

KIRKUK

NCCI Governorate Profile

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Geography

Situated in northern Iraq, Kirkuk is located between the Zagros Mountains in the northeast, the Lower Zab and Tigris rivers in the west, the Hamreen Mountains in the south, and the Sirwan (or Diyala) river in the southwest. Kirkuk is also approximately 250 kilometres (155 miles) from Baghdad. The governorate is relatively small, covering 9,679 km², or 2.2% of Iraq.

Iraq's northeastern highlands begin in southern Kirkuk and extend towards the Iraqi borders with Iran and Turkey. Much of Kirkuk is characterized as arable land. Agriculture provides essential sustenance and income for most of the governorate's residents.

In 2007, about 572,080 residents lived in Kirkuk city, the capital, according to World Food Programme estimates. The other three districts of Kirkuk are Daquq, Al-Hawiga and Dibis.

Population

The exact demographic composition of Kirkuk is unknown today. No comprehensive census has been conducted in Kirkuk since the 2003 US-led invasion of Iraq. In 2007, the Iraqi government estimated the population of Kirkuk at 902,019, or about 3% of Iraq's total population. Gender distribution is equal (50% male/50% female) in the governorate. Kirkuk is also highly urbanized with estimates that only 31% of its residents live in rural areas.

While many Kurds have returned to Kirkuk after decades of displacement, local authorities are not sure whether Kurdish or Arab residents are the majority. Some Arab residents of Kirkuk are originally from southern Iraq. Particularly in the 1970s, many Arabs resettled in the governorate as a result of benefits and incentives offered by the Ba'ath regime. Turkmen, Assyrians and Armenians also constitute smaller minorities in the governorate.

Historical Overview

Kirkuk's archaeological remains date back 5,000 years and Kirkuk is allegedly the oldest site of continuous human occupation in modern day Iraq. Kirkuk has historically been considered an area of significant commercial opportunity, located at a crossroads of trade between Iran, Turkey and Syria. Accordingly, Kirkuk was the site of frequent battles between the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Median empires and other successive empires that wished to gain hegemony in this strategic zone. Islam reached the area in the 7th century AD.

Kurds were the predominant ethnic group in present day Kirkuk until the late 20th century, but a number of minorities have also inhabited the area for hundreds of years. The Turkmen began migrating to Kirkuk during the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, and have comprised a significant ethnic minority since about 1055. Arabs and Assyrians also constituted small minorities in this multi-ethnic area.

Kirkuk experienced another wave of Turkmen migration when it became part of the Mosul Wilayet in the Ottoman Empire. Kurds in the Mosul Wilayet initiated some militant and political steps towards establishing more autonomy for the Kurdish Ottoman entity but these efforts were interrupted when the British forces entered in 1918. Representatives of Kirkuk opposed integration of the Ottoman Wilayet into Mesopotamia. Despite this objection, an official decree from the League of Nations included Kirkuk in the British Mandate of Mesopotamia in 1924.

Pre-2003

Seven years after the discovery of a major oil gusher at Baba Gugur, the European-owned Iraq Petroleum Company (IPC) completed construction of Kirkuk's first oil field by 1934. The local Kurds and Turkmen received modest compensation for oil extraction under foreign auspice. IPC retained a virtual monopoly on all oil exploration in Iraq until the 1960s.

In 1972, the Ba'ath government nationalized oil companies in Iraq. As a majority in Kirkuk but a minority in great Iraq with poor representation in the central government, the Kurds saw little benefits from oil nationalization. The 1970s were an especially tumultuous period for Kirkuk and other northern areas with Kurdish majorities. The central government redrew boundaries and renamed many governorates, dividing Kirkuk into two parts. One part was given the name "At-Ta'mim," meaning "nationalization" in Arabic. The new boundaries established an Arab majority in that area.

Successive Iraqi governments discriminated against the Kurds. Saddam Hussein's campaign of "Arabization" most profoundly transformed Kirkuk. Between 1970 and 2003, hundreds of thousands of Kurdish Iraqis were expelled to other Kurdish areas in the north while Arab Iraqis resettled in Kirkuk with the national government's support.

