

**JOURNALISTIC OBJECTIVITY IN THE KURDISTAN REGION OF IRAQ:
EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN JOURNALISTS AND
POLITICIANS**

Hataw Hama Saleh HUSSEIN,

*Dep't of Media, College of Human Sciences, University of Halabja, Iraq,
hataw.salih@uoh.edu.iq*

Shwan Adam AIVAS,

*Dep't of Media, Technical College of Administration, Sulaimani Polytechnic University, Iraq,
shwan.adam@spu.edu.iq*

Rawezh Kamaran AHMED,

Kurdistan Technical Institute, Iraq, rawezh.ahmed@kti.edu.iq

Kamaran Qader YAQUB,

*Dep't of Accounting, Technical College of Administration, Sulaimani Polytechnic University,
Iraq, kamaran.qader@spu.edu.iq*

Ali Mohammed SALIH,

*Dep't of Oil and Energy, Technical College of Engineering, Sulaimani Polytechnic
University, ali.salih@spu.edu.iq*

Abstract

This study examines the shifting dynamics between journalists and politicians in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, focusing on the nature of their interactions and the implications for press freedom. Additionally, it explores the influence of Kurdish digital media on journalistic objectivity. Primary data were gathered through interviews with seven journalists and two media observers. The findings indicate a transformation in the journalist-politician relationship, evolving from a traditional alliance to a more strategic partnership. While this partnership has, in some cases, facilitated access to reliable information and countered misinformation, it has also compromised journalistic objectivity and professional ethics. The study highlights the persistent role of political influence as a critical factor shaping press freedom, given that many Kurdish media outlets, particularly digital platforms, depend on political affiliations for their survival. The impact of the journalist-politician relationship has been twofold: at times fostering the dissemination of accurate information, while at other times reinforcing misinformation and distorting facts, thereby undermining professional integrity. This alliance has also contributed to violations of journalistic standards, including defamation, ideological or religious offenses, incitement to criminal or terrorist activities, copyright infringements, breaches of privacy, and threats to social security and cultural traditions. The study further underscores the extensive political dominance over freedom of expression and the press in the Kurdistan Region. The increasing dependency of Kurdish media—particularly digital platforms—on political figures has led to a precarious situation where journalists, under political pressure, may be compelled to publish misleading or fabricated content that contravenes ethical and legal standards. This dynamic has, at times, exacerbated social instability, intensified political tensions, and violated religious, national, and human rights values. Ultimately, the state of press freedom and freedom of expression in the Kurdistan Region is contingent upon the political leadership's openness to criticism and critical discourse. Greater political transparency and tolerance for journalistic scrutiny are essential for fostering a more independent and ethical media landscape.

Keywords: Journalists, Politicians, Relationships, Objectivity, Kurdistan.

DOI: 10.31039/bjir.v2i3.28

1. INTRODUCTION

True journalism focuses on uncovering the facts, presenting all perspectives, defending citizens' rights, and advocating for public interests (Hussein, 2018, Aivas, 2017). In contrast, politicians are often accused of concealing facts, hiding certain truths to protect their personal interests, and attempting to manipulate public perception to maintain their dominance (Brants and Voltmer, 2011). This dynamic between journalists and politicians raises important questions, particularly when these two powerful entities merge. In such cases, individual interests may conflict, leading to potential human rights violations. According to the principles of journalism, journalists and politicians should not form secret alliances, as the journalist's role is to reveal the truth and expose corruption. Journalists must approach those in power with

skepticism, ensuring that politicians are not glorified in the media but held accountable, especially when their actions are questioned. During interviews, journalists must be adept at posing insightful questions, as politicians are often skilled at avoiding tough inquiries. In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, the alliance between journalists and politicians is particularly prominent. This relationship is deeply rooted in the region's political history, where Kurdish journalism has been intertwined with the political ties between journalists and politicians from the very beginning (Syan, 2017, Aivas, 2014). Following the 1991 uprising and the establishment of a semi-autonomous Kurdish region in northern Iraq, the management of media and journalism became both a political right and a responsibility. Many Kurdish journalists have political backgrounds, and political parties have often influenced their training in journalism. As a result, the roles of journalists and politicians have become difficult to distinguish.

1.1. Research Problem

The alliance between journalists and politicians is a critical issue in journalism that has not been thoroughly explored in detail. There is a need for Kurdish libraries and academic resources to investigate this matter further. In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, media and politics are deeply **interconnected**. This strong relationship between journalists and politicians creates a significant challenge for both professions, as it directly influences the independence of the media, particularly digital media. The close connection between the two sectors complicates the ability of the media to operate free from political influence, raising concerns about the autonomy and objectivity of journalistic practices.

1.2 Research Importance

Over the past decade in Kurdistan, many media outlets claim independence, but in reality, most are deeply connected to politicians and ruling parties, with many media organizations being owned and controlled by political figures. The significance of this study lies in investigating the issue of professional objectivity within the media, particularly focusing on the extent to which politicians influence journalists to maintain these relationships. Research into the relationship between journalists and politicians is crucial for understanding how this dynamic affects the expansion or restriction of freedom of press. This study examines the power of the media and its independence, exploring how government authorities and politicians attempt to control the media landscape. At the same time, the study seeks to assess how politicians

influence journalists through their access to power, and how such influence may negatively affect media impartiality and integrity. Furthermore, it explores how politicians may use the media to conceal corruption or enhance their public image. Ultimately, this research addresses the central question of whether the relationship between journalists and politicians strengthens or weakens the media's role and influence.

