

Kurdish People Fast Facts

CNN Editorial

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Kurdish people show their support for the upcoming referendum for independence of the Kurdistan region at a rally on September 21, 2017, in Erbil, Iraq.

Here is some background information about the Kurdish people. The Kurds do not have an independent country of their own because their homeland (called Kurdistan) has been divided among, and occupied by [Iraq](#), [Syria](#), Turkey and [Iran](#). A relatively small number of Kurds live in Armenia as well.

About Kurdistan

Area: Roughly 74,000 sq. miles

Population: Nearing 50 million (some Kurds reside outside of Kurdistan)

Religion: Two thirds are [Sunni Muslims](#) and other main religions still practised are Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Yarsanism, Yazidism, Alevism, and Judaism. Religious diversity has been a feature of Kurdistan for many centuries.

Other Facts

Kurds have never achieved nation-state status, making Kurdistan a non-governmental region and one of the largest stateless nations in the world.

Portions are recognized by two countries: Iran, where the province of Kordestan lies; and northern Iraq, site of the autonomous region known as [Kurdistan Regional Government \(KRG\)](#) or Iraqi Kurdistan.

Kurds were mostly nomadic revolving around sheep and goat herding until the end of [World War I](#) and the breakup of the Ottoman Empire, however there were some settlements some of which have ancient beginnings.

There are three dialects of the Kurdish language, Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), Central Kurdish (Sorani), and Southern Kurdish (Palewani or Xwarîn).

Kurds make up about 10% of the population in Syria, 19% of the population of Turkey, 15-20% of the population of Iraq and are the second largest ethnicity in Iran.

The Peshmerga is a more than 100,000-strong national military force which protects Iraqi Kurdistan, and includes female fighters.



Timeline

October 30, 1918 - (TURKEY) - The Armistice of Mudros marks the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I.

November 3, 1918 - (IRAQ) - With the discovery of oil in the Kurdish province of Mosul, British forces occupy the region.

August 10, 1920 - (TURKEY) - The Treaty of Sèvres outlines the dissolution of the Ottoman Empire, with Turkey renouncing rights over certain areas in Asia and North Africa. It calls for the recognition of new independent states, including an autonomous Kurdistan. It is never ratified.

July 24, 1923 - (TURKEY) - The Allies and the former Ottoman Empire sign and ratify the Treaty of Lausanne, which recognizes Turkey as an independent nation. In the final treaty marking the conclusion of World War I, the Allies drop demands for an autonomous Turkish Kurdistan. The Kurdish region is eventually divided among several countries.

1923 - (IRAQ) - Former Kurdish Governor Sheikh Mahmud Barzinji stages an uprising against British rule, declaring a Kurdish kingdom in Sulaimaniya in northern Iraq.

1924 - (IRAQ) - British Forces retake Sulaimaniya.

1943-1945 - (IRAQ/IRAN) - Mustafa Barzani leads an uprising, gaining control of areas of Erbil and Badinan. When the uprising is defeated, Barzani and his forces retreat to Kurdish areas in Iran and align with nationalist fighters under the leadership of Qazi Muhammad.

January 1946 - (IRAN) - The Kurdish Republic of Mahābād is established as a Kurdish state, with backing from the Soviet Union. The short-lived country encompasses the city of Mahābād in Iran, which is largely

Kurdish and near the Iraq border. However, Soviets withdraw the same year and the Republic of Mahābād collapses.

August 16, 1946 - (IRAQ) - The Kurdish Democratic Party of Iraq (KDP) is established. (IRAN) - The same day, [Massoud Barzani is born in Kurdish Republic of Mahābād](#).

1957 - (SYRIA) - 250 Kurdish children die in an arson attack on a cinema. It is blamed on Arab nationalists.

1958 - (SYRIA) - The government formally bans all Kurdish-language publications.

1958 - (IRAQ) - After Iraq's 1958 revolution, a new constitution is established, which declares Arabs and Kurds as "partners in this homeland."

1961 - (IRAQ) - KDP begins a rebellion in northern Iraq. Within two weeks, the Iraqi government dissolves the Kurdish Democratic Party.

March 1970 - (IRAQ) - A peace agreement between Iraqi government and Kurds grants the Kurds autonomy. Kurdish is recognized as an official language, and an amendment to the constitution states: "the Iraqi people is made up of two nationalities: the Arab nationality and the Kurdish nationality."

March 6, 1975 - (ALGERIA) - [Iraqi President Saddam Hussein](#) and Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi of Iran sign a treaty. Iraq gives up claims to the Shatt-al-Arab waterway, while Iran agrees to end its support of the independence seeking Kurds.

June 1975 - (IRAQ) - Former [KDP Leader Jalal Talabani](#), establishes the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK). The following year, PUK takes up an armed campaign against the Iraqi government.

