

A Thematic Analysis of Online News Stories Framing Democracy in Both Iraqs

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Abstract

This study analyzed online news stories framing *democracy* in two leading news agencies in Iraq. A mixed method approach of combining quantitative and qualitative content analyses was used to examine themes framing *democracy* as well as analyzing topics and sources. The study also examined statistically significant differences between both news agencies for *democracy*. *Democracy*, political human rights, and popular participation, as three themes of *democracy*, appeared most frequently. Elections, corruption, and *democracy* were the most prominent topics covered by both news agencies. Findings show a significant difference statistically in coverage of *democracy* in the online news stories. In terms of sources, the majority of news stories used citizens and local officials as two most frequent sources in regard to the coverage of *democracy*. Findings show that media in Iraq and the Iraqi Kurdistan Region rely heavily on ordinary citizens along with powerful sources while covering themes of *democracy*.

Key words: Iraq, Kurdistan, *Democracy*, Online News, and Content Analysis

Introduction

Framing is the theoretical framework used in this study. Individuals are able to identify, organize, see and explain information through frames (Entman, 1993; Gamson, 1992; Goffman, 1993; Reese, 2007; Scheufele, 1999; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Davis and Kent (2006) argue that frames enable humans to see certain things but not everything. Researchers such as Gitlin (1980) and Tuchman (1978) utilized the theory to evaluate news coverage. "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived

reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Gamson (1989) discusses that a frame shows the meaning of the issue and events. Gamson and Modigliani (1987) state that a media frame is part of story that helps us understand the controversy. Regarding news frames as a way to turn meaningless events into an important one, Tuchman (1978) writes: "The news frame organizes everyday

reality and the news frame is part and parcel of everyday reality” (p. 193). Goffman (1974) argues that since individuals cannot comprehend a complex issue fully, they tend to develop “primary frameworks” to understand the issue better. Framing as both “macro-construct and micro-construct” depicts how individuals, journalists, and communicators deliver information and present features of an issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing, therefore, is valuable tool to explain a complex issue such as *democracy* (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Framing and agenda setting can potentially overlap basing on how researchers study and conceptualize an issue. Scholars refer to both as frame building and agenda building (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Zhou & Moy, 2007). Issue agendas are studied through agenda setting (Cobb & Elder, 1971), and similarly issue agendas and social forces and influences have been identified through frame building (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987; Scheufele, 1999). “The activities of interest groups, policymakers, journalists, and other groups interested in shaming media agenda and frames can have an impact on both the volume and character of news messages about a particular issue (Scheufele & Twksbury, 2007, p. 13).

Source

The term "source" is used in this study only to refer to the persons who journalists turn to obtain information for stories (Berkowitz, 2009). Several scholars have argued the relationship between reporters and their sources. Researchers such as Anderson, Peterson, and David (2005), Blumler and Gurvitch (1981), McQuail (2000), Sallot and Johnson (2006), and Berkowitzs (2009) describe the relationship as a fight for power over public consent and opinion. "Essentially, journalism's paradigm

follows a science-like model, where reporters gather authoritative data and then present it without explicitly taking a side in the discourse," (Berkowitz, 2009, p.103). Ericson (1999) argues that through a source-driven process, journalists act like society's scientists who can produce the truth. "News is, after all, not what journalists think, but what their sources say, and is mediated by news organizations, journalistic routines and conventions, which screen out many of the personal predilections of individual journalists," (Sigal, 1986, p. 29). Depending on known sources to get the story done is easy, but new source must be taken into consideration (Berkowitz, 1987; Berkowitz & Adams, 1990; Brown, Bybee, Wearden, & Straughan, 1987; Gant & Dimmick, 2000; Roshco, 1975). Sources might try use reporters to promote their cause (Gandy, 1982; Molotch & Lester, 1974). News relies on what the sources have to say, and who tells reporters the core news have greater chance to have their voices heard (Curtin, 1999; Gandy, 1982; Turk, 1985). "Over time, much of the news originates from savvy sources who understand reporters' needs and can deliver information regularly; paradoxically, much of what sources deliver overall tends to miss the mark and lose a place in the news," (Berkowitz, 1992 & 2009, p.107). Bias is a controversial dimension of source credibility (Hovland & Weiss, 1951). Attribution of electronic news sources is important in proving credibility of news media (Gaziano & Mcgrath, 1986). However, the issue is the selection of sources. In American press, for instance, information bias stems from selecting elite sources such as government and political officials (Sigal, 1974), and this fact questions media objectivity and news trustworthy in the country. By selecting only political leaders, officials, and powerful people journalists

might become more knowledgeable on a particular issue, yet this reliance on limited sources avoids them in having a deeper insight on the issue (Rouner et al., 1999).