1.3 Research Aims

The primary purpose of this study is to analyze the alliance between journalists and politicians and its impact on the professional objectivity of journalists and digital media in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. This is achieved by pursuing the following three main objectives:

1. To explore the nature of the relationship between journalists and politicians in the Kurdistan Region.
2. To investigate how the relationship between journalists and politicians influences professional objectivity.
3. To assess the extent of political influence over freedom of the press.

1.4 Research Questions

To address the main objectives of the study, the following three research questions are posed:

1. What is the nature of the relationship between journalists and politicians in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region?
2. Can digital media journalists in the Kurdistan Region maintain professional objectivity and independence from political influence?
3. Has the political control over journalists in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region expanded or restricted freedom of the press?

1.5 Research Methodology

This study involved conducting seven written interviews with the editors of five Kurdish digital media outlets and two media observers in Sulaimani. The interviews included editors from the following websites: *Drawmedia*, *Kurd Mojo*, *Rachlakin*, *7 Roj*, *Nuhanewz*, as well as two representatives from the Kurdistan Union of Journalists and the Metro Center for Journalists.

Through eight primary questions, the interviews aimed to gather personal experiences and real-world examples regarding the professional work and relationships between journalists and politicians in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region. Topics covered in the interviews included daily routines at the workplace, responsibilities, professional roles and values, and the level and direction of political influence. To organize and analyze the data, a thematic content analysis was applied to the interview texts, which were then categorized into eight key themes (Hussein, 2022).

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section is organized into four main areas: the challenges faced by post-conflict nations and their journalistic cultures, the impact of digital media on interactions between journalists and politicians, the collaboration between journalists and politicians facilitated by digital platforms, and the political ownership of media outlets in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

2.1 Post-Conflict Countries and Journalistic Cultures

Journalistic cultures vary significantly between stable Western nations and post-conflict Eastern nations, and their characteristics are continuously evolving. In some countries, a close relationship between journalists and politicians is considered essential, while in others, it is seen as incompatible with the principles and ethical standards of professional journalism (Aivas, 2022, Aivas, 2017, Cammarano & Medrano, 2014). For instance, in democratic nations, the relationship between journalists and politicians is often a contentious issue and has been widely debated. Journalists in these cultures typically wield considerable power, making it unnecessary to align with politicians. They have largely maintained their professional independence and avoided becoming pawns of political interests. Media scholars argue that whenever an explicit agreement is made between journalists and politicians, it results in success for the politician and failure for the journalist, as it diverts the journalist from their core duty (Ahmed, 2023; Aivas, 2021; Hussein, 2018; Syan, 2017; Aivas, 2017; Cammarano & Medrano, 2014; Black, 2010). In developed countries, forming alliances between journalists and politicians is considered inappropriate. If a journalist aligns with a political stance, it is seen as a major threat to freedom of expression and journalistic integrity. A prominent case in 2017 involved French journalist Bruno Roger Bettit, whose political involvement sparked widespread media coverage and controversy (Al Jazeera, 2016). He faced harsh criticism from fellow journalists, who deemed his actions dangerous for press freedom. The case led to

numerous discussions and articles questioning the independence of French journalism due to the growing proximity between journalists and politicians. In the field of journalism, it is essential for journalists to professionally process and convey political information, as providing clarity to the public is one of their primary duties. Journalists also serve as gatekeepers, holding the legislative, executive, and judicial branches accountable by evaluating the actions of public officials. On the other hand, politicians recognize the power of their relationship with journalists and the media, often viewing the media as a form of fourth power, just as crucial as a military force. As a result, they invest substantial resources to build closer ties with journalists, or, at best, to exert control over the media, often offering financial incentives and salaries to journalists to influence the media landscape.

2.2. Digital Media and the Relationship between Journalists and Politicians

With the advent of the internet and the rise of digital media and social networks, the relationship between journalists and politicians has become increasingly intertwined. Politicians have gained significant benefits from using social media platforms and various online networks to strengthen their public image and promote their activities (Aivas, 2020). These platforms allow them to reach a wider audience, either through interviews, live broadcasts, or direct communication, with the aim of shaping public opinion. Many politicians have become well-known due to their presence on social media, often managing multiple accounts and websites to further their influence. Politicians also handle sensitive information in two distinct ways: some choose to disclose certain details to the public, while others withhold information that does not serve their interests (Aivas, 2014). As a result, several key issues emerge in the professional relationship between journalists and politicians, such as:

2.2.1 Journalism and Professional Objectivity

The Oxford Dictionary defines a journalist as someone who writes or prepares news for a newspaper, magazine, or website. However, the core question remains: who truly qualifies as a journalist? In 2010, Black outlined a set of ethical and legal standards for journalists, emphasizing the importance of adhering to principles like honesty, accuracy, fairness, and objectivity. According to Black, journalists should uphold values such as universality, proportionality, authenticity, independence, social responsibility, and impartiality. Journalists are also expected to use personal conscience, ensure that their reports are verified, and serve as watchdogs over political power, ultimately fostering public discourse and critical thought

(Aivas, 2024, Black, 2010). The primary role of a journalist is to inform the public, raising awareness of their rights and responsibilities. In democratic societies, journalists are tasked with advocating for the people, holding politicians accountable, and ensuring that officials fulfill their duties to the public, free from corruption. Therefore, journalists should report on all issues that are significant to the nation (Aivas et al., 2025, McQuail, 2010). However, there are instances when journalists fail to fulfill their true role and may find themselves in situations that stray from their professional responsibilities. To better understand this, journalist David Brewer¹ categorized different types of journalism, each with its unique characteristics, including:

2.2.2 The Activist Journalist

The first type of journalist in this classification is an activist, someone who actively advocates for a specific movement. These journalists often struggle to maintain objectivity, as they tend to support politicians aligned with their cause, while opposing those who do not share their views. Rather than focusing on reporting the story, they often become the center of attention, positioning themselves as the heroes of the narrative. If the question arises whether a journalist can also be an activist, the professional impact on media and journalism would be negative, as such journalists become biased. In the Kurdistan Region, there are numerous examples of journalists and activists blurring the lines between their duties and personal agendas.

