Introduction: The Kurds as Barrier or Key to Democratization

David Romano and Mehmet Gurses

This edited volume contains a collection of essays from many of the most well-known, accomplished scholars working on the Kurdish issue and questions of democratization. It is divided into four sections. Section I focuses on the Kurds and barriers to democratization and democratic deficits in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Section II, "Democracy in Divided Societies," turns to existing academic literature, theories, and examples of multiethnic societies and democratic transitions for guidance. Section III, "The Kurds and Democratization," attempts to place more emphasis on Kurdish demands and the possibilities for democratization in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. The final, fourth section of the volume draws readers' attention to the transborder nature of the Kurdish issue and how events in South, North, West, and East Kurdistan all impact each other.

Contributors to the first section of the volume, "Authoritarianism and the Kurds," were asked to focus on the ways in which the Kurdish issue in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, or Syria was securitized and served to hinder democratization. All four contributors to this section were thus asked to focus a bit more on the negative side of a complex, multifaceted issue. Chapter 1, by Michael Gunter, therefore concentrates on the "deep state" in Turkey, and how until quite recently an unelected shadow state of elites in that country prevented any democratic reforms that might recognize the Kurds, return to them their rights, and truly incorporate them into the political system. Chapter 2, by Ozum Yesiltas, focuses on how Arab nationalists there viewed any compromise with the Kurds as the beginning of a slippery slope toward Kurdish secession, leading to a long history of authoritarian repression and

even genocidal policies from Baghdad. Chapter 3, by Gareth Stansfield, examines the difficult history of Kurds in Iran, struggling against the construction of a Persian "dominant nation" and seeing their attempts to carve out a separate space of their own crushed. Chapter 4 of this section, by Eva Savelsberg, explains how Kurds in Syria remained largely peripheral to the main political dynamic there. Although the ongoing civil war in Syria offered Syrian Kurds the opportunity to seize some measure of freedom from central authorities, Savelsberg offers a pessimistic outlook regarding the extent to which the dominant Kurdish political parties there currently offer a democratic alternative.

The contributors to Section II, "Democracy in Divided Societies," were each asked to do something different. David Mason (chapter 5) applies his considerable theoretical knowledge of civil wars, insurgencies, and post-conflict democratization to the Kurdish issue. As an experienced scholar whose work has until now not focused on the Kurds, he looks at the issue from a more general, comparative perspective, drawing our attention to the forest rather than the trees. In the same vein, John Booth (chapter 6) utilizes his expertise on insurgencies and democratization in Latin America to build a comparison to the Kurdish issue in Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria. Despite important differences between Latin America and the Middle East, civil conflict in many Latin American states involved disenfranchised minorities. These minorities, depending on their size and cohesion, can play and have played a constructive role in democratization and the eventual settlement of these conflicts; Booth provides examples of how. Chapter 7 of this section, by Nicole F. Watts, focuses on the Kurdistan Autonomous Region of Iraq. The first to attain significant levels of self-determination, the Iraqi Kurds offer a fascinating example of what used to be an imaginary scenario. Watts investigates the extent to which autonomous Kurdish rule is translating into democracy for the people of South Kurdistan, given that autonomy, self-rule, and even independent statehood are by no means synonymous with "freedom" or "democratization."

The contributors to Section III of the volume, " The Kurds and Democratization," were asked to take a more optimistic view. Specifically, they were tasked with examining Kurdish demands in their respective states, how these might be accommodated, and how these demands might fit into or even promote democratization in general. Gunes Murat Tezcur (chapter 8) thus examines the ebb and flow of armed conflict between Kurdish insurgents and the Turkish state, offering insights into the ways such conflict might end in democratic accommodation. David Romano (chapter 9) focuses on the Iraqi Kurds' key role in drawing up the country's 2005 Constitution and argues that Kurdish demands for extensive decentralization and power

sharing offer the best way to keep Iraq together and democratic. Nader Entessar (chapter 10) examines the complex place of the Kurds and other minorities in the Iranian political system, questioning the extent to which the Kurds and others might find common cause with Iranian reformists and successfully democratize Iran in the face of opposition from hardliners in the country. Robert Lowe (chapter 11) looks at Kurdish gains in the midst of the civil war raging in Syria. Although he too draws our attention to the questionable democratic credentials of the leading Syrian Kurdish party, he argues that events in Syria at least offer the first serious possibility of democratic change there—which he concludes cannot occur without accommodating Kurdish identity and demands in some way.

