

Reporting on Minorities across Iraq

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), with the support of Free Press Unlimited (FPU) conducted an assessment project looking into the state of minority portrayal in Iraqi media. In consultation with local journalists, 25 media outlets (13 from Arab Iraq and 10 from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq) were selected for monitoring over the course of four months –from March until June 2015.

Key findings are listed below:

- More than **three-quarters** of the articles monitored were **regular news reports**. Editorials and interviews were rare.
- **64%** of the articles monitored also **displayed a relevant picture**. This hints to the fact that, in 36% of the cases, the story might not have been judged important enough to allocate picture space for it.
- **Yezidis and Christians have been reported on to a far greater extent than the other minorities** over the course of the period of monitoring. The context of the war with DAESH and of the migratory movements it engenders explains this disproportionate focus.
- Some minorities, such as the **Mandean, the Kaka'i, the Shabak, or the Shi'a Arabs only appear sporadically in the media**, usually when outlets report on politicians acknowledging the minority groups' cultural or religious celebrations.
- **Some of Iraq's minorities have not even been mentioned once during the period studied**. Examples of those would be the Baha'i, the Ahwazi, the Bedouins, or the Iraqis of African decent.
- **Party-affiliated or owned outlets tended to instrumentalize minorities** and use stories about them to advance particular political agendas.
- **Outlet with political affiliations/biases seem to be more of an issue in Kurdish media than in Iraqi Arab media**, seeing as a smaller proportion of the publications surveyed were deemed independent in the former.
- The data displayed an inverted trend in general reporting tone in Arab Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). In Arab Iraq, media portrayal of minorities is more often favorable than the contrary. On the other hand, KRI outlets publications tended to be more negative than positive. It may be the case that Kurds being a historically persecuted minority group themselves, with an important ethos/collective memory of discrimination and victimhood, are less incline to embrace minorities and that the media reflects this.
- The two most frequently recorded topics for articles on minorities were **war and conflict (29%)** and **internal displacement (16%)**.
- Al-Sumaria, Shafaq News, and Waar reported on minorities considerably more often than the rest of the outlets surveyed.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR EDITORS

1. Establish **ethno-religious targets for recruitment that will translate into a more diversified newsroom**. The hiring of more reporters from a minority background is indeed likely to widen the range of perspectives available within an outlet.
2. Similarly, **expand the scope of your outlet's contacts and sources** as a means of diversifying the comments and quotes published, as well as the information sources.
3. **Assign reporting on all facets of the news** (not only so-called "minority issues") to reporting staff members with a minority background, once again in order to diversify perspective.
4. Provide **culturally-sensitive training** to reporting staff about:
 - a. Self-diagnosing bias, and ways of nuancing reporting;
 - b. The role of media in minority groups portrayal, especially in the Iraqi context.
5. Enact a **zero-tolerance policy vis-à-vis racial stereotyping** in both discourse (workplace attitude) and reporting amongst your staff.
6. Adopt **internal editorial guidelines that are sensitive to issues of minority group representation**.

FOR JOURNALISTS

1. Thoroughly **research** your reporting topic in order to ensure that **appropriate lexicon** is used. Using "refugee issues" when discussing the status of IDPs in the KRI, for example, reinforces negative perceptions and false assumptions about rights and citizenship.
2. Take **specific interest in minority groups that are less represented in media**, such as the Baha'i, Kaka'i, or black Iraqis, for example, for the perspectives of both current events and "minority issues."
3. **Avoid identifying sources of minority background as representatives of their community**. Their ethno-religious identity can and should be specified, especially in the Iraqi context, but they should be presented as human beings first and foremost.
4. **Use more and better pictures to depict reporting**. The age and gender demographics portrayed should be varied. As this report shows, minority pictures in the media tend to show mainly children and elderly people, contributing to a "vulnerable" portrayal.
5. Provide **background information** and always **contextualize**, as neutrally as possible, reporting.
6. Publish more **interviews** as means of presenting diversified perspectives.

INTRODUCTION

Media-delivered narratives are central to the process whereby identities and normative frameworks are shaped. This power that the media has become endowed with has tremendous implications for societies and nations. As Cottle (2000) puts it, “[t]he media occupy a key site and perform a crucial role in the public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power.” By framing issues in particular ways, media in fact end up defining the boundaries of social organization. Although media reporting often claims to be relating factual information –whether it be the case or not –those facts are always tainted by the biases of the outlet or author relaying events. In this sense, regardless of the form written reporting takes –news piece, analysis, or opinion –it can be argued that media more often than not presents what Stone (1989) calls causal stories, which function as means of understanding issues in ways that fit a particular worldview. Those causal stories operate as tools for framing, and thus help define facets of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, thereby presenting a particular understanding of a given issue, and of its causal interpretation and moral evaluation. In other words, this ability of media to prioritize different considerations and thereby alter one’s perception of an issue is a truly powerful, yet informal, social tool. With this in mind, the present report aims to determine reporting trends on ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities living in Iraq in order to raise general awareness of negative stereotypes and myth embedded within those causal stories. How is media within Iraq depicting minorities? Can “minorities” be treated as a general group, or do causal stories differ depending on the minority? Are there differences in framing between Kurdish and Arabic media? How do political and/or sectarian outlet affiliations affect reporting?

Before further engaging with the topic, let us briefly contextualize the state of media in Iraq at this time and in recent history. Under Saddam Hussein’s Ba’athist government, media was highly controlled, as one could expect. After the fall of the regime in 2003, foreign effort has been devoted to developing the media and fostering the creation of independent outlets. International Media Support (2005) however pointed, at the time, to a lack of coordination and resources hindering the process and leading “the emerging Iraqi authorities to adopt media policies which do not correspond with international standards [of] sound, democratic practices and institutions.” Since then, several studies have been conducted to assess freedom of press in Iraq (e.g. Awad and Eaton 2013, Al-Rawi 2012) and it has been concluded, with varying degrees of nuance, that “the Iraqi media landscape [...] may not be the free, plural and professional fourth estate that many in the West had envisaged in 2003 but that it has real strengths – as well as weaknesses – which reflect the reality and complexity of modern Iraq.” Structural challenges, or a “lack of basis for a social contract between the state and citizenry,” seem to be the most substantial hurdle.

With this in mind, investigation on the current state of minority reporting in Iraq and the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) is crucial. In the words of Saad Salloum (2013): “Minorities risk becoming helplessly crushed beneath a complicated legacy of demographic manipulation and being ultimately lost in the conflict between major forces competing for space, power and fortune.” Improvements in journalistic minority-related practices could contribute to shifts in this competition. Print media, the Fourth Estate, can in fact help keep checks and balances in a country where a rule of law, rights-based democracy has yet to be firmly established.

In this context, the Institute of Regional and International Studies (IRIS) at the American University of Iraq, Sulaimani (AUIS), with the support of Free Press Unlimited (FPU) conducted an assessment project looking into the state of minority portrayal in Iraqi media. In consultation with local journalists, 25 media outlets (13 from Iraq and 10 from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq) were selected for monitoring over the course of four months – from March until June 2015. These outlets were selected among daily newspapers, online news agencies and monthly or bi-monthly magazines of different political, ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations. To be sure, this report does not claim to paint an exhaustive picture of the state of media reporting on minorities in Iraq. Rather, it highlights observed trends in selected written publications, over a defined timespan, in such a way as to hint at potentially harmful media practices, in a cautionary manner.

