for many of them for a long period of time. Indeed, 68.6% of the respondent replied “don’t know” to the statement “the first writing in Kurdish language date from the 16th century” and only 15.3% agree to that statement.

The first writing in Kurdish language date from the 16th century.

137 réponses



Kurdish youth know more about Kurdish history than Iraqi history.

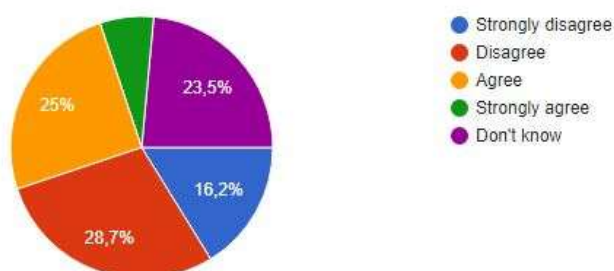
As mentioned above, sharing a common history is one of the most fundamental ways of sharing identity in a country. Yet, the 2005 Iraqi constitution left the ability of choosing school curriculums to federal entities creating a difference in curriculum between schools based in and outside of the Kurdish region.

Respondent are fully divided when it comes to feeling that they have as much knowledge of Iraqi history as they have on Kurdish history: 23.5% “don’t know”, 25% “agree” and 28.7% “disagree”.

Yet when it comes to actually measuring this knowledge with the false statement “Kurdish people were the only group repressed over the construction of an Iraqi identity in the 1930s” 39.1% of the respondent don’t know and 29.7% “agree” while only 19.6% “disagree”. The lack of correct answer to this particular question shows a lack of knowledge of Kurdish youth toward Iraqi history.

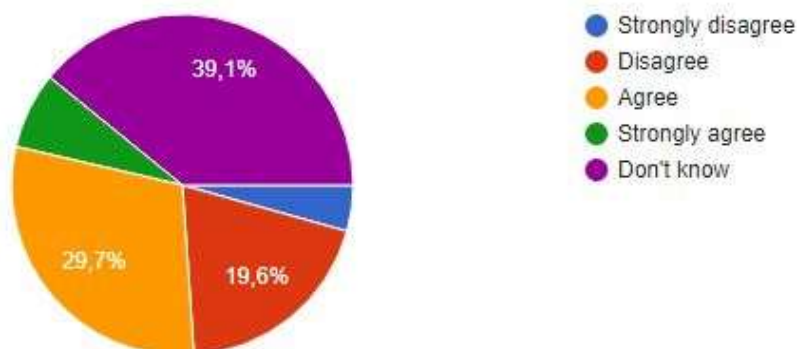
I feel like I know as much on Iraqi history as on Kurdish History over the past century (Iraqi independence up to today)

136 réponses



Kurdish people were the only group repressed over the construction of an Iraqi identity in the 1930s.

138 réponses



Therefore, Kurdish youth do not only have misconceptions about their own history, they also have a lack of knowledge about their national history.

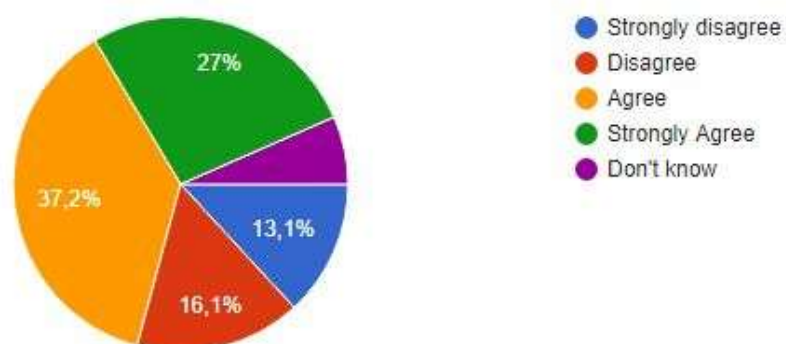
Kurdish youth are aware of the political component of nationalism

Nevertheless, the sample is aware of the political construction and stake that are associated with the concept of nation.

To the statement “Nationalist feelings are a construction and would not exist without education and politicians” 27% “strongly agree” and 37.2 % “agree”.

