Political Communication and the Media in Kurdistan

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Abstract

This thesis examines how the Kurdish media communicate political issues in relation to corruption, reform, government performance, and citizens' trust. In particular it investigates how young people understand and respond to political issues across the media and how their social and political backgrounds affect their evaluation of the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process. This investigation is combined with how media professionals view editorial policy of news coverage of political issues and freedom to access the public sector.

This thesis employs a combination of methods: content and framing analysis to examine five media platforms; focus groups, interviews and semi-structured interviews to elicit the views of young people and media editors; a thematic analysis is employed to assess the data gathered from both young people and media editors.

Overall, the findings indicated that both the ruling party's media and the opposition media, particularly the television channels, focus on using magnifying frames and localising frames in their coverage of the political issues with varying degrees. Each of them reflects the same reality differently which in turn leads to the viewers and readers become divided into two categories. This diversity of framing news coverage is due to the media discourse of the ruling party and opposition media and the political background of the young people as well. This research has revealed the need, especially from young people, for the establishment of a national media that strike a balance between the opposition and ruling parties and offer coverage of political issues without the direct influence of political parties.

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Contents

List of acronyms and abbreviations

KRG: Kurdistan Regional Government

KR: Kurdistan Regional

KNA: Kurdistan National Assembly

PUK: Patriotic Union of Kurdistan

KDP: Kurdistan Democratic Party

KIU: Kurdistan Islamic Union

IGK: Islamic Group of Kurdistan

KSP: Kurdish Socialist Party

KCP: Kurdistan Communist Party

IMK: Islamic Movement of Kurdistan

UN: United Nations

GK TV: The Television of the Kurdish People

KNN TV: Kurdish News Network Television

IFG: Iraqi Federal Government

ICP: Iraqi Communist Party

TPK: Toilers Party of Kurdistan

USA: United States of America

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Chapter one

1. Introduction

1.1 Political Contexts

This study concerns political communication and investigates the relationship between young people and political news across the media in Iraqi Kurdistan. Young people in this thesis are those aged between 18 and 28, as they have received very little attention from the main political parties although they constitute one of the largest sections of the overall population (Saber, 2015). A large proportion of this category suffers from unemployment while the other group who are university students, are not optimistic about the future particularly in terms of finding jobs (Abdullah, 2013). Since the two political parties in power, namely the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) have monopolised the public sector, the Peshmerga and Security forces, as well as the economy, they have succeeded in controlling the larger part of society through clientelism (Qani and Fatah 2012). In other words, the two political parties have used public funds, jobs and posts to buy people's votes and loyalty. The clientelism system exists when a kind of deal is struck between those in power and clients in society who agree to exchange benefits. In this regard, Bardhan and Mookherjee (2011) note that clientelism is associated with the political parties in power and they argue that 'Clientelism refers to strategic transfers made by political parties and governments to poor and disadvantaged groups as a means of securing their votes, in an effort to consolidate political power' (2011, p 2).

After the fall of the Saddam regime in 2003, the international economic sanctions were lifted which led to the Iraqi budget increasing rapidly as well as that of Kurdistan which receives 17% of the Iraqi budget (Salih, 2015). The two political parties started to appoint people and distribute jobs and posts on the basis of clientelism, which in turn fuelled unemployment amongst the new young generation who had just graduated. This category felt that although they had qualifications they had little chance of securing jobs, since a large number of people had been been appointed during 2003 - 2009 despite having no qualifications.

Alongside this, the opposition parties became stronger particularly following the emergence of the Gorran Movement which means "change" in English and which appeared formally in the elections in July 2009. The Gorran Movement was led by Nawshirwan Mustafa, the deputy leader of the PUK party, which he left arguing that he could not fight corruption and introduce reforms because the party would not allow him, therefore he established firstly a media company and then the Gorran party. According to many political observers and researchers, the real opposition party emerged from this election as they believed it was an important period of transition in the political and civic life of Kurdistan (Haji, 2015). This party, before announcing itself, established a media company in 2007 called Wsha (meaning "word" in English) which mainly focused on corruption and reform by arguing for change in the power structure. The Gorran Movement mostly relies on its media, particularly *KNN TV* and the *Sbeiy* website, to deliver its political discourse to people and remains focused on young people as they have received little attention compared to other demographic categories. The traditional political parties, such as the political parties in power, relied on recruiting large numbers to their membership on the basis of clientelism. In turn, this meant the two main parties did not focus on the media in elections before 2009 because they already controlled the people. By contrast Gorran relied on the media because it had no budget to buy votes and was not in a position to use jobs and posts to buy support. From this standpoint the media began to play a large role in political communication as Gorran pushed the two political parties to give importance to the media in the political communication process. Therefore, this study is important because it seeks to investigate this phenomenon by examining the role of the media in political communication particularly regarding young people who are targeted by the media of the opposition and ruling parties who both recognise the importance of gaining favour with this demographic sector.

In Kurdistan, there is no national broadcasting service as the media is controlled by the main political parties. The media platforms in this thesis were selected according to their ownership, since the political television channels are monopolised by the political parties. In this sense the two channels, namely *GK TV,* the main political TV, is owned by the PUK which is one of the main political parties in power, while *KNN TV,* the opposition political TV, is owned by the Gorran Movement which is also the main

opposition party. Alongside the two television channels, this thesis selected three websites, the online versions of former or existing printed publications, namely *Xendan,* owned by the PUK and the *Sbeiy* website which is owned by the Gorran Movement. Both these websites formerly had a print version but now they only retain an online presence. The final website is *Awena* which is independent and still has a print version, but this research focuses on its online output in order to maintain coherence with the other two websites and because online media have become more popular than print media. In this thesis, the print media were excluded because they are faltering, for example both *Xendan* and *Sbeiy* had a print version but they were closed down due to their loss of popularity. Furthermore, this thesis excludes social media because the Internet service in Kurdistan is unstable and not available everywhere as well being expensive compared to people's incomes. This thesis investigates the political discourse across the Kurdish media and how young people understand and respond to this discourse, in particular relating to the four issues: corruption, reforms, government performance and citizens' trust. These four political issues are the most important in people's minds and interests, therefore they are becoming daily subjects across the media (Warty, 2008; Hussain, 2015).

This thesis seeks to investigate the impact of the media in shaping Kurdish young people's attitudes, principally in relation to corruption, reform, citizens' trust and government performance. Currently all media platforms in Kurdistan are attempting to focus their political communication on young people's concerns and aspirations. Consequently, the thesis seeks to evaluate the media news coverage of the four political issues by adopting a framing analysis as a qualitative approach for analysing the textual news and by using content analysis to provide indicators for identifying the agenda of the five media platforms studied. Beside this, in-depth interviews were conducted with media professionals representing the five media platforms to investigate how they cover the political issues and to what extent they can access the public sector to obtain information about these issues. This thesis investigates how young people understand and respond to this media content through conducting focus groups with representative participants. Furthermore it uses in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews to examine how young people view the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process.

1.2 The Rationale of the Research Project

Decision-making in Kurdistan is conducted within the two main political parties rather than in the government departments (Qani and Fattah, 2012). Besides, the opposition parties have been unable to exert pressure on the the ruling parties who can buy the affiliation of people through use of public finance. The economy of Iraq when began to grow and it led to an increase in people's income, for example the monthly salary of the average employee increased from 200 to 600 US Dollars by 2008 (Muhamed, 2008). Employees' salaries increased rapidly, particularly in the public sector although the price of basic needs rose as well (Nury, 2012). However, at the same time, unemployment increased especially amongst young people because the two governing political parties deprived many people of government jobs, whilst giving these jobs to their own followers in order to buy their votes (Hussain, 2015). In an interview in the *Hawlati* Newspaper with Ayoub Barzani, a Kurdish political analyst of the reform process, the government did not have any plans in place to tackle corruption and introduce reforms as the government itself was corrupt (*Hawlat*i 2012a). Subsequently the opposition parties became much stronger, particularly the Gorran which was established some months before the election in 2009. Gorran is based on the promise to change the system in Kurdistan and its workers are mostly volunteers, whereas the members of the other parties receive a salary, particularly those in the ruling parties. At the same time the opposition parties became stronger because many people, particularly young people, attempted to find a job in different sectors instead of relying on financial support from the ruling parties. Young people started to support the opposition parties in order to enable the opposition parties to take power, introduce reforms and fight corruption. During the last election campaign the Gorran Movement Party relied on the media, particularly *KNN TV* and the *Sbeiy* website, to focus primarily on its agenda for political change, while the ruling parties depended on buying votes by using public funds. The opposition parties focused on fighting corruption and introducing reforms if they were to win the election, whereas the ruling parties argued that the Kurdish people should support them because they had struggled against Saddam's regime in the past and only they were able to keep Kurdistan safe. Alongside this, the ruling parties

argued that the Kurds needed to solve their problems with Baghdad before introducing reforms in the KRG (Hussain, 2015).

The Gorran Movement has introduced a new model of doing politics in Kurdistan which relies on the media and this is important as it has fewer active members compared to the other parties, particularly the ruling parties (Hussain, 2015).) The Gorran party's media remains largely focused on portraying corruption and the government's performance in a negative light and this appeals to young people who are the main demographic category affected negatively by the government. Consequently the opposition and independent media give importance to young people as their main target audience. From this stand point, the media has become much more effective in handling political communication and analysing the political process, particularly the opposition and independent media.

The hypothesis of this study is that economic growth in Kurdistan has led to a lack of social justice due to government corruption and that young people are the demographic group most affected by this phenomenon. This perceived lack of social justice has led to the formation of an effective political movement supported by young Kurds, and this is correlated with the emergence of a stronger opposition and independent media.

1.3 Objectives of the Research

This study investigates how Kurdish media address the four political issues in relation to corruption, reform, government performance, and citizens' trust. This thesis has selected these four political issues as they receive intensive coverage by the media, particularly by the opposition and independent media due to continuing government corruption and its poor performance. Hussain (2015) argues that corruption in Kurdistan is due to clientelism which is mainly practised by the two political parties in power. Therefore this thesis adopts the theoretical assumption that the clientelism model is a major causality factor which fuels corruption. It also aims to interview media professionals in order to evaluate how they view the coverage of political issues and to what extent they can access the public sector to obtain information about these issues. This thesis investigates how young people understand and respond to the political issues and explore the role of the media in shaping their

political attitudes towards the aforementioned political issues. Part of this will include an analysis of the demographic characteristics and political backgrounds of young people that affect their understanding and their responses to political news with particular reference to the four political issues identified.

The thesis focus on political communication in Kurdistan by adopting framing analysis as a qualitative approach to analysing textual news along with content analysis. Sound effects and visuals will be excluded because the majority of the news reports on television in Kurdistan do not involve these techniques and effects due to lack of professional expertise in the Kurdish media (Abdul Rahman, 2012; Muhedeen, 2012). To examine young people's attitudes towards the media coverage, government performance and the political process, this thesis will apply the active audience theory the particularly coding/decoding model which allows the audience to evaluate the media content by arguing that the audience receive the media message actively, thereby forming their own meaning from the experience or through the social context (Brant, 2012). Morley applied this model in his second study (1980/1999) of the demographics of the BBC's audience for the TV program 'Nationwide' to understand the breakdown of social class, gender and ethnicity through conducting focus group (cited in Roskos-Ewoldsen, David and Monahan, 2009). This model gives importance to the role of the audience background, particularly demographic characteristics such as gender, place of residence and education, in affecting their understanding of the media content, which has a similar aim of this thesis. The variable of age will be excluded because this thesis focuses specifically on young people between the ages of 18 and 28 based on the assumption that they share the same issues in this study. In this particular study, the respondents' political background will be taken into account because the two political parties already control a large part of society, and in turn, it can be assumed that many young people are influenced by their families and become close to the political parties in power, while the remainder can be divided between the opposition and independent. This different background might affect their understanding and attitudes.

Furthermore, from the active audience theory, uses and gratification will be taken into account, as this model gives importance to the role of the audience. Zhao notes that

the 'audience are able to provide researchers with an accurate description of their mass media use because they are aware enough of their own media use, interests, and motives that have a role in understanding the media content' (Zhao, 2008, p 22). Uses and gratification theory can be used to evaluate the government, for instance Reddick argues that 'although the use and gratification theory was applied originally to radio and television, the basic features of this theory can be applied to a certain degree to citizens' efforts to contact and communicate with the government as well' (2010, p 16). My research adopts this method to evaluate the attitude of young people towards the political issues across the media, government performance and the political process gathered through conducting focus group and interviews. Thus methodologically, the focus groups, in-depth and semi-structured interviews will be applied to collect the data from the young people which will subsequently be analysed qualitatively by applying thematic analysis.

1.4 The Research Questions

The research raises a series of questions to investigate the aims, which can be clarified as follows:

Q1: To what extent and how do the Kurdish media cover political issues in particular those relating to corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust? This research question is designed to produce a textual analysis of the news coverage by applying content analysis to identify indicators underlying the agenda of each media platform and applying qualitative analysis to identify how each media platform uses frames in their news coverage. The media platforms analysed include the opposition TV channel *(KNN TV)* and the ruling party's TV channel (*GK TV*), as well as three websites, namely: *Sbeiy* (opposition party), *Xendan* (ruling party) and *Awena* (independent).

Q2: Why does each platform of the Kurdish media have a different style of covering the identified political issues according to its ownership and what is the level of freedom of access to information in terms of these political issues? This research question is designed to explore the opinions of the media professionals in each media platform through conducting an in-depth interview with the news managers of the organisations selected in this research, to provide additional insights into the findings

revealed by both the first research questions. Furthermore, it will allow evaluation of the level of freedom of access to information in the media according to the three types of ownership: ruling parties, opposition parties and the independent media.

Q3: How do young people understand and respond to the political news in particular relating to corruption, reform, and government performance and citizens' trust across the different Kurdish media and how do young people evaluate the government's performance and the role of elections in the future democratic process? And to what extent do the demographic characteristics and political background of young people have an impact on their understanding and response? This research question seeks to evaluate if and how young people are influenced by the media in terms of the coverage of political issues in order to identify the role of the media in shaping their political attitudes. This research question seeks to understand the attitudes of young people towards the government's performance and the political process more generally. Through conducting focus groups the attitudes of young people towards the media will be evaluated, while the in-depth and semi-structured interviews will assess the young people's views towards the government's performance and the political process.

1.5 Research Motivation and Significance

Political communication research is especially important for Iraqi Kurdistan where the role of the media has increased rapidly since the election of 2009 (*Roznama*, 2009); there are several reasons for this. The first is that the outcome of the elections showed that people were influenced by the mediated election campaigns, for example the Gorran Movement Party managed to achieve 23% of the votes with only its media platform to publicise itself (Al-Zaidi and Sadiq, 2012). Prior to the election of 2009 there was no competition between the political parties because the two main parties monopolised power, entering under one list in the election. At the same time the opposition parties were weak, with the consequence that their election campaign was also ineffective (Al- Zaidi and Sadiq, 2012). These two authors argue that the Kurdish people were focused on the establishment of the government and administrative institutions after the uprising of 1991 and they did not have a positive experience of that process, while the Iraqi regime continued to pose a danger to the security of

Kurdistan until 2003. Furthermore, the experience of democratisation in Kurdistan has not reached a level which has enabled the opposition parties to become strong since the political parties have continued to rely on interpersonal communication through their members in their organisation offices instead of using the media.

The results of the 2009 election demonstrated that the media had become more effective than in previous years. Al-Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) argued that the two ruling parties used public finances to buy votes, and saw no need to use the power of political advertising prior to the emergence of the Gorran Party. Therefore the results of the election in 2009 took them by surprise. They went on to argue that social mobility in Kurdish society, alongside the role of the independent and opposition media in covering corruption, has made people more aware of the political process, particularly young people.

The other point which makes this thesis important is that it focuses on three interrelated aspects, namely content analysis of the political news, the perception of young people regarding political issues across the media and the attitude of media workers regarding access to information. This research will seek to form a comprehensive interpretation of the political communication process, as well as exploring the role of both traditional media (TV) and new media (websites). Thus the main significance of this research project can be determined in the following points:

- The outcome of this research shows how the Kurdish media cover the political issues and to what extent they contribute to the shaping of the political attitudes of young people. Young people comprise one of the largest sections of Kurdish society, while at the same time they have not received a great deal of attention from the government. Hardy (2012b) argues that young people in Kurdistan are a very dynamic stratum in society however they face huge problems of unemployment and housing and they are worried about their pensions in the future. He also argues that it is this category in society which is demanding that the government introduces reforms, and it is also one of the reasons why it has become a major item of interest for the media, in particular the opposition and independent media. Young people are considered more likely to be influenced by the opposition parties, and this indicates that they are likely to become powerful and affect a change in the political system in the future (Hussain, 2015). The

findings of this research can offer some analysis as to how political communication and the political system in Kurdistan may develop, as well as delineating some expectations and assumptions about the future of political communication and the democratic system in Kurdistan.

As far as I observed this is the first research of its kind conducted in Kurdistan. Most research conducted in both Media Studies and Political Science is based on quantitative data, and there is no existing qualitative data into political communication in Kurdistan. As a consequence the project is important for academics and the political world alike. Conclusions may also prove useful to other researchers dealing with political communication in the country.

1.6 Chapter Outline
This thesis is presented in seven chapters. Following the introductory chapter, the second chapter examines the literature that is composed of several sections according to the theoretical and conceptual framework adopted within the thesis. Particularly, it discusses the framing analysis as a criteria and approach to analysing the political news as well as applying active audience theory particularly the coding/decoding model and uses and gratifications to evaluate how young people understand and respond to political news and government performance. Alongside these theories, in this chapter the clientelism model will be examined as a theoretical assumption of the causality of the corruption and the lack of effective government performance in Kurdistan.

Chapter three discusses the methodology and the rationale behind the methods adopted for data collection and data analysis. To address the research questions and the rationale of selecting the methods, this thesis used a mixed methods approach, such as content analysis (statistical analysis) and framing analysis (qualitatively) of the news content in particular relation to the four political issues across the five media platforms. In-depth interviews were used to examine the views of the media professionals towards the editorial policy of the news coverage and the freedom of obtaining information about the political issues in the public sector. Alongside analysing the news content and media professionals' opinions, this chapter adopts three methods, namely focus groups, in-depth and semi-structured interviews, to

collect data from three different sample groups of young people. The focus group was used for young people to evaluate how the media cover the political issues, in-depth interviews were used to evaluate how young people evaluate the government's performance, and semi- structured interviews were used to evaluate how young people view the role of elections in the political process. The data collected from both young people and media professionals were analysed through thematic analysis. Furthermore, this chapter discusses the ethics of both the data collection and sampling process.

Chapter four discusses the life condition of young people as a main category in Kurdish society, although they have received little attention from the KRG. This chapter focuses on young people in terms of their concerns, especially education, unemployment, housing, state pension and political participation. Alongside examining young people's issues, this chapter briefly examines the history of the Kurdish media and describes the five media platforms selected for study in this thesis. This examination of the life condition of young people and the history of the Kurdish media helps to understand relevant elements for this thesis and provides background information to understand the structure of the political issues and the media context in Kurdistan which forms the central part of this thesis.

Chapter five begins the analysis of the empirical data by examining the content of the political news in three sections. The first section relies on the content analysis of the textual news, while the second examines the news selected through the framing analysis qualitatively. The third remaining section focuses on the editorial policy and the freedom of access allowed to the public sector to collect information about the political issues of the media through conducting in-depth interviews with media professionals, particularly the chief news editor or managing news editor of the five media platforms examined in this thesis.

Chapter six discusses the findings related to young people's understanding of and their response to the political issues in the news coverage across the Kurdish media, specifically the attitude of young people towards the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process. This chapter consists of three sections; the first section discusses how young people understand and respond to the news relating

to the four political issues across each television channel and website through conducting 7 focus groups. This section analyses the role of the demographic characteristics and political background of young people in relation to their political understanding and response. The second section discusses the attitudes of young people towards the government's performance by conducting in-depth interviews with 15 young people. Similarly to the first section, the second section examines the role of the demographic characteristics and political background of young people in terms of their evaluation of   the government's performance. The third section remains focused on the role of political participation in the democratising process and future government performance through analysing the views of 7 young people elicited from semi-structured interviews.

Chapter seven concludes the research project and consists of four sections. The first section consists of a review of the findings, while the second provides a reflection on the findings of the three theoretical approaches adopted in the research, namely framing analysis, active audience theory (particularly the coding/ decoding and uses and gratifications models), and the clientelism model. The third section provides reflections on the practical implications of the findings and the fourth section presents suggestions for further research, particularly in relation to the topic of this research project.

Chapter Two

2. The theoretical and conceptual framework in the literature review

2.1 Introduction

The present chapter will look at the theoretical and conceptual framework through presenting theoretical and empirical evidence within the relevant literature. The literature relevant to this thesis will be reviewed in four sections which will help to introduce the topic of the research and its main conceptual framework.

The first section reviews the framing theory which was adopted in this thesis as a method of analysis of the news content related to selected political issues: corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust and this helps to examine how the media use frames in their coverage. The second section looks at the active audience theory, particularly the coding/decoding model which argues that the audience might construct meaning of the media content through their own experience or from the social context, based on the assumption that the audience does not understand the media content similarly due to the differences in their backgrounds. This argument supports the research question which investigates how young people understand and respond to the political issues across the media, government performance and the role of elections in the political process, and the role of demographic political background in their evaluation. Furthermore, the second section reviews the uses and gratifications model which enabled the audience to provide the researcher with information to examine the media and the government's performance as well. The third section examines the relationship between young people and political news through reviewing the relevant theoretical and empirical research and this informs the central part of this thesis. The final section looks at the clientelism model based on the assumption that it causes a political system to be corrupt. This helps to examine the political structure of Kurdistan as well as understanding the causality of corruption and the lack of effective government performance that represent the main concepts of the political issues in this thesis.

2.2 Framing Analysis

This methodology is adopted to investigate political communication by examining how young people understand and respond to the political issues across the media

and how they view government performance and the role of elections in the political process. Accordingly, this thesis examines the media content, particularly political news dealing with corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust, including the attitude of media professionals towards the coverage of political issues and freedom to access the government departments. To this end, a part of the present study analyses the media content particularly political news items which cover the four political issues. Research into political communication is important because, as Willnat and Aw (2009) argued, it can help people to make sense of how media operate in the political process. Bryant and Zillmann stated that, 'political communication research is important not only for individual citizens but also for key political actors, such as political leaders, information strategists, and journalists' (2002, p216). Similarly, Bucy and Holbert refer to the concept that this type of research might 'affect leadership, policies and democratic processes involving the lives of hundreds of millions of people' (2011, p 544).

The present study applies framing analysis as the theoretical framework and approach to analyse textual news due to its suitability for such analysis, as framing is widely used in different fields due to its flexibility. Framing started with Goffman in 1981 when he argued that the social situation is determined by different points of the frame and this concept was further developed at the beginning of the 1990s by other researchers (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). Entman was perhaps the most influential in laying the foundation and systematic methodology for conducting framing research by devising four main categories, namely: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993). Bucy and Holbert (2011) show that framing makes a significant contribution in the research that focuses on the qualitative textual analysis and in particular it started to be used in political communication research to determine the potential effects of media coverage on the media receivers. Bryant and Oliver (2008) also show that framing has become a dominant methodology in communication research. In the same way, Kaid (2004) noted that framing analysis is widely used in political communication research because it allows an examination of the contextual content. The analysis of news texts in their historical and social context can reveal deeper level of meaning compared to the quantitative analysis of words and textual elements. As

Neuendorf (2002) notes, inferences cannot be made into the producers' and audiences' accounts by using content analysis only, and both content analysis and audience studies need to be integrated to give a full account of the opinions revealed. On the other hand, the role of content analysis is not limited to understanding what the media content and its characteristics are, as Berelson (1971) argues, through content analysis we can understand the potential influences of media on audiences. Furthermore, Macnamara suggests that content analysis provides the media researcher with the tools to evaluate the effectiveness of an organisation at communication and to measure the 'strategic insights and intelligence through issues tracking (environmental scanning), competitor analysis and trend identification' (2005, p 21). However, there are many critics of the content analysis approach as many believe that it has predominantly focused on quantitative content analysis (Macnamara, 2005). For this reason, Newbold, Boyd-Barrett and Van den Bulck argue that, 'the problem is the extent to which the quantitative indicators are interpreted as intensity of meaning, social impact and the like' (2002, p 80). There is no simple relationship between media texts and their impact, and it would be far too simplistic to base decisions in this regard on mere figures obtained from a statistical content analysis.

Prior to the emergence of framing theory, more researchers adopted agenda setting to evaluate the impact of the news programs on the audience. As Tankard (2001) notes, framing has become a second stage of agenda setting. The agenda setting theory argues that the priority of the media in covering subjects has a general influence on the audience, while framing theory argues that the framing of each news item has some specific influence on the audience (McCombs, 2002). This means that framing theory is more accurate because it deals with the individual news article, whereas agenda setting argues that the news programmes all together can have an impact on the audience.

This is further cited in McCombs and Shaw (1993) who claim that framing focuses on the text content and not only on the general coverage of the issues. Consequently, framing fills the gap that was implicit in an analysis based exclusively on agenda setting. Riaz (2008) further argues that media producers use mass communication

methods to provide their audience with a specific agenda, to create interest in certain issues and use framing to show the importance of these issues. Therefore the implications of agenda theory on audience perception is limited compared to framing. In this respect, Berger argues that 'agenda setting theory argues that the institutions of mass communication don't determine what we think, but determine what we think about' (2004, p 67).

However, framing analysis was criticised due to its being an incomplete method of evaluating the content as it focuses on text and excludes the manipulation of sound effects and visuals and the size or colour of the texts in print media. Van Dijk (2006) refers to the role of the manipulation of sounds and the size of text and argues that these features should be considered in textual analysis. Some researchers have tried to develop framing analysis in their research, for instance Choi and Lee (2006) suggested relying on the scene as the basic unit of analysis of TV news. Another problematic of framing analysis is the coding and interpretation processes which can be open to the bias of the researcher, for example Tankard argues that, 'coming up with the names for frames itself involves a kind of framing'(2001, p 97).

The other important aspect to mention about framing analysis is that the audience has its own framing for interpretation, so this argument reduces the influence of framing. Scheufele (1999) and Choi and Lee (2006) distinguished between media framing and audience framing and then suggested that four key processes should be taken into consideration, namely 'frame building, frame setting, individual-level processes of framing, and a feedback loop from audiences to journalists' (Scheufele,1999, p103). On the other hand, Price et al. (1997) supported the influence of the framing model through two studies, which showed that the framing model had direct influence on audience decision-making and public policy and contributed to the shaping of public opinion.

In order to develop a framing model, other researchers have tried to apply framing in a mixed methodological approach to evaluate different levels of the framing effect. Van Group (2007) used framing within an agenda setting model to develop a strategy to reconstruct frame packages, which means that the framing model is suitable to the aims of the research and it can be best adapted to the model. Alongside this, Choi and

Lee (2006) suggested that in reception studies in the media, framing should include narrative techniques, especially where the character and psychological explanation of media influence are taken into consideration.

In the light of the varied literature surrounding framing analysis and despite the model having weaknesses, it is currently becoming one of the main models used in research that focuses on media effect and audience perception. The weaknesses identified by the aforementioned authors can be summarised into three main points: framing does not include sound or the size of text (Van Dijk, 2006), the names applied to frames are problematic (Tankard, 2001) and the distinction between media framing and audience framing is often hard to define (Scheufele ,1999; Choi and Lee, 2006). To overcome these weakness, this thesis will only focus on textual news rather than audio-visual because a part of the sample will be selected from Kurdish websites which have no audio-visual content while the remaining news sample will be selected from the two Kurdish TV channels which attach little importance to audio-visual effects due to the lack of expertise in the Kurdish media compared to Western TV channels (Abdul Rahman, 2012). Specifically regarding the name of frames this research will design a form of encoding the framing of the news according to four clear concepts which will form the criteria for framing the news. Alongside this, the encoding process will attempt to determine the emergent frames as well.

The methodology chapter will provide more detail about the process of applying framing as an approach for textual news analysis. Specifically regarding the distinction between audience framing and journalists' framing, it will be argued that both sides can have their own framing for news items, while this criticism does not imply that framing does not have an impact on the audience. In this thesis, besides framing analysis, active audience theory is applied which argues that the audience do not receive the media message passively (Hartig, 2015). The application of this theory helps to strike a balance between media effect theory such as framing and active audience theory that supports the ability of the audience to receive the media message actively.

Recent political communication research studies that have used framing analysis have demonstrated that 'framing within competitive elite environments tend to see

journalists as having a rather passive, stenographic role in transmitting source positions' (D'Angelo, 2012, p360). This model is useful for the present research for many reasons, but mainly because it investigates coverage of political issues across different media, where each has a specific moral evaluation for the coverage of news based on whether it is by the opposition party, the ruling party or the independent media. This model allows the present research to distinguish amongst them due to the researcher's assumption that they each use a different frame in their coverage. This model allows the present research to distinguish amongst them due to the researcher's assumption that they each use a different frame in their coverage. The research focuses on specific political issues particularly corruption, reform, government performance and these concepts are covered differently across the media studied in this research which are divided into three different types of ownership, each of which has its own dimension and vision, particularly the media belonging to the political parties in power and the opposition. In turn, this affects the framing of the political issues in their media coverage.

2.3 Active Audience Theory
The previous section discussed the concept that framing analysis is an approach to analysing political news, but intrinsic to it is the argument that media content has an influence on the audience. Thus the framing model constructs the audience as passive and variously influenced by the content of the media it watches or reads. By contrast the active audience theories criticised this argument, particularly those scholars who developed the active audience theory which purports that media texts do not have the same effect on the members of a given audience due to the fact that any audience consists of different social groups. This thesis seeks to examine how young people understand and respond to the political issues and how they evaluate the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process and democratisation. Alongside this, the thesis investigates the role of demographic characteristics and political background in the evaluation of young people towards the media, government performance and political process. Therefore, active audience theory, particularly the coding/decoding model which focuses on the role of audience background in understanding the media content and the uses and gratifications model

enable the audience to provide information to researchers when examining the media and government performance.

2.3.1 Coding/decoding model

Hall, one of the main scholars who defined active audience theory and presented the coding/decoding model, argues that it is 'something to do with the asymmetry between the codes of "source" and "receiver" at the moment of transformation into and out of the discursive form' (2004, p110). This theory allows for the importance of individual interpretation and understanding of a given piece of news based on the background of the audience, their social context and knowledge. According to Nightingale (1996) 'the coding /decoding model was first proposed by Stuart Hall in 1973' and Valdivia notes that his model focuses on social structure through three levels: 'the framework of knowledge, the relation of production, and the technical infrastructure that proposed this'. (2008, p 362). The coding and decoding affect both the media production and consumers of this production, while the media producer always attempts to ensure that its output is understood and decoded according to its expectations. The coding/decoding model was applied by Brunsdon and Morley to examine the audience of 'Nationwide', a British news programme between 1978 and 1999, which involved a close textual analysis of a single episode of the programme aired on May 19, 1976 (cited in Roskos-Ewoldsen, David and Monahan, 2009, p 223). The model was applied to understand the differing social classes, gender and ethnicity of the audience watching an episode of 'Nationwide' through conduction focus.

Active audience theory in general supposes that audiences are not passive in interpreting media messages, and that they are not influenced according to the level of the intended messages by producers, but rather their active reading and use of different media makes them capable of creating their own meaning out of media content. The audience might be using the media content for different functions. For instance, Radway (1984) found that people may use romantic novels to resist the dominant culture and Ang (1985) noted that women watch soap operas for entertainment purposes. This indicates that the audience can use media for their own purposes, particularly based on social factors and most notably gender. An example of

how empirical research applied the uses and gratification model to evaluate audience response was the study of Arab TVs Satellite channel which found that young females mostly prefer TV dramas, movies and music while young males prefer news programmes (Al- Hadidi et al, 2006). They argue that young males in the Arab world are mostly responsible for covering life expenses, which in turn makes them give importance to political content as there is still no political and economic stability in these countries.

Prior to Radway and Ang's works, other researchers argued that media content does not affect the audience in similar ways due to factors relevant to individual differences and the demographic characteristics of a given audience. Morley (1992) argued that audience studies should take social characteristics into account, namely social class, gender, age, ethnicity, place of residence and education. In the same way, the conceptual frame of active audience theory and its arguments were established by some researchers who focused on television audiences. Fiske (1987) notes that viewers of television are not a homogeneous mass, rather they are composed of a wide range of different groups. Fiske's argument seems even more relevant and powerful today with the emergence of specialist media and multi-media platforms which allow the audience to select different channels or programmes, highlighting the ability of viewers to be more selective. Alongside the consideration of the audience's background, another research study which investigated active audience theory identified other points to be factored in. For instance, Clarke (2000) reported that specific audience members differ in the production of meaning in accordance with the different social setting in which media messages are received. This relates to the prior knowledge and attitudes of receivers of the media content. Palmer notes that the 'audiences are functionally differentiated by their relationship to the moment of production of media output' (2004, p 72). Young people are not a homogenous mass and they can be read differently on the basis of their demographic characteristics and political background. This diversity can affect the media's influence on their attitudes and interest, a phenomenon which has attracted the attention of researchers for many years, as seen earlier in both Morley (1992) and Fiske (1987).

Alongside the demographic categories of social class, gender, age, ethnicity, place of residence and education, the present research hypothesises that there are other variables which can affect the political communication of young people in Kurdistan, mainly political interest, political awareness, and political affiliation or political orientation, but this does not mean that these assumptions can be generalised to all political environments and societies. Empirical research has also shown that the Internet has a positive effect on the political participation of young people compared to the influence of TV (Bakker and De Vreese, 2011), although in Kurdistan TV still retains more influence ((Technology, the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sport, 2009). Östman found in his research in Sweden that 'Internet use and news consumption, both of which were related to political knowledge, were moderately related to political participation' (2012, p 105). In addition, young people as a whole can express as a specific group what characteristics they hold in common, as noted by Quintelier, Dietlind and Allison (2012). This research examined a cohort of young Belgian people and detected that social networking has a potential influence on young people and demonstrated that the political context enhances the effects of the network to which the young people belong.

According to earlier literature the attention paid to political news by young people is associated with political participation. Holt et al. (2013) found in their research that use of political news increased the political engagement of young people and Moeller and De Vreese (2013) found that exposure to political news among young people is linked to political engagement, whereas exposure to entertainment has the opposite impact. The level of exposure to political content across the media and the motivation to access such information can be related to the lack of understanding of politics, considering that the media play such a crucial dimension in the role of political education (Buckingham, 1999). In terms of demographic characteristics the control variable most significant within the media's role in exposing corruption has been identified by empirical research in terms of the level of education of the audience, which enables them to understand their role in relation to their rights and responsibilities towards the government (Dutta and Roy, 2013). In the same way in a recent PhD thesis in Kurdistan, Ali (2011) notes that the level of higher education is the only variable that has any correlation to the audience's understanding of political

news. In another words, Ali found that the people who have a higher level qualifications are more interested in political news and tend to construct their own meaning from the messages received, compared to people who have a lower level of qualifications. The outcome of Ali's research helps the current thesis to take the education factor into account when determining what can affect this factor of young people's understanding of the political issues across the Kurdish media.

Political discussion among people who have different political backgrounds and experiences may not influence their attitudes. Talat (2006) argues that people who have longstanding political orientations are not necessarily affected by media exposure and interpersonal communication. He expresses the view that people might participate in political debate merely to evaluate the information received from the media; on the other hand people who are less politically informed tend to understand politics from the media and interpersonal communication. It is known that the impact of demographic characteristics and other variables of young people's backgrounds are not stable and the influence varies according to the different communication environments or societies. With specific reference to the literature in Kurdistan, little previous academic research has been undertaken to study political communication and young people, and to date only two PhD research projects have been conducted into political communication in Kurdistan. The first investigated the role of political programmes on Kurdish satellite TV in shaping the political awareness of the audience (Ali, 2011). The second was research into the role of the media in activating political participation in Iraqi Kurdistan (Mageed, 2011). Equally, there are no academic journals dedicated to the media in Kurdistan and media research is usually published in general university academic journals due to the fact that Media and Communication Studies only started in 2001 in Iraqi Kurdistan.

In terms of the criticism of active audience theory, some arguments have been raised by researchers, such as Fiske (1987) who argues that the paradigm has overrated the viewers' ability to create their own meaning. Furthermore, (Alasuutari, 1999 and Clarke, 2000) argue that the active audience might not all be resistant to the media messages, which means the whole audience are not necessarily active to the same extent. This criticism of active audience theory means that the audience have different

views because of their background and this emphasises the main argument of the coding/decoding model. Therefore, this thesis takes this argument as a theoretical assumption to highlight the demographic characteristics and political background of young people in Kurdistan when evaluating the political issues across the media and government performance and the role of elections in the political process.

2.3.2 Uses and gratifications model

The uses and gratifications model is located in active audience theory and consists of several concepts (Zhao, 2008), while this thesis focuses on the concept that the audience can provide information to the researcher to evaluate the media content as well as the government's performance as they are active and can construct meaning according to their experience and social context (Danesi, 2013). Therefore, the uses and gratifications model emphasises individual differences, which is parallel with the coding/ decoding model and means that both models are significant in examining the demographic and political background of young people. Al-Biada (2008) in her research in Lebanon detected that females tend to favour entertainment programmes, such as movies, music and competition programmes. Another study which applied the uses and gratification model to examine the use of Iraqi young people of media broadcasting found a significant correlation between gender and use of media broadcasting (Mustafa, 2010). He found that females mostly prefer movies and music, particularly those who are not in higher education. He suggested that young females in universities tend to favour political programmes more than those who have not completed university or who are not educated. In Mustafa's research it can be seen that education has a role to play in determining the motivation of young people, particularly young females.