This report presents the results and conclusions emerging from this assessment exercise. It is organized in four sections. The first one presents a short, targeted overview of Iraq’s ethno-religious and geopolitical situation, with a specific focus on the minorities reported on over the course of the assessment period. Next, the 25 media outlets studied are introduced, along with their history (date of establishment, political affiliation and funding, readership and distribution, etc.). The third section details the methodology used to analyze the data collected over the course of the project and, finally, the last section presents data analysis and conclusions.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this report included a focused literature review on media in Iraq, as well as on minorities and their presence in the media over time. It also included selective media monitoring and coding, following by qualitative and quantitative data analysis. In consultation with local journalists, 25 written media outlets (13 from Iraq and 10 from the Kurdistan Region of Iraq –see *Appendix B for the full list*) were selected for monitoring over the course of four months –from March until June 2015. These outlets were selected among daily newspapers, online news agencies and monthly or bi-monthly magazines of different political, ethnic, linguistic and religious affiliations. The choice to concentrate on written media rather than, or alongside with, audio-visual media, resorts to the very sensitive current situation the whole of Iraq is experiencing. The idea of a full media monitoring including selected television stations and radio has been taken into consideration but then abandoned, at least for the moment, as the recording of what is being broadcast, in this particularly tense moment, would possibly be regarded as an action raising security concerns.

In total, 281 publications were tracked and analyzed. A protocol of analysis (*see Appendix A*) was developed to ensure the standardization of monitoring, drawing from findings of the EU project "In other Words – Web Observatory and Review, for Discrimination Alerts and Stereotypes Deconstruction." Overall, cross-sectional analyses were performed using the different elements of the Protocol, controlling for some of the variables when necessary, in order to answer the questions evoked in the introduction. The results will be presented below, and the analysis will draw on those charts to point to particularly interesting pairings and highlight trends in reporting on minorities. The analysis also relies on the qualitative assessment of coders to support and/or explain the tendencies accentuated by the data.

Two small teams of researchers – one in Baghdad and one in Sulaimani - with background experience in media research were tasked with the daily analysis of the content of those publications in relation to minority groups. Publications issued by minorities were scrutinized on their portrayal of other "diverse" groups. Together with the team of researchers, FPU/IMCK developed a protocol of content analysis to be used during research. Qualitative observations included the glossary used (particularly of pejorative terms and nicknames), blatant and subtle stereotypes applied, and general remarks on reporting style. Particular attention was given to the framing and language used in reporting on and/or transcribing political speeches.

The following elements were systematically monitored and used for quantitative analysis for the present report:

- Frequency –or missed opportunities –of reporting per outlet;
- General topic of the article;
- General tone of the article;

- Political and/or ethno-cultural affiliations of outlets;
- Specific minority group reported on;
- Geographic focus of the article (by province);
- Stereotyping (evaluated through the use of nicknames to refer to minorities);
- Use of a relevant picture to accompany the written article.

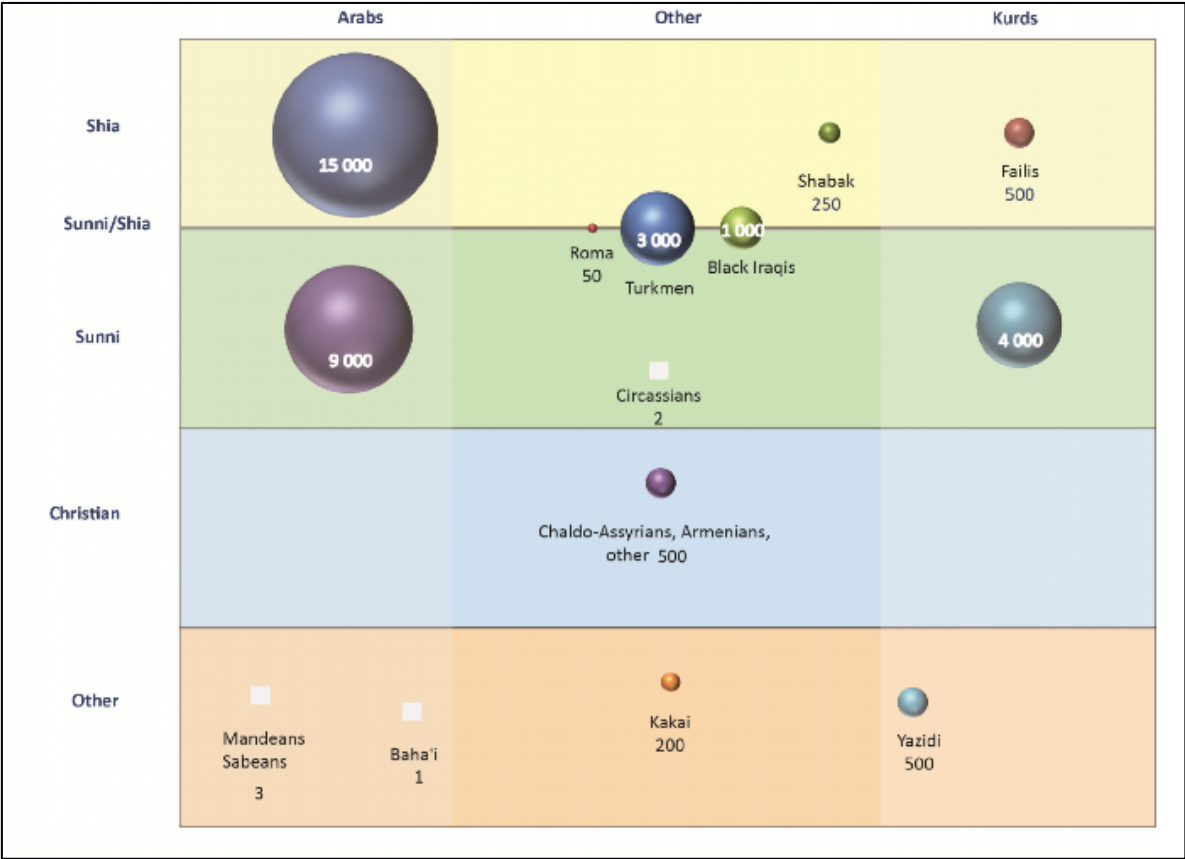
Due to coding discrepancies, this report is unfortunately not able to systematically consider some of the Protocol's elements, such as article length, article bias, and the presence of hateful speech. Coders' comments on those issues will nonetheless be used as contextual information when relevant.

Overall, cross-sectional analyses were performed using the different elements of the Protocol, controlling for some of the variables when necessary, in order to answer the questions evoked in the introduction. The results are presented below, and the analysis draws on those charts to point to particularly interesting pairings and highlight trends in reporting on minorities. The analysis also relies on the qualitative assessment of coders (*see Appendix B for full weekly reports*) to support and/or explain the tendencies accentuated by the data.

MINORITIES IN IRAQ: AN OVERVIEW¹

Over the course of four months of media observation, it was found that the media reported on 14 minority groups. Due to space constraints, only those groups will be presented in this section, which by no means purports to comprehensively render Iraq’s rich ethno-religious landscape. This short overview merely serves as contextual grounding for the analysis and conclusion that emerge from the report.

Figure 1: Ethnic/religious distribution of the population of Iraq
 Source: Pichon (2015)



¹ The data and information relayed in this section were taken from two main sources: the Minority Rights Group International website, as well as Saad Salloum’s *Minorities in Iraq: Memory, Identity and Challenges* (2013). Due to a lack of unreliable census, all population counts should be considered as rough estimates.