The idea that media should be free from government control and dominance of powerful sources is considered as a strong pillar of *democracy* (Graber, 2003). Therefore, news source diversity is a significant component of free media and *democracy* (Boler, 2010; Choi & James, 2007; McChesney, 1995). News sources under Saddam Hussein era were not diverse, and access to information was only through state and official methods (Ricchairy, 2007). Therefore, studying news sources of both news agencies here to measure the democratic progress in post-Saddam Iraq is valuable.

Democracy

Meanings and definitions of *democracy* are contended and disputed (Berlin, 1969; Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010; Janda, Berry & Goldman, 2008; Seo & Kinsey, 2012). Opinions never come short about *democracy* (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2010), in the United States, (Dryzek & Berejikian, 1993), in the Middle East (Dayton & Kinsey, 2010) or Sweden (Larson, 2001). Seo and Kinsey (2012) and Dryzek and Berejikian (1993) outlined five major discourses for *democracy* that included equality, human rights, voting and participation of citizens and wisdom of electorate. There are five categories of *democracy*: virtues and vices of democratic system, means to achieve *democracy*, obstacles of *democracy*, principal elements of *democracy* and *democracy*/Middle East and Islam (Dayton & Kinsey, 2010; Seo & Kinsey, 2012). The Economist Intelligence Unit (2010) writes: "Free and fair elections and civil liberties are necessary conditions for *democracy*, but they are unlikely to be sufficient

for a full and consolidated *democracy* if unaccompanied by transparent and at least minimally efficient government, sufficient political participation and a supportive democratic political culture," (2010, p.1) According to the *democracy* index of the Economist Intelligence Unit, there are 60 indicators to measure the electoral processes, pluralism, civil liberties, government functions, political participation and political culture. These indicators are used to rank any country on how democratic it is. The Economist's 2013 *democracy* index of 1667 countries, the United States ranks 19, and Iraq ranks 113 and classified as a "hybrid regime" between a flawed *democracy* and an authoritarian regime (The Economist, n.d.).

The Other Iraq

CNN's Arwa Damen (2009), CBS's Bob Simon of "60 minutes" (2009), Washington Post's Liz Sly (2011) and New York Times' Scott Nelson (2007) refer in their stories and photo galleries on Kurdistan Region as "The Other Iraq" for its model of peace, prosperity, and stability in Iraq. Sly (2011, p. 3) describes the other Iraq in her story: "For this isn't the real Iraq, the one where bombs go off and people are assassinated and the electricity is almost never on. This is Kurdistan, the northern enclave that broke away from Saddam Hussein's Iraq after the 1990-91 Persian Gulf War and secured virtual autonomy from Baghdad following the U.S. invasion in 2003. It's mostly safe, and much of it is beautiful, in some places spectacularly so. It's populated not by Arabs but by Kurds, who claim European descent, speak their own language and are possessed of an unqualified love for all Americans." Simon (2009) writes about the other Iraq this way: "When visiting Kurdistan, one can see nation-building wherever one looks—Kurds are building their country day by day.

There are more cranes here than minarets and there's a run on cement. A new mall with 8,000 shops and stalls is going up. So is an apartment complex known as "Dream City," in which some of the units are selling for \$1 million. A giant bowling alley is almost finished, and an opera house is not far behind. What's behind the boom? Security." The other Iraq is now a leading force in the front battle with IS in the north of Iraq. It also helps the Iraqi army in fighting with IS. While the U.S. government favors this part of Iraq, the U.S. administration label some other Kurdish groups as terrorists who fight for their rights in Turkey, Iran, and Syria (Filkins, 2014). The other Iraq has a website called "theotheriraq.org" where it defines the IKR as such (2010): "Have you seen the Other Iraq? It's spectacular. It's peaceful. It's joyful. Fewer than two hundred US troops are stationed here. Arabs, Kurds and westerners all vacation together."