Nationalist feelings are a construction and would not exist without education and politicians

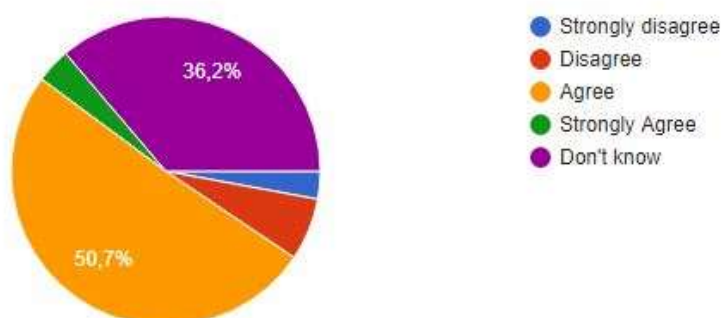
137 réponses



And a short majority is aware that Kurdish nationalism started from small elite in the 19th century before being spread to the rest of the society as 50.7% of the respondents “agree” with the related statement. However, we must keep in mind that majority of the respondent are students from Ishik University and may be more aware than other students.

For most of the 19th century Kurdish nationalism remained the concern of a small educated elite while the majority of the people identified themselves as belonging to a tribe or to the Umma.

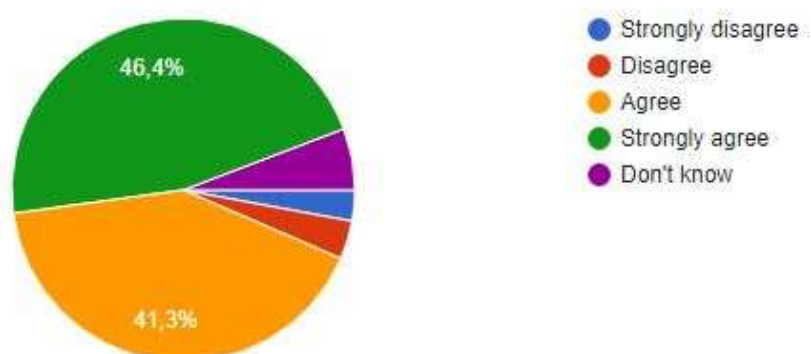
138 réponses



Finally, the large majority of the students are aware of what constitute a nation as almost 90% “agree” or “strongly” agree to the related statement.

A Nation can be recognized through shared history, language, religion and cultural practices.

138 réponses



As a consequence, students are aware of the political aspect of the definition of nation and nationalism and yet they are not able or willing to question their knowledge of their identity as we have seen from the previous sections.

They are not cross-checking the information they receive from their lecturer about Kurdish history while all information and debates are available on the internet and they are not interested in educating themselves in Iraqi history so as to find some common ground between Kurdish and Arabic people. This is confirming the idea that most young people do not question “the official history” they are being taught as school based on a politically designed curriculum.

Findings related to Kurdish youth self-identity

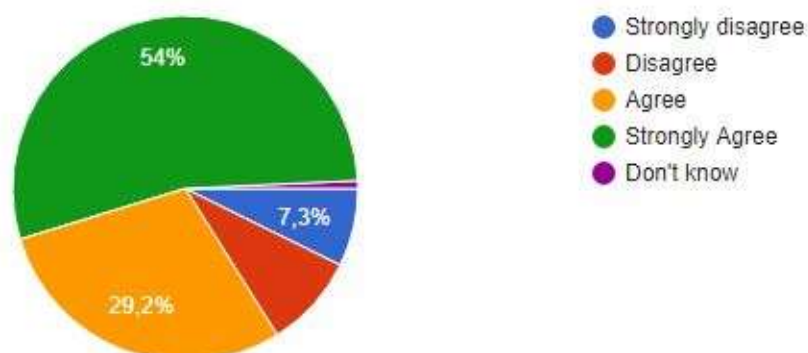
The aim of this section was to confirm the research assumption that most Kurdish youth identify themselves as Kurds before any other kind of social identity and as a result adopt some typical social practices in their daily life.

Kurdish first

To the statement “I identify myself first of all as Kurdish” 54% “strongly agree” and 29.2% “agree” which represent the large majority of the respondent. In addition this corresponds roughly to the 87.5% of the respondent who stated that their mother tongue was Kurdish.

I identify myself first of all as Kurdish

137 réponses



As a consequence, it explains the rejection of the respondent to the statement “I consider myself Iraqi as much as Kurdish. As 38.2% “strongly disagree” and 27.2% “agree” to the statement. Yet a bit more than quarter of the respondents “agree” to the statement (28.7%).