Figure 1 above gives a general idea of Iraq's population distribution, along sectarian and ethnic lines. The media has reported on most of the groups represented in this graph over the studied period, albeit to different extents. Geographically, four main military or paramilitary units –the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), the Peshmerga, the *Hashd Al-Shaabi* (Popular Mobilization Forces), and DAESH –exert relative control over part of the Iraqi territory, formally or not. The central Iraqi government, based in Baghdad, the capital, and the ISF formally control and defend most of the southern and western provinces of the country. Some provinces, however, are under the control of the *Hashd Al-Shaabi*, such as Najaf, Kerbala, and Basrah, as historically Shi'ite areas. Other provinces, however, such as Diyala, have been retaken from DAESH by the ISF with the help of Shi'a militias, which have since retained informal control. DAESH also still dominate some areas of the country, such as Mosul (Ninewa province) and parts of Anbar, the largest and westernmost province of Iraq. Finally, northern provinces of As Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Dohuk and Halabja are under the formal control of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and shape a semi-autonomous referred to as the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) with a legitimate security forces, the Peshmerga. It should be noted that some provinces and district in Iraq's northeast, which border the KRI, are considered as “disputed,” meaning that their administration status –either through Erbil or Baghdad –is technically temporary. Some of those, such as Sinjar in Ninewa for example, are currently under the de facto control of the KRG and its Peshmerga forces.

Figure 2: Map of Iraq
Source: Khokaviv Publications



With regards to the different minority groups existing in this complex and changeable geopolitical context, let us first address the question of **Kurds** and **Arabs**. Within the KRI, Arabs, both Sunni and Shi'a, are considered to be a minority and were therefore accounted as a single category for monitoring purposes. They represent more or less nine million people within Iraq, and on-going civil conflict in the southern and eastern parts of the country have led many to seek refuge in the KRI. Similarly, the four million Sunni Kurds in Iraq are registered as a minority in news reports emerging from Iraq only, seeing as they make up the ruling majority within the KRI. Outside the semi-autonomous region, they live mainly in the Ninewa, Kirkuk, Salahaddin and Diyala governorates. Shi'a Kurds, or **Feyli Kurds**, are a minority group across Iraq, seeing as the majority of the Kurdish population

living within the KRI is of Sunni confession. They have ties with Iran, which include the use of Persian (Farsi), and are found in the KRI, Kirkuk, and Baghdad.

Shi'a Arabs are another group, which now makes up for about 15 million people in Iraq. They are most geographically concentrated in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, and southeastern Iraq. Like the Kurds, they were one of the groups marginalized and discriminated against under Saddam Hussein's rule. Another minority group of Shi'ite confession are the **Shabak**. They live in Mosul, Ninewa Plains and account for about 0.7% of Iraq's population. Their identity is mostly ethnic, seeing as they consider themselves to be neither Arabs nor Kurds, and have been resisting assimilation policies. They speak Shabaki.

The 500,000 **Christians** of Iraq also form a minority group. They historically live in Baghdad, Mosul, Ninewa and the KRI, but have mostly left Mosul and Ninewa due to the threat posed by the presence of DAESH. The vast majority belongs to Eastern Catholic Churches (Armenian, Chaldean and Syriac Catholics), with some notable exceptions (e.g. the Assyrians, who are Nestorians, members of the Syriac Orthodox Church). Christians of Iraq nowadays claim an ethnic identity that is neither Arab nor Kurd, and some speak other languages, such as Neo-Aramaic. Historically, it was the case that many Christians of Iraq identified as Arabs; the recent sectarian violence has spurred a revival of a distinct ethnic character for the group. Finally, it is important to note that, since the beginning of the war with DAESH in 2014, many Iraqi Christians have left the country.

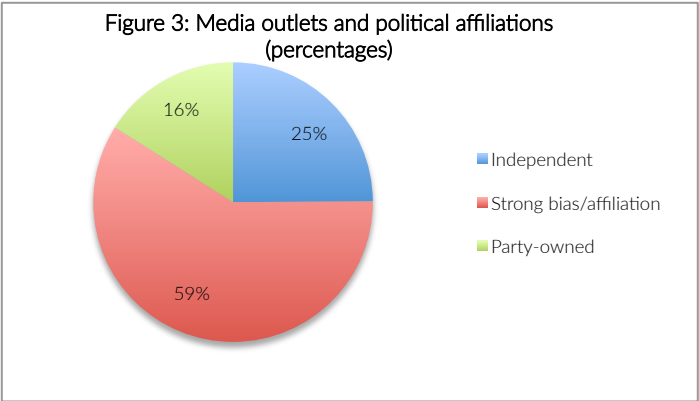
Another large minority group –three million individuals –is the **Turkmen**. The group is composed of both Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, in somewhat equal proportions, and of a few thousands Christians. The Turkmen are thus predominantly an ethnic group and speak Azerbaijani or some form of Turkish. Both the Kurds and the Arabs are currently pressuring the Turkmen into assimilation, seeing as they live across the districts of Tal Afar (west of Mosul), Mosul, Erbil, Alton Kopri, Kirkuk, Tuz Khurmatu, Kifri and Khanaqin, some of which are part of the so-called "disputed territories."

The **Yezidi** used to live in parts of the so-called "disputed territories" east of the KRI –Sinjar Mountain and Shekhan. While some of the 500,000 Yezidis of Iraq remain, many have fled to escape the threat posed by DAESH. They are one of Iraq's ancient communities, and practice a very specific religious, believed to be rooted in Zoroastrianism. In the past, most Iraqi Yezidis identified as ethnically Kurdish, mainly on the basis that they have Kurmanji Kurdish as their mother tongue. The events of August 2014 and on-going sectarian violence have however, as is the case with the Christian, led to a revival of the ethnic Yezidi identity. Despite those ethnic ties, the group resists the KRG's territorial integration aspirations, especially in light of the August 2014 DAESH attacks. Another ethnically Kurdish, yet distinct, minority group in Iraq are the **Kaka'i**, who mainly inhabit Ninewa and Kirkuk. They practice a religion considered a syncretism between Shi'ism and Zoroastrianism and make up about 0.06% of Iraq's population.

The **Mandean**, who claim descent from the Arameans in the 2nd century, adhere to the Gnostic religion and, although representing a very small number of Iraqis –about 3,000 –are most concentrated in Baghdad and Amarah, in the south of Iraq.

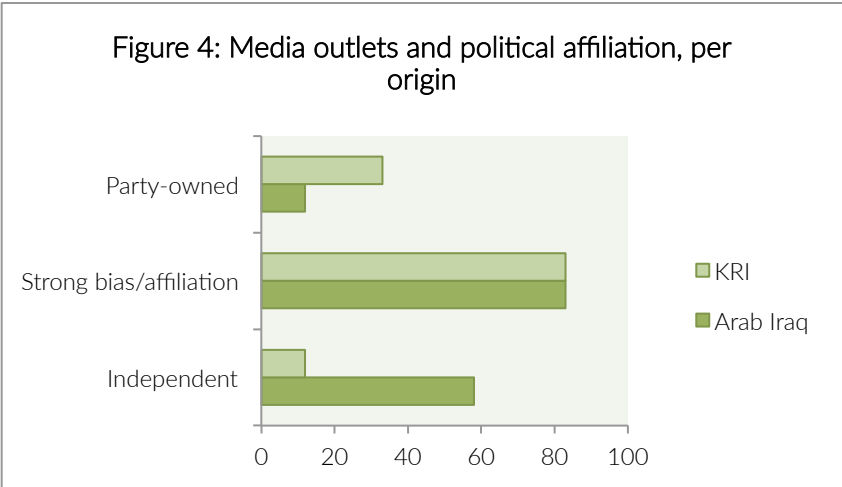
Finally, while Syrians are not indigenous to Iraq, they have become an important part of the country’s ethno-religious landscape over the past few years and are reported about in a distinct way. In this sense, **Syrian refugees** have been included as a category in the monitoring process. Similarly, we have also included a category for internally displaced persons (**IDPs**). While they do not represent an ethnically or religiously homogenous group, they are portrayed as a minority by the media. Those were used when articles referred only to IDPs or refugees without any mention of their ethnicity or religion.