Media in Iraq

After overthrowing Saddam Hussein in 2003, media in Iraq, tightly controlled by the state, witnessed remarkable changes. The transformation was developed by the Iraqi journalists who had been deprived from press freedom for three decades under the Iraqi dictatorial regime (Ricchiardi, 2007). Ricchiardi (2007) writes in his reports about the transformation: "Overnight, Iraq's media landscape blossomed into one of the most diverse and unfettered press environments in the Middle East. Privately owned news outlets grew from zero to more than 200 in a rush to meet demands for uncensored information. And despite formidable chaos over press freedom, Iraqi citizens suddenly had access to a varied menu of information unimaginable under Saddam Hussein." However, the new dream of a free press lived shortly in Iraq and the IKR. The media outlets provided psychological groundwork for bitter

conflict between the ethno-sectarian groups (Al-Marashi, 2007). "Iraq's state-run system failed to offer a neutral media space to all of the candidates and parties running in the election, despite a \$500 million U.S. effort to make the Iraqiya a national public service system," (Amos, 2010, p. 7). Reports and researches assert that the judiciary system in Iraq and the IKR has been used against the media. "Iraqi news organizations continue to be plagued by lawsuits brought by the highest powers in government to intimidate and, in some cases, close them down," (Recchiardy, 2007, p. 75). Recchiardy (2007) writes: As protests swept the country, Iraq's security forces turned on them with a vengeance. Nalia, Kurdistan's first independent TV station, had been filming unrest in Sulaymaniyah when 50 masked gunmen raided the studio, destroying equipment and setting the building ablaze. Three days later, men in uniforms, some wearing a skull-and-crossbones insignia on their helmets, stormed the Baghdad headquarters of the Journalistic Freedoms Observatory, a prominent Iraqi press freedom group. Among materials stolen: archives that documented abuses against the media. (p.79). Kim and Hama-Saeed (2008) interviewed 22 Iraqi and Kurdish journalists to examine press freedom and press system in Iraq including the IKR. They found that media in Iraq does not operate anymore under the previous authoritarian system under Saddam Hussein. Iraqi and Kurdish journalists are free to write about several social, religious, and economical taboos that were forbidden during the previous regime; this signals press freedom improving in Iraq. However, Iraqi journalists cannot write about political leaders, the current government, and certain type of religious issues (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008). "Although most Iraqi media appear to be without formal censorship",

journalists confront physical, legal, and political threats that may “push them backwards toward an authoritarian press system” instead a libertarian press system (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008, p. 591).

Research questions

Bas News Agency (BNA)

Despite the Iraqi media stalemate, hope never fades. The *BNA* was established in June 2011 in Erbil. A former Kurdish journalist Botan Tahseen owns it. *BNA* is a private, independent, commercially dependent news agency that tries to provide readers as objectively and accurately as possible (Bas, n.d.). The news agency is free from political, sectarian, and religious affiliations (*BNA*, n.d.). *BNA* readership has been dramatically increased in the last two years to 53 percent; it was 10 percent in January 2012 (Bas, n.d.). *BNA* policy is to publish political and economic social news professionally, and its future goal is to establish partnership with other international news agencies to provide world media outlets accurate and objective content (Bas, n.d.).

National Iraqi News Agency (NINA)

The *NINA* was established on October 15, 2005, when the ethno-sectarian conflict in Iraq was at its peak. *NINA* is a professional and neutral news organization, and operates disregarding political, ethnic, and sectarian conflicts (National, n.d.). The United Nations *Democracy* Fund (UNDEF) funded *NINA* since its start date up to May 2006 when the news agency became self-funding, and its content was limited only to its subscribers (National, n.d.). *NINA*'s subscribers since then include local newspapers such as *Al-Mu'tamar*, *Al-Adala*, *Al-Muwatin*, *Al-Umma* and *Addustour*, international newspapers like *Al-Bayan UAE newspaper*, radio stations such as BBC and Um Al-Qura radio, TV channels such as Al-hurra, Baghdad, Al-Furat, news

