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Kurdish Self-Determination Trajectories:
Between Domestic Institutions and Great Power Politics

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Résumé

Aucun projet d'autodétermination kurde n'a donné lieu à un État souverain. Cependant, en 1991, une entité politique autonome kurde est née *de facto* au nord de l'Irak. Puis, en 2004, son statut a été élevé à celui *de jure*. Similairement, une entité autonome kurde existe *de facto* en Syrie depuis 2012. En même temps, les Kurdes de la Turquie et de l'Iran ont du mal à revendiquer leurs prétentions envers leurs États parents. Cela soulève des questions sur les facteurs qui déterminent les trajectoires de ces projets d'autodétermination. Ce mémoire de thèse propose que c'est une combinaison des effets des institutions étatiques et de la politique des Grandes Puissances qui les explique. Son cadre théorique est axé sur la supposition qu'on peut étendre la portée des théories institutionnalistes et géopolitiques issues de la bibliographie sur la sécession à l'ensemble des expressions d'autodétermination, y inclue l'autonomie. Ayant adopté un design de recherche d'étude de cas comparative, ce mémoire teste ses hypothèses à partir des données empiriques retracées à compter d'évènements clés, comme les crises d'État-nation, dans les trajectoires des projets d'autodétermination kurdes en Turquie, Syrie, Irak et Iran. Les trouvailles renforcent l'argument principal et sont spécifiquement significatives concernant l'intercession des Grandes Puissances. En somme, quand les revendications d'autodétermination s'alignent sur les intérêts des Grandes Puissances, celles-ci peuvent compenser les arrangements institutionnels non favorables sur place, ce qui permet l'apparition ou la consolidation de l'entité politique. Lorsqu'il y a un désalignement entre les deux, les Grandes Puissances soutiendront le statu quo.

Mots-clés : Autodétermination, Sécessionnisme, Autonomie, Institutionnalisme, Géopolitique, Kurdes, Turquie, Syrie, Irak, Iran

Abstract

Kurdish self-determination projects have not produced a sovereign state. However, later upgraded to *de jure* status in 2004, a Kurdish-led *de facto* autonomous polity emerged in 1991 in northern Iraq. Another Kurdish *de facto* autonomous polity exists in Syria since 2012. Meanwhile, Turkish and Iranian Kurds struggle to press their claims against their home state leaders. This raises questions about the factors that determine the trajectories of their self-determination projects. This thesis contends that it is a combination of domestic institutions and Great Power politics that inform them and builds its theoretical framework on the assumption that institutionalist and geopolitical explanations from the literature on secession can be extended to other expressions of self-determination, as autonomy. Through a comparative case study research design, this thesis tests a set of hypotheses against empirical evidence traced from several key events, such as nation-state crises, in the trajectories of Kurdish self-determination projects in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The findings largely support the argument, and are specifically significant for Great Power intercession. In summary, they suggest that where self-determination claims align with the interests of Great Powers, they can offset the unfavorable institutional arrangements in place, allowing for polity emergence or consolidation. Where these claims and Great Power interests are misaligned, these uphold the status quo.

Keywords: Self-Determination, Secessionism, Autonomy, Institutionalism, Geopolitics, Kurds, Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Iran

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List of Abbreviations

AANES:	Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria
AKP:	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)
BDP:	Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi (Peace and Democracy Party)
CPA:	Coalition Provisional Authority
CPT:	Causal Process Tracing
CUP:	Committee of Union and Progrss
DBK:	Desteya Bilind a Kurd (Kurdish Supreme Committee)
DDKO:	Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları (Revoltionary Cultural Eastern Hearts)
DEP:	Demokrasi Partisi (Democracy Party)
DTP:	Demokratik Toplum Partisi (Democratic Society Party)
ENKS:	Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriye (Kurdish National Council in Syria)
EU:	European Union
FSA:	Free Syrian Army
HADEP:	Halkın Demokrasi Partisi (People's Democracy Party)
HDP:	Halkların Demokratik Partisi (People's Democratic Party)
HEP:	Halkın Emek Partisi (People's Labour Party)
HPÊ:	Hêza Parastina Êzîdxanê (Protection Force of Êzîdxan)
HPG:	Hêzên Parastina Gel (People's Defence Forces)
IGC:	Iraqi Governing Council
IMK:	Islamic Movement of Kurdistan
IRA:	Irish Republican Army
KAR:	Kurdistan Autonomous Region
KCK:	Koma Civaken Kurdistan (Kurdistan Communities Union)
KDP-I:	Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDP-S:	Syrian Kurdistan Democratic Party
KDP:	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KGB:	Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopasnosti (Committee for State Security)

KNC:	Kurdish National Council
KRG:	Kurdistan Regional Government
MDS:	Meclîsa Demokratîka Suriya (Syrian Democratic Council)
MGRK:	Kurdish Meclîsa Gel a Rojavayê Kurdistanê (West Kurdistan People's Council)
MHP:	Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi (Nationalist Movement Party)
NATO:	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OHAL:	Olağanüstü Hal (State of Emergency)
PAK:	Parti Azadi Kurdistan (Kurdistan Freedom Party)
PJAK:	Partiya Jiyana Azad Kurdistanê (Kurdistan Free Life Party)
PKK:	Partiya Kakerên Kurdistan (Kurdistan Workers' Party)
PUK:	Patriotic Union of Kurdistan
PYD:	Partiya Yekitîya Demokrat (Union Democratic Party)
SCP:	Syrian Communist Party
SDF:	Syrian Democratic Forces
SNC:	Syrian National Council
SNRC:	Syrian National Revolutionary Coalition
T-KDP:	Turkish Kurdistan Democratic Party
TAK:	Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan (Kurdistan Freedom Hawks)
TAL:	Transitional Administrative Law
Tev-Dem:	Tevgera Civaka Demokratîk (Movement for a Democratic Society)
TIP:	Türkiye İşçi Partisi (Workers' Party of Turkey)
UAR:	United Arab Republic
UN:	United Nations
US:	United States
USSR:	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WPA:	Washington Peace Agreement
YBŞ:	Yekîneyên Berxwedana Şengalê (Sinjar Resistance Units)
YJÊ:	Yekinêyen Jinên Êzîdxan (Êzîdxan Women's Units)

YPG: Yekîneyên Parastina Gel (People's Protection Units)

YPJ: Yekîneyên Parastina Jin (Women's Protection Units)

Introduction

What explains the divergent trajectories of the self-determination projects of Iraqi, Syrian, Turkish, and Iranian Kurds? With an estimated population of 30-45 million (Fondation Institut Kurde de Paris 2017), the Kurds are an ethnic group that inhabits an area that spans the borders of modern Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. They form sizeable minorities in each of the four countries. However, they constitute significant regional majorities in this contiguous transnational space referred to as Greater Kurdistan or, simply, Kurdistan.

Since the early 20th century, different Kurdish self-government projects have emerged, struggled, and/or flourished in each mentioned country. The proponents of these projects have employed various strategies, including state confrontation and efforts to persuade the international community to pressure their home states (R. Griffiths 2020: 5). Some of them have received foreign military support at different stages and have been covered extensively by international media, framed as being more in line with Western liberal democratic values than other West Asian groups. In addition, Syrian and Iraqi Kurds, in particular, have been instrumental in the pursuit of Western-led agendas in their home countries. And yet, no Kurdish sovereign state has formally emerged, not even in Syria and Iraq. As a result, the Kurdish people are often labeled by the media as the largest stateless nation in the world.

However, even in the absence of a sovereign state based on the Kurdish homeland, there is a variation in terms of self-determination project advancement between Iraqi, Syrian, Turkish, and Iranian Kurds in their conflict against their respective home states. Throughout this study, the term "self-determination" is employed as defined by M. Griffiths (2013: 762), who claims that it "does not have to mean irredentism, secession and the violent renegotiation of territorial frontiers" and

that "[T]he promotion of minority rights, devolution, federalism and greater-acknowledgement of the legitimacy of cultural self-expression are all expressions of self-determination."

To answer the question, we have conceived this thesis through a comparative case study research design to take advantage of variation within and across four cases, from the emergence of the first self-determination projects in the 20th century to the 2010s. Our cases are named after dyads of ethnic groups advancing a self-determination claim and their home state. Although this center-periphery relationship is the basis for the cases, our analysis does not overlook other factors, such as these central actors' relations with other international or regional actors.

The Contemporary Kurdish Cases

The Kurdish self-determination projects in Turkey have led to limited achievements in terms of self-determination. They have been able to reverse some of the institutional bans that the country's 20th-century leaders had been progressively implementing, such as the ban on the Kurdish language or names. However, these victories have been framed as advancements in individual rights, not collective or minority rights (Tocci 2007: 60). Nevertheless, these projects have never been able to establish an autonomous polity, let alone an independent state. This lack of tangible advances in terms of self-determination does not mean that the leading project proponent, the insurgent Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK), has been inactive: the last violent campaign started in 2015, and the death toll as of 2023 is above 6,600 people (Center for Preventive Action 2023).

The current *de facto* Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) has its roots in the three autonomous cantons that were declared in three Kurdish-majority enclaves of northern Syria by the Union Democratic Party (PYD) at the outset of the Syrian civil war. Their mere emergence and expansion were tactically consented to by Bashar al-Assad's regime to focus on fighting the Syrian opposition challengers. The Damascus-AANES relations have not been violent.

Moreover, the PYD has received support from Great Powers to advance its positions during the war. However, its conflictual relationship with Turkey is characterized by confrontation, as the PYD is linked to the PKK, declared a terrorist organization in Turkey. Autonomy exists but is not free from contestation (Center for Preventive Action 2023). So far, the existence of common enemies might have prevented Damascus from clashing against the Rojavan Kurds. Still, fears about new hostilities have been rekindled in recent years, especially after al-Assad's legitimacy seems to be gradually restored abroad (Ya'qoube 2023).

The Kurdish Autonomous Region (KAR) is a Western-backed autonomous region in northern Iraq. In the wake of the country's US-led invasion, it upgraded from the *de facto* region that had emerged in 1992. For years, it has displayed greater governance capacities than the ensemble of the Iraqi state (Jüde 2017: 847-848). It has also officially established relations with relevant international actors within the Iraqi federal framework, including neighboring Turkey (Gunter 2014: 52-55; Center for Preventive Action 2023). The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) has tried to advance its self-determination project with an independence bid. The 2017 referendum for independence also brought about a crisis at the institutional level, with Iraq's constitutional court declaring the plebiscite unconstitutional (News Wires 2017).

While Iran's Kurdistan was once the cradle of "Kurdish nationalism" (Martorell 2016: 9-10), Iran's Kurdish self-determination project has lost visibility in recent times compared to its counterparts in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. As in neighboring countries, several parties coexist, each with a distinct agenda. Much like Turkey, in Iran, no autonomous polity has recently emerged. The center-periphery relations are conflictual, as skirmishes are not infrequent in a country where state grip is greater than in the previous two cases (Neuhof 2016). In addition, Kurdish discontent with the

regime is also expressed in the polls, where they seem to opt for Tehran-sanctioned reformist candidates (Badawi 2017).

In summary, we have two cases where autonomous polities have emerged (one *de facto*, AANES, Syria, and one *de jure*, KAR, Iraq) and other two where proponents still struggle to press their claims. In light of this variation, our central argument suggests that the varying outcomes of self-determination projects in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran are due to (1) the political opportunity structures created by their respective home state's institutional arrangements and constraints, and (2) to the extent to which their respective claims align with the political interests of Great Powers.

Our argument builds on two complementary theoretical approaches. On one hand, Phillip Roeder's 2007 Segmental Institutions Thesis, an institutionalist theory that emphasizes how the bottom-up dynamics of secession at the domestic level are constrained or enhanced by the institutional arrangements that govern the home state's relationship with its periphery, as well as the relationships among peripheral actors. For Roeder (2007: 11-12), secession happens as "the consequence of the failure of one set of state institutions to keep people and territory within their jurisdiction."

On the other hand, Bridget Coggins' 2014 approach highlights how the international politics of international recognition determine whether state emergence happens or not in separatist conflicts. In the words of Coggins (2014: i-ii), "the strongest members of the international community have a decisive influence over whether today's secessionists become countries," and "their support is conditioned on parochial political considerations." Her primary focus is the role of Great Powers as gatekeepers of the international system, and the implications of the recognition or non-recognition of newcomers for the *status quo* and the platform population of these candidate states.

In practice, by adopting this argument, we should expect to find that Syria and Iraq have or have had less resilient institutional arrangements than Turkey and Iran in that they (1) have created more opportunities for Kurdish self-determination project proponents to press their claims, and (2) have not been able to withstand the pressure. Likewise, we should expect to find that, facing each home state's relations with the Great Powers, the self-determination claims advanced by Syrian Kurds and, especially, by Iraqi Kurds, have aligned better with the interests of the Great Powers than those of Turkish and Iranian Kurds. Building on Coggins (2014), Great Powers with an unfriendly relationship with a home state must have been likelier to back their Kurds, and to sponsor their claims, whereas Great Powers with a friendly relationship with a home state must have been likelier to back them over the Kurds, and to uphold their institutional arrangements. This should explain why similar or analogous crisis points have not led to the same result in Turkey or Iran.

Lastly, in mobilizing M. Griffiths' (2013) conceptualization of self-determination, this thesis intends to contribute a finer-grained study of the four cases. Many works on secessionist literature, including Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014), tangentially discussed some of these cases individually but always as failure examples from the perspective of state emergence. Specifically, this also helps us take some distance from previous works, built on arguments anchored in state-building theory that sought to explain the KAR phenomenon. These included terminological characterizations of this polity as a *quasi-state* (Natali 2007, 2010), based on its institutional and economic capabilities, or a *de facto state* (Jüde 2017), directly influenced by the momentum that the polity gained during and after its victorious counteroffensive against Daesh. Regarding Roeder (2007), this master's thesis adds to a line of existing case studies that have further mobilized his theory outside the Eurasian experience, such as Hartzell (2014), Hoddie (2014), Lacina (2014) and Mehler (2014). In particular, we expect this comparative case study to yield valuable insights for

ethnic or separatist conflict management, in particular, for strategies other than secession, like autonomy or federalization. Also, we expect to understand better the international top-down dynamics that affect self-determination projects and how these intersect with the political opportunity structures that derive from the institutional framework of the home state.

Organization of the Master's Thesis

This thesis is organized into five parts: the Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, and 3, and the Conclusions section. Chapter 1 develops the study's theoretical framework. It is further divided into three sections: the first revolves around extending the logic of secessionist conflict to autonomy as another expression of self-determination and lays out the different key concepts. The second section is devoted to Roeder (2007) and his Segmental Institutions Thesis, while the third describes and analyzes Coggins (2014). Each of the second and third sections features a review of the relevant institutionalist or IR literature, the justification of our choice of theories to be tested, an in-depth outline of the respective theories, and the hypotheses we have derived and adapted from them. Chapter 2 concerns the methodological considerations of our comparative case study research design, our case selection, and the operationalization of variables. In Chapter 3, we present the empirical data relative to each of the four cases and a discussion section where the relevant findings are interpreted. Lastly, the Conclusion section deals with the theoretical, practical, and ethical implications of these findings.

Chapter 1: Theoretical Framework

Roeder's institutionalist approach stems from Comparative Politics, while Coggins offers an English School framework to study the state recognition dynamics in international society. However, despite their respective background traditions, both studies lie within the broader literature on secession. In delimitating the theoretical scope of our comparative case study, this Chapter bridges some of the conceptual gaps between these two theories. Therefore, this brief introduction provides basic definitions and identifies some common ground among the diversity of viewpoints in this literature.

1.1 Extending the Logics of Secession to Other Outcomes of Self-Determination

The basic assumption underpinning this master's thesis is that a conjunction of the causal logic of Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014), limited initially to secession, can explain the broader trajectories of self-determination projects. This involves not only outcomes of secession or independence, but also autonomy or decentralization, which, following M. Griffiths (2013), are expressions of self-determination too:

> "Since the end of decolonization, it has become clear that the diplomatic compromises that facilitated the transfer of political authority during that era are now obsolete. Today, the principle of self-determination lacks both definition and applicability. Saving it from a complete descent into incoherence will require a renewal of the links between autonomy, democracy, human rights and the right to self-determination. Central to cultivating this renewal should be the adoption of a more liberal and expansive interpretation of the meaning of self-determination. Self-determination does not have to mean irredentism, secession and the violent renegotiation of territorial frontiers. The promotion of minority rights, devolution,

> federalism and greater acknowledgement of the legitimacy of cultural self-expression are all expressions of self-determination" (M. Griffiths, 2013: 762).

Among the different expressions of self-determination mentioned by M. Griffiths, secession and autonomy share one crucial trait: both pertain to (1) a political community and (2) a territorial jurisdiction. For example, Keil and Anderson (2018: 91) conceive autonomy as "arrangements which involve the transfer of political power (administrative, fiscal and/or legislative competences) to a minority group (or multiple groups) residing within a particularly defined geographical area." Likewise, Benedikter's (2007) and Lapidoth's (1997) conceptualization of territorial autonomy revolves around the allocation of "limited self-rule," or autonomy, "to geographically clustered minority groups" (in Keil and Anderson 2018: 91).

Regarding secession, the territorial component remains constant across the different definitions. Wood (1981: 110) defines secession as "the formal withdrawal from a central political authority by a member unit or units on the basis of a claim to independent sovereign status." Beran (1984: 21) follows a similar logic: "withdrawal, from an existing state and its central government, of part of this state, the withdrawing part consisting of citizens and the territory they occupy." Likewise, Heraclides (1997: 500) claims that secessionism exists where a communal group seeks to separate a constituent region of a state from its metropolitan territory.

In this sense, arrangements leading to autonomy or state formation through secession involve a settlement for a given community within a given territory to implement partial or complete self-rule.

Another shared similarity is autonomy and secession's link to conflict as expressions of self-determination. From the secession end, its link to conflict is further supported by accounts such as Radan (2008, 2020, 2023). While he recognizes the conflictual relationship between the home state

and the secessionist group, he advocates for broader definitions of secession based on the objective, not the means to achieve it. Conversely, other accounts rather ingrain this relationship in the mere definition. For example, Crawford (2006: 375-418) further narrows down secession to instances that feature, among others, three qualifying conditions relating to conflict and violence: (1) home state continuity, (2) the home state's continuous opposition to secession, and (3) the use of force. Specifically addressing "secessionist conflict," according to Heraclides (1997: 498), one starts when the parent state rejects the secessionist claims and does not provide for alternatives to accommodate them. In this case, the ultimate goal of secession teleologically defines both the insurgent actor and the ensuing conflict.

While secessionist conflict might seem a good fit to devise this type of conflict, there is a lack of consensus in terms of nomenclature. This element directly confronts Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014). The first work, along with others such as Bunce (1999), Hale (2000), Beissinger (2002), Lustick, Miodownik, and Eidelson (2004), conflates secessionist conflict with ethnic and ethno-nationalist conflict. Conversely, Coggins (2011, 2014) and other IR scholars, such as Heraclides (1990, 1997), point out several salient differences. They stress that secessionist conflicts are characterized by their objective and that not all ethno-nationalist conflicts are driven by the goal of secession. Likewise, Connor (1994) explains that secessionism is not limited to the ethno-nationalist dimension and describes ethno-nationalism as just one of the possible categories of motivations that may fuel secessionism.[1] For the latter group, this goes beyond nomenclature and

[1] Other possible categories of motivations for secessionist claims cited by Heraclides (1997: 501) include cultural and societal distinctiveness (Duchasek 1970) and grievance, which is addressed through the notions of "internal colony" (Hechter 1975: 30-34) or comparative disadvantage (Horowitz 1985: 249-254). Grievance and comparative disadvantage are also addressed by Esman (1977: 373) through the idea of the "milch cow." This refers to the prevailing belief in wealthy separatist regions that a "callous" central government is draining their prosperity in favor of less efficient regions.

has conceptual implications, as this conflation may inflate the case population to include ethnic-conflict dyads whose experiences have little to no bearing on secession.

However, similarities do exist between secessionist and ethno-national conflicts. According to Heraclides (1997), both types of conflict involve a "communal group" that "challenges the state, its authority, unity, and territorial integrity," rejects the dominant identities and cultures, and seeks to "undermine the position" of the dominant group (Horowitz 1985; Gurr 1993, in Heraclides 1997: 498). This implies that, while not all secessionist conflicts are ethno-nationalist conflicts, and vice-versa, there may be cases of conflict that fall under both types. In this case, we anticipate that the insights of both Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014) apply to our four cases, where the contesting communal group is also an ethnic group (Kurds) that differs from the dominant ethnic group of the common or home state (Arabs, Persians or Turks).[2]

By linking "secession" and "cantonization/federalization" to "minority conflict," Clancy and Nagle (2009: 7-13) tacitly assume the idea of a minority group challenging the dominant group within the home state. Although it is not always the case that secessionist or autonomist challengers are also minority groups, such as the Flemings in Belgium, these definitions reinforce the notion that both secessionism and autonomy are expressions of self-determination, and "macro-political" methods that deal with minority differences in minority conflicts. While secession *eliminates* these differences, "cantonalization/federalization" serves to *manage* them.

This self-determination conceptual framework allows for a more flexible framing of our outcomes in terms of trajectories. Defined in McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001: 195) as "what happens after

[2] This even holds with Roeder's (2007: 31-34) claim that institutional arrangements, especially segment-states, often inform ethnic groups and not vice versa. According to Besikçi (1992: 68), Kurds have become aware of their distinctive identity, culture, and history in response to the institutional denial of "differential Kurdish traits."

a revolutionary situation has appeared," this conceptualization does not exclude the possibility that these outcomes are evolving and that attainments can be either accumulated or reversed. This is consistent with the idea in Seymour (2008: 34) that "self-determination is an on-going process, often pursued by ethnic and national groups with a long time horizon." His typology of self-determining polities already implies that the logic of secession can be extrapolated to outcomes of autonomy. This is further reinforced by framings of autonomy as a "strategic choice" (Seymour 2008: 70), that build from Buhaug (2006) and Jenne, Saideman, and Lowe (2007), or "tactic" (R. Griffiths 2021: 160; Cunningham and McCulloch 2023: 302-306) that some secessionists might be willing to settle for when they realize their inability to attain statehood. Similarly, Roeder (2018: 1-19) sees the achievement of institutional outcomes other than *de jure* statehood as "strategic opportunism." In summary, this implies that outcomes of formal or informal autonomy or minority rights recognition may also result from or during secessionist conflicts. Conflict parties are incentivized to switch between political objectives depending on their relative capabilities, with weaker groups aiming to recognize minority rights or autonomy, and stronger groups aiming for independence.

These dynamics have an analogous effect on the use of force in secessionist conflict. More specifically, Cunningham and McCulloch (2023: 304) describe how secessionist actors switch from tactics that do not always imply violence (conventional politics, tactics of violence, and tactics of nonviolence) and how these groups are incentivized to switch between them, depending on the "conditions on the ground." This introduces one last aspect that extends to the conceptualization of secessionist conflict: the conflation of conflict with armed violence.[3] Even in the absence of armed

[3] Although not specific to secessionist and ethnic conflicts, Staniland's (2017) armed politics approach offers a comprehensive conceptualization of intrastate conflict that does not conflate its existence with violence.

or mass-scale violence, the conflictual relationship between the secessionist collective and their home state persists. Roeder (2007: 229-256; 2018: 18) implies this logic by incorporating the notions of "escalation of means." So, both theories apply to cases with varying degrees of intra-state violence, such as our four conflict dyads.

In summary, our understanding of secessionist conflict builds on Radan's (2008: 31; 2023: 34) argument that "there is no reason why the use or threat of force should be an element of any definition of secession because it is only concerned with how secession is achieved." This, in turn, informs our definition of self-determination conflict, which encompasses any conflicts involving a communal group seeking to advance a self-determination claim, irrespective of whether it or the host state resort to violence, even if at times.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning that the link between decentralization and pressures from the international system is recognized in works as Keil and Anderson (2018):

> "Hence, more and more governments in countries plagued with ethnocultural conflict are pressured by the international community to adopt solutions including decentralization and power sharing. It is therefore no surprise that the UN Department of Political Affairs has developed a support unit focused on power sharing and decentralization (UN, 2014)" (Keil and Anderson 2018: 93).

On a final note, self-determination helps unify this framework's terminology, which originally ranges from references to "nation-state projects," "common-state" and "ethnic conflicts" (Roeder 2007) to "independence projects," "home state" and "separatist conflict" (Coggins 2014). In this Chapter, references to "self-determination projects" and "self-determination conflict" will only be used in our own hypotheses and will not be employed in the description of other authors' arguments. Self-determination also enlarges the range of possible outcomes that may occur in our dependent

variable. The theories to be tested were originally conceived to explain the outcome of the emergence of functional states, from the points of view of internal capacity (Roeder 2007) and of international agency (Coggins 2014). In line with McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) and Seymour (2008), our dependent variable is expanded to encompass broader project advancements in self-determination trajectories, which involve material changes in the political status of the concerned group (see Table 1).

Table 1: Terminological and dependent variable comparison across Roeder (2007), Coggins (2014) and this study.

	Project	Conflict	Host State	Dependent Variable
Roeder (2007)	Nation-State Project	Ethnic Conflict	Common-State	State Emergence
Coggins (2014)	Independence Project	Separatist Conflict	Home State	State Emergence
This Study	Self-Determination Project	Self-Determination Conflict	Home State	Self-Determination Project Advancement

We have chosen to maintain Coggins' "home state" term to designate the host state because "common-state" involves that a segment-state exists for a titular ethnic group advancing a self-determination or nation-state project, which is not the case in most instances of our variance.

1.2 Domestic Explanations and Roeder's Segmental Institution Thesis

Self-determination trajectories, much like state emergence, respond to domestic explanations. In the literature on secession, domestic explanations of state emergence have usually stemmed from the Comparative Politics field. These focus on bottom-up causal mechanisms confined to the host state's territory, and which present external influence or intervention as exogenous factors.

According to Coggins (2011: 439-446), this body of literature is organized around four categories of domestic explanations: negotiated consent, decisive relative strength, ethnonational mobilization, and institutional empowerment. To these four explanations, we have to add a more recent subgroup of theories that criticize the previous approaches and that stem from the Comparative Politics field. It includes works such as Hroch (2015), R. Griffiths (2021), or Roeder (2018). This criticism is well summarized by Roeder (2023: 219), who claims that those older institutionalist theories on secessionist conflict primarily emphasized "the conditions under which mobilization takes place."