2.2.3 The Hunter Journalist

Hunter journalists are those who relentlessly follow politicians, scrutinizing every move and behavior in the hope of obtaining a story or breaking news. These journalists often rely on questionable sources that do not meet journalistic standards, leading to unreliable and skewed information. There are numerous examples of this practice both in Europe and worldwide, and in recent years, the Kurdistan Region has seen an increase in such activities, which has contributed to the spread of false and distorted information.

¹ David Brewer is a media trainer and assistant to journalists in countries with developing media landscapes. He has held several prestigious positions, including editor-in-chief of BBC News, editor-in-chief and first editor-in-chief of CNN Arabic in Dubai, and consultant to Al Jazeera English television in Qatar. With many years of experience, he has conducted journalism training globally, primarily in post-conflict countries.

2.2.4 The Companion Journalist

Companion journalists develop close personal relationships with politicians, often placing their trust in specific parties or individuals. As a result, they rarely criticize the actions of these politicians. Instead of protecting the public's interest, they become advocates for the politicians they support, using their platform to promote and praise their work. This undermines the core role of journalism, as the media becomes a tool to serve the interests of the political authorities rather than the public.

2.2.5 The Political Journalist

Political journalists are those who, from the beginning of their careers, align themselves with a specific political ideology or party. They only report what politicians want to be broadcast, turning their journalistic work into a form of political advocacy rather than objective reporting. Professionally, these individuals are not considered true journalists but are more akin to public relations operatives for a particular party or agenda, as they disregard journalistic principles in favor of party interests.

5.1.2.2. The Interest-Oriented Journalist

Interest-oriented journalists are flexible and self-serving, aligning themselves with politicians and parties where they can personally benefit. They do not take journalistic responsibility seriously and use their platform for personal gain, often at the expense of the public. These journalists frequently shift their allegiances to different sides, adapting to whichever political force seems to offer the most opportunity. In the politically unstable and post-conflict environment of the Kurdistan Region, following the fall of the Arab Ba'ath Party, such journalists have flourished, becoming more prominent in recent years.

2.2.6 The True Journalist

The true journalist is independent, free from affiliations, and cannot be bought or influenced by parties, politicians, or authorities. This type of journalist is committed to conveying the truth, embracing diverse viewpoints, and objectively reporting on all issues. They are not subject to external pressures and present a balanced view of events. True journalists do not treat anyone as untouchable and hold all figures accountable, highlighting the essence of journalism: to expose the truth and ensure transparency.

According to above classification and characteristics, there are very few genuine journalists in the Kurdistan Region. Kurdish media often struggles to understand and train such journalists, frequently overlooking professional objectivity. In this regard, the Kurdish media has many shortcomings, failing to uphold the standards of impartiality and objectivity (Hussein, 2018, Aivas, 2017). The International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) in its Declaration of Standards emphasizes fairness and the public's right to receive accurate, objective information as core duties of journalists. Journalists must maintain professional impartiality, avoiding bias and partisanship, because objectivity and professionalism are fundamental to the role. Furthermore, journalists are more likely to remain objective and independent when serving the public interest rather than the private agendas of specific parties. Restricting a journalist's independence undermines their professionalism (Hallin-Mancini, 2004). Unfortunately, in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, the strong political ties between journalists and politicians have led to very little independent, professional media and free journalism (Aivas, 2024). Even in Kurdistan, there is frequent confusion between the roles and duties of journalists, politicians, spies, and judges, whether this is intentional or not.

2.3 The Alliance between Kurdish Journalists and Politicians

In 2003, before the liberation of Iraq, in 1991 Kurdistan had already gained semi-independence from the Iraqi state. This created a unique media environment in Kurdistan—a blend of authoritarian media control (leftover from the Ba'ath Party) and a semi-liberal system that emerged after the 1991 uprising. The media system in Kurdistan, post-uprising, developed in a complex and unclear manner. Additionally, since the era of Kurdish guerrilla warfare, party loyalty has significantly influenced the media, and journalists have historically maintained strong ties with specific political parties. The intertwining of journalistic and political roles in Kurdistan has deep historical roots, making it difficult for journalists to separate from political affiliations (Hussein, 2018, Aivas, 2021). As a result, journalists in Kurdistan often transition into politics, and vice versa or even perform both roles simultaneously. This fusion of roles is emblematic of an undemocratic society and is particularly evident in the post-conflict environment. In developed countries, the role of journalists is considered equal, if not more important, than that of politicians. Journalists often earn more financially than politicians do, and they have no need to enter politics or compromise their professional integrity for material gain. In these countries, politicians aim to build relationships with journalists out of fear of the media's influence. For example, Napoleon Poincaré once spoke of the power and fear invoked

by a journalist's pen. In this context, when a politician agrees to an interview, it is akin to being invited to a real parliament—there is an underlying sense of caution, as the politician knows the journalist will not shy away from holding them accountable for the public's benefit. The differences between regions with a high level of press freedom, such as Western countries and Europe, and newly developing regions like Iraqi Kurdistan are vast. In the history of journalism in the Middle East, and particularly in Kurdistan, the strong connection between journalists and politicians can largely be traced to the government's control over the media. For years, the media was used primarily for government propaganda, serving the interests of those in power. Even today, despite significant progress in media development and a growing number of outlets, politicians continue to dominate the media landscape in Kurdistan. This dominance remains evident as many media outlets are still owned by powerful political figures or parties. As a result, some media experts and researchers argue that free media does not truly exist in Kurdistan (Aivas et al., 2025).