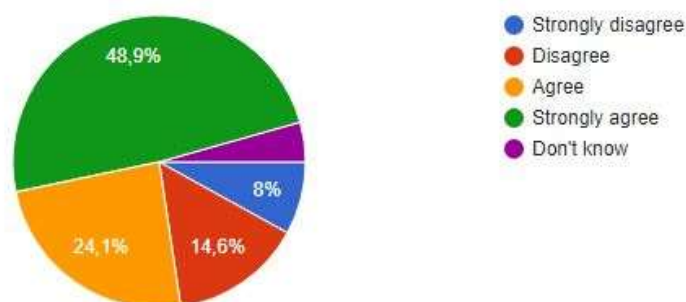
More inclusion within Iraq

If they identify themselves as Kurdish, it looks like they are aware that they cannot live in autarky and that there must be some common ground between Arabic and Kurdish people.

Indeed, as most of the respondents realized that language is an important component of the nation and a must to build good relationships and communication, questions related to the place that ought to be left for Kurdish and Arabic language within Iraq aimed at measuring the level of openness of Youth in Kurdistan to relationships with the rest of Iraq. Yet a large majority of Kurdish people recognize that speaking Arabic is important for them (48.9% “strongly agree” and 24.1% “agree”).

Speaking and understanding Arabic is important for me

137 réponses

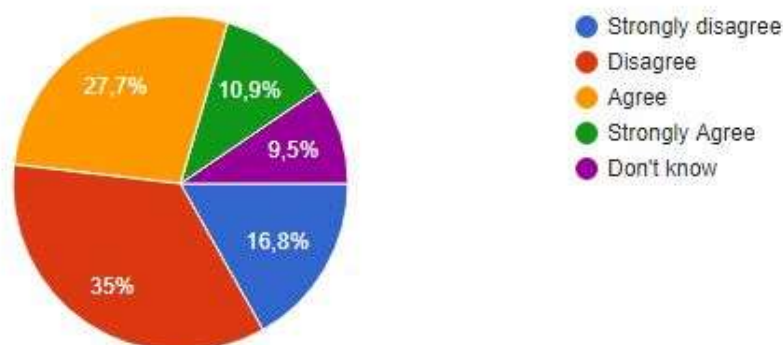


In addition, Kurdish people are asking for reciprocity in the mastery of language. As they value learning Arabic, most of them expect all Iraqi citizens to master both Kurdish and Arabic language. 60% of the respondents “agree” or “strongly agree” to the statement “Arabic and Kurdish should be spoken by all Iraqi citizens.”

Finally, it looks that respondents are mixed on the possibility for a country to function properly with more than one official language. As almost 40% of the respondents do not think that a country can function properly with more than one official language, while a slightly more than 50% think that it is possible. As long as a large majority of young people living in Kurdistan will not believe that a country can function properly with more than one language on the model of countries like Switzerland, a common future between Kurdish and Arabic people will be hardly successful.

Language is a strong component of national identity and it is not possible for a country to function properly with more than one official language

137 réponses

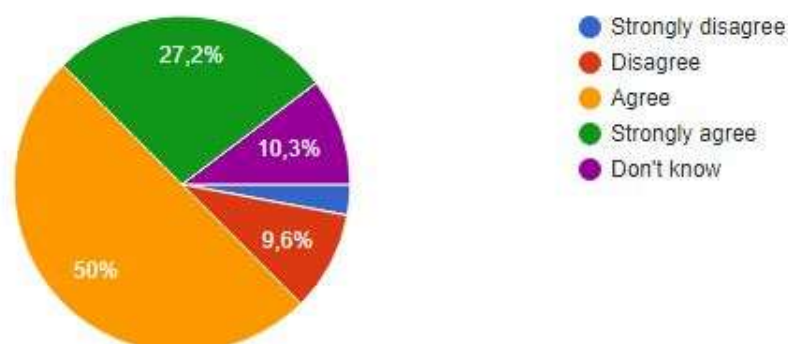


History and social practices in relationship to self identity

A large majority of the respondents agree that history took an important place on knowing who they are. By agreeing to this statement respondents validated the hypothesis that history classes are important for building someone's identity. As history classes teaches about a country common past and ancestors, learning Kurdish history allows young Kurds to feel part of a larger destiny. This points out the carefulness that must be put in designing history curriculum.

Learning Kurdish history took an important place in knowing who I am.