According to him, the more recent shift of the focus towards "strategy" and leadership has been a major conceptual breakthrough. As a result, newer theories are less dependent on conditions and revolve more around agency or decision-making. They do not neglect any of the previously enumerated considerations, such as national mobilization, institutions, or facts on the ground; these just cease to be at the center of these newer postulates. While these theories may be a good fit to test against our cases, they require information that we do not have access to, and which may involve a time frame well beyond the scope of a master's thesis.

Back to the four traditional categories of domestic explanations, the first one involves "Negotiated Consent." According to Coggins (2011), this is a normative causal argument. Works such as Crawford (2000) claim that the international community upholds international law and the status quo until the home state consents to secession. Other authors, such as O'Connell (1992), find that, in case of conflict, there might be legitimate grounds for consent in the shadow of defeat. The second category is "Decisive Relative Strength" (referred to by Siroky et al. (2020: 1050) as the "facts on the ground"). In violent conflict, secessionist groups with superior military power are likelier to assure their independence (Licklider 1995; Crawford 2000; Toft 2010). This argument revolves around the coercive capacity necessary to vanquish competing sources of authority within the group's area of influence and over the platform population. These authors find that clear victories give way to lasting peace as they evidence the balance of power. In particular, Toft (2010, 114) finds that rebel victories tend to yield longer and more stable periods of peace. The third one is "Ethnonational Mobilization." Stateless minorities with an ethno-national conscience are more likely to make secessionist demands. Also, ethno-national minorities are likelier to ensure their secession because they tend to be more mobilized (Horowitz 1985; Bunce 1999; Hale 2000; Beissinger 2002; Roeder 2007). The last one, "Institutional Empowerment," has the most bearing

on this study, as it encompasses and makes the central claim of Roeder (2007). In summary, minorities enjoying access to solid institutional structures are likelier to secede from their home state. Therefore, popular mobilization is unnecessary if elites enjoy a titular ethnic segment-state, that is, an institutionalized mechanism of political influence.

As Phillip Roeder puts it, his Segmental Institutions Thesis is "an extension of the institutionalists' most fundamental claim, that political institutions structure political life" (Roeder 2007, 15). This means that they determine the players, the opportunities to act, the costs and benefits of each type of political coalition, organizational form and strategy, and the political agenda (Ostrom, 1992; Lalman, Oppenheimer, and Swistak 1993; Shepsle, 1989; Tarrow 1988; Eisinger 1973; Kitschelt 1986). This implies that the institutional arrangements of the common state create a given political opportunity structure that will shape the decision-making process of the different players. According to Roeder, this also applies to nation-state project proponents, and to their trajectories too.

Roeder's model has several spatial implications. He claims that institutional arrangements shape the rapport (1) among political actors on the periphery of the common state and (2) between political actors of the periphery and of the center (see Figure 1).

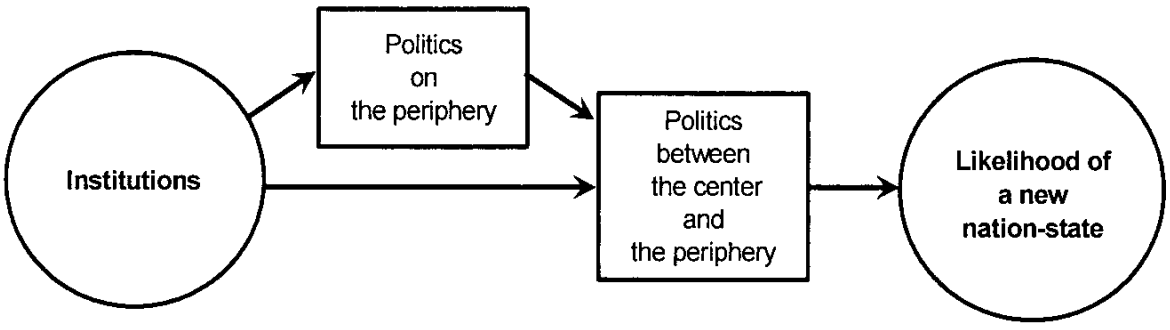

Figure 1: The Segmental Institutions Thesis (in Roeder 2007:14)

In this sense, these institutions inform the politics on the periphery, creating opportunities for concurrence among proponents of competing nation-state projects "to establish political hegemony within a target population within a target homeland." Likewise, segmental institutions shape the political rapport between the periphery and the center, where nation-state project proponents "seek to induce the leaders of the common-state" to get preferential treatment and advance their agendas over others. This increasingly leads to "zero-sum" conflicts over the distribution of decision-making competences between the governments of the common-state and the segment-state. As a result, leaders find it harder to compromise, as one party's gains are seen as losses for the other (Roeder 2007: 14-19).

While the outcome of interest in this theory revolves around state formation or "the creation of new nation-states," the author identifies one intermediate event that plays into the causal chain toward independence: nation-state crises. These are critical points where nation-state project proponents can strengthen their credibility vis-à-vis common-state leaders and advance their claims on the bargaining table.

A series of factors are identified by Roeder (2007: 259), whose combined effect can explain (1) why some "nation-state projects are" more "likely to reach the bargaining table with leaders of an existing state and to become the focus of a nation sate-crisis" than others; and (2) why some "of these nation-state projects are more likely to succeed at creating a sovereign nation-state."

These questions unveil the analytical unit of this theory, the "nation-state project." Building from Breuilly (1994), Hechter and Levi (1979), Roeder defines it as a "claim that a specific population (purportedly a nation) should be self-governing within a state of its own —one that may not yet

exist. On the other hand, "nation-state" designates a "territorial jurisdiction (the state) and a political community (the nation)" (Roeder 2007: 12).

In answering these questions, this theory does not dismiss traditional alternative explanations such as identities, grievances, greed, mobilization of resources, or international recognition. The Segmental Institutions Thesis encompasses all of them, but unlike previous works (Gurr 2000; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Hechter and Okamoto 2001), it no longer assigns primal causality to them. Regarding these, Roeder makes two claims: (1) that "[E]lements of identity, grievance, greed, mobilization and international recognition must be present for a successful nation-state project; and (2) that "[T]hey must align so that they are mutually reinforcing." As a result, it treats them as "intervening or endogenous factors" affected by the type of institutional arrangement in place. In this sense, he introduces segment states as the key institutional arrangement that "leads all of those elements to align favorably" (Roeder 2007, 9-10). The presence of a segment state thus becomes the first condition in the causal chain towards the success of a nation-state project. Consequently, this theory implies that all of these elements are necessary for creating a new nation-state, but none is sufficient on its own. According to Roeder, this overcomes a prevalent limitation of approaches, such as McCarthy and Zald (1987) and Oberschall (1973) where one of these factors carries greater weight than the rest, that is, assuming that the other factors are always propitious. He asserts that, during the 20th century, new states have mostly come from administrative upgrade of segment-states. This paragraph points out at a key element that has led us to choose Roeder (2007) over the other reviewed theories. Despite its focus on institutional arrangements, its all-encompassing nature makes it inclusive of alternative or complementary factors and more robust than alternative models. Consequently, it adjusts better to a larger case population and the cases and observations on which it relies are relatively numerous and up to date:

658 ethnic groups in 153 independent states from 1955 to 1999 (Roeder 2007: 38). In this sense, this thesis joins other works such as Hartzell (2014), Hoddie (2014), Lacina (2014) and Mehler (2014), by testing the Segmental Institutions Thesis against cases such as Tibet, Nicaragua's Miskito people, India and Cameroon's Anglophones, respectively.

This claim introduces us to the fundamental concepts that inform the dyads in his research: segment-state and common-state. He derives the definitions for both terms from "segmented state." This is a state claiming to be a nation-state that "divides its territory and population further among separate jurisdictions and gives the population that is purportedly indigenous to each jurisdiction a distinct political status." The segmented state institutional arrangements create a "common-state" that is "common to the whole territory and population" and separate "segment-states" for each distinct populations and territories (Roeder 2007: 12). In order to explain how segment-states emerge as independent states, the author draws five sets of hypotheses. The first and second sets focus on institutions and their direct effects on secessionist trajectories.

The first of these sets of hypotheses revolves around the notion of nation-state crises. While not the actual dependent variable in either Roeder (2007) or this thesis, the occurrence of such intermediate critical points indicates that project advancements may take place. The main hypothesis in the set implies that self-determination state projects empowered by segment-states are far more likely to lead to nation-state crises. Conversely, it implies that if they had had access to segment-states, self-determination project proponents whose claims go unheard would have been much more likely to occasion nation-state crises. Our first hypothesis is, therefore, an adaptation of his central hypothesis in this set.

Hypothesis 1. The likelihood that bargaining between proponents of self-determination projects and home state leaders will escalate to a nation-state crisis rises when the proponents control a segment-state (adapted from Roeder 2007: 261).

Despite its focus on segment-states as the independent variable of interest to measure the occurrence of nation-state crises, the Segmental Institutions Thesis foresees alternative factors, whose effect may compensate for the peripheral leader's lack of access to a segment-state: the "conquered nation syndrome" and transitional instability. These are accounted for by two secondary hypotheses in this first set. Sub-hypothesis H1a (Roeder 2007: 262) claims that "[T]he likelihood that bargaining between proponents of a nation-state project and common-state leaders will escalate to a nation-state crisis rises when the nation-state imagined by the project existed immediately prior to incorporation into the common-state." Likewise, Sub-hypothesis H1c (Roeder 2007: 262) claims that "[T]he likelihood that bargaining between proponents of nation-state projects and common-state leaders will escalate to a nation-state crisis rises when the common-state government is weakened by political turmoil or constitutional transition."

On the other hand, the second set of hypotheses relates to the necessary shift in the balance of leverage towards segment-state leaders to advance their self-determination project. This becomes more likely as the design of the segmental institutions in place enhances the segment-state leaders' ability to (1) cause losses on common-state leaders, (2) withstand losses from conflict, and (3) withhold information as to their actual capabilities. Our second hypothesis is, therefore, an extension of his central hypothesis in this set to other expressions of self-determination.

Hypothesis 2. When and where the institutional arrangements in place give greater leverage to leaders on the periphery, including segment-state leaders, there are (a) greater incentives and means

for these leaders to press their self-determination claims from the home state and (b) greater incentives for home state leaders to accede to such claims (adapted from Roeder 2007: 291).

The truth is that not all segment-states eventually become independent nation-states. Therefore, the Segmental Institutions Thesis also examines how segment-states vary in each case to ascertain the characteristics that lead to the emergence of a new nation-state. In this sense, Roeder (2007) develops three additional sets of hypotheses where he accounts for the combined effect of the aforementioned endogenous factors on creating crises and affecting the balance of leverage, political identity hegemony, the security of common-state leaders, or the platform population's political empowerment.

The first of these factors is identities. Roeder's hypotheses identify the conditions that increase the likeliness that one given identity on the periphery coordinates and "achieve[s] regional ascendance in political-identity hegemony". While identities are at the core of works such as Connor (1994), Geertz (1963), Haas (1993), A. Smith (1981), and Nagel (1994), in Roeder's hypotheses, political-identity hegemony is not expected to drive extensive nationalist support, but to enable the political leadership of a segment-state to "block the expression of alternative projects" (Roeder 2007: 21). This builds partially on Rothschild's (1981: 96-99) idea that "politicized ethnicity surfaces and hardens along the most accessible and yielding fault-line of potential cleavage available" and that institutional arrangements have direct bearing "in affecting the configuration of ethnic groups, the cutting edge of ethnic conflict, and the very content of ethnicity per se."

This question is central to the third set of hypotheses, which posit that in the presence of a segment-state, leaders who have achieved political-identity hegemony have greater capacities to mobilize any advantages vis-à-vis the common-state leaders. Conversely, where this hegemony has not been attained, these advantages are more prone to be unused. These advantages, in turn, may shift the

balance of leverage toward self-determination projects with political-identity hegemony. As a result, our third hypothesis is an adaptation of the main hypothesis in this set.

Hypothesis 3. When and where peripheral leaders, including segment-state leaders, have consolidated political-identity hegemony, there are (a) greater incentives and means for these leaders to press their self-determination claims and (b) greater incentives for home state leaders to accede to such claims (adapted from Roeder 2007: 292).

Grievances and greed come next. Consistent with Gurr (1971), Collier and Hoeffler (2000), Nagel and Olzak (1982) or Ragin (1979), Roeder (2007) accounts for them as drivers of the ambition of a nation-state project towards the objective. As such, Roeder's hypotheses identify the institutional conditions that increase the likelihood that independence becomes the central focus of grievances and greed. This implies that the project's ambition is "channeled toward the creation of an independent political system" instead of looking for a solution within the existing framework of the common-state (Roeder 2007: 21).

The third is the mobilization of resources. Roeder's hypotheses posit that nation-state projects identified with a segment-state can take advantage of its "superior organizational resources" and its "hierarchical rather than atomistic or corpuscular structure." This implies a comparative advantage over competitors in the race to "place claims on the bargaining table" and to extort the central government into awarding concessions (Roeder 2007: 21-22). This is consistent with works such as McCarthy and Zald (1987), Oberschall (1973), McAdam (1982), Morris (1984) or McAdam, McCarthy and Zald (1988).

These factors make for the center of Roeder's fourth set of hypotheses, whose main one deals with the factors from the common-state leaders' end that may affect the balance of leverage by

increasing their capacity to inflict losses on segment-state leaders or withstand losses inflicted by these. Here, unity and security refer to the consolidation of the political leadership of leaders. Conversely, this implies that division or insecurity can make common-state leaders more vulnerable and affect their position at the bargaining table. Our fourth hypothesis is, therefore, an adaptation of this one.

Hypothesis 4. When and where the unity and security of common-state leaders decline, there are (a) greater incentives and means for peripheral leaders, including segment-state leaders, to press their self-determination claims and (b) greater incentives for home state leaders to accede to such claims (adapted from Roeder 2007: 292).

Next, Roeder mentions how institutions matter in creating opportunities to act effectively. These can create incentives for or against independence, rising or decreasing costs and benefits. His hypotheses imply that segment-states afford some privileges to hegemonic nation-state proponents, such as preferential access to the leadership of the common-state as "the officially sanctioned voice of every interest on the periphery." This also has bearing on the arena of center-periphery politics, in that institutions may create incentives for solid segment-state governments to confront weak common-state governments (Roeder 2007: 22).

This relates to the fifth set of hypotheses. This one revolves around the role of segment-state leaders as switchmen, who, in the presence of institutional arrangements that favor political-identity hegemony, "can direct the political action of the segment-state population to support or challenge the common-state." Two institutional arrangements make this more likely: (1) segment-state leadership autonomy, in the sense that the tenure of segment-state leaders is independent of the common-state leadership, and (2) segment-state population inclusion, understood as the political empowerment of the segment-state population to partake in the governance of the common-state

(Roeder 2007: 295-296). Conversely, dependence and exclusion from common-state politics are expected to produce the opposite effect. Our fifth hypothesis is, therefore, an adaptation of the central hypothesis in this set.

Hypothesis 5. The more the political empowerment of the population within periphery politics exceeds their empowerment within the common-state (a) the greater are the incentives and means for peripheral leaders to press their self-determination claims, and (b) the greater is the incentive for home state leaders to accede to such claims (adapted from Roeder 2007: 295-296)

Lastly, Roeder claims that projects identified with a segment-state are more likely to "gain institutional recognition as sovereign states" than projects without a segment-state. International recognition "can result" in *de jure* independence and, thus, deter the common-state from reincorporating the secession state. However, for the author, this factor is "only a ratification of a lengthy process of gestation of political-identity hegemony, of focusing greed and grievance on the solution offered by a nation-state project, of empowerment of proponents of that project, and weakening of an existing common-state" (Roeder 2007: 22).

His empirical observations from the dynamics across the different phases of nation-state creation during the last century support that (1) segment-states are "almost always" necessary for the emergence of a new state out of a nation-state project, and (2) without segment states, nation-state projects are "far less likely to produce crises in the first place" (Roeder 2007: 10-21).

Two causal links underpin the theory. The first one connects institutions with bargaining, both within segment-state actors and between the leaders of the common-state and the segment-state. Then, bargaining is connected with the likelihood of common state failure and the emergence of a new nation-state.

While not a central claim of his work, the author asserts that this approach circumvents some of the limitations of nationalism as a driver of nation-state emergence. According to Roeder (2007: 22) Nationalism is defined as the "political awakening of a people" or the "politicization of an ethnic group that galvanizes it into a nation." A consensus exists among primordialists, such as Connor (1972), and constructivists, such as Brass (1991), who agree that this awakening lays out a mobilization platform, eventually leading the group to achieve a state of their own. This critique is based on observations that "nationalism as such" was not present in several cases that ended in independence. Roeder (2007: 26-27) supports that "widespread popular nationalism seldom exists prior to statehood, and typically does not precede independence, and thus, does not provide an entirely satisfactory explanation for which nation-state projects succeed." Anyway, he recognizes that a successful nation-state project requires political-identity hegemony, which is "something that sometimes resembles nationalism." This prevents alternative projects from trumping the nation-state project seeking secession, as they cannot capitalize on the segment-state resources to mobilize the population on their behalf. Likewise, building from Schelling (1960), Roeder extends these logics to national identities by claiming that states coordinate them: "in most instances, nationalism is a by-product of independence," and "in the rare instances in which a strong nationalism exists prior to independence, it is usually the product of a segment-state."

To sum up, much like in the Segmental Institutions Thesis, in our hypotheses, it is the institutional arrangements in place in a home state that condition the remaining endogenous factors, with segment-states being more helpful for self-determination project proponents to reconcile them favorably.

1.3 International-Level Explanations and Coggins' "Friends in High Places"

Secessionist conflicts are increasingly numerous and relevant to the emergence of new states. However, they are also the most implacable and intense, and the least susceptible to pacific resolution. Consequently, they pose one of the main security challenges, not only for individual states, but also for the international system (Kymlicka 1995: 193).

In IR literature, as Coggins (2011: 444) describes, a common claim is that domestic factors can be *sufficient* to explain some instances of state emergence. However, they are not *necessary* conditions in all cases. As a result, some authors turned to the international level to find other factors that can help fill this gap. These explanations feed from different IR traditions, so they focus on different aspects of the international political arena. The first body of literature focuses on norms and their effects on the positioning of external actors vis-à-vis secessionist projects. Others look for answers in geostrategy or international security dynamics.

Among the norms-based works, Mayall and Simpson (1992) claim that the international system does not favor the right to self-determination. In turn, Heraclides (1997: 516) affirms that the system is "insufficient" to manage and resolve these conflicts since there is a normative constraint against unilateral secession, which clashes with other normative principles inherent to the liberal order, such as the protection of Human and Minority Rights. His approach follows prior works that seek to reconcile both normative principles by identifying criteria susceptible to becoming normative. For example, Kamanu (1974: 361) and Beitz (1979: 112) draw the line at the home state's unequal or unfair treatment of the secessionist collective. For Dinstein (1976) and, particularly, Beran (1984: 26), the freedom of individuals to decide their political relations should prevail over "eternally immutable borders." Islam (1985: 219) identifies grievances and suffering as criteria susceptible to becoming normative for future secessionist demands. In turn, Heraclides

(1997) develops a set of six preconditions that are consistent with the principles of liberal peace and which can help establish normative precedents for the acceptability of non-consensual secession.[4]

Other works focus on evidence from different cases, such as Biafra, Bangladesh, or Cyprus, to explain how these norms have been circumvented. A group of authors suggests that to counter the inertia of the global system's normative constraints, secessionist projects must find support in their regional environment (Islam 1985; Mayall and Simpson 1992; Ayoob 1995).

Other accounts challenge the apparent clarity of norms. This makes the central claim of Borgen (2009: 30-32). He claims that since the international society is not made up of one epistemic community, several interpretations of these norms are possible. As a result, Great Powers instrumentalize the ambiguity of international law to justify their decisions to intercede in favor or against one actor or another in secessionist conflicts. Borgen adds that, in attempting to legitimize their choice before the rest of the states, Great Powers adopted a legalist discourse, hoping to establish favorable customs in international law. Great Power support for challengers or home states makes the center of other accounts which draw from post-Cold War secessionist scenarios, including the post-Soviet and Yugoslavian cases. These posit that, although domestic factors may suffice to explain the existence of de facto states, the emergence of functional states at international level largely depends on the international politics concerns of Great Powers (Coggins 2011, 2014, 2018; Seymour 2019; Siroky et al. 2020).

[4] Heraclides (1997: 509) suggests six preconditions under which unilateral secession would be acceptable: (1) "a sizable and well-defined community or society," with a solid territorial base (a majority in one region), supporting secession; (2) "systematic discrimination, exploitation and injustice;" (3) "cultural domination against the community or society seeking secession;" (4) intransigence from the parent state regarding peace negotiations, lack of accommodation through autonomy, military repression; (5) secession will bring about "conflict settlement and regional peace;" (6) respect of Human and cultural minority rights in the new state.

More recently, works such as Stokes (2019) and Riegl and Doboš (2023) have adopted an approach that takes into account a complex combination of "dynamically developing competing interests, norms, and situational conditions." Their stance on normative aspects is similar to that of the previously outlined authors, considering the normative environment unfavorable to unilateral secession. However, the latter's approach to the outcome of secessionist projects focuses on the influence of the geopolitical environment in which "recognition-seeking entities" operate. In that regard, and in line with what the outlined models linking secessionist conflict outcome to international politics separately argue, they posit that "high-level tangible support may enable secessionists to win *de facto* independence." At the same time, "*de jure* status requires a broader support of the members of the international community" (Riegl and Doboš 2023: 187).

This signals a divide between the works that attribute primal causality to the intercession of neighboring states or regional powers, and those that focus on that of Great Powers. This reflects a cohort effect informed by the prevalent dynamics of bipolarity and unipolarity at each time. Likewise, the frameworks of more recent works extend their focus to regional considerations in response to the emergent multipolar system.

Within the group of norms-based works, there is another divide between contiguity considerations and regional power dynamics. For example, in Heraclides (1990), the hierarchical aspects of external actors seem to be largely absent from his analysis. However, in his comparative case study, he identifies a trend that shows that contiguous states tend not to intercede in foreign secessionist conflicts. Nevertheless, where involvement exists, these contiguous states have primarily supported the parent or home state. For example, the case of Turkey and Northern Cyprus, where strict contiguity is absent, remains unaccounted for in his study. In addition, in another paradigmatic

case, as India and Bangladesh, contiguity may have played a part. However, hierarchical considerations and regional power dynamics may have had more bearing.

Meanwhile, Goltz (1993) analyzes Russian support for secessionist projects in the separatist conflicts of the post-Soviet space, treating Russia as a former metropolis. An assessment that accounted for regional power dynamics and hierarchical considerations, however, could argue that Russia's hegemonic role in its regional system could have driven the outcomes.

Islam (1985: 218) advances the importance of the involvement of powerful neighboring states in the outcome of the secessionist conflict. Consistent with this idea, in Ayoob (1995), the intercession of neighboring actors in secessionist conflict is developed through the notion of regional hegemon involvement as a ramification of his subaltern realism paradigm. This paradigm posits that traditional security hypotheses cannot explain the security challenges inherent to "Third World" states, as these feature internal vulnerabilities resulting from their particular state-building process, and that rival states may exploit these:

> "[…] in order to succeed, a Third World secessionist movement needs strong external military support from the preeminent regional military power. In this context, three things seem to be crucial: (1) The external supporter must be willing to fight and be able to win a war against the parent state from which the secessionist movement wants to separate; (2) the external supporter's military capabilities in the region and its political influence internationally should be sufficient to deter other external powers, whether regional or extra-regional, from intervening militarily on behalf of the parent state in order to prevent secession; and (3) the external supporter's objectives must coincide with those of the secessionist movement in terms of breaking the parent state, for otherwise, the external supporter could come to a compromise settlement with the parent state even in the midst of a war, thus leaving the secessionist

movement out in the cold, and probably much worse off than if it had not attempted a secessionist war" (Ayoob 1995: 52-53).

Three of the elements in the citation above need to be highlighted: (1) military support; (2) the regional actor's military capabilities; and (3) the external actor and secessionists' shared goals. Elements 1 and 2 signal the differences between works that find causality in the regional environment and those that find it at the international system level.[5] Conversely, the third element shows a pattern shared with Coggins (2011, 2014) that informs her most fundamental claim: that Great Powers condition their support to secessionist projects to the extent that their interests align with such projects' claims.[6] This is the basis for her "geostrategic hypotheses" (Coggins 2014: 45-46). These hypotheses build on the fact that leaders' decisions are informed by international security considerations and the impact that the envisaged polity "is anticipated to have on the status quo." Consequently, this decision will be instrumentalized to "weaken" or destabilize competitors and "solidify their own security situation vis-à-vis the rest of the international community." According to Coggins, common motives for supporting challengers of the central authority of another state may be the wish to destabilize unfriendly neighboring states, to precipitate regime change or the prospect of being highly regarded by "potentially powerful insurgents." Our sixth

[5] This divergence is the most salient if we look at how the example of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is addressed in each current. This case is highly illustrative of how one single outcome can be interpreted as either a success or a failure. In Ayoob (1995), it is implied to be a success case, as Turkey has promoted and safeguarded state emergence through military support, regardless of its international recognition. However, in Coggins (2011, 450), even if cognizant of the strategic aspects of military involvement, the case remains just an example of how ethnic affinities may drive diplomatic support for state recognition. According to her, it is merely driven by affinity motivations, not by regional power dynamics. Thus, this form of agency would be limited to states ethnically related to the secessionist movement (for recognition) or the parent state (against recognition).

[6] Linked to the literature on motivations. See Suhrke and Noble (1977: 226-230) and Heraclides (1990: 370-376) for "affective" and "instrumental and utilitarian" motivations. Affective motivations include religion (Carment, James, and Taydas 2009: 67), ideology, and democratic principles (Bélanger, Duchesne, and Paquin 2005). Instrumental motivations include: (1) international politics and strategic motivations; (2) economic advantage; (3) domestic politics motivations; and (4) military considerations (Heraclides 1990: 370).

hypothesis is a combination of Coggins' hypotheses, adapted to extend its scope beyond the recognition of secessionism to broader expressions of self-determination.

Hypothesis 6: Great Powers with a conflictual relationship with a home state will be more likely to support a self-determination project, whereas Great Powers with a friendly relationship with a home state will be less likely to support its self-determination projects (adapted from Coggins 2014: 45-46).

Conversely, Coggins foresees one particular constraint that can inform the direction of Great Power support in a secessionist dispute. In line with Saideman (1997), the author introduces her "domestic security hypothesis" (Coggins 2014: 46-47), according to which states may consider that the intercession in favor of secessionist projects abroad may jeopardize the stability of their own domestic constituency. Governments that confer legitimacy on a foreign secessionist project potentially signal legitimizing secessionism at home, too.