2.4 Digital Media Ownership among Kurdish Politicians

On March 20, 2024, the Al-Alam Al-Jadeed website published an in-depth report on the ownership of Kurdish media, revealing the significant influence politicians hold over the sector. The details of this media ownership are outlined in Table 01 of this paper. In addition to the political figures and families affiliated with the two main ruling parties in Kurdistan—the Kurdistan Democratic Party and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan—many other political entities also own a considerable number of media outlets. This includes the Sabay Media Institute, owned by Nima Nusrewan Mustafa, the Gorran Media Network, controlled by the Gorran Movement, the United Kurdistan Media Network, run by the Kurdistan Islamic Union, and the Komal Media Network, managed by the Kurdistan Justice Association. The primary goal of these media channels, websites, and social media accounts is to enhance the political power of the ruling authorities, with politicians leveraging these outlets to further their interests. The Kurdistan Union of Journalists (KUJ) reports that more than 1,400 media outlets are active in the Kurdistan Region, including 30 satellite television channels, 127 terrestrial TV channels, and a large number of websites and social media pages. The region has created an environment conducive to both open and covert communication between journalists and politicians, allowing for the formation of alliances to safeguard their respective interests. It is rare to find a Kurdish politician or party that does not directly or indirectly control a multitude

of media outlets, including newspapers, radio and television stations, websites, and social media pages.

3. RESEARCH DATA COLLECTION

This section provides methodological details regarding the data collection process, explaining the rationale for selecting specific methods and the conclusions drawn from the researchers' perspectives. This study employed a qualitative approach, using in-depth interviews to collect data. The researchers deemed this approach to be the most accurate and logical way to assess the impact of digital media on professional objectivity, particularly by focusing on the relationship between journalists and politicians as a case study. Initially, twelve journalists from various backgrounds were approached to participate in the questionnaire. However, due to the sensitive nature of the topic and time constraints, only five news website editors agreed to participate: *Drawmedia*, *Kurd Mojo*, *Rachlakin*, *7 Roj*, and *Nuhanewz*. These five editors answered the researchers' questions (refer to Appendix 01). Each of the participants is a prominent and active figure within Kurdish digital media and social networks. The in-depth interviews with these individuals—particularly discussing their professional experiences and real-life examples from their daily work—provided valuable insights. In addition to addressing the main research questions, the discussions also covered their routines, responsibilities, roles, and professional values. Interviewees were encouraged to share detailed examples from their professional lives and to elaborate on the relationship between journalists and politicians, as well as the broader media environment in post-conflict Iraqi Kurdistan. To organize and analyze the interview data, thematic content analysis was used. This method involves categorizing the data into several themes and is commonly applied in media and policy studies to systematically analyze interview content (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis depends on the research questions, which are derived from the interviewees' responses. In this study, the researchers aimed to understand the nature and extent of the relationship between journalists and politicians in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Several key themes were identified for analysis, with each theme explored in detail. The analysis followed either an inductive or deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 86-93). In the inductive approach, themes are generated directly from the data, while in the deductive approach, the analysis is guided by pre-established themes and codes based on previous literature (Gale et al., 2013: 3). This study relied on a combination of both approaches, as preliminary theoretical readings and a wide

range of interviewee responses, supported by in-depth content analysis, informed the primary ideas surrounding the relationship between journalists and politicians.

4. RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

This chapter analyzes the collected data, focusing on the opinions of seven five prominent digital media editor-in-chiefs, and two representatives from the Kurdistan Journalists Union, and the Metro Center for Journalist Rights and Advocacy in Iraq.

4.1 Relationship between Journalists and Politicians

The relationship between journalists and politicians in the Kurdistan Region is complex and fluctuating. At times, it is very close, while at other times, it is distant and characterized by discord. Researchers hold differing views on the nature of this relationship in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq. Pshtiwan Zahir, the Editor-in-Chief of *Rachlakin*, stated, “The alliance between journalists and politicians is driven by mutual interests; politicians often aim to use journalists for their own benefit, rather than supporting them in providing accurate and constructive information.” Similarly, the Editor-in-Chief of *Mojokurd*, emphasized, “In the Kurdistan Region, there exists a friendship between journalists and politicians, which is not unusual and can be found globally. However, in Kurdistan, these alliances often go much deeper and are closer than they should be.” Suhaib Ahmad, the Editor-in-Chief of *7 Roj*, added, “For genuine journalism, it is vital to obtain and publish accurate information. While background information is important, using friendships for personal gain undermines the integrity of the media.” The Editor-in-Chief of *Nahanews* remarked, “Many friendships exist between officials and journalists in the Kurdistan Region, especially given the abundance of media outlets but limited information. This creates a need for special resources and connections with officials. These relationships are often understood as being based on friendship. If they provide information, I verify it later, since politicians often use journalists for their own purposes.” Apart from the views of the Kurdish news website editors who reaffirmed the alliance of interests between journalists and politicians in the Kurdistan Region, the Secretary of the Sulaimani branch of the Kurdistan Union of Journalists shared a different perspective. He stated, “Friendship and coalition are two distinct concepts. Friendship between politicians and journalists is normal, and we have numerous examples of this since the uprising. However, this friendship should not escalate into a coalition because that is not the role of a journalist.” Similarly, the Director of the Metro Center for the Protection of Journalists' Rights commented,

"It is normal for a journalist to have contacts, but it is crucial that these relationships do not impact their performance or how they write. Unfortunately, what we observe in Kurdistan is that the media is often aligned with political parties or individuals within those parties. Very few media outlets manage to maintain their independence." From these perspectives, it is clear that a friendly relationship between journalists and politicians exists in the Kurdistan Region and is seen as necessary for accessing reliable information. However, what is considered unusual is when this relationship evolves from "friendship" into a "coalition."

