



## A Sociological Study of the Effect Social Development on Cultural-Political Convergence in Kurds: A Case of Kurdish People Living in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey

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**Abstract.** Kurds living in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq play a significant role in planning and implementation of macroeconomic policies. The current condition of Kurds and their future convergence or divergence is one of the concerns of central governments. Some factors such as education, social self-esteem, stability and security, equality and justice, freedom of choice, and political will can affect their convergence, while other factors such as gender seem to have no significant effect on it. One of the key findings of this research was that Iranian Kurds were in a better condition than Turkish and Iraqi Kurds in terms of literacy rate, insurance coverage, stability/security, and media consumption. Turkish Kurds had a better condition in terms of employment and urbanization, while Iraqi Kurds were superior in freedom of choice and political will. Female Kurds in Turkey had higher information and participation than others. Overall, social and cultural convergence in these regions is expected to increase due to media consumption, shared history and language, and increased education and knowledge. However, political convergence seems impractical due to differences in the visions of central governments, sensitivity of the region, interference of superpowers, and the Kurds' dedication to peace, progress, and security.

**Keywords:** Social development, political convergence, multiculturalism

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Most official and unofficial statistics suggest poor human and economic development in Kurdistan, with Kurdistan having the lowest rank among the Provinces of Iran. To overcome this inequality and avoid any potential threat to national security, more interaction is needed between Kurdish people and the central government. Trust is a key factor in this interaction, but the government has not been successful in inspiring trust among Kurdish people. For example, Kurdish people have the lowest share in management at the macro, regional, and local level, both before and after the Islamic Revolution (Sufi, 2004). A number of these "threats" were "resolved" early on, such as the Assyrians genocide during the First World War or the Armenians who experienced a similar fate. Other problems such as that of the Kurds and Kurdistan were not "resolved", but expanded due to the unrest following the new circumstances. The issues of security, development, international relations, and hegemony became more prominent. Development seemed to be superior in Iranian Kurdistan compared to Iraqi Kurdistan that was involved with war for decades or Kurdish region in Turkey that were subjected to stricter rules and more radical principles. The following discussion presents the research on social development in Kurdish regions.

### 2. A CRITIQUE OF RELEVANT THEORIES

#### 2.1. Cultures of Welfare

How can cultural analysis frame social policy? Clarke identifies three types of analysis that enable reengagement with the 'social' in social policy. Firstly, there is culture as a field of social differences and differentiation. Cultural differences of identities are the basis for multiculturalism. Secondly, cultural explanations of social problems often compete for attention along with, or as an alternative to, agent-centered and structural explanations. Finally, culture

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denotes the process through which social construction occurs. Freeman adds a fourth area which involves listening to the biographies and voices of welfare citizens. Here, we present four discussions related to social policy:

### **2.2. Cultural Capital**

According to Bourdieu (1984), capital is the source from which power is derived. Instead of reducing social capital to an economic variant, we need to recognize its importance. What cultural capital does is to inculcate people into a mental 'habitus', a classificatory grid of dispositions that permits apprehension and cognition, through which a particular perspective is normalized and universalized.

### **2.3. Welfare Regimes and Cultural Paths**

Esping-Anderson distinguishes between commodification and de-commodification, the former denoting market dependence and the latter market independence, and thus provides a scale for de-commodification based on criteria such as replacement ratios, entitlement criteria, and contribution records. Accordingly, he defines three types of welfare regimes: those with maximum commodification (liberalism), those with maximum de-commodification (social democracies), and those in between (corporatism). There are two theories about the cultural paths of these regimes: (1) convergence theory: welfare states are developed in parallel with industrial modernization so that economic development would direct all systems toward the most advanced model, i.e. the British; (2) path dependency theory: Wilsford described path dependency as a means by which institutions and structures hem actors in by channeling them along established policy paths. According to Gilbert, the hegemony of the Scandinavian ideal has given way to that of the Anglo-American 'enabling state' upon which welfare systems are gradually converging.