Coggins (2011, 2014) stand out among the works that place primal causality on Great Power intercession. With an English School of IR background, her arguments build on the presumption that the international system works as a community or social group. "As such, the existing members decide if secessionists will become states or remain on the outside." This has bearings on her conceptualization of a successful secessionist project: '[R]ecognition by the system's members rather than – and sometimes despite – *de facto* control and authority is the pivotal distinction between states and non-state "others."' In her analysis of cases of partially recognized states, she finds that when regional powers act as promoters of the recognition of a new state, they cannot mobilize as many states as "global opinion leaders," such as Great Powers, acting in coordination. This is consistent with Borgen's (2009: 30) idea of "norm makers." The author attributes these

actors the power to influence the interpretation of norms regarding unilateral secession according to their interests. For Sterio (2023: 340), much like for Siroky et al. (2020), in the inconclusiveness of international law, it is "the involvement of great powers" [sic] "which determines the outcome of secessionist struggles." A key is to be found in the fact that, due to their weight and their likeliness to influence other states in the international community, Great Powers "make up the most important portion of this critical mass" (Coggins 2011: 449).[7] This relies on two dynamics: on one hand, that international recognition is essential to attain statehood (Coggins 2011, 2014; Krasner 1999; Sterio 2012). Awarding recognition has been proven to have an important effect on public opinion regarding the partition of states in secessionist conflicts (Shelef and Zeira 2017). On the other hand, according to the hierarchical conceptualization of the liberal order in Ikenberry (2011), the hegemon controls its subordinate states, particularly regarding their foreign policies. As such, consensus between Great Powers regarding the recognition of an aspiring state is the prelude for a subsequent cascade of legitimation from the rest of the system members (Coggins 2011, 2014; Siroky et al. 2020).

Based on this, Coggins (2014) introduces a third crucial argument examining coordination between Great Powers:

> "[…] My third and final argument is that the international system incentivizes leaders to coordinate their recognition to (1) maintain system stability and peace among themselves, (2) ensure a critical mass of support for new members, and (3) diffuse responsibility for violating another member's sovereignty (by legitimizing a challenge to its territorial integrity) and limit the potential for its violent retribution. When the Great Powers' preferences align positively, they easily collude in favor of an aspiring state, and a decisive cascade of legitimacy follows.

[7] This also resonates with Riegl and Doboš (2023: 187) who, building on Fabry (2020: 38), claim that "not all UN members have the same diplomatic weight," citing the UN Security Council's permanent members, who are characterized as "an elite club of gatekeepers, and their disagreement prevents an entity from entering the UN."

> When they align negatively, the would-be state is decisively blocked. Similarly, when their preferences do not align, leaders typically defer to the status quo and emergence does not occur." (Coggins 2014: 10).

However, Siroky et al. (2020: 1051) do not share this view. For them, the coordination tendency posited by Coggins (2011, 2014) is unclear, and they argue that, in general, the relationship between Great Powers varies across time and space.[8]

We have chosen Coggins (2014) over alternative theories to benchmark the analysis of exogenous factors in our four cases because prior theories, such as Heraclides (1997), Islam (1985) or Ayoob (1995) present a temporary cohort effect. They rely on dynamics that are specific to their respective studies' time frames. Some of them fall short at explaining more recent problematics, for example, as to why Kosovo's statehood bid has gathered more international support than Abkhazia's or Nagorno Karabakh's. Additionally, although it does not incorporate them, Coggins' model does not rule out the participation of other factors, including domestic concerns and military interventions.

In summary, our sixth hypothesis adapts Coggins' claim that status changes are not always a purely endogenous process and that functional polities, whether autonomous or sovereign, need mutual recognition. Contrary to the institutionalist conventional wisdom, the emergence of new polities may be prompted by the recognition from already established polities even in the absence of home

[8] This differential is more manifest in the case of partial recognition, as for Abkhazia and Kosovo. In the first case, Russia did not gather the support of a large chunk of the international community. At the same time, although not generalized, Kosovo's recognition is more or less widespread. Siroky et al. (2020: 1050) argue that the salience of US military links compared to Russia's has played a decisive role in the differential configuration of each one's support. Nevertheless, they add that, in the case of Kosovo, normative constraints within the liberal order, unfavorable to unilateral secession, and other structural constraints, such as internal vulnerabilities regarding secession, have constrained the effect of cascade recognition mentioned by Coggins and themselves.

state consent. In addition, it challenges liberal norms-based explanations in that our explanation assumes that external actors are not apolitical in awarding such recognition or in interceding in favor or against self-determination project proponents.

Final Considerations

Adopting this mixed theoretical framework has several advantages. First, face to this comparative case study, it can help us frame our variation in a more detailed manner and account for two sets of non-competing factors. It does not seek to find which theory has primal causality but to find how institutionalist and geopolitical concerns interact. This adds to other works integrating institutionalist and IR explanations, such as those by Seymour (2008) or Dembinska and Campana (2017). The latter's analytical essay vows for a comprehensive study of the divergent trajectories of *de facto* polities, and considers that the internal dimensions of their endurance are "strongly intermingled with external factors," the two being "distinct, but interrelated, pieces of the same puzzle" (Dembinska and Campana 2017: 256). It is also in line with developments from institutionalism, such as Roeder (2018), which incorporates external action as an exogenous factor that can affect secessionist trajectories. In addition, by extending the scope of Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014) to other expressions of self-determination and mobilizing a broader and less legalist conceptualization of the term, this framework can contribute to updating the debate on self-determination conflict beyond norms-based considerations, much like Murphy (2019).

Chapter 2: Methodology

This master's thesis has a comparative case study research design. A "cross-case study," according to Yin's (1994) unit-based taxonomy and Gerring's (2011) classification, it relies on four cases conceived as political projects aiming for national self-determination, advancing claims against a home state: (1) Bakuri Kurds-Turkey, (2) Rojavan Kurds-Syria, (3) Başûri Kurds-Iraq, and (4) Rojhelati Kurds-Iran. The reason for distinguishing between four different cases and not treating the problem as just one is Roeder's (2007) argument that domestic institutions coordinate and shape political life. More specifically, and consistent with this institutionalist principle, Sheyholislami (2011) claims that while the processes that gave rise to Kurdish national awareness are analogous, they are also specific to each state. This author argues that the Kurdish national awareness is fragmented due to the fragmentation of their homeland. Thus, despite the transnational nature of the movements, the scope of the political projects of Kurdish actors circumscribes to their respective home states.

This case choice has two justifications. First, it has an inherent advantage: integrating four distinct cases with extensive within- and cross-case variance is especially suitable for theory testing. On one hand, intra-case variance can yield robust case-specific explanations and, as a result, enhance the study's composite internal validity. On the other hand, cross-case variance can help us compare those findings across the four cases and, to some extent, generalize them by proceeding to more robust testing of our chosen theories. Lastly, despite the weak causal effects resulting from cross-case studies, the unusual combination of both within- and cross-case variance in our set of cases can afford these explanations some degree of plausibility elsewhere. Nevertheless, one should be aware of a possible cohort effect since most cases are concentrated in one region.

Secondly, these four cases remain to be addressed in conjunction and depth in the literature on secession. Traditional characterizations of the cases, including Heraclides (1990, 1997), Roeder (2007, 2018), or Coggins (2011, 2014), have failed to conceptualize a dependent variable that captures the variation that makes them especially rich. As a result, our "outlier" case, Başûri Kurds-Iraq, has not been treated as a case of success despite being the only one where the project has led to the establishment of a *de jure* autonomous polity. Nevertheless, comprehensive accounts of the Kurdish question exist in different fields, such as Anthropology (Minorsky 1940) and Historiography (Asatrian 2009). Likewise, there are descriptive works that focus on one single dyad and the dynamics of each scenario of ethnic conflict (Mango 2005; Tejel 2009; Gunter 2006, 2008, 2014). Others, among which Tocci (2006, 2007), also focus on one specific case to ascertain the potential of Great Power intercession for pacification.

In dealing with our within-case analysis, we employ the causal process tracing (CPT) method as described by Blatter and Haverland (2012: 79-143; 2014). Especially suited to answer questions like "why did this (Y) happen?," it is interested in "the many and complex causes of a specific outcome and not so much in the effects of a specific cause," and its objective is to unveil the "sequential and situational interplay" between the different factors to offer a portrait of how these "causal factors generate the outcome of interest." The authors conceive it as a specific approach to within-case analysis based on "configurational causation"[9] and "temporality"[10] as ontological and epistemological foundations (Blatter and Haverland 2014: 59-60). This means that the causal

[9] Building on Ragin (2008: 109-146), the authors adopt three key assumptions, namely, "(i) social outcomes are the result of a combination of causal factors; (ii) there are divergent pathways to similar outcomes (equifinality); and (iii) the effects of the same causal factor can be different in different contexts and combinations (causal heterogeneity)" (Blatter and Haverland 2014: 64).

[10] Building on George and Bennet (2005: 140), the authors emphasize spatial contiguity and temporal succession as "epistemological foundations for drawing causal inferences." (Blatter and Haverland 2014; 65).

inferences drawn by using this methodological approach are not deterministic and that they stress the spatial and temporal relationship between conditions and outcomes in the process, which clearly resonates with the notion of trajectories that informs our dependent variable.

> "[…] we talk about 'causal chains' when we trace the sequential combination of causal factors over time and introduce the term 'causal conjunctions' when we want to indicate that two or more factors interact at a specific point in time for producing a specific outcome. These two concepts highlight the importance of timing in causal explanations, and they are based on the logic of 'configurational thinking'" (Blatter and Haverland 2014: 62).

In combination with the logics that inform our hypotheses, adapted from Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014), the analysis feeds on three types of causal-process observations. These are, according to Seawright and Collier (2004: 318), "an insight or piece of data that provides information about context, process, or mechanism, and that contributes distinctive leverage in causal inference." Following Blatter and Haverland (2012: 107-122; 2014: 66-69), the individual case analyses in Chapter 3 rely on three types of observation. First, on a comprehensive storyline "in which the development of potentially relevant causal conditions is presented in a narrative style." It shall assist us in delimitating the sequences in the overall process and identify critical events that shape the process, that is, the divergent trajectories of the Kurds in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. Variation within dyads is examined for cues that indicate the presence, absence, or value of the variables preconized in Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014). To this end, we further attend to smoking gun observations and confessions. Following Blatter and Haverland (2014: 67-68), these are cues that give a "more detailed insight into the processes that occur at critical moments." This sort of empirical evidence offers greater "certainty that a causal factor or a combination of causal factors actually led to the next step in the causal pathway or to the final outcome of interest."

Roughly speaking, smoking guns show the proximity of causes and effects in time and space. According to the authors, smoking gun observations are linked to other sorts of observations and, as a whole, these "can be used inductively to make strong causal claims." Additionally, confessions help us unveil perceptions, motivations and anticipations of major actors. On the other hand, cross-case variation feeds on the relevant patterns identified in the causal chain of each of the four cases. The same configurational thinking principles apply to our cross-case comparisons. After identifying the causal configurations that play at key events within each individual case, these are compared against each other in section 3.5 of Chapter 3. This design, where the analysis of within-variation precedes that of cross-case variation helps us overcome one important limitation of the comparative method in Comparative Politics, as advanced by Lijphart, that is, handling too many variables. By identifying the relevant causal configurations in each case, the analysis can be focused on the "key" variables (Lijphart 1971: 685-690).

As this methodological approach is centered on the dependent variable, in establishing causality throughout the Kurdish self-determination project trajectories, our empirical chapter shall attend to two types of key events: nation-state crises and self-determination advancements. The first key event is a critical point where there is *potential* for change in the dependent variable: nation-state crises are conceptualized as critical points where self-determination project proponents can strengthen their credibility vis-à-vis home state leaders and advance their claims on the bargaining table. These play a role as intermediate variables between the domestic factors that inform hypotheses 1 to 5 and the outcome and, therefore, they are useful to identify critical points with no changes in the dependent variable, which may go unnoticed if we only attended to value change. As the cases show, not all nation-state crises lead to value changes in the dependent variable, and not all these changes stem from endogenous nation-state crises. Thus, it is essential to attend to

self-determination advancements too. These are conceived as those critical points where there *has* been a change of value in the dependent variable. Under Roeder's (2007) and Coggins' (2014) frameworks, these values correspond to either the presence or absence of statehood or international recognition, respectively. However, under the framework of this master's thesis, additional values are possible, including autonomy (both *de facto* and *de jure*) as another expression of self-determination (see Table 1, page 13).

Nation-state crises, as conceived, result from the bargaining between center and periphery leaders within the home state's institutional framework. By tracing causality backwards from these critical points, we can get a better portrait of the political opportunity structures generated by the institutional arrangements in place and of the domestic factors that contributed to this reinforcement of the project proponent's leverage. In addition, the findings can be further reinforced by comparing the causal conjunctions of nation-state crises that led to self-determination advancements against those that did not. As for institutional arrangements, we mobilize the operationalization implicit in Roeder (2007), which encompasses both the formal and informal norms in place in a state, including constitutions, regulations, laws, or customs, among others.

On the other hand, by tracing causality backwards from self-determination advancements that did not stem from nation-state crises, we can also discern which factors, domestic and external, contributed to the value change in the dependent variable.

To increase the validity of our findings, we will also consider whether the preconditions present in self-determination advancements were also present in or absent from similar critical points where the dependent variable did not change value.

This study draws on diverse source materials. Among the relevant primary sources, we can find treaties, peace agreements, constitutions, laws, and even International Organization resolutions. Besides, secondary sources, such as academic works and monographies, can be beneficial to access processed data, especially from sources that have worked with more first-hand evidence and raw data. Non-academic publications are helpful, too. News may provide important data about temporality, confessions, and maybe smoking guns. Accounts from militancy, such as Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp (2017) or Öcalan (2012), offer rich insights into actor goals, motivations, and perceptions.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

This chapter analyzes the trajectories of the different Kurdish self-determination projects in each scenario, examining intra- and cross-case variation through the 20th century, especially after the first self-determination project proponents emerged in the mid-century and until the 2010s. The start of this period roughly corresponds to the first Kurdish rebellions against the central authorities of the budding modern nation-states that arose from the Ottoman and Persian Empires, driven by discontent at the gradual dismantling of the suzerainty and informal autonomy arrangements that had been in place for centuries. On the other hand, the end of this time frame is marked by the latest developments in Iraq and Syria, with the KRG's failed 2017 independence bid and the gradual consolidation of the *de facto* AANES.

In the search for intra-case causality, the cases will be organized around the key dependent variable in our argument, the trajectories of Kurdish self-determination claims. These will be further operationalized through two key events that stem from our institutionalist hypotheses: nation-state crises, and the outcome of self-determination claim advancement (see Table 2).

Likewise, in addition to focusing on the operation of the institutionalist and international explanations derived and extended from Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014) towards these key events, each section features some complementary background information. This helps nuance our intra-case causality and establish boundaries for the operation of each of these factors. This background focuses on the institutional environment where each Kurdish self-determination project emerged and how it informed the relationship of their respective proponents with the center and alternative project proponents on the periphery.

Table 2: Table of key events in the trajectories of each self-determination project within their respective home states.

Home State	Key Actor	Key Event	
		Nation-State Crisis	**Self-Determination Advancement**
Turkey	PKK	First insurgency (1984-1999)	Failure (except for the lift of some cultural expression bans)
		Second insurgency (2004-2013)	Peace Process (2013-2015)
		Third insurgency (2015-ongoing)	Ongoing
Iraq	KDP	First Iraqi-Kurdish War (1961-1970 and 1974-1975)	Recognized autonomy in 1970 Interim Constitution and 1974 Autonomy Law (never enforced)
	KDP/PUK (after 1986)	Second Iraqi-Kurdish War (1980-1991)	*De facto* KAR (1992-2004)
	KRG		*De jure* KAR (2004-ongoing)
			Territorial expansion (2015-2017), status quo
		Iraqi-Kurdish Conflict (2017)	KAR Referendum on Independence (2017), failure
Syria	PYD		Three *de facto* Autonomous Cantons in Rojava, later AANES (2012-ongoing)
			Territorial expansion (2015-2019)
Iran	KDP-I		*De facto* Republic of Mahabad (1946), failure
		First Insurgency (1982-1984)	Failure
		Second insurgency (1989-1996)	Failure

This table only includes nation-state crises escalated by bargaining between key actors (self-determination project proponents) and home state leaders.

The fifth and last section examines cross-case variation and identifies which patterns are more or less frequent across the cases. It also addresses the implications for our argument, the two theories, and the future of the Kurdish self-determination projects. Finally, it identifies a pattern that is not covered in our argument and these theories and which deserves further academic study.

On a final note, the processes that led to the establishment of the current state borders of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and Syria, and which inform our case delimitation, are the same that led to the fragmentation of the Kurdish homeland (see Fig. 2). In Kurdish, each of the four fractions is now

called after a cardinal direction, namely, Bakur (north), in Turkey, Rojava (west), in Syria, Başûr. (south) in Iraq, and Rojhelat (east) in Iran.[11]

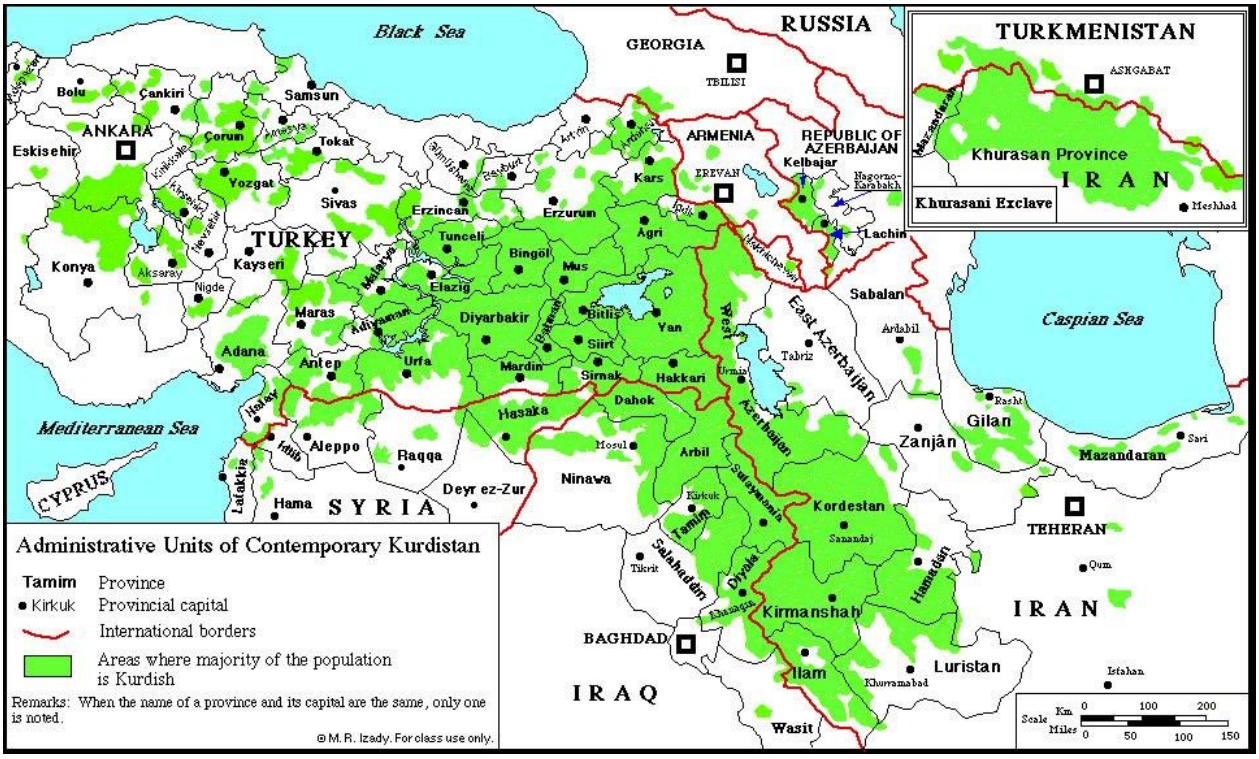

Figure 2: Political map of northern Mesopotamia with highlighted Kurdish-majority areas (Izady n.a.)

Lastly, for clarity's sake, it is worth mentioning that, as in Roeder (2007), in this study, segment-states, much like other types of institutional arrangements, remain part of the independent variable. In anticipation of the forthcoming analysis, it will be established that autonomy arrangements make the center of most claims across the four cases. Since autonomy involves the segmentalization of

[11] First, the Treaty of Zuhab or Kasr-ı Şirin (1639) defined the spheres of influence of the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Persia. It resulted in the current border separating Iran from Turkey and Iraq. Later, the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) transposed the power balance that resulted from the Turkish Independence War (1919-1923). It consolidated the status of the Republic of Turkey as the successor of the Ottoman Empire in much better terms than the Treaty of Sèvres (1920), which reflected the power balance resulting from World War I and the Ottoman defeat. This meant a larger territory for Turkey, which remained free from Western influence zones. It further confirmed the Western influence zones that had been in the making since the Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916), which resulted in the consolidation of the French Mandate for Syria and Lebanon and the British Mandate of Mesopotamia under the auspices of the League of Nations. In general terms, Lausanne led to the consolidation of the current Syrian-Iraqi border. The Turkish southern border was further consolidated by the Treaty of Ankara (1926), signed by Turkey, Mandatory Iraq, and the United Kingdom, and by the incorporation of Hatay to Turkey after a referendum in 1939, backed by the French colonial authorities of Syria.

the home state, it may mistakenly appear that the segment-state becomes the outcome rather than the independent variable in this study. However, segment-states as such are only accounted for in this comparative case study through its effects rather than its causes, as a subtype of institutional arrangement that is present in part of two of the analyzed trajectories.

3.1 Bakuri Kurds-Turkey

Turkey is home to the largest Kurdish population in the world. Martorell (2016) states that Turkish Kurds (about 20 million people) represent 28% of the country's population. According to the Fondation Institut Kurde de Paris, 12 million Kurds remain in their Bakur homeland, which stretches over the regions of Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia. The remaining 8 million are scattered throughout the rest of the country. Other estimates, such as the CIA World Factbook, show lower figures, placing the nationwide proportion of Kurds at 19%.

The Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK, Partiya Kakerên Kurdistan in Kurdish) stands out as the leading Kurdish self-determination group in the Bakur. However, its consideration as a terrorist organization and subsequent ban does not allow it to participate in Turkish democratic institutions. This space has been occupied by other parties, usually referred to as Kurdish or minority-friendly parties. Nowadays, all of these groups seek self-determination in the form of autonomist arrangements within Turkey, including provisions for implementing grassroots democracy. Before the end of the Cold War, the PKK vied for independence and the establishment of a Kurdistan sovereign state.

3.1.1 Background

Unlike modern Turkey, the Sublime Porte had a good relationship with the Kurds. In the context of Ottoman expansion in the Middle East, the Kurds saw an opportunity to maintain their

independence despite Shia Safavid Persia's centralization efforts and anti-Sunni policies (McDowall 2004). In a climate of "permanent and brutal" oppression, the Kurds sided with Sunni Ottomans (Ünver 2016: 69) and recognized Constantinople's suzerainty over their territories.[12] After 150 years of Ottoman-Persian clashes, these territorial adjustments were consolidated by the Treaty of Zuhab or Kasr-ı Şirin (1639).[13]

While the Ottoman nation-state project to modernize the empire still provided for some informal autonomy, Hassanpour (1992) and Ünver (2016) state that most Kurdish principalities were suppressed, not without resistance, during the Tanzimat period (1839-1876). Jwaideh (2006) describes that sheikhs and feudal lords emerged as leaders during this local power vacuum. Although Constantinople's administrative centralization policies were met with confrontation, the Kurds did not generally question their allegiance to the Ottoman Empire[14] and supported its army in other campaigns, including the Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878), World War I (1914-1918), the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1923) (McDowall 2004) or the Armenian Genocide (1915-1917) (Martorell 2016). In fact, according to this author, early forms of politicization of the Kurdish ethnicity had taken shape within the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) before it centered on Turkish nationalism after the Ottoman defeat in the Balkan War (1912-1913) and the 1913 coup d'État.

After its defeat in WWI, the Ottoman Empire undertook negotiations for a new distribution of its territory in the Treaty of Sèvres (1921). A new Great Power, the US, under President Wilson's

[12] Martorell (2016: 15-17) refers to the Safavid Siege of Dimdim (1609-1610), which occurred after an attempt to establish an independent principality based in the city, now in Iran. In retaliation, the Persian army massacred the city's inhabitants. A literary account of the events by poet Feqiyê Teyran (1590-1660) symbolized Kurdish resilience.
[13] Kemankeş Kara Mustafa Pasha. 1639. "Treaty of Peace and Frontiers (Zuhab/Kasr-ı Şirin)." https://fass.nus.edu.sg/hist/eia/historical-texts-archive/.
[14] One exception is Shayk Ubayd Allah, who intended to establish a Kurdish principality between the Van and Urmie lakes after the power vacuum left by the Russo-Turkish War (1977-1878) in the Transcaucasian front. See McDowall (2004: 53-59).

administration,[15] emerged to negotiate on behalf of the interests of minorities and to offset the Western European powers' colonial ambitions in this distribution of Ottoman lands. Despite Constantinople's acquiescence to reform its institutions to implement the treaty, one factor proved itself sufficient to crush it along with the rest of Sèvres provisions: the emergence of a new nation-state project led by the Turkish National Movement, led by Mustapha Kemal Attatürk, who largely opposed to the treaty as a Western attempt to "crush the Turkish nation."[16] As a result, the Turkish National Movement challenged Constantinople's authority during the Turkish War of Independence (1921-1923). The war disrupted the negotiations and, eventually, shifted the balance of leverage towards the Nationalists. Consequently, this treaty was never ratified. Otherwise, this top-down mechanism would have led to the establishment of, at least, a Kurdish autonomous region in Eastern Anatolia.[17]

With the victory of the Attatürk-led movement over the Allied Powers, the Republic of Turkey became the *de jure* successor of the Ottoman Empire. With the balance of leverage in its favor, the republic renegotiated a new peace settlement that resulted in the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Turkey thus minimized its territorial losses, as well as its concessions to minorities. For one thing, the concept of minority was narrowed down to one factor: religion. As a result, all provisions relating to minority rights within Muslim-majority Turkey refer to Orthodox Greeks, Armenians or Jews. As Sunni or Alevi Muslims, the Kurds are virtually absent from its text. Moreover, unlike Sèvres,

[15] Wilson, Woodrow. 1918. "The Fourteen Points." https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/peace/fourteen-points. In Point Twelve of his "Fourteen Points" speech, he declares that "The Turkish portions of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty, but the other nationalities which are now under Turkish rule should be assured an undoubted security of life and absolutely unmolested opportunity of autonomous development […]."
[16] Kemal Atatürk, Mustafa. 1927. "The Great Speech." http://www.mfa.gov.tr/lausanne-peace-treaty.en.mfa.
[17] Foreign Office. 1920. *Treaty of Sèvres*. https://treaties.fcdo.gov.uk/awweb/pdfopener?md=1&did=63986. Art. 62 (Section III, Part I) establishes the guidelines for the study of an autonomy arrangement for "the predominantly Kurdish areas lying east of the Euphrates, south of the southern boundary of Armenia […] and north of the frontier of Turkey with Syria and Mesopotamia […]." Moreover, Art. 64 (*ibidem*) provides for the possibility that the Kurds within the areas defined in Art. 62 may become independent from Turkey if they so express to the Council of the League of Nations and if it deems it appropriate, with Turkey agreeing to "renounce all rights and title over these areas."