The final, fourth part of this volume, "Regional Issues," looks at the transnational nature of the Kurdish issue. No state's "Kurdish issue" exists in a vacuum. The borders dividing Kurdistan were always witness to unauthorized movements of people, goods, and ideas. In today's increasingly globalized world, that movement seems only to have increased. So just as the Arab Spring revolution in Tunisia led to strong reverberations across the Arab world, Kurdish gains in one part of Kurdistan (South/Iraqi Kurdistan in particular) can greatly impact Kurdish communities in neighboring states. When appropriate, the contributors to this section examine this "contagion effect." In the case of chapter 12 by Mehmet Gurses, the focus revolves around the role Iraqi Kurds play in a resolution of the Kurdish conflict in Turkey. Gurses begins by offering robust evidence for the positive role that the Iraqi Kurdish autonomous region can play in helping to democratize neighboring states with significant Kurdish minorities. He does so by providing statistical evidence about what kinds of balances of power lead to enduring conflict resolution, and then showing how the existence of the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq affects the balance of power in Turkey. Ofra Bengio (chapter 13) then concludes the volume's collection of essays with a look at how recent changes in the Middle East created a truly revolutionary situation for the Kurds. Although the full extent of the changes remains indeterminate, Bengio analyzes the direction events seem to be taking the Kurds and the states in which they reside.

The Background and Context of the Kurdish Issue in the Middle East

In Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, central governments historically pursued mono-nationalist ideologies and hence a state policy of repressing Kurdish identity. The official, constructed national identities of all four states were based on Turkish, Persian, or Arab national ethnicity. This in itself is not

particularly surprising, since similar approaches underpinned even supposedly "civic" states in the West. Most states, in fact, developed a *staatsvolk*—a dominant national group that largely controlled the state and determined the state's identity as a reflection of itself. How this dominant nation related to others varied across time and space, however.[1] The French Republic based itself on a national identity derived from the French language and culture, or, broadly speaking, the identity of the Franks (originally from the Loire and Parisian regions). The United States and Australia were based on white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant ethnicities, while Canada eventually built itself on two official founding nations—English and French. Those hailing from other ethnic groups could eventually gain citizenship in these states (hence the designation of "civic nationalism"), but they would remain outsiders to the extent that they failed to fully adopt the language, culture, religion, and other context-dependent characteristics of the official, more recognized nation. State policy would also support, glorify, and commemorate the official-dominant ethnic group's symbols, history, culture, and language while ignoring others.

France, the archetype of the "civic" nationalism, also became the most well-known example of state-led, aggressive assimilation policies. At the time of the French Revolution in 1789, less than half of all "Frenchmen" spoke French.[2] Today, virtually all of France's population speaks French and identifies as French, although significant outsiders remain among the Basques, Bretons, and Corsicans. While the official rhetoric of France and most other modern states today insists that anyone born within the confines of the state's borders belongs to the nation, some clearly belong more than others.[3]

The immediate post-World War I period saw the emergence of the modern Turkish and Persian states out of the ashes of the Ottoman and Safavid empires. It also witnessed the colonial creation of the completely new states of Iraq and Syria. The new state elites of all four countries attempted, to varying degrees, to follow what can be described as the national strategy of the French Republic. Whether basing the new state upon the language, culture, and constructed history of the Turkish, Persian, or Arab (in the case of both Iraq and Syria) national identities, they all pursued similar assimilationist policies toward other ethnic groups that found themselves within their new borders after World War I. For Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, the Kurds stood out as the only significant ethnic minority to be assimilated. In more multiethnic Iran, the size of the Kurds placed them second (after Azeris) in the line-up of "others." Azeris have largely maintained a peaceful coexistence with the Iranian regime, whereas the Kurds' relations with the Iranian state have been characterized by numerous violent uprisings dating back to the early 1920s.