agencies like the Italian News Agency, embassies such as the German and Chinese embassies and international organizations like the UN Assistance Mission for Iraq UNAMI (National, n.d.). *NINA* (2005) describes itself on its website as such, "Amid an atmosphere of fear, terror and the sounds of explosions and violence that raged over Baghdad in 2005 the National Iraqi News Agency emerged to provide Iraqi media with an outstanding model of professional news reporting and journalism ethics as well as independence and neutral news coverage based on credibility, speed and not being influenced by any sector, party, state or nation. It was on the 15th of October 2005, on the day when the referendum on the Constitution was held, “ (p. 1). This study examines how these two media outlets frame *democracy* in their online stories. These news agencies were selected for this study on the grounds that they claim they are independent, neutral, and professional. The researcher is interested to learn whether and how thematic views are different based on the media situation in both the IKR and Iraq. Since few studies have been conducted in this area, the researcher poses these questions:

RQ1: What are the prominent thematic aspects of news stories that frame *democracy* in both *BNA* and *NINA* news agencies?

RQ2: What are the most prominent topics in the news stories of both news agencies?

RQ3: What type of sources have both news agencies used in the news stories?

RQ4: Are there statistically significant differences between the stories from both agencies with regard to prominent themes and topics featured in the stories?

Method

Content analysis was conducted to answer the research questions. Content analysis is a “technique

that is based on measuring the amount of something and ... it is a means of trying to learn something about people” (Berger, 1998, p. 23). Reinard (1994) stated that content analysis could be a quantitative study of articles, documents and pictures. Content analysis is used for the present study because it can quantify messages and gives the reader a summary as it is not limited to variables used (Neuendorf, 2002). Berger (1991) said “content analysis is a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of something in a representative sampling of some mass-mediated popular art form” (p.25). Weber (1990) defines it as “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 9). Since this study looks for content that reflect *democracy* variables, content analysis is relevant here as Neuendorf (2002) argues that content in the form of writing has predictable effects.

Sampling

Each of *BNA* and *NINA* has at least 20 news stories per day. The researcher selected 15 days randomly. These are the dates: May 6, 2013; May 13, 2013; May 28, 2013; June 11, 2013; June, 25, 2013; July 9, 2013; July 14, 2013; July 29; 2013; August 5, 2013; August 29, 2013, September 1, 2013; September 19, 2013; September 28, 2013; October, 3 2013; October 10; 2013. The author selected these dates because there was a continuous major political debate on the upcoming elections and changing power shift by the Iraqi lawmakers. Politicians in general thought that Iraq’s Prime Minister Nouri Maliki violated human rights and derailed from the democratic path of the new Iraq (Sadah, 2013). A total of 612 news stories were obtained on the website of both news agencies (basnews.net and *NINA*news.com). *BNA* (N= 281) and *NINA* (N=331). The researcher looked for only political news stories and ignored opinion pieces and

social, cultural and financial news stories for the aim of the study as it focuses on *democracy*. Each story is one unit of analysis. The reason that these two online news services have been chosen belongs to the fact that they are not state-run and define themselves as neutral, free and professional news agencies.

Coding scheme

The researcher coded thematic features of the stories. For thematic features, the researcher, besides his preliminary analysis of 50 stories within the sample, relied on categories based on his review of literature on *democracy*. These are the 10 aspects of *democracy* that were measured: (1) popular participation, (2) *Freedom of speech/press*, (3) freedom of religion, (4) justice, (5) political human rights, (6) economic and social human rights, (7) , (8) education, (9) diversity, and (10) "other". Kinsey and Seo (2010) define *popular participation* as the idea that everyone has the same right in a *democracy* to make decisions in regard to their future. According to them *freedom of speech/press* means people are free to express their opposition, ideas and opinions to the government. *Freedom of religion* means citizens are free to choose their religion. Justice is more related to the rule of law than individual position. *Political human rights* refer to individuals having rights to participate in political life disregarding discrimination or repression. *Economic and social rights* mean equal access to health and housing. War and peace includes those stories that focus on *democracy* as a means to promote human security. *Education* refers to the role of informed citizens as components of *democracy*. *Diversity* means multiple ethnicities, lifestyles and religions. "Other" means the above themes were not found in the news stories. Each prominent aspect of *democracy* featured in each story was coded as a nominal variable (1 = popular participation; 2 =