Lausanne foresees cultural autonomy only as a matter of communities and not of communities and territories.[18]

This shift is also reflected by the nation-state project advanced by the Turkish Nationalist Movement. The Amasya Protocol (1919), a memorandum of understanding signed by the Turkish Revolutionaries and the Ottoman authorities in order to establish common goals vis-à-vis Turkey's allied occupation, foresaw the establishment of a Kurdish autonomous region (Martorell 2016: 34). According to Bayır (2013), this promise was beyond the pluralist discourse articulated by the Turkish Nationalist Movement at that time. This was reflected in the Constitution adopted at the beginning of the Turkish War of Independence in 1921, whose Article 11 provided for this possibility. However, this project for a joint Turkish-Kurdish nation-state gradually fell flat as the war progressed in favor of the Turkish nationalists. Their prevalent discourse became more Turkic-centric, as did Attatürk's nation-state project. Eventually, months after the signature of the Treaty of Lausanne and days after the official proclamation of the republic,[19] the 1921 Constitution was amended secretly to repeal Article 11 on November 29, 1923 (Martorell 2016: 34).

Attatürk organized Turkey under a new nation-state project based on a doctrine later known as *Kemalism*. Informed by the founding values of the republic: republicanism, populism, laicism, reformism, nationalism, and statism (Zurcher 2004; Bunton and Cleveland 2013). It has been the backbone of the Turkish institutional arrangements ever since, including the 1924, 1961, and 1982 constitutions. In practice, it involved administrative centralization. However, it also had consequences for the cultural autonomy of the non-religious minorities that fell outside the scope of Lausanne, including the Kurds. Not only did this mean that the Kurdish informal autonomy

[18] Foreign Office. 1923. *Treaty of Lausanne*. https://api.parliament.uk/uk-treaties/treaties/11781.
[19] According to Martorell (2016: 34), the Sultanate had been effectively abolished on November 1, 1922. However, the republican form of government was not made *de jure* until October 29, 1923.

arrangements that had survived the Tanzimat period were not to be officially recognized, but that they were going to be suppressed by force.

Kemalism and the Kurdish periphery

These measures were seen as a betrayal by the Bakuri Kurds, especially within the Hamidiye cavalry that had cooperated with the Turkish nationalists (Martorell 2016: 44). Among these collaborations, paradoxically, the Hamidiye had an essential role in repressing Ottoman Armenians, as it had been created especially to suppress Christian revolutionaries in the late 19th century and to advance a pan-Islamist project (Kévorkian 2006). Thus, the first modern Kurdish political projects emerged in this context of administrative reforms and cultural assimilation, among actors collaborating to assimilate other groups. While it did not take place to advance an ethnic self-determination project per se specifically, the Sheikh Said rebellion (February-April 1925) mobilized the feudal lords and religious leaders of the Eastern Anatolia periphery against the new constitutional order (Üngör 2011). Their main aim was to restore the monarchy and restore the favorable institutional arrangements they had previously enjoyed. After the rebellion was quelled by the Turkish army, Said and his collaborators were executed in retaliation, and, as reported by the British information services, the Eastern Anatolian periphery was repressed by a "tyrannical military administration" that caused a significant number of internally displaced people and refugees (Martorell 2016: 46).

From the Kemalist end, the rebellion was used by the Turkish state to justify further repression of its unrecognized minorities. Not only had the autonomy arrangements been effectively terminated, but policies were put in place to suppress their cultural expressions in a process of progressive Turkification of the society. From the Kurdish end, skirmishes and revolts would not cease to be

infrequent in the periphery. However, forced exile in neighboring countries opened new horizons for Kurdish intellectuals and elites to organize new projects out of Ankara's watch. The first Kurdish party proper, Khoybun (or Xoybûn), was established in Beirut in 1927. Self-determination was at the center of the project in a manner not to alter the existing tribal structures. Except for the Republic of Ararat experience (1927-1931), an attempt to establish a self-governing polity, most of the party's activity was subsequently led from Syria (Tejel 2009).

Kemalism also informed Turkey's foreign policy. In the post-WWII scenario, communism began to be seen as a threat to the country's values, and on February 18, 1952, Turkey was admitted to NATO. This directly affected the stance that Great Powers adopted on the different Kurdish self-determination projects. In addition, Ankara's alignment with the West has had direct bearing on its relations with neighboring countries, especially Ba'athist Syria and Iraq, which sided with the USSR.

Turkey's political situation did not stabilize during the coming decades. A military coup took place in 1960 that gave way to the 1962 Constitution. More lenient than its predecessor, it foresaw some concessions to the working class and sought to establish a multi-party system. This new institutional context did not provide for autonomy either. However, these arrangements allowed a Kurdish-led organization, the Revolutionary Cultural Eastern Hearts (DDKO, Devrimci Doğu Kültür Ocakları in Turkish), to flourish within the Workers' Party of Turkey (TIP, Türkiye İşçi Partisi in Turkish). According to De Jong (2015), the left-wing reformist party "reintroduced socialist ideas that the Kemalist state had declared taboo and, even, contrary to the law." As a result, even if the party's project was not limited to the periphery, it could channel some of the claims of the Bakuri Kurds. Many of its voters were based in Kurdish-majority provinces (De Jong 2015: 6-7).

In 1971, another military coup brought about the illegalization of the TIP and, consequently, the DDKO, leaving the Bakuri Kurds with no efficient platform to voice their grievances and advance their claims.

3.1.2 The PKK Nation-State Crises

While short-lived, the TIP and the DDKO experiences allowed for reorganizing the periphery's political actors within Turkey. However, according to Marcus (2007) and De Jong (2015), the post-1971 experience spread the idea that the approaches of traditional, tribal-based parties such as the Khoybun, or co-optation under the umbrella of state-wide left-wing parties were unable to solve the problem. Therefore, to circumvent these limitations, the Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) was founded in 1978 by Abdullah Öcalan "Apo" and Sakîne Cansiz.[20] From its inception as a Marxist-Leninist liberation movement, it sought to advance a self-determination project encompassing the Turkish Kurds and their homeland. As De Jong (2015: 10) explains, its manifesto and program, until 1995, vied for the establishment of a Kurdish democratic nation-state, rejecting alternatives such as regional autonomy. Much like other contemporary liberation movements, it assumed an anti-colonial discourse, where Turkey was regarded as a colonial power.

This escalation of stakes in the center-periphery relations was further reinforced by Kenan Evren's 1980 military coup that gave way to the 1982 Constitution, currently in force. The resulting institutional arrangements foresaw further restrictions on minority rights. It accounted for several indirect bans on cultural expression, as it does not include any explicit mention of Kurds or Kurdish,

[20] According to De Jong (2015: 8), the PKK had already been in operation since the mid-70s under the name Kurdish Revolutionaries (SK).

or any other unrecognized minority groups or languages.[21] However, it also imposed indirect limitations to undermine the prospects of peripheral leaders in bringing their claims to the parliament. On the one hand, as Gençkaya (2014) reports, parties were no longer allowed to be named after ethnicities, religions, or ideologies and to adopt symbols related to these. On the other hand, the Parliamentary Elections Law, enacted in 1983, imposed a minimum nationwide voting share of 10% for parties to be allocated seats in the Great National Assembly.[22] This virtually closed the negotiation table to peripheral democratic actors that sought to deviate from the Kemalist state doctrine, as the Kurds accounted for only 19-28% of Turkey's population.

An escalation of means soon followed this escalation of stakes as the armed phase of the Turkey-PKK conflict erupted in 1984. This can be divided into five phases: (1) First Insurgency (1984-1999); (2) Ceasefire (1999-2004); (3) Second Insurgency (2004-2013); (4) Peace Process (2013-2015); and (5) Third Insurgency (2015-ongoing). These insurgencies qualify as nation-state crises, and due to several factors, the first and second insurgencies contributed to limited advancements in their projects.

Nation-State Crisis: First PKK insurgency (1984-1999)

This insurgency saw the emergence of the PKK's armed branch (HPG, Hêzên Parastina Gel in Kurdish). This upsurge in violence left 37,000 deaths and thousands of internally displaced people, mainly fleeing to Istanbul and Ankara, and refugees that crossed the border towards Kurdish areas of Iraq, mainly Makhmur, and Syria.

[21] Türkiye. 1982. *Constitution of the Republic of Turkey*, https://natlex.ilo.org/dyn/natlex2/r/natlex/fe/details?p3_isn=39950. Article 42.9 provides that "[N]o language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institutions of training or education."
[22] Türkiye. 1983. *Parliamentary Elections Law*, https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/1983/en/74138.

The described escalation led to this nation-state crisis even without segmental institutions. The PKK did not have access to, let alone control, a segment-state. Furthermore, due to the electoral restrictions in place, the segmental arrangements in place still gave Ankara a greater balance of leverage than any peripheral actor. In fact, through the implementation of the emergency rule (OHAL, from Turkish Olağanüstü Hal) in ten provinces of the southeast in 1987, Ankara had imposed a "dual system of law" in the country (Kurban 2003: 190; Tocci 2007: 57). Under OHAL, province governors had broader powers to suppress or limit civil rights and freedoms. This affected the parties that operated from within the Turkish institutions, too, as, in parallel, the legal system was instrumentalized to ban pro-Kurdish parties under the slightest suspicion of links to the PKK. This shut down dialogue within the parliamentary space. According to Koğacıoğlu (2003: 273), "[…] the boundaries of the Turkish political domain are juridically marked in a way that to a large extent prevents substantial social concerns and aspirations from being translated into forms of legitimate political action." While the OHAL disincentivized mobilization from within the state institutions, it had a positive effect on the PKK's political-identity hegemony on the Kurdish periphery. The disempowerment of alternative project proponents made them more vulnerable to the PKK's already "monopolizing, hierarchical and intimidating character," and many lost their autonomy. While Kurdish parties and associations had more specific and coherent proposals than the PKK, they were unable to advance them as they "hardly represented coherent and comprehensive political platforms" (Tocci 2017: 60). This also raises questions about the political empowerment of Kurdish citizens under the OHAL, who seemed to be equally disempowered in both local and national politics.

The PKK might have also found incentives in the perceived insecurity of Evren's regime, which concentrated its efforts on co-opting political Islamist groups to prevent an Islamic revolution akin to Iran's (1979) and "to use and promote Islam as a tool against communism" (Hemmati 2013: 60).

However, it is an external factor outside the scope of our hypotheses that seems to have given greater incentives to the PKK to press their claims against the Turkish state. While some authors, such as Kurtuglan (2020: 74), suggest links between the insurgents and the Soviet KGB, it is not Great Power support that helped the PKK slightly shift the balance of leverage in its favor after Turgut Özal was elected president of the republic in 1991. Much like the Khoybun, the PKK took advantage of the favorable context in Syria and Iraq to organize out of Ankara's reach (Tejel 2009: 93). An adversary of Western-leaning Turkey, the Arab-Socialist Syrian regime, in fact, welcomed Öcalan in his exile and offered its territory as a safe haven to the Bakuri militias. This resulted in on-and-off efforts made by Ankara to ease the restrictions on cultural expression, such as "the legalization of Kurdish in speech, music, records and videotapes," or "a partial amnesty law" (Tocci 2007: 61).

The balance of leverage eventually shifted to Ankara's side for two main reasons. On one hand, Ankara's instrumentalization of the Kurdish Hezbollah Islamist militias. While other authors such as Mango (2005) claim that it was the PKK who collaborated with the Kurdish Hezbollah to attack the Turkish army, Martorell (2016: 76) claims Ankara armed the group and tolerated its activities in exchange for their help in coercing Kurdish opposition leaders and PKK members. On the other hand, the end of the Cold War precipitated some important changes according to De Jong (2015). First, the PKK abandoned Marxism-Leninism.[23] Tocci (2007: 60) describes how, in the meantime,

[23] "In 1993, Öcalan said that when the PKK talked about 'scientific socialism,' it did not refer to Marxism, but to its own peculiar ideology […] 'that goes beyond the interests of states, nations and [social] classes' (Brauns and Kiechle,

the PKK deescalated its stakes, at least nominally, as it was "in response to political contingencies:" from its original goal to establish a Pan-Kurdish state to a proposal for reform of the Turkish state to allow for an autonomist or federal solution. Although vague about what it entailed in practice, this updated self-determination project would still be incompatible with Turkey's vision.

Secondly, and most importantly, in 1998, Ankara and Damascus signed the Adana Protocol, which urged Hafez al-Assad's regime to withdraw its support to the PKK. USSR support seemed to dissuade Ankara from intervening against Damascus, but after the Soviet dissolution, Turkey found again incentives to threaten Syria with an armed escalation (Tejel 2009). Furthermore, post-Cold War Syria had problems of its own trying to adapt to the new capitalist order (Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp 2017). As a result, Syria expelled the PKK from the Syrian-occupied Bekaa Valley in Lebanon. This event precipitated the PKK's unilateral ceasefire declaration in 1999 upon Öcalan's arrest in Kenya after fleeing Damascus (Gunter 2014: 41). Therefore, Adana suggests that Syrian support was the factor that gave the PKK the most incentives and means to keep pressing their self-determination claims against Ankara. On the ground, the Protocol meant a total relocation to the Qandil Mountains (KAR, Iraq), an exclave that became the group's new headquarters.

However, the end of the First PKK Insurgency was simultaneous to another development that indirectly helped minority-friendly parties: the acceptance of Turkey's bid to join the European Union and the opening of the accession negotiations. This all came from the Kemalist nation-state project, which involved the objective of EU membership. For Tocci (2006, 2007), this milestone helped revert part of the burden that the OHAL dual system of law had created on Kurdish

2010: p. 77). Symbolically, the 1995 [PKK] congress removed the hammer and sickle from [the party's] banner" (original in Spanish in De Jong 2015, 16).

democratic actors. Moreover, this marks a significant divergence between the first and the second PKK insurgencies.

By signaling resolve to accept Turkey's bid "and its increased willingness to share the burden of Turkish security," the EU inspired credibility among Turkish decision-makers.[24] As a result, Ankara moved towards a "passive enforcement" of the Copenhagen criteria, as these "conditions" were no longer considered "a matter for political bargaining, but rather as the sine qua non" for accession (Tocci 2007: 70-71). In turn, Turkey's signaling commitment increased its credibility among EU decision-makers. Initially, though limited, this immediately affected the center-periphery negotiation table regarding the Kurdish question. While not explicitly using terms such as "Kurds" or "Kurdish" in its progress reports, the European Commission gradually raised the tone against the situation in the "southeastern" provinces. It urged Ankara to solve the problem through politics rather than militarily. For Tocci (2007: 72), in practice, it renewed the political space and allowed "both for suppressed Kurdish demands to come to the fore and for these to be discussed […] within the more liberal segments of the establishment."[25] In addition, the accession process had measurable effects on the platform population. Building from opinion polls, Çarkoğlu (2003: 175) and Müftüler-Baç (2016: 109) claim that support for EU accession was greater among Kurds than among other groups, especially those with low socio-economic status, that is, those who expected more significant benefits from the change of institutional status quo. However, Tocci (2007) highlights some of the limitations of the EU's approach. She claims these obligations were clear regarding individual rights and cultural expression, the areas with greater attainment.

[24] For Tocci (2007, 53), a peaceful resolution of Turkey's Kurdish question was desirable to the EU because of the country's geostrategic importance to its security interests, especially regarding irregular immigration. Also, with Turkey's accession in mind, the conflict represented a greater liability for the European bloc.

[25] Tocci (2007, 72-73) includes accounts of local politicians, such as one advisor to the Mayor of Diyarbakır, who explained: "the EU has sparked a debate in the region; it has provided moderate Turks and Kurds with a new language, which could facilitate debate both within the two groups and between them."

However, the EU was quite unspecific in terms of governance. Not only did these not mention the words "Kurd" or "Kurdish," but exclusively "hinted that Turkey 'may consider' devolving responsibilities to sectoral ministries or to new regional structures'" (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations 2005: 103). Eventually, due to mutual disinterest from both ends, and the subsequent loss of mutual credibility, the accession process has effected few material changes in the institutional arrangements, and negotiations between the center and the Kurdish periphery have fallen short of the initial expectations.

The stalling accession process was not the only factor contributing to this "lull" and even "reversal" of the rights-based reform (Tocci 2007: 65). Premier Erdoğan's AKP government (2003-2014) shifted the country's foreign policy towards the Middle East as it focused on parts of the electorate whose priorities were not related to EU membership. This new doctrinal approach has been dubbed *Neo-Ottomanism*, a term popularized by Barchard (1985).

Nation-State Crisis: Second PKK Insurgency

Still lacking institutional leverage, let alone a segment-state, the PKK found incentives to resume its violence campaigns against the Turkish state in June 2004 by seizing the opportunities created by the US-led invasion of Iraq.[26] (Tocci 2007: 4). The PKK's hegemony in the periphery seemed not to have been undermined by Adana, and still enjoyed widespread support due to ideological reasons, but especially due to "the absence of alternatives—not just in the sense of the government being too powerful to confront in other ways, but also because the PKK has largely destroyed or

[26] In addition to the PKK, other militant actors have been active since the early 2000s, such as the Kurdistan Freedom Hawks (TAK, Teyrêbazên Azadiya Kurdistan). It is considered a terrorist organization by the US and the EU, but not by Turkey, which insists that it is not a separate entity from the PKK. Eccarius-Kelly (2011) indicates that while the PKK and the TAK state they are rivaling groups, there is no unequivocal evidence of a fight between them. This may mean that either the TAK has operational autonomy or that the PKK uses them for specific purposes. In any case, the author recognizes that the TAK terrorist activities have been detrimental to the PKK's negotiation attempts and compares the situation to that of the IRA and the Real IRA in Northern Ireland.

neutralized competitor non-state organizations" (Davis et al. 2012: 113). Also, Ankara maintained its restrictive electoral and lawfare policies against the pro-Kurdish parties, therefore undermining the political empowerment of the Kurds within the nationwide politics.[27] Moreover, the insurgents mobilized despite Ankara's greater stability compared to the context of the previous insurgency. These limitations, together with other factors such asits imprisoned leadership and the lack of Syrian support, resulted in inferior capabilities compared to the 90s, and informed the lower intensity of this second insurgency. As a result, "rather than focusing on rural insurgency, the post-2004 PKK violence targeted urban, economic, and tourist targets, particularly in the summer of 2005" (Tocci 2007: 66).

However, the candidates of one pro-Kurdish and pro-EU party, the Peace and Democracy Party (BDP), ran independently in the 2011 parliamentary election and managed to surpass the 10-percent electoral threshold, winning 36 seats,[28] and opening an alley for the resolution of the crisis. The relationship between Ankara and the Bakuri Kurds has been influenced by Erdoğan's pragmatism, which, in turn, has been informed by parliamentary arithmetic and public opinion (Gunter 2014: 70). With a project for constitutional reform that involved greater presidential powers, this author suggests that Erdoğan accepted the Peace Process with the PKK (2013-2015) as he sought the support of the pro-Kurdish BDP.[29] The BDP urged Erdogan to create a delegation for "fresh talks with the outlawed" PKK.[30] This peace process is an example of non-segmental

[27] HDP Europe. 2024. "History of Kurdish political parties in Turkey." https://hdpeurope.eu/history-of-kurdish-political-parties-in-turkey/. Before 2013, five pro-Kurdish parties were outlawed by Turkey's Constitutional Court (HEP in 1993, DEP in 1994, HADEP in 2003, and DTP in 2009), and the other three had to merge into others after the opening of cases against them.
[28] HDP Europe, "History of Kurdish political parties in Turkey."
[29] Kirişci and Cengiz (2015) indicate that in the 2011 election, Erdogan's AKP list had won 327 seats and fallen short of the 367-seat majority needed to carry out his constitutional reform.
[30] "BDP urges dialogue with outlawed group." 2012. *Hürriyet Daily News*, February 21, 2012. https://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/bdp-urges-dialogue-with-outlawed-group-14317.

institutional arrangements slightly shifting the balance of leverage towards a peripheral actor. For Gunter (2014: 70-71), it was doomed from the start as the goals of both parties were mutually incompatible, and neither Ankara nor the PKK were willing to deescalate the stakes.[31] Despite the limited effect of the peace process, the circumstances (seat distribution of the Grand National Assembly), together with the parliamentary arrangements in place, made Erdoğan dependent on the parliamentary arithmetic to advance his constitutional reform bill. As a result, these institutional arrangements, designed to favor home state leaders, incentivized Ankara to deescalate the situation. This both created a less aggressive parliamentary context and incentivized pro-Kurdish parliamentary groups to further their claims. Indirectly, it also benefited the PKK as it opened a platform for dialogue. The BDP was the first pro-Kurdish party that was not outlawed by the Turkish Constitutional Court and ceased to function independently at the national level only as it merged with the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) while retaining autonomy at the local level.

The HDP, led by Selahattin Demirtas, won 70 out of 550 seats in the Grand National Assembly in June 2015 (Chislett 2015). Cagaptay (2016: 16) claims that these results trumped Erdoğan's plans to implement its constitutional reform and, as a result, he turned to the far-right and ultranationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) for support.

Nation-State Crisis: Third PKK Insurgency

As a result, the bargaining between the center and the periphery actors turned into another nation-state crisis, this time due to the different distribution of parliament seats arising out of the June 2015 general election. The HDP lost the leverage that the BDP had enjoyed, and the Peace Process

[31] Gunter explains that AKP demanded the PKK's disarmament, which had different plans, as it sought to institutionalize its HPG as the official security forces of the southeastern provinces. Regarding governance, the PKK suggested a checks-and-balances system incompatible with the constitutional reform envisaged by Erdogan.

gave way to the ongoing Third Insurgency in July, with a renewed state offensive against the PKK. This escalation of means differs from the prior two in that violence occurred in urban areas (Chislett 2015), with combats in Diyarbakır's old city. In addition, Ankara resumed its judicial campaigns against the pro-Kurdish parties and their leaders for humiliation against the Turkish people, libeling, and even terrorism. Eventually, Demirtaş was jailed in 2016 (Shaheen 2016a) with no prospects of being freed in the near future (Reuters 2023a). This was reconciled with other measures, such as the elimination of political representations, in particular locally elected BDP and HDP city and town councils, and the appointment of trustees by the state (International Crisis Group 2017). This emphasized the relative disempowerment of the Kurdish electors locally (Bezci and Borroz 2015).

Despite losing the leverage afforded by the institutional arrangements, the HDP's 2015 electoral results gave its leader, Selahattin Demirtaş, "the legitimacy to be an interlocutor" in the Kurdish peace process (Chislett 2015: 17). The election results, if we take into account the official characterizations of the -BDP and HDP as political wings of the PKK, which authors as Novellis (2017: 68-69) support, show that the Apoist autonomist project still enjoyed political-identity hegemony among the Bakuri Kurds. Ankara seems to be aware that in the absence of other credible political alternatives, the Kurds will continue to support the PKK and other groups. For this reason, Erdogan sponsored the refounding of the Turkish Kurdistan Democratic Party (T-KDP), a group related to Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (International Crisis Group 2017). Apart from the incentives derived from its political-identity hegemony, the PKK might have also found incentives to keep pressing their self-determination claims in Erdogan's apparent instability. Apart from the 2016 military coup d'État attempt, the country has suffered a severe financial crisis. However, another factor was present again in the conjunction: tolerance of PKK activities in

neighboring Syria due to the emergence of the Kurdish-led *de facto* AANES. Although the support from al-Assad's regime this time is indirect, this could explain the escalation of means compared to the second insurgency, with violence levels that Chislett (2015: 17) compares to those of the "military-dominated 1990s."

So far, no efforts to deescalate the stakes have been made: if the parties compromised their key claims, their bases would interpret that as a betrayal, considering the decades-long suffering. Also, the parties' resilience implies they can withstand the costs of this escalation of means, with counter-terrorist official Nihat Ali Ozcan suggesting they could "tolerate 500 deaths a year" (Gunter 2014: 71). In its fight against the PKK, Ankara supported several actors in Syria that could undermine the Kurdish grip of power south of its border, with accusations of even tolerating or facilitating the activity of Islamist groups such as Jabhat al-Nusra or the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Daesh) (Ayboga, Flach and Knapp 2017). However, Turkey escalated the means by intervening directly and, for the first time, launching a large-scale offensive outside of its territory in 2016. The aim was to exert greater control of the Turkish-Syrian border and to coerce the Rojavan Kurds not to support the PKK. This was followed by another one in 2018, resulting in the occupation of the Kurdish-majority city of Afrin (Hubbard and Patel 2018).

In summary, by considering the Kurdish question a vital threat to the territorial integrity of Turkey (Watts 1999: 634; Müftüler-Baç 2016: 108-109), its institutions have been designed and updated to prevent or hinder the participation of dissident minority groups such as the pro-Kurdish parties. However, this case shows that, within a hybrid democracy, the institutional arrangements governing the electoral and parliamentary system may give some leverage to these minority groups under very specific circumstances, and incentives to home state leaders to accede to their claims (Tocci 2007).

This does not mean that international factors have not operated. As we have seen, the EU influenced the center-periphery negotiations (Tocci 2007). Also, Turkey's NATO membership has prevented its Western allies, including the US, France, and the UK, from establishing any friendly ties with the PKK.

However, one factor out of our scope has been identified to have largely contributed to the incentives and means of the PKK in particular. Neighborhood geopolitics have compensated for the absence of favorable domestic institutionalist factors. Syrian support (Tejel 2009; Martorell 2016), direct or indirect, was key during the First Insurgency, which ended promptly after it was withdrawn. It was largely absent during the second one, where the PKK had more limited means. Moreover, it was present again during the third, which can explain the escalation of means and the rising costs for Ankara.