Between 1986 and 1989, the central Iraqi government organized an ethnic cleansing campaign called Al-Anfal ("The Spoils of War") against Iraqi Kurds. Amnesty International estimates that 182,000 civilian Kurds were killed by firing squads, chemical weapons, and aerial bombardments. Thousands of Kurds were forcibly expelled from areas like Kirkuk. After the First Gulf War and Kurdish rebellions in 1991, an additional 150,000 Kurds were forcibly evicted from Kirkuk.

Post-2003

Following the American-led invasion in 2003, the Kurdish Peshmerga forces briefly occupied Kirkuk and it appeared that the governorate might become an entity of the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). However, the Kurdish occupation conflicted with a main objective of the US invasion: capturing and securing the oil fields in Kirkuk. MNF-I forcibly withdrew Kurdish forces from the governorate, accusing them of disconcerting Iraqi Arabs who had taken up residence in the area in past decades. Yet since 2003, more than 100,000 Kurds have settled in Kirkuk. The KRG government reportedly subsidizes returnees' relocation expenses.

Lingering animosities between the Erbil-based Kurdish political party (Kurdish Democratic Party) and the Sulaymaniyah-based Kurdish political party (Patriotic Union of Kurdistan) in Kirkuk's governmental institutions have led to poor governance and service delivery. Since 2005, there have been no elections in Kirkuk, largely due to violence and political stalemate. Many residents of Kirkuk allege that corruption and a refusal to compromise among public officials is delaying the restoration of Kirkuk's public utilities and dilapidated infrastructure.

Kirkuk is simultaneously considered the cultural capital of Kurds and Iraqi nationalists, placing it at the centre of considerable controversy. Politicians often refer to Kirkuk as "Little Iraq" because they believe that the governorate is a microcosm of Iraq, representing major conflicts between the nation's diverse communities.

There is a national political impasse concerning the possible designation of Kirkuk as part of Iraqi Kurdistan. The fate of Kirkuk remains uncertain as the governorate is characterized with "indeterminate status." Kurds may refer to Kirkuk city as the "Jerusalem of Kurdistan." Meanwhile, many Arabs, Turkmen and Assyrian Christians claim that Kurdish authorities in Kirkuk use tactics including murder, kidnapping and physical intimidation to force minorities to leave the governorate and thereby alter the area's demographic composition.

Tensions over the disputed territory of Kirkuk are further aggravated by periodic insurgent attacks that target vulnerable pipelines. Kirkuk is currently the second largest oil-producing governorate. The 970-kilometer Kirkuk-Ceyhan oil field is Iraq's largest crude oil export line. From this location, at least 500,000 barrels of oil are pumped towards Turkey daily.

In 2004, the Interim Iraqi Constitution adopted Article 140 concerning the "normalization" of Kirkuk. It elaborates upon a three-step process that was to be completed by December 2007: "reversing previous Arabization policies" and resettling Kurdish returnees, conducting a census to ascertain demographic composition, and holding a referendum on integration of Kirkuk into Iraqi Kurdistan by December 2007.

Nearly three years later, the referendum has been repeatedly postponed. Article 140 remains at a deadlock in Baghdad and non-Kurdish opposition to implementing Article 140 is threatening to further destabilize the area. Tension is further aggravated as Kurdish authorities and security forces establish authority and visibility throughout Kirkuk. This has forced many non-Kurds into displacement and angered the Turkmen and Arab populations in particular.

As Iraqi MPs continue to stall in implementing the census described in Article 140, Kirkuk's demographic composition remains rather speculative. Despite decades of displacement prior to 2003, some analysts estimate that Kurds are now a majority in Kirkuk, constituting slightly more than 50% of the total population; however, this is not officially confirmed.

Arab residents of Kirkuk, many of whom have origins in southern Iraq, are still a formidable demographic bloc. However, since 2003, thousands of Arabs have fled Kirkuk, many without any belongings. They claim that the Kurdish police and military officers are forcibly expelling Arabs from their homes in order to alter the governorate's demographics and ensure that any future census or referendum would cede sovereignty to the Kurds.

Kirkuk is a flashpoint on the "trigger line" boundary stretching from Iran to Syria, which generally separates Arab and Kurdish forces. When concerns about Kirkuk's security resurfaced in January 2010, MNF-I introduced the concept of Combined Security Forces in Kirkuk and other governorates on the Arab-Kurdish divide. In these units, Iraqi soldiers and police officers, American soldiers, and Kurdish soldiers from the Peshmerga militia patrol and fight together.