4.2 Media Ownership between the Duty of Politicians and the Rights of Journalists

For journalists and media outlets to survive and thrive, they need financial support to maintain their independence when making editorial decisions and publishing content, ensuring they adhere to professional media standards. In countries with advanced Western political and media systems, these financial relationships are well defined, with clear employment contracts that outline the duties and rights of both media owners and journalists. Journalists in these countries are typically not forced to abandon critical reporting, even during financial crises. In contrast, in many Eastern countries, particularly in post-conflict and transitioning democracies, the relationship between media owners and journalists is different. In the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, many politicians own media outlets, either directly or indirectly. These politicians, due to their positions, often restrict the publication of content that could harm their interests. As a result, when a media outlet in the Kurdistan Region faces financial difficulties, some politicians step in to offer financial support, with the condition that these outlets cease criticism of them and shift from a "friendship" to a "coalition" stance. In this context, some respondents declined to answer such questions, while others expressed varied opinions. The Editor-in-Chief of *Kurd Mojo* was certain that, in the event of a crisis, when officials offer support to the media, it is on the condition that they do not criticize them. He remarked, "We don't have an example like the BBC, where funding is provided while preserving editorial independence. In fact, media outlets financially supported by politicians not only cannot criticize them but are often directed to attack their political opponents. These journalists become subordinates of politicians, and such individuals are businessmen, not journalists." This dynamic has become relatively public, with the affiliations and motives of the media and journalists becoming clear. The Editor-in-Chief of *7 Roj* echoed similar concerns, noting that any journalist or media outlet receiving financial support from any political entity typically refrains from publishing content that could threaten their interests. "Even the most significant mistakes are ignored," he added. These views

reinforce the notion that no politician acts without ensuring their own interests; they do not coordinate, cooperate, or even form friendships with journalists unless their interests are guaranteed. As a result, some media observers are convinced that independent media does not exist in the Kurdistan Region. Previous efforts to establish independence have been undermined by financial crises, the limitations of large corporations, and the decline in advertising revenue and sales of media products. In this context, one respondent pointed out, "If a politician helps a journalist, they automatically gain ownership over the media privileges, and the journalist cannot separate from them. The media outlet becomes the politician's shadow." Meanwhile, the Director of the Metro Center for the Protection of Journalists' Rights acknowledged that there were independent media outlets in the Kurdistan Region at the start of their operations. "Most of them were neutral initially," he said, "but over time, they fell under the influence of politicians. They start advertising for you, and then you cannot criticize them. Unfortunately, this has become the dominant situation now."

4.3 Politicians and Journalists' Sources of Information

Unofficial sources often serve as the primary channels of information for both media and journalists, especially when these sources are politicians they maintain contact with. Some researchers in this study have expressed differing views on how reliant journalists are on informal statements from politicians. One researcher noted, "Most political news is received unofficially because politicians are reluctant to speak on the record. It is difficult to obtain information from official government institutions and parties; so much of the political information journalists receive is unofficial, often coming from behind-the-scenes meetings. Some journalists accept this because these unofficial sources provide easy access to information." Therefore, maintaining relationships between journalists and politicians often serves the public good, as it ensures the general right of citizens to access both public and private information. Editors of *Rachlakin* and *NuhaNews* websites explained that when they cannot obtain or verify information from official sources, they are compelled to turn to unofficial channels. Without these private and unofficial sources, they are unable to address "sensitive issues" or uncover "unspoken matters." One editor added, "It often leads to misleading information... and they don't even apologize." The editors of news websites affiliated with the Kurdistan Regional Government, many of whom were subjects of this study, openly acknowledge their reliance on unofficial sources of information. They do not hide the fact that some of these sources are politicians with whom they maintain close contacts for

various reasons. In this context, the Secretary of the Sulaimani branch of the Kurdistan Union of Journalists emphasized, “Officials are a good source of information for the media, but sometimes the information they provide leads to significant mistakes, and the source of the news remains undisclosed.” In contrast, the Director of the Metro Center for the Protection of Journalists' Rights pointed out the challenges related to the implementation of Law No. 11 of 2013, which grants the Right to Information in the Kurdistan Region. He noted that informal channels of information hinder the law’s enforcement, further complicating the situation. This highlights the issue: while journalists may rely on both close and distant relationships with politicians to obtain and verify information, there is no legal framework in place to ensure access to information, nor are there guidelines for law enforcement to facilitate the law. This lack of regulation has created a situation where there is no co-responsibility between the media and the authorities, ultimately preventing the establishment of a professional and independent journalistic environment. As a result, friendships and alliances between journalists and politicians remain inevitable.