3.2 Rojavan Kurds-Syria

The 2 million Syrian Kurds represent around 10% of the population (Martorell 2016). The Rojava covers the Kurdish homelands that stretch over 19,000 km2 in northern and north-eastern Syria, in the governorates of Aleppo, ar-Raqqa, and Hasaka. Kurdish-majority areas are not contiguous and largely overlap the homelands of Arabs and other minorities such as Assyrians or Armenians. Likewise, the Kurdish-led *de facto* Autonomous Administration of North and East Syria (AANES) also extends over contiguous Arab-majority areas. As of 2024, the AANES comprises seven regions: Manbij, Euphrates (Kobane), Jazeera, Afrin, Deir-ez-Zor, ar-Raqqa, and Tabqa.

Nowadays, the hegemonic Kurdish political actor in the Rojava is the Democratic Union Party (PYD, Partiya Yekitîya Demokrat in Kurdish), founded in 2003 by Fouat Omar. It was established to obtain "tangible results," as it accused its predecessors of being too conformist and not achieving enough visibility (Gunter 2014: 41).

3.2.1 Background

Two elements become salient in the prior Syrian Kurdish experience: (1) the relationship with Damascus had been relatively calmer than in the rest of the cases, at least in terms of large-scale violence, in part due to the late development of the Kurdish national identity and the assimilation of urban Kurdish populations (Gunter 2014); and (2) its close links with the Kurdish actors across the Turkish border. This last element is also crucial to understand more recent developments.

It is an event that took place in Turkey, the Sheikh Said rebellion (1924), which lies at the heart of the first Kurdish autonomist project in Syria. Many of the dissident Kurds fled Turkish repression. They settled in Lebanon, where the Khoybun party was founded in 1927, and in the Jazeera region (now the Hasakah governorate) under French mandatory rule (Tejel 2009; Gunter 2014). In the following decade, the inhabitants of this region, mostly Kurds and Assyrians, organized to demand autonomy from the French authorities. This demand was rejected because the Kurds are not a minority from a religious perspective (Gunter 2014). As Tejel (2009) describes, this rebellion was organized by Kurdish tribal leaders and Khoybun-linked intellectuals, whose main goal was to freely dispose of the region as an operative base against the Turkish state. In any case, the region would not be under Damascus' direct control until the withdrawal of the French troops in 1946.

Even if Syria was nominally proclaimed a republic in 1930, it would not be effectively independent until 1946. In the meantime, it was under Vichy French rule and preventively occupied by the Allies during World War II. Like Iraq, the Syrian Republic was not spared by the race between the different currents of Arab nationalism, including Arab Socialism and Pan-Arabism. From the country's independence and up to the instauration of the United Arab Republic (UAR) along with Nasserist Egypt in 1958, Syria experimented six coups (three in 1949, one in 1951, one in 1953

and one in 1956), twenty governments (among which, the military regimes of Za'im, Selu and Shikshali) and four constitutional processes. Moreover, the UAR succumbed in 1961 after another coup. The Syrian Arab Republic was then established, but it witnessed three other coups (the Ba'athist coup of 1963, the Neo-Ba'athist coup of 1966, and Hafez al-Assad's 1970 Corrective Movement).

In this climate of instability, one Syrian regime after the other would see a progressive institutionalization of the discrimination against non-Arabs (Tejel 2009: 5-7). Until the establishment of the Syrian Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP-S) in 1957, the political life of the Kurdish side had been organized around three parties: Khoybun (until 1944), the Kurdish League (1945-46), and the Communist Party (until 1957). According to Gunter (2014: 25), the Khoybun and the Kurdish League lacked a proper self-determination project for Syria. They used the country as an operative base against Turkey. As for the Syrian Communist Party (SCP), it catered to workers and laborers who thought that communism was the best way to stop Arab nationalism.

The KDP-S was founded by former members of the Khoybun, the Kurdish League, and the SCP, as they no longer considered communism to be enough to protect Kurdish identity from Arab nationalism (Gunter 2014: 25-26). However, unlike Iraq's KDP, its project did not revolve around autonomy. Its program focused on the rights of the Kurds as a minority. Despite this, it remained a clandestine organization, as the UAR authorities never recognized it. Nasser's rule on UAR Syria brought about the suppression of Kurdish cultural expression, including the language, political repression against communists and KDP-S members, and anti-Kurdish purges in the army (Gunter 2014). For Nasser, the Kurds were a double threat: their non-Arab identity jeopardized the Arab unity upon which the UAR was based, and the Kurds were perceived to be too attached to their "feudal chiefs" and "notables," figures that the authorities "wished to eliminate" (Tejel 2009: 48).

This situation further deteriorated after the arrival of the different Ba'athist regimes. Al-Hilal's infamous "Twelve-Point Plan" put the Kurds on the spot, referring to them as the "enemy" and the "Kurdish danger" (Gunter 2014: 61). For Vanly (1992: 119), there is evidence that this plan was related to the discovery of oilfields in the Jazeera (Hasakah) region in 1958. The plan sought to eradicate all signs of Kurdish culture from this region and was conceived to disempower the Kurds from any actual agency in the country's political life. Point twelve provided for the withdrawal of the Syrian nationality from any non-Arab who wished to remain in the region. According to Tejel (2009: 51) and Gunter (2014: 19), this point is at the core of Syria's statelessness problem regarding the *ajanib* ("foreigners") and the *maktoumeen* ("unrecorded"). According to the latter, up to 20% of the Syrian Kurds became *ajanib* and lost several rights, among which, the right to vote, to own properties, or to work as civil servants.

In this context, the KDP-S faced extensive state retaliation. The project failed at engaging its heterogeneous bases, which split up twice, one in 1965 and another in 1970. The party's radicals organized the latter, which then founded a new party called el-Parti. Left-leaning, its platform was made up of students, intellectuals, and SCP militants. The more conservative faction was organized under the name Kurdish Democratic Progressive Party of Syria, whose bases were made up of notables, merchants, religious leaders, and landowners (Gunter 2014: 26).

Two elements of Hafez al-Assad's regime (1970-2000) policy towards the Kurds become salient: (1) the ongoing ethnic cleansing efforts along the Turkish border, and (2) the establishment of functional alliances with the Kurds in what Tejel (2009: 62) calls the "years of exploitation."

The first element refers to the Arab belt (al-Hizam al-'Arabi) project, destined to Arabize the Hasakah governorate. It further sought to create a physical barrier between the Kurds of Turkey

and Syria (Tejel 2009: 61). Its effects were never reversed, and, still, nowadays, this governorate has smaller proportions of Kurdish inhabitants than other Rojavan areas. Vanly (1992) reports other anti-Kurdish measures, such as the ban on Kurdish clothing, names and the language.

The second element refers to the regime policies aimed at consolidating al-Assad's fragile monopoly of power. Through his Corrective Movement, he purged the government and the army from enemies. He established a clientelistic model that favored the Alawite minority to the detriment of the Sunni majority of the country. The regime approached the Kurds in order to deter and/or counter any possible Sunni dissidence (Tejel 2009: 65-67). According to this author, these policies are not to be construed as pro-Kurdish, but as a way to co-opt and control the Kurds and avoid prospective scenarios of revolution. This pragmatism is also reflected in al-Assad's foreign policy. According to Vanly (1992), al-Assad did capitalize on the Turkish PKK in order to destabilize Turkey. In fact, from 1979 until 1998, this revolutionary group had its operative base in Syria, and its founder, Abdullah Öcalan, resided in Damascus until 1998. Damascus afforded shelter and support to the PKK for various reasons: rivaling alliances amidst the Cold War, the management of the Euphrates waters (Vanly 1992: 124), Turkey's annexation of Hatay (Dunn 2007), and the Ankara-Tel Aviv alliance (Schøtt 2017). In exchange, much like Khoybun did, the PKK did not interfere in the internal relations of Damascus with the Syrian Kurds. These remained largely demobilized and, surprisingly, many of them opted to serve in the Syrian army (Vanly 1992: 125).

This collaboration phase of the Damascus-PKK relations came to an end after the Adana (or Hatay) Agreement in 1998. Turkey threatened Syria with war if it did not expel the PKK rebels from its

territory.[32] In any case, the tolerated presence of the PKK in Syria had a visible and "unexpected" consequence (Gunter 2014: 93).

3.2.2 The Birth and Rise of the PYD

The birth of the PYD in 2003 was the first real milestone in Kurdish self-determination in Syria. It is the first party that embraces the objective of a Pan-Kurdish state through arms (Gunter 2014: 41). While the PYD denied any connections with the PKK, for most authors, including Gunter, these are evident. Apart from sharing a common goal and project, both parties are members of the same umbrella organization, the Kurdistan Communities Union (KCK, in Kurdish, *Koma Civaken Kurdistan*). Furthermore, this author estimated that, in 2007, up to 20% of the forces stationed in the PKK base in Qandil were Syrian, and that this was due to Hafez al-Assad's policy to allow Syrian Kurds to join the PKK instead of the Syrian army.

The increasing politicization of the Kurds in Syria can be attested by the growing number of protests that took place in the country in the wake of the "territorialization" of Kurdish nationalism in Iraq (Olson 2005; Tejel 2009: 80), that is, the fall of Saddam Hussein and the US-led official institutionalization of the KAR, and the momentum it built for Kurdish self-determination proponents. Wary of the resulting Iraqi scenario, Bashar al-Assad's regime (2000-nowadays) vigorously repressed Kurdish uprisings throughout the Syrian Kurdistan and other major Syrian cities in the wake of the Qamishli revolts (2004), leaving 43 fatalities and 2,500 detentions. These revolts were the first signal of domestic Kurdish dissidence in Syria (Tejel 2009). In this context, the PYD emerged as a credible alternative to the traditional parties that had succumbed to co-

[32] For authors such as Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp (2017), Damascus's move was consistent with other processes brought about by the dissolution of the USSR and the disappearance of the bipolar order, such as a progressive dismantling of the Ba'athist welfare state and a need to attract new investors from US-allied countries.

optation by Damascus within the Kurdish political scene of Syria, and its project gradually became hegemonic.

The War in Syria and the Kurdish Periphery

The War in Syria (March 2011-ongoing) saw a readjustment of the politics of the Syrian state center, with several project proponents now fighting over it, each with its international backers. On one hand, al-Assad's regime, backed by Iran and Russia, is fighting to maintain its grip over the state's institutions. On the other hand, the Syrian opposition, incarnated in the Syrian National Council (SNC), backed mainly by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and by the Western allies in general, and controlled to a great extent by the Muslim Brotherhood (Ayboga, Flach and Knapp 2017). However, another factor added to the already complex situation. The emergence of Salafi projects advanced, first by Jabhat al-Nusra until its demise in 2013, and later by Daesh. The latter sought to restore the Caliphate under an ultraconservative interpretation of the Sharia Law.

Likewise, at the war's outset, the Kurdish periphery was home to several proponents of Kurdish self-determination projects. Apart from the aforementioned PYD, the successors of the original KDP-S challenged the PYD, among which the KDP-S (el-Parti) reemerged to advance a KRG-based project in Rojava. In fact, in October 2011, the Kurdish National Council in Syria (ENKS, Encûmena Niştimanî ya Kurdî li Sûriye in Kurdish) was established by the KDP-S (el-Parti) and other minor conservative parties under the auspices of the KAR's Premier, Massoud Barzani, in Erbil (Carnegie Middle East Center 2012).

The war came as an exogenous development that created opportunities for conflict between the two. However, only the PYD and its militias, the People's Protection Units and the Women's Protection Units (YPG/YPJ, in Kurdish Yekîneyên Parastina Gel/ Yekîneyên Parastina Jin),

emerged as the hegemonic actor in the Syrian-Kurdish periphery and established what is now the *de facto* autonomous polity known as the Autonomous Administration of North-Eastern Syria (AANES).

The civil war context intensified the PYD-ENKS struggle. The PYD has accused the ENKS of collaborating with Turkey and, on several occasions, with Islamists in order to undermine the PYD's internal coherence in the territories it controls (Türkeri 2016; Ayboga, Flach et Knapp 2017). Nominally, the PYD and the YPG/YPJ emerged as an independent player that was neither affiliated with Damascus and the Syrian Arab Army nor with the SNC and the Free Syrian Army (FSA). However, the ENKS accused the PYD of collaborating with al-Assad's regime in the assassination of Mashaal Tammo in 2011, leader of the Kurdish Future Movement (founded in 2005), whose spin-off parties are close to the ENKS. On the other hand, the ENKS aligned intermittently with the SNC, with minor militias such as the Jabhat al-Akrad or the Salah-ad-Din Brigade aligning intermittently with the FSA (Gunter 2014: 108).

Center-periphery relations

As Gunter (2014: 103) explains, due to the large influence of the Turkish government in the SNC, the PYD opted out of the opposition coalition, as it feared its project would end up lost in the conflict of interests. As the author indicates, from the Kurdish perspective, the SNC does not seem open to accede to any self-determination claims in case of regime change. Instead, the PYD decided to tactically side with Damascus, which Salih Muslim, leader of the PYD, described as "an intelligent enemy." In turn, the Syrian regime abolished Legislative Decree No. 93 of 1962, which had stripped the Syrian nationality from many Kurds regarded as "alien inflitrators" and created two stateless categories, *ajanib* and *maktoumin*. This meant the restoration of the Syrian nationality

for the first group but not for the second. The same author implies this is another example of the Syrian regime playing the PKK card against Turkey in retaliation for Ankara's support of the SNC. Nevertheless, Damascus unilaterally enacted a new constitution in 2012, which contained no provisions regarding Kurdish cultural or political autonomy.[33]

The Islamist projects advanced, first, by Jabhat-al-Nusra and, later, by Daesh, were incompatible with the PYD's self-determination project for the Rojavan Kurds. Laicism and gender seemed to be the main friction points between the two, according to Gunter (2014: 113). As the first author explains, Salafists perceive Kurds as "*takfiri*" [sic].[34] Moreover, no alleys for cooperation existed between these Salafist groups and the PYD. As the conflict progressed, the Kurds came to perceive them as proxies of the Turkish government, while the Islamists perceived the Kurds as proxies of Damascus (Tabler 2016: 21-24).

From the three Kurdish cantons to the AANES

Self-Determination Advancement: The Three Kurdish Cantons

The PYD and YPG/YPJ seized control of the Kurdish-majority areas in northern Syria where the Syrian Arab Army had retreated from on July 19, 2012.[35] The PYD soon established a *de facto* autonomous administration and organized the territory into three autonomous cantons: Afrin, Kobane ('Ain-al-'Arab), and Cizire (Jazeera).

[33] Syrian Arab Republic. 2012. *Constitution of the Syrian Arab Republic*. https://www.wipo.int/wipolex/en/legislation/details/16572. The country's official name is still Syrian Arab Republic. Article 4 still recognizes Arabic as the sole official language. It contains no explicit mention to the Kurds or Kurdish as a minority people or language.

[34] Probably *kafir*, Arabic for apostate. *Takfiri* is the one who accuses the *kafir*. Salafists have instrumentalized takfirism to justify the use of violence against Muslims who do not share the same view of Islam.

[35] As Gunter (2014) indicates, Damascus concentrated its troops in better-controlled areas to launch offensives against the Free Syrian Army effectively and entrusted the defense of its northern periphery to the PYD.

Several factors contributed to this outcome. First, although the Syrian War was not a by-product of any escalation in the bargaining between the Kurdish actors and al-Assad's regime, it was a nation-state crisis that had a direct bearing on the emergence of the three cantons. Damascus' retreat from the area meant that the unfavorable institutional arrangements that had been in place and forced the PYD and other actors to clandestinity were no longer enforced.

This power vacuum left the PYD and the ENKS fighting for political-identity hegemony. However, only the PYD emerged as the hegemonic self-determination project proponent in the Rojava. Despite the support from the KAR, the ENKS and its Peshmerga remained relatively irrelevant. The success of the PYD compared to the trajectory of the ENKS is explained by several factors according to Gunter (2014: 110): (1) Institutional concerns: the PYD could fill the power vacuum left by Damascus in 2012 because it promptly mobilized its Central Coordinating Committee, which had already been clandestinely coordinating the party's Local People's Committees since its establishment in 2007. In addition, in 2011 it created the West Kurdistan People's Council (MGRK, Meclîsa Gel a Rojavayê Kurdistanê in Kurdish), a local assembly made up by 320 elected members that took over the authority and competences of municipalities that ceased their operation due to the war. (2) Relative strength: initially, the PYD was the only Syrian-Kurdish party with an armed branch, and, despite the KRG's efforts to arm the ENKS, the Roj Peshmerga, with circa 2,000 troops (Wahab 2016: 43), and other allied militias did not account for as many troops as the YPG/YPJ, with circa 40,000 (Wahab 2016: 43). As a result, the ENKS' impact on the conflict has been limited. (3) Demographic concerns: on top of that, the platform population of the ENKS was mainly made up of wealthier Kurdish elites who could afford to flee the country at the early stages of the war (also in Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp, 2017). Despite the described PYD-ENKS rivalry, an effort was initially made to accommodate a joint Kurdish-centered self-governance project.

Along with other independent parties, the main two Rojavan political groups signed a KRG-brokered cooperation agreement in Erbil (KAR, Iraq) on July 12, 2012. This gave way to the Kurdish Supreme Committee (DBK, Desteya Bilind, a Kurd in Kurdish), which was conceived as a coalition that would rule these Kurdish-majority areas. It lasted until 2013, when the ENKS withdrew due to the PYD achieving political-identity hegemony among the platform population. As a result, the DBK was abandoned, and the PYD focused on another coalition, the Movement for a Democratic Society (Tev-Dem). This new coalition marked one of the main divergent points with the KRG's political model, as, nominally, it made room for non-Kurdish actors, such as Assyrians, Armenians, Chechens, Turkmens, and Arabs, and adopted the Apoist grassroots model based on the principles of democratic autonomy, communalism, and democratic confederalism by the PKK leadership[36] (Gunter 2014; Sary 2016; Ayboga, Flach et Knapp 2017).

Furthermore, not only did Damascus withdraw from the area, but it also decided not to turn against the PYD and tolerate the emergence of the cantons. Al-Assad's regime had incentives not to fight the Kurds and treat them like a strategic ally, which allowed it to concentrate on fighting the SNC and the Salafi Islamists. Likewise, due to al-Assad's dire situation, the PYD had incentives to press its self-determination claim, but not to collaborate with the SNC, sponsored by Turkey (Gunter 2014: 110-112).

In addition, while at the moment of pressing their claim, the political empowerment of the Rojavan Kurds within periphery politics was not greater than in national politics, it gradually grew as the *de facto* polity's grassroots participation institutions consolidated (Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp

[36] According to Novellis (2017), "democratic autonomy" involves that the people have a direct say in the decision-making process for all issues that affect them; "communalism" is the self-organization of a population at the most basic local level, involving all types of groups and people, that is, the implementation of the democratic autonomy principle at grassroots level; and "democratic confederalism" is the framework for collaboration between communal and regional entities.

2017). Before that, many fell into the *ajanib* and *maktoumin* categories and were prevented from fully participating in civil life.

Lastly, at that stage, Great Powers did not support the PYD and the YPG/YPJ. They concentrated on the main actors within the Syrian Civil War, namely, al-Assad's regime, backed by Russia, together with its regional allies, and the SNC, backed by the Western bloc and the Arab monarchies (Gunter 2014: 104).

In the wake of the emergence of the three cantons, two elements characterize the PYD self-determination project's evolution: (1) territorial expansion and (2) its increasing inclusiveness.

Self-Determination Advancement: Territorial Expansion

This phase in advancing the PYD's self-determination project cannot be understood without the effect of the inclusionary turn it took by establishing the Tev-Dem Coalition. First, as Wahab (2016: 43) explains, effective autonomy could not be sustained without territorial contiguity. And secondly, given the isolated nature of the Kurdish enclaves, incorporating other neighboring minorities in the new institutional arrangements was vital. However, what made territorial expansion possible within a context of international embargo and under the constant attacks of the FSA and Jabhat-al-Nusra, first, and Daesh, later?

For starters, having access to and controlling a *de facto* polity gave the PYD greater leverage over its rivals. As the polity consolidated, it became a *de facto* segment-state within Syria. However, this did not give the PYD greater leverage against Damascus or the SNC, as their relationship was still not regulated under the prior institutional arrangements. Al-Assad's critical situation still incentivized the PYD to further its project, and Damascus to acquiesce.

In this process, political-identity hegemony becomes salient again, as with territorial expansion, the polity's jurisdiction expanded over non-Kurdish peoples, too. The YPG/YPJ would achieve their initial military victories, which would play into consolidating their institutional arrangements. First, the liberation of Tel Abyad (June 2015), an Arab-majority city, allowed for territorial contiguity between Kobane and Cizire (Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp 2017), and later, the liberation of Manbij or al-Bab (August 2016), which allowed for a direct link between Afrin and Kobane and cut access to the Turkish border to Daesh (Schmidinger 2016).

This reinforced the inter-ethnic character of the Apoist project[37] and increased the visibility of the PYD and the YPG/YPJ as an emerging player within the context of the Syrian civil war. The institutional arrangements put in place thus evolved, with the creation of Kurdish-led but nominally ethnic-neutral[38] umbrella organizations. First, in October 2015, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), made up by different groups and militias, but led by the YPG/YPJ. Later, in December 2015, the Syrian Democratic Council (MDS, Meclîsa Demokratîka Suriya) emerged as the SDF's political branch, encompassing the Tev-Dem and other Syrian left-wing parties. It is not possible to ascertain which level of support the PYD institutions enjoyed among non-Kurds from election results. However, according to Kurdish activist Heval Amer, when Arab tribes tend not to be sure about which force to collaborate with, they opt for the stronger option, and, in this respect, the YPG/YPJ's victory over Daesh in Kobane was decisive (Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp 2017). Achieving political-identity hegemony among Kurds and non-Kurds alike has secured the PYD's

[37] In Öcalan's (2012) roadmap, he lays out his conceptualization of democratization, which involves "not only peoples of all cultures, ethnicities, and religions (as well as flexible and open identity concepts) but also individuals that share fundamental rights and freedoms."
[38] Pollock (2016) reports that 80% of the SDF troops were Kurdish, while 20% were Arab.

situation within the Syrian war context. It sure contributes to incentivizing it to keep pressing its claims.

At least nominally, the Tev-Dem and the Apoist grassroots participation institutions offered better political empowerment prospects for the populations under PYD, and later MDS, jurisdiction than Syria's autocratic regime, and this should create more incentives for the PYD to further its self-determination project. Again, this factor may not be as decisive, as it seems that Great Power intercession also played a big part in reinforcing the polity's territorial expansion and its political-identity hegemony among non-Kurds. The increasing visibility and relevance of the PYD-led institutions brought international attention. On one hand, in 2016, the SDF became the primary ally of the US-led coalition against Daesh on the ground. According to Clawson (2016: 55) this actor is "second to none" in fighting the transnational terrorist group. This did not have the same effect at the negotiation table, where the SNC is still the preferred interlocutor of the West. The SDF also received military support from Russia after the Sukhoi SU-24M incident with Turkey (Borshchevskaya 2016: 49).

In turn, this led to new territorial gains south of the Euphrates River at the expense of Daesh-controlled Arab-majority areas such as ar-Raqqa or Deir-ez-Zor.[39] From the three original cantons, the Kurdish-led polity grew to establish the Democratic Federation of Northern Syria-Rojava, which, on July 16, 2018, eventually became the AANES. Balanche (2016: 30) highlights that upon becoming a recipient of US military aid, the PYD-led institutions were seen by the anti-Daesh Arab groups as the only "repository for U.S. weapons," which they must join to receive arms.

[39] Europa Press Internacional. 2017. "Rusia da por cumplida su misión de acabar con Estado Islámico en Siria," *Europa Press* December 7, 2017 http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-fds-completan-toma-raqqa-antigua-capital-estado-islamico-siria-20171017121700.html.

On the other hand, fears of a PKK strengthening amidst the violent escalation at home prompted Turkey to intervene directly in the war. This implies that "Turkey and the PYD see each other through the lens of their relationship with the PKK: when the PKK is at peace with Turkey, so is the PYD. When the PKK fights Ankara, Turkey, and the PYD become deeply hostile toward each other, as is the case now in Syria" (Cagaptay 2016: 13). First, through the Euphrates Shield Operation, aimed at reinforcing the FSA's grip in areas west of that river (Shaheen 2016b). Later, it launched the Olive Branch Operation, and seized the city of Afrin on March 18, 2018 (Hubbard and Patel 2018). Anti-Kurdish measures were implemented and Kurdish symbols were destroyed (Osborne 2018). Finally, during the summer of 2018, the Kurdish-led forces retreated from Manbij at the request of Turkey and the US.

While the described events imply some discoordination between the US and Turkey, the US is still careful not to undermine its ally's domestic security policy. Clawson (2016) reports that efforts were made to facilitate a Turkey-SDF entente, by diluting its Kurdish component by integrating more Sunni Arabs. However, the main concern of the US is to prevent the PYD from overtly collaborating with Damascus and from getting closer to Russia (Clawson 2016: 55; Pollock 2016: 8). Conversely, the relationship between Russia and the PYD has been less conditional due to its antagonism with Turkey and their divergent goals in Syria. Moreover, unlike the US, Russia does not consider the PKK a terrorist organization. According to Borshchevskaya (2016: 49) and Pollock (2016: 8), Russia has always supported the inclusion of the PYD (and the MDS) in the Geneva talks, as their attitude regarding Damascus is not hostile. While Moscow's interlocutor of preference is Damascus, it has also granted military aid to the Kurdish-led groups and, unlike the US, has not ceased to support them in Afrin after Turkey's Olive Branch Operation (Balanche 2016: 31).

This scenario is characterized by pragmatic alliances that, unlike in Iraq's KAR case, have not led to an upgrade of the region's status to a *de jure* autonomous polity. Russian diplomats presented a draft constitution for Syria in Astana, Kazakhstan, in 2017 to speed up the peace talks. If the SNRC had not rejected it (Meyer 2017), it would have been the first official recognition of the "Kurdish cultural autonomy" in Syria. However, it does not explicitly mention any current AANES institutions or its boundaries.[40] This reflects the dynamics of the UN-facilitated Syrian Constitutional Committee, where the AANES and the SDF are not represented.

In summary, this case illustrates how a development outside the center-periphery bargaining can prompt the development of, at least, a *de facto* autonomous polity. The causal conjunction that permitted the emergence of the original three Rojavan cantons rested on the local inoperativeness of the home state's institutional arrangements, on the PYD's political-identity hegemony, and, especially, on Damascus's tactical tolerance of the PYD's furtherance of its project.

The causal conjunction that allowed for the necessary territorial expansion that rendered that autonomy possible rested on these same factors and added two more: the expansion of the PYD's political hegemony over its newer subjects, and the support afforded by Great Powers, mostly limited to military aid and conditioned by the interests of allies which are more important at regional and global level.