OUTLETS SURVEYED



This section briefly introduces the media outlets monitored and highlights key analysis factors, which are instrumental in understanding the biases entrenched in reporting that result in the formulation of certain types of causal stories. Figure 3 highlights the proportions with regards to political affiliation.

It should be noted that there are reverse trends when it comes to political affiliation within Kurdish and Arabic media. While in both cases the majority of outlets are classified as “party-affiliated or biased,” the KRI presents a larger proportion of those, and a much larger proportion of party-owned outlets. Only 9% of Kurdish media sources in this report are categorized as indepent. Iraqi outlets, on the other hand, are 38% independent, 54%



affiliated or biased, and only 8% party-owned. Figure 4 demonstrates this.

Iraqi media

Most of the publications emerging from Iraq were established between 2003 and 2006, after the fall of Saddam Hussein. They are all publishing in Arabic and based in Baghdad, with the exceptions of **Al-Sharqya News** and **Radio Nawa**. Al-Sharqya is based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, and tends to be critical of the government. It is owned by Saad Al-Bazzaz, a journalist and secular Iraqi nationalist from Mosul who was forced into exile during the Gulf War because of his remarks on Saddam Hussein's policies. Al-Bazzaz has since then built a media empire abroad. On the other hand, Radio Nawa is based in Baghdad, but publishes in Kurdish.

Independent news outlets include **Al-Sumaria News**, **Baghdad Al-Akhbariah**, **Al-Hurra**, and **Al-Sabah al-Jadid**. Al-Sumaria is a newspaper owned by a Lebanese businessman, Shafiq Thabet, and is part of a large TV network that broadcasts throughout the Middle East. Al-Sabah al-Jadid is a respected independent publication, whose editor-in-chief is Ismael Zayer, a prominent Iraqi writer. The outlet has been involved in controversy in the past. In 2014, it was bombed after publishing a cartoon of Iran's supreme leader, Ali Khamenei. The newspaper's staff reportedly regularly receives threats. **Al-Hurra** is part of the US government-funded Middle East Broadcasting Network (MBN). Al-Hurra has a general stream for the Middle East and an Iraq-focused stream.

Al-Sabah Al-Bayyna Al-Jaddidah does not have official political affiliations, but is known to be a pro-Shi'ite media outlet. It also reputed to have somewhat of a socialist bias. Another pro-Shi'ite publication monitored for the purpose of this report is **Al-Adalla**. It is owned by Adil Abdul-Mahdi, current Iraqi Minister of Oil and prominent member of the Supreme Islamic Council party. It has been observed over the course of this research project that it exclusively reported on meetings, statements, and achievements of Shi'a politicians and religious figures.

Shafaq News was founded by a team of Feyli Kurdish journalists. It publishes in both Arabic and Kurdish, and is based in Baghdad. Similarly, **Al-Ittiad** is a pro-Kurdish outlet, owned with the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), one of the two main opposition parties within the KRI. **Al-Mada** has ties with KRG politicians, and was founded by Fakhri Karim, an eminent former member of the communist party. It is published by the Al-Mada Foundation for Media, Culture and Arts, which Fakhri Karim still heads.

Al-Mashriq is a daily newspaper owned by Ghandi Kasnazani, a pro-Allawi Kurd whose brother, Malas Mohammed Kasnazani, was the Iraqi Minister of Trade in the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi. They both recently faced corruption charges.

Al-Sabah is officially owned by a large Iraqi media group, but is financed by the central government in Baghdad. It represents the government's views.

Kurdish media

Publications based in the Kurdistan region are for the most part published primarily in Kurdish. Very few are considered as independent (no political affiliation). Sulaymaniyah-based **Hawlati**, the KRI's first independent newspaper, was founded in 2001. It rarely publishes about minorities. Similarly, **Awene**, also considered as independent and based in Sulaymaniyah, was established in 2006 by a seasoned group of journalists including Asos Ahmed Hardi, notable Kurdish intellectual and founder of Hawlati. It scarcely publishes reports about minorities, every two or three weeks for the period monitored, due to extensive sponsored reporting by external entities, such as Qaiwan Group (a large private sector company) and the parliament. **Nalia Radio & Television (NRT)** is another Sulaymaniyah-based news outlet, was launched in 2010. While some controversy and mystery surrounds the agenda and funding of NRT, it is widely considered as independent. Finally, **Evronews**, another independent Kurdish outlet, is based in Dohuk. It is run by reporters and funded by private donations. It emerged as a print publication only, but has been online since 2014.

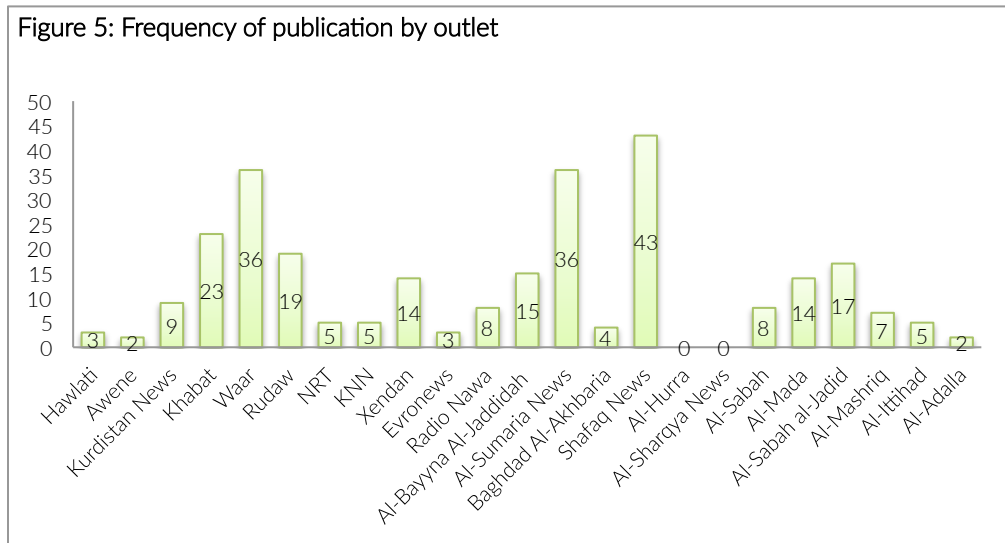
Other media outlets surveyed are known to be affiliated with the PUK, an opposition party whose base is largely concentrated in Sulaymaniyah. Those include **Kurdistan News** and **Xendan**, established in 2010. While most of Xendan employees also hold positions within the PUK, Kurdistan News is the PUK's official media organ. It rarely put out articles about minorities. When it did, they were short and/or it directly copied from another PUK outlet.

Kurdish News Network (KNN) was founded in 2008 as a subsidiary of the Wusha Corporation, which is owned by and affiliated with the Change Movement (Gorran), a major opposition party also based in Sulaymaniyah. The publication was founded by Nawshirwan Mustafa, the leader of Gorran.

Finally, three publications have ties with the party currently in power, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). **Khabat**, the party's official daily newspaper, is based in Erbil. It systemically covers Massoud and Nechirvan Barzani's and the Barzani Charity Organization's activities. In the same sense, it regularly published reports about minorities, mostly about Yezidis, covering all positive KDP activities with the Yezidi community, to balance the flailed KDP policy in the Sinjar area. The paper also wrote about all meetings of high-level government officials with Yezidi and Christian community leaders. **Waar** is based in Dohuk and was established in 2009, with the official support of Massoud Barzani, KDP leader and President of the KRG. It

published reports about minorities almost regularly, habitually covering the problems faced by displaced minorities. It also reported on meetings between non-governmental organizations and Duhok province officials with minorities. **Rudaw**, although it has no official affiliation with the governing party, is also considered as pro-KDP. It is based in Erbil, and there are claims that Nechirvan Barzani, KDP member and current Prime Minister of the KRG, funds the publication.