4.4. Pressuring Politicians to Speak Out and the Role of Journalists

Journalists, as intermediaries between the people and the government or decision-makers, are expected to press politicians for answers to the issues raised by citizens. The relationship between journalists and politicians plays a crucial role in raising issues and ensuring that the public receives the necessary responses. In this study, four of the researchers emphasized that, when gathering information, following up, and preparing reports or conducting interviews with politicians, Kurdish journalists tend to approach politicians with caution. While they may ask difficult questions, they are careful not to push too hard, often seeking to maintain a cooperative relationship. The Editor-in-Chief of *Drewmedia* observed that some journalists and media outlets, which are closely aligned with politicians, filter their questions through them in advance. These journalists only receive approval from the politicians before directing their questions. He noted that the tone and respect shown to politicians, or the ease of journalists’ questioning, depends largely on the journalist’s ability to compromise and avoid falling into material or spiritual temptations. “It all comes down to the principles of journalism, which are essential for the journalist,” he explained. The Director of the Metro Center for the Protection of Journalists' Rights reinforced this view, stating, “politicians themselves do not participate in some programs without knowing what the questions will be beforehand. In many cases, the questions are provided to them for approval.” This practice illustrates how the act of

“remembering politicians” has become an agenda for journalists and media outlets, whether government-affiliated or not. The nature of the interview—its tone, complexity, and the bluntness or gentleness of the questions—often depends on the level and stature of the politician being interviewed. “Sometimes a journalist may work for party-affiliated media, but still ask tough and impactful questions. Conversely, there may be journalists in opposition media who are unable to pose good questions. At times, politicians are perceptive enough to evade difficult questions. Ultimately, it depends on both the journalists and the politicians themselves.”

4.5 Alliance between Political and Journalistic Interests

When an alliance forms between politicians and journalists, the key question arises: do citizens or the media benefit. Most of the researchers in this study have differing opinions on this matter. The Editor-in-Chief of *Kurd Mojo* expressed skepticism about such alliances, stating, “In certain contexts, the relationship between politicians and journalists is not ideal.” In contrast, the Editor-in-Chief of *Drewmedia* viewed friendships between politicians and journalists as normal, as long as these relationships do not manifest in the journalists’ work. He pointed out that any influence, whether direct or indirect, from politicians on journalists inevitably affects their professional duties. “Now, journalists and politicians are no longer simply friends,” he said. “Politicians have their own journalists and media outlets. What was once a friendship has now turned into a more structured relationship—like that of a master and an agent.” This shift has reached such a critical point that the credibility of the information provided by journalists is now questionable, as political interests rather than adherence to the professional standards of journalism often drive it. The researchers’ opinions reveal that the coalition between journalists and politicians may sometimes benefit both the media and the public. One editor explained, “Due to the financial crisis and unemployment, if you are close to a minister or spokesperson, you can provide the public with accurate details about salary distribution, which is often obscured by hundreds of false statements in the media.” According to the Editor of *Nahanews*, whether this relationship is beneficial depends on the type of information being exchanged. “If the relationship serves to provide information that benefits the people, it is in the public’s interest.” Beyond these perspectives, the Director of the Metro Center for the Protection of Journalists’ Rights emphasized the importance of maintaining the relationship between journalists and politicians, but only on the condition that it does not influence the “writing and messaging of the journalist.”

4.6 Journalists' Professionalism and Political Hegemony

The researchers in this study were divided on the issue of journalists' professionalism in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, particularly when it comes to political influence. Several fundamental factors contribute to these differences, including the division of journalists into parties, ruling and opposition fronts, as well as the prevalence of consumer, shadow, and neutral media outlets. One researcher noted, "Journalists are still dominated by party politics and threats." This means they are unable to perform their professional duties objectively and free from political control. The Editor-in-Chief of *Kurd Mojo* highlighted the difficulty of maintaining journalistic independence, stating, "It is difficult to say... The coalition between journalists and politicians in the Kurdistan Region is so entrenched that it is challenging to find genuine, objective journalists." Editors from *7 Roj* and *NahaNews* agreed, with one adding, "None of the media in the Kurdistan Region or Iraq can operate independently, professionally, or free from political hegemony." Consequently, achieving journalistic professionalism is nearly impossible unless political influence over many professional aspects is significantly reduced. From these views, it becomes clear that journalism, as a "profession in search of headaches" is not an easy field for anyone who wants to work in it, perform their duties without obstruction, and prove their professionalism. There was opposition media from 2000 to 2013, but it was unable to maintain its independence. The Editor-in-Chief of *Drawmedia*, who explains, echoes this view "Politicians have distorted the media market in such a way that only a few media outlets and journalists can defend and remain on the true path of journalism. Promoting this direction will eventually foster genuine journalism and a free, professional media." Despite the challenges and political dominance, there are still diverse voices and perspectives that refuse to conform to the prevailing situation and remain committed to the objectivity of their media content.

4.7 Genuine Professional Journalism and Party Hegemony

The concept of genuine professional journalism, free from the hegemony of the ruling party in the Kurdistan Region, is an issue on which not all researchers agree, and some even refrain from commenting. In this regard, the Editor-in-Chief of *Kurd Mojo* states that if international standards were applied to define a professional and honest journalist—one who does not rely on advertising or take money from anyone—such journalists would be rare in Kurdistan. In contrast, the Editor-in-Chief of *Drewmedia* emphasizes that there are still genuine media outlets and journalists who continue their professional duties on the correct path of journalism,

independent of party influence, and who are more trusted by politicians and their parties. Other researchers contest this view. The Editor-in-Chief of *7 Roj* believes there are few truly independent journalists. He attributes this to the unusual and distorted state of Kurdish media, which has led many to leave the profession or even feel ashamed to identify as journalists. "There are independent and professional journalists, but they are invisible, suppressed, and cannot access publications," he said. This perspective is interpreted differently by the Secretary of the Sulaimani branch of the Kurdistan Union of Journalists, who acknowledges the existence of many genuine journalists in Kurdistan but asserts, "They have not been far from party domination." Meanwhile, the Director of the Metro Center for the Protection of Journalists' Rights believes that while there are still some independent and free media outlets and journalists who operate outside the party agenda, they are fewer compared to previous years.