That all four states failed in their quest to assimilate "their" Kurds stands out as one of the puzzles social scientists seek to piece together and explain.[4] Twentieth-century Kurdish uprisings in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria bear witness to the refusal of many Kurds to be erased from history. A partial listing of the biggest revolts includes the following: The 1919 Kucgiri revolt (Turkey), the Simko rebellion of the 1920s (Iran), the Barzanji revolts of the 1920s (Iraq), the 1937–1938 Dersim uprising (Turkey), the 1946 Mahabad Republic of Kurdistan (Iran), the Barzani-led revolts of the 1960s and 1970s (Iraq), Iranian Kurdish unrest under the Shah (1960s) and the attempts to break away from the new Islamic Republic between 1979 and 1982 (Iran), Iraqi Kurdish collaboration with Iran from 1980 to 1988 (Iraq), the post-1984 PKK insurgency (Turkey), the 1991 Desert Storm Kurdish uprising (Iraq), the 2004 Serhildan (Syria), and the post-2004 PJAK guerrilla war against Iranian forces (Iran). As with all large political undertakings, each uprising stemmed from a number of causes and motivations. Enemies of the Kurds unfailingly tried to discount the Kurdish nationalist component of each uprising, however, labeling them as "feudal attempts to resist government authority," "banditry," "opportunism," "results of foreign meddling," or other pejorative classifications. Many of the revolts may have been these things and more, but denying the Kurdish nationalist component of the rebellions probably has to do with politics more than an honest attempt to understand the episodes in question.

Repressive and assimilationist policies of the states in which the Kurds found themselves as minorities went to extreme lengths. There is a "Kurdish issue" today because first, the Kurds failed to achieve even a single state in the post–World War I period, which saw Kurdistan divided between four states dominated by other nations. Given the nationalism of ethnic Arabs, Turks, and Persians in the region, it would have been more puzzling had Kurdish nationalism failed to emerge. Its emergence led to fears of secessionism in Ankara, Tehran, Baghdad, and Damascus. Fragile new states, or the Turkish and Persian-Turkic traumatized remnants of forcibly dismembered empires, immediately viewed Kurdish secession as a mortal danger. Their response to the danger was to deny the Kurds space to be Kurds within their new states. Kurdish education, writing, theater, and even music were banned to varying degrees in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. As Gunter recounts in Section I, Turkey went the furthest in this regard, even denying the existence of a Kurdish minority within the country until 1991 (when Kurds formed some 20 percent of the population). As Lowe discusses in Section III, Syria summarily removed the citizenship of over 100,000 of "its" Kurds in 1963, only returning it in 2012 in order to encourage them not to take part in the mostly Sunni-Arab uprising against the regime. Both

Stansfield and Entessar also examine how in Iran, after a brief period of relaxing the restrictions under Presidents Khatami and Rafsanjani in the 1990s, the regime once again banned Kurdish-language publications and Kurdish cultural and linguistic initiatives. Education in and official recognition of the Kurdish language never occurred. Yesiltas also explains how in Iraq the British initially flirted with the idea of Kurdish autonomy, and after that at least local administration of Kurdish areas by Kurds and education in Kurdish. The Iraqi monarchy quickly witnessed the rise of Arab nationalist sentiment in Baghdad, however, accompanied by increasing efforts to exert tighter control over restive Kurds in the north. The republican regimes that followed it offered only forced assimilation and repression, culminating in the genocidal *Anfal* campaigns of 1987–1988 and the use of chemical weapons on the Iraqi Kurds.