Figure 5 below shows the number of articles reporting on minorities issued by each of the outlets above for the four months covered by this study.

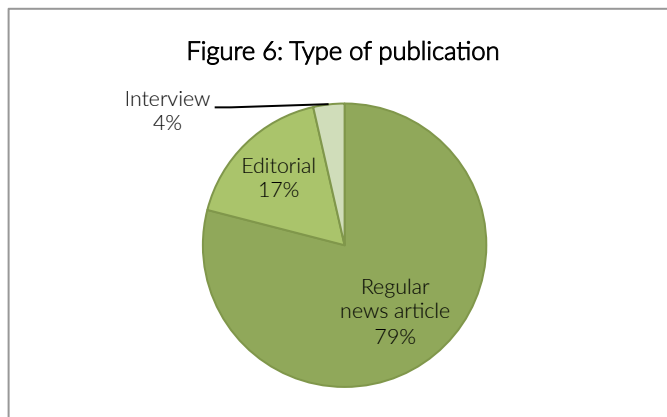


ANALYSIS: THE STATE OF MINORITY PORTRAYAL IN IRAQI AND KURDISH MEDIA

Before proceeding to the analysis, it is important to contextualize the setting of the monitoring period –March to June 2015. First and foremost, DAESH, or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, was then still a powerful actor in the region and retained control over parts of Iraq. This gave rise to exodus-like migratory movements, which would possibly not otherwise have occurred. This especially affected Iraq’s minorities, such as Yazidis and Christians, who happen to be the group’s targets. Consequently, it somehow cemented the belief that “IDP” is an identity, and further entrenches “IDPs” as a group within society, to the extent that they are making similar rights-based claims. War also remained a reality in many areas of Iraq, over the course of those four months. March 2015 sees the beginning of the three-month long siege of Tikrit, led by the ISF. Coalition airstrikes continue to hit large parts of the Ninewa province, where Mosul is located. In April, the offensive to regain Ramadi is launched and successful. Overall, fighting was ongoing on several fronts, in both Iraq and Syria. This special context influences the state of media reporting, once again

because minorities represent DAESH targets, and because it motivates migration, both internally and across boundaries.

With this in mind, this section will start by discussing form-related trends (length, article type, use of photos) on minority reporting throughout the country. Then, it will move on to a widely encompassing content analysis to identify trends observed in reporting depending on outlet location (i.e. Iraqi versus Kurdish media), minority groups, geographic focus, and topics covered. To be sure, this report does not claim that the trends highlighted in this section represent causal or correlative relations. Rather, they are observations, coincidences, that hint at the possibility of causality or correlation. In this sense, they are useful means of orienting further research or, from a practical perspective, drawing attention to potentially harmful journalistic practices.



Form

In general, most publications on minorities took the form of a regular news article, relaying information about a specific current event, as figure 6 shows. Only a few editorials were published, and the tone that those adopted was mostly negative, reporting on IDP influxes within the KRI or responding to allegations that the Peshmerga had destroyed Sunni Arab villages for expansion purposes during the Tikrit offensive. Some interviews were also published, which, on the other hand, conveyed a rather sympathetic perspective on minorities. The interviewees were most often war victims –Christians and Yezidis –relaying their experience, or political figures discussing governmental support for a particular group.

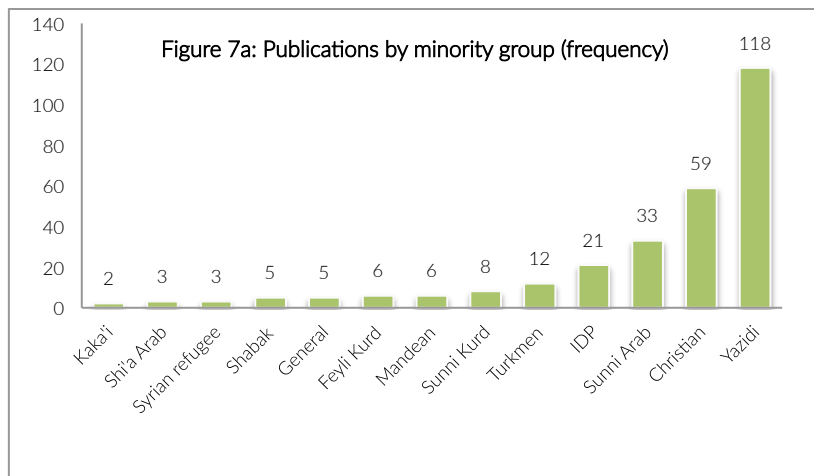
The use of a relevant picture to accompany the article was also an element monitored. It matters to the extent that it highlights the importance granted by the media outlet to the story. It was found that, for 64% of the publications monitored, a relevant image was used to illustrate the story. Interestingly, within KRI media, 55% of the articles reporting on Sunni Arabs did not use a relevant picture, and 55% of those used a negative tone, while the rest used a neutral tone. This trend to some extent mirrors an overall negative perception of Arabs within the KRI and could explain that some outlets do not prioritize stories about this minority group when it comes to the space allotted to the publication. Similarly, 34% of the articles on the Yezidi minority were not visually illustrated. It is also interesting to note that articles discussing certain topics –criminality, history, culture & education, discrimination,

religion and internal displacement –most often used a relevant picture. Only 58% of the articles about war and conflict used a relevant picture. It was noted by the research team that, quite often, the demographics represented in the pictures displayed alongside minority-related articles were children or the elderly.

Content: Minority focus

Exploring reporting trends per minority group can be insightful to understand the dynamics motivating media practices, as well as social context. The present study has indeed found that outlets reported differently on some minority groups, and that distinct trends existed depending on the outlet’s location (Iraq or KRI). This speaks of both political strategies motivating the use of certain discourse frames, as well as prevalent norms informing societal understanding of majority-minority relations. To the extent that the media plays a role in shaping and/or perpetuating those norms, it is important to evaluate minority-specific reporting tendencies.

Across the board, it seems that politically affiliated or owned publications were more inclined to instrumentalize minority reporting for political gains. Within the KRI, the KDP outlets portrayed minorities, mostly Yezidis, Christians, and Turkmen to a much lesser extent, as ‘owned’ by the government. For example, they showed that only the KDP offered them services and hosted them. When it came to the question of forming a minority special force, however, the KDP rejected and opposed the idea. In Iraq, although outlet affiliations seem to be less strong, as was stated above, state-owned outlets also seemed to be pushing for a particular agenda using minority reporting.



A predictable, yet highly relevant, trend noticed is that minorities were commonly addressed in newspapers only if major events connected to them occurred, especially

in the context of war and conflict, as well as cultural and religious events. Furthermore, in certain cases where events involved both “majority issues” and “minority issues,” the former overshadowed the latter in news reports. A telling example is the Anbar crisis, during which Iraqi outlets focused reporting on the operations undertaken by the ISF at the expense of reporting on how minorities were impacted by the crisis. In the same vein, the Mandeian Festival was created and established in March 2015, and three media outlets covered the news. In all cases, however, the focus of reporting was on Iraqi Prime Minister Haider Al-Abadi’s speech congratulating the Mandeian community. It can be argued that this was a missed opportunity to report on the Mandeian identity and the impact of the festival for the community. Overall, therefore, it seems that even in cases where news is specifically relevant to minorities, their perspective is usually not used for reporting purposes.