136 réponses



When it comes to social practices, young Kurdish seem more open to mixed practices. Young people of Kurdistan no longer only listen in priority to Kurdish music as 36.2% agreed to the statement while 32.6% disagreed and they also related themselves to the Mesopotamian civilization which includes the rest of Iraq. 51.9% “agree” or “strongly agree” to the statement “I am proud to know that Iraq was part of the Mesopotamian civilization.

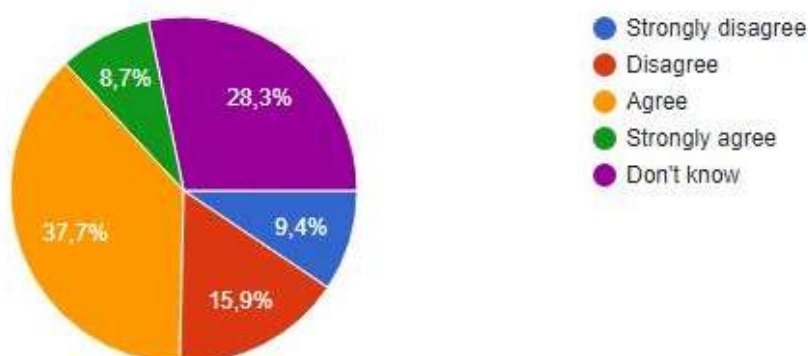
These new social practices as the attachment they have to the Mesopotamian civilization could leave a room to create a sense of unity in Iraq.

Kurdish youth within Iraq

Every country gets pride in their Independence Day. They became national holidays in most countries of the world. Yet when it comes to assess the relationship of young people of Kurdistan relationships to Iraq’s independence from Britain, only 37.7% of the respondent “agree” that Iraq’s independence from Britain in 1930 is a great moment of their country’s history while 28.3% “don’t know” and 15.9% “disagree”.

Iraq independence from the British in 1930 is a great moment of my country’s history

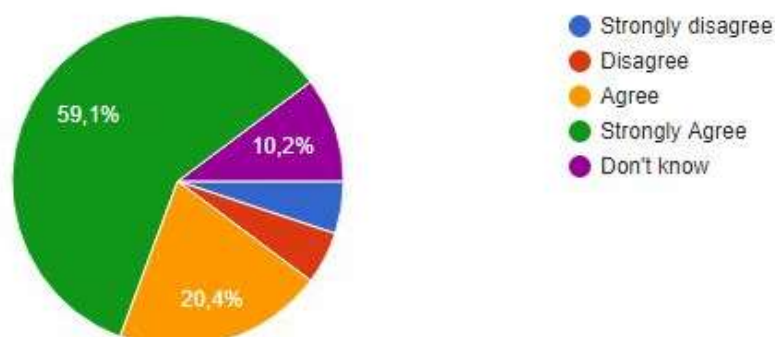
138 réponses



By opposition, Kurdish youth as the rest of the Kurdish population feel much more proud of peshmergas victories than of those of the Iraqi army (59.1% “strongly agree” and 20.4% “agree).

I feel proud of peshmergas victories much more than of the Iraqi army.

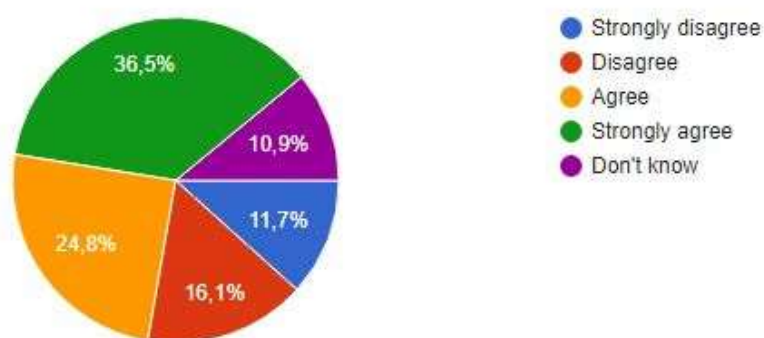
137 réponses



However, a majority agrees that religion, language or ethnicity do not matter when it comes to making political decisions. This could translate into electing politicians rather on their programs and ideas than because of their religion or ethnic affiliation.