Unfortunately, states that acquired the means to severely repress their Kurdish minorities did not stop with the Kurds. Governments used the threat of Kurdish revolts or secessionism to help justify the creation of the "security state" (or *mukhabaraat* state in Arabic). The security state requires mechanisms of repression, authoritarianism, and intelligence gathering that readily get transferred from one issue (containment of the Kurds in this case) to others, such as suppression of dissidence in general. Government offices and organizations ostensibly created to deal with a specific threat and operating outside the normal rule of law—whether military tribunals and emergency courts, or special counterinsurgency forces and "para-state" militias—have a way of creeping into new areas of society and compromising democracy and the rule of law in general. Laws that restrict the free speech and freedom of assembly of Kurds restrict these rights for everyone in society. Economic resources devoted to counterinsurgency and repression get siphoned off from other uses, such as investment and economic development. Popular passions directed against Kurdish "others" find it difficult to focus simultaneously on government shortcomings. The "Kurdish issue" and how it was dealt with in all four countries—Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria—thus compromised democracy for everyone in those countries. The civil wars that resulted at least in part from aggressive attempts to assimilate the Kurds, and Kurdish resistance to such efforts, cast a blight on generations of Kurds and non-Kurds.[5]

The Kurds as Key to Democratization

Civil war can potentially create strong incentives for a more inclusive and democratic system in the aftermath of the conflict. Inconclusive and costly wars in particular can lead warring parties to seek a negotiated settlement

from which a more inclusive and democratic system can emerge.[6] During the war, involved parties get a better sense of each other's actual strength or weakness. Once they are able to more realistically assess their own prospects for victory or defeat, they may become more amenable to political compromise. Thus, just as the Kurdish issue has often served as a barrier to meaningful democratization, the same issue may also offer a key to genuine democratic improvements in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Section III offers readers a more optimistic take on the most recent developments in Turkey and Iraq, in addition to hypothesizing about how Kurdish demands in Iran and Syria could serve the democratic interests of all Iranians and Syrians. Thus, just as Kurdish rebellions might have helped justify the securitization of the state as described in Section I, they might conversely serve as a check upon the power of the states they oppose. As some of the chapters in Section II make clear, a more balanced distribution of power among various contenders within a state can encourage more enduring, democratic ways to accommodate differences.

The chapters in Section III thus focus on Kurdish demands within Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Genuine individual rights, from freedom of speech and assembly to due process and security of persons, obviously benefit average citizens in a political system regardless of their ethnicity. Even group demands such as recognition, language rights, decentralization, and local governance can prove beneficial to a wide spectrum of society as government becomes more reflective of, accountable to, and in touch with its citizens.

It is also the contention of the contributions in this section of the book that meaningful democratization in any of the four states under consideration cannot occur without a fundamental change vis-à-vis their policies toward their Kurdish minorities. In this sense, accommodation of the Kurds within Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria represents a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for further democratization. Repressing Kurdish rights in any of these states, no matter what the justifications are, places limits on how much they can democratize. When it comes to substantive democracy (a working definition of which is discussed below), paranoia toward Kurdish identity and demands compromises the democratization journey for all citizens of a state.

At the same time, few states even in today's world appear willing to cede substantial territory to secessionist movements. The implicit position of all the contributors to this volume is that if states with a substantial Kurdish minority wish to maintain their current territorial integrity and also pursue long-term stability, they must find ways to democratically incorporate the Kurds. Some Kurdish nationalists may not be satisfied with anything

short of their own Kurdish state, however, similarly to how some Basque nationalist remain committed to creating their own state despite significant levels of Basque autonomy within Spain. Depending on the circumstances, Kurdish secession and statehood could be considered. In Iraq, a recent op-ed by the editor of a prominent pro-central government newspaper went so far as to discuss this possibility as a legitimate "Plan B" option if the Kurds and Baghdad fail to resolve their differences.[7] The problem with a Kurdish Plan B in Iraq or elsewhere centers on territorial borders, however. It seems highly unlikely that even in hypothetical scenarios wherein current states might accept Kurdish secession, all parties could agree on the boundaries of the territory Kurds would leave with. The resulting high likelihood of violent conflict over territory hardly makes Plan B more appealing than repressive state policies aimed at keeping the Kurds within the fold. All of which takes us back to the question under consideration in this volume: How to democratically incorporate the Kurds within their current state boundaries?