Freedom of speech/press; 3 = freedom of religion; 4 = justice; 5 = political human rights; 6 = economic and social human rights; 7 = *democracy*; 8 = education; 9 = diversity; and, 10 = other). The author coded topics in each story relying on the definition of the democratic variables used by Kinsey and Seo (2010). (1) *Elections*; (2) *Corruption*; (3) *Internal conflicts*; (4) *External conflicts*; (5) *Services*; (6) *Terrorism*; (7) *Democracy*; (8) *Economy*; (9) "other". Elections refer to issues related to voting, electoral campaigns, fraud, electoral preparations and the electoral process. *Corruption* is related to any political, administrative, financial and ethical corruption involving officials and politicians. *Internal conflicts* refer to ethnic and sectarian deadlock between Shiites and Sunnis, Arabs and Kurds, and amongst other Iraqi sects and ethnic groups. It also means political row amongst the political parties over power, resources and land. *External conflicts* refer to any issues related to the conflict between Iraq and its neighbors as well as Iraq and the international powers such as the United States, Britain and other European countries. *Services* stand for the provision of basic services for Iraqi people such as electricity, water, roads, housing units, health, education and etc. *Terrorism* refers to any issues to the safety, security and calmness of the cities in Iraq as well as any terrorist threats, attacks and turmoil undergoing in the country. *Democracy* is based on the themes defined in the theme section. Economy/rebuilding refers to the economic booming, oil contracts, giant projects in the rebuilding process, and *other* means the above topics were not found in the news stories. The author also coded sources in the news stories. 1) *Reporter*; 2) *citizens*; 3) *local officials*; 4) *international officials such as the US and European officials*; and 5) *neighboring officials* such as Iran, Turkey, and Syria.

Reporter refers to the journalist or the reporter that wrote the story. *Citizens* refer to any ordinary Iraqi and Kurdish citizens used as sources in news stories. Ordinary citizens refer to people who don't practice any public, governmental, and political positions. *Local officials* mean any Iraqi and Kurdish officials inside the country such as government and political officials, political religious officials, and law enforcement forces' officials. *International officials* mean any official from outside the country such as US and European officials as well as officials in the neighboring countries used as sources for a story. The sources were coded either quoted or paraphrased through out the articles. The researcher quoted the sources as long as they had new information to tell. Once a source was repeated, either quoted or paraphrased, the researcher discarded them if did not add new content.

Inter-coder reliability

To test the reliability of the coding system, two coders outside the journalism school at The University of Kansas were trained. One was a female graduate student from the international studies and the other was a male graduate student from social sciences school at the same university. Each coder was given 12 percent of the sample. The inter-coder reliability was 89 using Cohen kappa. Analysis was based on the coding performed by the primary coders.

Results

The analysis of 612 online news stories of *BNA* and *NINA* yielded several interesting findings. The researcher first reports on the most prominent thematic aspects of news stories that framed *democracy* in *BNA* and *NINA* (RQ1), then presents findings on the most prominent topics that framed *democracy* (RQ2). The researcher, then, shows what

sources do both news agencies used in the analyzed news stories (RQ3) and finally he shows statistically significant differences of most prominent themes and topics (RQ4).

Frame. Table 1 summarizes frequencies of the themes. Of the 10 theme categories – popular participation, freedom of speech/press, freedom of religion, justice, political human rights, economic and social rights, democracy, education, diversity, and other – democracy was the most prominent theme in the news stories of both news agencies (19.4%), followed by political human rights (16.7%), popular participation (15.7%), freedom of speech/press (14.9%), education (9.6%), economic social rights (8.8%), freedom of religion (7.7%), justice (4.6%), diversity (2.0%), and other (.7%).

Table 1: Shows frequency of themes covered in both news agencies

Percent	Count	
19.4	119	Democracy
16.7	102	Political human rights
15.7	96	Popular participation
14.9	91	Freedom of speech
9.6	59	Education
8.8	54	Economic social rights
7.7	47	Freedom of religion
4.6	28	Justice
2	12	Diversity
0.7	4	Other
100%	612	Total

Topic. Table 2 shows the results for the most prominent topics category and top three topics category. Elections (21.1%) were the most salient, followed by corruption (17.2%), democracy (15.8%), internal conflicts (14.2%), terrorism (11.4%), external conflicts (8.2%), services (6.4), economy (3.1%), and other (2.6%). There was no election at the time, yet having one to replace Iraq’s then prime minister was always on the table of the lawmakers for discussion.