### **2.4. Grids and Groups**

Lockhart has applied the grid-group theory of Douglas and Wildavsky to social policy. This theory incorporates two dimensions of social explanation: the 'grid' axis refers to the degree to which someone does or does not accept external prescriptions, whether these be specific (an order) or background (rituals, customs); the 'group' axis refers to a person's desire for and experience of integration with others. Lockhart proposes that the grid-group theory can fulfill the accounts left incomplete by rational choice and institutionalist models. It also draws attention to the processes of cultural socialization.

### **2.5. Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism is both an acknowledgement of the fact of cultural plurality and a valuation of that pluralism. This definition generates a vast range of disagreements. At one end of the spectrum are 'perfectionists' who insist that there is only one good life, one set of correct values and beliefs, so that multiculturalism is a misguided and possibly a dangerous dilution of the true way. At the opposite extreme are 'separatists' who believe that the fact of pluralism must be acknowledged but interaction between cultures must be kept to an absolute minimum.

### **2.6. Media**

#### **2.6.1. Pluralism and Criticalism**

Pluralism is based on the idea that a diversity of media outlets reflects the openness of a free society and facilitates the flow of information and opinion upon which a liberal democracy depends. This liberal theory sees the press as performing four roles. Firstly, it keeps the public informed of the significant events affecting their lives and so assists in the process of public

education. Secondly, the press holds the government and parliament to account, operating as a source of critique and opposition and counter-balances the state's tendency to centralize and conceal itself from public view. Thirdly, it is a stage upon which public debates can take place and the dialogue essential to democracy can occur. Finally, the press takes the temperature off public opinion and so captures changes to national identity over time.

There are two dimensions to pluralism that must be distinguished. On the one hand there is the market dimension of free speech and of competition between media outlets. On the other hand, there is a public good dimension that resists the anything-goes tendencies of the market.

### **2.6.2. Media and Social Policy**

The main question here is how and why the media construct social problems and represent social policies in particular ways. Sotirovic attributes cognitive distortions to the media. Her research suggests that media frames are even more important than ideology, social location, and interpersonal relationships in influencing perceptions.

### **2.6.3. Research Hypotheses**

- There is a significant relationship between unemployment rate and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between urbanization and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between infant mortality and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between literacy rate and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between insurance coverage and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between insurance coverage and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between freedom of choice and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between insurance coverage and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between in-group and out-group social relations and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between political will and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between social self-esteem and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between stability/security and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between media consumption (satellite TV, press, and the Internet) and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between equality/justice and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between gender and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between education and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.
- There is a significant relationship between employment and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

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- There is a significant relationship between housing and cultural-political convergence in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, and Iraq.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Design

The present research uses a mixed methods design. First secondary analysis is used to examine qualitative indices and variables and then survey is used to collect data about indices and variables for which there is no documented information. Finally, grounded theory is used to interpret and explain qualitative data and construct an independent theory.

#### 3.2. Instruments

Data were collected using a researcher-made questionnaire, unstructured interviews, tables and graphs provided by statistics centers, and a review of relevant literature.

#### 3.3. Population and Sample

The population consisted of all Kurdish regions in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq. Sampling involved three stages. In the first stage, 30 Kurdish regions were identified in Iran, Turkey, and Iraq (4 provinces in Iran, 21 provinces in Turkey, and 5 provinces in Iraq). Using Cochran's method the population size was reduced to 6 provinces (Azkia and Astane, 2010). Two major cities were selected from each region: Diyarbakır and Malatya from Turkey, Sanandaj and Mahabad from Iran, and Sulaymaniyah and Arbil from Iraq. In the second stage, using multistage cluster sampling several blocks were selected based on people's quality of life. The final sample were selected using systematic sampling and completed the questionnaire.