The Journey of Democratization

What do we mean by "democracy?" Surely Turkey has been democratic since the advent of a multiparty electoral system in 1950. Iraq and Iran also hold hotly contested elections nowadays; yet, Freedom House's 2013 ratings for both countries were "not free" (rated "6" out of "7" on the freedom index, civil liberties index, and political rights index, with "7" being the worst-possible rating).[8] On a general level, we rely on the notion of democracy as a continuum rather than an absolute, and find a definition of substantive democracy offered by Larry Diamond and Leonardo Morlino a useful point of departure: Diamond and Morlino identify eight dimensions on which democracies can vary in quality:

> The rule of law, participation, competition, and vertical plus horizontal accountability are content-relevant but mainly procedural, concerned mainly with rules and practices. The next two dimensions are substantive: respect for civil and political freedoms, and the progressive implementation of greater political (and underlying it, social and economic) equality. Our last dimension, responsiveness, bridges procedure and substance by providing a basis for measuring how much or little public policies (including laws, institutions, and expenditures) correspond to citizen demands and preferences as aggregated through political process.[9]

In this definition, democracies of comparable sum quality may place varying relative emphases on different factors. A government may prove

responsive to its ethnic majority, for instance, but if that ethnic majority wishes to circumscribe the rights of a minority, this negatively impacts respect for civil and political freedoms. Assessing and judging the varying levels of democratization or potential democratization in different states thus becomes a daunting task. This volume presents the admittedly subjective assessments of different scholars for the Turkish, Iraqi, Syrian, and Iranian states, all of whom share the view that at some point on the democratic road, forcibly stymieing Kurdish aspirations stops the journey's forward momentum.

The contributions in Section II do more than just theorize about democratic governance, however. Written by scholars with a broad familiarity of theories and cases from across the world, these chapters explain the current state of knowledge about democratic transitions and managing multiethnic states. Because other states have managed to emerge from the trauma of sectarian conflict and civil war to form genuinely more inclusive, better governed polities, these chapters summarize the wisdom of these experiences so that they may help shed light on future possibilities for addressing "the Kurdish issue." We contend that Turkey, Iran, and Iraq do not really suffer from a "Kurdish problem" or "issue," but rather from a "democracy problem." Addressing the latter offers the best, but by no means certain, path out of the current impasse. These chapters offer us an account of what has worked and what has not in other multiethnic states, and chapter 7 (by Watts) assesses the democratization progress of the autonomous Kurdistan Region now that Iraq may have finally found a way to accommodate its Kurdish population.

A wide array of mechanisms exist to try to democratically accommodate Kurdish minorities, of course, and the contributors to this volume largely remain agnostic regarding specific policy prescriptions. The closest thing to a specific policy prescription appears in chapter 9 (by David Romano) on Iraq in Section III, regarding the kind of federalism Iraqis enshrined in the 2005 Constitution. There exists a large body of inconclusive literature about whether or not federalism offers a democratic method of accommodating ethnic minorities, or if the strengthening of individual (rather than group) rights presents a preferable alternative.[10] A majority of the literature expresses the belief that federal systems do help to democratically manage sectarian conflict, however. David Romano concurs with Liam Anderson's view that "...in societies with long histories of inter-ethnic tensions and powerful secessionist sentiments, a federation may be the *only* way to sustain democracy while maintaining the territorial integrity of the state."[11]