1978 - (IRAQ) - KDP and PUK forces clash, leaving many dead.

1978 - (TURKEY) - [Abdullah Öcalan forms the Kurdistan Workers' Party \(PKK\), a Kurdish separatist group](#).

Late 1970s - (IRAQ) - The Baath Party, under Hussein's leadership, uproots Kurds from areas with Kurdish majorities, and settles southern-Iraqi Arabs into those regions. Into the 1980s, Kurds are forcibly removed from the Iranian border as Kurds are suspected of aiding Iranian forces during the Iran-Iraq War. **1979** - (IRAQ) Mustafa Barzani dies in Washington. His son, [Massoud Barzani](#), is elected president of KDP following his death.

1980 - (IRAQ) - The Iran-Iraq War begins. Although the KDP forces work closely with Iran, the PUK does not.

1983 - (IRAQ) - PUK agrees to a cease-fire with Iraq and begins negotiations on Kurdish autonomy.

August 1984 - (TURKEY) - PKK launches violent separatist campaign in Turkey, starting with killing two soldiers. The conflict eventually [spreads to Iran, Iraq and Syria](#).

1985 - (IRAQ) - The cease-fire between Iraq and PUK breaks down.

1986 - (IRAQ) - After an Iranian-sponsored reconciliation, both KDP and PUK receive support from Tehran.

1987 - (TURKEY) - Turkey imposes state of emergency in the south eastern region of the country in response to PKK attacks.

February-August 1988 - (IRAQ) - During [Operation Anfal](#) ("spoils" in Arabic), created to quell Kurdish resistance, the Iraqi military uses large quantities of chemical weapons on Kurdish civilians.

Iraqi forces destroy more than 4,000 villages in Kurdistan. It is believed that [some 100,000 Kurds were killed](#).

March 16, 1988 - (IRAQ) - [Iraq uses poison gas against the Kurdish people in Halabja in Northern Iraq. Thousands of people are believed to have died in the attack.](#)

1990-1991 - (IRAQ) - The [Gulf War](#) begins when Hussein invades Kuwait seeking its oil reserves. There is a mass exodus of Kurds out of Iraq as more than a million flee into Turkey and Iran.

February 28, 1991 - (IRAQ) - Hussein agrees to a cease-fire, ending the Gulf War.

March 1991 - (IRAQ) - Kurdish uprising begins, and in two weeks, the Kurdish militia gains control of Iraqi Kurdistan, including the oil-rich town of Kirkuk. After allied support to the Kurds is denied, Iraq crushes the uprising. Two million Kurds flee, but are forced to hide out in the mountains as Turkey closes its border.

April 1991 - (IRAQ) - A safe haven is established in Iraqi Kurdistan by the United States, the United Kingdom and France. Iraqi forces are barred from operating within the region, and Kurds begin autonomous rule, with KDP leading the north and PUK leading the south.

1992 - (IRAQ) - In an anti-PKK operation, 20,000 Turkish troops enter Kurdish safe havens in Iraq.

1994-1998 - (IRAQ) - PUK and KDP members engage in armed conflict, known as the Fratricide War, in Iraqi Kurdistan.

1995 - (IRAQ) - [Approximately 35,000 Turkish troops launch an offensive against Kurds in northern Iraq.](#)

1996 - (IRAQ) - [Iraq launches attacks against Kurdish cities, including Erbil and Kirkuk.](#)

October 8, 1997 - (TURKEY) - [The United States lists PKK as a terrorist group.](#)

1998 - (IRAQ) - The conflict between KDP and PUK ends, and a peace agreement is reached. This is brokered by the United States, and the accord is signed in Washington.

1999 - (TURKEY) - [PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan is captured in Nairobi, Kenya,](#) by Turkish officials. **2002** - (TURKEY) - Under pressure from the [European Union,](#) Turkey legalizes broadcasts and education in the Kurdish language. Turkish forces still combat PKK, including military incursions into northern Iraq.

May 2002 - (TURKEY) - The European Union designates the PKK as a terrorist organization.

February 1, 2004 - (IRAQ) - [Two suicide bombs kill more than 50 people in Erbil.](#) The targets are the headquarters of KDP and PUK, and several top Kurdish officials from both parties are killed.

March 2004 - (SYRIA) - Nine people are killed at a football (soccer) arena in Qamishli after clashes with riot police. Kurds demonstrate throughout the city, and unrest spreads to nearby towns in the following days, after security forces open fire at the funerals.

June 2004 - (TURKEY) - State TV broadcasts Kurdish-language programs for the first time.

April 6-7, 2005 - (IRAQ) - Kurdish leader Talabani is selected the country's president by the transitional national assembly, and is sworn in the next day.