I believe that religion, language or ethnicity do not matter when it comes to making a political decisions

137 réponses



Findings related to Kurdish youth vision of Iraq and Kurdish independence

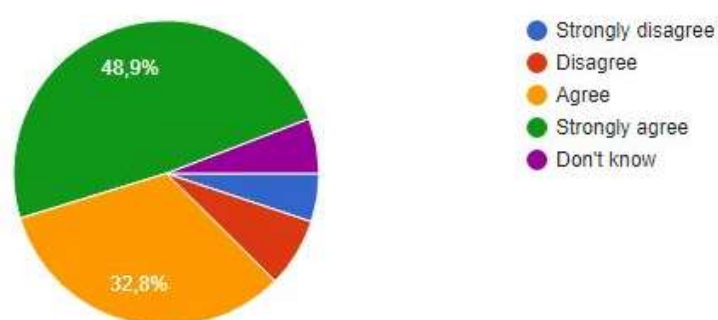
Once, the self identity of young people living in Kurdistan has been assessed and the relationship between the definition of their identity with their historical knowledge, it is important to measure the consequences of such results on young people's opinion about Kurdish independence few months after the referendum. If Kurdish nationalist ideas succeeded in convincing fully young Kurds that they need an independent state, the majority of the respondent should still promote an independent Kurdistan despite the drawback of autonomy that was imposed by Baghdad government as a sanction for conducting the referendum.

Young people living in Kurdistan still support independent Kurdish state.

48.9% of the respondents "strongly agree" and 32.8% "agree" that Kurdistan region should be an independent state going back to the same percentage of youth that identify themselves as Kurdish first and whose mother tongue is Kurdish. In addition, most of them agree that Great Kurdish should be united in an independent country with Erbil as capital and Sorani as official language (30.7% "strongly agree" and 35% "agree"). If the capital city and official language of such an independent country would surely create debates among Kurdish people, it is clear that Kurdish youth feel like they belong to a bigger group than Iraqi Kurdistan and that their nation should be united within one nation-state. This reflects their knowledge of Kurdish history as many Kurdish figures taught in their history programs such as Salahaddin and Sharaf Khan lived in the Turkish part of Kurdistan.

Kurdistan region of Iraq should be an independent state

137 réponses



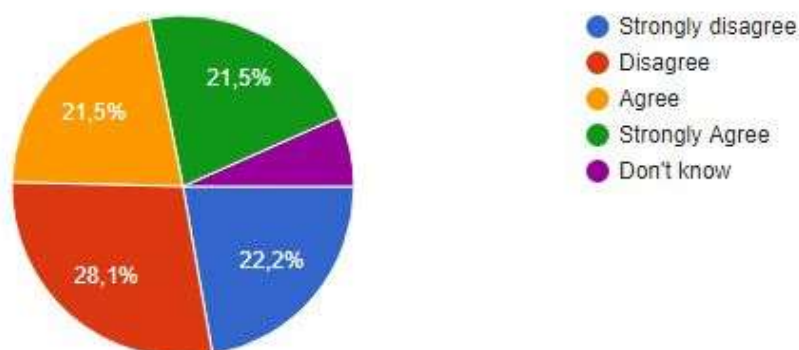
Tense relationship with Arabic Iraqis

The adhesion of youth for an independent state reflects in their relationship and prejudice toward Arabic Iraqis mostly conveyed by historical events.

Indeed, almost half of the respondent recognized not trusting Arabic people in the same way they trust Kurdish people and roughly the same numbers feel like Arabic people must apologize to Kurdish people because of what happened in the past.

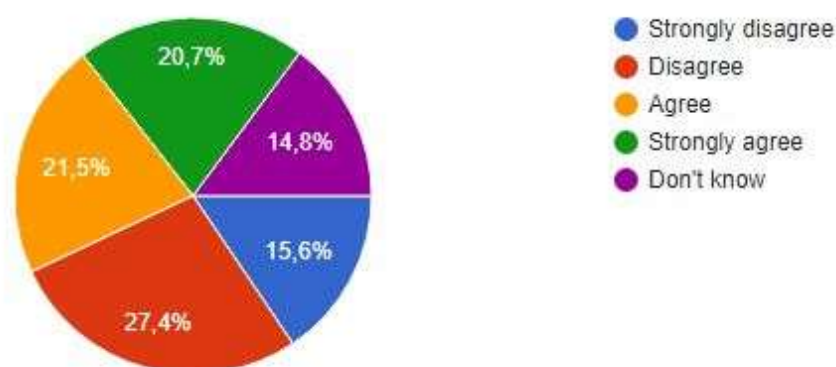
I do not trust Arabic people in the same way as I trust Kurdish people