**Table 1.** Population and sample

Country	Turkey		Iraq		Iran		Total
City	Diyarbakır	Malatya	Sulaymaniyah	Arbil	Sanandaj	Mahabad	
Population	1500000	430000	800000	1300000	500000	220000	4750000
Population 25 years and over	765000	206400	356000	520000	240000	116600	2204000
Sample size	251	251	251	251	251	251	1506

Total sample size was calculated using Cochran's formula. Qualitative sampling, also called purposive or theoretical sampling, is used in qualitative research. Theoretical sampling is based on concepts that emerge during analysis. This type of sampling has cumulative features and is based on previous samples. The researcher contacts individuals that have enough information about the subject ('the gatekeepers'), and sample size depends on theoretical saturation of questions (Mohammadpour and Iman, 2008). The author conducted unstructured interviews with 50 gatekeepers. A variety of methods are used for data collection in qualitative research, including participant observation, unstructured interviews, and document analysis. In this research, participant observation and unstructured interviews are used to collect data.

#### 3.4. Data Analysis

Non-parametric tests are used for qualitative variables, i.e. literacy rate, urbanization, unemployment rate, infant mortality, and insurance coverage. The F-test in analysis of variance (ANOVA) is used to compare two or more populations. Qualitative variables can be measured

with nominal and sometimes ordinal scales. Pearson correlation and F-test are used to examine these variables. Demographic variables such as gender, occupation, and employment are multiple nominal. T-test is used to compare the means of two or more groups. Then multivariate regression analysis can be used to examine the direction and strength of correlations between the variables.

#### **4. FINDINGS**

##### **4.1. Unemployment Rate**

Unemployment rate is the percentage of the total labor force that is unemployed or seeking employment.

###### *Iranian Kurdistan*

According to the data provided by the Statistical Center of Iran in 2012, Kurdistan is the third province of Iran with the highest unemployment rate (15.6%), preceded by Lorestan (20.6%) and Kermanshah (15.6%).

###### *Kurdish region in Turkey*

Due to the policies of the Turkish government the Kurdish regions have always been among the poorest and the most underdeveloped parts of this country with the highest unemployment rate. Poverty, unemployment, deprivation, and repression in eastern and southeastern Turkey led to the rise of PKK in the 1970s.

###### *Iraqi Kurdistan*

The economy of Iraqi Kurdistan depends on oil revenues. This region has a more developed economy than the rest of Iraq. The peaceful policies of Iraq and its relations with the world have resulted in positive economic outcomes for this region. According to statistics published in 2013, the volume of trade of Iraqi Kurdistan with Turkey and Iran was about 8 and 5 million dollars respectively.

##### **4.2. Population and Urbanization**

###### *Iranian Kurdistan*

According to the Statistical Center of Iran, urbanization in Iran has increased from 31% in 1956 to 61% in 1996. In 2007, urbanization was 68.5% in Iran and 59.5% in Kurdistan Province. A 1.1 household density was also reported. The number of houses in urban areas was 8.2 per 1000 people.

###### *Iraqi Kurdistan*

Especially after the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 the cities of Iraqi Kurdistan have been quickly developing. Iraqi Kurdistan is gradually becoming a safe trade zone, resulting in migration of people from other cities to metropolitan areas in this region. Fast urban development and growth is a major characteristic of developing countries (Todaro, 1982).

##### **4.3. Kurdish region in Turkey**

Urbanization in Turkey is 69%.

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**Table 2.** Urban population in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey (2000-2012)

Country	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006
Turkey	40,899,792	41,642,275	42,642,275	43,519,914	44,399,539	45,280,133	46,370,953
Iran	42,210,756	43,387,102	44,326,417	45,342,404	46,358,540	47,393,548	48,146,256
Iraq	16,144,324	16,591,135	17,039,565	17,485,613	17,924,509	18,354,119	18,786,330

Country	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Turkey	48,570,947	49,696,210	50,847,592	52,170,735	53,523,455
Iran	49,689,874	50,496,063	51,332,830	52,104,755	52,905,891
Iraq	19,640,997	20,099,911	20,601,129	21,121,620	21,655,257

Source: United Nations World Urbanization Prospects at <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.URB.TOTL>