The different motivations for using media have been outlined by the uses and gratification model which characterises the audience as active (Danesi, 2013). This theory was further developed by Katz, Blumler and Gurevitch who proposed the following five basic assumptions (Zhao, 2008). Firstly, audience members actively select which media best meets their needs; secondly audience members are key in choosing which media best meet their perceived needs; thirdly audience members have a wide range of gratification providers they can choose from, not just the media;

fourthly audience members can describe their own preferences and choices in selecting different forms of media for different purposes; fifthly researchers should investigate audience preferences before reaching any general conclusions about the significance of the mass media in influencing public opinion (Zhao, 2008, p 22). The current research takes the fourth assumption which argues that the audience are able to provide the researchers with information to evaluate the media because they are aware enough of their own media use. Moreover, this theory can applied to communication study in general, in this respect Reddick argues that 'although the use and gratification theory was applied originally to radio and television, the basic features of this theory can be applied to a certain degree to citizens' efforts to contact and communicate with the government as well' (2010, p 16) Based on this, my research takes this argument to evaluate the attitude of young people towards the political issues across the media, government performance and the political process through conducting focus groups and interviews.

More recently, new technology has changed previous orientations around media theories, particularly the Internet which has expanded users' opportunities. Rannikko (2010) notes that new media must take the active audience theory into account as the audience have become more able to select materials across the Internet. Alongside this, new media enable users to select information in relation to media themes because it gives them the opportunity to interact with media producers and their partners (Lievrouw and Livingstone, 2006). Although new technology allows increased interaction between media producers and users, Beckett (2008) notes that any such interaction is limited. Apart from the current level of interaction between media producers and users, the new media has facilitated audience participation in the media production process, so this argument justifies the active audience paradigm as the audience becomes more selective in choosing the media outputs and interaction with others. Accordingly, the application of an active audience paradigm is reasonable in the present research, as the audience includes young people who consume their political news across a range of platforms such as TV channels and websites.

2.4 Young people and political news

This section looks at the relationship between young people and the political news across a range of media in Western countries, developing countries and Kurdistan through reviewing the empirical research. This helps to identify popular media types for political communication purposes which are used by young Kurdish people. At the same time, this provides an image of how the media are used for political communication in Kurdistan against the background of the global media landscape of political communication.

Several researchers have investigated the relationship between young people and the media and they have based their research in both developed and developing countries. Buckingham (1999), Hamid (2000) and Allawaty (2011) claim that evidence exists in both democratic societies and new democracies which suggest an association between news media use and political knowledge in young people. Conversely, Mesch and Coleman (2007) and Henn and Foard (2012) discovered that there are differences in the role of the news media in a range of established western democracies where a decline in political participation and therefore of voting numbers among younger citizens has been identified. According to such research, it was argued that the decline of political participation among young people may be closely linked to their use of new media, particularly social media. This is in contrast to the lack of decline in the political activities of those of adult age due to their continued dependence on traditional media (Lenhart et al. 2010). In developing countries people use social media as a political platform to express their views and exchange opinions, this leads to an increase in political participation albeit indirectly (Stieglitzand Dang-Xuan, 2013; Hickey, 2014). For instance, young people ranked highest amongst the categories of people who participated in demonstrations during the Arab Spring and they largely depended on social media websites to organise their activities (Howard and Hussain, 2013; Macafee and De Simone, 2012). Researchers have outlined and categorised the different orientations in terms of political participation in the World Values Survey (Jeong, 2013). For example, Jeong (2013) found that civic engagement through music, art and charitable organisation has a positive impact on political participation, and he detected that there is a positive correlation between civic participation and political demonstration. Furthermore, he

found that a political organisation can adopt a negative role in terms of political participation particularly those organisations or unions controlled by the government in non-democratic regimes. These researchers (Strömbäck and Shehata, 2010; All-Laban, 2007) found that there is a causal relation between exposure to the political news by young people and their political interest. Beside this, Holt et al. (2013) argue that the increasing number of news channels across the world has given more opportunity to people to watch news, which in turn has raised their political interest. According to Holt et al, the traditional definition of political participation includes voting, polling, and participation in activist movements only, and they suggested that any definition of political participation should include other activities like interaction, discussion with people across social media and uploading videos on YouTube as a means of political expression. Their research further suggested that 'social media could serve as a leveller of political interest and offline political participation between younger and older citizens' (Holt et al. 2013, p 31). According to some of the literature, the use of political content across the different forms of media can be associated with political participation and political interest.

There are many studies which substantiate that television has a considerable role in shaping viewers' political behaviour whether in an established democracy or in new and developing democracies. Tewksbury, Jensen and Coe (2011) argue that TV news stories affect audience attitudes because of the impact of television in general rather than the credibility of the news. Bucy and Grabe (2007) showed that TV had a considerable role in conveying information to viewers within the election process in 1992 in the USA. These views about whether television or new media exert a greater influence on young people's attitudes depend on cultural factors, audience habits and individuals' patterns of media use. Moreover, Voltmer and Brants (2011) assume that political actors, such as governments, political parties and other elites of established political institutions are losing control over the way in which politics is communicated and interpreted in the public sphere due to the power of new media.

The research that investigated the use of You Tube during the 2008 U.S. presidential primaries found that often the audience gained political information from TV news on YouTube (Hanson, Haridakis and Sharma, 2011). Previous research confirmed that

both TV and new media have complemented each other until now. However media usage has been constantly evolving and the current thesis will examine the importance of both TV and websites. Nonetheless, TV remains more popular than the Internet especially in countries where Internet services are still limited due to lack of infrastructure or financial backing and the fact that some people in those countries are still computer-illiterate (Ciborra, 2005; Agboola, Isaac and Arthur, 2000) .

Specifically in Iraqi Kurdistan there is a lack of research that has investigated how young Kurdish people use the media. The most recent research, conducted in 2009 was by the Technology and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kurdistan. This survey found that, 'more than 98 per cent of young people watch TV and only 40 percent use the Internet, while most young people prefer political news, particularly males' (2009, 10). Furthermore, Internet service in Kurdistan remains limited to only certain cities and is expensive in relation to young people's income, whereas there is no tax on TV users, which means TV remains more popular (Warty, 2008, Abdul Rahman, 2012). In Kurdistan there is no research available to date into young people and the Internet and their usage of new media, particularly social media. Generally, social media are not used as much by Kurdish young people compared with other countries due to the high costs of Internet services and lack of mobile connections, which in countries where these exist, can lead to increased use of social media at the expense of other media platforms. The National Youth Survey of 2009 also went on to note that more than 90 per cent of young people had participated in previous elections and 70 per cent wanted the political system to be changed. This shows a high level of political interest and engagement by young people in Kurdistan.

The media has contributed to the emergence of democratisation, in the same way as the emergence of the printed press in Western democracies during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (Habermas, 1991). In this respect, Pridham (1990) argues that the emergence of democracy is related to the role of the media. In the same way, Chadwick (2012) argues that 'the Internet is evolving into one of the most significant enablers of political innovation since the emergence of mass democracy' (2012, p 2). However in some aspects, TV plays a more active role, as both authors Chadwick and Pridham argue that television has more impact on young people

because of their relatively lower political awareness (Pridham, 1990; Chadwick, 2012) . In a similar vein, Kaid et al. (2007) found that political advertising across new media (YouTube in particular) has quite a strong influence on young American voters. In relation to new media, Russell et al. (2002) argue that young people in the UK are least likely to change their political views and they do not rely on new media to understand politics. Conversely, an earlier study identified that new media enable young people to be more interactive, and hence have a positive effect on their various forms of political communication (Bakker and De Vreese, 2011; Kruikemeier et al. 2013).

Traditional media still play a key role in political communication, nevertheless, the majority of arguments show that young people increasingly depend on new media for political communication whether in established or emerging democracies because new media are becoming more popular. However, in new democracies the lack of media freedom as well as issues related to the funding of traditional media may force opposition parties to rely on new media to communicate with young people, as new media are cheaper and more readily available. For instance, the former Mubarak regime in Egypt did not allow the Muslim Brotherhood to establish a traditional media outlet but through the Internet they communicated with the Egyptian youth. Attia et al. (2011) argue that the Egyptian youth, through communicating via social networking, managed to sustain the impact of the revolution. Funding is another major factor as media producers can establish platforms online more cheaply than using either print media or broadcasting. Even in a democratic society social media have an active role in terms of political participation, as Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen and Wollebaek, (2013) show in their study in Norway where social media enjoy a considerable and independent role in mobilising and organising demonstrations. In their study they conclude that social media should be an alternative means of political and civil organisation alongside traditional media. The Internet has evolved into an active instrument in developing the independent media, particularly in new democratic societies like Kurdistan, where the independent media started with website, one of the media discussed in the following chapter. The development of the Internet is supposed to help young people to become more active in political communication particularly as young people tend to communicate with their friends

across social media if the Internet is more readily available. It is worth mentioning, however, that young people in Kurdistan still do not use the Internet on their mobile phones as a result of high Internet prices and unreliable services.

In light of the above research, it can see that people use the political news to understand politics and from this context young people rely on the media to understand and participate in the political process. TV channels and new media, such as the websites Youtube and other forms of social media are the main platforms in political communication, however, in Kurdistan the TV still takes the main role as discussed above. Regarding the new media in Kurdistan, websites have become the most popular (Muhedeen, 2012). Therefore, this thesis examines TV as the most popular media platform and websites which follow TV in terms of audience numbers, particularly for obtaining political news.

2.5 Clientelism Model

This section reviews the political issues identified in this thesis as the four concepts of corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust. These concepts are largely highlighted in the Kurdish media particularly across the opposition and independent media due to the lack of government performance and the political system which is based on the client system (Hussain, 2015). Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) argue that the political system in Kurdistan is characterised by nepotism and the citizens are not treated on an equal basis. Therefore this section reviews the concept of political clientelism as a causality of the political issues in Kurdistan.

Since clientelism features in the political system this situation is supposed to create political issues, particularly corruption and the lack of government performance. This discussion reviews the clientelism model as a theoretical assumption that has repercussions on the political system of Kurdistan and it provides a suitable theoretical and conceptual framework for the thesis.

Roniger adopts the term clientelism from Richard Graham who characterised clientelism as an action-set built upon the principle of 'take there, give here', enabling clients and patrons to benefit from mutual support as they play parallel to each other at different levels of political, social, and administrative articulation' (2004, p 355).

Roniger (2004) further explains that clientelism in the political arena, particularly in the government context, leads 'to the distribution of state resources (jobs, contracts, and services) in exchange for political support and is associated with various forms of patronage and organisational brokerage. This implies that in the political clientelism system there is a form of deal between those in power and their clients to exchange benefits. In this regard, Bardhan and Mookherjee (2011) note that clientelisim is associated with the political parties in power and they argue that 'clientelism refers to strategic transfers made by political parties and governments to poor and disadvantaged groups as a means of securing their votes, in an effort to consolidate political power' (2011, p 2). In this respect, Stokes et al (2013) argue that in clientelism system, the political parties distributes jobs, cash, credit, myriad and other resources to citizens in order to vote in favour of them front of them either for the election campaign or at any other time . This secures and keeps the politicians in power.

The above definition of clientelism can apply to the political arena of Kurdistan where both political parties in power, the PUK and KDP, since the creation of the first government in 1992, started to construct their popularity based on the client system. On 19th May 1992, the election of the Kurdistan National Assembly (KNA) was conducted with the participation of eight Kurdish political parties and 4 Assyrian parties (Christian ethnic groups) who were competing for 100 parliamentary seats with 5 seats reserved for ethnic groups by quota, although subsequently 5 seats were retained for the Assyrians because the Turkmen withdrew from the elections. The Turkmen comprise the third minority group in Iraq and the majority of them live in Kurdistan, particularly in Kirkuk and Erbil, and most of them came from Turkey during the Ottoman Empire period. According to the election rules each list was supposed to obtain 7% in order to enter the KNA. Ultimately, the KDP obtained 51% and the PUK gained 49% of the votes (Dabrowska and Hann, 2008). Despite fraudulent incidents in this election, Stansfield (2003) stated that this election was one of the most democratic in the Middle East. The PUK did not agree to form the opposition because it believed that the KDP would start to buy the loyalty of the citizens through the distribution of public funds, as there was an old long-standing competition between the two parties about keeping and expanding their influence,

which had sometimes led to armed conflict between them. As a result, the KDP and PUK formed a 50-50 coalition government and subsequently divided the government departments by making small concessions to the minor parties in order to ensure their support. According to Mustafa who was the PUK deputy leader, he suggested his party should form the opposition, nevertheless other members of the PUK preferred to enter the government because, as mentioned above, they did not have confidence in the KDP's undertakings (Mustafa, 2008). As the two political parties in power, the PUK and KDP, monopolised the public sector, Peshmerga and other security forces, as well as the economy, they could control the larger part of society on the clientelism basis through using public funds and jobs to buy votes (Qani and Fatah 2012).

The client system leads to lack of social justice because the whole population have no real opportunity to find jobs (Bellamy, 2013). Another feature of the clientelism system is that the government faces over-employment because the political parties in power need to distribute new jobs to people continuously (Warner, 1997). The two arguments of Bellamy (2013) and Warner (1997) show that the new generation, particularly young people, face the negative consequences of the client system. After 2003 the budget of Kurdistan started to increase due to the economic sanctions being lifted and the two political parties, PUK and KDP, started to monopolise the economic sector through establishing big companies which dominated contract allocation without transparency (Salih, 2015). Salih (2015) notes that the client system in Kurdistan led to a lack of social justice, for instance a small sector of society became wealthy dramatically while large parts of society became poor as a result of inflation. In the same way, the public services were not developed and the opposition parties were weak (Al Zaidi and Sadiq, 2012). As a result, the civil organisations and independent media emerged to criticise the government. In this regard, Al Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) argue that the debate of corruption and demand for reform by the people, civil society organisations, opposition parties and opposition and independent media mainly started from 2004 when the budget of the KRG started to increase.

 The most prominent intellectual group which criticised government policy was the Rahand, which translates as 'dimension' in English, and which appeared from 1994 to 2006. Most members of this group were living in the EU and through their journal of

the same name they published articles focusing on questions of freedom and democratisation in the KRG. Rasul (2010) mentioned that the Rahand group developed a critical discourse which had an active impact on readers, particularly on young people, which contributed to change and helped the emergence of real opposition parties. As well as this group, other forms of opposition emerged, for instance the development of independent media, such as the Hawlati newspaper which started in Sulaymaniyah as a weekly newspaper in 2000 and then became a daily.

It is undoubtedly the case that, prior to 2009, some pressure groups and the independent media were more active in voicing opposition to the ruling parties than the smaller political opposition parties themselves. This was largely due to the fact that the two main parties stifled any open debate from the opposition parties and endeavoured to control any public criticism against them. This forced many Kurdish people to demonstrate openly, for example about the national budget which although it increased, still did not deliver improved public services. In this context, Ali (2009) claimed that the Kurdish ruling parties argued that they were the only legitimate organisations worthy of government because they had opposed the Saddam regime, and that therefore the Kurds should show them loyalty for patriotic reasons. Moreover, when the opposition parties criticised the government, the two main parties accused them of being new in the political arena and therefore not having played a part in the struggle against the former regime. This in turn implied that only the two parties in power were legitimate; the opposition parties were ignored even though they were willing to help find a solution to the issues of corruption and reform. Therefore, members of the opposition parties joined in the anti-government protests alongside ordinary citizens.

When ruling governments in a country do not allow opposition parties or individuals to propose different ideas this can lead to alternative forms of opposition, such as popular demonstrations and reports across the independent media. For instance, in Western democracies people and opposition parties usually have more rights to express their critical opinions against the performance of their governments compared with the people and opposition parties in a new democracy. All the

revolutions during the Arab Spring were initiated by the people and encouraged by the opposition parties. Salah (2009) argues that group pressure and the independent media encouraged the public to ask their government to make reforms in public services through demonstrations at the end of 2005 and the beginning of 2006 in the KRG.

By the end of 2005, some of the PUK leaders formed a campaign to introduce reforms inside the KRG; these became known as the reform group in the PUK. This group made demands, such as reducing the power of the PUK leader, introducing reforms in the PUK, activating the Political Bureau of the PUK, conducting an election amongst the PUK members and ensuring the services provided to the public were improved (Mustafa, 2009). The PUK followed this up by taking steps to implement the demands of the Reform Group. In spite of this, the Reform Group refused the offer to join in the internal elections of the PUK, arguing that the PUK had no real intention of conducting reforms. In addition, the Reform Group was uncomfortable with the power-sharing agreement between its party (the PUK) and the KDP. Under these circumstances, Nawsherwan Mustafa, leader of the Reform Group, along with the rest of its members, resigned from the PUK. Subsequently, in March 2007 they established a Media Company called Wsha which means 'awareness', to inform the people about corruption and reform (Mustafa, 2008).

The company of Wsha had a considerable impact on the political situation of the KRG particularly in the PUK-influenced area because the Reform Group effectively became the opposition within the KRG, as they had a large membership base. Accordingly, freedom of expression expanded for each of the other opposition parties as well as the media (Al Zaidi and Sadiq, 2012). The opposition parties started to develop a coherent programme against the ruling parties, with the four opposition parties, the Kurdistan Islamic Union (KIU), the Islamic Group (IG), the Toilers Party of Kurdistan (TPK) and the Socialist Party of Kurdistan (SPK) entering the last election in July 2009 under a single list named 'Service and Reform'. The Media Company, Wsha, formed its own list in the election and called it the Gorran list meaning 'change'. This group focused on reforms and corruption and a call to change during the election campaign. As a result of all these oppositional activities and the competition amongst the two traditional

parties, the other political entities became stronger in the last election campaign. Ultimately, the traditional list (KDP and PUK) gained 59 seats out of 111 seats while the Gorran list took 25 seats with only 13 seats for the Service and Reform list. The results were declared by the independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq. This was a significant transition in political life in Iraqi Kurdistan because the two main parties had controlled the elections since 1992. Asos (2015) argues that the real opposition party started from the election in 2009, as people started to find an alternative party, particularly young people because the new generations demanded a better level of public services and accountability. However, the older generations still appreciated the struggle of the two main parties which they had conducted against the Saddam regime. Also most of the older generations kept a strong affiliation to these parties because they stood to gain financially through pensions or bribery (Qani, 2012a).

Criticism of civil society and the opposition party increased when oil production restarted and people found that although the national budget increased, the level of ordinary people's income did not change (Hussain, 2015; Salih, 2015). The arguments of both researchers imply that the KRG did not have an effective economic strategy or strong economic policy. In this regard, Qani (2015) argues that the two families in Kurdistan who dominated the PUK and KDP parties sought to transform the political system to a rentier economy system, such as those in the Arab Gulf countries, which is administered by families and ignores democratisation which is opposite to this system because in a democracy people play a big role in policy-making and decisions. Chaudhry (2011) explains that much of the Saudi state is based on the rentier economy system, where, for example, construction has relied on patron-client relationships through corruption of individuals by providing them with jobs in both the private and public sectors. Qani (2015) justifies his argument through four points, the first is that the two families monopolise the economic system through adopting the rentier system which relies on protecting the oil without transparency and using the income of this in their companies' favour. Secondly, the religious dimension gives credence to the Salafist ideology which states that ruling families should be obeyed in any way, therefore the people do not have any right to demonstrate or seek to shape political parties or change the power base, even if the rulers become an authoritarian regime. As a result, the whole political process gradually comes under the families'

control and the people will be forced to support the system even if they do not receive good quality services or are forced to suffer because of unemployment. The third point is that the families seek to form an intellectual group which does not criticise the political system through providing its members with higher salaries and privileges.

In the light of the above discussion, it can be concluded in this section that the political economy of Kurdistan has been monopolised by the two political parties based on the system of clientelism (Hussain, 2015), and through adopting the rentier economy model (Qani, 2015; Salih, 2015). Such a system leads to corruption, bureaucracy, over-employment and general lack of social justice. The sector of society most likely to be affected by the client system are the young people because this system is based on the rentier economy which is unjust and creates over-employment, which particularly affects young people.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has considered the theoretical and empirical research into political communication in both new democracies and established democracies through several academic studies. The literature review discussion of related research helps establish how the arguments and assumptions of the present research can be delineated into a coherent framework, particularly framing analysis which in turn can be used as the criteria for analysing the political news. This chapter also reviewed the literature related to active audience theory particularly the coding/decoding model and uses and gratifications model which will be applied in order to evaluate how young people in Kurdistan understand and respond to the media content in particular across the Kurdish media as well as to examine how young people evaluate the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process. The chapter has reviewed the clientelism model as a key theoretical assumption to review the Kurdish political system since the first government was formed in 1992. It is clear that the current political issues in Kurdistan have historical roots as a result of the accumulation of problems that have not been resolved by the client system adopted by the two political parties in power. The political system in Kurdistan may be considered as unique, as is the lack of academic research in Kurdistan in general, due to the historical background of the region. As Kirmanj (2013) notes, Kurdistan is not an independent nation-state although it does have many elements of a country's profile.

Chapter Three

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the project is to investigate political communication among young Kurdish people, thereby using Kurdistan as a case study by focusing on specific political issues across the Kurdish media and examining how young people understand and respond to the news coverage and how they evaluate both the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process.

Based on the research questions and its aims the present thesis uses a mixed methods to obtain data: applying content analysis and framing analysis to the textual news; conducting in-depth interviews with media professionals and with each focus group; conducting in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with young people.

Hollway (2009) used a mixed methods approach involving both content analysis and interviews with the audience to increase the level of credibility of findings in her PhD thesis. Such mixed methods allow the researcher to compare findings received from both the audience and political news content. Smith argues that 'content analysis can be used by researchers to compare the results of their content analysis with the information they are able to obtain from surveys or focus groups' (2009, p 333).

This chapter consists of four sections and the first section looks at the rationale of using a case study and explains the selection of political issues which were identified according to four concepts: corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust. The second section looks at content analysis and framing analysis which were applied as an approach to enable analysis of the textual news across the five media platforms. It also explains the strategy of sampling, the method of data analysis and ethics, as this addresses the first research question. The third section looks at the selection of the focus group that set out to analyse how young people understand and respond to the political issues across the five media platforms. This section also explains the selection of questions in each of the in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews which explored the attitudes of young people towards the government's performance and the political process. Through conducting focus group

involving both in-depth and semi-structured interviews with young people the third research question will be answered and the findings of this research question will be presented in Chapter Six. As in the second section, the third section includes the sampling strategy adopted,as well as the method of data analysis and ethical considerations.

The fourth section looks at the in-depth interviews which were devoted to examining the views of media professionals concerning the editorial policy underlying the news coverage of political issues and their perceived freedom to obtain information about political issues, all of which address the second research question.

3.2 Case study

The present research takes the case study approach to examine political communication amongst young people in Kurdistan as a means of understanding and interpreting political issues through the Kurdish media platforms. These are divided into different types according to their affiliation, namely the media controlled by the ruling political parties, by the opposition parties and the independent media. Each Television channel and website uses its own frames for covering the identified four political issues and there are more likely to be significant differences between the coverage of the media owned by the ruling political parties and that of the opposition and independent media.

This thesis investigates how young people understand and respond to political issues and it seeks to investigate how and why the media institutions selected use different frames to cover the main political issues identified, namely corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust. These four concepts are widely covered by the media, particularly the opposition and independent media due to the perceived prevalence of corruption and poor government performance (Hussain, 2015). The increasing coverage of corruption issues by the opposition media forced the ruling media to cover this topic to a limited extent and it shows the government's performance in a positive light in order to defend the ruling parties' record. In this regard, Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) argue that the debate about corruption and the demand for reform from the people, civil society organisations, opposition parties and opposition and independent media mainly started in 2004 when the budget of the

KRG started to increase. Hussain (2015) also argues that the KRG adopted the client system due to the two families who dominated the KDP and PUK particularly after the increase in the budget after 2004. As Salih (2015) notes, the client system in Kurdistan led to a lack of social justice, for instance a small number of people became wealthy while a large sector of society became poor as a result of inflation. Furthermore, Hussain (2015) notes that the price of houses increased tenfold between 2003 and 2010, while the city councils still do not have sufficient houses and flats to provide to young people as well as other social categories.

As a result of this ongoing issue of corruption, young people started to demonstrate in May 2005 and they asked the government to solve this and introduce reforms (Zaidi and Sadiq, 2012). In this regard, Mustafa (2009) notes how the Gorran Party established the media company Wsha, which included *KNN TV* and the Sbeiy website in 2007 to exert influence on the government to introduce reforms. The two cases of corruption and reform became the slogan of all the political parties in the election campaigns of 2009 and 2013, apart from the ideological background of these political parties. The slogan of the government in 2009 and 2013 promised to introduce reforms and fight corruption, which means that corruption and reform became a challenge to all political parties and became a daily issue across the media. During the Arab Spring the young people started to demonstrate in January and February 2011. They asked the government to fight corruption and introduce reforms and as a result, 9 young people died and dozens were injured in these demonstrations. As Hardy (2012b) argues, young people form the main sector of society, but they gain little attention from the government whilst they compose the main category of people who pay the price of corruption. At the same time young people were becoming more educated, which enabled them to gain more political knowledge, to understand government policy and to demand their rights in areas such as housing and employment. Kurdistan adopted a policy of democratisation and the media has played an active role in this process, as each political party seeks to have an effect on people through its media channels. Young people are the main social category and they believe that they do not receive sufficient attention from the government as aforementioned, while in turn it is the young people who are seeking political change in the country.

The investigation of young people and the media framing of political issues through the case study approach enabled the researcher to interpret the political communication process in Kurdistan. As Davies and Mosdell (2006) argue, the case study enables researchers to understand the phenomenon by examining a few examples which can be used to interpret the phenomenon itself. This issue is the main political phenomenon in Kurdistan which the present research seeks to investigate by analysing political communication and applying the case study method; this empirical method has frequently been used successfully by political communication scholars (Stuckey, 1996; Stanyer, 2007). The other reason for applying the case study is its flexible approach which allows the researcher to adopt a mixed method approach, as clarified by Marschan-Piekkari and Welch, who argue that 'the most efficient approach is to use the case study which involves the collection and /or analysis of quantitative and/ or qualitative data in a single study'(2011, p 214). Opinions vary as to which approach, quantitative or qualitative, provides the most appropriate means of obtaining data which may be used to address particular research issues (Della Porta and Michael, 2008). Previous studies which investigated media issues have adopted a mixed method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methods, all of which demonstrates that a hybrid of the two approaches includes many different forms of research methodology.

The thesis is based more on the qualitative approach with a small amount of quantitative analysis, which is the content analysis of the news in order to investigate the importance of each media platform, where this gives an indicator of the agenda of these media. Besides the content analysis of the news content, the framing analysis will identify which frames are used by the five media outlets in their coverage of political news, thus enabling the thesis to be comprehensive and integrated. The four concepts together reflect the main political issues in Kurdistan, while the young people form the main sector of society affected by and interested in these issues. The media in Kurdistan have a different agenda when covering these issues and therefore it can be assumed that they use different frames in their coverage as the ownership of the Kurdish media is divided among the ruling parties, opposition and independent media. Which means the case study approach is adopted here to investigate these issues and provide a case study of political communication in Kurdistan.

Marschan-Piekkari and Welch (2011) show that the mixed method is useful for deeper understanding and for supporting the findings, while Hesse-Biber notes that the mixed method enables the 'qualitative researcher to creative quantitative measures from their qualitative data' (2010: 1). Moreover Denscombe (2010) notes that the mixed method enables the researcher to develop the research instrument and design a variety of research questions, while Greene argues that there is much for the researcher to 'benefit from the creative thinking of the diverse application of social inquiry' (2007, p 143).

The case study approach is helpful in finding the causal interpretation of a phenomenon, and this gives further justification of its application in this research. Gray (2010) notes that the case study is useful for research which investigates media perceptions and for measuring the background of media audiences. It allows the researcher to investigate a phenomenon through focusing on a part of the issue which means that its function is not limited to a descriptive explanation but reveals a more in-depth explanation. Yin (2009) also argues that the case study can be used for explanation and generalisation as it enables the researcher to investigate a phenomenon or a group of events in the context of society. Furthermore, Yin (2009) notes that the case study can help to interpret the causality of a phenomenon. From this standpoint, the current thesis raises three questions to enable further understanding of political communication. These focus on different aspects of the issue: analysis of the media content of the political news; editorial policy and the freedom of media professionals to investigate political issues; evaluation of young people's understanding of and response to the media content of the political issues and of their attitudes towards the government's performance and the political issues. To examine these questions through this case study several different methods will be adopted, such as content analysis and framing analysis, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews as will be explained in the following three sections in more detail.

3.3 Content analysis of political news
This section looks at the content analysis of the news coverage, including the sampling strategy of the selection of the media and news content, the method of data analysis

and the ethical case as well. The content analysis was employed to address the first research question which seeks to investigate to what extent the media covers the political issues in Kurdistan and how framing is used in their news coverage.

Specifically with regard to the sampling of the media content analysis, there are several Television channels and websites that are not news providers in Kurdistan, therefore only 2 Television channels and 3 websites will be studied here. The rationale for selecting and rejecting components of the sample is related to the purpose and generalisation of the study in terms of the components and structure of the Kurdish media. In terms of the news channels in Kurdistan, they can be classified into those channels belonging to the ruling parties and those belonging to the opposition parties. Accordingly, one Television channel owned by the ruling parties has been selected, namely *KG TV* oriented by the PUK and this channel is specific in its political content. The *KG TV* channel's headquarters is in Sulaymaniyah City, which is located in the area where the opposition parties have most influence. In addition, most of the independent media platforms have emerged there because the area of PUK influence is more liberal than that of the KDP. *KNN* is the second Television channel selected and it is owned by the biggest opposition parties collectively known as the Gorran Movement and it also mainly focuses on political issues in Kurdistan. As for websites in Kurdistan, there are three types classified according to their ownership either by the ruling parties, opposition parties or independent ownership. The website representative of the main governing political party is the *Xendan* Website which is the most popular, whereas the most popular website among the opposition parties is *Sbeiy* owned by Gorran, the main opposition party. Although there are many independent websites, *Awena* has been selected because it is one of the main ones, and in order to give a balanced view of political news in this research project.

From this standpoint, the thesis excluded print media, radio and social media for several reasons. With regard to the print media, currently the newspaper's popularity has fallen and several newspapers have been closed, which reflects a wider global phenomenon. For instance, the two websites analysed in this thesis, *Xendan* and *Sbeiy,* have both closed their print version. A further example concerning newspapers is the

'*Kurdistan News',* owned by the PUK and the oldest newspaper in Kurdistan, which prints 4,000 copies daily, while Kurdistan has a population of some 5 million. By comparison, the websites studied here attract up to 100,000 daily visitors (Muhedeen, 2012). Moreover, radio listeners are increasingly limited to housewives and taxi drivers and most radio programmes tend to focus on music with a small amount of news and other programme content (Warty, 2008). In terms of social media, although its users are globally increasing rapidly, nevertheless in Kurdistan it is not more popular than television and websites for two reasons. Firstly the Internet is still expensive and unreliable and most users do not have mobile access because the Internet is only available by installing a home connection. Secondly, the Internet is not available everywhere, particularly in more rural areas, which means that television remains the main media platform and there is no tax on television which ensures its popularity.

Regarding the sampling strategy, this involved selecting news programmes from the two selected television channels and news coverage on the three websites during a year. From the registration of my PhD programme in January 2012 until the selection of my sampling in April 2013 I observed the whole Kurdish media generally and the selected media specifically. Furthermore, I started to discuss with professionals working in the media in Kurdistan and discovered that *GK TV* has the main news programme which is presented at 10 pm. This programme includes all the news stories presented during the day, it mainly consists of news but sometimes it invites political observers, journalists and experts to analyse some topics. This programme lasts nearly one hour and includes 15-35 news stories. Similarly, *KNN TV* has a similar news programme which is presented at 9 pm. The two news programmes on *GK TV* and *KNN TV* largely present their daily news content in this peak-time broadcast (Ali, 2011; Mageed, 2011). Therefore, during one week between 11th to 17th April 2013 news items from the television channels as well as from the 3 websites were selected. Thus the total amount of news content analysed from both channels was 14 hours across *GK TV* and *KNN TV* and the total number of news items was 280. From these, 136 news items were identified as being relevant to the four political issues. For more details on this, see Table 5.1 in Chapter Five which is devoted to textual analysis.

With specific regard to the news from the websites, all the news presented during the week was selected, which totalled 714 news items with 182 being relevant to the four political issues, again see Table 5.4 in Chapter Five. Thus the total number of news items across the five media platforms was 994, with 318 being relevant to the four political issues. Those 994 news items were analysed quantitatively in the form of a content analysis by applying several categories, while the 318 items were analysed qualitatively by applying a framing analysis. The sample of the news content analysis in this thesis is small as my research is based on the qualitative method, where usually the sample is small (Macnamara, 2005), (Denscombe, 2010) and Marschan- Piekkari and Welch, 2004).

This thesis has applied a content analysis to the political news selected in order to focus on the second research question which investigates how specified political issues (namely corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust) are covered across the main Kurdish media platforms. The content analysis of the news content is divided into content analysis (statistical analysis) which is a quantitative approach and framing analysis which is qualitative approach. The thesis is mainly focused on qualitative content analysis rather than quantitative content analysis, as it seeks to investigate political communication qualitatively. However, quantitative analysis was used as an additional approach to provide indicators as to what extent the selected media give importance to the four political issues compared to other themes, thus enabling the agenda of the studied media platforms to be determined. Furthermore, the second research question seeks to evaluate the priorities of the media channels, which makes the application of quantitative content analysis even more relevant. The quantitative method helps researchers to be more reliable and reduce bias as well (Newman and Carolyn, 1998; Markula and Michael , 2011).

Alongside these features of the quantitative method, the qualitative method is considered important and much more accurate in obtaining in-depth insights into issues. Newbold, Boyd-Barrett and Van den Bulck (2002) support the qualitative approach arguing that there is a relationship between media texts and their impact which cannot be evaluated quantitatively. Alongside the general importance of such qualitative content analysis, this thesis recognises the scarcity of research into

political communication in Kurdistan particularly the lack of any qualitative research in this field. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis will be conducted, as the current research is the first study to adopted the qualitative research approach foto examine political communication in Kurdistan. Hollway mentioned that, 'the aim of qualitative document analysis is to discover new or emergent patterns, including overlooked categories' (2011, p 321). This is relevant to the current thesis which aims to acquire in-depth understanding of how political issues are covered across different media, from the media of the parties in power, opposition media and independent media sources. Keen and Todres (2006) claimed that the qualitative study seeks to achieve findings which accurately represent the research with the aim to describe, interpret, and evaluate message content. Regarding the importance of content analysis in media research, Wimmer and Dominick also added that it 'is an efficient way to investigate the content of the media' (2006: 156). The present research seeks to provide accurate knowledge and understanding of political news across the Kurdish media. Those scholars who support the quantitative approach, such as Newman and Carolyn (1998) and Markula and Michael (2011), argue that it reduces researcher bias and increases the reliability of the research. Therefore, in order to give as wide a picture as possible, the present research has applied both quantitative and qualitative descriptive analysis to cover the research questions and aims. As Markula argues, 'A mixed methods approach helps answer different questions and thus enables a researcher to obtain a single well integrated picture of a situation' (2011, p 201).

Regarding the method of data analysis of the news content, this will be restricted to textual news and any sound effects and visuals will be excluded because the majority of news reports on television in Kurdistan do not involve these techniques or effects because of lack of expertise in the Kurdish media (Abdul Rahman, 2012; Muhedeen, 2012). Similarly previous research which examined the news content of the Kurdish media excluded sound effects and visuals for the same reason (Ali, 2011; Mageed, 2011).

Two methods have been applied to analyse the textual news, the first being content analysis to analyse the news quantitatively according to several categories. Each news item from the sample was rendered into a transcript, closely read and then

categorised and coded. The news items were divided into three categories, with the First category classifying the news from across the television channels into three subcategories: (1) news relating to political issues (reform, corruption, government performance and citizens' trust); (2) news relating to disputed areas which refers to the external issues of Kurdistan; (3) other news (non-political and foreign news). The news items from the websites in this category were similar in content to the television but did not include the the subcategory of 'disputed areas' because during the categorising process I found this was mostly highlighted on the television. The First category is devoted to evaluation of the priority given by the media platforms to the four political issues compared to other themes and the results of this are presented in Table 5.1 and 5.4 in Chapter Five.

The Second category was devoted to classifying the news related to the four political issues into four subcategories: (1) corruption, (2) reform, (3) government performance, (4) citizens' trust. This would identify the agenda of the media towards each of these concepts and issues and thereby provide the priority of the five media platforms. The results are presented in Table 5.2 and 5.5 in Chapter Five.

The Third category sought to categorise the news related to the four political issues into three subcategories: (1) using positive value, which means that the item showed the government in a positive light when discussing its performance, reforms and the level of citizens' trust in the government, while corruption was not discussed as an issue. (2) negative value, which means that the item reported negatively on the government's performance, reforms and citizens' trust, with corruption as a main news item and an important political issue obstructing development in Kurdistan as well as the overall democratic political process. (3) neutral value, which means that the media covered the four issues using a neutral approach. The third categorisation process was conducted by reading each news story and assigning one of the three values according to the phrases used and the approach of the coverage. The results of this category are presented in Table 5.3 and 5.6 in Chapter Five.

Regarding the qualitative content analysis of the news content, framing analysis was applied to examine the news related to the four political issues covered in the selected media and the total news items were 318. This approach is widely used for analysing

news content as discussed in the literature review, and is viewed as particularly useful in research related to political communication. This research has applied the framing analysis according to the 4 components determined by Robert Entman (1993). These are : (1) problem definition, which helps determine how the media define the problem of the political issues and to what extent the media define the political issues; (2) causal interpretation, this component helps identify how the media refresh the causality of the political issues; (3) moral evaluation, identifies how the media evaluate the political issues; and (4) treatment recommendation, this component allows understanding of the extent to which the media attempt to provide solutions to political issues. There are several PhD researchers who have employed framing analysis as an approach and used its criteria to analyse textual news when researching political communication (Mchakulu, 2010).