135 réponses



I feel like Arabic people have to apologize to Kurdish people

135 réponses

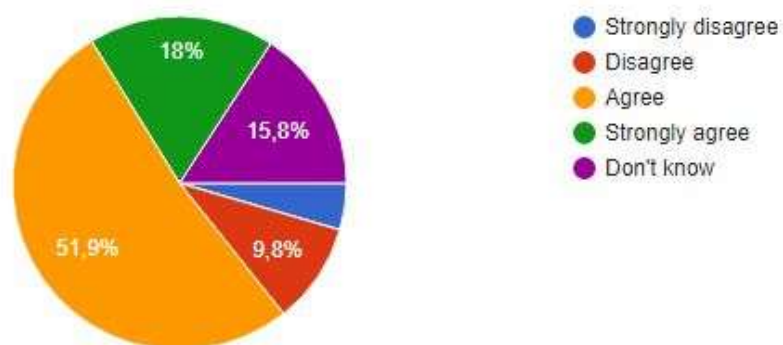


In addition to these uneven relationships, young people living in Kurdistan developed the feeling that the rest of Iraq is taking advantage of Kurdish resources (60 % “agree” or “strongly agree”)and that Kurdish interest cannot reconcile with those of the rest of Iraq (56% “agree” or “strongly agree”).

More importantly they feel that Kurdish people cannot have a common destiny with the rest of Iraq at 51.9% “agree” and 18% “strongly agree”.

I feel like Kurdish people cannot have a common destiny with the rest of Iraq

133 réponses



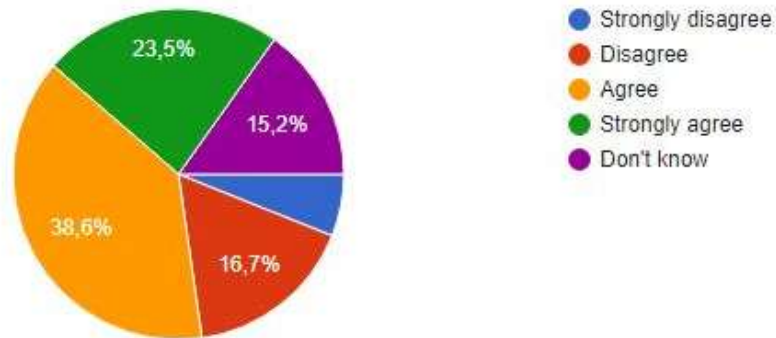
Lack of representativeness within Iraq

Despite the Federal system and the high level of autonomy enshrined in the Iraqi constitution, most Kurdish youth do not feel like this division and delegation of power is allowing their voice to be heard within Iraq.

As a consequence, they do not feel like the rights of Kurdish people are protected as much as those of other communities in the country.

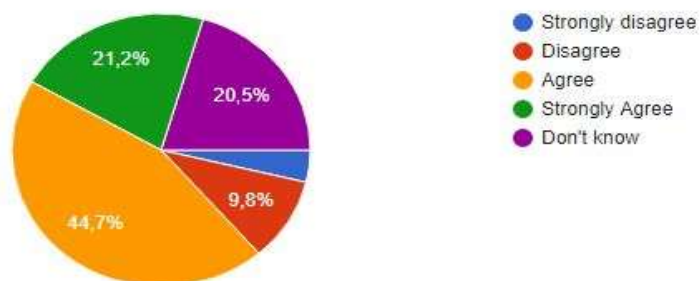
I feel like Kurdish people do not have the same rights as other groups in today's Iraq political system

132 réponses



I feel like Iraq's federal system does not work as it does not allow true representation of Kurdish interest

132 réponses



VI. Conclusion

There is no inevitable and irreversible evolution to nationhood. Nation as political construct relies on how national feelings are transmitted from one generation to another. Parents and relatives play a large role into transmitting national feelings but the state through primary and secondary school programs play their part as well.

In the case of Kurdistan, the design of history curriculums is a competence of Kurdistan regional government who emphasized on the history of the Kurdish region rather than Iraq as a whole giving students limited knowledge about their country's history but a large knowledge about events that happened in Kurdistan including Turkish, Syrian and Iranian Kurdistan. In addition, they developed an official version of history that serve the purpose of promoting a long existing Kurdish nation from which the young generation is supposed to be inheriting.

In this context, young people living in Kurdistan identify themselves first as Kurds rather than Iraqi. They also recognize that learning their history took a large part in knowing who they are which confirm that school programs played a strong part in defining who they are which suggest that if the Kurdish government had been developing another official history for the region, including some national history it may have reduced the divide between Erbil and Baghdad.

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