**Table 3.** Social service and insurance coverage

Year	Turkey		Iran		Iraq	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
2000-2005	24	46	-	-	-	-
2006-2010	34	50	38	47	51	61
2010-2014	45	52	42	47	46	61

Source: International Labour Organization, Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM) database

#### 4.4. Social Relations

The collected data indicate that the majority of the participants agree or totally agree to regular relations with relatives, friends, neighbors, and the society (87%, 78.7%, 76%, and 73% respectively). 50% of the respondents were interested in domestic tourism and 63.6% enjoyed visiting other cultures and countries. 38% of the respondents did not comment on their interest in following the problems of Kurds in foreign countries. Mean, median, and mode values generally suggest that the respondents are social collectivist individuals. In addition, it can be inferred that the extent of social relations is broader in Iraqi Kurdistan than Iranian and Kurdish in Turkey. Broader social relations indicate higher cultural-political convergence. Given the total mean, median, and mode values and their near normal distribution, social development in this index is at an average level.

#### 4.5. Political Will

The data show that 50% of Kurds in the three countries believe that their country is strong enough to defend the rights of their people. 68.8% complained about conflicts between different parties that hinder growth and development. 50.5% did not consider local officials to be caring about their problems, and 66% believed that government officials do not pay enough attention these regions. It is noteworthy that 28% disagreed to their obligation or interest in voting, while 43% were in favor of voting and 29% did not comment. This is slightly inconsistent with the statistics provided by central governments about people's participation in elections. About 48% of the respondents believed in political discrimination in their region, while 29% did not comment. This is probably because 87.5% of the respondents believed that their civil rights are not respected by the government (especially in Turkey). It can be inferred from responses that Kurds in these regions are dissatisfied with their condition, but support their country's integrity. The more the government respects the political will of Kurds, the higher will be their cultural-political convergence. The total mean, median, and mode values and their near normal distribution indicate average to high social development in terms of this index.

#### 4.6. Stability and Security

About 67% of the respondents are not optimistic about the future and believe that war and conflict can occur at any time. About 43% were against investments in the society they lived in, while 43% agreed to it. It must be noted that 60.5% of the respondents have a sense of attachment to their country, and about 48% are concerned about horrific events and crimes in the country. Disagreeing to national attachment had the lowest frequency of responses. Given the total mean, median, and mode values and their near normal distribution, social development in this index is at an average level.

#### 4.7. Cultural-Political Convergence

Cultural convergence is evaluated by indices such as relations with family and friends, tendency to and frequency of travel, consumption of media, and production of cultural programs, while political convergence is evaluated by tendency for disappearance of borders, creation of a unified government, and attitude toward sociopolitical injustice. The data show that 64.3% of the respondents are in favor of finding friends from Kurds living abroad, with only 5% being against this idea. Moreover, 71.3% are willing to find business partners from Kurds living in other countries. 66.2% agreed to marriage with Kurds in other countries, and 62.5% were familiar with the customs of Kurds living abroad. 70.8% of the respondents believe that Kurds living abroad are culturally inferior. Iranian Kurds seem to be at a higher cultural level given their education and standards of living. An increasing trend of cultural development has been evident since 2000. 51% of the respondents agree to cultural-political convergence and 39% (especially in Iranian Kurds) did not comment. Interestingly 84.7% of the respondents believed that Kurdish regions must be concerned with their own development rather instead of getting involved in political issues. Creation of a Kurdish government in the region and disappearance of borders between the Kurdish regions in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey is a major issue for these countries and is strictly panned by them. However, the people are generally in favor of gradual and consistent development along with dignity and security and place more emphasis on cultural convergence than political convergence. Given the total mean, median, and mode values and their near normal distribution, cultural-political convergence in the three Kurdish regions is average to high.