Most recently, the UN introduced a new proposition: creating a "special status" for Kirkuk, which would last for up to ten years. Effectively, this plan would permit political autonomy within Kirkuk, but it would prevent the KRG's desired annexation of the governorate. Washington, Ankara, and other geopolitical entities in opposition to an independent Kurdish entity appear to support this UN proposal.

Armed Groups

Since the US-led invasion in 2003, the main armed group found in Kirkuk was Al-Qaida in Iraq (AQI), which had spread bases throughout the country. There were also the Peshmerga forces and Al-Asayesh forces (Kurdish groups), which are considered government troops belonging to the Kurdistan region (KRG). There are no armed Turkmen militias or Shiite militias in Kirkuk.

In 2005, Al-Qaida began targeting the public without exception—committing acts of terrorism. Most of AQI’s members are Ba’athists, uprooted Iraqis, or terrorists from outside Iraq (especially from Syria and Saudi Arabia). AQI’s position is currently besieged as its members are pursued in remote areas that are not well-protected. Although Kirkuk was once a hotspot for terrorism, now there are controlled points that are free of armed groups. AQI’s operations in Kirkuk remain limited and target mainly civilians; AQI does not pose a significant threat to the local or national governments in this province.

The Sunni Sahwa (Awakening) forces hope to integrate with the governmental forces and play a big role in restoring security to areas—such as Kirkuk—that have been plagued with terrorism in the past. A large number of Sahwa forces have integrated with the governmental forces, but there are still a large number of Sahwa forces that have not yet integrated.

There is a lot of opposition between the politicians and the Kurdish parties in terms of the Iraqi Security Forces. The Iraqi government has sent no more than 1,000 soldiers to Kirkuk in more than a year, but the presence of Iraqi police forces is strong in comparison with other governorates.

There is an office for Moqtada al-Sadr and his forces in Kirkuk. However, Al-Sadr supporters do not carry out offensive operations or any activities that oppose the national or local government in Kirkuk.

Perhmerga groups belonging to Kurdistan are not very welcomed by local Arab and Turkmen residents. The Peshmerga constitutes the main security forces for Kurdistan and answers to the Ministry for the Kurdish Peshmerga. In Kirkuk, they carry out regular security operations to protect the people and political parties.

Al-Asayesh forces are not welcome by the local people—and even many Kurds—in Kirkuk, as they are attached to a specific party’s agenda. Al-Asayesh is overseen by the Interior Ministry in Kurdistan. In Kirkuk, Al-Asayesh has bases inside and outside of the city center. Until 2009, Al-Asayesh carried out raids and arrests, sometimes without apparent or legitimate cause. Then, Al-Asayesh was barred from initiating any unauthorized operations, and can only begin an operation by order of a judge. The local government has recently carried out many investigations against individuals in Al-Asayesh, further tarnishing the image of Al-Asayesh and making its forces unwanted outcasts in Kirkuk.

Provincial Council

	Name	Position	Work Number
1	Abdul Al-Rahman Mustafa	Governor	N/A
2	Rakan Saed Ali Jubouri	Deputy Governor	07701309711
3	Rizkar Ali Hamu Jan	Council President	07701524036
4	Ribawar Faik Abdul Majid	Council Vice President	07701324793
5	Ibrahim Khalil Rashid	Chairperson of the Economic and Financial Committee	07701317292
6	Babikar Sadiq	Chairperson of the Resources and Human Rights Committee	07701572851
7	Barween Muhammed Amin	Chairperson of the Recruitment/Human Resources Committee	07701371802
8	Barhan Mizhar Al-Asi	Chairperson of the Agricultural Committee	07701302677
9	Hala Noor Al-Din	Chairperson of the Legal Committee	07701308863
10	Hussein Toran Baha Al-Din	Chairperson of Social and Religious Affairs	07701327997

		Committee	
11	Tahasin Muhammed Ali	Chairperson of the Appointments Committee	07701575976
12	Torkan Shukr Ayob	Relations/Affairs	07701321111

Number of members in the council: 41

Council coalitions and the number of their seats in the council:

- a) Kirkuk Fraternity List (26)
- b) Iraqi Republic Gathering List (6)
- c) Iraqi Turkmen List (8)
- d) Islamic Iraqi Alliance (1)

Humanitarian Overview

The national political stalemate over the status of Kirkuk complicates security provisions and public service delivery.