Although Savelsberg in Section I of this volume does not view federalism as necessarily democratic in the Syrian case (should it emerge there one day), others argue that federalism cannot function in the absence of

a constitutional regime.[12] Federalism can take different forms and involve different institutional arrangements, of course, the range of which remain beyond the scope of the discussion here. A common dichotomy, however, juxtaposes "ethnic federalism" with "territorial federalism." In ethnic federalism, borders are drawn to give solid majorities to communities with numerical concentrations in different regions of a state. The communities can thus become "masters in their own home," to use a popular phrase from the Québecois context, and separation between different communities breeds good neighborliness. Such a system risks enshrining sectarian differences and promoting competition and even conflict rather than cooperation and compromise, however. In the Iraqi context, this would correspond to "soft partition" of the state into a Kurdistan, "Sunnistan," and "Shiastan."

Alternately, territorial federalism consciously sets out to divide and mix different sectarian groups so that none controls a distinct administrative unit or subnational government. The system hopes to thereby lessen "in group vs. out group" competition and rivalries and promote cooperation and bridge building alongside an over-arching national identity. Such a system does nothing to protect minority identities, however, and gets typically viewed as an assimilationist program that threatened groups resist strenuously.

The promise of simply "extending equal democratic rights to all Turks, Iranians, Syrians or Iraqis" is also typically viewed as insufficient and even insincere by the Kurds. Especially in Turkey, which has been officially democratic since 1950, this meant giving everyone the equal right to view themselves as Turks and denying anyone the right to be a Kurd. The supposed granting of equal rights may thus still involve denying the right to education in Kurdish, naming things in Kurdish, publishing in Kurdish, and a host of other things that a *staatsvolk* so often denies less powerful ethnic groups within the state. The editors of this volume therefore feel that individual rights, if brandished in lieu of group rights, do not offer a democratic way forward to incorporate the Kurds within existing states in the Middle East. In the final analysis, the most suitable democratic policies may vary by time and place. Opening political systems to real participation of Kurds, as Kurds, will allow affected communities to arrive at their own choices.

Conclusion

The revolutionary wave that swept through the Arab world, collectively referred to as the "Arab Spring," has upended secular dictatorships in Tunisia, Egypt, and Libya, resulting in first-ever free elections in which a plethora of political parties competed for power. Authoritarian regimes in Morocco, Algeria, and Jordan announced a series of constitutional reforms,

lifted emergency rule, and shuffled cabinets in response to pro-democracy protests. Despite uncertainties over the course and outcome of the ongoing struggle in Syria, pressure on Bashar al-Assad to either step down or undertake democratic reforms remains. The Arab Spring thus has not only exposed the untenable and corrupt nature of authoritarian regimes in the region but also pointed to the need for a significant change in the region. The new Middle East may look very different from the Middle East of the twentieth century. While many commentators on the region are consumed by continuing violence in Syria along with tensions and concerns over the nature of infant democracies in Egypt, Tunisia, and Libya, or stress resolving the Arab–Israeli dispute for achieving "peace in the Middle East," this book asks whether or not the often-overlooked Kurdish issue may constitute a more important fulcrum for change in key states of the region. The editors of this book thus believe that the phrase "peace in the Middle East" should not only refer to the Arab–Israeli conflict. A truly more peaceful and stable Middle East can simply no longer ignore the Kurds, their past suffering, their present problems, and their future aspirations. The Kurdish conflict is arguably one of the most intractable ethnic conflicts in the contemporary world. The Kurds are geographically concentrated; they hold serious grievances against the states that rule over them; they have already engaged in many armed rebellions against "their" states; and they are spread across international boundaries of Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The size and geographical dispersion of the Kurds, numbering between 35 and 40 million[13] and comprising roughly 20 percent of the total population in Turkey and Iraq and 10 percent of the total population in Iran and Syria, coupled with decades-long violent struggle for a better status, calls for an urgent need to resolve the issue. This seems especially true given the geostrategic importance of the states with Kurdish minorities and the monumental changes now affecting the region. With increasing globalization, growing diaspora communities, and multiplying means of communication outside government control, suppressing an identity, language, culture, and history, has become an even less viable state strategy. Domestically, the emergence of a nationalist urban Kurdish intelligentsia, the capability of the Kurdish groups to amass widespread popular support and to mobilize both human and material resources, and the existence of millions of politicized Kurds render the status quo untenable. The Kurdish issue has become more complicated with the establishment of an autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq and the prospects of a similar entity in northern Syria. The Kurdish issue not only is therefore rapidly becoming an issue for the countries that have significant Kurdish minorities (i.e., Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria) but also impacts the relationship between these countries and the rest of the