Table 2: Shows frequency of topics covered in both news agencies

Percent	Count	
21.1	129	Elections
17.2	105	Corruption
15.8	97	Democracy
14.2	87	Internal conflicts
11.4	70	Terrorism
8.2	50	External conflicts
6.4	39	Services
3.1	19	Economy
2.6	16	Other
100%	612	Total

Sources. Table 3 shows the frequency of each source category. Out of 5 sources, citizens are the top one (42.3%), followed by local officials (26.6%), reporter (20.9%), officials in neighboring countries (6%), and international officials (4.2%).

Table 3: Shows frequency of sources used in both news agencies

Percent	Count	
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42.3	259	Citizen
26.6	162	Local officials
20.9	128	Reporter
6	37	Officials in neighboring countries
4.2	26	International officials

Research question 4 asks if there is statistical difference of themes and topics covered by both news agencies. A Chi-Square test was performed and a significant difference was found between the frequency of themes and topics in *BNA* and *NINA*. Table 4 shows the statistical significant difference of themes covered by both news agencies: $X^2 (9) = 151.851, p <.001$. The statistical significant difference of *democracy*, which is the first most prominent theme: *BNA* is 32% and *NINA* is 11%. The statistical significant difference of political human rights, which is the second most prominent feature: *BNA* (20.3%) and *NINA* (11.8%). The statistical significant difference of popular participation, which is the third most prominent theme: *BNA* (23.6%) and *NINA* (14.5%). Table 4 shows the rest of statistical significance difference of themes.

Table 4: Shows statistical significant difference of themes in both news agencies

Themes		News Agency	
		<i>BNA</i>	<i>NINA</i>
	Count	98	21
<i>Democracy</i>	Percent	32%	11%
	Count	72	30
Political human rights	Percent	20.30%	11.80%

	Count	70	26
Popular participation	Percent	23.60%	14.60%
	Count	60	31
<i>Freedom of speech</i>	Percent	25.70%	4.50%
	Count	31	28
Education	Percent	55.40%	44.6
Economic social rights	Count	30	24
	Percent	10.70%	6.30%
Freedom of religion	Count	24	23
	Percent	8.50%	6.90%
Justice	Count	18	10
	Percent	6.40%	2.40%
Diversity	Count	9	3
	Percent	3.20%	9%
Other	Count	1	3
	Percent	0.30%	1.10%
Total	Percent	100%	100%

$X^2 (9) = 151.851, p <.001$

Table 5 shows the statistical significant difference of topics covered by both news agencies: $X^2 (8) = 97.781, p <.001$. The statistical significant difference of *elections*, which is the first most prominent topic: *BNA* is 30% and *NINA* is 14%. The statistical significant difference of corruption, which is the second most prominent topic: *BNA* (13.20%) and *NINA* (64.80%). The statistical significant difference of *democracy*, which is the third most prominent topic: *BNA* (19.60%) and *NINA* (13%). Table 5 shows the rest of statistical significance difference of topics.

Table 5: Shows statistical significant difference of topics in both news agencies

Topics		News Agency	
		<i>BNA</i>	<i>NINA</i>
	Count	83	46
Elections	Percent	30%	14%
	Count	37	68
Corruption	Percent	13.20%	64.80%
	Count	55	42
<i>Democracy</i>	Percent	19.60%	13%
	Count	53	34
Internal Conflicts	Percent	18.90%	10.30%
	Count	36	34
Terrorism	Percent	12.80%	10.30%
	Count	2	48
External Conflicts	Percent	70.00%	8.20%
	Count	7	32
Services	Percent	2.50%	9.70%
	Count	8	11
Economy	Percent	2.80%	3.30%
	Count	2	14
Other	Percent	0.70%	4.20%
Total	Percent	100.00%	100.00%

$X^2(8) = 97.781, p < .001$

Discussion

This study focuses on media behavior, which may be of interest to scholars in the fields of international communication, public policy, *democracy*, and communication.