July 2005 - (TURKEY) - Six people die from a bomb planted on a train by a Kurdish guerrilla. Turkish officials blame the PKK.

2005 - (IRAQ) - The 2005 Iraqi constitution upholds Kurdish autonomy, and designates Kurdistan as an autonomous federal region.

August-September 2006 - (TURKEY) - A wave of bomb attacks target a resort area in Turkey, as well as Istanbul. Separatist group [Kurdistan Freedom Falcons \(TAC\) claims responsibility](#) for most of the attacks and threatens it will turn Turkey into "hell."

December 2007 - (TURKEY) - [Turkey launches attacks in Iraqi Kurdistan, targeting PKK outposts.](#)

2009 - (TURKEY) - A policy called the Kurdish Initiative increases Kurdish language rights and reduces military presence in the mostly Kurdish southeast.

September 2010 - (IRAN) - A bomb detonates during a parade in Mahābād, leaving 12 dead and dozens injured. No group claims responsibility for the attack, but authorities blame Kurdish separatists. In 2014, authorities arrest members of Koumaleh, a Kurdish armed group, for the attack.

April 2011 - (SYRIA) - [Syria grants citizenship to thousands in the Kurdish region.](#) According to Human Rights Watch, an exceptional census stripped 20% of Kurdish Syrians of their citizenship in 1962.

October 2011 - (SYRIA) - Meshaal Tammo, a Syrian Kurdish activist, is assassinated. Many Kurds blame [Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's](#) regime for the assassination.

October 19, 2011 - (TURKEY) - [Kurdish militants kill 24 Turkish troops](#) near the Iraqi border, a PKK base area.

June 2012 - (TURKEY) - Turkish forces strike PKK rebel bases in Iraq after a PKK attack in southern Turkey kills eight Turkish soldiers.

July 2012 - (SYRIA) - Amid [the country's civil war](#), Syrian security forces retreat from several Kurdish towns in the north eastern part of the country.

August 2012 - (TURKEY) - [Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan warns that any attempts by the PKK to launch cross-border attacks from Syria would be met by force](#); the Turkish Army then performs a large exercise less than a mile from border villages now controlled by the Syrian Kurdish group Democratic Union Party (PYD).

December 2012 - (TURKEY) - [Erdogan](#) announces the government has begun peace talks with the PKK.

January 10, 2013 - (FRANCE) - [Three Kurdish women are found shot dead in Paris](#), one of whom was a founding member of the PKK.

March 21, 2013 - (TURKEY) - Imprisoned [PKK founder Abdullah Ocalan calls for dialogue](#): a letter from him is read in the Turkish Parliament, "We for tens of years gave up our lives for this struggle, we paid a price. We have come to a point at which the guns must be silent and ideas must talk."

March 25, 2013 - (TURKEY) - Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan and Iraqi Kurdistan Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani negotiate a [framework deal that includes an outline for a direct pipeline export of oil and gas](#). The pipeline would have the Kurdish crude oil transported from the Kurdish Regional Government directly into Turkey, allowing the KRG to be a competitive supplier of oil to Turkey.

June 2014 - (IRAQ) - [Refugees flee fighting and flood into Iraqi Kurdistan](#) to the north as ISIS militants take over Mosul. [Kurdish Regional Government \(KRG\) closes then reopens, with restrictions, border crossings](#) used by those fleeing ISIS.

June 23, 2014 - (IRAQ) - Iraqi Kurdistan President Barzani says that ["Iraq is obviously falling apart, and it's obvious that the federal or central government has lost control over everything."](#)

Early August 2014 - (IRAQ) - Reportedly [40,000 Yazidi, a minority group of Kurdish descent, flee to a mountainous region](#) in north western Iraq to escape ISIS, after the group storms Sinjar, a town near the Syrian border. Also, 100,000 [Christians](#) flee to Erbil, after Kurdish leadership there promises protection in the city.

August 11, 2014 - (IRAQ) [Kurdish fighters in Kurdistan, who are called Peshmerga, work with Iraqi armed forces to deliver aid to Yazidis](#) stranded on Mount Sinjar after fleeing ISIS fighters.

August 12, 2014 - (IRAQ) Some Yazidi tell CNN that [PKK fighters control parts of the mountain, and have offered food and protection from ISIS](#).

December 2, 2014 - (IRAQ) The government of Iraq and the government of Iraqi Kurdistan sign an agreement to share oil revenues and military resources. Iraq will now pay the salaries of Peshmerga fighters battling ISIS and act as an intermediary to deliver US weapons to Kurdish forces. The Kurdistan government will deliver more than half a million barrels of oil daily to the Iraqi government. Profits from the sale of the oil will be split between the two governments.

January 26, 2015 - (SYRIA) After 112 days of fighting, the [YPG](#), Kurdish fighters also known as the People's Protection Units, [take control of the city of Kobani from ISIS](#).