world. Turkish relations with neighboring countries, the United States, and Europe, for instance, have been influenced, if not shaped, by the Kurdish issue. In the words of former US ambassador to Turkey Morton Abramowitz and Jessica Sims, "the Kurdish issue in Turkey has now become an American problem as well…for the first time, the United States will need a region-wide Kurdish policy."[14]

We believe that the Kurds are a part of the solution, not the problem. During the long journey toward further democratization, the Kurds, as one of the largest ethnic groups in the Middle East, can play a vital role to bring about stability and democracy. As the region is undergoing monumental changes, failure to address Kurdish demands for recognition and representation can have far-reaching consequences, strengthening authoritarian tendencies and deteriorating the status of other smaller ethnic and religious minorities in these four key Middle Eastern states. The Kurdish issue of the twenty-first century may also turn out to revolve around matured Kurdish nationalist movements and rectifying the injustices suffered by the Kurds in the previous century. There exists a growing sense that the Kurds' time has come, an idea captured in the title of Michael Gunter's 2011 book on recent changes in the region: *The Kurds Ascending*.[15] If more democratic state systems do not work out in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran—if they fail to produce sociopolitical systems where the majority of Kurds and other groups in these states wish to continue living together—then these states in their current form should not be considered sacred. As a result of their painful history living under Turkish-, Persian-, and Arab-dominated regimes, it may even prove too late to offer the Kurds meaningful minority rights and liberal governance. For the sake of peace and stability in the region, many of us hope that it is not too late to successfully incorporate Kurds, as Kurds, into the Turkish, Iranian, Iraqi, and Syrian states. This forms part of our motivation for preparing this book. The only alternative to successful democratic inclusion or dangerous, likely violent territorial revisions would be the return of, or continuation of, authoritarian and repressive forms of government designed to keep the Kurds and other groups in their place. We do not view such an option as ideal or feasible.

Notes

1. Brendan O'Leary, John McGarry, and Khaled Salih (eds.) *The Future of Kurdistan in Iraq* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), pp. 61–62.
2. Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 60–61.

3. As late as 1960 in the United States, for instance, intense debate surrounded the election of President John F. Kennedy because he was a catholic. The clear implication was that a catholic was not as much a "true" American as a protestant. It took another half century before someone with one African-American parent could be received as a sufficiently genuine American to become president, and even this was accompanied by no small amount of controversy.

4. See, for instance, Christine Allison and Phillip G. Kreyenbroek, (eds.) *Kurdish Culture and Identity* (London: Zed Books, 1996); Ismail Besikci, *Kurdistan and Turkish Colonialism* (London: Kurdistan Solidarity Committee and Kurdistan Information Centre, 1991); Philippe Boulanger, *Le Destin Des Kurdes* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998); Martin van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State* (London: Zed Books, 1992); Nader Entessar, *Kurdish Politics in the Middle East* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010); David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997); Robert Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880–1925* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1989); and David Romano, *The Kurdish Nationalist Movement: Opportunity, Mobilization and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