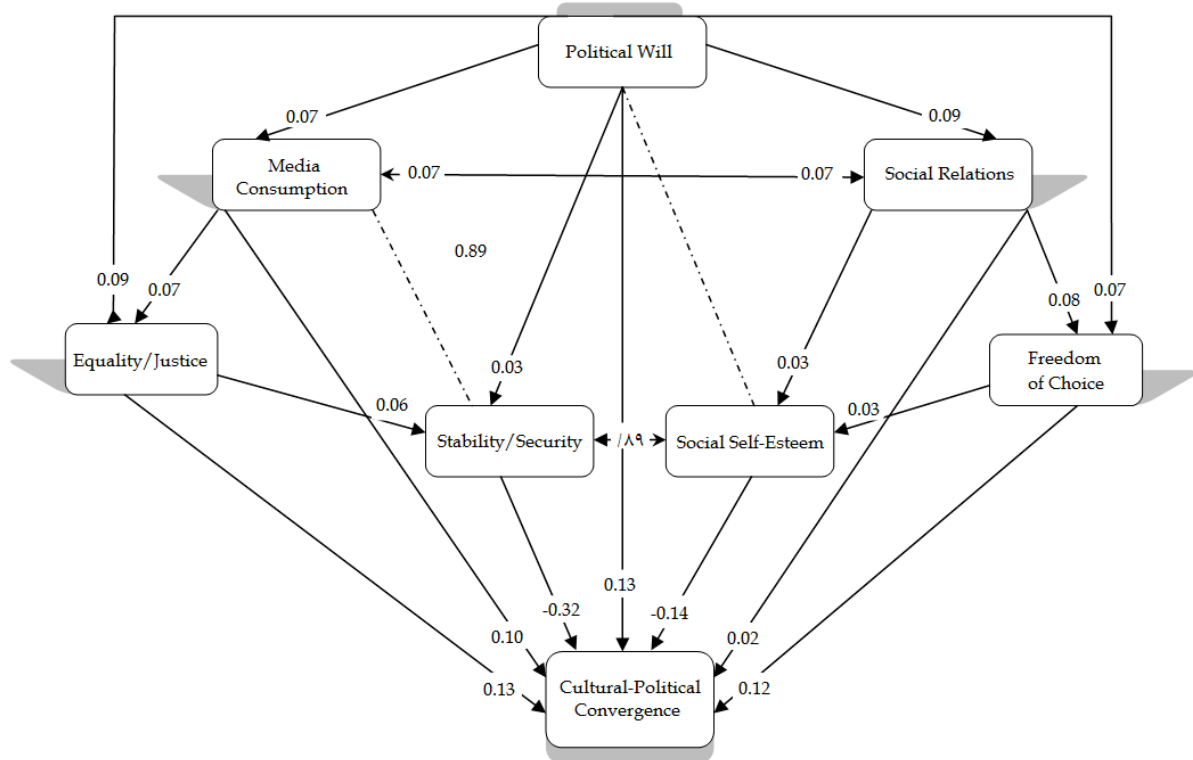
**Table 4.** Correlations between the variables

Hypothesis	Significance	Pearson Correlation	Direction
Freedom of choice and cultural-political convergence	0.000	0.162	Positive
Social relations and cultural-political convergence	0.025	0.065	Positive
Political will and cultural-political convergence	0.003	0.087	Positive
Social self-esteem and cultural-political convergence	0.000	-0.114	Negative
Stability/security and cultural-political convergence	0.000	-0.157	Negative
Media consumption and cultural-political convergence	0.000	0.109	Positive
Equality/justice and cultural-political convergence	0.000	0.120	Positive
Education and cultural-political convergence	0.000	0.198	Positive

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**Table 5.** Demographic variables and cultural-political convergence

Variables	Leven's test	Variances	t-test	Result
Gender	0.80	Equal	0.62	No significant relationship
Employment	0.30	Unequal	0.41	No significant relationship
Housing	0.07	Unequal	0.19	No significant relationship



**Figure 1.** Path analysis

This matrix shows that there freedom of choice is not significantly correlated with self-esteem, stability/security, media consumption, and age. Also media consumption is not significantly correlated with self-esteem and stability/security. Age is correlated only with social relations and media consumption. The strongest correlation exists between self-esteem and stability/security.