4.8 Freedoms of Expression and Press

The relationship between journalists and politicians, often cited as an excuse for expanding or restricting freedoms of expression and the press in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, is another issue on which researchers in this study have diverse opinions. Banar Hidayat, Editor-in-Chief of *Nahanews*, believes the issue is two-sided, as journalists and politicians are two interconnected entities constantly in conflict, each trying to impose its own terms. "This depends on the type of information and which party can control it better." Suhaib Ahmad also echoes this view; Editor of *7days* website, who confirms that journalists and the media they represent can do their work freely, but within the political boundaries set by politicians—free enough to avoid violating those boundaries. Karwan Anwar, Secretary of the Sulaimani Branch of the Kurdistan Union of Journalists, highlights that the relationship between journalists and politicians is normal, as long as it does not involve "covering up or hiding each other's flaws or creating suspicious relationships." Therefore, the tensions surrounding freedoms of expression and journalism are directly tied to the fluctuating relationship between journalists and politicians. In this context, Razwan Zalmi the Editor-in-Chief of *Kurd Mojo* website emphasizes: "this relationship has restricted the media's freedoms, as politicians ultimately impose their conditions. At times, it has granted freedom to some media outlets, but only for certain parties and not others." The Editor-in-Chief of Drawmedia, Mohammed Rauf, who offers another interpretation, also shares this opinion. He believes the relationship between politicians and journalists "has a dark side, leading to chaos and the defamation of journalism and media work in the Kurdistan Region." According to his analysis, this relationship has not resulted in fewer

violations or greater freedoms; instead, it has only created a space for media to operate without adhering to ethical and professional standards.

5. CONCLUSION

5.1 Research Results

After analyzing the content of the participants' opinions, this study concludes that the relationship between journalists and politicians has entered a dangerous stage with the rise of digital media and the widespread use of social networks. As a result, politicians to serve their interests have manipulated journalists. The study reached the following conclusions and recommendations:

1. The relationship between journalists and politicians in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region of Iraq has shifted from friendship to an alliance. Currently, this alliance of interests forms the foundation of their relationship.
2. The impact of the relationship between journalists and politicians has been twofold. Sometimes, it has led to the dissemination of accurate information, but at other times, it has confirmed distorted information and false news, negatively affecting professional objectivity. The alliance between journalists and politicians has occasionally resulted in violations of professional media standards, leading to media crimes such as defamation, religious or ideological insults, incitement to commit crimes or terrorism, violation of copyright, invasion of privacy, and damage to social security and cultural traditions.
3. The dominance of politicians over freedoms of expression and the press is high, with the alliance between journalists and politicians in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region developing into a dangerous situation. Many Kurdish media outlets, especially digital media, cannot survive without the continued support of politicians. Often, under political pressure, journalists are forced to publish false, distorted information or articles that violate professional rules and laws. This has, at times, contributed to social instability, tensions between political parties, and the violation of religious, national, and human values. Therefore, the state of freedoms of expression and the press in the Kurdistan Region depends on politicians' openness and their commitment to criticism and critical thinking. The more open and authoritative they are, the more the rights and freedoms of expression and journalism can flourish.

5.2 Research Recommendations

The results of this study further emphasize the significance of the relationship between journalists and politicians. The following recommendations are made:

1. **In terms of professionalism:** There should be closer evaluation and regulation of the alliance between journalists and politicians in the Iraqi Kurdistan Region to ensure ethical practices and transparency.
2. **Methodologically:** Alternative approaches should be employed to collect and analyze data regarding the alliance between journalists and politicians.
3. **Theoretically:** A model or theory should be developed for the relationship between journalists and politicians both inside and outside the Iraqi Kurdistan Region, with an emphasis on identifying the similarities and differences in their dynamics.

REFERENCES

- Abdlaziz, R.A., Ahmed, Y.A., Mohammed, B.A. and Yaqub, K.Q., 2022. The Impact of Oil Price Shocks on Economic Growth-Iraq A Case Study for The Period (1968-2019) Using Symmetric and Asymmetric Co-Integration Analysis. *QALAAI ZANIST JOURNAL*, 7(2), pp.1045-1074.
- Ahmed, B.K., 2023. The Nature Relationship Between Journalists and Politicians and its impact on objectivity. *Journal of Kurdistan for Strategic Studies*, (1).
- Ahmed, Y.A., Abdlaziz, R.A., Yaqub, K.Q. and Mohammed, B.A., 2023. The impact of economic planning in improving the profits of beekeeping fields-Halabja governorate as a model. *University of Kirkuk Journal For Administrative and Economic Science*, 13(1).
- Aivas, S.A, Fatah, N.A, Bayz, H.A, Karem, L.E, Hussein, H.S, Yaqub, K.Q; 2025: Critically Discuss Epistemological Issues by Examining the Claim to ‘Truth’. *International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies*. Vol 5 No 1 (2025), Pp 78-83.