5. The role of both inter- and intra-state conflicts in strengthening authoritarianism is not limited to the states with a Kurdish minority, of course. Brynen, Moore, Salloukh, and Zahar (2012, p. 262) discuss how this was the trend in the entire Arab world, for instance: "Armed conflict creates not just threats to state and regime security; it also creates conditions that increase the state's capacity to maintain a monopoly on the means of coercion and survival, even in the face of growing popular illegitimacy and discontent." When the threat comes from an outside group, such as Israel, the Kurds, imperialism or colonialism, it becomes that much easier to rally people around the state and get them to forgive its authoritarian transgressions. See Rex Brynen, Pete W. Moore, Bassel F. Salloukh, and Marie-Joelle Zahar, *Beyond the Arab Spring: Authoritarianism and Democratization in the Arab World* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2012).

6. For more on this, see Elisabeth J. Wood, "An Insurgent Path to Democracy: Popular Mobilization, Economic Interests, and Regime Transition in South Africa and El Salvador," *Comparative Political Studies* 34.8 (2001), pp. 862–888; Leonard Wantchekon, "The Paradox of 'Warlord' Democracy: A Theoretical Investigation," *American Political Science Review* 9.1 (2004), pp. 17–33; Mehmet Gurses and T. David Mason, "Democracy Out of Anarchy: How Do Features of A Civil War Influence the Likelihood of Post-Civil War Democracy?" *Social Science Quarterly* 89.2 (2008), pp. 315–336; Madhav Joshi, "Post-Civil War Democratization: Promotion of Democracy in Post-Civil War States, 1946–2005," *Democratization* 17.5 (2010), pp. 826–855. For a counter-argument, see Page V. Fortna and Reyko Huang, "Democratization after Civil War: A Brush Clearing Exercise," *International Studies Quarterly* 56.4 (2012), pp. 801–808.

7. Abd al-Jabbar Shabbout, "Plan B at the Kurdish Level," *al Sabah*, December 4, 2012. This op-ed only appeared in Arabic. For a discussion in English of the op-ed, see David Hirst, "A Kurdish State Is Being Established, and Baghdad May Accept It," *The Daily Star*, December 24, 2012, http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2012/Dec-24/199715-a-kurdish-state-is-being-established-and-baghdad-may-accept-it.ashx#axzz2G1NAQe2I

8. Freedom in the World 2013, "Freedom House," http://www.freedomhouse.org, accessed on January 21, 2014.

9. Diamond, Larry Jay, and Leonardo Morlino, "The Quality of Democracy: An Overview," *Journal of Democracy* 15.4 (2004), p. 22.

10. For a recent summary of the literature, see Jan Erk and Lawrence Anderson, "The Paradox of Federalism: Does Self-Rule Accommodate or Exacerbate Ethnic Divisions?" *Regional and Federal Studies* 19 (May 2009), pp. 191–202.

11. Liam Anderson, "The Non-Ethnic Regional Model of Federalism: Some Comparative Perspectives," in Reidar Visser and Gareth Stansfield (eds.) *An Iraq of Its Regions: Cornerstones of a Federal Democracy?* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007), p. 209.

12. David Cameron, "Inching Forward: Iraqi Federalism at Year Four," in Lamani Mokhtar and Bessma Momani (eds.) *From Desolation to Reconstruction: Iraq's Troubled Journey* (Waterloo, Ontario: Center for International Governance Innovation, 2010), p. 36.

13. The various contributors to this volume do not all provide exactly the figures regarding the Kurdish population in the Middle East, although all of them agree on a range between 25 and 40 million. The truth is that no one really knows the real figure because Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria have not permitted any census that could provide it. As one might expect, the question is politically sensitive in all these states. In any case, a general sense of how large the Kurdish population is in the region serves the purposes of this volume adequately well.

14. Morton Abramowitz and Jessica Sims, "Erdogan's Kurdish Issues," January 28, 2013, http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/erdogans-kurdish-issues-8024, accessed on January 8, 2014.

15. Michael Gunter, *The Kurds Ascending: The Evolving Solution to the Kurdish Problem in Iraq and Turkey* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2011).