The Turkmen might be the most noticeable exception to this tendency: their grievances and identity seem to have been somewhat justly represented in publications monitored. They were relatively frequently reported on, mainly (75%) on the topic of their relations with the majority community –either Kurds or Arabs, depending on the outlet –and their political rights claims grounded in an ethos of discrimination. The geographical focus of the publications was largely Kirkuk, a disputed province where Turkmen are heavily represented. In the context of the fight against DAESH, the group has pushed for more independence and recognition, and for the right to defend itself independently. The modern narrative behind the Turkmen identity can be summarized as follows:

“They have called for their community to be better represented demanding that they be regarded as the ‘fourth component’ of Iraq (alongside the Shi’ites, Sunnis and Kurds) in effect turning them from a ‘minority’ into a ‘major group’. However, their lack of success in that regard prompted them to embrace their minority status as the best channel through which to claim their rights.” (Salloum, 2013)

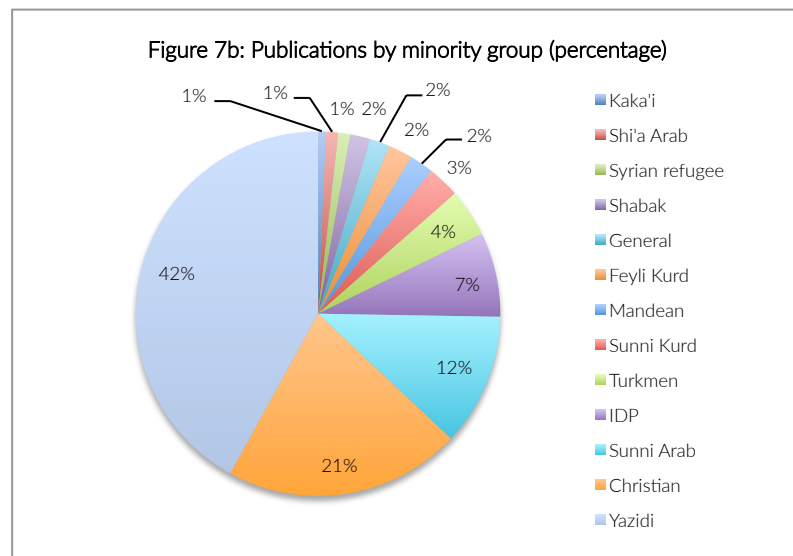
In this sense, it can be said that media reporting, largely neutral, has been fair in its portrayal of issues related to the Turkmen community.

Looking at more of the data per minority group, the most striking observation is that Yezidis and Christians have been reported on to a far greater extent than the other minorities over the course of the period of monitoring. As mentioned above, the context of the war with DAESH and of the migratory movements it engenders explains this disproportionate focus. Out of the 118 articles about Yezidis logged, 68 were published within KRI media. This highlights the fact that the “Yezidi crisis,” which started with the August 2014 DAESH attack on Sinjar, has since then had considerable impact on Iraqi Kurdish society. It also speaks of two important contextual elements. First, following the atrocities committed by DAESH in August 2014, Yezidis received a substantial amount of foreign media attention. Second, as Al-Ittiad, the pro-Kurdish Baghdad-based newspaper, reminds us through its consistent referral to the group as “Kurdish Yezidis,” their political situation remains

controversial. Sinjar is part of the so-called “disputed territories.” Therefore, while some argue that Iraqi Yazidis are ethnically Kurdish, neither do they currently live within the KRI, nor is it clear that they wish to do so. The media attention granted to Yazidis thus seems to serve political purpose more blatantly than in other cases.

This, in part, may also shed light as to why Syrian refugees, who have also been coming into the KRI *en masse* due to conflict with DAESH or other armed groups, were far less reported on (only 2% of articles, from KRI outlets, and neutrally written) than IDPs and Yazidis. Indeed, the political rewards of harboring of refugees from Syria –and highlighting it publicly –do not look as high. On the other hand, interestingly, “refugee issues” has been somehow frequently recorded as a topic. This highlights an important trend in KRI media discourse, especially amongst government-affiliated outlets: the portrayal of the Kurds as “ruling” over minorities, granting them some rights and resources out of goodwill. A striking example of this is found in articles that geographically focus on the province of Dohuk: 70% are about the Yazidi community (all Iraqi nationals), and one fourth of those discuss “refugee issues.” The perpetuation of this causal story is misleading, to the extent that when a refugee-related lexicon is used to discuss the situation of internally displaced minority groups, it obscures the citizenship rights that those groups possess as nationals.

Comparably, Iraqi outlets have reported the most on Yazidis and Christians, also viewed as IDPs, but from a different perspective. The Yazidi crisis has not affected Baghdad to the same extent, and has thus been covered differently in Iraqi media. Indeed, much fewer articles on the topic of internal displacement, and more on relations with the majority community, were published. This underlines the different stakes at play. While Iraqi media concentrated on disputed land and the territorial uncertainties that followed from the crisis, KRI outlets also emphasized the economic burden of harboring the Yazidi community, especially in the province of Dohuk.



Similarly, throughout the country and within Iraq, Christians are the second-most reported on minority group, with 59 articles (21%). This focus can also be explained by the fact that they have been directly and openly targeted by DAESH, especially since the group seized the city of Mosul. Reporting on Christians was, in 49% of the cases, positive. However, all publications displaying a positive tone, with one exception, came from Iraqi media outlets. This suggests a marked discrepancy between the frames, or causal stories, used to depict the Christians in the south and in the KRI. The majority of articles on Christians also focused on either their foreign exile or calls from major religious figures, such as Pope Francis, to protect the Christians on Iraq.

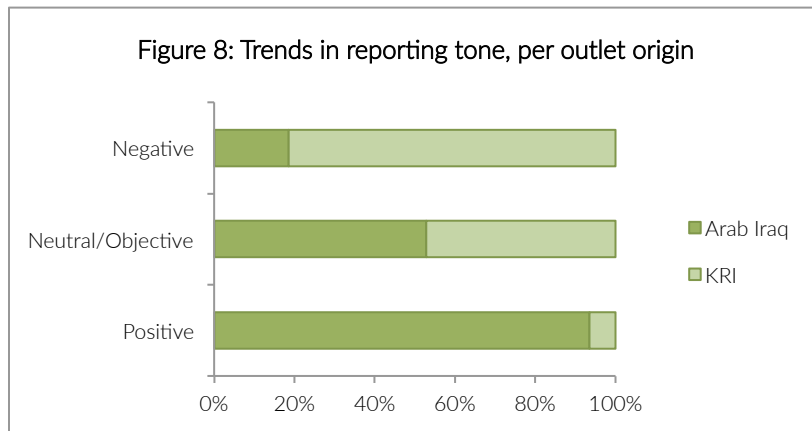
In the case of the group labeled as “IDP,” while articles were mainly neutral (48%), negative tone in reporting was registered chiefly in KRI media and positive tone, exclusively in Iraqi outlets. Within the KRI, while trends on reporting about IDPs can be observed along party lines, overwhelming pessimism is entrenched within the causal stories, which all fall under a “blame game” type of narrative. KDP-affiliated or owned outlets tended to report the financial burden that IDPs represent, highlighting the generosity of the Kurdish government in providing limited services. On the other hand, opposition-affiliated outlets leaned towards featuring stories about the ways through which the central government in Baghdad provided financial support for IDPs within the KRI. Finally, independent publications stood out as very critical of IDP-related policymaking, attacking the KRG for its mismanagement of the issue. They at times also conveyed a populist message, pointing to shifts in employment towards IDPs, at the detriment of Kurds. Overall, key negative glossary revolved around jobs, security, crimes, the spread of diseases and, prostitution.