Democracy was the most prominently featured frame category in the 612 news stories analyzed in both news agencies (Table 1). It was also the third prominent topic covered by both news agencies (Table 2). This indicates that media in Iraq and the IKR do pay attention to *democracy* despite the lack of a full libertarian press system in both regions. It also means that reporters, who had been deprived

from free press for three decades under the former Iraqi regime (Ricchiardi, 2007), cover themes of *democracy*, although law has been used against the media, in some cases closes them down (Amos, 2010). This finding means that the Iraqi and Kurdish media are concerned about *democracy*. It also shows at least one strong side of the Iraqi and Kurdish media as Awad, Eaton and Rassam write that the Iraqi media might not be free, professional, and pluralistic; nonetheless it has real strengths. Therefore, this is a strength and signals improvement. Results show that *BNA* covers *democracy* as a theme and as a topic more than *NINA* does (Table 4 & 5). This indicates that the Kurdish media is more concerned about *democracy* than the Iraqi media, though media in both places witness big challenges (RWB, 2010). Hanson (2013) writes one of the reasons the U.S. invaded Iraq was to save the IKR and make sure it has a successful American friend in the Middle East. The IKR is now called “the other Iraq” for its progress, stability and prosperity. This plays an effective role to push the Kurdish media to be more concerned about *democracy* than any other place in Iraq.

Freedom of speech, as a theme, and Elections, as a topic, both have received much attention by both news agencies. The former comes as the fourth most prominent theme and the latter comes as the first most prominent topic (Table 1 & 2). Both tell the reason why the Iraqi and Kurdish media are concerned about *democracy* because both features are main principles of *democracy* (Berlin, 1969). *Freedom of speech* reflects the situation of journalists in the IKR and Iraq because according to RWB (2010), Iraq is not safe for journalists. Findings show that *BNA* covered both categories more than *NINA* (Table 4 & 5). This means that journalists in

Kurdistan pay more attention to elections and *Freedom of speech*.

Political human right is the second most prominent theme, but findings indicate that *BNA* covered it more than *NINA* did (Table 1 & 4). This reflects the political process in the IKR and Iraq since there is a newly born strong opposition group in the IKR called Gorran (which means Change in English), which focuses mostly on the political rights; whereas the Iraqi political process has witnessed a deadlock, making the political parties almost forget the political rights and focus mostly on power instead (Kurdistan Region, 2010).

Popular participation is the third most significant theme covered by *BNA* and *NINA* and the former covered it more than the latter (Table 1 & 4). This also reflects the same political process discussed above. The *BNA* news stories paid attention to what the new opposition says to the Kurdish power in regard to the popular participation. *Education* did not get much coverage in both news agencies, but results show significant difference statistically as *BNA* covered education more than *NINA* did (Table 1 & 4). Given the unstable situation in Iraq due to explosions and terrorist attacks on a daily basis, the educational process is not on the right track. However, the process has not received much coverage.

Economic social rights and *freedom of religion* did not get much coverage, too. Results show slight statistical difference of both categories mentioned in the *BNA* and *NINA* news stories (Table 1 & 4). Economy in Iraq and the IKR is booming, but that has not reflected in the coverage of both news agencies, which are two leading news wires in Iraq. *Justice*, too, received less attention and coverage in the news stories in both news agencies, but results

show a significant difference statistically (Table 1 & 4). Diversity was the least prominent theme covered by *BNA* and *NINA* and there was a slight significant difference (Table 1 & 4). Iraq is a large diverse country, which consists of several ethnic groups, but that fact does not reflect in the coverage of both news agencies.

Internal and external conflicts constitute 22.4 percent of the coverage of both news agencies and results show that the Kurdish news agency pays more attention to these conflicts than the Iraqi news agency (Table 2 & 5). This highly reflects the political life in Iraq and the IKR, as there are internal conflicts among the local political parties over power and resources. On one hand, it also reflects solid external conflicts between Iraq and Iraqi Kurdistan over resources, demography, military, and borders, and external conflicts between Iraq and Turkey and other neighboring countries, on the other. The statistical difference is due to the fact that the IKR is relatively more stable, making the media to be more concerned about conflicts that hurt the stability the region enjoys since the 2003 US-led Iraq invasion.