Alongside the four components, during the coding process each article was coded using general and open coding in order to explore the dominant framing components used in the coverage of the news stories and to identify how the phrases and points were used to construct each framing component. Subsequently, certain frames were identified that were used as a tool for constructing the 4 frame components. These were: (1) reframing, which means that the media devotes several news items or news stories to cover a case in one news programme; (2) magnified frame, refers to what emphasis the media gave to the case; (3) consequences frame, which refers to how a specific issue or a case has potential to have negative or positive impact; (4) simplify frame, refers to how the media simplifies the issue or underestimates its real size or significance; (5) localising frame, which means the issues are made to appear of local importance or smaller; (6) internal security frame, this refers to how the media claims that internal security is under threat from others, either from terrorism, or from Baghdad because of historical conflicts, or the threat from surrounding countries regarding Kurdish issues. These frames may be used by the media in order to distract people from asking the government to further reform internal issues. These are detailed in Appendix (5) which is devoted to the content analysis coding sheet.

Regarding the ethics involved in the selection of the news content sample, I visited the five media outlets and informed them that I was conducting research into political

communication and the *KNN TV* and *GK TV* gave me seven news programmes on one DVD disk and mentioned that they were happy to provide material to any researcher free. Similarly, the managers of the three websites offered to provide me with their news during the week but I informed them that I would personally save and download the news as the three websites have open access and are free. Alongside this, the researcher can ask the Ministry of Culture to obtain the news and programmes across the media free. The Minister of Culture of the KRG provides this service to all researchers, as this ministry employs a system to record the whole media output and this helps researchers if the media are unwilling to co-operate.

3.4 Conducting focus group, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews with young people.

This section examines three methods (focus group, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews) employed to collect data from young people, including the sampling strategy, the approach of analysing the data and the ethics as well. These three methods were employed to answer research question three which investigates how young people understand and respond to the political issues across the media and how they evaluate the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process.

Focus groups, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews are among the main tools of data collection for qualitative research (Leavy, 2014; Elamé, 2013) and these methods can be combined with a quantitative approach in a single research (Elamé, 2013). Each of the three methods was applied to achieve specific aims: the focus group was used to evaluate how young people understand and respond to the political issues across the five media platforms studied in this thesis; the in-depth interviews were used to investigate how young people evaluate the government's performance; and the semi- structured interviews were used to discover how young people view the political process, particularly the role of elections, in the development of the democratic process.

This thesis applied three tools and three different samples of participants to answer the first research question which consists of three parts: evaluating the media, evaluating government performance and evaluating the role of elections in the

political process. The focus group method was selected to collect data addressing the first part of the question (evaluating the media) comprised 42 participants across 7 focus groups. The in-depth interview method was chosen to address the second part of the first research question (evaluating government performance) by selecting another 15 participants. The semi- structured interview method was applied to the final part of the research question (how young people see the elections in the political process) by selecting another 7 participants during the election campaign. Therefore, the total number of the sample is 62 participants, 42 for the focus group, 15 for in-depth interviews and 7 for semi-structured interviews and all the participants were between 18 and 28 years old. All of these were conducted in the Kurdish language and subsequently translated into English, and all the transcripts relevant to the research questions are presented in Appendices 1-3. Each method will be explained more fully in terms of sampling, ethics and data collection process in the following section.

3.4.1 Focus group

The focus group was applied to the first research question to explore how these media platforms contribute to the formation of the attitudes of young people towards current political issues in Kurdistan. The other objective of conducting a focus group in this thesis is to enable comparison of the points of view expressed by the young people with the findings of the content analysis data. Babbie used focus groups 'to examine how U.S. citizens frame their views of political issues' (2012, p 157), and this method has been adopted in the current research. Lunt and Livingstone argue that a 'focus group is useful when researchers seek to discover participants' meanings and ways of understanding (1996: 3)', which is clearly an objective of this research. Semetko and Scammell (2012) added that a focus group is a widely adopted method that can be used in political communication research. Perlmutter (1999) also shows that focus groups were used in marketing research before political communication and then became a method tool for evaluating voters' feelings about any issue due to the inability of the survey method to examine audience attitudes effectively. As well as this method being useful to political communication research and appropriate to this thesis, it had not been used in any research in political communication, as far as I observed. The two research studies into political communication conducted in

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Kurdistan by Ali (2011) and Mageed (2011) applied a quantitative method, namely content analysis of textual news and survey. The present thesis seeks to achieve deeper understanding of these issues through using qualitative approaches.

There are recognised limitations to the use of a focus group, which Hennink (2013) defines as typically including six to eight participants or fewer. Scholars have different recommendations about the number of focus groups in individual research, for example Beall suggests that the researcher 'can conduct one to two focus groups only' (2010, p 35). Accordingly, in one of her research studies she conducted only three focus groups and devoted the focus of each group to the age of the participants. The limited focus group helps the research to be focused because as a qualitative tool it does not seek to generalise the data findings as in a survey. As the limited number of focus group participants allows the researcher to control the data, Hennink states that 'focus group homogeneity involves bringing people who have enough in common to allow the development of a productive controversial dynamic' (2013, p 39). Similarly, Bloor (2001) argues that discussion through the focus group takes place in a dynamic and spontaneous fashion, although the process is conducted in an organised meeting. Moreover, the focus group allows the researcher to explore how each individual person affects the others, thus allowing a further opportunity to observe interpersonal communication. Martin (2011) found and suggested that in researching the effects of media in countries that have strong relationships amongst people, the evaluation of interpersonal communication should be included.

The focus group process was carried out between 14th and 28th April 2013 and during this period one week's news from *GK TV*, *KNN TV*, *Sbeiy Website*, *Xendan Website* and *Awena Website* were selected from 11th to 17th April 2013. The focus group process was conducted at the same time as the content analysis of the political news selection in order to evaluate the young people's feedback on live events and news. The focus group consisted of 7 separate groups and each group was composed of 4-8 young people, making a total of 42 participants, with each group discussion lasting around 45 to 60 minutes. The seven focus groups were divided into two focus groups to discuss *GK TV* and two focus groups to discuss *KNN TV*. The other three remaining focus groups were centred around the websites: *Xendan*, *Sbeiy* and *Awena*,

with one focus group for every website; this means of obtaining news is less popular than television. Participants with differing political allegiances were divided among the different focus groups because Kurdish society is divided among the political parties, which is reflected in media users. Warty (2008) argues that partisan media and a lack of national broadcasting services leads to society being divided on the media. Therefore, the participants were divided among the focus groups and it was impossible to find one young person who used all five media platforms studied. Nonetheless, as stated earler, it is possible to devote one or two focus groups to evaluate the media or any cases (Beall, 2010).

Specifically in Iraqi Kurdistan there is a lack of research that has investigated how young Kurdish people use the media; the most recent research, conducted in 2009 was the National Youth Survey undertaken by the Ministry of Culture and Youth. In this survey, it was found that more than 98 per cent of young people watch television and only 40 percent use the Internet. Muhedeen (2012) states that the Internet in Kurdistan is expensive, unreliable and it is not available everywhere, which means that websites are not so popular compared to the television which is free of charge. From this stand point, the present thesis has excluded analysis of social media.

The participants were selected according to demographic characteristics, namely gender, place of residence, and level of education. The participants were also selected according to some variables regarding the background of the young people, namely their political affiliation or political orientation and political knowledge or interest.

The following table clarifies the composition of the focus groups.

Table 3.1

Focus Group Numbers	Demographic characteristics of the participants in the focus groups			
	Gender	Place of Residence	Higher Education and not in higher Education	Total

		Fe	Ma	City	Town and villages	In higher education	Not in higher education	
First	Tele-vision	2	3	4	1	5	-	5
Second		1	3	4			4	4
Third		3	4	4	3	7		7
Fourth		3	4	5	2	7		7
Fifth	Website		7	3	4	7		7
Sixth		4		4		4		4
Seventh		2	6	6	2	8		8
Total		15	27	30	12	38	4	**42**

Focus Group numbers		Political background of the participants in the focus groups					
		Political affiliation or political orientation			Political knowledge or political interests.		Total
		Ruling parties	Opposition parties	Independent			
First	Television	2	2	1	Media		5
Second		1	2	1	Not in higher education		4
Third		1	4	2	Media		7
Fourth			1	6	Media		7

Fifth	wesite	1	4	2	Political science	7
Sixth			2	2	Political science	4
Seventh		2	2	4	Political science	8
Total		7	17	18		**42**

Participants in the focus groups according to demographic characteristics and political background.

During the selection of the sample every effort was made to keep a balance between the categories of young people according to their political and demographic characteristics as the thesis aimed to investigate the role of these factors as general and additional findings. However, it is not necessary to strike an exact balance because this thesis is located in qualitative research which, unlike quantitative research, does not attempt to generalise the data (Hadiwinata, 2003). According to Table 3.1, 38 young people were in higher education, and 4 young people were not. This can be explained by the fact that the majority of this age group in Kurdistan are either attending higher education programmes or have a university degree (Technology and Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, 2009). Accordingly, the thesis only devoted one focus group to young people who are not in higher education and this group evaluated *GK TV* (see Appendix 1). This will not affect the data obtained for *GK TV* because there is another focus group devoted to *GK TV*. Hughes and DuMont (2002) preferred conducting focus groups in homogeneous groups in this way, while Beall (2010) suggested that is possible to devote even one focus group to evaluate any research topic. Furthermore, as stated above, this piece of qualitative research does not aim to generalise the data.

Regarding the other two remaining factors, gender and place of residence, the participants were divided into 27 males and 17 females, which is not significant and will not affect the results. The participants were divided into separate and mixed groups of males and females, for instance there was one female focus group, one male focus group and the five remaining were mixed because the majority of them preferred this formation. It can be argued that gender division in Kurdistan, as in

other cultures, is often influenced by males, particularly in the formation of their political attitudes. Elsayed (2011) conducted focus groups with females separately for her PhD thesis and argued that Egyptian females often felt ashamed when speaking in meetings with males. In terms of the place of residence the young people were divided into 27 from cities and 15 from towns and villages, which reflects the fact that the majority of Kurdish people live in cities. In terms of age, the thesis did not take this into account for two reasons, firstly this is a cohort of young people aged 18 to 28 and this category share common political concerns, for example most of them are not employed in the public sector and they face housing problems, unemployment, and no clear prospects for the future. The second reason is that half the participants were selected from private university and aged over 24, which means the participants were exactly divided into the age groups (18- 28).

To investigate the variables regarding the background of young people, namely political affiliation and political knowledge or political interest, some students were selected from the Department of Media and Political Science as they have a strong relation to these variables. At the same time the focus group whose participants were not in higher education was selected, on the assumption that they might have a weaker level of political knowledge. At the end of each focus group the participants were asked their political background and whether they were affiliated to a particular party or had any specific political orientation such as towards the ruling political parties, the opposition or independent media. Specific demographic characteristics were recorded to establish which participants were in higher education or not, along with their gender and place of residence (cities, villages and towns). It proved quite feasible to ask people about their political background in Kurdistan, as they were keen to show their affiliation to one of the political groups. This would allow for comparison between young people in higher education and those not in higher education and for these variables to be tested. The focus group and in-depth interviews were conducted during April and May, as this date was near the time of the election campaign leading to the August election and came at a time when the media coverage in relation to the research topic was greater.

The participants were selected from the University of Sulaymaniyah, University of Charmw and the University of Human Development and a small number I met in a youth club. Prior to the selection of university students I visited the Heads of Department and Faculty of these universities to explain my PhD project and they formally allowed me to meet their students. The lecturers were willing to help me arrange appointments with the students and provided a room in the university to conduct the focus groups. This is due to the fact that lecturers appreciate the work of researchers and tend to help them and provide them with all the facilities if required. I showed the students a sample of news on television and from websites but the respondents were not interested in watching them or reading them, as they claimed they had already seen them. This is probably due to the fact that most of the young people selected were interested in politics and were active users of the media platforms studied, a phenomenon common in qualitative research which mostly relies on purposive sampling (Merriam, 2014;Yin, 2010) in order to find deeper understanding rather than generalising the data as in quantitative research (Hadiwinata, 2003).

The data collected from the focus groups, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews were all transcribed and analysed through thematic analysis as a method of data analysis. Thematic analysis is a typical approach to analyse qualitative data from interviews (Athanasiou and Darzi, 2011), however this approach has some limitations. In this respect Willig claims that 'thematic analysis does not itself provide the researcher with a clear theoretical basis which means that the researcher has to do a lot of conceptual work before embarking upon the research itself' (2013, p 65). Another perceived weakness of this approach is that thematic analysis is also used to analyse quantitative data leading to a deductive approach, whereas in this thesis thematic analysis is used on qualitative data. However, this should not detract from the value of such analysis as any findings will aid comparison with the other data obtained elsewhere.

Thematic analysis was also used to analyse the data collected by conducting in-depth interviews with the chief news editors. This thematic approach was adopted by Harper and Thompson (2011) who noted that the thematic analysis is useful in

dealing with data from verbal interviews, such as focus groups. Alongside this, thematic analysis has been described as a flexible method to analyse data and useful for qualitative research (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Willig (2013) also noted that thematic analysis can deal with a wide range of data including transcripts of interviews, focus group discussions and media texts. Finally, thematic analysis enables the researcher to systematically present the data which has been collected (Saldaña, 2012). The approach also helps to explain the emergence of sub-questions after the data collection. Another important point of thematic analysis is that it helps researchers to find further meaning and identify the emergence of information relevant to the research question because it does not involve categorising the data by specific content type. Rather the data is interpreted according to the research questions which means that it can be used for several questions as coding and category criteria that develop during the data analysis, all of which aims to serve the research question (Athanasiou and Darzi, 2011). The transcripts were coded according to several sub-questions that relate to the main research questions of the project, as can be seen in Appendices 1-3 in order to ensure the main ideas of the participants were represented. Subsequently, notes were written on each idea and comment from the participants and any relationship between the comments was noted in order to identify common ideas and specific points mentioned by the participants. Furthermore, the analysis process was conducted on the data collected from the in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews and the focus groups, as can be seen in the transcription copy of these in Appendices 1-3.

Prior to conducting a focus group the key aims, research questions and concepts of the thesis were outlined to ensure the participants focused on the topic because during the focus groups they tended to discuss irrelevant points if left unchecked. My previous experience as a media presenter and correspondent from 2004 -2010 helped me to conduct the interviews confidently and effectively. Most of the participants were volunteers, because in Kurdish culture participants in such projects are not usually rewarded. Although some participants wanted their names to be shown, pseudonyms were adopted throughout to ensure anonymity along ethical grounds. During the focus groups each respondent presented one or two main points. Due to the nature of the focus groups that were composed of several members, each person

tried to discuss a few points and the others tended not to repeat the same comment, as they either approved of it or expressed a different viewpoint. All the participants' comments were recorded and a pen was used to record notes as this is useful later for the researcher. Subsequently all the participants' comments relevant to the research question were transcribed and presented in Appendix 1.

3.4.2 Conducting in-depth interviews with young people.

As aforementioned the focus group was presented as the first tool of the qualitative approach for data collection while the in-depth interviews can be identified as the second tool of data collection. Moskowitz (1998) notes that both approaches can be combined in the single research due to the flexibility of the qualitative approach. The present research has used in-depth interviews for collecting data from young people's perception of the government's performance. Several authors refer to the advantages of in-depth interviews, for instance in widening interpretation and perception (Mayer, 2011). This method is useful in 'covering a wide area of interest' such as that of the current research project (Hine and Carson, 2007, p 15). Wimmer and Dominick (2006) note that in-depth interviews are important for obtaining information on sensitive and serious issues and they argue that this allows the researcher to gain fresh information in detail.

The in-depth interviews were applied as another tool for obtaining data about how young people evaluate the government's performance in order to examine the understanding and attitudes of young people, therefore the participants were asked several questions during the in-depth interviews, as can be seen in Appendix 2. The interviewees were composed of 15 participants who participated between the 2nd and 25th May 2013. This period came a few months before the Kurdish election campaign and as a result political discussion amongst people became more heated. This in turn led to young people being more ready to discuss political issues and the government's performance. The demographic characteristics and political background of the young people which were taken into account during their in-depth interviews are illustrated in the following table:

Table 3.2

65

Demographic characteristics			Political background
Gender	Educational background	Place of residence	
2 Male	Students in Media Studies University of Sulaymaniyah	City	Opposition
2 Male	Students in Political Science University of Sulaymaniyah	Town and villages	Independent
1 Male	Unemployed	City	Ruling parties
2 Female	Students in Media Studies University of Sulaymaniyah	City	Ruling parties
1 Male	Unemployed graduate from Erbil	City	Ruling parties
1 Female	Student in Education Department - Salahaddin University in Erbil	Town and villages	Ruling parties
2 Female	Students in Education Department - Garmian University	Town and villages	Opposition
1 Female	Student in Media Study University of Sulaymaniyah	City	Independent
1 Male	Unemployed	City	Independent
1 Female	Media Study University of Sulaymaniyah	City	Opposition
1Male	Unemployed graduate from Erbil	City	Opposition

Total	8 Males &7 Females to make a total of **15** young people.

Demographic characteristics and political background of sample

The interviewees were composed of 8 males and 7 females who were studying in different departments in the university. With specific regard to the educational background of the 15 participants, 10 of them were students from the Media Studies, Political Science, Education and Linguistics departments, while 2 of them had graduated, but were currently unemployed, and the remaining two were not in higher education. Thus the sample represented a cross-section of young people in Kurdistan, although the thesis is based on qualitative research which aimed to select young people who are interested in politics. It is a reasonable assumption that most young people in Kurdistan are interested in politics because they face issues such as finding a job, housing, and future security as there is no state pension in the private sector (Warty, 2008; Hussain, Talat, 2006 and Hussain, 2015). Regarding their place of residence, 10 of the participants were from cities and the remaining 5 from towns and villages, as the majority of Kurds live in cities.

With specific regard to their political background they all had a different political orientation and 6 of them were affiliated to the opposition parties, 5 of them were affiliated to the political parties in power, and the remaining 4 were independent. As aforementioned in the focus group section, in Kurdish society most people tend to reveal their political background and it is quite possible to ask them about this.

The actual length of each in-depth interview varied between 30 to 40 minutes and they were audio recorded and subsequently typed. Pen and paper was also used for recording some important notes and the interviews were conducted in different settings, such as in the university, in a public square, in a youth club and in a coffee shop. Enough time was allowed to conduct the interviews and the whole process was done face to face, which is more effective than by telephone or online because it allows the interviewer to interact with the respondents, who prefer this method as well. The conducting of the in-depth interviews and focus groups was not difficult as I had worked in the media as a news correspondent and radio presenter when I was a student in Kurdistan and Egypt during my Bachelors and Masters degree programme.

Similarly to the focus group, all 15 interviewees participated as volunteers because in Kurdish culture respondents do not expect to be rewarded for participating in research. The interviews as aforementioned were conducted in Kurdish and later translated into English by the researcher, no agency appears to be available to do this service. All transcripts relevant to the research question are presented in Appendix 2.

3.4.3 Conducting semi–structured interviews with young people

This thesis used the semi-structured interview to understand how young people see the role of their political participation in elections and their perception of the role of elections in a future democratic political system, as this is a part of the first research question. The participants in the semi-structured interview comprised 7 respondents who were asked some key questions in a public square during the last election campaign in September 2013 in order to obtain data to address the research question.

Interviews conducted as part of research may take different forms and types, such as the semi-structured interview, structured interview and unstructured interview (Ritchie and Palmer, 2005; Schuh, 2009). The semi-structured interview is important for asking standard questions, and it allows for the investigation of additional questions (Jolley and Mitchell, 2007). However, the same authors also argue that structured interviews contribute to increasing the reliability and reducing the risk of bias from the interviewer. Klenke (2008) notes that the semi-structured interview is usually prepared for limited key questions. This form of interview was important for the present research as it allowed young people to be interviewed in public squares and respond to questions more informally. The other reason for using this type of interview is that the young people in this kind of place and situation do not have sufficient time for a structured interview to be conducted as they came out to participate in the election campaign and to enjoy it. Therefore they tend to be unwilling to give more time to the researcher and it was easier to conduct the interviews in a short time, so the actual length of the semi-structured interviews was about 10-20 minutes only. During the semi-structured interviews there were seven young male participants who were interviewed between1st and 6th September 2013. Five of them were interviewed in Sulaymaniyah and the other two in Erbil. This was due to the fact that the election campaign was more popular at night particularly in

Salim Street in Sulaymaniyah and Eskan Street in Erbil. The majority of young people who participated were males with a few females who only attended with their parents or brothers. Therefore, I could not conduct semi-structured interviews with any female young people because they mostly tend to be willing to participate in interviews in educational and cultural institutions individually and not with their parents, as they feel a kind of shame when speaking with researchers, particularly during the election campaign which is characterised by hustle and chaos. The respondents were informed of the aims of the thesis and the interviewing process and were asked several questions to collect data about how young people interact with the political campaign, how they see the role of political elections in a democracy and how this may affect potential government performance after the election, all of which address a part of the first research question. These semi-structured interviews were important particularly as they were conducted at s suitable time during the election campaign as the atmosphere of this period motivates participants to deliver their messages more strongly to the researcher. Further clarification of the content of the semi-structured interviews can be found in Appendix 3.

3.5 Conducting in-depth interviews with media professionals

In-depth interviews were also used to collect data from media professionals particularly the Chief News Editor and Managing News Editors of the television channels and websites whose news content was selected for the present research. The aim of the interview with media professionals was to address the second research question relating to why each Kurdish media platform has a different style of covering political issues according to its ownership and to evaluate the freedom to obtain information about political issues. The interviews with this group were important for this research because it was expected to reveal an evaluation of their editorial policy in particular with relation to corruption and government performance. This also helps explain their attitudes towards the research issues and their editorial policy, and another advantage of the in-depth interviews is to provide a context in which to examine several issues related to media freedom and transparency in government departments. This is particularly important in Kurdistan where the government does not provide information to all the media equally, particularly the opposition and independent media. In this regard, Hussain (2015) notes that there is no real

transparency in the public sector towards the media and parliamentary members, particularly in the oil sector, which is the main sector in Kurdistan and Iraq as more than 90% of the budget comes from this sector (Salih, 2015). Moreover, Omer (2013) notes that the majority of government departments do not have a media spokesman or public relations officer, which in turn means that the media cannot obtain information or investigate the corruption and shortcomings of the government, particularly the opposition and independent media. Therefore, the interviews with media professionals facilitated investigation of this issue which contributes to the quality and performance of the media. Furthermore, there is a lack of research in this field, particularly in Kurdistan.

Freedom of the media is quite relevant to the discussion of political communication, particularly in the Kurdish media context, as both authors Salih (2015) and Omer (2013) mentioned, the media in Kurdistan do not have an opportunity to investigate corruption and this thesis is largely focused on the issue of corruption. Therefore, conducting interviews with media professionals not only helps this thesis to investigate this topic, but also informs the textual analysis chapter, as thereby providing deeper understanding of political communication in Kurdistan.

In light of the above arguments about the importance of conducting interviews with media professionals in this thesis, I visited the five media platforms which represent the Kurdish media to conduct the interviews. I found that the Kurdish media are administered by a small staff, particularly the websites, for instance *Awena* has only four media professionals and the S*beiy* team had only 9 members. Therefore, I decided to choose only one member from each. Whilst this may appear a very limited sample, the professionals themselves argued that they preferred to conduct an interview with only one member, claiming that any one of them was able to provide the necessary details to address the research questions as the whole team were familiar with editorial policy and issues of freedom. They also argued that there is is good interaction between media professionals as their numbers are small. Furthermore, the researcher was not able to compel their participation as they were working and therefore free to decide to what extent they were willing to help the researcher in terms of time and the number of respondents. Alongside this, the limitations of the

number of media professionals will not affect this thesis because the 5 respondents selected provided the required information . In each of the five media platforms one professional was interviewed, as shown in the following table detailing the respondent's position, the date, place and method of interview:

Table 3.3

Positions of media professionals	Date of in-depth interview	Place and the method of the and- depth interview
News Chief Editor of *Xendan*	22/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
Managing News Editor of *KNN TV*	22/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
The Head of Public Relations of *GK TV*	14/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
News Chief Editor of *Awena* website	19/2/2013	By Skype
News Chief Editor of *Sbeiy*	1/5/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office

Positions, date, place of interview and the method of interview with media professionals

According to the data in the above table the professionals were divided into three News Chief Editors, one Managing News Editor and the representative of *GK TV* was Head of the Public Relations unit of the channel because the channel preferred to select this respondent to be interviewed. All the interviews were conducted face to face and only the News Chief Editor at Awena was interviewed via Skype as this was the only possible method to conduct the interview.

The respondents were informed of the research questions and aims before being asked several questions, see Appendix 6. All the interviews were recorded, and the actual lengths of these interviews lasted from 30 to 45 minutes.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that this thesis is located in the case study methodology by applying content analysis to determine the priority and agenda of the Kurdish media regarding identified political issues, namely corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust. Subsequently, framing analysis was employed as a qualitative criterion to evaluate the media and analyses how specific framing components and other frames are used in the news coverage. Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with a group of media professionals to investigate their editorial policy and to evaluate the level of freedom journalists have to access information in government departments. Focus groups, in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews were employed as a qualitative approach to examine young people's understanding and response to political issues across the media and analyse how they view the government's performance and the role of elections in the future democratic process. The data collected from the young people and the media professionals were analysed qualitatively by applying thematic analysis.

The table below clarifies this summary of the methods used.

Table 3.4

	Research Question	Main Instruments	Main Method & The Data Analysis Approach	Presentation of findings
Q1	To what extent and how do the Kurdish media cover political issues in particular those relating to corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust?	Selecting one week's news output on *GK TV* *KNN TV* *Sbeiy Website* *Xendan Website* *Awene Website*	Content Analysis (Quantitative)	Chapter Five
			Framing Analysis (Qualitative)	

Q2	Why does each platform of the Kurdish media have a different style of covering the identified political issues according to its ownership and what is the level of freedom of access to information in terms of these political issues?	In-depth Interviews with a range of Media professionals	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative)	
Q3	How do young people understand and respond to the political issues, and how do they see government performance and the role of elections in the future democratic process, and what is the role of demographic characteristics and political background in influencing their evaluation?	Focus Group In-depth Interviews Semi-Structured Interviews with (young people)	Thematic Analysis (Qualitative)	Chapter Six

Summary of methodology used

Chapter Four

4. The living condition of young people and the media in Kurdistan

4.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the living condition of young people and a brief history of the Kurdish media and how it contributed during the Kurdish national movement to the raising of political awareness among the Kurdish people. Both aspects comprise the essential part of this thesis which in turn will help understand the position of young people and their issues in the political context of Kurdistan. Examination of the recent history of the Kurdish media provides a clear vision of its structure and role in political issues. However there is a lack of research and data regarding this topic due to the precarious political set up of Kurdistan. This chapter consists of two sections, the first examines the living condition of young people in Kurdistan and analyse four elements, namely the position of young people in Kurdish society, education, their economic situation, which includes housing and pensions, and their political participation. The second section will give a brief history of the Kurdish media and discuss the five media outlets selected in this thesis, namely *GK TV* and *Xendan* website which is owned by the PUK, one of the two ruling political parties and *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy* website owned by the Gorran Movement which is the main opposition party, alongside the *Awena* website which represents the main independent website.

4.2 The living condition of young people in Kurdistan

This section examines the condition of young Kurdish people in four points, namely the position of young people in the Kurdish population, education, the economic situation of young people which includes housing and pensions and their political participation.

4.2. 1 Young people in the Kurdish population

Since 1997 no national statistics relating to the whole of the Iraqi population have been produced because of the prevailing unfavourable political and security issues. The only available relevant official information is a 2009 survey which was based on taking a sample and was conducted by the Central Agency for Statistics and Information Technology and the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports of Kurdistan.

According to this survey young people in the 10 to 30 age group comprised 42% of the population in Kurdistan and this percentage was approximately 10 per cent higher than the average rate of young people in other countries (Nugent, 2006). The age of young people selected for this research is between 18 and 28 years; three reasons have dictated this: firstly, this category comprises one of the largest sections of Kurdish society and it has received little attention from the government due to the poor economic strategy of the KRG and the corruption of the government (Hardy, 2012a). The second reason is that much of this section of society, although already graduated from universities still face unemployment problems, while the remainder who are currently students do not believe they will be able to find jobs in the future, and as a result they tend to feel unsafe and dissatisfied with government policy (Abdul Ali, 2011). DeLong, Burger and Hamilton (2010) argue that, there are different views about the advantages and disadvantages of having a higher rate of young people in the strategy of development planning but most studies argue that a higher fertility rate is one of the factors that may hinder development. According to other researchers there is a correlation between a country's population growth rate and its energy use (DeLong, Burger and Hamilton, 2010). This can be helpful for countries which fundamentally have a higher rate of population but which lack economic power; this age group is recognised as a valuable resource in all countries and many have strategies for developing and safeguarding the young. Iraqi Kurdistan has a huge amount of untapped natural resources, such as oil, gas, metals and fertile land for agriculture as well as a good supply of fresh water. These natural resources generate significant income for the national government, which means that funds are available to invest in areas of society of most importance to young people, such as education, training and jobs. Therefore, the high percentage of young people in Kurdistan mentioned above should not necessarily represent a burden on the process of national development, as adequate resources exist within the government. Despite this, the KRG has to date developed no real strategy to address young people's issues, youth unemployment has increased and public services are still poor, although during the last decade the budget of Kurdistan increased dramatically, from less than $1 billion to $13 billion as a result of the increase in oil exports. Zebary (2010) stated that the Youth Empowerment Organisation of Kurdistan found that youth-related policies in

the government's programme have been marginalised and it will take several years to solve the problems faced by young people. These problems will be further clarified in the following points.

4.2.2 Young people and education in Kurdistan

Education in Kurdistan is free at all stages from primary school to graduate education. However, the main opportunity realistically open to every student is to achieve a bachelor's degree as places on Masters and PhD programmes are still not sufficient to meet demand from students. Since 2009 public universities have accepted around 70% of students achieving a higher mark in secondary school while the remaining students have been forced to try and secure an offer from one of the country's private universities. As a result, the number of private universities in Kurdistan has increased since 2008 and currently there are 15 private universities, a number equal to that of the public universities. However, offers at postgraduate level have remained limited to students who are members of the ruling political parties, even as recently as 2011. Given the process of corruption in place, which is also central to this thesis, the students who are members of the ruling political parties have more chance of progressing through the higher education system compared with those who support the independent and opposition parties. In an interview with Ali Said the Minister of Higher Education on 28 January 2013, he stated that the government should strive to give MA and PhD offers to students on a transparent and fair basis and not on the basis of party affiliation (*Xendan*, 2013a). Nevertheless, the Department of Military and Police Studies in universities currently persist in offering places only to those students who are members of the ruling political parties. This partisan intervention into the universities' affairs in Kurdish society has affected not only the educational rights of all young people but the quality of the education system as well. As a result of this corrupt system, even students who have relatively low grades on completion of their MA or PhD have become lecturers and scientific researchers, instead of these places going to more suitably qualified students. The student union itself has been monopolised by the ruling political parties; their main objective is to encourage students to become members of the ruling parties as well as to scrutinise non-party political activities in the university. Mustafa (2009) argues that the Kurdish

authorities have imitated the tactics adopted by Saddam's regime, which involved manipulating educational departments for political socialisation and promotion of the ruling political parties. The reputation of the student unions has faltered in recent years because of the influence of the ruling political parties, which in turn has led to independent groups of students engaging in protest activities such as holding demonstrations, conducting alternative meetings and seminars. Ali (2012) argues that the universities in Kurdistan have become a social meeting place and merely provide certificates instead of producing suitably trained professionals who could play a constructive role in the process of national development.

In 2011 the KRG introduced a few reforms, in particular relating to the education system and higher education, which offered opportunities to students to study abroad, specifically on MA and PhD study programmes. Alongside this, a commitment was made to provide study opportunities in the public universities in a more transparent and fair manner, although in reality, students who have affiliations to the ruling political parties are still more likely to obtain such offers. To date, higher posts in universities are still occupied by lecturers who are affiliated to the political parties in power. Prior to 2006 most university graduates had the opportunity of finding jobs in the public sector because the government was new and the two ruling parties offered jobs in order to buy votes. However, more recent opportunities for finding jobs in the public sector have decreased accompanied by a similar decrease in the private sector. Abdullah (2013) mentioned that the desire of students to reach a level of higher education has fallen due to the fact that progression and jobs are based on favouritism and not on academic results. Jobs in the private sector are not considered as palatable as they do not usually include a state pension; consequently, people prefer to secure a job in the public sector even though the salary may be lower.

The government does not have a real plan to tackle graduates' issues and develop the level of university training needed; to date students are not qualifying in accordance with the requirements of vacant jobs on the ground. The previous Minister of Sport and Young People in an interview mentioned that young people should try to find a job and improve their skills because graduate qualifications alone are not sufficient (*Roznama* 11 May 2008, p 12).

Despite the fact that education at primary and secondary level is free, the quality of school provision is poor; there are several reasons for this: the curriculum, teaching methods and leisure facilities. The duration of study in state schools is between 8 am to 12 pm which is only 4 hours, whereas in private schools this is typically 7 hours. Classroom size can be as high as 45 while the average is 23 in private schools. The ratio of students and teachers in public schools is not consistent, for instance some schools have 10 teachers and only 20 students, whereas in others there are 500 students and 10 teachers. Furthermore, the curriculum in the state schools is outdated and is not commensurate with the requirements of contemporary society. Specifically the teaching methods and the relationship between students and teachers are still based on past authoritarian models. The Ministry of Education made a pledge to change this state of affairs in 2010, but these issues have not yet been addressed. Currently, the environment in state schools does not encourage students to take any interest in education because of the poor level of educational facilities. In an interview with Dana Sofe, a member of the Education Committee of the Kurdistan Parliament, he stated that the budget of the Ministry of Education is too low (*Hawlati* 2012b). On the other hand, the private schools have access to larger budgets and adhere to international standards of education in relation to the number of students in classrooms and the level of educational facilities. However, private schools are available only in the capital cities of the three provinces of Iraqi Kurdistan and not in the districts and villages. In general, the private schools qualify students without dependence on public funds. On the other hand, given that tuition fees at these schools are equal to the annual income of the average employee, few people are able to educate their children privately, all of which leads to an increase in class differentiation in society. Another element to consider in relation to private schools is that many families, especially those from the middle class, have sent their children to these schools due to peer pressure. Furthermore, the presence of private schools in any society may not necessarily be considered a wholly negative phenomenon if the public schools are operating at an acceptable average level. In 2013, the opposition members of parliament asked the government to increase the budget of the Education Department and earmark some buildings for education which are used by the offices of the political parties.

From the discussion above, it can be argued that the education system in Kurdistan requires comprehensive reform in order to play a part in creating a democratic society. Demands by both opposition parties and independent groups are on-going for the ruling government to introduce reforms, including those relating to education. Generally it can be assumed that some of the objections and protests raised by young people since 2006 have been justified by the failure of the educational system.

4.2.3 Economic situation of young people

The Iraqi central government and the Kurdistan Regional Government do not provide any form of funding to parents who have children and only those employed in the public sector receive a nominal amount, normally about $10 a month per child. Therefore, most young people cannot plan their life without their family's support until they have completed their education and start to work, because the family is required to fund them. At present in Kurdistan there is no system of student loans as exists in the UK and other countries, whereby a young person can take out loans from the government in order to pay tuition fees. This means the burden of paying education fees rests entirely on families, which is often a significant barrier to entering higher education. Moreover, many young people, even after completing their studies, will face obstacles in finding work and planning for the future. This problem is more severe in Iraq, as indicated by comparative statistics for youth unemployment, which reveal that, for example in the UK, 20.3% of 15-24-year-olds were economically inactive during the period of 2010-14, while in Iraq this figure was 34.1% (*The World Bank* 2014).

The economy of Kurdistan depends on the budget which is drawn up by the central government in Baghdad and this constitutes 17% of the national Iraqi budget; 95% of the total budget is derived from oil production. The KRG has the right to set its own economic policy, except for the salaries of employees in the government sector which are required to be the same as in the rest of Iraq. Therefore, the economy of Kurdistan is influenced by the economic situation in the wider country. The budget of Kurdistan increased from $1 billion in 2003 to $11.616 billion in 2011 after the fall of the Saddam regime due to the lifting of the international economic sanctions, which enabled Iraq to export oil. However, the people's standard of living has not improved

because of corruption and poor economic policy. In 2013 the budget of Kurdistan rose to $13 billion although this did not stem the rise in unemployment. According to the report prepared by the Economic Chamber of the Gorran Movement, the main economic problem in Kurdistan is that the government has consistently ignored the private sector (*Sbeiy*, 2011a). Furthermore, those people who work in the private sector have no insurance or pension provision, therefore unsurprisingly people continue to seek employment in the public sector with the consequence that out of the five million strong population of Kurdistan, as many as 1.5 million work in the public sector. One example of this phenomenon are the Military and Security Departments which are controlled by the ruling parties and employees in these departments are offered posts as a means of securing their votes for the same parties. Therefore, the budget of these departments is five times higher than that of the Department of Health and Education, but employees in some government departments work only three days a week and sometimes less. Arguably, this can be considered as a form of underemployment relating to "overstaffing" or "hidden unemployment," namely the practice of businesses or entire economies employing workers who are not fully occupied because they are not working full normal weekly hours (Felices, 2003). Abdul Ali (2011) found that more than 41% of employees in the public sector are surplus and do not contribute to the production process, while 70% of them are not graduates from universities or are not qualified. Therefore, opportunities for the new generation of graduates in the public sector have become limited. Most current employees do not have any relevant graduate qualifications necessary to work in the public sector as they were randomly appointed after 2003. As a result, the quality of services in the public sector has become poor and curtails potential new opportunities for future graduate students. Abdul Ali argues that the main causes of underemployment in Kurdistan are due to low wages in the private sector, the absence of life insurance and pension rights as well as appointments being made on the basis of mediation and nepotism.