An attempt at explaining this striking difference in portrayal of IDPs in Iraq and the KRI might lay in socially perpetuated stereotypes, which seem to find an implicit echo in media. Indeed, within the KRI, IDPs is often synonym to “Sunni Arab.” Given the country’s history, Kurds tend to have enduring resentment towards Arabs, which leads them to view IDPs with suspicion. While publications have not outwardly embraced this stereotype, trends in reporting betray a bias. For example, 75% of the articles focusing on the province of Anbar (where several DAESH strongholds are located) were published within the KRI and adopted a negative tone. Conversely, the remaining 25% were published by an Iraqi outlet, Al-Bayyna Al-Jadidah, and positively portrayed Sunni Arabs, calling for reconciliation and explaining that not all Anbar citizens supported DAESH and should not be discriminated against. Likewise, it can be argued that displaced Sunni Arabs have also suffered from conflict over disputed territories –mainly in the province of Kirkuk –and the demographics control policies related to the controversial Article 140 of the Iraqi Constitution, where they

have at times been forcibly returned to unsafe homes. Yet, only 18% of the monitored articles about Kirkuk touched upon the issue.

Content: Tone of reporting

Overall, therefore, we can make the claim that for the period monitored, inverted trends in tone used were observed between Iraqi and KRI outlets. The tone of reporting in Iraqi media was neutral/objective in 55.6% of cases and positive 37.3% of the time, leaving a mere 7.2% of negative articles remaining. This speaks of a trend where, in general, media portrayal of minorities within Iraq is more often favorable than the contrary. Within the KRI, on the contrary, only 3% of the reporting on minorities was positive. 59% was neutral and 36%, negative, as figure 8 below illustrates.



Kurds were not very frequently reported on in Iraqi media –only eight articles in total. Most of them were written in a neutral tone, and the topic most often addressed was relations with the majority community. Typically, they covered disputes between the central government and the KRG about oil revenues and the budget. Kurdish independence and its implications were also addressed. Namely, commenting on the KRG’s call for the resignation of Foreign Affairs Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari, Baghdad Al-Sumaria published a quote by Muqtada al-Sadr’s spokesperson, a prominent Iraqi Shi’ite religious leader, warning the Kurds about “the dangers of getting independence.”

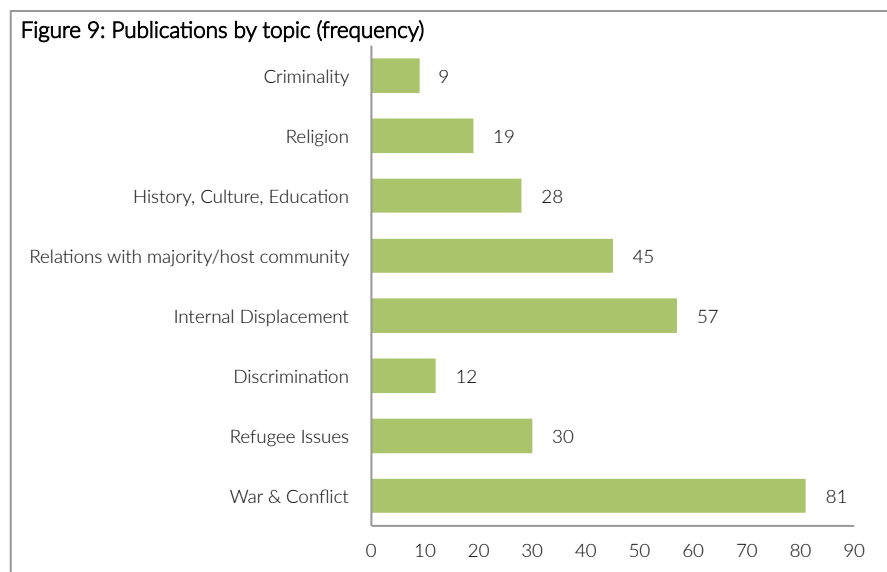
Some minorities, such as the Mandeans, the Shabak, the Kaka’i, and the Feyli Kurds only appear sporadically and infrequently in the media (six and two articles, respectively), usually when outlets report on politicians acknowledging the minority groups’ cultural or religious celebrations. Xendan also reported on the Kaka’i request for a parliamentary quota in the next KRG election, emphasizing the accommodating response of the Kurdish Speaker of Parliament. For all that, it is important to recall, some of Iraq’s minorities have not even been mentioned once during the period

studied. Examples of those would be the Baha'i, the Ahwazi, the Bedouins, or the Iraqis of African decent.

In the same vein, outlets only rarely reported on Shi'a Arabs (1% or three articles in total) and mainly did so negatively, with only one positive story. Those articles discussed the involvement of Shi'a militias in the fight against DAESH, and highlighted Shi'a grievances against the stance of some Sunni politicians, referring particularly to Atheel Al-Nujaifi (Sunni Governor of the Ninewa province). Given that Shi'a Arabs make up the most populous group in Iraq, the question as to why their group's media presence is so limited would certainly deserve more attention.

Content: Topics covered

On another level, some conclusions can also be drawn from an analysis of the data per topic covered. Considering the sociopolitical context of the period over which this report's research was conducted, it is not surprising to note that the two most frequently recorded topics for articles on minorities were war and conflict (29%) and internal displacement (16%), as figure 9 shows. In this sense, it seems that had it not been for some minority groups' unfortunate place in DAESH's rationale, and the fighting that ensued from this rationale, media outlets might have been less interested in reporting on them. Furthermore, 41% of the articles on war and conflict and 21% of the articles on internal displacement adopted a negative tone vis-à-vis the minority group reported on. To the extent that minority groups have suffered extensively from attacks, fighting, and displacement, it is thought provoking to note the persistence of negative framing in some publications.

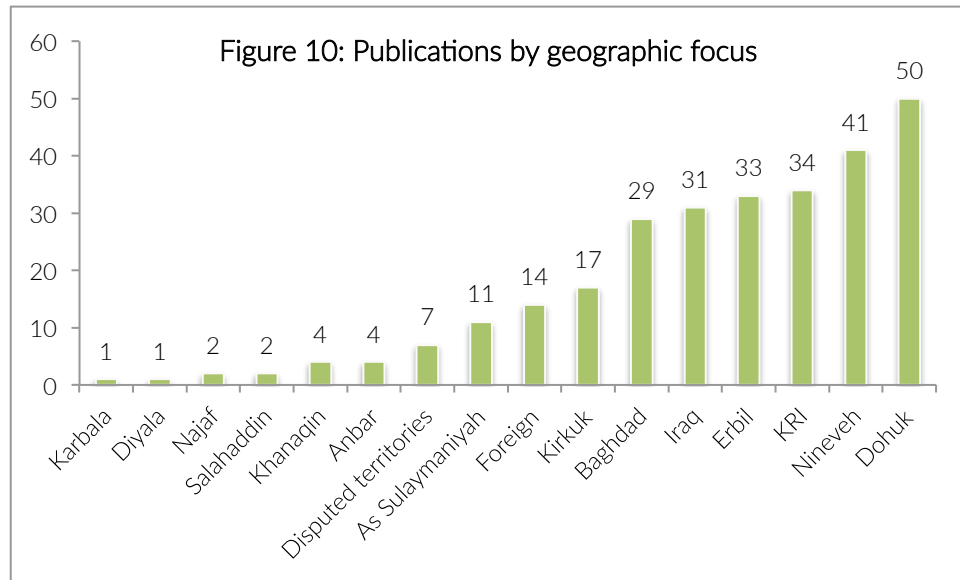


Very little attention was devoted to history, culture, and education, and religion (10% and 7% of all articles monitored, respectively). In a context where several ethno-religious celebrations or historical remembrance events occurred over the research time frame, it can be argued that reporting opportunities, which could have contributed to a better understanding and more accurate portrayal of minorities within society, were missed. Most often, when those events occurred, reporters wrote about mainstream politicians public speeches acknowledging the minority. Those acknowledgements usually used a praiseful glossary, highlighting the importance of a given minority for Iraq. For example, Prime Minister Al-Abadi stated that the Mandeans were parts and parcel of Iraq's "social fabric." In the same fashion, several politicians, such as Baha Al-Araji, an influential member of the Iraqi National Assembly, publicly spoke at the occasion of Easter, claiming that Christians were essential to Iraq's landscape.