These limitations, regarding, on the one hand, Damascus' mere tolerance and lack of open acceptance of the PYD's claims and, on the other hand, the limited Great Power support, inform

[40] "Syrian Arab Republic 2017 – Draft of 23 Jan 2017." 2017. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Syria_2017D. Article 4 enables the use of Kurdish by the "Kurdish Cultural Autonomy" alongside Arabic, while this remains the state's official language. Moreover, Article 15 provides for the possibility of decentralization and the passing of new laws stating the extent of the "Kurdish Cultural Autonomy."

the limits of this advancement. It seems that, as long as Damascus does not recognize the MDS or, failing that, as it is not an internationally sponsored party to the Geneva and Astana talks, the AANES will be doomed to exist as a *de facto* polity.

It remains to be seen how the relationship between the AANES and Damascus evolves as and if the SNRC and FSA's threat gradually disappear, along with the incentives for al-Assad's regime to accept the AANES' existence. In the words of Öcalan, a "pacific coexistence between nation-states and democratic confederalism is possible provided that the state does not interfere" in the normal business of the self-administration institutions. Otherwise, the PKK's founder would advocate for "self-defense" (Ayboga, Flach, and Knapp 2017).

3.3 Başûri Kurds-Iraq

The Başûr and the Kurdistan Autonomous Region are not coterminous. Although the Başûr boundaries are not officially established, they cover a larger area than the KAR's. This polity comprises the territories of four oil and water-rich northern governorates (Dohuk, Erbil, Sulaymaniyah and Halabja). Martorell (2016) and the Kurdish Institute of Paris estimated the Iraqi Kurdish population to be around 5 million (19% of Iraq's total population), forming a majority in an area of 76,000 km2. Kurdish-majority exclaves exist in other governorates, such as Nineveh, Salah-ad-Din, and Diyala. Both inside and outside the KAR, the Kurds coexist with other communities such as the Turkmen, Assyrians, Armenians, and Arabs.

The Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) is the leading Başûri actor. It is a coalition of the two main parties in the KAR, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). Except for a brief period between 1986 and 1994, where both parties collaborated against Saddam Hussein's regime, these groups fought for the hegemony in Iraqi Kurdistan.

Eventually, in 1998, they signed a peace deal. They established the foundations, later institutionalized in 2005, of the current KRG, which allows them to maintain stability as each group preserves its hegemony in their traditional areas of influence.

3.3.1 Background

Different Kurdish political actors have fought centralizing Iraqi nation-state projects and, later, discrimination for decades. During Mandatory Iraq (1920-1932), Turkish tribal leaders viewed the new British administration with mistrust. As described by Martorell (2016: 48), a "kingdom" was established around Sulaymaniyah by Mahmood Berzenji,[41] who led a series of insurrections against the British. According to this author, these campaigns were more centered on opposing the new power dynamics that resulted from the establishment of a new state, which jeopardized traditional tribal power sharing and lifestyles. On the other hand, Batatu (1989, seen in Fuccaro 1997) points out that the Iraqi society united across tribal, religious, and urban-rural cleavages to protest against British rule. This paved the way for establishing political parties, as class-society elements were gradually adopted. At this time, the international community addressed the Kurdish problem as an issue of minorities and, according to McDowall (2004: 145), the League of Nations provided for special treatment of the Kurds in the Mosul Vilayet after it was assigned to Iraq by the Treaty of Ankara (1926). This included provisions to appoint local Kurds as public officials and the use of Kurdish as an administrative language. However, no such development did take place.

The independent Hashemite Kingdom of Iraq (1932-1958) did not enforce any provisions to accommodate the Kurdish minority. McDowall (2004) describes that, as discontent grew, the Barzani clan succeeded Berzenji upon his death. Mustapha Barzani founded the main Kurdish party

[41] "Barzinji" in McDowall (2004).

of Iraq, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP), in 1946 in Mahabad (Iran) while in exile. In the meantime, Iraq had been subject to a second British occupation (1941-1947) as a result of a phyllo-Nazi military coup. At this stage, the KDP's self-determination project emerges: according to McDowall (2004: 296) the KDP is the first actor to adopt a "nationalist programme," proposing an Iraqi union where the Kurds would participate voluntarily.

However, social and economic issues were excluded from the party's program to not set itself at odds with tribal leaders and landlords. The USSR would also offer asylum to Mustapha Barzani after the fall of Mahabad, who found incentives to return to Iraq after General Qasim's coup in 1958, which would establish the Republic of Iraq and start the advancement of an Arab socialist nation-state project for the ensemble of Iraq. Several parties were legalized, including the KDP and several Kurdish-language publications (Martorell 2016: 54). Although not intrinsically related to the Kurdish actors, Qasim's Arab Socialist regime had repercussions in Iraq's foreign policy. Within the context of the Arab Cold War, the new republic abandoned the Central Treaty Organization (signed in 1955). It reversed its regional alliances, aligning with Nasser's Egypt and against Pahlavi Iran. This, in turn, would affect the trajectories of both Iraqi and Iranian Kurds.

3.3.2 The Ba'ath and the Periphery

The emergence of institutional Pan-Arabism in Iraq was initially led by Arab socialist Qasim, whose administration ended in 1963 after his assassination. Nasserist Arif would rule the country up until 1968, when the Ba'athist elements of the military ousted him. In turn, Ba'athism was led by Ahmed Hassan al-Bakr (1968-1979) and Saddam Hussein (1979-2003). The implementation of this Pan-Arabist nation-state project marked a new low in Baghdad's relationship with its Kurdish periphery, organized around the KDP.

Nation-State Crisis: First Iraqi-Kurdish War and Self-Determination Advancement: Nominal Autonomy

The Barzani clan's KDP succeeded Berzenji in the struggle against state centralization in the Kurdish periphery. Although, initially, its project did not vie for independence, it inspired a campaign against Qasim's government, and later against al-Bakr's. A two-phase war took place before and during al-Bakr's administration (1961-1970 and 1974-1975). The causal conjunction that led to this nation-state crisis did not rely on controlling a segment-state. The institutional arrangements in place were not especially favorable to the Kurdish group. Still, the Barzanis could effectively escalate the center-periphery bargaining into the First Iraqi-Kurdish War.

Two factors stand out as major contributors to this critical point and the subsequent project advancement: al-Bakr's precarious security situation upon his arrival in power, and Iranian support, in a dynamic which Dunn (2007) identifies as "exporting the Kurdish cause."

This first factor is related to Baghdad's policies towards the Kurds. As McDowall (2004: 323) describes, the Ba'ath Party's project for Iraq tended towards administrative centralization. Nevertheless, the First Iraqi-Kurdish War was settled after Mustapha Barzani negotiated autonomy for three northern Kurdish-majority governorates with al-Bakr's government. As this author explains, the Ba'ath regarded autonomy as a temporary solution while buying some time to reinforce the central government. Considering the political instability in the center, al-Bakr found incentives to make limited concessions to political contenders in exchange for their political support. These co-optation efforts are also accounted for in McDowall (2004: 324-325) and a coetaneous MERIP report from 1974, which mentions that Baghdad had planned to incorporate the KDP into the National Front coalition in order to reinforce its alliances and build up against other

contending parties, such as the Communist Party. As a result, Kurdish autonomy having been enshrined in Article 8 of the country's 1970 Provisional Constitution,[42] along with the recognition of the Kurdish identity (Article 5) and the officiality of the Kurdish language in Kurdish-majority districts (Article 7). However, no implementation efforts were ever made.

In the absence of Great Power support and of a segment-state, the second factor, Iranian support, helps explain many of these developments. The KDP rebels capitalized on Iranian aid to shift the balance of leverage in their favor. It came thus as an exogenous development that empowered them against Baghdad. As described by McDowall (2004: 337), this support, also afforded to other opposition groups, was not conceived to help the KDP advance its self-determination project, but to further destabilize the already unstable new Ba'athist government. In exchange, the Iraqi government supported Iranian dissident groups, mainly Khomeini's Islamist opposition. This support allowed Barzani's forces to keep up with Baghdad's even if the KDP had not entirely persuaded its platform population that the war was the only solution, and to negotiate the 1970 Autonomy Agreement. The salience of this backing is further attested by the fact that the second phase of the war ended abruptly after Iran withdrew it in the wake of the 1975 Algiers Agreement (Martorell 2016: 55), whereby Iraq and Iran agreed to no longer support each other's dissident groups. Much like what the Adana Agreement meant for the PKK, this was a severe backlash for the KDP: it forced the KDP forces to retreat and Mustapha Barzani to exile to the US.

On the Kurdish side, Mustapha Barzani later stated having signed the 1970 agreement with Baghdad due to popular pressure,[43] which can be taken as a proxy for the limited political-identity

[42] Iraq. 2017. *The Interim Constitution of the Republic of Iraq*. https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP09T00207R001000100001-3.pdf.

[43] Mustapha Barzani on the 1970 Agreement: "'At first they [the Baathis] came to us and said, "We will grant you self-rule." I said this was a ruse. I knew it even before I signed the agreement. But (our) people asked me, "How can

hegemony achieved by the KDP during these years. However, the hegemony of this pragmatism did not last long on the Kurdish side, as social discontent grew at the lack of implementation efforts from Baghdad and the new Arabization projects of the Nineveh and Kirkuk governorates, including ethnic cleansing, which further dispossessed Kurds from their rights and reinforced their political disempowerment within the state institutions.

In this post-Algiers scenario, Baghdad reinforced its Arabization program, much like the one implemented in fellow Ba'athist Syria. McDowall (2004: 339-340) describes how the arrival of Arab colonists altered the demographic profile of several Kurdish-majority areas, mainly Nineveh and oil-rich Kirkuk. In this context of Kurdish discontent against the KDP's management of the crisis, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was founded in 1975 by Jalal Talabani in his exile in Damascus. According to McDowall (2004: 343), the PUK organized against "the inability of the feudalist, tribalist, bourgeois rightist and capitulationist" KDP "tribal" leaders to offer a solution. Therefore, in succeeding the KDP in its struggle against Baghdad, it also established a conflictual relationship with the former. Their fight to secure the hegemony for their respective project extended over two decades, and became the most salient during the Iran-Iraq War (1980-1988) and during the Kurdish Civil War (1994-1998). However, despite the KDP-PUK feud, the Iran-Iraq War incentivized the Kurdish parties to escalate a nation-state crisis against Baghdad and managed to temporarily cooperate to establish the *de facto* Kurdistan Autonomous Region.

you refuse self-rule for the Kurdish people?" It is easy, in the light of the crimes committed against the Kurdish people since then, to suppose the Baath acted wholly out of cynism" (McDowall 2004: 328).

Nation-State Crisis: Second Iraqi-Kurdish War, and Self-Determination Advancement:* de facto *emergence of KAR

At the outset of this nation-state crisis, the underlying causal conjunction implied no access to a segment-state. Not much had changed since the end of the first nation-state crisis, as the 1970 and 1974 autonomy arrangements were still not enforced. As a result, Baghdad was still favored by the institutional order in place, which had been taken over by Saddam Hussein in 1979. In addition, the Arabization campaigns deepened, and so did the alienation of Kurds from the state. However, something had changed. Within the Iran-Iraq War context, the Kurdish actors found incentives to advance their respective claims against Hussein's regime, which despite being consolidating, was rogue enough to stage a war against the seemingly weaker budding Islamic Republic of Iran.

However, the position of the Kurdish groups was still precarious at the outset of the crisis, partly because none of the groups had achieved political-identity hegemony. Amid the Iran-Iraq War, two phases can be distinguished regarding the KDP-PUK relations. Up to May 1987, the first one has been characterized by McDowall (2004: 351-352) as a quasi-civil war. At the beginning of the Iraqi offensive against revolutionary Iran, most of Baghdad's troops concentrated at the front in the neighboring country. This left the KDP and PUK peshmerga relatively free to collide amidst unlikely alliances. The KDP, among other opposition groups, was once again approached by Iran to undermine Baghdad's domestic monopoly of power and fight the PUK, which had established close links with the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP-I). Moreover, Hussein's government started negotiating a ceasefire with the PUK to relieve some of the pressure and concentrate on the Iranian front. The end of this phase precipitated in 1987 when the KDP and the PUK, among other parties, called for unity across partisan lines against Hussein's regime. At Iran's instance, the PUK cut ties with the KDP-I and closed ranks with the KDP within a National Opposition Front, which

included other actors such as Kurdish socialists, Assyrian democrats, and Iraq-wide Communists. Paradoxically, this did not give incentives to Hussein to back down and, in turn, escalated the means against the Kurds. He inaugurated a new offensive in Kurdistan, the Anfal campaign (February to September 1988). Iraqi state forces employed chemical weapons against peshmerga-controlled civilian areas, as in the Halabja massacre, which resulted in about 5,000 civilian fatalities (Martorell 2016: 65). This marked a new phase of significant ethnic cleansing efforts that lasted until 1991, and involved, among other measures, a *cordon sanitaire* along the Turkish and Iranian borders.

In any case, Hussein's genocidal offensive against the Kurds saw momentarily relief during another exogenous development, the First Gulf War (1990-1991), as the regime troops were concentrated in Kuwait. Despite the 1991 revolts attempt, that gathered support from cross-border Kurdish groups, Martorell (2016: 90) highlights clashes with Baghdad's forces around Kirkuk and a decisive Kurdish victory in Sulaymaniyah that year.

This limited coordination among groups that gathered support from cross-border Kurdish actors afforded some degree of realism and credibility to the Kurdish self-determination project. The Kurdish campaign acquired, likewise, limited significance, as it drew the attention of the international community. In an example of Great Power intercession on behalf of an ethnic group, the US, UK, and France established a no-fly zone north of the 36º parallel, supposedly under United Nations Security Council Resolution 688. This text is the first explicit reference to the Kurdish people by an international organization, and called for "an open dialogue" to "take place to ensure that the human and political rights of all Iraqi citizens are respected." However, it did not expressly provide for the implementation of a no-fly zone (Security Council 1991).

In this context of relative calm and a double embargo, Baghdad could no longer implement its institutional arrangements by force. Therefore, the Kurdish political actors found incentives to organize a *de facto* autonomous region, which was not recognized either by Baghdad or abroad. Indeed, an informal segment-state was created. It materialized the KDP-PUK limited ad hoc coordination, but still lacked a proper and uniform self-determination project. According to Gunter (2014), this limited political-identity hegemony is marked by a "difficult power balance" between KDP and PUK. In addition, Bengio (2003) considers this conductive of the "forging of a stronger Kurdish identity" in Iraq. In 1992, in the wake of the first free elections held in the region, the Kurdish regional parliament and governments were constituted. In any case, the limitations of such coordination around the project are further attested by the electoral results. This election reinforces each party's respective traditional strongholds: the PUK won Sulaymaniyah, Kirkuk, and Diyala, while the KDP won Dohuk and Erbil (Atroushi 1997). This reinforces the existing partisan cleavages and each party's grip of power in their respective regions.

The Kurdish Civil War: testing the resilience of the KDP-PUK coordination

The double embargo endured by the Kurds (one backed by the UN, as part of the country, and another one from Baghdad, aimed at destabilizing the *de facto* autonomist project) took a toll on the project's resilience. In addition to the dependence on black market goods and the operation of foreign NGOs, another source of pressure came from across the border, as Kurdish refugees from neighboring Turkey fled state repression. The PKK reorganized around the Qandil mountain region in Iraqi Kurdistan, which became the object of Turkish attacks (Martorell 2016).

Apart from strategic divergences regarding the management of supply routes, the leadership of the KDP and the PUK disagreed in other aspects. McDowall (2004: 380) describes how Massoud

Barzani (KDP, Mustapha Barzani's son) adopts a more restraint stance, proclaiming "autonomy for Kurdistan, democracy for Iraq," wary of making more enemies in the neighborhood, while Jalal Talabani (PUK) shows a more radical view, talking about "self-determination within a federal Iraq."

Party life and party adherence in Iraqi Kurdistan during the 90s (and up to nowadays) should not be equated with Western party life, as they represented a complex web of tribal alliances, and "loyalties to traditional elites and their parties remained salient" (Natali 2010: 46). In light of the stalemate created by the elections, and, according to this author, of the INGOs' insensitive approach to the tribal nature of the Kurdish political life in the allocation of aid, these created new opportunities for conflict, as "[I]nstead of trying to bridge existing cleavages between the Kurdish parties, donor agencies, and foreign governments encouraged fragmentation." (Natali 2010: 46). Eventually, the two parties resorted to a fratricide war that would span between 1994 and September 1998, when the leaders of both parties signed the Washington Peace Agreement (WPA), whose contents have never been made public. This institutional arrangement, which would not be ratified until 2002, consolidated the partisan control of traditional areas of influence, and established the basis for the (still in operation) transitional regional governance framework, where two parallel party administrations exist in each area of influence for key policy areas that have not yet been effectively unified and transferred to the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), such as intelligence or security. For instance, Peshmerga forces are loyal to their respective party and do not share a joint command or hierarchy, evoking Gunter's (1996: 240) idea of the Kurdish party leaders as warlords rather than statesmen or Hassan's (2015) characterization of the system as "sultanistic."

Self-Determination Advancement: the KAR's Emergence as a* de jure *polity

This is the farthest any Kurdish self-determination project has been advanced across our four cases. As a result, the causal conjunction that led to it can shed some light on the factors that allowed the *de facto* KRG to press its claim further.

Firstly, it did not result directly from the escalation of the center-periphery bargaining into a nation-state crisis. This means it did not arise from Hussein's consent to the status upgrade within the prevalent Iraqi institutional arrangements. It happened in spite of them. Despite the KAR controlling a *de facto* segment state, the autonomous polity could still not capitalize on any institutional advantage arising from Iraqi institutional arrangements. The autonomy provisions of the 1970 interim constitution were still unenforced, and Baghdad had imposed an embargo on the polity. The WPA framework had consolidated the KDP and the PUK's grip over their traditional strongholds. Their alliance seemed to enjoy some degree of political-identity hegemony. Still, as Mofidi (2014: 15-16) notes, spoilers of this autonomist project soon emerged, especially in the realm of political Islam, and with greater presence in the area of Halabja, where INGOs linked to the Muslim Brotherhood had been particularly present and where the Islamic Movement of Kurdistan (IMK) emerged and took control. With a program vehemently opposed to both KDP and PUK's secularism and the Ba'ath regime, skirmishes were not infrequent in this area. On top of that, the Kurdistan Regional Parliament held its last meeting in 1996. This means that the KRG could find incentives in neither its political-identity hegemony nor a comparatively greater political empowerment of the Kurds within the KAR.

The main factor contributing to this advancement was the controversial invasion and, later, occupation of Iraq by a US and UK-led coalition. Although it had been conceived to topple Hussein's regime, it came as an exogenous development for the Kurdish actors that led to the

institutionalization of the framework established by the WPA by the 2004 Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), drafted by "US nationals assisted by two expatriate Iraqis," and later "imposed" on to the Iraqi Governing Council (IGC) for approval (Jawad 2013:10). The 25 IGC members, in turn, had been appointed by the US-led civil administration, the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), directly controlled by the allied occupation forces. Influenced by the US, the TAL recognized the KRG as the legitimate government of the Kurds, a status that was later enshrined by the by the 2005 Iraqi Federal Constitution.[44] Much like the TAL, the 2005 Constitution was drafted by 55 Iraqis of diverse backgrounds without legal expertise, assisted by a "board of law advisers, comprising mostly foreigners whose names were never disclosed" (Jawad 2013: 11).[45] In summary, Great Power intercession influenced the KAR's institutional upgrade in two manners. First, this Western-led military invasion brought about the regime change that opened the new constitutional process that would allow for it. Secondly, the US directly controlled the transitional decision-making institutions that allowed for the KAR's upgrade.

However, despite the significant achievement, the subsequent situation in the Başûr was still characterized by instability, and the operation of some Islamist groups with alternative projects, including the Ansar al-Islam militias, or the aforementioned IMK, could jeopardize the WPA institutional framework. Eventually, the Ansar al-Islam militias were driven out of the KAR (Martorell 2016: 88), and the KAR leaders managed to incorporate the IMK into the KDP-PUK entente, as noted by Mofidi (2014: 27). This meant that it commenced to operate legally within the

[44] Iraq. 2005. *Constitution of the Republic of Iraq*. https://www.refworld.org/legal/legislation/natlegbod/2005/en/36563. Especially Article 141, which reads, "Legislation enacted in the region of Kurdistan since 1992 shall remain in force, and decisions issued by the government of the region of Kurdistan, including court decisions and contracts, shall be considered valid unless they are amended or annulled pursuant to the laws of the region of Kurdistan by the competent entity in the region, provided that they do not contradict with the Constitution."

[45] This author focuses on the flaws of the Constitutional Process, including the exclusion of Sunni Arabs, which led to the Iraqi spoiler problem that has been studied in peacebuilding literature (Donais 2009; Dodge 2020).

KAR political arena, and even ran in the 2005 Legislative Election alongside them and several other parties in the Democratic Patriotic Alliance List, made up of 9 other groups representing different positions in the political spectrum and bridging ethnic and religious lines. With elections often portrayed as one of the scenarios with greater potential for crisis in post-war societies, it is remarkable that KDP and PUK leaders ushered the formation of a joint list. Relying on the traditional nature of Kurdish party allegiance and creating a common framework for urban and rural elites across ethnoreligious, ideological and tribal lines, the Kurdish leaders avoided the appearance of spoilers of their project.

Nevertheless, the list strategy dissipated, and parties joined forces across less generalist alliances (KDP-PUK's Kurdistan List, the Islamist Reform and Service list, among others) for the 2009 legislative election. Despite the unparalleled economic growth brought about by the pacified environment, social discontent grew stronger due to perceived corruption by the two main parties. Here, the Gorran Change List appeared as a PUK scission. In that election, Gorran won 25 seats and became the second party in terms of votes and seats in the Kurdish National Assembly. While this movement faced the challenge of becoming a clean and credible option outside the co-optation of the "sultanistic system." (Hassan 2015), its supporters faced the challenge of aggression by traditional alliance party supporters. However, with leadership not exempt from nepotism, Gorran succumbed to co-optation and transformed into another "traditional/conservative party," abandoning its reformist stance (Saleem and Skelton 2019).

The KAR's project resilience and political-identity hegemony throughout its platform population have been secured through the coordination and inclusion of its elites and some degree of compromise (peshmerga excluded) during the last decades. However, as the Gorran experience attests, criticism has also flourished within KAR's platform population. This demonstrates that

this political-identity hegemony may fluctuate, as the region's relationship with its grassroots is complex. The KAR's evolution seems quite similar to the "Tatarstan Machine" described in Roeder (2007: 87), where opposition was co-opted or suppressed to rapidly achieve political-identity hegemony. Civil participation in regional political life can be classified into two distinct civic engagement scenarios. One characterized by "domestication-co-optation," with most society organizations having emerged under the shadow of political parties, and being thus "devoided of any form of independency in terms of internal structures and agendas" (Khedir 2020: 146). The other has flourished under the friendly legal framework established by the KRG as a result of "international expectations" and its portrayal by the international community as "an emerging democracy in the Middle East," which have left it "no choice but to send out democratic-friendly messages to the external world," together with the emergence of political dissent since 2009. These, however, maintain a "confrontational relationship with KRG and the two main parties" (Khedir 2020: 146).

Self-Determination Advancement: The KAR's Territorial Expansion, and Nation-State Crisis: The KAR's Independence Bid

This sub-section addresses these two milestones in conjunction, as they are intimately related. Chronologically, the nation-state crisis related to the KAR's independence bid is after its temporary territorial expansion.

Much like in Syria, facing Daesh's imminent threat, state troops withdrew from the country's north. This signaled Baghdad's inability to provide a defense to its population. With the Daesh campaign jeopardizing Baghdad's unity and security, it seems safe to assume that the KRG considered that the Iraqi government would consent to this territorial expansion due to its dire situation. On top of that, much like the PYD and the SDF, the KRG, and its peshmerga received

financial support from the Western-led coalition against Daesh. While the Kurdistan National Assembly was suspended from 2015 to 2017 (Stocker 2017), and despite the use of force by the security forces against civilians in order to suppress the 2011 anti-establishment demonstrations (Gunter 2014 55), the results of the subsequent referendum on independence signal that the KAR project as a whole enjoyed political-identity hegemony among its inhabitants. As a result, the KAR moved, *de facto*, its borders further south during its counteroffensive against Daesh. It came to control a wide area outside of its original jurisdiction. During the campaign, the peshmerga not only repelled the Islamist insurgency attacks on the KAR, but also managed to protect other Kurdish and non-Kurdish objectives outside the regional boundaries, for example, by preventively occupying Kirkuk in light of an offensive (June 2014), as well as by freeing Sinjar (December 2015) or Mosul from the terrorists (July 2017) (Duarte Amaral 2019). Both Kirkuk and Sinjar are defined in the constitution as "disputed territories," which have traditionally been considered part of the Iraqi Kurdistan but were subject to Arabization campaigns under the Ba'ath. As a result, they were not transferred to the KAR's jurisdiction and their status remains unclear until it is ultimately defined by referendum.

To capitalize on this momentum, Massoud Barzani launched its independence bid. It could not count on institutional leverage, as it was an attempt at unilateral secession, with Article 109 of the 2005 Constitution indirectly pointing out the unconstitutionality of the bid.[46]

However, other factors incentivized Barzani. Iraq's withdrawal was seen as a sign of weakness by the KRG. Three years before the referendum, Gunter (2014: 57) already reported that Massoud Barzani had expressed his desire for independence and unsuccessfully tried to gather international

[46] Iraq, *Constitution of Iraq*. Article 109 reads: "The federal authorities shall preserve the unity, integrity, independence, and sovereignty of Iraq and its federal democratic system."

support. The prospects did not look bright at home either, as Baghdad opposed the consultation from the beginning. Barzani encountered opposition from the Assyrians, a minority within the KAR and its surroundings, with an autonomist project of their own (Julius 2017). The goal of independence seemed to have consolidated, as the KAR Kurdish-led establishment groups favored independence. However, this support is nuanced. The PUK offered "conditional" support to Barzani, on the same grounds as actors such as Gorran or the Kurdistan Islamic Group, which disagreed about the procedure, "namely that the referendum will take place outside of a deadlocked Kurdistan Parliament." The referendum was eventually held in Greater Kurdistan, which includes the KAR and the officially disputed areas outside its jurisdiction (Kaplan and Mardini 2017). The following wording could be read in Kurdish, Arabic, Syriac, and Turkmen in the ballots: "Do you want the Kurdistan Region and the Kurdistani areas outside the Region to become an independent state?" (Rudaw 2017b).