March 21, 2015 - (TURKEY) In a letter read to thousands during a celebration in the city of Diyarbakir, [imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan urges fighters under his command to lay down their arms, stop waging war against the Turkish state and join a "congress."](#)

May 18, 2015 - (TURKEY) In the run-up to parliamentary elections on June 7, an [explosion rocks the office of the Kurdish People's Democratic Party \(HDP\) in Adana](#), in southeastern Turkey. Six people are injured.

June 7, 2015 - (TURKEY) Three-year-old fledgling party [Kurdish People's Democratic Party \(HDP\) receives more than 13% of the vote, winning 80 seats](#) in the 550-seat parliament.

June 16, 2015 - (SYRIA) Kurdish forces in the Syrian town, Tal Abyad say they have defeated ISIS fighters and [taken back the town](#) on the Turkish border.

June 23, 2015 - (SYRIA) Kurdish fighters announce that they have taken back the town of Ain Issa, located 30 miles north of the ISIS stronghold, Raqqa, a city proclaimed to be the capital of the caliphate. A military base near Ain Issa, which had been occupied by ISIS since last August, is abandoned by the terrorist group the night before the Kurdish forces seize the town.

February 17, 2016 - (IRAQ) [Turkish airstrikes target some of the PKK's top figures](#) in northern Iraq's Haftanin region. Airstrikes come after [a terrorist attack in Turkey kills 28](#), although no Kurdish group has claimed responsibility for those attacks.

March 13, 2016 - (TURKEY) A [car bomb attack kills at least 37 people in Ankara](#). The Kurdistan Freedom Falcons, or TAK -- an offshoot of the Kurdish separatist group PKK -- takes responsibility for the attack.

March 17, 2016 - (SYRIA) Kurds declare that a swath of north eastern Syria is now a separate autonomous region under Kurdish control. The claim stirs up controversy, as Syrian and Turkish officials say it goes against the goal of creating a unified country after years of civil war.

July 20, 2016 - (TURKEY) Following a failed coup attempt, President Erdogan declares a state of emergency. In the first three months, pro-Kurdish media outlets are shut down, and tens of thousands of civil servants with alleged PKK connections are dismissed or suspended. The purge includes ministers of parliament, military leaders, police, teachers, and mayors, including in the Kurdish-majority city of Diyarbakir.

September 25, 2017 - (IRAQ) Iraqi Kurds vote in favour of declaring independence from Iraq. [More than 92% of the roughly 3 million people vote "yes" to independence](#).

October 16, 2017 - (IRAQ) Iraq and Iranian-backed militia launch an attack and invade Kirkuk and the other areas that control over is disputed with the Kurdistan Regional Government.

March 23, 2019 - (SYRIA) Kurdish forces announce they have captured the [eastern Syrian pocket of Baghouz, the last populated area under ISIS rule](#).

October 9, 2019 - (TURKEY/SYRIA) [Turkey launches a military offensive into north eastern Syria](#), just days after [US President Donald Trump's](#) administration announced that US troops would leave the border area. [Erdogan's "Operation Peace Spring"](#) is an effort to drive away Kurdish forces from the border, and use the area to resettle around two million Syrian refugees. The Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) who operate in the region are Kurdish-led, and still hold thousands of ISIS fighters captured in battle.

October 17, 2019 - (TURKEY/SYRIA) US Vice President [Mike Pence](#) announces that he and Erdogan agreed to a ceasefire halting Turkey's incursion into northern Syria. [The Turkish government insists that the agreement is not a ceasefire, but only a "pause" on operations in the region](#).

November 15, 2019 - (TURKEY/SYRIA) Turkey's decision to launch a military operation targeting US-Kurdish partners in northern Syria and the Trump administration's subsequent retreat [allowed ISIS to rebuild itself and boosted its ability to launch attacks abroad](#), the Pentagon's Inspector General says in an Operation Inherent Resolve quarterly report.

March 24, 2020 - (SYRIA) The [SDF releases a statement calling for a humanitarian truce](#) in response to a United Nations appeal for a global ceasefire to combat the [coronavirus](#).

July 30, 2020 - (SYRIA) During a US senate committee hearing, [Secretary of State Mike Pompeo](#) confirms the Trump administration's support for the [Delta Crescent Energy firm's deal to develop and modernize oil fields in northeast Syria under control of the SDF](#). The following week, Syria's foreign ministry calls the deal an attempt to "steal" the oil.

February 8, 2021 - (SYRIA) Pentagon Press Secretary John Kirby is questioned about the Delta Crescent Energy deal during a press conference. He says that the US Department of Defense under the [Joe Biden](#) administration is focused on fighting ISIS. It is not aiding a private company.

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