Moreover, most members of the military army, police and security forces are not university educated and the majority of them were previously young farm labourers working in rural areas. The government does not support the agricultural sector and people working in this sector, the result is that villages in rural areas do not have

enough services and leisure facilities and many young people from these areas have migrated to the cities to join the military, security forces and the police. Other consequences of this migration are that the price of basic goods has increased in the cities. Prior to this migration, Kurdistan relied on local food products, whereas now almost all food is imported including fruit and vegetables. Level of salaries and unemployment are the main problems faced by young people.

4.2.3.1 Housing, state pension and social welfare

Lack of housing is a common problem amongst people, particularly young people and there are several reasons for this. The main one is that the government does not have a housing strategy for young people but like other social provision it distributes housing to those parts of the population who have an affiliation to the ruling political parties instead of introducing a housing programme for the whole of the population. In an interview on the *Sbeiy* website (20 November 2010) Amen Jaf, an expert in local affairs, claimed that the government does not have any strategy for housing construction and all the projects that have been completed are of poor quality and they did not meet the required building standards. Jaf also referred to the fact that the political leaders in the ruling parties have monopolised the house building companies which focus on profit and do not receive any sanctions from the government for failing to complete on time or according to the specifications. The Minister of Reconstruction and Housing, Kamaran Ahmed, recognised this lack of quality in government-sponsored projects in an interview with *Xendan* (9 May 2013b). He went on to state that his department had funded some projects in 2012 that were not completed satisfactorily by certain companies and made the promise not to repeat this mistake in his department. Members of the government have publicly acknowledged that this form of corruption exists and that tighter controls are necessary but on the other hand, as Enayat (2012) argues, the government is not capable of finding a solution to the housing problem or assuring the quality of its housing projects by employing competent engineers to design them. This is a result of salaries for these positions being considerably lower than in the private sector, which has forced expert engineers to move from the public to the private sector. Enayat (2012) also mentioned that most private companies have been monopolised by

political leaders of the ruling parties. Alongside this, the issue of housing is not only related to poor quality, at stake there is also the pricing levels, as in the last decade the government constructed flats which it proceeded to sell at very high prices which has cut out many people in need of housing while at the same time others have bought simply to make a profit (Enayat, 2012). The Director of the Investment Department in Sulaymaniyah has acknowledged this to be the case and mentioned that the government will consider building flats for people who do not have a house and selling them at a reasonable price, in an interview with the *Xendan* Website (5/1/2013c). Even though the government has started to build flats the numbers planned are not likely to meet demand, particularly for young people, who essentially lack sufficient funds to pay the required 50% deposit up front. This point was made by the Minister of Reconstruction and Housing who said that the government will build 5,000 flats for people who are not able to buy a house and argues that this will represent an important achievement of the government as there are 100,000 families who do not have their own home. In a report on the *Radio Sawa website* (3 Jun 2010) the Institute of Political Issues for Kurdistan shows in its opinion poll that 26% of young people claimed they were facing a housing problem.

Targeted benefit from the government started in 2013 to grant loans to students who have completed their university studies. This is around $120 per month and is only for one year, but few students apply for it as the amount is not enough and it takes time to process the claim. At the same time the majority of students who have completed university are not able to find jobs, so they depend on their parents for financial assistance. Therefore, the majority of young people face a delay in marriage because of the situation, and they do not feel their life is secure because they have no health insurance or benefits. In Kurdish society marriage is the first step for couples to be able to live together.

4.2.4 Young people and political participation

Young people comprise the largest category of people who have consistently participated in politics since the creation of the Kurdish National Movement, right up to the current situation. However, currently young people are not at the centre of political decision-making because the political leaders have monopolised all aspects of

policy-making in both of the two main political parties and government. Hardy (2012a) argues that one of the main issues facing young people is the marginalisation of their role in policy-making and this led young people feeling dissatisfied, which results in them holding protests and demonstrations.

Many young people worked in the organisational structures of the whole political parties with a low salary, particularly from 1991 to 2005 due to the lack of jobs in other areas of society. Alongside this, the participation of young people in the political parties at that stage was passive because they were not able to exert any influence on the decision-making process. After 2005, young people started to withdraw from working for the political parties due to the economic boom which opened new job opportunities for them. Also improvements in living standards allowed families to support their children financially, thus enabling them to visit clubs and other places where young people can gather, whereas before they had only been able to visit youth organisations created by the political parties as these were free to use. Talat (2006) found that the participation of young people in political parties had decreased; his survey revealed that 65% of young people did not participate in political parties. Rather, young people tended to engage in political participation outside the political parties, for example Talat showed that young people participated more in unofficial informal demonstrations rather than formal ones (Talat, 2006). However, formal demonstrations became difficult particularly after the events of 17th February 2011 when demonstrators faced murder and violence by the police and security forces in Sulaymaniyah. Ali (2011) mentioned that local government officials in the cities and towns dealt with demonstrations according to their personal whims. Even if this argument is true, the main responsibility lies with the government as it gave its officials the go-ahead to use their own power instead of following regulations and failed to punish its officials when they dealt with demonstrations beyond the legal boundaries. Although young people often face violence from the security forces in demonstrations, they remain among the most active category of protesters in demanding their rights. Through sit-ins, gatherings and demonstrations they attempt to convey their views on political issues which often differ from those of the mainstream parties in government. Hardy (2012b) states that young people represent the most active force in Kurdish society in relation to political participation and that,

besides sit-ins and demonstrations, they also actively publish critical pieces in the independent print media or online. In the electoral body, young people make up the largest category of those who vote. According to Talat (2006), more than 80% of young people participated in the last elections and this rate is higher than among middle aged and older categories.

4.3 A Brief history of the Kurdish media and the media selected

This section briefly looks at the history of the Kurdish media and how it contributed during the Kurdish National Movement to the raising of political awareness among the Kurdish people. The section will also define the five media platform outlets selected in this thesis. The aim of this section is to help understanding of the media structure of Kurdistan according to the role of the Kurdish media in the coverage of political issues.

4.3.1 Brief history of Kurdish media

The first Kurdish newspaper was published in Egypt by Miqdad Mathat Badrkan with the title of *Kurdistan*, and it lasted four years from 1898 to 1902. In that period the Kurdish people lacked a political entity which would enable them to have their own press, as Kurdistan was under the rule of the Ottoman Empire (Mustafa, 2012). Although Egypt was also part of the Ottoman Empire there were fewer restrictions on freedom of publication, hence Badrkan chose Egypt as the location to publish the newspaper *Kurdistan*. Mustafa (2012) stated that the Kurdistan newspaper only numbered 31editions and it was not published regularly because of the political situation and general lack of funds. Editions 1 to 6 were published by Miqdad Badrkan in Egypt and later numbers were published by his brothers Amin Ali and Suraya in Geneva and Folkestone in the UK. Two reasons are given by Mustafa (2012) about the changes; the first was that Miqdad went to Istanbul because he was summoned by the rulers of the Ottoman Empire as the newspaper's political aims encouraged the Kurdish people to start a political movement fighting for their rights against the Ottomans. The second reason is that the other brothers of Miqdad were forced to choose another location for publication as the Ottoman rulers were putting pressure on Egypt to arrest them.

Political circumstances in the Ottoman Empire changed as a result of a coup in 1908 led by the Taraqi group, which led to an increase in the level of freedom. This change helped the Kurdish people to print the *Kurdistan* in Istanbul in 1908. While this paper had the same title as that published in Egypt, its circulation lasted only one year due to the coup by Shawkat Pasha in 1909 who decided to cease publication of the paper (Mustafa, 2012). Other print media were established at the same time by Kurdish organisations and young Kurdish students in Istanbul such as the *Kurd Tawn Taraqi Gazette* in 1908, *Rozi Kurd* in 1913, and *Hatawe Kurd* in 1913 (Mustafa, 2012). Jamal Baban started to publish the *Bangi Haq* which means 'the right call' in Baghdad in 1914, but this was also subsequently closed down due to the British occupation of Iraq. During all this period, at the turn of the 20th century, Kurdish people were starting to publish papers outside the Kurdish areas as these were not sufficiently developed and lacked both urban centres and facilities, including universities and printing presses.

When Britain occupied Iraq newspapers begun to be published in different languages, namely English, Arabic and Kurdish. Following this, the Kurdish people seized the opportunity to start publishing a Kurdish newspaper with the title *Tegayshtni Rasti* which means 'truth of understanding' in English, that was published from 1917 to the end of the First World War on 27th January 1918. The paper ceased publication due to the withdrawal of support from Britain because the aim of supporting it was essentially for propaganda and publicity on behalf of Britain. (Mazhar, 1978). During the period of British colonialism in this region, Mazhar argued that Britain preferred to support Arab language newspapers in the rest of Iraq.

In 1920 the Iraqi people began a revolution against the British army; Britain withdrew its army from Sulaymaniyah, which today is part of Iraqi Kurdistan, in order to control the other areas of Iraq, and the Kurdish people seized the opportunity to control their own area within Iraq. King Mahmud established the Kingdom of Kurdistan and named Sulaymaniyah as its capital city, where a newspaper called *Peshkawtn* (meaning 'develop' in English) became the official print media. This paper was also published for less than two years, from 29 September 1920 to 27 July 1922, because the Kingdom of Kurdistan passed from British control to that of Iraq. The Iraqi state

was formed during that period of liberation from British colonial rule which also meant that Britain helped to form the Iraqi system; Mustafa argues that Britain favoured the Arabs' national claim and ignored that of the Kurds (Mustafa, 2012).

Following the integration of Kurdistan into Iraq, some print media were established by Kurdish organisations and intellectual groups to raise the political awareness of the Kurdish people and ensure the protection of the Kurdish identity, the titles of these publications were *Omed Istiqlal*, *Bangi Haq*, *Bangi Kurdistan* and *Rozi Kurdistan*. The Iraq regime was a newly formed monarchy and did not become really powerful until the Second World War, its status remained that of a protectorate under British control, so Iraq was forced to allow the Kurdish people to publish their newspapers because from the British perspective this would help to make Iraq more stable. The Kurdish media focused on poetry and Kurdish literature to defend the Kurdish national cultural identity as its people had lost their local governing power and become part of Iraq. Qani (2012b) mentioned that the Kurdish people defended their identity through publishing poetry, but that the content of these poems was part of an ongoing political discourse.

After the Second World War the Iraqi regime became stronger and exercised control of the Kurdish National Movement by allowing it to publish print media on condition that it did not focus on political issues and self-determination. Alongside this, the Iraqi regime prevented any Kurdish political activities and any Kurdish groups that supported the aims of the Kurdish National Movement. As a result of these censoring processes, two kinds of publications emerged, the Kurdish official publications and underground publications. The main official publication was the *Galaawez* magazine published during the period of 1939-1940. At the same time, the Kurdish people started to establish political organisations and underground publications, for instance *Zenawai Kurdistan* which in English means 're-life Kurdistan' at the beginning of the 1940s and the *Netionam* magazine which in English means 'nation'. In the middle of the 1940s Kurdish political parties emerged, such as the KDP in 1943, opening their offices in Kurdish rural areas as the majority of Kurdish people were located in rural mountainous areas which were difficult for the Iraqi regime to control. The KDP started to publish underground publications, for instance the *Risgary* paper which in

English means 'liberation'; this paper was secretly distributed in Kurdish towns and cities.

The Iraqi regime was forced to allow the Kurdish people to publish their print media due to the efforts of the Kurdish National Movement which started at the beginning of the 1940s. The aims of the Iraqi regime in allowing the Kurdish print media were twofold; firstly to let the Kurdish people know that the regime was giving them cultural rights and secondly to use these media outlets to promote the Baghdad regime. The Iraqi regime allowed the Kurdish media to publish newspapers from the 1940s until the fall of Saddam in 2003, as it used the Kurdish media itself to oppose the voice of the Kurdish National Movement. Despite the Kurdish print media being controlled by Iraq, it nonetheless indirectly influenced the ultimate goals of the Kurdish National Movement which was also that of protecting Kurdish identity. For the same reasons mentioned above the Iraqi regime established Kurdish radio in 1954 and Kurdish TV in 1967 (Wasfi, 2005). Wasfi mentioned that freedom of information was not stable under the policies of the Iraq regime; nevertheless Kurdish media professionals working in the new TV and radio stations attempted to focus on political rights, especially when levels of freedom gradually increased during the period of negotiations between the Iraqi regime and the Peshmerga. Undoubtedly, the Kurdish media under the former Iraqi regime, whether in print, radio or TV, indirectly contributed to the development of the Kurdish National Movement, in spite of the lack of freedom and its primary stated focus on Kurdish language and literature.

On 14 July 1958 the Iraqi system changed from a monarchy to a republican system following the revolution of the Free Officers led by Abdul Karim Qasim. Qasim started negotiations with Mustafa Barzani, the leader of the Kurds, about their political status but they did not arrive at any agreement, which prompted the Kurdish rebels to establish the National Movement Armed, centred in Kurdish rural areas under Iraqi control. Due to the geographical nature of these areas, this movement is known in Kurdish political literature as 'the struggle in the mountains' and the rebels depended on guerrilla warfare because they did not have a professional standing army to fight the Iraqi regime. The Kurdish rebels established print media outlets such as *Xabat* which was published by the KDP and *Sharara* published by the PUK. These papers

were distributed in the cities and towns by their members who were working in secret organisations. Alongside these papers, the Kurdish rebels established radio stations on the Iraq-Iran border, for example the KDP established the *Radio Voice of Kurdistan in* 1964 and the PUK established the *Radio Voice of the People of Kurdistan* in 1976. The aim of these papers and radio stations was to raise political awareness among the Kurdish people particularly those who were living in the towns and cities, as those living in the rural areas were already in close communication with the rebels. Arguably, the rebels used mass media communication to reach the Kurdish people in the towns and cities and establish far more interpersonal communication with those living in the rural areas. This struggle is called the Kurdish Resistance Media in the Kurdish political literature and it lasted from 1958 to 1991 when the Kurdish revolution won the day.

Following the revolution in 1991, each political party started to establish its own media, and several reasons are given for this. The first concerns political publicity and the need for each party to become more popular within the new political regime and system. At that time people's living standards were low, and there was no independent media until 1999, when the first independent newspaper *Hawlati* was published in the city of Sulaymaniyah, beginning as a weekly and becoming a daily from 2005. An independent radio station, *Radio Nawa*, was also established in 2005 in Sulaymaniyah and there is as yet no independent news TV channel, as this would require greater availability of funds and there is insufficient media freedom. On the other hand, today there are a number of commercial TV channels that focus on music and movies as news TV cannot depend merely on advertising in Kurdistan as yet. However, *NRT TV* claims that it is independent while at the same time others claim that *NRT* is not independent. In order to examine the structure and development of recent Kurdish media, the following section will explain in greater detail the role of the media involved in this research, namely *GK TV*, *KNN TV*, *Xendan* Website, *Sbeiy* Website and *Awena* Website.

4.3.2 *GK TV*

GK TV belongs to the PUK and it was the first Kurdish channel established by the Kurdish political parties after the revolution in 1991. The channel started

broadcasting by the end of 1991, but to begin with, it was only local, covering only the Sulaymaniyah area. On the 1st June 2008 the PUK established a version of *GK TV* by satellite, which represented the first Kurdish satellite television news channel. Before this channel other public satellite channels had emerged, such as *Kurdistan TV* launched by the KDP in 1999 and *Kurdsat TV* launched by the PUK in 2000.

GK TV is a news channel but it focuses largely on international issues instead of the main current issues in Kurdistan. According to Mageed (2011) *GK TV* has a number of goals, such as the political promotion of the PUK's policies, democratisation and the right to express opinions and shedding light on the disputed areas currently administered by the Baghdad government but which the Kurdish people want to be incorporated into Iraqi Kurdistan. The channel has dedicated news bulletins to cover issues outside Kurdistan, particularly news related to the Kurdish part of Syria and Turkey to distract attention from internal issues such as corruption and the investigation into public sector services.

4.3.3 *KNN TV*

Kurdish News Network (*KNN)* was established by the company Wsha which in English means 'the word' and started its test broadcasting in the middle of 2008. Wsha is a media company which consists of a radio channel, TV channel and a website. This company was established by Nawsherwan Mustafa, the previous vice-president of the PUK until 2006, since then Mustafa has split from the party with his group and established this media company. Mustafa argued that the aim of the split was to promote reforms in the political system in Kurdistan through his media company; he also argued that he was not able to introduce reforms when he was in the PUK due to the position taken by the other leaders within the party who rejected his plans for reform (*Gorran Movement*, 2009).The specific aim of the channel as stated on its website is as follows:

The channel does, though, conform to the wider agenda of the Wsha Corporation, which is to address the inequalities and barriers to reform which plague the Kurdistan area. KNN's aim is to promote political, social and economic reform by exposing corruption and highlighting the ways in which the interests of the Kurdish people are

not being addressed and could be better served. The channel attempts to address such problems as the lack of distinction between the public and the private spheres which, especially in regards to business, have ensured that vested interests within the government have the power to undermine moves towards a more democratic state and society. KNN's philosophy is based on the assertion that freedom of expression is a right, and not a privilege, and seeks therefore to be both an information provider, a medium for people to express their views and a public arena in which debate is encouraged rather than suppressed (*KNN Website*, 2013).

KNN is mostly funded by the Gorran Movement, although Rahman (2012) stated that it also obtains some funds from gifts and donations from wealthy citizens as well as through advertising.

4.3.4 *Xendan website*

The *Xendan* Website is the online version of the *Xendan* Foundation for Media and Publication because the majority of online media outlets are simply an electronic version of the newspapers and magazines circulated in Kurdistan. Although the majority of the Kurdish print media began offering an electronic version during the last decade, they were not popular until 2011, largely because Internet facilities were unavailable to the majority of people and were only available to companies and foundations. Moreover, Internet contracts were expensive relative to people's incomes.

The *Xendan* Website is sponsored by the *Xendan* Foundation for Publishing and Broadcasting. According to Muhedeen (2012), the Xendan Foundation belongs to Barham Salah, the Vice-president of the PUK. *Xendan* has a number of aims: providing an objective media information service, focusing on democratisation and the development of a civil society, spreading the culture of moderation in order to create a climate where diverse views are accepted and tolerated. There are 40 media workers working for the *Xendan* website and its sister radio channel. Although, as mentioned above, Muhedeen (2012) argues that *Xendan* is also sponsored by the former prime minister Barham Salah, who is thereby able to influence *Xendan* policy. *Xendan* claims that it is independent by arguing that it does not receive funding from the PUK's

finance department. However, it is clear that *Xendan* is supported by the PUK because it was established formally by Barham Salah when he was Prime Minister of the KRG and he is currently Deputy Chairman of the PUK. Since Barham Salih and other leaders in the ruling parties have their own influence and interests they use part of their own funds for the media to protect them and their position.

4.3.5 *Sbeiy website*

The *Sbeiy* website was established by the Gorran Movement in 2007, and it has the same aim as *KNN TV*, as mentioned above. *Sbeiy* relies on obtaining news and information from other media workers in the Gorran Movement, such as those at *KNN TV* and the Voice of Gorran which is the sister radio channel. There are 8 media workers in *Sbeiy* and its budget is relatively small at only US$120,000 per month (Salih, 2010).

4.3.6 *Awena website*

The majority of staff at *Awena* previously worked at the *Hawlati* newspaper, the latter was the first independent newspaper in Kurdistan established in 2000. The *Awena* newspaper was established in 2006 and its electronic copy is administered by separate staff in the same building. This website largely focuses on political issues. According to Salih (2010) only the four editors are formally employed, due to lack of funding. Furthermore, he claimed that he is working as a volunteer at *Awena*, because each of the four news editors earns only US$ 400 per month. This salary is quite low compared to the average salary of media workers in Kurdistan, while some media employees can earn as much as US$ 8,000 a month. The monthly budget of *Awena* is around US$ 3,000 to 4,000, a very small sum which does not allow him to appoint enough news editors or correspondents, therefore most *Awena* correspondents work as volunteers (Muhedeen, 2012). Warty (2008) stated that the issue of media funding is related to the economic structure of Kurdistan, where the main companies are monopolised by the two ruling parties. In turn, these companies do not provide funds through placing advertisements across the independent media which frequently criticise both the companies and the two ruling parties. There are also no subsidies available to the independent media from the government.

4.4 Conclusion

Regarding the living conditions of the young, this chapter found that young people in Kurdistan comprise the largest section in society and most observers believe they do not receive enough attention from the government. Several factors have been ascribed to this, principally tied to corruption and lack of any coherent government youth policy. Although the government offers free education from primary school until graduate level, not all young people receive adequate education and qualifications. Several factors are at work here: the first is related to the government's educational strategy which does not focus on the quality of education or ensuring that students qualify to meet the requirements of current socio-economic needs. For example, there are now many graduates unable to find jobs because almost all the positions have been taken by others who were already appointed by the government in the period of 2004-2009. A second factor is related to the government's economic strategy which does not support the development of the private sector which could employ graduates and reduce unemployment. Inclusive of this is the fact that most people prefer jobs in the public sector which guarantees a state pension, minimum wage and employee rights, unlike the private sector. This in turn leads to people thinking that their lives will not be secure unless they obtain a job in the private sector. Jobs in the public sector have become more difficult to obtain because the two ruling parties appointed a huge number of people during the last two elections in order to buy their votes. This policy has produced a negative impact on young people and the new generation find it difficult to obtain jobs in both the public as well as the private sector. Consequently young people have become more active in politics, particularly taking part in demonstrations and engaging with the opposition parties to fight for their rights. Young people in Iraqi Kurdistan form a remarkable demographic section of the population and are more willing to demand reforms and fight corruption compared to other categories in society.

Regarding the Kurdish media, the first form of Kurdish media was the newspaper *Kurdistan,* published in Egypt in 1898 which was rather late compared to the other surrounding nations such as the Arabs, Turks and Persians because the Kurds lacked any political entity enabling them to exercise their cultural and political rights. As noted above, the Kurds continually used the media to raise political awareness and

protect Kurdish identity until 1991, when the Kurdistan Regional Government was established. Prior to 1991, several political parties struggled against various Iraqi regimes and each political party used its own media platform to communicate with the Kurdish people living in cities and towns. However, much communication with Kurds living in rural areas was more interpersonal, as these areas were remote and largely outside the control of the Iraqi regime. After 1991 the Kurdish media was largely under the control of the main ruling political parties until 1999 when the independent print media began to emerge. The opposition media outlets also started to become more powerful following the emergence of the Wsha Company, which is owned by the Gorran movement, the largest of the opposition parties.

The main issue facing the independent and opposition media is funding and the lack of freedom of information. These two issues reflect on the state of the political system, for example the problem of media funding is related to corruption, since the major companies are monopolised by the two ruling parties and no advertising is placed with the opposition and independent media, given its critical stance towards the government in power. The relationship between the media and government in the KRG territory is complex and ever-changing. Modern technology and online access may bring about a further change in this relationship as the Kurdish people will be able to obtain news and information from a wider range of independent sources.

Chapter Five

5. Political Issues across the Kurdish Media and Editorial Policies

5.1 Introduction

The first two sections of this chapter will discuss the findings of the news content analysis across the Kurdish media, with particular focus on each of the following: *GK TV, KNN TV*, *Xendan* website, *Sbeiy* website and *Awena* website. The third section looks at the freedom to access the public sector to investigate political issues and the editorial news-making policy of each of the above media outlets by conducting in-depth interviews with their Chief News Editor or News Managing Editor. The first section is based on a content analysis of 994 items of news. From these 994 news items, the focus will be on 318 articles relating to internal political issues, in particular those relating to the main themes identified by this research as being most significant in Kurdistan, namely corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust. These will be analysed according to three values, namely whether the content is positive, negative or neutral. The second section will analyse the 318 news articles qualitatively through framing analysis thus presenting a more in-depth analysis to complete the overall analysis of the first section which gives some significant indicators to the qualitative analysis to be carried out, such as the coverage level of political issues and the use of values in the news coverage.

The third section is based on in-depth interviews with the media professionals from each of the TV and websites, from which the Chief News Editor or the News Managing Editor were specifically interviewed. These interviews enabled the researcher to discuss the findings of the news content analysis and to understand why and how they address political issues through particular use of the values and frames in their coverage of the news as well as issues related to access to freedom of information for journalists in Kurdistan.

5.2 The News Coverage and Values Used Across the Kurdish Media

This section will analyse the news coverage broadcast or published by the Kurdish media selected as the focus of this research project, namely *GK TV*, *KNN TV* as well as the *Sbeiy*, *Awena* and *Xendan* websites. Alongside this, the section will investigate the values used in the news coverage whether positive, negative or neutral. The aim of the present section is to examine Research Question one which is related to the extent of the level of coverage of internal political issues by the Kurdish media.

5.2.1 The news coverage in particular relating to the four political issues across *GK TV* and *KNN TV*

This examines the level of the extent of news coverage in particular relating to political issues across the opposition party TV and that of the TV channel owned by one of the political parties in power in order to show which one of them displays more interest in political issues. For this research, the main news programme was analysed across a whole week. The news programme content was coded according to three categories, the first was news relating to the four political issues: corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust, which in turn was interpreted in the light of three categories, positive, negative and neutral values. The second category relates to news from the disputed areas which are now administered by Baghdad although the Kurdish claim they are part of Iraqi Kurdistan. The third category identifies other news, such as that related to non-political issues and foreign news. Unlike the first main category of news coverage, the second and third categories were not subjected to qualitative analysis through in-depth interviews or focus groups but they were included to provide a fuller evaluation of each network's coverage of the identified political issues (corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust)

For instance, the data in Table 5.1 shows that *KNN TV* covers internal political issues twice as frequently as *GK TV*, whereas *GK TV* covers the disputed areas twice as much compared to *KNN TV*. The disputed areas consist of Kirkuk Province and some other towns currently administered by Baghdad but which the KRG believe to belong to Kurdistan. This difference confirms that *KNN TV* focuses on internal issues rather than on news from the disputed areas administered by Baghdad. This in turn raises the question as to why *GK TV* does not focus on internal political issues, whether this is

due to the lack of this issue in Kurdistan or because the channel is owned by the PUK which is one of the ruling political parties and therefore responsible for dictating the political agenda. The data in table (5.1) show the indicators of the main news categories which will be examined more in depth in the next section with the news coverage analysed qualitatively.

Table 5.1

News Categories	KNN TV		GK TV		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
News relating to political issues (reform, corruption, government performance and citizens' trust)	101	63.5	35	29	136	48.6
News relating to disputed areas	22	13.8	33	27.2	55	19.6
Other news (non-political news and foreign news)	36	22.7	53	43.8	89	31.8
Total	159	100	121	100	280	100

The news coverage in the main daily news programme during one week between 11-17 of April 2013 across *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

According to the data from the above table *KNN TV* covers political issues in 101 news items on political issues, representing 63.5% while 13.8% of its content covers the political issues of the disputed geographical areas. This shows that the opposition parties tend to focus more on internal issues of Kurdistan rather than on the disputed geographical areas because *KNN TV* is owned by the main opposition party and wishes to highlight the political failings of the government. However this table does not show which aspects of internal political issues *KNN TV* covers (corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust), nor which value is predominantly used through its coverage, whether positive, negative or neutral. These details will be

presented in a later table. Besides the news relating to internal political issues and the disputed areas, *KNN TV* devotes only 22% of its coverage to non-political or foreign news items. Conversely *GK TV* is a wider-ranging political news channel and it devotes 43.8% of its coverage to non-political news and foreign news, for instance the coverage level of internal political issues by *GK TV* is only 29% and the remaining proportion is devoted to news from the disputed areas which has a very similar percentage to the coverage of internal political news (27.2%).

As the data shows, *KNN TV* covered 159 news items in total during one week in its daily news programme, while GK TV presented 121 news items. There are several reasons for the difference in the number of news items covered, firstly in *GK TV* the actual length of news is longer and it relies on lengthy reports which can extend to more than 6 minutes; secondly, *KNN TV* is based on re-framing news which means presenting one news story or one event through several news items in the same news programme, this editorial style can have more impact implications on the audience because it allows cumulative coverage. Thirdly, the editorial style and policy of *KNN TV* focuses on shorter television news items and reports, as explained by both news makers of the two channels interviewed for this research and which will be clarified in the last section.

5.2.1.1 The news coverage of political issues across *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

The previous point showed that *KNN TV* presented 101 news items representing 63.5% of all its coverage, by contrast the coverage rate of *GK TV* was only 29 news items representing 29%. This looks at which political aspects, whether reform, corruption, government performance or citizens' trust are covered more by both TV channels. Table (5.2) shows the extent of the level of coverage of political issues across *KNN TV* and *GK TV*.

Table 5.2

Political news	KNN TV		GK TV	
	F	%	F	%

Corruption	30	29.7	7	20
Reform	5	4.9	9	25.7
Government Performance	51	50.5	18	51.4
Citizens' Trust	15	14.9	1	2.9
Total	101	100%	35	100%

The coverage level of the main political issues across *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

The table shows that both *KNN TV* and *GK TV* devoted half of their coverage to government performance issues among the four issues identified, but this does not mean that the two channels addressed the news similarly in terms of attributing positive, negative and neutral values. Furthermore, there is not much difference in terms of the coverage of corruption issues, with *KNN TV* devoting 29.7% of its time and *GK TV* 20%. This table (5.2) only shows the level to which a given issue was covered, while the next table will show in what way the four issues are addressed, whether positively, negatively or neutrally.

The above table shows that *KNN TV* devoted 14.9% of its coverage to the issue of citizens' trust, which is more than 5 times that of *GK TV* whose proportional average was only 2.9%. By contrast *GK TV* covered the reform process to the extent of 25.7% whereas *KNN TV*'s coverage was only 5% as *KNN TV* prefers to focus on government corruption and criticism of its actions and policies. The next section will analyse the editorial policy of each channel in terms of whether the news coverage was presented in a positive, negative or neutral manner.

5.2.1.2 The dominant values in the news coverage across *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

The previous point focused on the dominant issues covered by the two channels but it did not provide any specific stance on the political issues covered, particularly whether the two channels clearly display a different view or editorial policy. *KNN TV* is owned by the Gorran Movement Party which is the main opposition party and has never been in power to date, while *GK TV* is owned by the ruling political party and

seeks to show the advantages of the government and the positive aspects of the government's performance. This factor is highly significant in Kurdistan as there is no public service broadcasting organisation in the KRG, so both channels have been established to support the views of their respective ownership. Therefore, this identifies the different values clearly expressed in the coverage of the four issues by both channels, which means it builds on the previous section, while the later qualitative section in the present chapter will examine the variations in each channel in depth. This does not mean that the present section has no clear role and purpose, but rather it will provide some indicators which can be used in the argument to interpret and support the qualitative analysis.

Table 5.3

Political News	KNN TV								GK TV							
	Positive		Negative		Neutral		Total		Positive		Negative		Neutral		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Corruption	-		30	100	-		30	100	5	71.4	-		2	28.6	7	100
Reform	-		2	40	3	60	5	100	6	66.7	1	11.1	2	22.2	9	100
Government Performance	2	2.9	45	88.2	4	7.9	51	100	15	83.3	1	5.7	2	11.1	18	100
Citizens' Trust	-		15	100	-		15	100	1	100	-		-		1	100
Total	2	1.9	92	91	7	6.9	101	100	27	77.1	2	5.7	6	17.2	35	100

The dominant values (Positive, Negative and Neutral) used in news coverage by *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

The data shows that the dominant value evident in the coverage of the four political issues on *KNN TV* is negative, to a level of 91% which means that *KNN TV* covers the

identified political issues negatively, whereas the proportion of negative values evident on *GK TV* is only 5.7%. This would indicate that *GK TV* does not criticise the four political issues compared to the news coverage on *KNN*. Furthermore, the divergence in the use of positive values in terms of political coverage is much greater than negative values because *KNN TV* uses positive values in their news about government undertakings to the extent of only 1.9% while *GK TV* reaches 77.1%, thus the average rate becomes more than 37 times greater. With specific reference to the use of neutral values, *GK TV* uses more than twice as many neutral values compared to *KNN TV*, however the use of neutral values is lower on both channels especially on *KNN TV* which uses only 6.9% and 17.2%on *GK TV*. Thus from the general trend in terms of the way the news is reported, it can be seen that there is a significant difference in editorial policy between the two channels as *GK TV* tends more and more to adopt a positive value to the extent of 77.1% of the weekly news coverage on the four political issues analysed, while the dominant value identified on *KNN TV* is negative in 91% of its news coverage on the four political issues.

Alongside this analysis using the three values in terms of the political issues in general, the data shows that the four identified political issues are addressed contradictorily by the two channels and also between or within each channel. For instance, *KNN TV* does not display a positive value in the coverage of three of these political issues, namely corruption, reform and citizens' trust, although the remaining issue, government performance, is addressed positively but only to the extent of 2.9%. In contrast *GK TV* shows a positive value in all aspects with a much higher rate, for instance citizens' trust is 100%, government performance is 83.3 %, reform 66.7% and even corruption is addressed positively with 71.4%. It can be deduced from this that *GK TV* does not accuse the government of being responsible for corruption and it covers corruption cases as a separate issue from the government's performance, which will be shown more clearly in the qualitative analysis section later through the analysis of specific news items.

GK TV does not use any negative value in the coverage of corruption and citizens' trust due to the fact that the channel reflects the policy of the ruling political party, as the

political parties in power argue that corruption has become the norm and can be observed in every country.

5.2.2 The news coverage of political issues across the (*Sbeiy* website, *Xendan* website and *Awena* website)

The previous section showed the level of news coverage across *KNN TV*, which is owned by one of the opposition parties and *GK TV* which belongs to one of the political parties in power. This section looks at the three websites owned respectively by the ruling political parties, the opposition party and an independent website. The table below shows the three websites in terms of the extent of their coverage of the political issues (reform, corruption, government performance and citizens' trust) compared to their coverage of other news.

Table 5.4

News Categories	*Sbeiy*		*Awena*		*Xendan*		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%		
News relating to political issues (reform, corruption, government performance and citizens' trust)	63	28.9	64	37.4	55	16.9	182	25.5
Other news (non-political news and foreign news)	155	71.1	107	62.6	270	83.1	532	74.5
Total	218	100	171	100	325	100	714	100

The news coverage across *Sbeiy*, *Awena* and *Xendan* websites during one week between 11-17 of April 2013

The data shows that the coverage of four political issues across the three websites comprises only 25.5% of their total coverage (see Table 5.1), whereas both TV channels devoted 48.6% of their coverage to these issues (see Table 5.4). The difference between both TV channels and the three websites is that the latter devote more coverage to entertaining news compared with the TV channels, particularly the

Xendan website which covers internal political issues only to the extent of 16.9%. The number of its news items covering other aspects is 270 out of 325, which is more than the total news articles of the other two remaining websites, which means that the *Xendan* website has affected disproportionately the average of the total number of news items related to internal political issues.

According to the data, the independent *Awena* website has the highest level of coverage of internal political issues, with a rate of 64 news articles out of 171, representing 37.4%. By contrast the average of internal political issues identified on the *Sbeiy* website (is owned by the opposition) is 63 news articles out of 218 representing 28.9% and the other remaining Website is *Xendan* (owned by the ruling political parties) whose coverage rate as mentioned above is 55 news articles out of 325 representing only 16.9%. It can be seen that the number of news articles relating to internal issues across the *Sbeiy* and *Awena* websites is quite similar, in particular relating to the number of news articles, for instance *Awena* has 64, *Sbeiy* has 63 and *Xendan* 55. Whereas there is quite a large difference between them in terms of the percentages as *Sbeiy* devotes the majority of its news coverage to Iraqi political news and foreign news and some non-political news, while *Xendan* is not solely a political website which means it is more of a general website, and *Awena* is a more political website, as will be clarified further in the later section which explores the opinions of the media workers from the three websites.

5.2.2.1 The news coverage of political issues across each website: *Sbeiy*, *Awena* and *Xendan*

This examines the four political issues (reform, corruption, government performance and citizens' trust) that are covered by each website. The present section compares each website in terms of its coverage of each of the four issues to identify its individual interest or agenda, as it supposed that the three websites vary according to their ownership.

Table 5.5

Political News	Sbeiy		Awena		Xendan		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Corruption	11	17.5	4	6.3	2	3.7	15	8.3
Reform	2	3.1	7	10.9	16	29	25	13.7
Government Performance	30	47.6	46	71.9	35	63.6	113	62.1
Citizens' Trust	20	31.8	7	10.9	2	3.7	29	15.9
Total	63	100	64	100	55	100	182	100

The coverage level of the main political issues across each website: *Sbeiy*, *Awena* and *Xendan*

The data shows that government performance is the dominant issue covered among the four categories under study here. The *Awena* website comes first with its coverage of government performance by devoting 46 news articles out of 55, representing 71.9%. While the lowest coverage of any issue according to the data is corruption which featured in only 15 news articles representing only 8.3%. *Xendan* had the lowest level of coverage in the website that addressed corruption with a proportion rate of only 3.7%. The later point will look at the values used to address these issues across each of the three website whether positive, negative or neutral and it will be clearer whether each print media attempts to interpret the government's performance as positive or negative.

Specifically, in relation to news items connected to the reform process, *Xendan* is first among the websites devoting 29% of its coverage to the issue of reform as the website belongs to the PUK, one of the ruling political parties. The ruling political parties are trying to communicate to Kurdish citizens their new projects and developments in the public sector, and this raises the question of whether the government provides this kind of news only to their media or whether the other media channels choose not to cover government related news items. It is clear that both the opposition and

independent website devote much less coverage to reform than the media owned by the political parties, for instance the proportion of coverage of *Sbeiy* is 3.1% and 10.9% for *Awena*. However, both *Sbeiy* and *Awena* do not just frame the news about government's undertaking positively, which means they criticise the reform process of the government in their news coverage as well. This will become clear in the discussion below that investigates the values used in the news coverage, as well as identifying the reason why *Sbeiy* and *Awena* tend not to cover news related to the reform process. This will be analysed in the section that focuses on the editorial policy and attitudes of the media workers interviewed for this research.