The context of the war with DAESH also tainted articles on minority groups' relations with the majority/host community. In Iraq, politicians –most notably Prime Minister Al-Abadi –gave speeches calling for inter-cultural and inter-religious reconciliation. He called the advancement of Iraq "a collective responsibility," and highlighted the fact that citizens of Anbar and Ramadi should not be held responsible for the actions of DAESH. Articles then reported positively on Baghdad's response to the refugee crisis and stabilization strategy.

Content: Geographic focus

An interesting observation coming out of organizing the data by geographic focus is the differences in framing depending on, once again, outlet origin. It can be noted that Iraqi media outlets published 86% of the articles using the "disputed territories" lexicon. Conversely, KRI media outlets referred to the provinces directly in their publications -71% of the articles on Ninewa were found in Kurdish media, for example. Furthermore, as was mentioned above, the glossary used in articles about Anbar province in Kurdish media differed vastly from that used in Iraqi media, portraying IDPs from that area in contrasting ways. An important emphasis on Dohuk province (33%), an area relatively close to some active DAESH frontlines, where several IDP and refugee camps are located, amongst KRI publications also highlights the "Kurdish savior" causal story disseminated in the media, albeit to varying extents (depending on political affiliations).



CONCLUSIONS

This present report was an attempt at depicting media reporting trends on ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities living in Iraq, over a determined timeframe (March-June 2015). By doing so, it pointed to stereotypes and myth embedded in the causal stories constructed by different outlets and the societies within which they exist. In a country as diverse as Iraq, issues of framing and images are of importance in many respects. First, ensuring that reporting is relatively free of clichés –be they harmful or not –is key to an inclusive and safe state, where communities coexist peacefully. Second, the perpetuation of stereotypes can lead to normative shifts, which in turn may motivate irrational or sub-optimal political and economic deeds.

How is media within Iraq depicting minorities? Can “minorities” be treated as a general group, or do causal stories differ depending on the minority? Are there differences in framing between Kurdish and Arabic media? How do political and/or sectarian affiliations affect reporting? Those questions were, as mentioned above, central to the research presented in this report. It was found that, in general, while stereotyping is not blatant in media, more subtle practices –referred to as “trends” established through the observation of quantitative data –could in fact be identified. Most significantly, it was found that publications on minorities usually took the form of regular news reports, as opposed to editorials (or other opinion pieces) and interviews. In the same sense, more than half of those news reports did not present a relevant picture to illustrate. Both those observations suggest that, in many instances, minorities do not represent a prime topic for news outlets. With regards to groups reported on, Yazidis, Christians, and IDPs were primarily represented. As mentioned, this is probably explained by the context of the war with DAESH. In the same sense, topics most frequently written on were “war and conflict” and

“internal displacement.” Some minority groups were either reported in 1-3% of the articles monitored, or not at all. While it makes sense that current event orient the substance of reporting, it is a concern that some groups, who remain an integral part of Iraq’s ethno-religious landscape, are forgotten in the news. Party affiliation has also been identified as a potential issue. It seemed that outlets with political biases –officials or not –tended to report news in ways that served a political agenda, which is detrimental to the portrayal of certain minority groups and can lead to instrumental reporting. On this matter, with regards to marked differences in reporting trends between Iraqi and Kurdish outlets, it seems that this question of bias was more saliently observable within the KRI. Moreover, the data displayed an inversed trend in general reporting tone in Iraq and the KRI. In Iraq, media portrayal of minorities is more often favorable than the contrary. On the other hand, KRI outlets publications tended to be more negative than positive. Both the fact that Kurds are themselves a minority within Iraq and the region, and that fewer Kurdish outlets are deemed independent, could provide explanations for those observations.

It is hoped, modestly, that those conclusions will provide incentive and suggestions for further research, as well as orientation for media practices training within Iraq. There seems to be a need for the development of a stronger, more independent, Fourth Estate if Iraq and the KRI are to achieve goals of stability through inclusive democratic advancement. In the words of Iraq’s foremost expert on minorities, access to “public media [is the only way for minorities] to [effectively] communicate their feelings and ideas about exclusion and marginalization policies, and [...] to express sufferings and dreams” (Salloum, 2013).

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APPENDIX A – MEDIA RESEARCH PROTOCOL

The following research protocol is mainly based on materials produced by the European Union financed project "In other words" - Web Observatory and Review, for Discrimination Alerts and Stereotypes Deconstruction.

<http://www.inotherwords-project.eu>

Questionnaire for research in Arab and Kurdish Iraq written media on portrayal of minorities

Date:

Name of newspaper/website:

Name of online news agency:

Title of article:

Type of article:

- Article
- Editorial
- Interview
- Portrait
- Article part of a series
- Letter written by a reader

Page in which the article is:

Section in which the article is:

- News
- Economy and finance
- Culture
- Social life
- Religion
- Sport
- Other. Which?

Length of the article:

Name of journalist/editor/reader:

On which minority group/member of minority group does the article report about:

- Christian
- Shi'a Muslim
- Yezidi
- Kaka'i
- Turkmen
- Baha'i
- Shabak
- Black people
- Arab Iraqis (in the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan)
- Kurds (in Arab Iraq)
- Other. Which?

What is the subject of the article about?

- Internal displacement
- War and conflict
- Work and employment
- Religion
- Criminality
- Culture, education and history
- Relation with majority community
- Discrimination

The article is:

- Positive
- Negative
- Objective and neutral
- Other. What?

Whose opinion and perspective is presented in the article?

- The interviewee. Is he/she a public figure, represent an official institution? If yes, which?
- The journalist
- The editor
- The reader
- Other. Who?

How is the language used in the article?

- Neutral and correct
- Offensive and rude
- Promoting discrimination
- Inciting hate
- Using common stereotypes

Report as written concrete example of stereotypes/discrimination/hate speech/:

Are "nicknames" describing minorities used?

- Yes. Which?
- No

Is there a picture with the article?

- Yes
- No

Is the picture related to the content of the article?

- Yes
- No. Why?

Overall comments to the article:

APPENDIX B – LIST OF MEDIA OUTLET SURVEYED

Publications for media survey in Kurdish Iraq

Hawlati, daily
Awene, weekly
Kurdistan-e News, daily
Khabat, daily
War, daily newspaper and online news agency
Avro, newspaper, agency, and magazine
Nawa, online news agency
KNN, online news agency
NRT, online news agency
Rudaw, online news agency

Publications for media survey in Iraq

Al-Sabah, daily
Al-Mada, daily
As-Sabah al-Jadid, daily
Al-Mashraq, daily
Al-Ittihad, daily
Khabat, daily
Al-Adalla, daily
Al-Bayna, daily
Baghdad, daily
Al-Sumariyya, online news agency
Al-Sharquiya, online news agency
Shafaq News, online news agency
Al-Hurra, website

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