- Aivas, S.A. and Abdulla, M.K., 2021. The Effects of Media Language Using of Comedian Program Audiences of Kurdish Televisions; BEZMÎ BEZM Program at KurdMax TV As A Case Study. *Journal of University of Raparin*, 8(1), pp.144-186.
- Aivas, S.A., 2022. Media development and its indicators; the Iraqi KUrdistan Region between 1991-2021 as an example. *Twejer Journal*, 5(2), pp.895-982.
- Aivas, S.A.W., 2014. Kurdish online journalism: shifting boundaries of privacy rights during the coverage of the 2014 general election campaigns.
- Aivas, S.A.W., 2017. *Kurdish journalism cultures* (Doctoral dissertation, Doctoral dissertation. Nottingham Trent University).
- Ali, B., Nazari, F., Mustafa, K., Yaqub, K.Q. and Alyani, M.A., 2024. Impact of Trade Liberalization on Economic Growth in Developing Countries. *Bulletin of Business and Economics (BBE)*, 13(2), pp.1128-1133.
- Aljazeera. (2018, July 20). French president to fire aide caught beating protesters in May. [Online] Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/7/20/french-president-to-fire-aide-caught-beating-protesters-in-may> (Accessed: 31/03/2024).
- Black, J., 2010. Who is a journalist. *Journalism ethics: A philosophical approach*, pp.103-116.
- Brants, K. and Voltmer, K. eds., 2011. *Political communication in postmodern democracy: Challenging the primacy of politics*. Springer.
- Brewer, D. (n.d.). The relationship between journalists and politicians. [Online] Available at: <https://mediahelpingmedia.org/advanced/the-relationship-between-journalists-and-politicians/> (Accessed: 10/11/2023).
- Hallin, D. C., & Mancini, P., 2004. *Comparing media systems: Three models of media and politics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hassan, K, M., and Aivas, S, A., and 2024. Dramatic assignment of the main characters in the Kurdish documentary; Kurdsat and Kurdmax satellite channels as examples. *Journal of Kurdistan for Strategic Studies*, 1(6). <https://kissrjour.org/index.php/jkss/article/view/263>

- Hussein, H.H.S., 2018. *The role of news media in supporting democracy in Kurdistan Region*. Nottingham Trent University (United Kingdom).
- Hussein, H.H.S., 2019. Student violence" between family reality and societal incitement". *Journal of the Faculty of Arts (JFA)*, 79(4), p.5.
- Hussein, H.H.S., 2022. The effect of Television Drama in imagining women in Kurdish Society. *Journal of Garmian University* 9,(special issue 2), pp.79-91.
- Hussein, H.S., 2022. The Impact of Television Dramas on Women's Image In Kurdish Society. *Journal of Garmian University*. Special issue 2. In 7th *Garmian Scientific Conference* (pp. 79-91).
- Kim, H.S. and Hama-Saeed, M., 2008. Emerging media in peril: Iraqi journalism in the post-Saddam Hussein era. *Journalism Studies*, 9(4), pp.578-594.
- Malling, M., 2019. Power and exchange in formal and informal interaction between journalists and their sources.
- McQuail, D., 2010. *McQuail's mass communication theory* (6th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Meyers, C. ed., 2010. *Journalism ethics: A philosophical approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Mohammed, A., Salih, A. and Raof, H., 2020. Vipulanandan constitutive models to predict the rheological properties and stress–strain behavior of cement grouts modified with metakaolin. *Journal of Testing and Evaluation*, 48(5), pp.3925-3945.
- Nikolchev, S. ed., 2004. *Political Debate and the Role of the Media: The Fragility of Free Speech*. European Audiovisual Observatory.
- Noori, R., Hussein, H.H.S. and Ibrahim, A., 2022. Mental Health Impacts of Using Social Media Among University of Halabja Students (Kurdistan Region of Iraq). *ANFUSINA: Journal of Psychology*, 5(2), pp.105-128.
- Qaradakh, B.H. and Aivas, S.A., 2020. Media Messages, And Its Effect On the Health Awareness of the Citizens, COVID-19, During The Curfew in The Kurdistan Region of Iraq. *Qalaai Zanist Journal*, 5(2), pp.1-35.

- Salih, A.M., 2018. The purification of industrial wastewater to remove heavy metals and investigation into the use of zeolite as a remediation tool.
- Salih, A.M., Williams, C. and Khanaqa, P., 2021. Kinetic Studies of Heavy Metal Removal from Industrial Wastewater by Using Natural Zeolite. *UKH Journal of Science and Engineering*, 5(1), pp.18-25.
- Školkey, A., 2016. Collusion between politicians and journalists in the context of wiretapping of journalists. *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, (2), pp.107-124.
- Sowunmi, F.A., Raufu, A.A., Oketokun, F.O., Salako, M.A. and Usifoh, O.O., 2010. The role of media in curbing corruption in Nigeria. *Research Journal of Information Technology*, 2(1), pp.7-23.
- Syan, K. A. Q., 2017. *Media in an emergent democracy: The development of online journalism in the Kurdistan region of Iraq* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bradford).
- Van Dalen, A., 2021. Rethinking journalist–politician relations in the age of populism: How outsider politicians delegitimize mainstream journalists. *Journalism*, 22(11), pp.2711-2728.
- Van der Goot, E.S., Van der Meer, T.G. and Vliegthart, R., 2021. Reporting on political acquaintances: Personal interactions between political journalists and politicians as a determinant of media coverage. *International Journal of Communication*, 15, p.23.
- Yaqub, K.Q., 2019. *Impact of oil revenue volatility on the real exchange rate and the structure of economy: Empirical evidence of “Dutch disease” in Iraq* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Bradford).
- حسین and ههتاو همهسالج, 2022. کاریگری دراما تهلهفزیونییهکان له ویناکردنی ژن له کۆمهلهگهی کوردیدا. *Journal of Garmian University*, (special issue 2), pp.79-919.
- کاروان محمد حسن and شوان آدم, 2024. التوظيف الدرامي للشخصيات المحورية في الدوكودراما الكوردية (قناتي كوردسات و كوردماكس الفضائيتين أنموذجاً). *Journal of Kurdistan for Strategic Studies*, (6).