5.2.2.2 The dominant values in the news coverage across *Sbeiy*, *Awena* and *Xendan*

There are considerable variations among the three websites in terms of the values expressed in relation to the four political issues considered in this research. The previous section showed that *Xendan* gives more coverage to reform news than the others. The present section supports the argument that *Xendan* tries to show the government positively, for instance the data in table 5.6 below shows that Xendan adopts a positive value in its coverage of the four issues to the extent of 72.7% with 18.2% having a neutral value and only 9.1% negative. The negative value relates to criticism of the government across the media and the negative proportion seen on *Xendan* (9.1%) is significantly lower than on *Sbeiy* which is 85.7% and 68.8% for *Awena*. Furthermore, *Xendan* used negative values in the news related to the Yellow Zone and the departments for which the KDP is mainly responsible as will be shown more clearly in the later section based on a qualitative analysis of the news content. This means that *Xendan* tends not to criticise the government, particularly in the zone of PUK influence, as it is a party website it is obvious that the criticism would be minimal.

Table 5.6

Political News	*Sbeiy* (opposition website)							
	Positive		Negative		Neutral		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Corruption	-	-	11	100	-	-	11	100
Reform			1	50	1	50	2	100
Government Performance	1	3.3	23	76.7	6	20	30	100
Citizens' Trust	-	-	19	95	1	5	20	100
Total	1	1.6	54	85.7	8	12.7	63	100
Political News	*Xendan* (website of ruling political parties)							
	Positive		Negative		Neutral		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Corruption	1	50	-	-	1	50	2	100
Reform	14	87.5	-	-	2	12.5	16	100
Government Performance	25	71.4	4	11.4	6	17.2	35	100
Citizens' Trust	-	-	1	50	1	50	2	100
Total	40	72.7	5	9.1	10	18.2	55	100
Political News	*Awena* (Independent website)							

	Positive		Negative		Neutral		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Corruption	-	-	1	50	1	50	2	100
Reform	5	71.4	-	-	2	28.6	7	100
Government Performance	1	2.1	37	77.1	10	20.8	48	100
Citizens' Trust	-	-	6	85.7	1	14.3	7	100
Total	6	9.4	44	68.8	14	21.8	64	100

The dominant values (Positive, Negative and Neutral) used by *Sbeiy*, *Awena* and *Xendan*

The table above shows the dominant value used by each website; *Sbeiy* uses negative values to the extent of 85.7% particularly when discussing corruption, reaching 100% and 95% for news related to citizens' trust. In the same way, *Awena* is more similar to *Sbeiy* than *Xendan* in using these values, for example the dominant value used by *Awena* is negative with a rate of 68.8% in relation to the four political issues and the highest level is citizens' trust which is 85.7% followed by 77.1% for the government's performance. By contrast, *Xendan*'s dominant news values are positive with an average of 72.7% and it reaches a value of 85.7% on reform news, whereas in both *Sbeiy* and *Awena* there was no identifiable positive stance, with a rate of 0%. In terms of using positive values across *Awena* and *Sbeiy*, *Awena* adopts positive values in the coverage of government performance to the extent of 9.4% particularly in the news related to reform which is 71.4%, whereas the news related to corruption and citizens' trust is zero percent. In the same way, the positive values expressed across *Sbeiy* are only 1.6 %.

The data in Table 5.6 show that *Awena* and *Sbeiy* are more similar in terms of using values in their news coverage, as *Xendan* tends not to criticise the government but rather focuses on showing the government positively. This argument will become

clearer in the later section which relies on a qualitative analysis of the news content across each website.

5.3 The Frames Used and the Nature of News Coverage across the Kurdish Media

The previous section showed the agenda and values adopted by specific Kurdish media outlets in their news coverage and provided some indicators of the variation in terms of their level of coverage and use of values regarding each of the four political issues, most of it based on the type of ownership of each form of online media. The present section looks at why the media vary in terms of how they cover the issues and how they use positive and negative values. A framing analysis will be applied qualitatively to explore the dominant frames as well as the nature of news coverage. This present section examines the news content across the two television channels and the three websites studied in this research.

5.3.1 The frames used and the nature of news coverage across *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

This examines the four political issues (reform, corruption, government performance and citizens' trust) through a framing analysis qualitatively by applying the four frame components (problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation) that were determined by Entman (1993). Alongside the four frame components, the news will be analysed according to the four main issues identified as the focus of this research, in order to show how the media address these political issues.

5.3.1.1 The four frames components in the coverage of corruption news across both *GK TV* and *KNN TV*

The news coverage relating to corruption by both *GK TV* and *KNN TV* will be analysed according to the four frame components to demonstrate how each channel defines corruption and thereby determine its causal factors. The moral evaluation component particularly in the framing of the issue of corruption is important in evaluating the editorial policy of each channel and website. In terms of the treatment recommendation component it will become clear what proposals the media suggest to solve the issues of corruption, such as offering a suitable plan, or new regulations required from the government.

From the seven news items that focused on corruption across *GK TV*, problem definition is the dominant component among the others and the second component is causal interpretation which is used in four out of seven news items. However, the channel does not refer to the main causal factor but it silences the wider issue by localising it, for instance in the following news item from *GK TV* it can be identified how the channel turns a nationwide corruption issue into a local one:

> A number of drivers demonstrated in front of the Rezgary petrol station (government petrol station) in Sulaymaniyah and they began to block the road because the directors of the petrol station would not issue their cards. One of the drivers said they had been coming for several days and the workers at the petrol station promised to distribute the cards to them, but every day they claimed they had not yet received all the cards from the other department. The administrator of the petrol station said he had contacted the department to send the cards, but they said they had already sent them but the car which was to collect the cards had been disrupted (*GK TV*, 13 April 2013).

From the above news item it can be seen that *GK TV* did not examine the main issue which is why petrol is being sold by cards. This card was issued by the government during the petrol crisis to determine the distribution of petrol to people on a weekly basis with each driver entitled to 50 litres. In terms of moral evaluation and treatment recommendation, GK TV did not use either in the above news item nor in all the other seven news articles, except one in which GKTV interviewed the Minister of Health who suggested that it was important to control corruption relating to pharmaceutical products.

The same news item regarding the sale of petrol was addressed on *KNN TV* which outlined the reasons for the demonstration by drivers which is connected to how petrol is distributed. *KNN TV* argued that the lack of petrol in public petrol stations was because it has been monopolised by the ruling elite elders as though they were their own private petrol stations. As a result petrol is sold at higher prices by private petrol stations compared to public petrol stations and this is the reason why the drivers demonstrated. The *KNN* channel reminded its viewers that demonstrations

about petrol had been frequent and that the government still had not solved this problem, in spite of Kurdistan being rich in oil reserves as well as being an international exporter. On *KNN TV*, the causal interpretation component was clear and the news represented the government as being not only the origin of the petrol crisis but also the one that should solve the problem. *GK TV*'s ownership by the PUK ruling party does not allow it to focus on the underlying reasons for any negative news item or to adopt any form of moral evaluation. Generally it tends not to cover news that identifies corruption; for example *GK TV* broadcast only seven news items out of 121 in relation to corruption during the week selected for analysis while *KNN* broadcast 30 news articles out of a total of 101.

This highlights *KNN TV*'s wider focus on corruption news; it interprets corruption-related issues with a negative value as discussed in the previous section (see Table 5.3). The 30 news items covered the four issues from various angles because the channels addressed them through a number of different news stories. In this way some of these issues were continued over several days, therefore it is clear that *KNN* was trying to make its audience aware of these issues through cumulative coverage. The relevant themes in terms of corruption analysed from the week's sample news coverage on *KNN TV* are shown below according to the 4 frame components.

Table 5.7

Problem Definition	- intervention in the constitution and regulation using an inconsistent approach - controlling security and military institutions - delay in government pensions - corruption in investment projects - intervention and controlling investment projects by local officials -corruption in importing health medications

Causal Interpretation	-exploitation of laws, regulations and institutions to remain in authority - lack of accountability with officials and employees due to affiliation to ruling parties - exploitation and controlling investment projects
Moral Evaluation	- lack of transparency and accountability by Government - lack of democracy - the government has poor economic priorities - the ruling parties monopolise the public sector and big private companies - the ruling parties give priority to their parties rather than to national issues - the government does not have a suitable method of accountability
Treatment Recommendation	- adhere to the laws and legislations - conduct accountability with negligent persons and aspects in public and private sectors

The 4 frame components in framing corruption news across *KNN TV*

The above table is an example of how *KNN TV* uses the 4 frame components in framing corruption news, particularly problem definition and moral evaluation which were the dominant components used in framing the 30 news items. The definition of issues and their causal factors are important particularly through the coverage of corruption issues, where it helps to understand the issue and its causality factors. Cobb and Coughlin (1999) argue that the determining of the definition of an issue is a central feature of the framing process; in the same way Prim and Clark (1996) show that the definition of an issue and the determining of its causal reasons are important before providing any moral evaluation and treatment recommendation. The determining causal factors in the news coverage on the corruption issue display the moral evaluation of the media. For instance, *GK TV* specified only 7 news items on corruption and it did not show the main causal factors in order not to criticise the government.

5.3.1.2 The four frame components in the coverage of reform news across *GK TV* and *KNN TV*

This section discusses how both *GK TV* and *KNN TV* used the 4 frame components in framing the news related to certain projects and policy changes that the government introduced and which I have called reform news. *GK TV* devoted 9 news items to covering reform news, and as was shown in the last section investigating the values used in the coverage of the news, *GK TV* used positive values to the extent of 66.7% and only 11.1% carried negative values (see Table 5.3). Following on from this, it can be seen that the channel used positive evaluation in framing the reform news compared to other values. In the same way, it demonstrated that moral evaluation and treatment recommendation were the dominant components used in the framing of reform news, while problem definition and causal interpretation were of secondary importance. The problem of framing the reform news is the value and treatment recommendation given to the reform issue in terms of how far any new projects and plans will offer a suitable solution and whether they will provide a beneficial political programme and have a positive influence on the public. It is understood that the government should carry out reforms when there is something wrong or improvements are required, for instance as seen in the topic of road building taken from the following news item covered by *GK TV*:

> In the framework of projects undertaken for the development of roads by the government, the new road in Darbandixan town has been opened and it will help to reduce the number of car accidents due to the increased traffic on the main road between Sulaymaniyah and Garmian region (*GK TV*, 14 April 2013).

From the above news paragraph it can be seen that the government has completed the project to develop the road and solve the problem of car accidents. The channel did not conduct interviews with any independent observers or offer any opposition views about this project to interpret and evaluate whether the project was successful or not. The report infers that the new road is the best solution, yet the previous road and the newly-opened road are single carriageway, and citizens have been asking the government to build a dual carriageway or motorway in this region since the

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establishment of the KRG. The problematic of this channel is that it tends to conduct interviews with government officials during its news reports and it ignores the independent and opposition aspects to explain whether the new road project was completed successfully or not. Enayat (2012) argues that the government has not solved the car accident problem due to the lack of CC TV on the roads. He went on to claim that most of the projects are not completed to any standard quality measures as the majority of companies carrying out these projects are controlled by the ruling official elite. These companies do not do their jobs properly because they know that when their projects are completed they will be approved by ministers because they have a strong lobby in the government. Thus we can identify several examples where *GK TV* did not criticise the projects undertaken by the government in the framing of its news coverage.

In terms of using the four frame components, the framing of the news on reform by *KNN TV* is predominantly influenced by problem definition. It is adopted in three news items out of the five which deal with KRG policy towards Baghdad. These three news items were addressed briefly by *KNN TV*, while the other two remaining news items were broadcast using moral evaluation components and there was criticism of the reform process through the coverage, for example in this news article from *KNN TV*:

> The government has increased the vehicle number plate registration fee to provide them with funds to solve the public banking crisis. However it is not clear whether these fees will go to public funds or to the ruling parties' accounts. The government does not have a strategic plan to reduce the deficit in the balance of payments and as a result the public banks have faced the bankruptcy issue again this year. In the wake of this, the majority of projects are influenced negatively, such as projects involving real estate, labour and transportation (*KNN TV*, 17 April 2013).

The news paragraph above is basically a reform-related news item about a new plan which is to increase the vehicle registration fee, nevertheless *KNN TV* has criticised this by linking the plan to its negative consequences and reminding viewers that this

case happened in the previous year and has been repeated in the current year and accusing the government of misuse of public revenue from fees. *KNN TV* conducted interviews about these different aspects and encouraged the general public to support its argument in addressing the wider issues at stake as reported in the news item.

5.3.1.3 The four frame components in the coverage of government performance news across *GK TV* and *KNN TV*

Both channels use the four frame components in framing the news about government performance, as this topic was the one which received more coverage than all the others. *GK TV* devoted 18 news items out of 35 to government performance while *KNN* devoted 51 news items out of 101 to this topic. The dominant component used by *GK TV* is moral evaluation with positive description, which means it relies on positive values in its coverage of the news about the government. As seen in the previous section, *GK TV* used a positive value to the extent of 83.3% as it praised the positive activity of the government particularly in the Green Zone and among the senior leaders of the PUK. *GK TV* took the views of those foreign politicians who visited during the week's coverage to praise political and economic development in Kurdistan as well as the democratisation process. For example, Luis Ayala, Head of Socialist International, Damertash, Head of one of the Kurdish parties in Turkey and a delegation from the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs all visited during the week selected. In terms of the other three frame components, they are used much less, particularly treatment recommendation due to the nature of the news that focuses on the government's performance and the evaluation itself takes on the role of a recommendation. Problem definition and causal interpretation came in second place, particularly problem definition which means the majority of news stories across *GK TV* are based on the definition of subject matter with a positive moral evaluation.

The problem of the coverage of government performance is that it focuses on one specific aspect of the four political issues. For example, the coverage of the commemoration of the Anfal incident, which was the genocide conducted in the Kurdish rural areas by the Saddam regime in 1988. *GK TV* focused on the event as a ceremony and on how the government used the event to publicise itself to the international community by inviting a number of representatives from around the

world. Whereas *KNN TV* addressed this event by concentrating on the effects on the lives of the remaining victims' families and their demands from the government. Also *KNN TV* covered this case in ten different news items during the selected week's coverage, and their intent will be clearer when looking at the following news text as an example:

> The families of the Anfal victims did not allow the Minister of Martyrs of Anfal to read his speech in the Anfal ceremony in Chamchamal town, as the local official there accused those people of creating chaos. The families of the Anfal victims stopped the minister's speech due to the government not punishing some Kurdish people who helped the Saddam regime in the Anfal operation or putting them on trial. They also claim that the government has not offered suitable public services in the towns inhabited by the families of the victims (*KNN TV*, 13 April 2013).

It can be seen that *KNN TV* has taken advantage of the above issue by framing the part that presents an opposing view to the government and it has also addressed this issue across ten news items from five towns during four days. Alongside this, both channels address the same event, either by reporting the event directly or in a press conference and by using interviews to support their arguments. Clearly these two channels use their own frame to cover the news and the events, for instance in the press conference given by the officer responsible for the Human Rights Commission in Kurdistan. Another example of this can be seen below from *GK TV*:

> The officer responsible for the Human Rights Commission in Kurdistan declared that the human rights situation in Kurdistan is fine, however it needs some reform to be better. This is in contrast to the argument presented by the opposition parties, as the officer responsible for the Human Rights Commission in Kurdistan argues that the level of human rights here is much better than in those countries surrounding Kurdistan (*GK TV*, 11 April 2013).

The news of the same issue as broadcast by *KNN TV*:

The three parliamentary members in the Commission on Human Rights in the Kurdistan Parliament have detected two detainees who were arrested in secret by security forces and they have not sent them to trial for several years. Alongside this, the officer responsible for the Human Rights Commission in Kurdistan declared that the situation of human rights is not fine (*KNN TV*, 16 April 2013).

From the two news texts above, we can see how each channel covers the issue through use of different framing: *GK TV* has interpreted the issue so as not to blame the government in terms of the human rights situation, whereas *KNN TV* directly accuses the government by presenting an example of two persons who have been treated by the government in an inhumane way. The variation between these two channels in their coverage is visible in the use of the moral evaluation component as well as the causal interpretation of the specific issue. In terms of which frame components were used more, on *KNN TV* we can see that it is moral and causal interpretation, while problem definition comes in second place. The main difference between the two channels is ascribable to how they use moral evaluation of the government's performance, for example *KNN TV* uses treatment recommendation in some news stories by conducting interviews with independent political observers and opposition leaders. In other words, the main difference in using the four frame components is moral evaluation and how the reports recommend alternative solutions for the government. The other issue raised in terms of the news coverage by the two channels is that they do not seek different views in reporting the news, so each channel conducts interviews with people who support the arguments of the channel rather than seeking views from different constituents. This issue will be investigated in a later point which will specifically examine editorial policy by conducting interviews with the news makers of each channel and website.

5.3.1.4 The four frame components in the coverage of citizens' trust news across *GK TV* and *KNN TV*

There are quite large differences between *GK TV* and *KNN TV* in terms of covering the news that focuses on citizens' trust. *GK TV* covered this issue in one news item only, which was about the people of Qaladze town who demanded the government replace

the Qaladze town interchange. In this news report the channel did not use any moral evaluation components while the treatment recommendation of the issue was addressed by conducting an interview with an administrator from Qaladze Town Council who said they had asked the government to solve the issue and the government responded that it would do this. The majority of government officials, when asked by journalists about specific issues, said they had future solutions and plans. While *KNN TV* addresses this issue by reminding viewers that the government had made promises and the issues have still not been solved, *GK TV* does not remind viewers that the government has not fulfilled its promises to reform the country. Furthermore, *KNN TV* focuses on these issues by reminding viewers throughout the week's coverage in twelve news items covering the four main issues, thus achieving a cumulative effect of influencing people's views. This means that *KNN TV* through the use of moral evaluation components accuses the government of non-implementation of its promises.

The number of news items on citizens' trust broadcast by *KNN TV* comprised 15 out of 101 and most of these were constructed with negative values, as the stories covered issues such as the lack of public services, demonstrations about delays in salary payments and the demand for equality with Baghdad, objection to certain judges' rulings and people who have not been compensated by the government. *KNN TV* focused on these issues even if the issue only attracted a small group of demonstrators, either in government departments or in other places. Furthermore it tended to devote longer news reports to these items compared with other news channels. The moral evaluation of these kinds of reports was created by conducting interviews with a sample of people who were demonstrating or severely criticising the government's actions. Furthermore, the news reporters of *KNN TV* quoted the views of other writers from newspapers or individual political observers on social media to criticise the government, in other words *KNN TV* used different sources to express its moral evaluation in framing the issue of citizens' trust and it used these in all 15 news stories about people who do not trust the government. Moreover, in two news reports it showed people who had been forced to ask international organisations to intervene in their cases, as can be seen in the news text below as an example:

The families of young people who were killed by the security forces in a demonstration for reform and fighting corruption on 17th February 2011 asked the Swedish Parliament delegation during their visit to Kurdistan delegation to exert pressure on the Kurdish government to arrest the accused and prosecute them (*KNN TV*, 15 April 2013).

The news paragraph above is a clear example of the lack of trust in the government, while in another news item the family of Akram asked Human Rights Watch to investigate the decision of the Dhouk Provincial Court. *KNN TV* made a short sensational video graphic to affect the emotions of its viewers by repeating this story several times a day during the week. The video graphic showed a recorded interview with Akram's father who is an old man and who said, while crying, that the "Kurdish Authority is unfair to us and we said that Saddam was unjust but the Kurdish Authority is even more unjust".

KNN TV used the four frame components in framing the citizens' trust issue in the majority of the 15 longer news items and thus it allowed for the inclusion of all frame components. Moral evaluation was the dominant frame component used, as can be evidenced by the following points:

The Human Rights Watch challenged the trial of Syed Akram, as Akram's family argues that all judgments and courts are controlled by the political ruling elite (*KNN TV*, 11 April 2013).

The news of the same issue (lack of independence of the judiciary) as broadcast by *KNN TV was as follows:*

The political chamber of Gorran argues that both the political parties in power have used the Anfal catastrophe to control the families of the victims to support them in the election and they do not represent this event as nationally important. Therefore, both parties do not allow the prosecution of accused (*KNN TV*, 13 April 2013).

From the two quotes above it is clear that *KNN* portrayed the judiciary and courts as being controlled by the two political parties. In the second quote *KNN* relied on the

argument of Gorran which owns the channel rather than conducting interviews with interested parties and legal observers. *KNN* relies on chambers which were established in other fields such as economics, journalism and culture. These conduct research for Gorran and provide information to its media outlets, such as *KNN TV* and the *Sbeiy* website. Gorran's media uses the argument of these chambers to form moral evaluation of the political issues in their news coverage, as the offices of both the chambers and the *KNN* and *Sbeiy* are located in the same area, which helps to conduct interviews on any case easily and quickly. The Managing News Editor of *KNN* argues that they try to conduct interviews with government officials on the issues and events that arise daily but they mostly refuse to co-operate (Interview, 22 April 2013).

The moral evaluation components demonstrated that *KNN* focused on the negative aspects of the government as this channel is owned by the main opposition party. In the week's news coverage selected for the content analysis, *KNN* TV focused critically on several aspects that showed the government in a negative light.

Taking the same case across *GK TV,* it can be seen that the items are covered quite differently. *GK TV* devoted several news items to the same topic, namely the ceremony held annually in the middle of April and implemented by the Saddam regime to commemorate the genocide of Kurds in rural areas in 1988, as can be seen in the following example quoted on *GK TV*:

> Qubad Talabani, the Iraqi President's son and leader of the PUK, along with a number of politicians participated in the Ceremony of Anfal at the Monument of Anfal in Chamchamal Town. He met the victims' families who appreciated the role of the government and PUK in helping them psychologically and providing them with pensions (*GK TV*, 13 April 2013).

In the above quote it can be seen clearly that *GK TV* framed this event to describe the government positively and focused on the PUK leader's son. Also *GK TV* forms its moral evaluation of the event by quoting the statement of one person who participated in the ceremony and who described the government positively. Thus both *KNN TV* and *GK TV* frame the news by conducting interviews with someone who

supports their policy rather than collecting information and different views to form their news report. In this case, both channels covered the event differently through moral evaluation component in framing the news.

5.3.2 Other frames used in the coverage of political issues on *KNN TV* and *GK TV*

Alongside the four frame components, some frames were used in the coverage of political issues across both *KNN TV* and *GK TV*, such as reframing, magnified frame, consequences frame, simplifying frame, localising frame and internal security frame.

KNN TV used the reframing of certain political issues by repeating single news stories in several news items where each item took a slightly different view of some aspects to discuss and support the same argument. In other words the channel tried to collect several points of view as a campaign to support the single news story or issue. *KNN TV* tended to present a one-sided argument, particularly that which supports the view of the Gorran Movement or expresses protest against the government. *KNN TV* used reframing as a tool in five news programmes out of seven and the average use of reframing varied from 4 to 8 news items in each daily news programme. Most people interviewed during the news report supported the argument of Gorran, as well as those who were invited as independent political observers to interpret the issue on live news programmes. By contrast, *GK TV* news did not rely on reframing in its coverage of political issues but used this to praise President Talabani by dedicating 15 news items to the anniversary of his becoming President of the Republic of Iraq in the news programme on 13 April 2013 where this item occupied more than a half of the programme. News items related to the party's activities and personalities is a dominant feature across *GK TV*, whereas *KNN TV* did not focus on these topics.

The consequences frame is the second most widely-used frame on *KNN TV*, particularly in its coverage of the corruption issue and its interpretation of the negative influence of corruption on the future of the government and society in general. By contrast, *GK TV* relied on the consequences frame in its coverage of the news relevant to reform and the government's performance to show the positive implications of the reform process in the future political development and democratisation process in Kurdistan, for example in this news article from *GK TV*:

Parliament has started to issue regulations to fight the control of business and trade in Kurdistan, which will solve the problem of monopolies in business and trade absolutely (*GK TV*, 12 April 2013).

The above quote infers that the government will definitely solve the monopolising of business and trade in the future. By contrast, KNN in 2 news reports claims that any new regulations and rules are not practised by the government which means that even if parliament issues new rules this will not solve the corruption issue. For example in the following quote we can see how *KNN* portrayed the law and its implementation:

The Attorney General criticised the fact that Parliament send several projects to be regulations and laws but Parliament itself ignores them (*KNN TV*, 14 April 2013).

Another news article about the passive role of parliament and government can be seen in the following example:

The parliamentary member mentioned that after the issue of the law of Political Detainees the courts have changed the law text because the courts are controlled by the government (*KNN TV*, 15 April 2013).

From both quotes KNN described how the government controls parliament and does not rely on the law in the administrative process. *GK TV* uses a consequences frame in order to show that the government has ongoing plans to resolve these issues. The government covers its shortcomings by telling people that it has a plan to solve their problems in the near future, as this was repeated during the week's coverage. For example when people asked the government to replace the Qaladze town interchange, Qaladze Town Council in the news report on GK TV said they already had a plan to solve this in the future (*GK TV*, 17 April 2013).

The other frame used was to present a magnified version of the issues or events, which leads to the normalising or localising of the issue. *KNN TV* used the magnified frame in presenting corruption and the negative aspects of the government by highlighting the issue by repeated coverage and reinterpretation of the story, thus

providing several points of view. For instance, in the news report about the person who was secretly captured by security forces, *KNN* covered this in the following way:

> The family asked the government about their son who was arrested in 1998 during the civil war between the KDP and PUK. This case is one of the hundreds who have paid the price for the mistakes of the ruling parties (*KNN TV*, 15 April 2013).

KNN TV reports this story or single case which happened in the past in order to enlarge the size of the problem and portray the government's performance, thus magnifying the case by generalising one single example to others. In this respect Entman (1993) claims that in framing the news the media seeks to heighten the issue or maintain silence if they choose to ignore certain elements of the case in the news story. This can be done through the field of experience of editors who have information about the social and historical context of the society and issues across the media.

Conversely *GK TV* uses the magnified frame in the coverage of its political project to portray the government's performance. Furthermore, the moral evaluation component was the dominant frame used across *GK TV* which showed reform positively as mentioned above. In the same way, *GK TV* used the localising and normalising frames in its news items related to corruption, for example through focusing on one factor of the specific issue only or by localising the issue through covering corruption in a small area instead of covering whole cities and towns. An illustrative example of this from the news items analysed during the sample week was the item about 32 people who were given out-of-date medication which caused some of the patients to lose their eye sight, thus producing a crisis which was discussed across all the media. *GK TV* showed the report that the Ministry of Health decided to investigate the company who imported the out-of-date medication. During this crisis *GK TV* prepared a news report about the pharmacy to localise the issue as can be seen in the following example:

The team monitoring the quality of production and services punished 3 pharmacies as these pharmacies did not use air-conditioning (*GK TV*, 12 April 2013).

This can be seen as an attempt to shift the blame or focus away from central control of imported medicines to local bad practice in pharmacies issuing these medicines. This in turn was designed to show that the government was actually in control of the issue of medication distribution. Similarly *GK TV* adopts a normalising frame to cover the shortcomings of the government, for example in the following two quotes it can be seen how *GK TV* uses this frame to support the government:

Because of using this vaccination 40 people now face a decline in their eyesight and the government has formed a team to investigate the case (*GK TV*, 12 April 2013).

The number of people treated in this case was more than 40 and several of them lost their eyes. This case was covered across most of the media and became a big crisis because of the tragic outcome. GK TV did not focus on this case and it only devoted a short time to this, without discussing the details. In another example it can be seen how normalising is applied:

The head of the Human Rights department stated that the circumstances of human rights in Kurdistan is good, however the opposition parties asked this sector be improved because it needs reform compared to other countries (*GK TV*, 11 April 2013).

During the week's coverage the opposition and independent media focused on the circumstances of human rights in Kurdistan particularly in prisons and they criticised the government strongly. *KNN TV* presented the news report 3 days after *GK TV's* report as follows:

The situation of human rights in Kurdistan is bad. During the investigation of three members of the opposition parliament, a secret prison was found. Accordingly, It can be assumed that there is another secret prison in Kurdistan (*KNN TV*, 16 April 2013).

Looking at the same case it can be found that *GK TV* seeks to normalise the case by inviting the Head of the Human Rights Department to describe the case positively. Conversely, *KNN TV* covered the case negatively and it connected this to another news story related to the case. Alongside this, *KNN TV* added the assumption that this case might be the worst seen so far. Arguably *GK TV* tended to normalise and simplify the case while *KNN TV* tended to magnify the case by presenting the negative hypothesis of the case.

Furthermore *GK TV* used the internal national security frame particularly in constructing its treatment recommendation. For example in 10 news items the phrase "protect the Kurdish gains" was used. This phrase was mainly used by *GK TV* during crises and in the normal meetings of political party members, as evident in the following quote:

> Kosart Raul, the PUK Vice President, received Farhad Sangawi the senior PUK radio presenter. They discussed political issues and the relationship between the Kurds and Baghdad as well as protecting the Kurdish gains (*GK TV*, 14 April 2013).

This news has no real value as a news item because members of the same party can visit each other every day. However, *GK TV* connects this normal story to the issue of security by reminding people with the phrase "protecting the Kurdish gain". This phrase in Kurdish society means that the autonomy achieved in 1991 is still under threat whether from Baghdad or surrounding countries which have a Kurdish minority. *GK TV* uses this phrase to argue that internal political stability is more important than making reforms as Kurdish sovereignty may be threatened at any time. The ruling parties use this argument to avoid fighting corruption and making reforms. Emphasis of this phrase by the political parties in power delivers the message that they have achieved freedom for Kurdish society and the people should respect them and not ask them to introduce reform because security is more essential than introducing reforms.

In terms of using all the frames during news debates, both channels rely on one political observer or one person who has some experience of the issue. Since both *GK*

TV and *KNN TV* display partisan news reporting depending on the views of their ownership, this means that there can be no real open debate and discussion of the issues involved and it is clear that one channel supports the government while the other supports the views of the opposition.

5.3.3 The frames used across the (*Xendan*, *Sbeiy* and *Awena*)

The four frames components and other frames will be applied to investigate how they are used across website which is classified into three websites according to their ownership; namely, *Xendan* which is owned by one of the ruling parties, *Sbeiy* for the main opposition party and *Awena* which is an independent website. The total news output to be analysed comprises 182 news articles divided into 55 news articles from *Xendan*, 63 news articles from *Sbeiy* and 64 remaining news articles from *Awena*.

5.3.3.1 The four frame components in the coverage of corruption news across *Xendan, Sbeiy* and *Awena*

During the sample week's coverage *Xendan* covered the corruption issue in only two news articles, alongside this it did not use the causal interpretation component to determine who was responsible for corruption in order to avoid criticising the government. In terms of moral evaluation *Xendan* quoted an argument from the government's administrator without conducting any interviews or taking the views of any other political observers whether from the opposition or independent political observers. For instance, in one of the two news items, the Head of the Garmin Region said that "corruption is not too widespread and it will be controlled in the near future" (*Xendan*, 17 of April). It can be seen that *Xendan* constructed the moral evaluation and the treatment recommendation components from only one point of view, namely that of the government. By contrast, *Sbeiy* covered the corruption issue in eleven news articles and the dominant components used were problem definition and causal interpretation, while leaving moral evaluation and treatment recommendation to the readers. However some news stories consisted of moral evaluation and treatment recommendation components and these were longer and included some interviews. Through this moral evaluation of the news stories on corruption it can be identified that Sbeiy addresses corruption more objectively than *KNN TV*, although it is also

owned by the Gorran Movement Party. *Sbeiy* tries to evaluate corruption by avoiding using moral evaluation and some phrases have only random descriptive meaning. The second reason is the reader can understand the issues without further explanation, as website readers are more conscious of the issues than TV viewers particularly in developing countries because website users are already educated while a part of TV users are not necessarily very well educated. (Al- Hadidi and Imam, 2004). The news text below illustrates the coverage style of *Sbeiy* in terms of using the four components:

> During the distribution of salaries to the Peshmerga (Kurdish Army Forces), they were asked to pay membership fees and join the two political parties in power (*Sbeiy*, 16 April 2013).

It can be seen from the above quote that the political parties forced the Kurdish Army forces to become members of the ruling political parties, while *Sbeiy*'s readers would implicitly understand that it is against democratic values for the national army to become members of the ruling parties. Therefore, *Sbeiy* did not mention the moral evaluation component as the coverage of this issue is clear and does not need any further explanation.

Awena, the third online website under analysis, used the four frame components in its coverage on corruption in only two news items, and these were very long news items. *Awena* varied from both *Sbeiy* and *Xendan*, because of its independent status and lack of partisan political agenda, by taking into account both sides of the arguments, such as the opinions of the ruling parties or the opposition and independent views. Thus, *Awena* tries to address the corruption issue and evaluate it from different viewpoints and arguments; for example some news items selected consisted of few sentences without many details. In this respect, the Chief News Editor of *Awena* said that his website lacks sufficient staff such as news editors and correspondents to offer fuller coverage due to a lack of funds. *Awena* criticised the government in terms of corruption news rather more than *Sbeiy*, although *Sbeiy* is owned by the main opposition party which consistently attempts to present more severe criticism of the government. *Awena* conducted more interviews with people who strongly criticised the government and quoted their views from these interviews in another media form

such as TV programmes, interviews from the newspapers and social media accounts of political observers, and they also took opinions from people's social media accounts where people usually criticise the government with greater freedom. For instance, *Awena* quoted an argument from an interview in the *Leveing Press* Magazine which was conducted with Salahadin, former president of the Kurdistan Islamic Union opposition party:

> The KDP is one of the ruling parties which accused Yasen who is a journalist accused of espionage simply because he criticised the KDP. Therefore, the government should take a lesson from the dictatorship regimes and it should make reforms and listen to the people (*Awena*, 15 April 2013).

From the above example it is clear how *Awena* evaluates the level of freedom of journalists by showing the view of the opposition expressed in other media sources. By quoting and publishing this kind of argument, *Awena* expresses its attempt to criticise the government.

5.3.3.2 The four frames used in the coverage of reform news across *Xendan*, *Sbeiy* and *Awena*

Xendan was the website which covered most news relating to the reform process by the government and it was covered in 16 news items, while *Sbeiy* covered it in only two and *Awena* in seven. This is because *Xendan* is owned by the PUK which is one of the ruling political parties. The dominant frame component used in this news was moral evaluation and most of the views were taken from interviews with the government's representatives, while alternative views were not available without seeking other opinions. Therefore, although certain projects were not completed successfully by the government according to the opposition and independent website, *Xendan* did not conduct interviews with their representatives in order to avoid criticising the regime. The majority of news items covering reform were identified as corruption news in other media as they showed an opposing view to the reforms and they were not considered as real examples of reform. Seven news articles were covered by *Xendan* as reform issues, while the opposition and independent websites

addressed these issues as corruption in the same period. For instance, *Xendan* showed that the government established a modern hospital in Sulaymaniyah, whereas *Sbeiy* interpreted this topic and showed the corruption evident during the completion of the project. In a similar vein, *Xendan* showed that the government had improved oil production, while *Sbeiy* and *Awena* criticised this news story by conducting an interview from other angles and arguing that the government had a poor plan in the oil sector. The oil sector is one of the main issues criticised by the opposition and independent political observers, who argue that the level of income from oil is unclear and that it has been totally controlled by the two ruling families. Several political and journalist authors have shown that the income from oil is controlled by the two ruling families and even the Ministry of the Economy is unaware of what oil contracts have been issued and the exact revenue from these (Salar, 2012). The Minister of the Economy absented himself from his job for one week and complained about his lack of power compared to his assistant who belongs to the other ruling party (the KDP). He also claimed that recently the KDP had taken control of the oil revenues, thus undermining his power. The main problem with *Xendan*'s news coverage is that it reflects the views of the government, while *Awena* attempts to maintain a balanced approach by focusing on various topics and seeking views from across the political spectrum. However, *Awena*'s editorial policy is more similar to that of the opposition website, particularly in terms of its use of negative values, which it displayed in the framing of five news items out of the seven analysed. This shows that the projects that were covered by the government as reforms were not real reforms and a consequence both *Awena* and *Sbeiy* have criticised them. For example, *Awena* is an independent website and it does not have any political interest to support either the opposition or the government.

The problem definition component is the dominant frame used by *Awena* in the five news items relating to reforms by the government. The interviews used in these reports used both independent and opposition points of view to demonstrate that the reform projects described were not completed successfully, but offered no moral evaluation. Thus by giving negative examples of some projects and plans carried out by the government, these issues can be evaluated independently by the audience. For instance, in its coverage of the news on the economy, *Awena* quoted a statement from

April 2013 to remind readers that the government controlled the public economy as can be seen in the following quote:

> Bays Talabani has been the Minister of the Economy of the Kurdistan Regional Government for 11 years and admitted that he did not have any information about the income from oil exports. He claimed that he did not have any information about oil income during the discussion on the budget in Parliament in 2012 and 2013 (*Awena*, 17 April 2013).

The above is a good example of how some issues can be presented to the public without offering any editorial evaluation of the issue, whether negative or positive. Drawing readers' attention to issues in this way requires experienced journalists and an editorial policy determined to address the issues whether by criticising the government by adding details and comments or supporting the government by remaining silent on certain points. The use of silence or the adding of some points during news coverage has more influence on readers according to Entman (2009). The framing of the news needs to be related to the media organisation's general policy and the editors should have a wide experience of cultural and political matters. Goffman (1981, p 63) notes that: "frames are a central part of a culture and are institutionalised in various ways". It would appear to be the case in the Kurdish media analysed in this research that the frames adopted by each media outlet do show institutional bias dependent on ownership of the media, which in turn reflect the political divisions in wider society.

Sbeiy covered reform news in two news items only and it used negative values in the coverage of one of them. For example, this news was the increase in car registration fees by the government and *Sbeiy* criticized this decision through taking the views of some people who argued that this would have negative consequences, during the news report on TV. By contrast, the same news was covered across the ruling parties' media as a reform issue by arguing that the government increased these fees because the level of the economy has increased too. *Sbeiy* does not focus on reform news in general and tries to emphasise any negative points as it is owned by the opposition party. In the coverage in one news item out of the two it used problem definition and moral evaluation components by conducting interviews with the opposition and the

government in order to keep the balance of the two different arguments. This is the main negative factor of the partisan media in Kurdistan that do not use the media as a platform for debating the different arguments on the political issues.