The results of KMO and Bartlett's tests in the following table indicates that the factor analysis has produced acceptable results which can be generalized to the population.



**Table 6.** Factor analysis

Freedom of Choice	Freedom of Choice		Social Relations		Political Will		Self-Esteem		Stability/Security		Media Consumption		Equality/Justice		Age	
	Sig.	R														
Social Relations	0.00	0.11	0.00	0.11	0.00	-	0.00	0.88	0.00	-	0.00	0.09	0.49	-	0.21	X
Political Will	0.00	0.07														
Self-Esteem	0.43	-	0.00	0.12	0.00	-	0.00	0.88	0.00	-	0.00	0.09	0.49	-	0.21	X
Stability/Security	0.24	-	0.00	0.12	0.00	-	0.00	0.88	0.00	-	0.00	0.09	0.49	-	0.21	X
Media Consumption	0.31	-	0.00	0.08	0.01	-	0.06	-	0.25	-	0.00	0.09	0.49	-	0.21	X
Equality/Justice	0.00	0.11	0.00	0.21	0.02	-0.05	0.01	-0.06	0.01	0.06	0.00	0.09	0.49	-	0.21	X
Age	0.46	-	0.00	-0.09	0.18	-	0.18	-	0.27	-	0.00	0.07	0.49	-	0.21	X
Education	0.00	0.09	0.01	0.06	0.00	-0.07	0.00	-0.10	0.00	-0.13	0.00	0.09	0.30	-	0.21	X

**Table 7.** Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.653	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1079049
	Df	45
	Sig.	0.000

Table 8 shows the communalities of the variables with total variance. The results show that self-esteem (0.87), stability/security (0.86), age (0.75), freedom of choice (0.65), media consumption (0.64), political will (0.55), and social relations (0.53) have the highest to lowest communalities respectively. This table shows rotated factors based on Varimax rotation.

**Table 8.** Rotated component matrix table

Factors	Components			
	1	2	3	4
Freedom of Speech	-0.110	0.219	0.765	0.070
Social Relations	0.196	0.594	0.243	-0.288
Political Will	0.365	-0.187	0.620	-0.068
Social Self-Esteem	0.933	-0.035	0.028	0.009
Stability/Security	0.929	0.001	-0.002	-0.016
Media Consumption	0.147	0.588	-0.222	0.474
Equality/Justice	-0.012	0.640	-0.011	-0.099
Age	-0.025	-0.130	0.075	0.856
Education	-0.263	0.345	0.136	0.123

After factor rotation, it is revealed that social self-esteem (0.93) and stability/security (0.92) have the highest load on component 1, equality/justice (0.64) and social relations have the highest load on component 2, freedom of choice (0.76) and political will (0.62) have the highest load on component 3, and age (0.85) has the highest load on component 4.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social development with its different indicators is critical to determining the quality of life in a country. It both affects and is affected by economic and political variables at the national and international level. Kurds living in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq play a significant role in planning and implementation of macroeconomic policies. The current condition of Kurds and their future convergence or divergence is one of the concerns of central governments. Some factors such as education, social self-esteem, stability and security, equality and justice, freedom of choice, and political will can affect their convergence, while other factors such as gender seem to have no significant effect on it.

One of the key findings of this research was that Iranian Kurds were in a better condition than Turkish and Iraqi Kurds in terms of literacy rate, insurance coverage, stability/security, and media consumption. Turkish Kurds had a better condition in terms of employment and urbanization, while Iraqi Kurds were superior in freedom of choice and political will. Female Kurds in Turkey had higher information and participation than others.

Overall, social and cultural convergence in these regions is expected to increase due to media consumption, shared history and language, and increased education and knowledge. However, political convergence seems impractical due to differences in the visions of central governments, sensitivity of the region, interference of superpowers, and the Kurds' dedication to peace, progress, and security.

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