The UN's Inter Agency Analysis Unit (IAU) estimates that there were more than 43,000 IDPs in Kirkuk in 2009. In 2009, 948 returnees to Kirkuk were officially registered. Many Kurds who have resettled in Kirkuk since 2003 are squatters and they live in tent settlements. Without legal residence or private property, these IDPs are at high risk for poor service delivery.

Ongoing displacement and the lack of a political solution in Kirkuk are sources of frustration that further threaten the region's security. In IOM's assessment of approximately 12,000 IDP households in Kirkuk, it appears that the greatest obstacles facing IDPs in the area include a lack of food (94%), shelter (81%) and water (50%). Furthermore, only 1% of IDP households/families have an employed member to help provide for their needs.

Electricity shortages most acutely affect Al-Hawiga district. More than 60% of households in this district have at least 11 hours of power cuts a day, or are not connected to the national electricity grid.

Members of the governorate's Provincial Council have commented that oil reserves sometimes negatively impact local residents' services like the electrical supply. A significant proportion of the governorate's electricity is diverted to oil extraction and pumping rather than residential areas. The generally poor electrical supply also negatively impacts Kirkuk's water supply in many areas. More than 53% of households in Daquq district are not connected to the general water network.

16% of individuals in Kirkuk district suffer from a chronic disease, well above the national average. Less than 13% of individuals have a chronic disease in the rest of the governorate. Chronic malnutrition in children under five years of age ranges between 11% and 17% in Kirkuk's four districts.

Kirkuk is a relatively rich province, particular in terms of natural resources, but many residents do not benefit from this wealth. Male unemployment in Kirkuk rests at 8% and female unemployment is estimated at 9%, which are relatively low rates for Iraq. Literacy rates in Kirkuk are also above the national average. However, there is significant variation between the province's districts. Daquq and Al-Hawiga are the poorest districts in Kirkuk. Education is particularly poor in Daquq district. 72% of women and 46% of men have less than a primary education (less than ten years of formal schooling)—which is almost double the national rate and Kirkuk's average.

Presence of NGOs

According to NCCI's NGO Mapping Survey, there were about 28 NGOs in Kirkuk when the area was surveyed in 2010. Most of these NGOs were established between 2003-2004. Approximately half of these NGOs focused on three sectors: human rights, children's rights, and women's rights. The

remaining NGOs generally work in the sectors of education, economical development and capacity building. Very few NGOs address issues specific to IDPs and refugees.

These NGOs identified a lack of community understanding of the role of NGOs, weak cooperation from authorities, and a lack of sufficient funding as the biggest difficulties facing them. In terms of what NGO leaders would most like to develop and improve, the priorities in Kirkuk are as follows: NGO management, project management (which includes proposal writing, project cycle management, monitoring & evaluation), networking and advocacy skills, and a capacity to abide by international humanitarian and NGO principles.

Culture

The three largest ethnicities in Kirkuk are Kurdish, Arab and Turkmen. Despite some ethnic tension, particularly in recent years, there is not a lot of separation between different ethnicities. Therefore, many traditions and habits are mixed and integrated between the various ethnicities; it is not always easy to classify or separate distinctive cultural patterns in Kirkuk based on any set of criteria. Moreover, each ethnicity has cultural divisions and variation based on urban and rural differences. The follow descriptions are generalized, and meant to provide a basic overview of Kirkuk's cultural diversity.

Arab villagers are mainly located in the areas of Al-Hwajeh, Al-Riyadh, and Zabbin Kirkuk. They traditionally wear the dishdasha, jaffya and kall. Rural and urban Arabs have a reputation for generosity and hospitality. One of their main meals is the habeat, a special meat dish.

Kurdish villagers are mainly located in the following areas: Chuan, Kara Anger, Debs, Lilan, Khalo Bazian and Salih. They traditionally wear a Kurdish uniform, which includes a shyrwal and kat. The most famous Kurdish meals are sawu (bulgur), kishkeh and tarkhineh. The most significant holiday for the Kurds is the Feast of Norouz, which occurs on the 21st of March each year; it is considered the Kurdish New Year.

The Turkman villagers are generally located in the region of Taza. Some of their most popular meals include dolmeh and biryani.

Further Reading

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