5.3.3.3 The four frame components in the coverage of government performance news across *Xendan*, *Sbeiy* and *Awena*

The quantitative findings (see Table 5.6) showed that *Xendan* addressed the news on government performance positively to the extent of 87.5% and it used negative values 9.1% only while *Sbeiy* used negative values 76.7% of the time and the figure was 77.1%. This means there is quite a large difference between them, and particularly *Xendan* showed the positive features of the government. Furthermore Xendan did not express any negative views on the issues either by eliciting the views of ordinary people or by conducting interviews with opposition and independent political observers. The dominant frames used by the *Xendan* website were the moral evaluation component and it was based on interviews and opinions taken from government officials and people who supported the government. As seen in the example of the Anfal ceremony discussed above, *Xendan* did not always present the negative arguments regarding government performance. Thus *Xendan* showed that the government was interested in the Anfal case to show the new generation and the world how the Saddam regime had committed genocide against the Kurdish people in 1988 through six news items during three days. By contrast *Awena* and *Sbeiy* addressed the victims' families points of view and were critical of the government for ignoring their situation. Both *Sbeiy* and *Xendan* showed that the government did not fulfil the promises it had made to the families of the victims to prosecute the people responsible and provide compensation and services to the towns where they were living.

Therefore, it could arguably be claimed that *Xendan* addressed the events by using frames that do not show the negative performance of the government, for example its misuse of cash, particularly in the Green Zone which is administered by the PUK. By contrast *Xendan* showed the negative performance of some government departments located in the Yellow Zone by posting four news items to show the negative aspects of the KDP, although this area is under the control of the other ruling party. The

interviews with the government officials only have an influence on the framing process when constructing the problem definition and moral evaluation components as the interviewees never criticise the government's performance. For instance, in the coverage of the government's performance in the oil sector, *Xendan* argued that the government is conducting itself in an honest and effective fashion, while some leaders of the PUK claimed that the government has failed in its oil management policy according to Talabani (2014). The negative oil management policy of the KRG has created a grave crisis between Baghdad and Erbil due to the fact that Baghdad claims that most oil contracts have been signed in secret. As a result Baghdad stopped sending the budget to the KRG for three months. Farage (2014) argues that the KRG has a wrong oil management policy and this led to the crisis instead of aiding the development process.

Sbeiy criticised the government in most news items that related to the government's performance through using problem definition, causal interpretation and moral evaluation components in the majority of its news. Any criticism of the government's projects and quality of provision in public services needs to be fully explained by exploring the background issues and causality factors, which in turn leads to the increased length of articles relating to reform or corruption. The dominant frame components used were moral evaluation and problem definition, and particularly moral evaluation was used in most of the news articles. *Sbeiy* depends on several sources to collect critical arguments against the government's performance, for example *KNN TV* reports and programmes, independent website reports and the personal accounts of some independent authors on social media. Some of the main points that criticise the government's performance and which are used constructing a moral evaluation are listed below:

> The presidency of the Kurdistan Region started to amend the constitution in order to allow Barzani to stay in power longer (*Sbeiy*, 17 April 2013).

Another example from *Sbeiy*:

> The conflict between the PUK and KDP to control the oil income led to
> the people of Kirkuk becoming uncomfortable (*Sbeiy*, 17 April 2013).

The examples quoted above are a sample of statements quoted by *Sbeiy* from the personal accounts of other online media journalists to construct the moral evaluation component in its own news coverage. This means that *Sbeiy* seeks to find opposing statements against the government or political parties in power from other media to support its agenda which is basically to criticise the government or politicians in power. This technique is characterised by Sbeiy more than on other media outlets studied here, because *Sbeiy* uses this style more than the others.

There were many similarities between *Sbeiy* and *Awena* in terms of using the frame components and negative values in framing the news that related to government performance. However, *Awena* focused more on the government's performance with 48 news articles out of the 64 displaying a dominant negative value. *Awena* focused on some topics where people and opposition parties criticised the government and the majority of interviews quoted to construct the moral evaluation component were from those who criticised the government. Moral evaluation and problem definition were the dominant frames used while the other two remaining components came in second place, particularly treatment recommendation because improvements in the level of public services were proposed. The news titles of *Awena* were different compared to *Sbeiy* and *Xendan* as they were longer and composed from the opinions expressed in different interviews. The critical features of *Awena* appeared in the titles of the news items, which highlighted government performance issues negatively, as can be identified in the following titles:

> It asked the government to ensure pension equality for the families of
> the Anfal victims with those traitors who served Saddam's regime in the
> Anfal operation (*Awena*, 13 April 2013).

Another example of a long title from *Awena*:

> A Doctor states the health situation of Kurdistan is terrible because of
> the poor national health care system and the policy of the Ministry of
> Health (*Awena*, 13 April 2013).

From the first title above it can be seen that *Awena* highlighted the fact that those people who worked in the security services under the Saddam regime and who participated in the Anfal operation in 1988 and *Awena* were awarded a higher state pension by the Kurdistan Regional Government than the victims' surviving family members. During the annual ceremony of Anfal, *Awena* connected the situation of the families' victims and the negative role of the government, claiming that it should prosecute those people accused of playing a role in the Anfal operation rather than rewarding them.

In the second quote *Awena* formed its negative moral evaluation through the statement of one doctor who criticised the role of the government and the Ministry of Health. From the title the reader can understand the rest of the news. *Awena* is characterised for using long titles compared to the other remaining websites studied in this research.

5.3.3.4 The four frame components in the coverage of citizens' trust news across *Xendan*, *Sbeiy* and *Awena*

Sbeiy is the website that devoted most coverage to the issue of citizens' trust, which was covered in twenty news items during the sample week and most of the items showed that people did not trust the government. Some of the news items were based on demands or statements from various groups in society, for instance it published seven demands in one week which means that people were trying to form a group to petition the government. The dominant frame used was treatment recommendation embedded in causal interpretation which came in second place and focused on issues that people argue the government should take action on. The majority of the causal interpretation explaining why people do not trust the government is evident from the news covered by both *Sbeiy* and *Awena*. The main causal factors can be inferred from both websites as shown in the 5.8.

Table 5.8

	Causal factors of the lack of citizens' trust of the government
Sbeiy	- Interference in the courts by the two ruling parties - Controlling the security sectors by the two ruling parties and using them for their objectives - Lack of consideration of the opposition members of Parliament by the two ruling parties - Lack of public services - Lack of freedom for journalists to access information about the government - Extension to the period rule of the President of Kurdistan - Delay in the paying of salaries to government employees - Lack of social justice
Awena	- Lack of public serves - Lack of freedom for journalists to access information about the government -Interference in the court's decision by the two ruling parties

The main causal factors behind the lack of citizens' trust of the government

From the above table it can be seen that there are several similarities between *Sbeiy* and *Awena* in terms of identifying the causal interpretations of why people do not trust the government. However, the number of factors from *Sbeiy* are much higher with 20 news items relating to the citizens' trust issue while *Awena* only covered 7. The number of news items does not mean that there is a difference between them because the both *Sbeiy* and *Awena* websites showed that people do not trust the government. In contrast, *Xendan* devoted only 2 news items to citizens' trust and it showed the government negatively in one news report which was on the people in Dhouk Province located in the Yellow Zone. In the one remaining news item *Xendan* only focused on the statement published by a group of young doctors that asked the

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government to control the import of medication to protect people, which means that *Xendan* blamed the government in Dhouk by relying on the causal interpretation component to explain why people do not accept the government's plan to establish an airport in the area as determined by the government. In the second news item the problem definition component was used along with a treatment recommendation. *Xendan* did not address the citizens' trust issue but chose to remain silent on this matter.

The other point identified in terms of the online news media compared to television news is that the magnification of the issues was less common online than on television. Alongside this *Awena* and *Sbeiy* addressed some news issues without identifying the name of the persons interviewed while arguing that they wanted to protect their identities particularly on sensitive issues. The issues of lack of freedom and other factors that need to be considered by newsmakers will be discussed below in a later section.

5.4 The Attitude of Media Professionals towards the Coverage of Political Issues and Freedom of Information Access

This section examines the level of freedom to access information about the public sector and the restrictions on journalists in obtaining information, particularly relating to the identified political issues, which will allow examination of government transparency. Alongside this, the section seeks to understand the use of values and frames in the news coverage according to the views of media professionals in the media studied in this thesis. To this purpose, five newsmakers were interviewed, three of them were Chief News Editors, and of the two remaining one was the Managing Editor of news and the final one was the Head of Public Relations. The table below outlines the details of the interviewees and type of interview conducted with each individual.

Table 5.9

Position of Media professionals	Date of in-depth interviews	In-depth interviews
News Chief Editor of *Xendan*	22/4/2013	Face to face interview
Managing News Editor of *KNN TV*	22/4/2013	Face to face interview
The Head of Public Relations of *GK TV*	14/4/2013	Face to face interview
News Chief Editor of *Awena* website	19/2/2013	By Skype
News Chief Editor of *Sbeiy*	1/5/2013	Face to face interview

The Media professionals according to their jobs, date and method of interview

5.4.1 The freedom to access information about the government sectors and the transparency issue

According to the media professionals from the opposition and independent media there is no real freedom for them to access the government sectors to collect information, as the Managing News Editor of *KNN TV* said:

> Even if journalists enter the public sector to conduct an interview about
> some issues, the administrators and media offices of these departments
> do not provide us with real information and they refuse any personal
> communication (In-depth interview , 22 April 2013).

Alongside the restriction of access, the government departments tend to provide information exclusively or predominantly to the partisan media controlled by the two ruling parties. Therefore, news items relating to the positive aspects of government performance and reform are covered much more extensively in these media compared to the media owned by the opposition parties and the 135 other independent media outlets. According to the Chief News Editor of *Awena* the media offices of the different government departments do not provide any news which

shows a lack of transparency. In turn this leads to the media being restricted in fulfilling its role and functions by the government. He also argues that the media office of the government does not provide any negative information about the government and these offices are created to hide the information instead of providing them to the media and public, as he said:

> When we try to investigate some issue or verify any news that has been covered and broadcast by the other media with the media administration of the government sectors they send us to the media office. The media office argue that they do not have any information and when we try to contact them by phone they do not respond to us as they know we are from the non-ruling parties' media. Whereas the media office often call the ruling media to cover their news and events (Skype interview, 19 February 2013).

The above is a good example of how the media are not treated equally due to lack of transparency particularly in some departments, such as security, the armed forces, the economy and oil sector. As these sectors do not have a media spokesperson any investigation becomes very difficult.

In terms of the transparency of the government and the providing of information by different departments, the Chief News Editor of *Xendan* has a different view compared to his counterpart at *Awena*. He argues that the government provides *Xendan* with more information and usually *Xendan* is the first media outlet to receive information due to the fact that the government trusts *Xendan* more than others and the reason is related to its objectivity (in-depth interview, 22 April 2013). This lack of transparency forces the media to depend on the second level to obtain information so the opposition and independent website try to gain information from the government in secret and by covert persuasion. This argument began to emerge when the independent and opposition media were asked during their in-depth interviews why they did not mention the names of any people who offered them information. The Chief News Editors of *Sbeiy* and *Awena* mentioned that the government did not provide them with information about certain issues particularly relating to corruption or the shortcomings of the government when they requested an interview or tried to

conduct an investigation, so as a result they attempted to contact certain employees and promised to conceal their identities. This is because the government is more likely to punish those employees who provide information to the media, particularly regarding corruption and the negative aspects of the government's performance. This phenomenon of anonymity can reduce the credibility of the news and the media. On this issue the Chief News Editor of *Awena* said that there is no other choice for the media if they wish to provide up-to-date information if the government refuses to hold a press conference and its media offices do not provide timely information.

Alongside the lack of transparency mentioned earlier, anonymity becomes a significant phenomenon across the online independent and opposition print media for several reasons. The first factor is the development of the opposition parties, particularly the emergence of the Gorran Party which split from the PUK and the majority of employees who work in the public sector and support Gorran are willing to provide information to the *Sbeiy* website and *KNN TV*. For example, the Chief News Editor of *Awena* notes that the opposition media can obtain more information compared to the independent websites, as the opposition parties have a huge number of employees who provide them with information and send them sensitive documents. Furthermore, the Chief News Editor of A*wena* believes that the other opposition media channels also depend on gaining information on government sectors from their affiliated government employees. The second reason is that each of the ruling parties consists of several political currents and groups and sometimes a specific current provides information about corruption among other colleagues to the independent website by guaranteeing them anonymity. The aim of providing information is not only to interpret reality because some groups and leaders try to influence their colleagues or the other ruling political party in order to reduce their popularity. This means that the independent website face the prospect of being used for the settling of scores and rivalries that exist, whether inside the one ruling party or between the two ruling parties, however the Chief News Editor of *Awena* said:

> We do not allow *Awena* to be used for political interest and to favour
> any political currents or groups. We publish news and information that
> have positive consequences for society even when we obtain them from

a certain party or political currents (Skype interview, 19 February 2013).

The above paragraph demonstrates the lack of transparency in Kurdistan, consequently both the opposition media and independent websites are forced to find other ways to obtain information, such as the use of government officials and party leaders in order that they will provide the information secretly. The Chief News Editor of *Awena* said that a section of its website was devoted to allowing people to publish their comments and articles in order to encourage them to take the role of journalists due to the general lack of transparency.

5.4.2 The editorial policy of the coverage of political issues across the Kurdish media

This focuses on the nature of political news coverage to understand the factors in using the values and frames to analyse the coverage of news across the media selected in this study. The news content analysis found that each website and TV channel examined in this study are dominated by a specific set of values and frames. This allows an understanding of the arguments of newsmakers in those media in terms of how they rely on values and frames during their news coverage. In terms of the interest in political issues, both the Managing News Editor of *KNN TV* and the Chief News Editor of *Sbeiy* noted that *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy* focus more on corruption and the negative aspects of the government. This is due to the fact that *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy* are owned by the Gorran Party which is the main opposition in Kurdistan and they also mentioned that the government is more corrupt and people claim that the government does not offer good services to the public. Therefore the coverage of these issues has become the priority of both *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy*. Furthermore they mentioned that the media should criticise the government rather than being used as a means of propaganda for manipulating the people, as happens in the media owned by the ruling parties that do not focus on the negative aspects of the government, but focus only on reform and showing the government in a positive light. Specifically, *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy* work for the Gorran Movement and this political party has clear political interests and specific targets as the Managing News Editor of *KNN TV* stated:

The Gorran Movement argues that the Kurdish political system is corrupt and needs reform. The Gorran media seeks to focus on these political issues, however we are working completely independently and Gorran has no control over its media. For example, the team which is working in the Gorran media has different views to the Gorran Party and some of the individuals are even affiliated to other political parties. So I can say that we are just working according to the principle of objectivity and professionalism. (In-depth interview, 22 April 2013).

Regarding the use of reframing and magnified frames during the news coverage across *KNN TV*, the Managing News Editor of *KNN TV* claimed that the importance of the events or issues causes his television channel to cover them in several news items and at different times. In terms of inviting government officials to discuss political issues on *KNN TV* news programmes, the Managing News Editor of *KNN TV* claimed that government officials do not want to discuss political issues on his news programme. He said that government officials were asked several times to participate in discussions and they refused as they did not want to answer sensitive questions in particular relating to corruption in the public sector or the shortcomings of the government. The editorial policy of *Awena* is closer to that of *Sbeiy* compared to *Xendan* in terms of how it uses values and frames in its news coverage, however the Chief News Editor of *Awena* claims that he seeks to cover political issues independently. He argues that the nature of political issues in Kurdistan has made the independent website become similar to the opposition media rather than the ruling media. In other words, he claimed that the main political issue in Kurdistan is corruption and lack of social justice. Therefore, both independent and opposition websites try to discuss corruption and the shortcomings of the government to a greater extent than other topics of interest. In terms of covering the political issues and events in short and superficial news items on *Awena*, as detected in the news content analysis in this research, *Awena* clearly did not cover the news in much detail. The Chief News Editor of *Awena* admitted this and claimed it is due to several factors, as he stated:

The main reason is the lack of a large *Awena* news team and we cannot cover all news and events in detail. We are only four editors and we do not have specific correspondents who send us reports. Furthermore, *Awena* correspondents work for alternative remuneration not for a real salary as we have a problem of funds. All of those working for Awena are kind of voluntary and we rely on other jobs because the salary of each editor is only around $300 (Skype interview, 19 February 2013).

The above example is also evidence that the independent media has funding problems and the views of the Chief News Editor of *Awena* on this situation raise a series of issues, particularly the reasons for Awena's apparent lack of funding. He stated that the big companies in Kurdistan are controlled by the ruling parties and these companies do not give advertising contracts to those media companies who criticise the ruling parties, therefore it is hard to obtain any income in this way.

The Chief News Editor of *Xendan* argues that this is an independent website and he said that there are 27 editors and journalists working for it. He claims the monthly cost of *Xendan* is about $18,0000 and this is covered by funding from NGOs and advertising. In other words, he claims that *Xendan* is an independent website as it does not rely on funding from the PUK which is one of the main ruling parties. In this respect, the newsmakers from *Awena*, *Sbeiy* and *KNN TV* argue that *Xendan* is completely controlled by the PUK and they claim that *Xendan* obtains moral and financial aid from the party. They said that it is clear that the ruling parties have opened up some media, arguing that they are independent and *Xendan* is one of them, and these types are called the "shadow media". The Chief News Editor of *Awena* argues that *Awena* can only raise $3500 and every year ends with a budget deficit, while *Xendan* claimed it does not have any funding problems at all.

The Head of the Public Relations Unit of *GK TV* argues that his channel has the same political attitudes as the PUK as well as focusing on the political issues related to that party's policies. He said the PUK is one of the main parties in Kurdistan and that Iraq and its situation makes its media focus on several topics not only on corruption. The Head of the Public Relations Unit of *GK TV* acknowledged that the government is corrupt and *GK TV* has decided to cover corruption issues along with other topics

since 2011. In terms of why *GK TV* uses more positive values and magnified frames regarding government performance and the projects carried out by the government, the Head of the Public Relations Unit of *GK TV* stated that:

> The opposition media tends to overrate corruption and use it as a political target and to gain popularity. The ruling parties have faced strong criticism from the opposition media. So, we need to respond to them by covering projects and plans that have been done by the government. We seek to show the reality of political issues on the ground, against the opposition media showing the wrong image to the public (In-depth interview, 13 April 2013).

The above quote shows that the ruling party's television channel has been forced to take a defensive position towards the coverage of the opposition and independent media by focusing on the projects carried out by the government as reform news. Consequently, the ruling media try to avoid any news that relates to corruption or the shortcomings of the government, which in turn means that the ruling media fail to provide an effective platform for providing the viewers with information on corruption.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has set out to present the findings of the first research questions which comprise a qualitative investigation into the interest in the coverage of political issues and the use of values in covering the news across the two television channels and three websites. This chapter also examines the second research question through investigating the professional media managers' views of the editorial policy in the coverage of political issues and freedom of obtaining information in the public sector. According to the findings, in the opposition media including *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy* and the independent website *Awena,* negative values dominate their coverage of political issues. This demonstrates that the agenda of the independent media is much closer to the opposition media than that owned by the ruling political parties, however the independent media used neutral values more than the other media outlets analysed.

By contrast, the ruling television and website focused on positive values in their coverage in order to show the government positively. Therefore, both *GK TV* and *Xendan* devoted a small proportion of negative values to criticise the government, and a large proportion of these negative values were devoted to criticising the Yellow Zone which is administered in reality by the other ruling party, the KDP. This means that both political parties in power have established media platforms mainly to give publicity to officials that either have a position in the coalition government or partisan posts. According to Warty (2008), the partisan media divides Kurdish society along media lines according to individuals' political background. Although there is no public broadcast service, there is no state media either, therefore each political party in power relies on its own media to cover the positive aspects of the government located in its area of influence or department which is administered by party officials. As a result, the PUK media do not emphasise coverage of the government in the Yellow Zone compared to the Green Zone, and vice versa.

The key findings of the qualitative analysis of news content obtained by applying a framing analysis can be summarised into several key points. The dominant frame components used across *KNN TV* were causal interpretation and moral evaluation and the majority of moral evaluation was taken from the views and arguments of the opposition politicians and independent political observers. *KNN TV* depends on

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reframing the political issues which means repeating the same news and events through varied news items in one news programme. *KNN TV* used the magnified frame as a tool to construct the four frame components, particularly in the framing of causal interpretation and moral evaluation to highlight corruption and showing government performance negatively. *GK TV* focused more on the moral evaluation component in covering the news to show the government's performance and the reform process in a positive light. *GK TV* constructed these two components by conducting interviews and quoting views from government officials and people who support the government. In terms of the issues of corruption and citizens' trust *GK TV* depended on simplifying and localising them. Both television channels did not invite political observers to discuss political issues from different viewpoints. *KNN TV* invited political observers from the opposition and independent, unlike *GK TV* which invited government officials to analyse the political issues, mostly in relation to government performance. By contrast, *KNN TV* dedicated discussion time in the news programme to corruption and negative aspects of the government's performance. The opposition and independent website were quite similar in terms of using the frame components. However, *Awena* conducted more interviews with government officials than S*beiy*, and the problem definition component was the dominant one used in their coverage. Both *Awena* and *Sbeiy* published some news items on corruption and negative aspects of the government without showing the name of the persons who gave them the information. Regarding *Xendan*'s coverage of political issues, this was quite similar to GK TV in terms of using the frame components as both of them are related to the PUK and they did not tend to show the government negatively. Alongside this, on *Xendan* the majority of news items that showed the government's performance negatively referred specifically to the Yellow Zone, however it did not focus on these issues when compared to the independent and opposition media. The findings showed that criticism against the government on *KNN TV* was much stronger than on *Sbeiy* and *Awena*, due to the television focusing more on an audience consisting of the general public, some of whom are not educated. The television news tends to criticise the government or other aspects of society more severely compared to the website. Furthermore, the regulations and laws which have been imposed to control the media tend to focus on the print media (Sleman, 2013).

The final section in this chapter is designed to discuss the freedom for journalists to access government sectors to carry out investigations and the editorial policy of these television channels and websites were considered in this case study. The findings of this section relied on in-depth interviews with the Chief News Editors and Managing News Editor. According to the findings, those working for the opposition television and both the opposition and independent website claimed that the government sectors did not provide them with information compared to the ruling media. They argued that some government departments did not have a media office such as the Security Department, the Peshmerga (Armed Forces) and the oil sector. As a result both the independent and opposition media seek to obtain information from employees and government officials in secret. In this regards, Sleman (2013) suggested that Kurdistan needs to solve the issues of freedom for journalists by issuing a new resolution to obligate government departments to allow them to investigate. This suggestion might be helpful but it will not solve the freedom issue properly because this issue is very complex and related to democracy and the political system. Accordingly, reducing the intervention of the ruling political parties in the public sector is supposed to activate freedom for journalists to investigate political issues in the public sector. This is further complicated by the fact that the whole public sector is monopolised by the ruling political parties and all public sector posts are distributed to people who are members of the political parties or have been appointed to protect the parties' interests even if it comes at the expense of freedom (Hussain, 2015).

In terms of editorial policy, ownership plays a key role in the news coverage of their respective news media channels. Those who work for the opposition and ruling party's television and website claimed that their media relies on the political attitudes of their parties who provide them with their funds. The editorial policy or the attitude of the independent website was more similar to the opposition than the media of the ruling parties in their coverage of political issues. This is because the independent and opposition media focused more on corruption and reported the government's performance in a negative light. The findings showed that the independent website covered some news in scant detail, where it does not explain the issues through taking views from different political observers. The Chief News Editor of the media

platforms complained about the lack of funds to appoint news editors, while the Chief News Editor of *Awena* noted that his team consists of volunteers who have to rely on other jobs to supplement their incomes.

Chapter Six

6. Young people's views on: the news coverage of political issues, the government's performance and the role of elections in the political process.

6.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at young people's understanding and their response to the four political issues (corruption, reform, government performance and citizens' trust) in the news coverage across the Kurdish media by conducting seven focus groups. It also examines young people's attitudes towards the government's performance and political process in Kurdistan by conducting in-depth interviews and semi-structured interviews. This chapter consists of three sections.

The first section discusses how young people understand and respond to the news on these political issues across each television channel and website and the data was collected by conducting seven focus groups (see Appendix 1). This section enables the researcher to understand how young people evaluate these media in terms of the coverage of the four political issues, as it investigates the role of the demographic characteristics and political background of young people in their understanding and their response to the coverage of the four political issues across the Kurdish media.

The second section looks at how young people evaluate the government's performance and the data was collected by conducting in-depth interviews (see Appendix 2). Similarly to the first section, this section will take the demographic characteristics and differing political backgrounds into account.

The final remaining section looks at the role of political participation in the election in shaping democratic politics and future government performance through the views of young people using data obtained from semi-structured interviews (see Appendix 2).

6.2 Young people's views on the news coverage of political issues

This section discusses how young people understand and respond to the political news in particular relating to the four political issues across *GK TV*, *KNN TV*, *Xendan*, *Sbeiy* and *Awena*. Furthermore, this section will investigate the role of demographic characteristics and the political background of young people in their understanding

and response to the political news across the two television channels and three websites. Accordingly, the section is divided into two parts and in the first the five media platforms will be discussed separately in order to provide details of each from young people's viewpoint. The second part will investigate the role of demographic characteristics and the political background of young people.

6.2.1 The understanding and response of young people to the coverage of political issues across the five media platforms

This discusses how young people understand and respond to the political news in particular relating to the four political issues across *GK TV*, *KNN TV*, *Xendan*, S*beiy* and *Awena*. This helps to investigate how young people evaluate each media platform studied in this research through the focus groups.

6.2.1.1 Young people's perception of the political issues on the ruling party's television channel (*GK TV*)

The first and second focus groups, composed of nine students, were selected from the Department of Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah to discuss *GK TV* as the ruling party's television channel and its coverage of the four political issues.

The majority of young people in both the first and second focus groups argued that *GK TV* did not focus on corruption and they returned to the topic with several comments. In the first focus group Lanya said:

> The media channels of the ruling parties do not focus on corruption as the main aim of these media is only to show the government positively. *GK TV* cannot be relied upon to provide people with information about the real issues due to its extensive coverage of international news and its focus on the positive achievements of the government (First focus group, 28 April 2013).

This respondent argued that *GK TV* has lost people's trust in addressing the main political issues objectively. Which means that *GK TV* does not give importance to the political issues as required by young people, as she believes that the priority of this channel is to highlight the government's performance positively. In this respect, Warty

(2008) argues that the media owned by the ruling political parties in Kurdistan were essentially established to provide publicity for politicians and the government rather than to criticise the shortcomings of the government.

In the same focus group Daban confirmed Lanya's argument and said:

> The coverage of the corruption issue has become a function for the opposition channels as they have taken a critical stance against the government. Therefore, the opposition media have forced the media of the ruling parties to assume a defensive stance.

The above comment infers that the opposition media increasingly highlight corruption while the media owned by the ruling parties seek to reduce the amount of corruption in its coverage. Furthermore, 4 young people out of the 9 in both the first and second focus groups mentioned that the ruling media have been forced to take a defensive position in terms of their coverage of corruption and the negative nature of the government's performance. The other reason for the lack of coverage of corruption by *GK TV* is the negative role of the government in fighting corruption and making reforms as can be clarified further by Lara's comment when she said:

> This is a negative aspect of the ruling political parties as they cannot make reforms and most of their members have lost their sense due to money and privileges. Instead of behaving logically and reflecting our society, they try to manipulate people for the small numbers of families or groups who monopolise power. The government is fundamentally corrupt and the media are not able to cover all aspects of this corruption. It is clear that the government has expired, but at the same time it is not allowing the rotation of power in a peaceful manner. Young people are aware of all the facts but there is no real choice. We understand we need change but we do not know how to implement change. (First focus group, 28 April 2013).

The participants in the focus groups evaluated *GK TV* according to its ownership by arguing that people do not trust the government to make any reforms. Therefore even if *GK TV* or any other ruling media cover the corruption issue, they will not positively

affect the attitudes of young people towards the government's performance. This implies that coverage of corruption is not crucial because the government does not pay any attention to criticism. Bahasht was a participant in the second focus group who demonstrated that she never believed that the ruling television channel represents political issues objectively and she said:

> I watch *GK TV* to know about certain projects and activities conducted by the government, especially in the Green Zone. The majority of participants in the two focus groups showed that *GK TV* focuses more on the positive aspects of the government, in particular in the Green Zone (Second focus group, 15 April 2013).

This respondent claims that the function of *GK TV* is becoming a platform to deliver information and announcements from the public sector located in the area dominated by the PUK. This is the main issue of the nature of Kurdish media which has become localised, because each media outlet has a specific target and is used by a specific group due to the partisan nature of both politics and the media. This in turn leads to media users being divided along partisan lines as well. Barzingy (2015) argues that Kurdish society is already divided because of the intervention of the two political parties in power in all aspects of people's lives.

In both the first and second focus groups there were opposite views on *GK TV* in terms of its coverage of corruption and they argued that *GK TV* has the right not to focus on corruption due to this channel belonging to one of the main ruling parties which has the aim of showing the truth. Soran in the first focus group said:

> *GK TV* addresses corruption to a minimum level compared to the opposition media. The opposition media tends to magnify corruption and remain silent in its coverage of the reform process and the establishing of new projects by the government. (First focus group, 28 April 2013).

This respondent believes that it is possible for the ruling media to cover corruption to a small extent. People are becoming familiar with the fact that the partisan media were established for publicity rather than forming a critical body to investigate the

shortcomings of politicians based on critical values during their coverage of the political process. This respondent in another comment suggested that the independent television channels should appear to reflect the political issues positively. However, Aso was one of the young people who criticised all the Kurdish media as he thinks they do not work objectively, as can be seen in his following comment:

> *GK TV* and the other media that belong to the ruling parties have gone into a defensive position as they have tended to exclude news and reports about corruption. At the same time the opposition media have focused on corruption to the extent that people do not trust the government, only those who belong to the ruling parties. Moreover, the opposition media try to convince people that the opposition parties are a viable alternative to take power. Accordingly, sections of the population do not trust either the opposition or the ruling parties' media because they believe that both have lost their reliability. This reason has motivated people to look to the independent media, although the latter are rather similar to the opposition media. Therefore, I can say that we need a professional media which could operate objectively. (First focus group, 28 April 2013).

The above comment reveals that competition between the ruling and opposition parties dominates their channel and leads to the distortion of reality. Much worse is that, even the independent media tend not to be trusted because they are close to the opposition media, particularly because they mainly focus on corruption. It seems that people have become uncomfortable because the agenda of the ruling media is quite different from that of the opposition and independent media. The content analysis in this thesis found that the ruling media largely use positive values to cover the government's performance while the opposition and independent media use negative values to cover this issue (see Table 5.3 and 5.6 in Chapter Five). This in turn means that some people do not trust the media. In this regards, Krmanj (2015) believes that the government is absolutely corrupt and the media is only able to show a little of the corruption. People might think that corruption is much greater than that covered in

the media because the detection of each corruption case makes people believe in the truth of other corruption cases.

6.2.1.2 Young people's perception of political issues on the opposition television channel (*KNN TV*)

The third focus group was selected from the Department of Media Studies and the young people in the fourth focus group who were not in higher education. These third and fourth focus groups were selected to discuss *KNN TV* as an opposition television channel and its coverage of political issues and they consisted of 14 participants. The majority of young people in both third and fourth focus groups showed that *KNN TV* has played a considerable role in covering the issue of corruption due to the fact that people were not entirely familiar with the corruption concept in Kurdistan. During the focus groups the young people proposed several arguments to support *KNN TV* in terms of its coverage of the political issues. In the third focus group, Shaida said:

> *KNN* has changed the critical thinking of Kurdish society. Before the emergence of *KNN TV* the other opposition parties were weak and they did not dare to address corruption more openly. *KNN* has opened horizons for debating several cases that contribute to helping people understand what their rights are and how to demand these rights. However, there is not full freedom in more places which could help the media to investigate several issues due to a lack of democracy as well as the right to access of information. (Third focus group, 14 April 2013).

This respondent claims that *KNN TV* has played an important part in the coverage of corruption; it has expanded critical thinking amongst the society by arguing that the opposition parties were weak before the emergence of Gorran. The partisan media model in Kurdistan directly reflects the political discourse of the parties, and the above comment shows that this respondent evaluates the role of the political parties through their media, for instance this respondent has connected the growth of critical thinking with the emergence of *KNN TV*. This has opened horizons for debating several cases that contribute to helping people understand what their rights are and how to demand them. This argument is in line with Krmanj (2015) who believed that

the emergence of Gorran and its media m arkedthe beginning of the real opposition party in Kurdistan.

This argument was accepted by the majority of respondents in both the third and fourth focus groups who agreed that *KNN TV* had raised political awareness in Kurdish society. The respondents in focus groups 3 and 4 showed that KNN TV focuses on the political issues through its critical views while the ruling party television channels only show the advantages of the government. In terms of the coverage of corruption across *KNN TV*, the majority of respondents believe that they trust *KNN TV* and they thought corruption is addressed much more fully than by the independent media. They thought the lack of democracy and transparency meant the media is not able to cover all corruption issues, as in the fourth focus group when Gaylan stated:

> The emergence of Gorran led to people discovering to what extent the ruling parties had become corrupt because previously there was no method of investigating government activity and the opposition parties were weak at that time due to the lack of freedom for journalists and the media. Therefore, I can say that corruption is much greater than is presented to the people and if we made a full investigation, more and more corruption could be uncovered. So I want to say that *KNN* has a good role to play in enabling young people to understand political issues. (Fourth focus group, 21April 2013).

The respondents believed that greater coverage of corruption in the public sector means that the majority of young people do not trust the government. Sarwar criticised Alan in the third focus group, when Alan said that *KNN TV* tends to magnify corruption. By contrast, Sarwar said that *KNN TV* has clarified some concepts in particular relating to corruption which were not familiar to a wide range of Kurdish society, such as clarifying the corruption of the government by using data. Sarwar explained that *KNN* has helped people to understand their rights through explaining the budget of the government and government economic policy. The debate between the respondents in the focus groups allowed the researcher to observe and understand how young people are influenced by the media in terms of the coverage of

politcal issues. The arguments of the respondents can be divided into three categories or views in each focus group of the research. The first category criticised the government strongly and supported the opposition media in the majority. In the second category there was a minority who supported the government while refuting the opposition media, and the third category that criticised both the media of ruling parties and the opposition media. This division of young people into the three main views will be discussed in the second section which focuses on the extent to which demographic characteristics and political background influence young people's evaluation of the media and help form these three views.

The opposite views towards *KNN TV* expressed by the young people in the focus groups were collected according to certain points or arguments. The main point was that *KNN TV* did not show the positive aspects of the government and the reform process and another main argument was that *KNN TV* is owned by the opposition party which has its own political agenda. Alan said:

> *KNN TV* shows corruption during election campaigns and in periods when the relationship between the government and opposition becomes poor. (Third focus group, 14 April 2013).

This respondent claims that *KNN TV* does not address corruption at all times, rather he believes this channel highlights corruption only during the election campaigns or in times of crisis in the relationship between government and opposition. This is further evidence that the partisan media is believed to be a tool used for political purposes of the party owning the channel.

Another criticism point about *KNN TV* was mentioned by Lana as follows:

> I think *KNN TV* shows an overestimated image of corruption because this TV channel has a specific agenda that concentrates on the negative part of the government. I think if the opposition parties took power they would behave in the same way as the current government. In particular, the Gorran movement as most of its members were members of the PUK prior to the split between them. (Fourth focus group, 21 April 2013).

The participant in this focus group does not trust *KNN TV* and she argues that it tends to overrate corruption and show the government's performance negatively because it is owned by Gorran, the main opposition party which seeks to take power.

The respondents were influenced by the issues covered on *KNN TV* and they supported their argument giving examples of what they had watched on the channel. The majority of young people during the focus groups demonstrated that *KNN TV* has played a big role in detecting corruption and explaining the government's performance. In terms of the government's performance, the respondents focused on the government's attempt to create a crisis in order to prevent people from asking for reform and claiming that the public sector should be improved.

6.2.1.3 Young people's perception of the political issues in the ruling website (*Xendan*)

The fifth focus group, composed of seven students, was selected from the Department of Political Science at the University of Sulaymaniyah to discuss the *Xendan* website as an example of the ruling website and its coverage of political issues. The majority of young people in this focus group said that *Xendan* and the other ruling parties' websites do not focus on showing corruption or on presenting a negative image of the government. According to the majority of participants the ruling media are absolutely controlled by the ruling parties. Dana said that there is no public broadcasting service in Kurdistan, so even the media of each of the two main ruling political parties focus on activities conducted by those ruling politicians who at the same time fund the media. In the same way, Hazar confirmed his colleague's statement and said:

> The *Xendan* website and other media channels belonging to the ruling
> political parties are a means of defending the government instead of
> being used to inform people of what is being conducted on the ground.
> (Seventh focus group, 20 April 2013).

From the above two examples expressed by Hazar and Dana it can be seen that *Xendan* does not work objectively as they argued that it focuses on the positive aspects of the PUK as a propaganda means to support that party. This can be demonstrated by the discussion of the role of *Xendan* in the coverage of political

issues when a majority of participants stated that *Xendan* does not focus on corruption. The government is corrupt but *Xendan* tries to ignore this and is unable to fight corruption, preferring to remain silent when it comes to covering those issues that help to galvanise opposition attitudes towards the government, particularly towards the PUK which funds it. Some of the participants referred to the role of funding in the policy of the media, whether ruling media or opposition media. For instance, Salam said:

> We need an independent media to actually report the facts to the people because the media channels belong to the political parties, and even the opposition media does not function objectively, particularly in periods of crisis, as each of these media channels has a specific agenda in order to help its given political party to take power. (Seventh focus group, 20 April 2013).