Identification with the KAR project became salient in the Kurdish Independence Referendum, held on September 25, 2017, where a 72.16% turnout was registered, and 92.73% voted in favor of this solution. Nevertheless, a lower turnout in the Sulaymaniyah and Halabja governorates, traditional PUK strongholds, may point to some discontent among traditional PUK-Gorran supporters towards this KDP overprotective grip of the KRG, according to Watts (2017). This can be taken as a proxy for the resilience of the KAR's self-determination project, as the platform population seems to have been convinced of the desirability of independence as proposed by the institution's leadership.

Despite the confirmation of this fluctuating internal support and demonstrating that the platform population is organized around the credible goal of independence, the referendum-caused nation-state crisis resulted in the demise of Massoud Barzani. Firstly, aided by Iran, Baghdad launched a

flash military offensive to regain control of the disputed areas and drove the peshmerga out of Kirkuk and back to the pre-2014 boundaries (Peçanha 2017). As a result, Massoud Barzani resigned as the KAR Prime Minister, instituting Nechirvan Barzani as his incumbent. The KAR leadership had not anticipated how Baghdad could reconcile external support, and how it could help the Iraqi state coerce them to the pre-Daesh *status quo* (Wahab 2017). In turn, the KAR leaders seem to have opted to deescalate the stakes, or, at least, temporarily abandoned the unilateral way in search of a new development. Secondly, even though the balance of leverage had favored the KRG, the unilateral secessionist demands were not met by Iraq, which opposed the referendum's celebration for two reasons: because it was unconstitutional, and because it was being held in the "disputed territories." Apart from the Iranian support, Baghdad capitalized on the institutional arrangements and challenged the bid at the Constitutional Court, which declared it illegal. In addition, the KRG did not gather any significant international support. In fact, reactions of rejection to the unilateral solution were generalized.

Iran is wholly opposed to the emergence of a Kurdish state, comparing it to Zionism (Hafezi and Karadeniz 2017). While Iran lost importance for the KDP-PUK after the fall of Saddam Hussein and the instauration of pro-Tehran governments in Baghdad, the role of Turkey has become more prominent. As Gunter (2014) describes, Turkey ceased to consider the KAR a security problem as the pro-Iran Da'wa party grew in importance. Turkey recognizes that only through the KAR can it increase its leverage in Iraq. However, this author alludes to a *friend in a higher place*, the US, as a reason that Turkey has adopted a more relaxed stance on Erbil. Despite this, Turkey severely condemned the referendum, fearing, much like Iran, that it may trigger similar domestic demands (Kaplan and Mardini 2017). The KAR was largely instrumental for the US to pursue its goals in Iraq. Likewise, the KAR benefited from the US-led intervention. As Gunter follows, the KAR was

a more reliable ally than Turkey on the eve of the 2003 invasion. However, despite the significance achieved by the KAR's campaign, Iraq's unity seems more important for the US than the KAR's independence. As reported by Abdulla (2017) in the wake of the 2017 referendum, the Trump administration stressed this point despite recognizing the "legitimate" aspirations of the Iraqi Kurdish people. For this author, the Kurds counterbalance Iran's interests and the unreliable Sunni leaders. Gunter (2014: 80) highlights that Washington has a prominent mediator role between Erbil and Baghdad. In this case, the Great Powers have coordinated against recognition. As Ali (2017) describes, Russia defended Iraq's unity and offered collaboration to both Erbil and Baghdad.

The current status quo seems more reaffirming than the readjustment that would take place, as having some limited leverage within unified Iraq seems more advantageous to the Great Powers and the secessionist alternative. As an ally, an independent Kurdistan could not offer much to the US. Its alliance is not as vital as Turkey's or Saudi Arabia's (Gunter 2014: 75). Likewise, for Iraq's allies, without the north's oil-rich regions, Baghdad would not be able to guarantee access to this oil output, and it would be a weaker partner, more dependable on Ankara's or Erbil's management of the Tigris and Euphrates headwaters. Therefore, a KAR with a high degree of self-governance within Iraq that has relatively good leverage within Iraq's nationwide decision-making seems more aligned with the interest of Great Powers, especially the US, than an independent Kurdistan.

Even if the independence debate has not been rekindled, other issues remain on the negotiation table between Erbil and Baghdad—for example, the question of Kirkuk and other disputed areas. Article 140 of Iraq's 2005 Constitution provides a process for deciding on the appurtenance of these areas. However, the term has long expired, and no official delimitation of the "disputed areas" has been agreed upon. This stalemate reflects the zero-sum conflict between Erbil and Baghdad over these oil and resource-rich areas. An effective transfer of the areas to the KAR

jurisdiction may imply a change in the balance of leverage in favor of the Kurdish segment-state that could lead to another secessionist challenge misaligned with the interests of Great Powers and further destabilizing nation-state crises.

The Sinjar self-government

It is worth noting that in one of these disputed areas, the Yezidi[47] majority district of Sinjar, in the Nineveh governorate, three projects dispute their hegemony. Both Erbil and Baghdad seek to tighten their grip over the strategic region. But also, a grassroots self-determination project emerged as three local militias[48] affiliated to the PKK-led KCK organized around the last Western-backed and Kurdish-led offensive to expel Daesh from the area in December 2015. While the peshmerga are generally framed as having led the campaign, locals acknowledge the contributions of PKK militias. Much like in the case of Syria's PYD, one part of the Sinjar survivors took advantage of the power vacuum left by their home state to organize around an Apoist self-determination project, and to establish a *de facto* Yezidi autonomous region, the "Sinjar self-administration" (International Crisis Group 2022). This alliance was regarded as a risk by Erbil, which vowed to regain control of the area, which it had effectively ruled from 2003 until their retreat in 2014. While the HPÊ was eventually co-opted into the KRG military apparatus (Goran 2017), the Sinjar self-administration maintained its structure. In this respect, the 2022 report by International Crisis Group, indicates that Erbil and Baghdad signed the UN-backed Sinjar agreement (October 2020) in order to establish joint rule over this peripheral district. However, this agreement seeks to eventually eradicate any PKK-linked groups from the area, which involves the dismantling of the "self-administration." The same report states that, even if "the PKK and its

[47] Despite being Kurdish-speaking, Yezidis are often considered a distinct ethnoreligious group. However, the KRG has tried to instrumentalize their identity to expand its jurisdiction over their territory (International Crisis Group 2022).
[48] The Êzîdxan Protection Units (HPÊ), the Sinjar Resistance Units (YBŞ) and the Êzîdxan Women Units (YJÊ).

affiliates enjoy widespread sympathy among Yazidis, they lack the administrative capacity that the KDP took with it when it withdrew from the district." It adds, "because Baghdad still regards the KDP as the legitimate governing actor, the YBŞ has little actual sway." This highlights that the KDP, as the KAR's ruling party, enjoys better access to Baghdad and other international interlocutors than the YBŞ, which supports the Segmental Institutions Thesis' claim that controlling a segment-state is more decisive than achieving legitimacy at grassroots level, even if the appurtenance of the Yezidis to the greater Kurdish ethnicity is contested.

In summary, the Kurds of Iraq have been able to advance their self-determination claims further than any of the other three groups. This intra-case variation illustrates well how Great Powers modify the direction of their support depending on the specific self-determination claim to be advanced and vis-à-vis the status quo change that it would entail in the prevailing status quo:

> "Despite its support for the Iraqi Kurds, however, the United States opposes independence for the Iraqi Kurds, because it feels that this would lead to the partition and end of Iraq and thus to greater instability in the Middle East. […] The United States tentatively does support the KRG as a way to maintain the political unity of Iraq and satisfy the Kurds." (Gunter 2014: 73-74).

On the institutionalist side, this intra-case variance is unique in the sample as it includes one period where the Kurdish self-determination project proponents control a segment-state. This is insightful not only about how these groups have improved their prospects but also regarding the mere emergence of segment-states. In this regard, our finding is consistent with Hartzell (2014), who, based on her Miskito-Nicaragua case study, concluded that segment-states can also be the consequence of center-periphery political bargaining. This account challenged Roeder's (2007:

53-63) view that segment-states usually emerged from top-down gerrymandering, influenced by the Eurasian Experience.

3.4 Rojhelati Kurds-Iran

According to Martorell (2016), Iranian Kurds (about 9 million) account for 12% of the country's population and represent the third largest ethnic group. Their Rojhelat homeland stretches over the foothills of the Zagros mountains in Kordestan, Kermanshah, Ilam, and West Azerbaijan provinces. Here, they coexist with other ethnic groups, such as Azeris, Armenians, or Lurs. Moreover, there is a Kurdish exclave in the eastern province of North Khorasan, bordering Turkmenistan.

Iran's leading Kurdish self-determination project proponent is the Iranian Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP-I). For decades, it confronted the different Iranian regimes to further its project. However, in 1996, after the military and intelligence operations aimed at quelling its insurgencies, Tehran inflicted severe damage on the party. As a result, it has not been able to escalate the bargaining into new nation-state crises. Ever since, other parties, such as Komala or the KCK-affiliated PJAK, have gained prominence. Although they do not compete overtly, their collaboration is limited too. So, their results are not notorious in an institutional environment that leaves minorities little to no leeway to channel their grievances through democratic means.

3.4.1 Background

The initial fears of the Kurds that they would lose autonomy under Safavid rule in Persia (1501-1722), led them to side with Constantinople in the Ottoman-Persian wars. However, in the post-Zuhab era, those who remained in the Persian sphere of influence enjoyed arrangements similar to those in place in the Ottoman Empire. The situation remained unchanged under most of the Qajar dynasty rule (1789-1925) (McDowall 2004: 33).

This climate of relative independence allowed many tribes to preserve their traditional structures and control large areas of the Zagros Mountains. The road to the emergence of the first Kurdish self-determination projects was analogous to that of the other three cases. In this sense, McDowall (2004: 76) indicates that the 1906 Constitution was met with discontent by the Kurdish tribal leaders. However, this resistance became more notorious after the British-backed 1921 Persian coup d'état led by Reza Khan, who seized the throne from the last Qajar shah and established the Pahlavi dynasty (1925-1979). Much like the Kemalist nation-state project for Turkey, the nation-state project of Pahlavi Persia (officially the Imperial State of Persia and, after 1935, the Imperial State of Iran) sought to standardize the institutions under a common baseline identity, in this case, the Persian one. Much like their Bakuri, Rojavan, and Başûri counterparts, the first uprisings were organized by reactionary tribal leaders on the Kurdish periphery. Among them, Ismail Agha "Simqu"[49] stands out, as he organized several revolts around Lake Urmiya that established an "independent state" in the area (McDowall 2004: 122). Despite this characterization and subsequent re-readings from Kurdish nationalism, Simqu's project was not a state project properly. He never envisaged implementing an administrative system (McDowall 2004: 122; B. Smith 2010). Furthermore, authors like Entessar (2010: 17) claim that he was only moved by his own "parochialism" and tribal interests, and according to McDowall (2004: 221), no manifesto has been found that can shed light on his ideology.

At the end of World War II (WWII), Iran was occupied by the USSR and Great Britain (1941-1946). The country's north, including part of the Iranian Kurdistan, was under Soviet influence, while the south was under British influence. The allies forced Reza Shah's abdication in favor of his son, Mohamad Reza Pahlavi. In 1945, on the recommendation of the Azerbaijani SSR President,

[49] Simko in Martorell (2016).

Qazi Mohamad, and Sayf Qazi, the leaders of a Kurdish political group called Komala[50] founded the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) to get rid of any British political influence (McDowall 2004: 240). The KDP, which later became styled as KDP-I, was the first actor to adopt a self-determination project for Iran's Kurds. The party's program already foresaw an autonomy arrangement for the Kurds within the Iranian state[51] (McDowall 2004: 241).

One year later, under the auspices of Joseph Stalin's government, an autonomous republic, the People's Republic of Azerbaijan, was proclaimed in the Soviet-occupied province of West Azerbaijan.

Self-Determination Advancement: The Republic of Mahabad

Within the favorable context of Soviet occupation, on January 22, 1946, the KDP leaders unilaterally proclaimed the Kurdistan Socialist Republic, better known as the Republic of Mahabad (West Azerbaijan), as it was based on this city and its surroundings. According to Martorell (2016: 51), it was the first Kurdish polity with a formal administration over a considerable territory. During its eleven months of existence, it was ruled by Qazi Mohamed.

The KDP-I leaders did not rely on prior polities to reconcile the necessary means. Much like the KDP and the PUK in Iraq, they capitalized on the fact that Great Power intercession, in this case, Soviet occupation, prevented Tehran from enforcing its institutional arrangements in the area. Furthermore, the KDP-I inherited Komala's support from local tribal elites (McDowall 2004: 239),

[50] Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan. n.d. "About." https://pdki.org/english/about. Komalay Jiyanaway Kurd (Kurdish Resurrection Society) on the KDP-I's official website. It was known as Je-Kaf in Kurdish.
[51] Other goals include (2) Kurdish as a language of instruction and administration; (3) provincial council to be elected democratically and to supervise state and social issues; (4) all leaders must be locals; (5) unity and fraternity with the Azeri people; (6) notables and farmers to be governed by one same law.

and so, it enjoyed political-identity hegemony within the area. They were probably incentivized by the uncertainty about the fate of Tehran after the occupation as well.

This *de facto* autonomous polity succumbed to the Iranian troops on December 15, 1946, once Tehran regained control over the area after the Red Army left Iran under UN pressure. The restoration of the center's grip over its periphery was followed by repression, and Qazi Mohamed was executed on the same square where the republic was proclaimed (Martorell 2016: 51-52).

The Republic of Mahabad was only possible under the protection of the Soviet Army, as it could not withstand Tehran's advances. While it did not receive direct assistance from the USSR and was never officially sanctioned by it, McDowall (2004: 246) considers that Moscow benefited from it, as it could weaken Tehran and affect the balance of leverage in Moscow's favor in the negotiation of oil concessions.

Despite its short existence, the Republic of Mahabad left a legacy that inspired other Kurdish self-determination projects outside Iran. As Martorell (2016: 50) indicates, the polity attracted partisans and activists from other Kurdish areas, especially from northern Iraq. This included Mustapha Barzani and his Peshmerga, who fled to the USSR after Mahabad's fall and founded Iraq's KDP (Martorell 2016: 53). The KDP's Iranian original branch later became known as the Kurdistan Democratic Party of Iran (KDP-I), and under Abdulrahman Ghasemlu's leadership, kept organizing revolts against Tehran's progressive administrative centralization.

Iran's center-periphery relations kept deteriorating except for Mohammad Mossadegh's term as Prime Minister (1951-1953). According to Tahiri (2014), Mossadegh gained support among the Kurds because of his minority-friendly and democratization policies. These, in turn, strengthened the KDP-I, which reorganized and launched new campaigns in the Kurdistan area. According to

this author, the Shah realized that, to prevent new institutional arrangements that may weaken his power, it was necessary to contain the Kurds and undermine their support for Mossadegh. Eventually, in 1953, the Shah staged a coup against the Prime Minister with US and British support. Nevertheless, the Kurdish question was not at the core of this coup, which was directed at impeding the nationalization of oil supplies and a possible alignment of Iran with the USSR.

3.4.2 The Islamic Republic and the Periphery

Discontent grew over the Shah's growing authoritarianism, not only in the periphery, but in the wider Iranian society. This led to the 1978 Iranian Revolution, a nation-state crisis staged by different actors seeking a regime change. The situation reinvigorated the KDP-I, which fought against Tehran and Marxists and Islamists to defend their self-determination project involving "democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan" (McDowall 2004). However, the Islamist faction, led by Ayatollah Rohullah Khomeini, gained momentum, and the initially secular revolution turned into Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution. Khomeini advanced an Islamist nation-state project for Iran with US support, as a way of preventing "a communist takeover" (Fattahi 2016).

The prospects of regime change had brought about opportunities for minority-friendlier institutional arrangements. However, with Khomeini's takeover of the revolution, these gradually faded away. The KDP-I's autonomist project was incompatible with Khomeini's theocratic views. As reported by McDowall (2004: 263), the Kurds "boycotted" the referendum on the establishment of the Islamic republic after learning "that the revised text omitted any mention of the Kurds." They had been excluded from the constituent assembly, where the Pan-Islamist project prevailed. Eventually, Iran's 1980 Constitution did not incorporate any provisions for the protection of Kurds

as a minority.[52] According to Khomeini, the concept of ethnic minority is contrary to Islamic doctrines. Moreover, Martorell (2016) indicates that, due to their Sunni beliefs and more secular views, Khomeini considered the Kurds an obstacle to the implementation of his Islamic republic project.

Nation-State Crises: First and Second KDP-I Insurgencies

Much like in the Başûri Kurds-Iraq case, the Iraq-Iran War (1980-1988) brought about new opportunities for the Iranian Kurds, who sought to shift the balance of leverage in their favor. The nation-state crises staged by the KDP-I, and their limited impact, can be explained by the underlying causal conjunction. The KDP-I did not control a segment-state and, under the 1980 Constitution, there was no legitimate channel to raise its self-determination claims. It was only able to press its claims against Tehran, especially during the first insurgency, due to the support received from Baghdad and the PUK, and because Tehran had concentrated most of its troops in the main frontline (McDowall 2004). The fact that this allowed for the establishment of a limited local administration, through "village councils" suggests that it enjoyed some degree of political-identity hegemony. However, in the "maelstrom of revolutionary events," it was difficult to "mobilize a mass movement." However, this political-identity hegemony was, again, limited to Mahabad and its surroundings (McDowall 2004: 265). In contrast, Tehran did not enforce the 1980 constitutional provisions on local government until 1999, when the first local elections were held in the Islamic Republic under the presidency of reformist Khatami (Tajbakhsh 2003). Thus, the prospects for

[52] Iran. 1980. *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran*. http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ir/ir001en.pdf. It includes no reference to ethnic minorities. However, Article 15 mentions "ethnic" languages and the freedom to use them "along with Farsi." While it made Twelver Shi'ism the country's official religion, the Constitution guarantees the country's religious minority's freedom of cult. It recognizes their right to govern themselves according to their own jurisprudence.

democratic political empowerment of the population within the KDP-I parallel administration were still greater than under Khomeini's rule. In this escalation of means, the KDP-I sent an ultimatum to Khomeini: either Tehran granted the Kurdistan autonomy and withdrew from the area, or the KDP-I would keep supporting Iraq. Khomeini considered this ultimatum a betrayal and sent the Pasdaran to the Kurdistan. This suggests that the KDP-I had miscalculated Tehran's actual capabilities. The fight extended from 1982 until 1984, when the parallel administration was dismantled in the countryside (McDowall 2004: 262-263).

Many KDP-I leaders fled the country, and the party stationed some of its troops in neighboring northern Iraq. As a result, Tehran mobilized its secret services in Europe to find KDP-I exiles. In 1989, the KDP-I leader was assassinated in Vienna, and according to Martorell (2016: 72), this marked the beginning of a new insurgency phase that lasted until 1996. The second insurgency had a more limited scope as the Iran-Iraq War had already ended. The KDP-I also had fewer means and capacities: the KDP-I seemed to rely mostly on the fact that it could operate from Iraqi territory, aided by the KDP and the PUK, which were also subject to a double embargo. On the other hand, much like Turkey's strategy to turn the balance of leverage in its favor, Tehran reconciled more means to suppress the insurgency by looking for support from neighboring enemy states. In September 1994, Turkey and Iran started a bilateral security commission for mutual assistance and pledged not to support each other's opposition groups (Minorities at Risk 2010). This is supported by the fact that the deployment of the Iranian army in Iraqi Kurdistan and its subsequent destruction of the KDP-I's infrastructure in this country led the KDP-I to cease its activities on August 24, 1996, under the pressure of the KDP and the PUK (Martorell 2016: 73).

The Political Fragmentation of the Kurdish Periphery

Ever since, Iran's Kurdish periphery has lacked a hegemonic actor. Other groups emerged, such as a new Komala (The Organization of Revolutionary Toilers of Iranian Kurdistan) in the 1970s, which intended to advance a Maoist self-determination project. This party merged with other Iranian communist parties during the Islamic Revolution but resumed its self-determination agenda during the 1990s (Erlich and Scheer 2007: 134-135).

Within this context of state persecution of and discrimination against minorities, another insurgency was started in April 2016 by the remnants of the KDP-I and the Kurdistan Freedom Party (PAK, in Kurdish Parti Azadi Kurdistan) (Neuhof 2016). The latter was founded in 1991 and tried to advance a project for Kurdish self-determination within a federal democratic Iran (Srtatfor Assessments 2016). Komala joined these in 2017, although their respective forces were kept separate. In parallel, a PKK-linked group, the Kurdistan Free Life Party (PJAK, Partiya Jiyana Azad Kurdistanê in Kurdish), announced that it would resume its insurgency against the Iranian state. The PJAK seeks to advance a self-determination program inspired by the Apoist ideology within a federal Iran (Brandon 2018). The PJAK, based in the Qandil mountains, like other KCK-affiliated groups, rose to the Rojhelat stage in the early 2000s. According to Erlich and Scheer (2007: 138), the PJAK "earned a certain amount of respect among Kurds as the only group" then "engaged in armed struggle against Iran." As a result, it attracted Washington's attention: "[T]he Bush Administration understands that PJAK is not capable of sparking a Kurdish uprising, let alone overthrowing the Iranian government. However, it can carry out destabilizing actions that contribute to that goal." While the US denied funding the party, Erlich and Scheer (2007: 136) assert that Washington "channels the money through Kurdish groups in [Iraqi] Kurdistan." This capacitation was being made through the Pentagon and together with Tel-Aviv (Hersh 2006).

According to Erlich and Scheer (2007), the PJAK was the only group receiving support from the US, even if either party has not officially confirmed it. As the authors indicate, the KDP-I and Komala denied receiving any funding from Washington, but their leaders declared they would be open to accepting it if offered.

Amidst the insurgency, the main Kurdish groups called for a boycott of the 2017 Presidential Election. However, voter turnout was high in the Kurdish-majority provinces of Kordestan, Kermanshah, and West Azerbaijan (Rudaw 2017a). In addition, reformist President Rouhani was the most-voted candidate (Badawi 2017). On one hand, this suggests that no group has achieved political hegemony over the platform population. Much like in Turkey, Kurdish parties remain outlawed, and Kurdish voters usually have been forced by this context to opt for reformist candidates. Support for Rouhani in 2013 and 2017 can be explained by the intensification of state repression during Mahmood Ahmadinejad's term (2005-2013). Already in 2008, Amnesty International reported increased persecution of the Kurds and a greater number of political prisoners in Iran.

In summary, much like in Turkey, in Iran, the trajectories of Rojhelati Kurdish self-determination projects have been influenced mostly by the state's unfavorable institutional constraints. Although Great Power intercession has existed, it has been limited. The only remarkable self-determination advancement was incidental to the USSR plans for Iran, and US support of the PJAK seems to be scaled to the actual capacities of the group. Moreover, unlike Turkey with its EU-accession bid, Iran has not had exogenous incentives to reform its institutions and implement minority-friendlier reforms. This has left the Kurds of Iran with few options to advance their claims. As a result, their status seems to be the most precarious among the four.

3.5 Interpretation of Findings

This section attends to the interaction of the independent variables informing our six hypotheses at the two identified types of key events: nation-state crises and self-determination advancements. It also analyzes which patterns are the most prevalent across the four cases to reinforce our explanations' external validity. A general overview appears in Table 3.

Despite their diverging pathways, the political awakening of Bakuri, Rojavan, Başûri, and Rojhelati Kurds occurred in analogous contexts of institutional reforms that led to state centralization, particularly with the introduction of the first Western-style written constitutions. Before that, all of them had enjoyed informal autonomy arrangements while pledging allegiance to the Persian or Ottoman Empire (McDowall 2004: 8). As grievances accumulated; different actors emerged to advance their self-determination projects. Some of these actors became irrelevant or disappeared, such as Turkey's and Syria's Khoybun. In contrast, others evolved and adapted their claims to the evolving context, such as Iraq's KDP and PUK or Turkey's PKK.

3.5.1 Institutionalist Hypotheses

Patterns of escalation to nation-state crises

We have also identified common patterns regarding the escalation of situations to nation-state crises. According to H1, the prospects of bargaining between proponents of a self-determination project and the home state escalating the situation to a nation-state crisis are greater in the presence of favorable institutional arrangements, especially segment-states. Nation-state crises have been identified in all four cases except Syria[53] at different stages (see Table 3).

[53] For Syria, the situation is less clear, as parties outside the scope of H1 brought about the Civil War.

Table 3: Cross-case comparison of independent and dependent variables.

		Key Event		Independent Variables					
Home State	**Key Actor**	**Nation-State Crisis**	**Self-Determination Advancement**	**Segment-State**	**Favorable Institutional Leverage**	**Political-Identity Hegemony**	**Home State Leader Security Compromised**	**Greater Political Empowerment of Population on Periphery**	**Great Power Support**
Turkey	**PKK**	1st Insurgency	Failure			x	x		
		2nd Insurgency	Peace Process		x	x			
		3rd Insurgency	Ongoing			x			
Syria	**PYD**		Cantons			x	x		
			Expansion	x*		x	x	x	x
	ENKS		DBK					x	
Iraq	**KDP**	1st Iraqi-Kurdish War	Nominal Autonomy				x		
	KDP/PUK	2nd Iraqi-Kurdish War	*De facto* KAR			x		x	x
	KRG		*De jure* KAR	x*		x	x	x	x
			Expansion	x		x	x	x	x
		2017 Iraqi-Kurdish conflict	Failed independence bid	x		x	x	x	
Iran	**KDP-I**		Mahabad			x	x	x	x
		1st Insurgency	Failure				x		
		2nd Insurgency	Failure						

***** *denotes* de facto *segment-state*

All observed nation-state crises, except for the one brought about by the KAR's unilateral independence bid, occurred in the absence of a segment-state[54]. However, as anticipated in Chapter 1, the original Segmental Institutions Thesis already foresees two alternative explanations for this phenomenon. Sub-hypothesis H1a (Roeder 2007: 262) claims that "[T]he likelihood that bargaining between proponents of a nation-state project and common-state leaders will escalate to a nation-state crisis rises when the nation-state imagined by the project existed immediately prior to incorporation into the common-state." While a formal Kurdish state has never existed, and the suzerainty and informal autonomy arrangements of the Ottoman and Persian Empires had been long rescinded, it is possible that "the conquered nation-state syndrome" compensated for the lack of a segment-state proper. Likewise, Sub-hypothesis H1c (Roeder 2007: 262) claims that "[T]he likelihood that bargaining between proponents of nation-state projects and common-state leaders will escalate to a nation-state crisis rises when the common-state government is weakened by political turmoil or constitutional transition." Roeder's H1c seems to hold better, as the first nation-state crises in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran happened in contexts of constitutional transition and political turmoil.