Both *BNA* and *NINA* paid much attention to *Terrorism* and its coverage constitutes 11.4 percent. Results show slight statistical difference (Table 2 & 5). Iraq suffers from terrorist attacks and everyday explosions, while the IKR enjoys a relative stability. Iraq's instability and turmoil have also reflected in the coverage. *Services*, as a topic, received attention and have a strong relation to corruption, which is the second most prominent topic in the news stories. Part of the corruption in Iraq and Kurdistan is in the services projects. Citizens were a big part of the sources used by both news agencies (Table 3), because it was mostly citizens talking about services and corruption in the country. *Economy* is the least

prominent topic covered by both news agencies. This reflects the limitation that this study has because the sample did not include economic and financial news stories.

Citizens constitute 42.3 percent of the sources used by both news agencies (Table 3). This means that citizens, to a large extent, have a say in the media and in the democratic process in Iraq, specifically on corruption, elections, *democracy*, political human rights, popular participation, and terrorism. Local officials have a large presence (26.6%) in telling the public what's going on, specifically on internal and external conflicts, elections, political human rights, and terrorism. Reporters themselves, to a large extent (20.9%), have a say on the themes of *democracy* and topics such as elections, corruption, internal and external conflicts. Officials in neighboring countries such as Iran, Turkey and Syria constitute six percent of the *BNA* and *NINA* news stories, specifically in the topics such as internal and external conflicts, terrorism, and economy. International officials, specifically U.S. officials, constitute 4.2 percent out of 5 sources used in the news stories. The U.S. officials were often used as sources on the themes of *democracy* and topics such as terrorism, stability, elections, and internal and external conflicts.

Citizens constituting 42.3 percent of sources used by both news agencies is a significant finding as it counters previous research done in this area. This finding suggests news source diversity in Iraq, which is a key component of free media and *democracy* according to scholars such as Boler (2010), Choi and James (2007), and McChesney, 1995). This high rate of citizens as news sources posits that both Iraqi and Kurdish news agencies don't rely much on officials and powerful sources, which is common in many parts of the world such as the United States and

Europe. It also shows that the Iraqi media has witnessed a change comparing to the media under Saddam Hussein when citizens were not entitled to talk in the media.

This study is not beyond limitations. The sample included only political news stories. This means the researcher did not focus on the financial, cultural, social and economic sections found on the website of both news agencies. Future research may analyze all the sections together to have a better image of the themes of *democracy* covered by the Iraqi media. The population contains two news agencies: one in Iraqi Kurdistan, the other in Iraq. Another useful research study might be including more media outlets to have a better and thorough understanding of which part of Iraq is more concerned about *democracy*.

This study concludes that Iraqi and Kurdish media frame *democracy* in their coverage, which is significantly different from one another. The Kurdish news agency, *BNA*, reflects more the policy of the Kurdistan Region, which is heavily focused on *democracy*. The Iraqi news agency, *NINA*, though it describes itself as a step towards *democracy*, focused less on *democracy*, and that reflects the Iraq's legislation, which is heavily focused on Islamic rules. The coverage of *democracy* in *BNA* reflects the term "the other Iraq" to Kurdistan Region for its steps towards *democracy*, peace, prosperity and progress. Nevertheless, the coverage of *democracy* does not mean that Iraq or Kurdistan is a democratic country or Region, but it's important to the fact that media covers it, even though the country is not a safe place for journalists.

The U.S. officials and officials in neighboring countries have a say in the democratic process in Iraq. This tells media scholars and professionals in the areas of international communication and public

policy that the new Iraqi media, though operates under dangerous status, do not only use powerful local officials as sources, but also to a great and effective extent they involve citizens in the democratic process.

This also suggests that media in Iraq involves citizens talking about *democracy* in media, and have a say in the democratic process in Iraq. This alone is a huge achievement comparing to the media in Saddam's era when the press system was authoritarian and press freedom was absent (Kim & Hama-Saeed, 2008). This finding also suggests that Iraq's media have improved in regard to using powerful sources, and this diversity in sources implies that the Iraqi media do not go after the U.S. model. Having two private news agencies talking about *democracy* suggest that Iraq's media model is on the early path towards privatized, neo-liberal model of news media.

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