Despite this focus group being specifically tasked to discuss *Xendan*, the participants discussed a range of the Kurdish media to explain their views about the case study. From the above example it can be seen that the participants criticised the political parties' media as they do not take a balanced approach in relation to the coverage of either the positive or negative aspects of the government. Salar, for instance, argued that the majority of Kurdish media channels are biased because they belong to the political parties and the media workers are from a specific political and social background as well. Throughout all seven focus groups it was observed that some of those who criticised the media linked to the political parties also tended to detract from the role of the opposition parties and their media. The intention of this group was not to criticise the partisan media because they did not support the independent media either. Arguably this category wanted to evaluate the ruling media positively but when they were asked to evaluate the opposition media they tended to criticise the partisan media in order to show the shortcomings of the ruling parties and their media.

In terms of the role of *Xendan* and its coverage of the four political issues the respondents' dominant view demonstrated that *Xendan* and the other ruling media tend to present them negatively. The participants argued that the ruling media try to

manipulate people through their coverage of the local political issues and by avoiding the main political issues on the ground. Dana said:

> The media channels of the political parties in power try to focus people's attention onto certain issues so that people do not think about the main issues. For instance, when people ask for reforms, the media of the two ruling political parties focus on the political crisis with Baghdad. The government has suspended some decisions regarding relations with Baghdad in order to use them when any internal crisis may occur. (Seventh focus group, 20 April 2013).

From the above paragraph it can be seen that the ruling media has lost its influence on people as the participants argued that the ruling party's buying of votes is also part of the corruption issue. In this focus group, Harem criticised the government strongly, describing it as corrupt. According to Harem, people do not trust the ruling media due to all the false promises made by the government over the last decade that they would introduce reforms. Alongside this, Harem thought that all people understood that the two ruling parties are not capable of fighting corruption and some people have an interest in maintaining the current situation. The participants argued that the negative political situation of Kurdistan is caused by the common interest of maintaining corruption by the two ruling parties and their affiliates. Harem confirmed this point clearly as follows:

> The government supports some people by offering financial support and privileges, so this group of people are helping the government by giving them votes and legitimacy. (Seventh focus group, 20 April 2013).

In the same way, Mardan stated that the leaders of the two political parties have become a kind of Mafia because they are clearly stealing public funds. During this focus group, the participants claimed that the independent media played an important role in informing people of the main political issues, as well as the ruling party's media. Mardan stated that, if the independent media and opposition media did not exist, nobody would know to what extent the government is corrupt. During the focus group Salar responded to the criticisms against the government and argued that his

colleagues exaggerated when describing the government negatively particularly in terms of the lack of reform and the level of public life. He went on to give an example to support his views and said that the government is capable of carrying out reforms because more and more people are becoming rich or poor whereas the middle classes are faltering every day and the majority of society are more likely to be in favour of the poor instead of the rich. Since the majority of this focus group had negative views towards the government the arguments of Peshraw and Hasan were criticised by his colleagues again. Mardan responded to Salar and he gave an example as evidence to support his argument by saying that "we cannot trust the government because it has already acknowledged corruption for several years and has not punished anyone". On the whole, the majority of participants in this focus group showed that *Xendan* does not reflect the political issues in the real political arena because it is owned by one of the ruling parties. At the same time the ruling parties are perceived as being incapable of fighting corruption and introducing reforms. Thus *Xendan* tends to avoid covering corruption by focusing on the not so important issues or local issues in order to deceive people. Whereas some of the participants claimed that the government has introduced reforms and will control corruption. In the next section there will be a discussion of the factors influencing the different views of young people in terms of their evaluation of the role of the media in the coverage of political issues.

6.2.1.4 Young people's perception of the political issues in the opposition website (*Sbeiy*)

The sixth focus group, composed of four students, was selected from the Department of Political Science at the University of Sulaymaniyah to discuss the *Sbeiy* website as an example of the opposition website and its coverage of political issues. Two of the participants believed that *Sbeiy* and the other media channels of Gorran have participated in raising the political awareness of people and forcing the government to introduce some reforms or do some new projects through highlighting corruption and the low standard of public services. The other two participants of the focus group criticised Sbeiy for its concentration on the negative aspects of the government, they believed it reflected the ambitions of the opposition party to take power. Rezaw was one of the two participants who criticised *Sbeiy* and said:

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The competition between the ruling political parties and those in opposition means that I don't trust either of them. We understand the government is corrupt because this is covered by the media that do not have any political interest. Accordingly I prefer the independent media because it does not use propaganda to assist any particular political party to take power. (Sixth focus group, 24 April 2013).

From the above paragraph it can be seen that the problem of Kurdish media is its ownership by the political parties and this is reflected in the attitudes of a part of society. This argument by Rezaw and other participants in all the focus groups shows how the respondents prefer the independent media because they are disappointed by the political parties who manipulate the media controlled by themselves.

The opposition media have more employees in the public sector to provide them with information and documents than the independent media has. The other factor mentioned in this focus group as a critical point against *Sbeiy* is the lack of coverage of some projects undertaken by the government. The chief editor of *KNN TV* earlier in Chapter 5 said news related to government projects is not given any consideration in the opposition media unless corruption was clearly identified in the projects. Otherwise, the audience needs to be informed about important projects done by the government as claimed by participants in all the focus groups in the research project.

This is the negative aspect of the opposition parties according to the participants in the focus groups. The ignoring of the positive aspects and projects by the opposition media was interpreted by the majority of the participants of the whole focus groups as demonstrating a clear lack of objectivity. The reason for the importance of this issue is that although the majority of the participants said they did not want to become pessimistic, they did not believe that the political system could be changed or reformed.

There were two participants who criticised *Sbeiy* for showing that the government is corrupt and this issue is covered more by the opposition and independent media. Furthermore, they argued that Sbeiy did not function objectively and ,did not focus on the positive aspects of the government. For instance in this focus group Sheren said:

The daily coverage of corruption by the *Sbeiy* Website makes me feel pessimistic about the government even though the government has some positive points. I would prefer *Sbeiy* to show the advantages and disadvantages of the government in order to appear more objective. (Sixth focus group, 24 April 2013).

This means that the daily coverage of corruption by the opposition media makes people feel pessimistic because they do not believe that the two political parties in power intend to introduce reform. Another reason for pessimism is that the opposition media does not cover new projects undertaken by the government. In turn this means that people do not trust the opposition media because they only highlight the negative image of the government and this makes people think that the opposition media are not working objectively. According to some respondents, objectivity in the media is crucial so that there is a balance in the coverage of the news relating to both negative and positive aspects of the government. As the news content analysis in the previous chapter (see Table 5.3 and 5.6 in Chapter Five) showed, the opposition media largely highlighted the government's shortcomings rather than showing any side of its positive performance. Another reason for complacency is that many people feel the economic level and public services have improved since 2003 and this makes them approve of the government's performance in general, particularly the middle and older generations. This generation feels quite comfortable with their current living conditions because they had suffered so much lack freedom and lower level of economic stability under Saddam's regime, but the majority of the new generations are looking for greater progress.

6.2.1.5 Young people's perception of the political issues in the independent website (*Awena*)

The seventh focus group, composed of eight students, was selected from the Department of Political Science at the Human Development University to discuss *Awena* as an independent website and its coverage of political issues. In this focus group the majority of the participants claimed that *Awena* and the independent media play an important role in helping people to understand the political process, particularly the government's performance. The majority of those who support *Awena*

said that it is better than the opposition media as the independent media does not seek to obtain political power. In other words they mean that the opposition media seeks to show the negative aspects of the government in order to make people think that the opposition is a good alternative. Rozan said:

> *Awena* and the independent media are the best and most reliable resources, as the independent media cover the political ground clearly, while the opposition media merely try to create a bad image of the government. (Fifth focus group, 20 April 2013).

This respondent prefers the independent media to the opposition media in its coverage of political issues, arguing that the independent media tends to work more objectively than that of the opposition parties. Objectivity in the news coverage as expressed by this respondent means that the media should highlight the negative and positive aspects of the government. This claim does not fit with the editorial policy of the opposition parties' media because the Managing News Editor of KNN TV (In-depth interviews, 22 April 2013) and the Chief News Editor of *Sbeiy* (In- depth - interviews, 1 May 2013) mentioned that they adopt negative values in the news to cover the political issues and they insisted that the audience should be provided with the shortcomings of the government rather than publicising any successful projects completed by the government. In this respect, Abdulaziz (2013) notes that the media in Middle Eastern countries are largely employ positive values in the news coverage due to the lack of democracy and the fact that the media have been controlled by the ruling political parties for so long. This makes people believe that objectivity in media coverage is achieved by focusing on publicising the government's activities and introducing projects completed by the government positively rather than criticising the shortcomings of any particular activity.

During the focus group some of the participants responded to Rozan's argument because the nature of the focus group was dynamic and allowed the respondents to interact by criticising each other and responding to opposite arguments. One of them was Jutyar, who said :

Awena often shows sensitive documents regarding the corruption of the government (which he claimed was one of the best ways of informing the viewers). One major problem with *Awena* is that the people providing information were kept anonymous, with the result that many viewers could not trust the website. The opposition media is bolder in showing corruption, particularly *KNN TV* as the opposition parties are more powerful in defending themselves while the independent media can more easily be punished by the government. (Fifth focus group, 20 April 2013).

The above views are not real criticisms of *Awena*; during this focus group two participants totally disagreed with both the opposition media and independent media in their handling of several arguments, as can be seen from the following comment by Massud:

We should understand that we are in a transition stage and the situation is improving step by step. Kurdistan needs reconstruction, whilst the opposition and independent media claim that everything should be perfect straightaway. Moreover, the *Awena* website focuses on deficiencies and defects in the government, so consequently it gives people the wrong idea about the government's performance and encourages pessimism. (Fifth focus group, 20 April 2013).

The above argument faced strong critical views from the majority of the participants and stated that the government is not interested in introducing any reform. In this aspect, Rebaz claimed that both the independent and opposition media report corruption every day and the government does not oppose this. Alongside this, the majority of the participants believed that the government cannot be trusted to change and they presented several arguments to support their views. One of the main arguments was that the government controls public funds to keep power by distributing money to buy votes. This argument has become a generalised statement by respondents, who, although they were asked to focus on the media, always tended to talk about the government as well because the nature of this research made them link media coverage with government performance. Another point is that the

respondents argued that there is no difference between the partisan media and the political parties, in another words, they argue that it is difficult to distinguish between the parties and their media channels, as the media organisations are part of the parties' overall unit and all the media professionals working in them are likely to be members of these parties.

The four main political issues identified in this case study and discussed by the focus groups are all connected to each other and all stem from corruption or the lack of social justice. In this last focus group the participants concentrated on another role of the independent media in the political process, for example, Fahmey said:

> The independent media played a role in the emergence of the Gorran Party by raising awareness of political rights among different sectors of society. Following this, Gorran obtained the attention of that group in society who sought reform. The independent media encouraged some of the political elite to make reforms through supporting these issues and some of them had split from both ruling parties. . (Fifth focus group, 20 April 2013).

Alongside this role, Rebaz argued that:

> The independent website has given space to some members of the independent elite to raise awareness of the people through their critical essays. . (Fifth focus group, 20 April 2013).

According to the above two arguments and the others who supported *Awena,* the independent website and their online versions have become a platform to connect three groups. These groups include the general public, independent authors acting as a pressure group and the opposition parties who criticise the government's performance through their coverage of corruption and by offering suggestions for further reforms.

6.2.2 Demographic characteristics and political background: young people's understanding of the news

This section seeks to understand how the background of young people has an influence on their attitudes. It is divided into two parts and the first one will discuss the demographic characteristics including gender, place of residence and whether the young people are in higher education or not. The second part is the political background of young people divided into two categories, namely young people's political affiliation or political attitude and political knowledge or political interests. The participants were selected from different backgrounds to analyse how this variable has an impact on their understanding and responses to political news. The composition of the seven focus groups are categorised in more detail in the following table:

Table 6.1

Focus Group Numbers	Demographic characteristics of the participants in the focus groups						
	Gender		Place of Residence		Higher Education or not in higher Education		Total
	Fe	Ma	City	town and villages	In higher education	Not in higher education	
First	2	3	4	1	5	-	5
Second	1	3	4			4	4
Third	3	4	4	3	7		7
Fourth	3	4	5	2	7		7
Fifth		7	3	4	7		7
Sixth	4		4		4		4
Seventh	2	6	6	2	8		8
Total	15	27	30	12	38	4	42
Focus	Political background of the participants in the focus groups						

Group numbers	Political affiliation or political attitude			Political knowledge or political interests	Total
	Ruling parties	**opposition parties**	**Independent**		
First	2	2	1	Media	5
Second	1	2	1	not in higher education	4
Third	1	4	2	Media	7
Fourth		1	6	Media	7
Fifth	1	4	2	Political science	7
Sixth		2	2	Political science	4
Seventh	2	2	4	Political science	8
Total	7	17	18		42

The participants in the focus groups according to their demographic characteristics, political background

6.2.2.1 The role of demographic characteristics in the understanding and responses of young people to political news

During the selection of the focus groups, different demographic characteristics were considered in this case study in order to seek to understand to what extent demographic characteristics influence young people's understanding and response to political news.

In terms of striking a balance between the genders, it was essential that the young people in the university who participated in the focus groups were divided equally between the genders, otherwise the male students would have dominated as they are more interested in political communication than their female counterparts. During the selection of the sample, I tried to strike a balance between the male and the female participants, but the young males were more eager to participate in the research

project than the female participants, as evidenced by the 27 male and 15 female participants in all the seven focus groups.

Despite the fact that the number of females who participated in the focus groups in this research project were fewer than the males, they were quite similar to the males in particular relating to their level of understanding and political attitudes towards the media of the ruling parties, the opposition or independent media. Consequently, gender is not a significant factor in the focus groups in this case study relating to any difference in support for the various politically-based media channels, although the majority of females tended to support the independent media, and they were very interested in political communication. The findings of this thesis differ from research conducted by both Al Hadidi et al, in the Arab countries and Al- Bada in Lebanon, who both found that young females largely watch entertaining TV programmes while young males mostly view political news programmes (Al- Hadidi et al, 2006; Al- Baida 2008). This research findings suggest that both genders in Kurdistan are interested in political news for two reasons. Firstly Kurdish culture might be different from Middle-Eastern society, particularly the Arab world, which was the focus of the two aforementioned research studies by Al-Hadidi et al (2006) and Al-Baida (2008). The second reason may be related to the thesis sample which mainly collected the views of female students. Mustafa (2010) found that young females in universities tend to view political programmes more than those women who have not completed university or are not in education.

This group of females in the focus groups were more optimistic about changing the system compared to the other groups where the majority considered the system and argued that the Arab spring had not succeeded as an example. While the males from the focus groups were divided into two groups where the majority group criticised the ruling media and the government. This group argued that the system needs to be changed and they also argued that both the opposition and independent media help people to understand political issues, particularly the opposition media as they are more powerful.

With regard to the factor of whether young people were in higher education or not, there is no clear difference in terms of their understanding the political issues across

the media as they were all interested in political communication. The other reason is that the unstable political situation made young people focus on the political issues because they are all affected by the system. Furthermore this research is based on purposive sampling and the young people were selected because they are interested in the research topic and because this research relies on a qualitative approach as was explained in the methodology chapter.

The place of residence variable of the participants in the focus groups showed that the majority of young people who were from towns and villages criticised the government more strongly compared with those from the cities. For example, although the respondents in the focus group were asked to evaluate the media selected, they insisted on offering criticism of the government, arguing that they do not distinguish between the ruling parties and the government itself, as they believe that their media channels promote the agenda of these parties.

The young people from town and villages felt disaffected and argued that the government should focus more on their areas compared to the cities and they felt that rebuilding was appropriate compensation for them. Below can be seen some examples of the comments made by young people who were from the category of villages and towns during the focus groups, for instance Mardan said:

> I do not believe that the government is able to fight corruption and make reforms in any way, as the leaders of the two political parties have become a kind of Mafia because they are clearly stealing public funds. If the independent media and opposition media did not exist, nobody would know to what extent the government is corrupt. (Seventh focus group, 20 April 2013).

Harem said:

> The people are quite sure that the government is corrupt; accordingly people do not trust the government and the media channels which support the government due to all the false promises made by the government over the last decade that they would introduce reforms. (Seventh focus group, 20 April 2013).

Sarwar said:

> The government has adopted the wrong policy whether at the level of
> internal policy or that towards Baghdad due to the actions of President
> Massoud Barzani who has tended to be over-authoritarian. (Third focus
> group, 14 April).

Gaylan siad:

> I can say that corruption is much greater than is presented to the people
> and if we made a full investigation, more and more corruption could be
> uncovered. (Fourth focus group, 21 April 2013).

From the above examples it can be seen that they have used strong words such as
"Mafia", "stealing public funds", "the government is corrupt" and the description of the
system and president as "authoritarian". Even those who supported the government
and the ruling media criticised the opposition and independent media strongly. For
example, Kamaran during the focus group which discussed the independent website
said the independent media does not address corruption cases objectively as it is not
accurate. He went on to argue that, usually the independent and opposition media
present a big headline without addressing the issue in-depth. The majority of young
people from the cities who supported the government in the focus groups did not tend
to refute the opposition and independent media absolutely and some of them even
said that they use these channels to understand the negative aspects of the
government. The question arises here, as to why they believe that the government is
corrupt but they still do not support the opposition parties, and the answer can be
related to the political background of some of them, as will be clarified in the next
point.

6.2.2.2 The role of political background in young people's understanding and their responses to political news

This part investigates the role of two factors: the political knowledge or political
interest and the political affiliation or political orientation of young people and how
this influences their understanding and response to political issues. The previous part

showed that young people, whether in higher education or not, are similar in terms of their understanding and response to political issues. In the same way this part shows that all the young people were interested in the political content across the media whether they were studying in the Department of Media and Political Science or were not in higher education at all. This interest stems from the feeling of all young people that they are not given attention by the government in general and as a result they feel it is important to focus on political content across the media. Alongside this reason, the research project depends on purposive sampling and most of the interviewees were interested in political communication regardless of their educational background. However, political affiliation or political orientation of is a significant factor as it plays a large role in determining young people's understanding and their response. During the focus groups the young people were asked about their political orientation to allow analysis of how this variable has an influence on their evaluation of the media according to whether they favoured the ruling parties, opposition or independent parties.

In all the focus groups 7 young people out of 42 supported the ruling parties and the majority of them sought to discuss the shortcomings of the ruling media in their coverage of the political issues, particularly corruption and the negative aspects of the government through several arguments. This is due to two factors, firstly the government is corrupt (Krmanj, 2015) and the ruling media do not reflect this corruption in their reporting. Instead they emphasise projects done by the government as part of the reform process and show the government positively, as revealed in the content analysis where the ruling media devoted positive values with higher percentage levels than the other media channels (see findings in Table 5.3 and 5.6 in Chapter Five). The qualitative news textual analysis also demonstrated how the ruling media devoted magnified framing to show the government's performance and used localising framing and simplifying framing to reduce the issues of corruption. Furthermore, the ruling media reflects the common arguments which are derived from the government's political discourse to create external threats on internal security. The government uses this threat to make people obliged and obey their reigns to avoid introducing reform and to develop internal systems. Qani (2012c) found that the ruling media use security framing in this way, with similar conclusions

to the current thesis. This approach is characteristic of authoritarian dictatorship regimes, for instance the Iranian regime always describes the US as 'the Devil against Iran" in order to distract the Iranian people from seeking democratic reform and focus only on the external threat which targets Iran. (Qani, 2012b). Similarly the two political parties largely devote news coverage to show that Kurdistan is always under threat from Baghdad and surrounding countries. In this respect, Hardy (2012a) notes that the young people in Kurdistan are very aware of government's political discourse, and they cannot be deceived easily. The second factor which makes the majority of young people feel influenced by the opposition and independent media rather than the ruling media is that this sector of society face issues such as unemployment, lack of social justice and they receive scant attention from the government. Therefore they are not influenced by the ruling media. Al-Hadidi and Imam (2004) argue that young people do not use media which ignores issues relevant to them. Essentially, the government does not give importance to young people and in turn the ruling media does not cover young peoples' issues. This argument is clearly expressed by the respondents, for example, Soran claimed that:

> *GK TV* is the representative of the PUK which is one of the main political parties in Kurdistan and Iraq; therefore it needs to focus on external news. The coverage of external news has affected the average rate of *GK TV* news coverage of corruption, and this means that the opposition party is too local compared to the PUK and this reason helps the opposition media to focus on internal issues more than the ruling media. (Second focus group, 15 April 2013).

This shows that young people understand the agenda of the Kurdish media and they are also able to determine the priority of the media ownership types. The dominant argument which was repeated is that the ruling media is adopting a defensive position, and this phrase implies that the other media are focusing on the shortcomings of the government. As a result the ruling media is forced to show the positive aspects and news projects or some reform process carried out by the government.

The young people from the ruling parties category argued that the opposition and independent media are not working objectively as they do not cover the positive aspects of the government. They argued that the coverage of the non-ruling media forced the ruling media to focus on the positive aspects of government more than the negative. Another argument was mentioned by Shwan who said:

> The PUK needs to protect itself through providing news coverage of the positive aspects carried out in the areas administered by the PUK because the KDP is focusing solely on positive aspects in its areas of control as well. (Fifth focus group, 20 April 2013).

This argument by Shwan shows that the competition or conflict between the ruling parties is a factor which means that both ruling parties do not show coverage of corruption in their respective areas of influence. Soran at the beginning of the focus group meeting said that:

> *GK TV* shows some news on corruption however it does not cover the big cases because *GK TV* is owned by the PUK which is in power. (Second focus group, 15 April 2013).

The above paragraph by Soran presents the opposite argument to his comment that the ruling media do not focus on internal issues because they are not local political parties and they feel frustrated at not being able to address them. The participants from the ruling party supporters' category during the discussion on the media touched on the government's shortcomings, for example Massud said:

> We should understand that the KRG is not like a developed country, so we should understand that we are in a transition stage and the situation is improving step by step. Kurdistan needs reconstruction, whilst the opposition and independent media claim that everything should become perfect. (Fifth focus group , 20 April 2013).

The above is a good example of how the people affiliated to the ruling political parties give them legitimacy even if they are seen as corrupt. This can also be seen from the arguments of participants in the same category, for instance Aso showed that people's

evaluation relates to their political orientation. He went on to say that political orientation depends on financial benefits received from the government, as he explains in the following statement:

> I think the effect of the media is related to the political background of the viewer, as the political background of each person depends on the family political background of that person. Moreover, the political background of the majority of people depends on the financial benefits gained by families from the political parties. So, those who still have not received any financial benefit from the ruling political parties prefer to support the opposition parties. (First focus group, 28 April 2013).

According to the above paragraph the political background of the audience is more powerful than the media messages themselves, in other words the effects of the media messages depend on the political background of the viewer. According to Talat (2006) who conducted research into political participation and affiliation among young Kurdish people found that the Kurds are generally becoming a partisan society because the two political parties have forced people into this situation as they are generally not treated equally for example in terms of employment opportunities. He also reported that the family is the main channel for shaping the political attitudes of their young people. According to this research schools and universities came as a second channel for political socialisation of young people as the two political parties have monopolised the students unions in this sector. Conversely, the research reports that young people form the sector of society which has affiliated least to the political parties compared to other categories because their loyalty has not yet been bought. Political background is not related to financial interest, in particular among the opposition parties because they are not able to provide benefits to people who support them in elections. The majority of participants from the independent and opposition categories positively evaluated the independent website. While half of the participants from the ruling party category, particularly those in the focus group which discussed the independent website, criticised the independent media. Moreover, the majority of the participants from the ruling party category criticised the opposition media during the focus groups that discussed the opposition media and

some of them even suggested that the independent media is the best as it does not have a political agenda. This category does not prefer the opposition and the independent media because of the political objectives of these media but rather because of the level of objectivity of these media. In other words, trust in the media among the participants from the political party category varies according to the ownership of the media and not on the actual content of the news.

The relationship between the political background of the participants and their moral evaluation can be clarified further by analysing the attitudes of the views of the participants supporting the opposition parties, for instance some of them criticised *KNN TV* and *Sbeiy* website owned by the Gorran Party which is the main opposition party. This was clearly expressed by those participants from different opposition parties as illustrated in the following quote by Nian:

> *KNN TV* is one of the channels that have been an active participant in addressing corruption; however it shows that the Gorran Movement is the only alternative that has a suitable solution. However, that is not true because most of the political leaders of Gorran were in power before the split from the PUK. (Third focus group, 20 April 2013).

In this focus group, Nian evaluated *KNN TV* positively while at the same time criticising the Gorran Party which is the owner of the channel and arguing that the Gorran leaders were formerly members of the PUK. During the focus groups the participants clearly supported the political parties to which they were affiliated, so the question arising here is which political parties the participants from the independent category supported most, ruling or opposition. The majority of the participants from the independent category criticised the ruling parties and their media and they supported the opposition media. They claimed that the opposition media helped people to understand the real political situation of Kurdistan through detecting corruption and the negative aspects of the government. During the focus group which discussed *GK TV*, Hawar criticised the ruling media strongly:

> Every person is sure that there is more corruption even among the political leaders, although this is not covered by *GK TV* or other media

that are owned by the political parties in power. The media owned by the political parties in power are faltering in popularity, especially amongst young people because they do not give a true account of the government's performance. The Kurdish authorities do not want to provide any services to the general public; instead they give services only to those who have political affiliation to them. The government only started to improve the country's infrastructure due to critical pressure from the opposition parties. (Second focus group, 15 April 2013).

The above quote shows that Hawar did not trust the government and ruling media as the government is corrupt and does not make any reforms. This infers that the opposition media forced the government to develop some public services. The majority of the participants from the independent category did not support the government, while at the same time some of them criticised the opposition parties and argued that they cannot be trusted to take power. The issue of the independent participants was not related to the situation of the opposition parties as they have not held power yet and therefore cannot be criticised for their performance.

According to the independent participants the opposition media should focus on both positive and negative aspects of the government, as this would help to provide a more balanced picture. Some of the independent participants believed that by remaining silent about some positive aspects of the government, the media was showing a lack of objectivity. They argued that this silence gives people the wrong impression of the government. This issue was raised with a Chief News Editor at *KNN TV* and he said that *KNN TV* focuses on corruption and the negative aspects of the government because the positive aspects have no significance in the editorial policy of *KNN TV*.

6.3 The attitudes of young people towards the government's performance

This section examines the positive and negative attitudes expressed by the participants about the government's performance and the role of demographic characteristics and the political background or political orientation of the participants in forming their evaluations. The data of this section was collected by conducting in-depth interviews with 15 young people from varied demographic and political

backgrounds. This section is divided into two parts and the first part examines the positive and negative attitudes of young people towards the government's performance. The second part analyses the role of demographic characteristics and the political background or political orientation of the participants in forming their evaluations. The previous section included a similar point which aimed to identify the role played by the demographic characteristics and political background of the young people in forming their understanding and responses in terms of the media coverage of the four political issues. It may be assumed that these factors become significant intervening variables in terms of the role of the media in shaping the political communication of young people. Moreover the examination of the role played by these demographic characteristics will lend further understanding to this case study and enable the researcher to investigate how and why young people demonstrate different or similar understanding of and response to the media coverage of the identified political issues.

6.3.1 The positive and negative attitudes of young people towards the government's performance.

This part examines the positive and negative attitudes expressed by the participants about the government's performance and political process. The results show that 10 out of 15 young people held negative views towards the government while the remaining 5 viewed the government and political process positively, therefore these two different views will be examined separately in the following two categories.

6.3.1.1 The negative attitudes of young people towards the government's performance

The dominant views of the larger part of the sample, comprising 10 of the 15 young people interviewed, were negative and critical towards the government. The main arguments proposed were related to four main factors: inability to introduce reform, fighting corruption, lack of democracy and control of the government departments by the ruling parties' offices. Zala, from the Department of Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah, during her in-depth interview stated that:

I cannot imagine how the government can make reforms because the KDP and PUK have held power since the revolution in 1991 and they have divided Kurdistan into two zones of influence. Ever since then there are many people who support these parties throughout the military, intelligence and security services. Alongside this, the two parties started appointing many people to the public sector and giving pensions to people in order to influence them in the elections (Zala, May 5 2013).

These respondents feel frustrated that the two political parties have failed to introduce reform because since 1991, many basic issues still have not been addressed, for example public services are still poor despite major budget increases since 2005 (Mahmwd, 2015). The KRG is weak and dominated by the two political parties which have entered every sector in society, such as the military, intelligence and security services. In this respect, Qani (2015) argues that the political system is becoming centralised and the two political parties in power do not allow any change in power.

This interviewee supports the opinion that there is a lack of legitimate democracy in Kurdistan and claims that the two ruling parties have taken power by controlling public funds. As a result, ordinary people who are not affiliated to the ruling parties cannot find jobs in the public sector, particularly since 2009 because a large number of people were appointed to the public sector during the elections in 2009 to buy their votes. This affected the future young generation because public sector posts were entirely filled and the private sector remains weak because government's revenue is predominantly based on oil production (Salih, 2015). He noted that 95% of the budget of Iraq is derived from oil and the economic structure of Kurdistan is quite similar to that of Baghdad because the budget of Kurdistan is based on 17% of the overall Iraqi budget. The distribution of jobs and posts in the public sector has led to a generational division of society. For instance, Rabar, from the Media Studies Department in the same university stated:

I am not happy with the government's performance due to the lack of job opportunities in the public sector for this generation (2 May 2013).

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In a more direct response, Zana from Media Studies in the same university accused the older generations of supporting the two ruling parties out of self-interest. The views were explicit about the age divide and are visible in the following statement:

> Most people of middle age and above do not have any sense of responsibility towards the younger generation and they are just looking after their own interests because they support the government, although they are quite sure that the government does not treat the public equally. Accordingly, the government does not tend to make reforms because a large section of society is happy with the current situation (2 May 2013).

The above response infers that there is a kind of mutual co-operation and interest sharing between the ruling parties and the older generations which is causing problems for the younger ones. A majority of the interviewees were unsure who is more responsible for creating the current political situation, whether it is the political parties through monopolising power or the people themselves, particularly the older generations through their collusion with the status quo. The interviewee above suggests that some members of the older generations may be happy with the current political situation as they enjoy job security even though they acknowledge there is corruption in the public sector.

Rabar at the same university, said:

> The corruption has also affected people who have a vested interest in the political parties. The people who are affiliated to the political parties in power people feel that the distribution of privileges is not divided equally among them. The majority of people who are affiliated to the ruling parties are not happy and he states his views that they prefer reform, whilst at the same time they are afraid of losing their current privileges provided to them by the regime. (2 May 2013).

According to this statement corruption has a negative impact on people who are already involved in the political parties whether in the partisan organisations or those appointed to the public sector because inside the ruling political parties there is no

fair system for distributing jobs and posts among non- partisan members. In turn, this affects employees' performance because, although they might not be qualified nonetheless they are appointed on the basis of nepotism. In this respect, Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) argue that Kurdish citizens are not treated equally on the basis of their citizenship, but instead politics in the country is dominated by a culture of nepotism leading to inequalities. Bellamy (2013) further notes that this type of clientelism system creates social inequality and lack of opportunities for all citizens to seek employment on the grounds of their merits rather than their connections. Warner (1997) indicates that another issue prevalent in this system is the level of over-employment in the public sector caused by the constant necessity for politicians to create new jobs in order to maintain their client base.

The intervention of the political parties in the public sector in all cities and towns is characteristic of the KRG, as Soma, from Media Studies at the same university noted:

> The government is weak if compared with the political parties' offices in all the main cities, as the KDP holds most power in its zone of influence and the PUK holds most power in its zone, whereas the central government is controlled by them both. What is clear is that the government is administered by the personal whims of government officials in the political parties instead of being run through regulation and the terms of the constitution (10 May 2013).

According to the opinion expressed by this participant, the government has distributed power in the public sector according to the whims of local officials rather than by adhering to regulations. In other words, the main issue of the government is the system which does not rely on individual accountability and this lack of accountability frequently leads to further corruption. Al Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) mentioned that the two political parties, since the first elections in 1992, have insisted on staying in power to control society through their local partisan organisations.

From the interview material, it appears that the majority of interviewees suggest a need to change the system and their is a lack of trust in the government and parliament to do so. This raises the further question as to how the participants

believed these changes could best be made, whether through the democratic election process or by other means. According to the comments of the interviewees, the majority of them were unable to give a clear answer to this question because they did not expect the two ruling parties to allow any sharing of political power, in spite of the electoral system. Rabar said:

> The main problem with the present system is that there is no long-standing or established tradition in the exercise of democracy in Kurdistan. (2 May 2013).

This view implies that the system could be developed and become more democratic if the government manages to focus on transparency and conducting fair elections. This view also implies that the people and the opposition parties do not have any real choice in the elections as they are not conducted fairly given the ruling parties' use of public funds to buy votes.

Alongside this critical point, which claims that the political system is absolutely monopolised by the ruling parties and is therefore impossible to change, there was a pragmatic point made that argued that Kurdistan is passing through a transitional phase similar to any newly established democratic society. Shorsh, from Political Science at the University of Sulaymaniyah during his interview commented that:

The two main parties do not make reforms because they want to stay in power in any way possible. So the devolution of power in a peaceful manner in any new democracy is difficult. I want the opposition parties to be stronger in order to evaluate the government and stand firmly against corruption. Accordingly, the reform of our system will need more time (13 May 2013).

This shows that the respondent believes any change in the political system needs time and is not achieved quickly, this perspective differs from the aforementioned statement with an interviewee who feels frustration. This respondent claimed that:

> The people should understand that the solution is to test the other political parties in the elections because the two main parties in power

are absolutely corrupt, and they will not make any reforms if the people

do not stop supporting them in the elections (13 May 2013).

This vision differs from some interviewees because it appears optimistic for the future of the political system, however there is no really clear indicator to show any positive development of the political system in Kurdistan. Some interviewees argue that the living standards and the democratic process have not improved although the economy of Kurdistan has advanced due to the growth in oil production.

During the interviews the majority of young people focused on the government's economic record and the distribution of oil-generated revenues, many referring to the fact that the budget of Kurdistan has risen since 2003 due to increased Iraqi oil exports, whereas the standard of living has not improved compared to the rise in national income. Kwvan, who did not complete his education because he left school during the period of economic sanctions which meant his family could not support him to study when he was a child in the 1990s, was very critical of the government's economic policy and said:

> The government does not have any stable economic plans. He
> supported this argument by saying that the government exports oil and
> yet there is a petrol crisis inside Kurdistan (25 May 2013).

The above paragraph reveals that the respondent understands the economic potential of the country and he compares the public services which are currently not enjoyed by the country with what could be achieved if the political will existed. The negative view of the respondent is based on real cases which have not yet been solved and this argument seems logical given the country's oil exports yet despite this, the petrol crisis is still ongoing in Kurdistan. This argument conforms to the qualitative textual news analysis of the opposition media which describes the government's poor economic policy (see Table 5.7 in Chapter Five).

6.3.1.2 The positive attitudes of young people towards the government's performance

The previous category outlined the negative attitudes expressed by ten of the young people towards the government's performance. This category reviews the attitudes of the 5 young people who viewed the government's performance positively. These 5 participants introduced several arguments in terms of their positive attitudes towards political issues while at the same time the majority of them argued that the opposition parties are not a viable alternative to take power. Hanan, from the Education Department in Garmian University, said:

> The opposition parties do not have enough experience to take power, particularly in the security sector. The government is not perfect like in Western countries but it is widely accepted by people in Kurdistan because the level of public services in Kurdistan is much better than in other parts of Iraq (19 May 2013).

The above comment is in direct contrast to those who criticise the government and accuse it of dereliction of its duty in the administration and provision of services. The above interviewee argued that the ruling parties are more suitable to govern by arguing that the opposition parties do not have any experience in managing the security and armed forces. This perspective is related to two widely held beliefs in Iraqi Kurdistan, firstly that the security and the Peshmerga are partisan forces, meaning that they owe their allegiance to the ruling parties rather than the Kurdish national government. Secondly that the two ruling parties alone through the control of the security forces and Peshmerga have protected people against the oppression of the Saddam regime. This respondent still believes that the ruling parties have a right to control their own militias, while in a developed political system the military and security belong to the state and are not partisan. The problem is that a large number of people have no political or legal awareness to understand that the political parties should not keep their own militias or control the army and security. Hussain (2015) states that control of the militias and army by political parties is against the democratic process and threatens democracy because the political parties are more likely to use their forces against their partners if they fail to win an election.

In the same way, Barzan, argued that the level of public life and public services has improved greatly over the years. He expressed optimism for the future due to

enhanced security and the increased government budget as a result of higher oil revenues. Qani (2012a) argues that a part of Kurdish society has become consumerist and politically passive like in the Arab Gulf states as the country has moved from suffering under economic sanctions to the current stage of development. He notes that the Kurdish people had many political concerns prior to the fall of Saddam's regime.

Another strange point was raised by Heshw, from the Media Studies Department in the same University, who said:

> I will give my vote to one of the political parties in power, although I know this party has become corrupt due to the fact that some of my family were victimised by this party, but still we are getting pensions from the party as well as receiving some privileges (10 May 2013).

This is an example of how some people support the ruling parties based on the distribution of privileges and a state pension to their supporters. People who were victimised during the Saddam regime came from the two ruling parties and they were subsequently entitled to a state pension. Receiving pensions from the ruling parties, obligates them to support the two ruling parties, this is especially the case with families who lost some of their members during the Kurdish National Movement and who now receive pensions as a result. Each political party created its own pension fund to provide state pensions to the families of the martyrs who were killed during the armed Kurdish National Movement who fought against the regime in Iraq and during the civil war in the nineties.

 The majority of the families that had been victims of Saddam's regime believed that they had to support the ruling political parties in honour of the martyrs and as thanks to the political parties that had given them a pension as compensation. Arguably, the two ruling parties used the state pension to buy votes while at the same time some of the people who were given a state pension did not fully understand the value of their vote in the political process because they believed that they should give their vote to the ruling parties. The problem of this perspective is that it relies on people's assumption that the state pension comes from the ruling parties' funds not from the income of the state because until 2008 the majority of jobs in government

departments were provided to people who promised to give their votes to the ruling parties. Thus, when applying for jobs in the public sector people were forced to register in the two ruling parties' organisation as a member of one of them.