Institutional Arrangements and Balance of Leverage

H2 posits that "when and where institutional arrangements give greater leverage to peripheral leaders, there are (a) greater incentives and means for these leaders to press their self-determination claims from the home state and (b) greater incentives for home state leaders to accede to such claims." There is one clear instances where the institutional arrangements in place favored

[54] This bid was trumped because of two factors. On the one hand, unfavorable institutional arrangements, i.e. the Constitutional Court Ruling that briskly declared the referendum unconstitutional (News Wires 2017). On the other hand, Iran's support for Baghdad helped suppress the KRG's grip of lands outside its formal jurisdiction, and demonstrating that the KRG had misinterpreted its capabilities (Dilanian et al. 2017).

peripheral leaders and created incentives for them to advance their self-determination projects (see Table 3).

During Turkey's Second PKK Insurgency, in the absence of segmental institutions, the conjuncture (i.e., seat distribution of the Grand National Assembly) and the parliamentary arrangements in place made Erdoğan, then still Turkey's Premier, dependant on the parliamentary arithmetic to advance his constitutional reform bill. As a result, these institutional arrangements unintentionally incentivized Ankara to de-escalate the situation and start a peace process. This created a less aggressive parliamentary context and, therefore, incentives for the BDP to further their claims and a platform for dialogue with the PKK (Gunter 2014: 70-71).

Lastly, the KRG may have found incentives in controlling a segment-state to launch its unilateral secession bid in 2017. However, the Iraqi institutional framework still favored Baghdad and allowed it to legitimately act against it, as unilateral secession is not permitted under the 2005 Constitution. This factor can explain only Baghdad's refusal to consent, however. Input from cases outside our sample, such as Kosovo, show that states can emerge and join the international society without parent-state consent. As a result, external factors seem to play a decisive role[55].

The evidence from our cases does not contradict H2 However, it is virtually limited to non-segmental institutions. It suggests that they can also shift the balance of leverage in favor of peripheral leaders and give incentives for cooperation to home state leaders.

[55] In addition, evidence from this pivotal point suggests that segmental institutions may have played into Erbil's dominance over Baghdad and the *de facto* Sinjar self-administration within the UN-brokered agreement signed by the KRG and the Iraqi government. Erbil could eventually impose its narrative that the Yezidis are not a distinct ethnoreligious group and reinforce their nominal position as legitimate representatives of the Sinjari Yezidis (International Crisis Group 2022).

Political-Identity Hegemony

H3 posits that "when and where periphery leaders have consolidated political-identity hegemony there are (a) greater incentives and means for them to press their self-determination claims and (b) greater incentive for home state leaders to accede to such claims." Table 3 lays out the patterns regarding this variable across the four cases. Building from our evidence, those self-determination project proponents who attained political-identity hegemony in their platform population have been more resilient in advancing their respective claims.

Where election results show sustained support over time for a group, they can be taken as a proxy for the political-identity hegemony of this group. In Iraq, most KAR voters have supported the KDP and the PUK in each election since the first one, held in 1992. Moreover, the 2017 independence referendum results show that the bid was widely endorsed in the Başûr. In Turkey, the PKK has political-identity hegemony as a result of the direct and indirect restrictions that Ankara imposes on democratic actors (Tocci 2007: 60). However, support for the PKK can also be measured through election results. For Novellis (2017: 68-69), many links exist between them, as some of them have adopted Apoist internal structures, such as a dual male-female co-chair system, and ultimate goals, and these parties have maintained good voting records in Kurdish-majority provinces. Where these minority-friendly parties held a considerable amount of seats in the Grand National Assembly, Erdoğan could even consider them as acceptable partners to pass key bills. Iran's panorama is less clear, but it still contains the earliest example of local political-identity hegemony in the sample, the KDP-I in Mahabad. Under circumstances of foreign occupation, where Iranian institutions were absent, the KDP-I could advance its project and organize a parallel administration limited to the city until the Soviet army withdrew. Conversely, post-1996 Iran shows how the KDP-I's cessation of activities (Martorell 2016: 73) led to the readjustment of the relations

among peripheral groups, with the emergence and rise of other groups and their subsequent fight for political-identity hegemony. In any case, despite the limited coordination among current actors, they have been mainly ineffective in escalating the stakes or the means against Tehran to the extent the KDP-I did in the 1980s. In Syria, though election results are unavailable, the PYD rapidly achieved political-identity hegemony over the ENKS, and it could capitalize on its structures and networks to grow and implement its project, not only over its Kurdish platform population, but also attracting Arabs and Assyrians (Ayboga, Flach and Knapp 2017).

More interestingly, the lack of political-identity hegemony played into the ENKS' decline against the PYD in Syria. Despite counting on other factors, such as support from the KRG, the group has remained on the fringes of the Rojavan scenario ever since (Gunter 2014: 10).

As a result, H3 is mostly supported by this evidence, especially where these peripheral leaders have access to a *de jure* segment-state. In the case of *de facto* segment states, political-identity hegemony also seems to give their leaders incentives to advance their claims. However, the evidence is less clear about the incentives of home state leaders to accede. Syria's case does not provide enough evidence in this respect, but it seems that external factors will eventually determine whom the balance of leverage will favor. In the case of non-segmental institutions, political-identity hegemony gives peripheral leaders incentives to advance their self-determination projects. However, it does not necessarily give home state leaders incentives to accede to these claims in all instances.

Unity and Security of Home state leaders

Much like peripheral leaders facing challengers advancing different claims for the periphery, the monopoly of power of home state leaders in the center may as well be jeopardized by the emergence

of other actors seeking to seize it. In this sense, H4 implies that "when and where the unity and security of home state leaders decline, there are (a) greater incentives and means for segment-state leaders to press their self-determination claims and (b) greater incentives for home state leaders to accede to such claims."

According to the data from Table 3, H4 generally holds, especially in the presence of segmental institutions, as in Iraq's most recent example. Once again, our evidence shows that self-determination project proponents tend to consider that advancing their claims is less costly where the unity and security of home state leaders are compromised. When the leaders are concerned about more immediate threats to its hegemony in the center, they usually devote their resources to solving that problem. As al-Bakr did in Iraq when he arrived in power in 1968, he tried to establish a broad-spectrum coalition to secure his position, so he acceded to the KDP's autonomist claims (McDowall 2004: 324-325). In Syria, al-Assad decided not to turn against the PYD and strategically permitted the establishment of a parallel administration in the country's north in order to prevent more hostile opposition groups from taking over these regions (Gunter 2014: 110-112). However, the PYD-led institutions have not been officially recognized by Damascus and are not part of the Geneva or Astana talks. Baghdad employed similar logic during the Daesh offensive in Iraq, as the state troops withdrew from the country's north. This allowed the KRG's peshmerga to pre-emptively occupy oil-rich Kirkuk, whose inclusion in the KAR is yet to be decided, and multicultural Mosul (Duarte Amaral 2019). Once the Daesh threat was neutralized, Baghdad launched an offensive to take over and regain control over these disputed areas (Peçanha 2017). Both Iraqi experiences show that the incentives to accede to self-determination claims disappear along with the threat.

Political Empowerment of Minorities on the Periphery

The last institutionalist hypothesis, H5, posits that "the more the political empowerment of the minorities within periphery politics exceeds their empowerment within home state politics (a) the greater are the incentives and means for peripheral leaders to press their self-determination claims and (b) the greater is the incentive for home state leaders to accede to such claims."

According to our evidence (see Table 3), the differential in the political empowerment within each country's institutional arrangements does create incentives for self-determination project proponents to press their claims. The political empowerment of the Kurds has been greater within periphery politics than in home state politics only in two cases, during three periods of time (in Syria after the Civil War, and in Iraq, after the consolidation of the KAR). Furthermore, segmental institutions, whether *de jure* (post-2004 KAR) or *de facto* (the post-1992 KAR and the AANES), have been in place during these years. These periods also overlap with processes that signal advancements of the self-determination projects, such as territorial expansion (during the 2013-2019 War against Daesh in Syria and Iraq), institutional upgrade (KAR in 2004/05), and a formal independence bid (KAR in 2017). However, the evidence about the incentives for home state leaders to accept these claims is unclear. While Damascus has had incentives to allow the AANES' territorial expansion within the context of civil war, as reported by Gunter (2014: 110-112), it does not imply that this will always be the case. In this sense, Baghdad tolerated such territorial expansion during the War against Daesh, but as soon as the threat that incentivized this decision disappeared, its attitude changed. Likewise, the Iraqi government eventually made the KAR withdraw its independence bid. Much like the other hypotheses, H5 holds especially concerning the incentives for peripheral leaders, but is less robust regarding the incentives for home state leaders.

In our evidence regarding the relative disempowerment of peripheral minorities compared to the rest of the home state population, only one case seems to completely fit the logic of H5. In the absence of other facilitating factors, the lack of political empowerment of the Syrian Kurds before the Syrian Civil War seems to have disincentivized their self-determination project proponents. Conversely, as in Turkey —especially during the OHAL years (Kurban 2003: 190; Tocci 2007: 57) and after 2015, with the suppression of BDP and HDP local governments (International Crisis Group 2017)—, the pre-KAR Iraq, and Iran —until 1999, with the celebration of the first city and council elections under the 1980 Constitution (Tajbakhsh 2003)—, this relative disempowerment has fueled grievances that proponents of self-determination projects have channeled when other situations have generated incentives to press their claims.

3.5.2 IR Hypothesis

Our institutionalist hypotheses hold to the extent that our evidence has not contradicted them, and contribute to explaining the escalation of the bargaining between Kurdish peripheral leaders and home states into nation-state crisis. Nevertheless, they cannot fully explain our outcome of interest, self-determination advancements, especially what makes home state leaders accede to self-determination claims. The emergence of Syria's three Rojavan cantons can be explained by a combination of Damascus' dire situation in the Civil War, which gave it incentives to acquiesce to the parallel administration, and the PYD's political-identity hegemony. However, the emergence of the KAR as a *de facto* polity and its subsequent *de jure* upgrade was not consented to by the Ba'athist regime at any moment. Indeed, for the *de facto* emergence of the KAR, much like for the emergence of the three original autonomous cantons of Rojava in Syria, the center had to leave a power vacuum on the periphery, so that the home state would not enforce its institutional arrangements. However, unlike in Syria, the KDP and the PUK had to rely on external factors to

pursue their goals. Likewise, Saddam Hussein's fall was precipitated by a US-led invasion and, later, occupation of the country, which led to a federal transition and the adoption of a new constitution. Similarly, the Republic of Mahabad (1946) emerged and could only exist in a context where the Iranian state could not enforce its institutional arrangements, that is, under Soviet occupation.

Since Great Power intercession mattered for these developments, as it could turn the balance of leverage in favor of the Başûri Kurds (and indirectly, to a lesser extent, of the Mahabadi Kurds), we shall proceed to analyze how other patterns of Great Power intercession have affected the advancement of Kurdish self-determination claims.

In this sense, H6 posits that "Great Powers with a conflictual relationship with a home state will be more likely to support a self-determination project, while Great Powers with a friendly relationship with a home state will be less likely to support its self-determination projects."

The identified patterns suggest that H6 mostly holds, as both the US and Russia have supported the allied home states against their Kurdish challengers: the US has supported Turkey and, after 2003, Iraq; Russia has supported Syria and Iran. Moreover, they have supported the Kurdish challengers against unfriendly home states: the US in Syria and, before 2003, in Iraq. However, there are two anomalies: one regarding Iraq and another one regarding Syria. On one hand, the US supports both the KRG and Baghdad. The KRG was its preferred partner during the war against Daesh. However, it became manifest during the KAR's independence bid that the US and its allies did not support the move and preferred a united Iraq (Gunter 2014: 73-74). On the other hand, the scope of the US assistance to the PYD-led AANES in Syria has been limited to military and strategic considerations, especially during the context of the war against Daesh and after the SNC factions proved to be ineffective in countering the terrorist organization. Unlike the KRG, the AANES has not yet

received firm diplomatic support from the US and its allies, and has been prevented from participating in the Geneva and Astana talks. At the core, we find an essential consideration: the PYD-PKK links and several aspects of the self-determination project advanced in Rojava (especially its Apoist ideology) and Turkey's internal conflict with the PKK. In Syria, the US does defer to its ally's security interests. As Gunter (2014: 76) posits, the relationship between the US and the different proponents of Kurdish self-determination projects have been informed by its relationship with Turkey, and so, there are "good" and "bad" Kurds. The KRG actors, not linked to the PKK, are the good ones, and the PKK and the PYD, along with all KCK member entities, are the bad ones.

Likewise, Russia has supported militarily the PYD project, but this has always been within the scope of the Damascus-Moscow-Tehran shared goal to undermine the SNC and keep al-Assad in power. So far, Russia has been the only Great Power that has been favorable, at least nominally, to the PYD's inclusion in the Geneva and Astana talks (Borshchevskaya 2016) and to have tried to enshrine a "Kurdish cultural autonomy" in a constitutional draft, rejected by the Western-backed SNRC (Meyer 2017). The evidence suggests that this Russian support may be merely performative and would seek to prevent a total alignment of the PYD with the West, which could eventually jeopardize Damascus and, as a result, its own interests in the region.

The EU has interceded in Turkey, as a candidate state for EU accession, in favor of minority rights and has expressed the desirability of new autonomist arrangements or political devolution to resolve the Kurdish question. However, this support has been largely unspecific, considering that Turkey is an allied country and that Gunter's US distinction of "good" and "bad" Kurds also applies here. As a result, the EU's intercession did not empower materially any particular Kurdish political group, let alone the PKK (Tocci 2007: 65). Nevertheless, it has provided a new frame to the BDP

or the HDP to legitimize their project vis-à-vis the Kemalist state doctrine, by reconciling the EU accession requirements with their self-determination claims.

3.5.3 Final Considerations

In terms of the causal conjunctions that led to the eight nation-state crises in all cases (see Table 3), two aspects stand out. Firstly, only one of these crises, the one created by the KRG's unilateral independence bid, fully fits Roeder's (2007) model. Although it did not fare well, domestic factors can fully explain it. Secondly, it becomes apparent how in six of these nation-state crises, self-determination project proponents found incentives to press their claims relying primarily on their political-identity hegemony; how only three could capitalize on the instability of the political center of the home state; and how only one benefited from circumstantial leverage from non-segmental institutions. This suggests that they had to rely on external factors other than Great Power support to offset the home state's balance of leverage. In fact, throughout the cases, we have identified another factor outside the scope of our hypotheses that seems to have contributed to compensate for the absence of a segment-state or favorable institutional arrangements. At different stages, the PKK, the KDP, and the KDP-I exerted pressure on their home state's governments and raised the home state's costs for non-cooperation. During the first PKK insurgency, Turkey relaxed some of the restrictions on Kurdish cultural expressions. Likewise, the first phase of the Iraqi-Kurdish War led to the institutionalization of Kurdish autonomy arrangements in Iraq's 1970 Interim Constitution. Moreover, the KDP-I could establish a parallel administration during part of the Iran-Iraq War. The identified common pattern is that these self-determination project proponents had relative freedom to operate from the territory of a neighboring state and/or received support from the neighboring state regime. This becomes especially relevant if we account for the immediate effect of the bilateral security agreements signed by the different common states to cease supporting

their neighbor's opposition groups, such as Adana (Turkey and Syria) and Algiers (Iraq and Iran). These agreements sharply brought to an end the First PKK Insurgency and the second phase of the Iraqi-Kurdish War. Similarly, Iran's 1996 intervention in northern Iraq left the KDP-I practically inoperative. This suggests that, once the home state addressed the source for this leverage shift, the home state could lower again its costs for non-compliance and, in turn, sharply raise the costs of self-determination. This is reinforced by the fact that no Syrian Kurdish groups received support from any neighboring state and that they remained relatively disincentivized to press any self-determination project until the outset of the War in Syria. An inverse example can be found in how Baghdad, during the 2017 nation-state crisis, could offset the KRG's leverage with Iranian support, to the point that the KAR's premier Massoud Barzani resigned.

This phenomenon is already accounted for in the Kurdish question literature as the "exportation of the Kurdish cause" (Dunn 2007). It refers to the destabilization of neighboring rival states by supporting or funding their domestic Kurdish insurgents while simultaneously fighting their own. Although not farther reaching, our evidence suggests that it may have played into the bargaining table as much as other domestic factors. This may imply that regional security concerns may not be totally aligned with global politics and that considering these factors could offer an alley for further research.

In any case, our evidence shows that nation-state crises have not been conductive of material self-determination advancements. In the absence of favorable Great Power intercession and of segment-states, and without support from neighbors, only one nation-state crisis, the second PKK insurgency, led to a peace process. However, under particular circumstances, the Turkish government found incentives to de-escalate the situation to entice the Kurdish-led BDP to support its constitutional reform in the Grand National Assembly. Other than that, the material self-determination

advancements across our cases, except for the emergence of the Rojavan cantons in the Syrian War, have taken place in contexts brought about by Great Powers.

Our findings support the argument derived from Coggins (2014) that Great Powers support self-determination advancements upon parochial considerations. This support has been informed by the consequences on the status quo of each self-determination advancement. So, rather than sponsoring Kurdish self-determination overall, they have interceded in favor of the Kurdish groups or the segment-states according to their geostrategic and global stability interests. A finer-grained analysis of this support shows that, where the self-determination claim did not fully align with their interests, Great Powers have limited their support to military aspects. Also, this military support was not originally intended to support these claims, and *de facto* polity emergence or consolidation was an indirect consequence of this intercession. Examples of this are the Republic of Mahabad and the US and Russia-assisted expansion of the PYD-led AANES during the War against Daesh in Syria. In other words, the PYD and the KDP-I capitalized on this context to advance their respective projects. Then, military support, alone, has not led to *de jure* polities. In this respect, our evidence suggests that, much like Coggins' (2014) original claim regarding Great Power recognition and system membership, self-determination project proponents need the official endorsement of Great Powers to upgrade their *de facto* polities to *de jure* status. This status upgrade has deeper implications for the home state balance and, therefore, for the regional and global status quo. This inference stems from the comparison of two causal conjunctions underlying: (1) the institutionalization of the KAR and (2) the inability of the AANES to follow the same steps. Diplomatic support from Great Powers is a factor that is present in Iraq but missing in Syria. Iraq's US-supervised constitutional process incorporated the existing KAR framework into the federal institutional arrangements. However, the US has not sponsored the legitimacy of the PYD in the

official peace talks. Only Russia has and, to a limited extent, its Draft Constitution for Syria signaled some sympathy for the Kurdish cause. However, it did not go as far as the 2005 Iraqi Constitution, as the Russian draft did not mention the AANES project explicitly. Alternatively, it could be argued that regime change in Iraq may have facilitated the process, as it completely wiped out the Ba'athist institutions. In Syria, al-Assad's regime continues in power and came out reinforced after the Daesh campaign. However, a hypothetical replacement of al-Assad by the Western-sponsored Syrian National Revolutionary Coalition (SNRC) would not likely result in such an advancement, as, so far, the SNRC does not recognize and fights the AANES.

Lastly, Great Power intercession has been decisive in all instances for the trajectories of self-determination projects. In three instances where Kurdish groups benefited from this intercession, they have offset or voided the institutional arrangements that kept the groups from advancing their self-determination claims. This, in turn, allowed for the emergence of autonomous polities. In the other two, it indirectly helped these polities to consolidate or extend their grip to other areas. However, when this support is directed at the home state, Great Powers have upheld the prevailing institutional arrangements, thwarting the prospective self-determination advancement.

In summary, our results support our argument that self-determination projects' trajectories depend on domestic institutional considerations and international politics. More specifically, while our findings falsify neither our institutionalist hypotheses nor Roeder's (2007), it has become more apparent that his theory clings too strongly to the Eurasian experience. In his Segmental Institutions Thesis, the role of external actors is purely testimonial, almost limited to the quasi-automatic international recognition of the former segment-state. Our four contemporary Kurdish cases suggest that external factors play a more significant role than anticipated by this author. This is consistent with a more recent work where he accounts for these factors as exogenous developments

(Roeder 2018). Our results reinforce Coggins' (2014) argument that Great Power intercession matters. However, the analysis of the four cases suggests that neighborhood rivalries contribute to self-determination trajectories too. Consequently, further attention should be paid to the intersection of these dynamics with the center-periphery balance of leverage within the home state and with global politics. This is consistent with recent trends in the literature on secession, where authors like Stokes (2019) and Riegl and Doboš (2023) have extended their attention to regional actors and geopolitical concerns, in response to the increasing multipolarity and the resulting detachment of regional conflicts from Great Power rivalries.

Lastly, further Kurdish self-determination advancements may require major readjustments from within the home states or of the global status quo. Home state leaders seem to focus on preventing such advancements, especially Turkey, which is fighting the "bad Kurds" both at home and in Syria and trying to impose a co-opted KRG-style project (International Crisis Group 2017). As a result, Great Power's support for the KCK-affiliated groups seems doomed outside of the realm of military aid for specific purposes. It also remains to be seen what will happen in Syria after the war ends and Damascus loses its incentives to tolerate the AANES. In addition, Iraq's KRG seems destined to keep coexisting with Baghdad due to unresolved matters, such as the status of the disputed territories, but especially for the misalignment of its hypothetical independence with the interests of Great Powers. Iran's Kurds seem to need more than reformist presidents in Tehran to keep advancing their claims. Finally, if Great Powers prefer to coordinate face a significant status quo change, a top-down intervention in the Middle East that could facilitate the emergence of Kurdish autonomous or even sovereign polities is more difficult now than 20 years ago due to Russia's resurgence and antagonism to the West.

Chapter 4: Conclusions

This master's thesis aimed to explain the divergent trajectories of the Kurdish self-determination projects in Turkey, Syria, Iraq, and Iran. None of the projects has achieved statehood up to April 2024. However, their trajectories vary in the extent to which they have been able to advance their self-determination claims.

With a comparative case study research design, feeding on qualitative and quantitative data, this thesis focused on two key events: nation-state crises and self-determination project advancements. Following Roeder's (2007) institutionalist and Coggins' (2014) IR accounts on secession, we identified two sets of factors that played into two aspects of secessionism: statehood and international recognition, respectively. Feeding on M. Griffiths' (2013) broader definition of self-determination, which encompasses autonomy and secession, and on accounts that link autonomy outcomes to secessionist conflict, we drew up six hypotheses that extended the logic underlying Roeder (2007) and Coggins (2014) to broader expressions of self-determination, including autonomy. In unveiling the causal conjunctions that led to these outcomes, our findings largely support our central argument that these trajectories are a function of (1) the political opportunity structures generated by the institutional arrangements in place and (2) the extent to which the self-determination claims align with Great Power interests.

Although our results do not contradict Roeder's segmental institutions thesis, they signal that, in the absence of segment-states or conjuncturally favorable institutional arrangements, some groups have still found incentives to press their claims, especially where the security or unity of home state leaders was in jeopardy. However, one factor outside the argument's scope significantly contributed to this explanation. Where self-determination groups receive assistance from neighboring states, they can reinforce their leverage and have more incentives and means to press

their claims against their home state. In this regard, these factors have been found to incentivize home state leaders to cooperate with self-determination project proponents despite being favored by the institutional arrangements in place.

Likewise, as Coggins posited, Great Powers have usually acted upon their interests. Their support has been conditional upon each self-determination advancement's effect on the status quo. Military support has reinforced the self-determination group's situation vis-à-vis the common enemy and the *de facto* existence of the polity. However, alone, it has not led to a d*e jure* polity. Our findings suggest that, where home state consent is withheld, much like a newcomer state's international system membership, upgrades to *de jure* status also require official endorsement from Great Powers. In addition, Great Power intercession in favor of the self-determination groups has been decisive for these trajectories: it has either offset or voided the unfavorable institutional arrangements that prevented these groups from advancing their claims and allowed for the emergence of autonomous polities. Conversely, where Great Powers have interceded in favor of the home state, these have upheld the said institutional arrangements, and no advancement of the self-determination project has eventually occurred.

Implications for Theory and Policy

Due to its research design and the cases selected, this master's thesis serves to reinforce the validity of approaches combining both institutionalist and IR explanations. Furthermore, extending the logic of secessionist conflict outcomes to other expressions of self-determination and mobilizing an all-embracing conceptualization of the term contributes to updating the debate on self-determination conflict beyond norms-based considerations. This adds to other accounts that bridge self-determination literature with institutionalism and geopolitics, such as Murphy (2019). In this respect, it also contributes a finer-grained insight by distinguishing between *de facto* and *de jure*

autonomy. In addition, our findings are also valuable for conflict management, both in theory, as a strand of self-determination literature, and in practice.

In theory, our findings suggest that the impact of segmental institutions in domestic and global security, as described by Roeder (2007), might be limited to the Eurasian experience. Our findings are consistent with Hartzell (2014) and her Nicaraguan case study, where she found that segment-states can be endogenous to the center-periphery bargaining and do not need to emerge from top-down gerrymandering. This implies that, although they may not end violence or lead to a final settlement of the conflict, segmental institutions, including autonomy and devolution, may not be intrinsically destabilizing, and may reduce the levels of violence and foster stability.

Our findings suggest that exclusionary non-segmental institutions have more destabilizing effects than segmental-institutions.[56] Self-determination project proponents may be reinforced and have more incentives to keep pressing their claims. Nevertheless, unresolved issues can sometimes be used as safeguards in the institutional arrangements to prevent further escalations of stakes or means, such as Kirkuk's status in Iraq (Uyanik 2017). As a zero-sum game, the costs of independence for the KAR are higher without Kirkuk, which Kurds often referred to as "our Jerusalem" (Madwar 2023).

In addition, segmentation in the form of autonomy or federalism may help the international community reconcile self-determination claims and bring about a stable, if not peaceful, scenario without compromising their strategic interests through outcomes of secession that have a more profound impact on the status quo.

[56] In federal Iraq, for instance, the Kurds still had incentives to keep pressing their self-determination claims, which resulted in the brief 2017 Iraqi-Kurdish conflict. However, the major insurgencies that have taken place in the country have been led by the Sunni Arab minority, a group without access to segmental institutions that was largely excluded from the constitutional process and which voted against it in the 2005 constitutional referendum (Anderson 2005).

In the complex context of states resulting from the transposition of Western-style institutions over territories that are a by-product of colonial gerrymandering, inclusiveness is vital to foster stability, let alone peaceful coexistence. Effective autonomy and federalization can channel self-determination claims too, may help ease the burden of decades-long exclusion, persecution or suppression of minorities, and still give Great Powers leeway to avoid destabilizing readjustments of the international order. However, speculatively, they will not suffice as long as the underlying periphery's self-determination project and the center's nation-state project keep antagonizing.

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