6.3.2 The role of demographic characteristics and political background in forming the political attitudes of young people toward the government performance.

The previous section in this chapter sought to evaluate the role of demographic and political background in determining the division of young people into two categories, those who prefer the opposition and independent media coverage of political issues and those who prefer the coverage of the media owned by the ruling political parties. Similarly this section looks at the role of demographic characteristics and the political background or political orientation of the participants in forming their evaluations in terms of the government's performance.

6.3.2.1 The role of demographic characteristics in forming the political attitudes of young people

The general findings from the previous part show that the participants are divided into two main categories and the largest group held negative attitudes towards the government's performance. Each group comprised three demographic variables meaning that they did not have a great influence in determining the views of these participants towards the government and the political issues. From this it can be assumed that young people are interested in political communication regardless of their demographic characteristics. However, some of the young people from the Political Science Department presented more critical arguments and all of them were located in the group which negatively evaluated the government's performance and political issues. Shorsh, from the Department of Political Science, questioned the views of some young people and the general public in particular relating to their level of political awareness. This respondent claimed:

> The two main parties do not make reforms because they want to stay in power. So the devolution of power in a peaceful manner in any new democracy is difficult. I want the opposition parties to be stronger in

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order to hold the government to account and stand firmly against corruption. Accordingly, the reform of our system will need more time. Alongside this, I fear these people will lose their endurance to support the opposition parties, but I am sure we will change the system given time (13 May 2013).

The above quote shows that the respondent is concerned that some people prefer a quick result from the opposition parties to change the system or introduce reform directly, but this may not always be the best way to introduce reform. The level of critical thinking shown in the above statement means that the participant has a broader level of awareness of international politics and is able to place the Kurdish situation in a broader context. In the same way during the interviews the young people in higher education were more confident and they tended to provide more detail and longer answers compared to those unemployed who tended to give shorter responses. I tried to ask the individuals in the latter group more questions and help them express the information they wanted to say. In other words, the variable of educational background had an influence on the level and intensity of expression but not on political affiliation because the respondents expressing positive and negative views towards the government belonged to both groups, those in higher education and those not. This means that educational background does not determine young people's affiliation to either the ruling or opposition parties, or determine their political attitudes divided between the two categories. Conversely young people from both the departments of Political Science and Media Studies evaluated the government's performance and the political issues negatively and positively, which means that the subject studied by the participants was not a significant variable, while the presence of a general university education was a considerable factor.

In terms of gender, the female participants tended to decline the invitation to take part in the interviews compared to males. This is because many females in Kurdistan feel uncomfortable when speaking to a male interviewer. However, this factor did not appear to influence the political attitudes expressed by the female participants who were as comfortable and uninhibited in expressing both positive and negative opinions of the government's performance and the political issues as were the male

participants. Apart from gender, the respondents were equally divided according to their attitude towards the government's performance which means that gender was not the determining factor for dividing the categories. Talat (2006) suggested that young people in general shape their political attitude and their political affiliation from their family and argues that the family in Kurdish society tends to be authoritarian in terms of educating their members and guiding them politically or otherwise.

This does not mean that demographic factors do not have any influence on young people's attitudes and behaviour. Mustafa (2010) found that education level has an impact on young people's media use in Iraq and he found that young females who are university students or graduates tend to use political news more than those who are not educated. The present thesis found that females are generally interested in politics and presented their comments very actively and differed very little from young males. This seems to show a new feature of females in Kurdistan who are interested in politics compared to the traditional view which holds that females do not attach importance to politics as they do not take responsibility of their lives' expenses.

In the same way the place of residence did not have any influence on shaping attitudes, although there is a specific geographical area of influence controlled by the two main ruling political parties, whereas the opposition parties show that they influence opinions in all parts of Kurdistan, according to the results of the election campaign. However, it must be borne in mind that the election results refer to all the people in general and there is no available specific data referring to young people. According to the findings of the focus groups presented in the previous chapter, the majority of young people accessed the opposition and independent media rather than the media of the ruling parties. Furthermore the focus groups demonstrated that the political background of the participants was a main factor in determining attitudes compared to other demographic characteristics. In the same way, this section has shown that demographic characteristics do not play a determinant role in young people's attitudes towards the government's performance and the political issues.

6.3.2.2 The role of political background in forming the political attitudes of young people

The findings of the previous section depended on data from the focus groups proved that the political orientation of young people played a major role in terms of how young people understand and respond to the political issues across the media. In the same way, this section identified that the political affiliation or political orientation of young people has an absolutely vital role in shaping their attitudes towards the government's performance. The 5 young people out of 15 who positively evaluated the government's performance and level of political issues were seen to be affiliated to the ruling political parties. Moreover the 7 young people out of the remaining 10 who criticised the government's performance in terms of the political issues adhered to the opposition parties while the remaining 3 declared themselves to be independent. Following this, these participants were categorised into three categories, the first were those who supported the opposition parties, the second were those supporting the ruling parties and the third were the independents whose views were closer to the opposition category.

The 3 independent participants' comments during the in-depth interviews were quite similar to those in the opposition category. Participant number 5, a male student from Political Science categorically suggested that the people should test the opposition parties in the elections. This respondent claimed that the two ruling parties are not capable of making reforms and the other two remaining independent participants showed that they did not trust the government (Ekram and Kwvan, May 13 2013). The dominant view of these three independent participants was that the system must be changed through elections, which is quite similar to those participants in the opposition category. For instance, it can be clearly seen in the following comment by Sayran, from the opposition category, from the Educational Department at the University of Garmian:

> As I said, we need to introduce reforms to our system whereas the political parties and the majority of people are not ready to do that. I think the elections will change the surface appearance of the government rather than the foundations of the system due to the fact that we have held elections but the basic political issues have still not been addressed (13 May 2013).

From the above comment it can be seen that the independent participants are closer to the opposition than the ruling parties' participants in terms of their political attitudes.

A large part of the population in Kurdistan have become partisan or has already held a prior political affiliation due to the structure of the political system (Talat, 2006), because the two ruling political parties control the government departments through their offices and officials who administer it. Helal and Mused (2006) argue that the partisan societal phenomenon is distributed across the Arab world and dates back to the age of colonialism. They noted that this phenomenon is reduced but it is still apparent in Lebanon as a result of ethnic and religious conflicts. This phenomenon in Kurdistan can be traced back to the clientelism system, established by the two political parties to control society (Hussain, 2015). Until 2008, the two ruling parties did not appoint people to the public sectors without referring back to the political ruling parties. In other words, both opposition members and the independents did not have a right to be an employee in the public sector from the revolution in 1991 until 2008. The Clientelism model in Kurdistan means that the governing parties have provided jobs to those people who are willing to support them, in the form of a reciprocal exchange of profit. As a result both the political system and the wider democratic process suffer as unqualified persons are promoted to positions of power and influence within the public sector while voters do not necessarily choose those candidates who have the most beneficial manifesto to improve conditions in the country. Thus Stokes (2013, p.14) notes that such 'exchanges seem to violate the free action or autonomy of voters'. As, In Kurdistan still jobs in the army, security sector and higher posts in other public sectors are still not given to independent and opposition members. As a consequence, the two ruling parties have established a strong popular base in society through offering jobs and state pensions to people in order to gain their support in the election process. For example Zala, a Media Studies student at the University of Sulaymaniyah from the independent category stated that:

> The largest part of Kurdish society obtains such privileges from the two
> main parties, for instance there are 1.5 million employees in the public
> sector. Accordingly the largest part of society still supports the

government because of their own vested interests. Well, most of them are middle aged and above, particularly those who live in rural areas and are not educated, as well as some young people who are affiliated to the political parties due to their salaries and jobs (10 May 2013).

This paragraph shows that the respondent is pessimistic about the government's performance and gives an example to evaluate this, claiming that it is not reasonable that 1.5 million people have a salary or state pension in a society numbering less than 5 million. This economic policy seems to have negative implications on the psychology of young people because the poor economic policy has negative consequences for the long term and the new generation always seem to pay the price of this. The above quote shows how young people feel that they do not have any suitable opportunities, particularly those who have graduated from university. The problem facing young graduates is that they cannot find jobs in the public sector particularly in their specific educational background. Jobs in the public sector were widely available until 2006 and then it became difficult to obtain one, while at the same time more jobs in the army and security sectors were available until 2012. From 2006 to 2012 many young people who were not educated became employees in both the army and security sectors as these sectors did not require any educational qualifications. The ruling parties offered these jobs as bribes for votes and it is easier to control the political attitudes of people who are bribed. The new generation who are educated and those currently studying are disappointed when they cannot find jobs, which has caused the majority to support the opposition parties in order to fight corruption and introduce reforms.

The critical points mentioned against the government's performance from the interviewees in the opposition category and who support the opposition parties is quite similar to those of the interviewees in the independent category. The dominant concerns focused on by these two categories refer to the lack of social justice created by corruption. Consequently, the majority of opposition and independent participants believed that the two ruling parties do not seek to introduce reforms because they attempt to keep their popularity by using public funds and distributing them among those who are affiliated to them through providing posts, state pensions and

privileges. Soma, from Media Studies in the University of Sulaymaniyah and from the opposition category argued that:

> The opposition parties still do not have any real choice in the election campaign because of the lack of transparency and free and fair elections (10 May 2013).

The above statement shows that the respondent does not believe in the political process or democratic exercise delivered by the political parties because they have seen how the two governing political parties have failed several times in local government elections and have not allowed any change in power. For example, Gorran won in the election of 2013 in Sulaymaniyah province but the PUK did not agree to give a post to the Gorran candidate.

In the same way, the participants of both the opposition and independent categories believe that although the two ruling parties have not succeeded in providing effective administration, nevertheless people continue to support them out of self-interest. For instance, Rabar, from the Media Studies Department at the University of Sulaymaniyah, claimed:

> Some of the young people who vote for the two ruling parties know these parties are corrupt, but they are afraid to lose certain advantages and privileges if the opposition parties win the elections (13 May 2013).

From the discussion above we can infer that the different attitudes towards the government's performance can be divided into two categories. The majority of the respondents expressed a negative attitude towards the government's performance and these consisted of the opposition and independent categories because they view the government as corrupt. Most participants in both the opposition and independent categories thought that real change in the political system is a solution which will mean a shift of power from the two ruling parties to the opposition parties. At the same time this same group of young people claimed that their peers who positively evaluated the government's performance belonged to the ruling parties' category and they were affiliated to both political parties. This category was generally viewed as acting out of self- interest due to favours received from the two ruling parties.

6.4 The views of young people on their political participation in elections

This section investigates the perception of young people of the role of political elections in a democracy and how this might affect potential government performance after the election. The data examined in this section were collected by conducting semi-structured interviews with 7 young people during the last election campaign in September 2013. Most participants in this section were young males because the majority of young people who participated in public electoral campaigns were male. The campaigns were largely conducted at night in public squares, and as a consequence few females participated and those who did just passed through with their own cars or came out with their families. Consequently, it was difficult to conduct any semi-structured interviews with females. However, it was not anticipated that this factor would affect the overall results. The previous two sections in this chapter showed that gender did not influence young people's political attitudes compared to political background in particular relating to the categories of the respondents, whether they support the ruling parties or the opposition parties.

The respondents highlighted different aspects of the role of elections in Kurdistan and they raised several points as arguments to show their views and expectations. The dominant views focused on their disillusionment and lack of trust in elections caused by several factors which were reiterated by several of them. In this regard, Azad from Sulaymaniyah City argued that elections do not lead to big changes, and as a consequence he claimed that he is not optimistic, as can be seen more clearly in the following comment:

> I think it is a shame for the ruling political parties who say they will carry out reforms, because what about 22 years ago when they had absolute power in Kurdistan, why did they not do it then? I am not like some people who may forget that political parties have frequently promised things and have not carried them out. However, I am not optimistic that I have a right to choose because there is no real choice on the ground due to everything being controlled by the KDP. I predict the KDP will win because it will use public funds to buy votes, therefore,

the opposition parties will not be able to take power in this election (6 September 2013).

The above comment is an example of young people's lack of trust in the ruling parties and shows that they do not believe that elections offer an effective opportunity for the public and opposition parties to determine a democratic change of government in Kurdistan. The above comment also implies that the elections are not conducted with integrity. In other words, the main issue relates to the level of democracy exercised on the political ground in Kurdistan. The comment also infers that the two ruling parties are responsible for creating the current political system and its inherent problems, as they have held power since the revolution in 1991 until today. Furthermore the two ruling parties have not always governed effectively, while at the same time they have monopolised power without changing the system.

In another semi-structured interview with Bestwn, this participant made the following comments about why he feels the two ruling parties do not allow any change in power and how they go about conducting the elections:

> The two political parties in power do not want to lose control and they call elections to successful exercise from the international community and to say to people that they are practising democracy. (2 September 2013).

In the same way, Dashet from Sulaymaniyah City said:

> The elections should be an opportunity for both political parties and for the people to make decisions about the political process in order to improve society (5 September 2013).

The two statements above reveal that the respondents would prefer the political system to be changed because they do not feel the elections provide a chance of changing the government. The issue of the election is that the two political parties always form a coalition government so they do not have to leave power because the system is based on the client system and each of the two political parties fear becoming the opposition. The two governing parties are part of the clientelism

system. This means Kurdish people look to a majority government system which characterises Western democratic societies. Krmanj (2015) believes that people do not trust either political party to abandon power because each one has its own security and armed forces within its own sphere of influence. Consequently, people believe that each ruling political party would be more likely to use military power if faced with exclusion from political power through the elections. In other words, if one of the two ruling parties failed in the election it would not accept this and would try to use its armed forces to protect its power.

Asos (2015) notes that the majority of people think that the opposition parties are not able to win elections and as a result they feel disillusionment and lack of trust in the election process. One of the questions addressed is how to reach an understanding of young people's behaviour in elections particularly those who claimed they were not optimistic. One respondent, Azad said:

> We need to send a message to tell the government that large numbers of people do not want the current political parties to stay in power. As well as this, voting for the opposition parties can be helpful for people, especially in parliament because the opposition members of parliament were the only ones defending projects and regulations that were useful for ordinary people (6 September 2013).

Bestwn also went on to say:

> I will cast my vote just to tell the current government we want to change. We hope to change the system in any way we can and we cannot do that because the majority of people still support the ruling parties out of their own self-interest. Moreover, as I said the ruling parties still control everything (2 September 2013).

The two examples above show that young people do not believe that election campaigns are helpful in the fight to change the power structure in Kurdistan. They gave two reasons for this. Firstly, the government monopolises power through using public funds to buy votes and secondly a large part of society supports the ruling parties out of their own self-interest. These particular respondents believe that

political development can be brought about by raising the number of opposition parties in parliament as these enhance the role of the legislative and regulatory bodies. Otherwise, the majority of respondents had no understanding of the role of parliament in the political system as the opposition parties were weak until the last parliamentary session (2009-2013). This in turn leads to some people not trusting parliament and the other reason is more likely related to people's political ignorance and the lack of media freedom. One respondent in the sample explained another advantage of giving his vote to the opposition parties. His name was Lawand, a young person from Erbil, who said:

> Although it is clear that no single opposition party could win outright, it was better to participate in the creation of an opposition coalition government as part of the national decision making process. The growth of the opposition after this election will reflect positively on political development and the reform process in the long term (semi-structured interview, 4 September 2013).

The above statement reveals that this respondent takes a long-term view of the role of election campaigns, which is very different from the previous respondent who expressed disillusion and frustration. Haji (2015) argues that Gorran participated in the coalition government in 2013 in order to keep its popularity because it thought that its members and supporters might feel disillusion and frustration.

During the semi-structured interviews there was only one young person out of seven whose name was Farman who said:

> Well, the two political parties have provided public services to us since the Kurdish National Movement began. So, how can we not support them at a time when the opposition parties are not offering a good alternative? We also have to take into consideration the corrupt practices of the ruling parties and they will not accept losing power as they have some companies that have signed a lot of economic contracts for the long term, so if they fail in the election everything will be

revealed. Therefore, the two parties will do anything to protect their interests, even start a fire (4 September 2013).

This respondent supports the ruling parties because they struggled against Saddam's regime rather than because of the current performance of the government, as the ruling parties are promoting this particular historical discourse to achieve legitimacy, particularly the armed national movement against the Saddam regime (Ali, 2009). This is one of the obstacles facing the new political parties which were established after 1991, and a section of the population, particularly the older generation, believe that the two political parties should be respected because of their history. Conversely, the majority of young people do not hold this view and the new political parties, such as Gorran and the Kurdistan Islamic Union, essentially focus on young people to involve them and win them as supporters. This does not mean that all young people support the new political parties because their families still play a key role in determining the political attitude of their family members. The political affiliation of young people still plays a powerful role, for example the above comment shows that the respondent believes the ruling parties are corrupt but still insists on supporting them.

The general perspective of respondents focuses on the lack of confidence in the integrity of the elections and the lack of opportunity for real competition between the ruling parties and the opposition parties due to the use of public money to buy votes by the opposition parties. This in turn leads to the majority of respondents not feeling optimistic about the elections, although some respondents believe that even if the opposition parties do not win in the elections they can have political influence if they win more seats in parliament. This argument was not believed by the majority of the respondents due to two factors; firstly it relates to their political ignorance because they do not believe that a strong opposition in parliament can have an effective influence on the government's performance. Secondly they do not predict that the two ruling parties will ever introduce real reform because they believe that both parties have relied on corruption to stay in power.

6.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the third research question which examines the views of young people towards the media in the coverage of political issues, government performance and political process as well as the role of democratic characteristics and political background in shaping their attitudes.

The outcome of the research found that the majority of participants claimed that KNN TV enables people to understand the concept of corruption and judge the level of the government's performance. They also argued that the ruling parties are trying to draw the attention of people to external issues by creating crises with Baghdad in order to get them to ignore the issue of reform in the provision of public services in the KRG. By contrast, the other category which was in the minority argued that both the opposition and independent media do not work objectively as they do not cover any new projects or reforms in the public sector carried out by the government and they unduly criticise the government to favour opposition parties.

Political background is divided between support for the ruling parties and the opposition. In this respect, Warty (2008) argues that the political parties have produced a Kurdish media and society based on partisan lines and resulting in a clientelism system, which seeks to control vital aspects such as media, the economy and jobs, security and the army. The clientelism system of Kurdistan divides young people into different categories based on the political parties and this has implications for their media use and trust of the media discourse because there is no national broadcaster (Warty, 2008). The lack of national media can affect the national identity of young people because the partisan identity dominates many young people, for instance some respondents believe the political party is corrupt but they still prefer it. This needs potential further research to examine the dimension of this attitude amongst young people regarding their values and role in the political process.

The family plays a large role in the political socialisation of young people (Talat, 2006), particularly those who are affiliated to the political parties in power and this affiliation is mainly based on interests, such as securing a job, higher level post, or pension. However, it is not necessarily the case that all young people follow their family's ideology as a large number of the sample criticised the ruling political parties

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while many of them held the opposite political orientation to their families. This particular group of young people relies on the opposition media for its political information, and at the same time it support the opposition parties to change power and introduce reform. They mainly looks for good governance rather than following the political party's ideology which means they would change their affiliation if any potential political party sought to fight corruption instead of continuing to support the existing opposition parties. The opposition and independent media play a large role in shaping the political views of young people as both opposition parties and young people are demanding reform. Hussain (2015) mentioned that the political discourse of young people in Kurdistan is largely formed by the opposition media and strategies.

The prevailing perception of Kurdish society regarding females' attitudes to political issues and communication is that a large number of them are not interested in politics as they have no responsibility for covering living expenses. Conversely the findings of this thesis detected that young females are interested in political communication as the female participants in the mixed focus and separate focus groups clearly expressed in their arguments; this new generation of young females is interested in political issues and care about reform and democratisation.

The living conditions of young people in general, regardless of gender, have become very difficult, and they remain cautious about their future career and life. A large majority of participants do not believe that elections can bring about any change in power for three main reasons; firstly the ruling political parties would not leave power even if they lost the elections, secondly the elections are not entirely fair and finally the political parties in power have already bought a large part of the adult votes in Kurdish society.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion Chapter

7.1 Introduction

In my conclusion I am going to draw together all the findings which consist of four sections. The first section will review the main findings and arguments of the research project, while the second section will examine the reflections of the thesis on the theoretical implications, namely framing analysis, active audience theory (particularly the coding/decoding model and uses and gratifications model) and theories of clientelism. Similarly, the third section will discuss the reflections of the thesis on the practical implications of the findings. The final section will show the suggestions and recommendations deriving from the research project for further research.

7.2 Review of the Main Findings

This section reviews the main findings and arguments of the thesis according to the three research questions that are answered in the empirical chapters as presented here into three parts. The first part examines the news content analysis as well as the freedom to obtain information about political issues in the public sector and the editorial policies of the news providers according to the views of the media professionals interviewed as part of the study. The second part presents the participants' understanding and response to the coverage of the political issues across the media as expressed through the focus groups. As the two parts are presented and argued in chapter five. The final part looks at the attitudes of young people towards the government's performance and the role of elections in democratic politics in Kurdistan which is presented and discussed in chapter six.

7.2.1 Media Coverage and the Editorial Policy

The findings chapter demonstrated that the ruling party media, whether television channels or websites, did not focus on corruption issues and they did not use any negative values in their coverage of corruption. Furthermore, *GK TV* used positive values in their coverage of corruption. Which means that corruption is normal and does not affect the level of administration quality or the government. For this reason, the ruling party media tended to focus on the government's performance and present

this positively. The ruling parties sought to cover other issues in order to avoid the topic of corruption and related issues that reflect the government negatively, for example *GK TV* and the *Xendan* website dedicated more of their news coverage to the external issues of Kurdistan. Qani (2012c) argues that both ruling political parties have created a crisis, such as worsening internal public services and the relationship between Erbil and Baghdad, in order to make people forget internal issues, particularly public service utility. Similarly the two research studies conducted in Egypt by Khalifa (2008) and in Syria by Ayish (2002) found that the state media mostly covered external issues to avoid covering corruption in the government. The qualitative framing analysis supports this argument, as it identified that the media of the ruling party rely on simplifying and localising corruption issues through their news coverage. The simplifying and localising frames were the main tools used to construct a news story in order to analyse the political issues. The framing analysis found that the moral evaluation component was dominant in showing the government's performance positively and the magnified frame was the main tool used to construct this issue. The chapter demonstrated that the ruling party media has adopted a publicity position role for the government particularly for the party that owns it. Since there is no public service broadcaster and the government departments' official websites are too weak, the government only faces criticism from the opposition and independent media.

In terms of the news coverage across the opposition media, whether *KNN TV* or the *Sbeiy* website, internal political issues were the themes covered most by them. The findings show that the opposition TV and website predominantly used negative values in their coverage of political issues, particularly corruption and government performance issues were those most covered by the opposition media. By contrast, the ruling parties' television and online print media focused on positive values in their coverage. Both *GK TV* and *Xendan* used negative values in their coverage much less than the opposition and independent media. However, some of these proportions refer specifically to the Yellow Zone which is administered in reality by the other ruling party which is the KDP. The qualitative framing analysis identified that the opposition media focused on both the causal interpretation and the moral evaluation components in the framing of the political issues.

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The findings showed the opposition media largely depended on interviews with opposition observers and independent political observers to evaluate the issues, which means that the moral evaluation component of the news coverage is taken from these interviews. In this regard, the Chief News Editor of *KNN TV* recognised that they conduct interviews to support the news coverage and discuss the issues as well as to show that they are working professionally. In terms of the interviews he demonstrated that the opposition media try to obtain the views of the government officials on the events and issues covered, but the majority of them refuse to co-operate. The Chief News Editor of *KNN TV* and the *Awena* website argued that government officials avoid discussing political issues, in particular relating to corruption, with the opposition and independent media because they are weary of being punished by their government. This refers to the lack of freedom and transparency, as Iraq including the KRG comes in at the lower levels of transparency (Transparency International, 2014). In this respect Sleman (2013) argues that Kurdistan needs regulation to oblige every department of government to introduce a media office or public relations unit. This provides freedom for the journlist to be able to conduct their investigations.

The qualitative framing findings discovered that the opposition television focuses on the magnified frame as a tool to construct the four frame components, particularly in the framing of causal interpretation and moral evaluation to highlight corruption and show the government's performance negatively through using a simplifying frame. Entman (2004) noted that successful framing relies on magnitude, where the magnification of certain issues allows them to become prominent while shrinking other issues can be achieved by simplifying or localising them. Alongside this, KNN TV utilised several frames to construct the political issues, through showing how the data determines the negative implications of corruption. In the same way, the above frame was used to show the positive implications of the news relating to new projects completed by the government as reform news. Another frame which was dominant on *KNN TV* was the reframing of the news relating to political issues. This means that the same news is repeated over and over again by using different news stories. The reframing of the specific event or issues is part of the magnification process of the news coverage. Reframing was the main feature of *KNN TV* while the phrase

"protection of electoral gains" dominated the news coverage on *GK TV*. The protecting of gains means that the Kurdish people and the political parties should forego reform based on the argument that Kurdistan is surrounded by enemies. This argument is used as an explanation in order to discourage people from asking the government for reform.

With regard to the independent website, the quantitative findings showed that it is more similar to the opposition website than the ruling parties' website, particularly in terms of using negative and positive values. Alongside this, *Awena* is characterised by certain features, particularly its use of neutral values in its news coverage, as it focused on this value more than the website of the opposition and ruling parties. In the same way, framing analysis demonstrated that problem definition components dominated in the news coverage across the *Awena* website. Problem definition is a central feature of the issues and it allows identification of causal interpretation and subsequently helps to present the treatment recommendation. The findings showed that the news titles of *Awena* were different compared to *Sbeiy* and *Xendan* as they were longer and composed of a varied set of opinions expressed in different interviews. Another relevant finding is that the *Awena* website attempted to strike a balance in terms of broadcast interviews, showing different aspects to support the news stories and discuss the issues in comparison to the media of the opposition and of the ruling parties (see section 5.3.3.2 on page:127- 129). Whereas the opposition and ruling media depended on interviews with persons who have a positive attitude towards them, particularly the ruling media which rarely depends on conducting interviews with opposition representatives.

The phenomena of leaking news and providing information in secret to the opposition and independent media were examined through discussion with the chief news editors of the media platforms involved in the research project and these reveal various factors. The main factor is the lack of transparency in the government which would enable the media to report on corruption, particularly for journalists from the opposition and independent media. Consequently, most of the government departments do not conduct press conferences and their media offices are ineffectual. As the chief editors of the *Awena* website, *Sbeiy* website and *KNN TV* demonstrated,

many government departments do not have a media office and their administration does not provide them with any information, such as from the Ministry of Oil and Natural Resources, Intelligence and Security. In this respect, the news content analysis identified that the opposition media is characterised by the number of scoops it has compared to the independent website as the opposition parties have more members in the public sector who provide them with information surreptitiously. Whereas the independent media does not have enough sources to provide them with information in particular related to corruption compared to the opposition media. As a result the independent media outlets are less effective; however the findings showed that they function more objectively particularly in terms of giving a balanced view of various issues in their news coverage and their use of neutral values. The findings showed that the independent website covered some news without much detail, although it focused on obtaining views from different aspects due to its lack of funds to appoint news editors and journalists. The Chief Editor of *Awena* pointed out that the team working on his website are volunteers as most of them rely on other jobs to support their income. He also argued that the problem of the independent media in Kurdistan is the lack of funds and they feel they cannot accept advertising from larger companies because these belong to the ruling parties and therefore they could be accused of collusion and participating in corruption.

7.2.2 The Perception of Young People in terms of the Coverage of the four Political Issues

The findings demonstrated that young people believed that the opposition and independent media, particularly *KNN TV* mainly focus on corruption and the shortcomings of the government. The participants in the focus groups stressed that *KNN TV* helped people to understand their political rights and functions related to their votes and support for the specific political parties to take power. The majority of the young people who participated in the focus groups to evaluate *KNN TV* and some of the young people during the focus groups described *KNN TV* in similar terms for several reasons. Firstly they recognised its daily coverage of corruption issues and the shortcomings of the public services in the cities and towns of Kurdistan. Secondly they praised *KNN TV* for using data to explain the wrong economic policy and distribution

budget of the central government. Thirdly, they believed that *KNN TV* has taken measures to activate the government and lessen levels of corruption.

By contrast, a minority of young people expressed a negative view towards *KNN TV* and they claimed that it attempts to underrate the government's performance. This group of young people also argued that these media have a specific aim and agenda which is to help the opposition parties to become more popular and eventually to take power. In other words they argued that the opposition media are not established to inform people about corruption, but rather they believe that the opposition media constitute a tool for promoting the political parties that own them. The findings showed that this group rejects the independent website as it focuses solely on the negative aspects of the government. The division of young people into one group that is influenced by the opposition and independent media and a second group that adheres to the ruling media is related to their consequent attitude towards the political parties. In other words, the political orientation or affiliation of young people is largely due to the role of media impact. The findings demonstrated that political knowledge or interest did not have an impact on the evaluation of young people because the respondents from the Faculties of Political Science and Media Study were in the groups who evaluated the ruling media, opposition and the independent media either positively and negatively in similar proportion to respondents who were not in higher education or lacked further education of any kind. In the same way demographic characteristics did not influence young people's attitudes to the media, whether owned by the opposition, ruling parties or independent. However, the set of respondents comprising young people from the towns and villages tended to have stronger opinions about both the ruling media and the opposition media. One important point that emerged is that young people believe the opposition and independent media are quite similar as they expected them both to focus on corruption and the negative aspects of the government. In the same way, the news content analysis showed that the independent website was more similar to the opposition media in terms of its coverage of the political issues, this means that young people are able to understand the media interests and media policy, which was further demonstrated in the focus groups.

7.2.3 The Attitude of Young People towards the government's performance and the role of elections in democratic politics in Kurdistan.

The findings demonstrated that young people were divided into two groups: the first group consisted of the majority of the participants expressing negative attitudes towards the ruling parties and the government in relation to the various political issues and several arguments were mentioned by this group of young people. Correlations were identified between the main arguments and points proposed by the respondents and the findings of the news content analysis of both opposition and independent online print media.

Their main views can be summarised as follows:

- Using public funds and government posts to buy votes.

- Corruption and lack of transparency.

- The lack of accountability due to the two ruling parties' desire to keep their respective areas of influence.

- The poor economic policy of the government to develop infrastructure.

- Monopolisation of the army and security.

- Creating internal and external crises in order to prevent people from asking for reforms.

The above points show the parallels between the content analysis and the young people's understanding and response to these issues. This in turn arguably reveals the extent to which the opposition and independent website, particularly *KNN TV*, play a major role in shaping the attitudes of young people in terms of political issues, specifically corruption and the negative aspects and shortcomings of the government, compared to the media of the two ruling political parties. Qani (2013) noted that the political discourse of young people and those who hold negative views of the ruling parties are influenced by the opposition media, particularly the media controlled by the Gorran Movement Party. The current research findings support this argument, while the political orientation or affiliation of young people also assumes a major role

as is evidenced in the findings identified from the in-depth interviews and focus groups. In the same way, one group of young people who were actually affiliated to the ruling parties mentioned that they were a minority in supporting the policies of the ruling parties and government. They argued that Kurdistan should not be compared to Western countries, as proposed by the opposition parties and those who support them. In terms of the opposition parties, this group claimed that they did not yet represent a suitable alternative to assume power as they did not have any experience in government administration.

In terms of the role of the political participation of young people in the political system and democratisation the findings showed that the dominant view among the majority of participants was disillusionment with the electoral process. They claimed there is no real choice for people and the opposition parties because the ruling parties have used public funds to buy votes. Consequently, the majority of participants did not believe that elections are an effective way of changing power because they argued that the two ruling parties represent hegemony of political power. Some of the participants argued that they only support the opposition parties in order to increase their numbers in parliament so that they might report on corruption. These respondents believed that the opposition will grow in the future which means supporting the opposition parties now will affect the political process and democratisation indirectly and in the long term. This shows that young people in Kurdistan have different views on the role of the opposition and the potential future development of the political system in their country, depending on the level of their political knowledge and understanding. Whilst the majority do not believe that change should occur in evolutionary stages, some young people recognise that deep-seated change can take a long time and cannot be brought about effectively by a sudden revolution. Another viewpoint identified from this research is that the participants claimed they did not trust parliament to hold the government to account as they believed it is controlled by the two ruling majority parties.

7.3 Reflections on Theoretical Implications

The use of framing analysis in this research presents outcomes that can be demonstrated as playing a decisive and fundamental role in the contribution of the

emergent frames, which were used as a tool in constructing the framing components. These consist of four main elements that interact with each other, namely: partisan media, ownership, the media worker culture and transparency or freedom of information.

The partisan media element refers to the fact that the media plays a main role in framing the political issues in Kurdistan as both television channels in this research are totally controlled by their respective political parties. In other words, both channels were established for propaganda functions rather than for profit or public service, as the media became a rule or essential condition for each political party to claim legitimacy or maintain a presence in the public sphere (Warty, 2008). Mchakulu (2010) found the same issues and phenomenon in Malawi, where media ownership had a significant influence in determining the framing process. The other problem of the partisan media model is that it makes media workers biased because they adapt their journalistic practices to match the political needs of the ruling government rather than basing these on the ethics and principles of objective journalism. Hamdan (2009) states that an authoritarian regime seeks to have its own media in order to control it to stay in power, whereas in Western countries politicians seek to have a strong relationship with journalists to cover their activity positively (Shea et al, 2006; Theake, 2004). Entman (2010) notes that bias assumes three types or forms. Firstly there is distortion which falsifies facts in order to control public opinion and attitudes. Secondly bias is visible in the content that allows one side or opinion to be dominant in political news coverage. The third remaining form is decision-making bias, also identified in this research, which detected that the same specific issues are addressed differently across the opposition media and the ruling media.

The second element is media ownership which is related to the fact that political parties exert greater influence on media policy. Most media workers in Kurdistan are obliged to have the same political attitude as the party of ownership, particularly in the ruling media, where most of them should be members of the ruling parties. Ownership has another implication in particular relating to the independent media because most of the large companies are monopolised by the ruling parties. This in turn leads to the independent media facing a funding problem, which leaves them

with a shortage of staff to cover the political issues with higher levels of quality and professionalism.

The findings of this research project demonstrated that the website functions more objectively compared to the other media outlets. This means that the media worker culture element is related to the political values adopted by the organisation, while those working in some independent media outlets are not motivated by any financial benefit as they work as volunteers.

The fourth and final element is related to the transparency or freedom of information issue, which is reflected in the framing of the news across the opposition and independent media. The media in Kurdistan seek to obtain information through those employees who work in the public sector and as a result they are forced to conceal the names of the providers of the news or information. This in turn affects the validity of the news content as some of the respondents thought that some information might not represent the truth. However, the findings showed that the Kurdish media is not restricted in relation to its freedom to broadcast and publish information. Some research which applied the framing analysis demonstrated that the laws and regulatory actions of governments can exert a major role in this respect. For instance, Eko (2004) notes that the framing analysis as used in the West may not be applicable in Sub-Saharan African countries due to the lack of freedom in those countries, and Mchakulu detected the same issue in Malawi (Mchakulu, 2011).

In terms of active audience theory, the political affiliation or the prior political orientation of young people plays a major role in shaping their understanding of political news and determining their response in particular relating to political issues. Previous researchers have supported the active audience theory and focused on the demographic characteristics that cause the audience not to be influenced by the media to the same extent. For instance, Fiske (1987) showed that television audiences are not a homogeneous mass, and argued that they are composed of a wide range of different groups. In the same way, Clarke (2000) notes that specific audience members differ in their production of meaning in accordance with the different social setting in which media messages are received. Alongside this, other researchers have focused on the role of demographic characteristics in influencing political orientation

in political communication (Tian, 2011). The present study has identified that demographic characteristics did not play a significant role in influencing political orientation in young people. For instance, the findings demonstrated that young females are interested in political communication, which is contrary to the cultural norms dominant in Kurdish society that expect women to follow men in terms of their political interests and attitudes. Furthermore, the findings of this study differ from the research conducted by Al-Hadidi et al (2006) who found that females in the Arab world countries prefer to watch TV dramas, movies and music while young males prefer to view news programmes. It also differs from Al-Baida (2008) in her research in Lebanon which detected that females tend to prefer entertaining programmes such as movies, music and competitions. This implies that young females in Kurdistan are unique compared to those in other Arab world countries which is similar to Kurdish culture. One reason for this may be that corruption has made the new female generation in Kurdistan consider politics more seriously because most of them are educated and want to work out of the home and take responsibility like their young male counterparts. Al-Hadidi et al (2006) argues that due to the lack of political and economic stability in Arab countries, young males there are mostly responsible for meeting the life expenses which makes them be involved more in politics. Educational level in this thesis, which was supposed to be a main factor in terms of affecting the understanding of the political news and responses of young people, proved not to be as significant as first predicted. Nevertheless, education seems to influence females in that they attach importance to political news as already above. In relation to theories of clientelism, the study found that young people believed that political issues, particularly corruption and the lack of government performance are rooted in several traditions, nepotism alongside handing out of positions, jobs and public funds to buy votes in order to buy votes to stay in power (Bardhan and Mookherjee,2011; Roniger 2004). Alongside, clientelism, which is deep-rooted in Kurdish society, is supported by an economic system which is based on rentier state often intrinsic to oil-rich countries. (Hussain, 2015; Qani and Fatah 2012; Qani (2015)

Chaudhry (2011) argues that the rentier economy system tends to lead to the client system. Future research may need to look more in-depth at the KRG's specific political economy and potential implications for democratic practices.

7.4 Reflections on the Practical Implications of the Findings

According to the findings of the research both the ruling party's media and opposition media, particularly the television channels, focus on using magnifying frames and localising frames in their coverage of the political issues and there is a strong distinction between them. Each one interprets political reality differently, which in turn leads to the viewers and readers becoming divided into two categories. This has been identified by some young people who claimed they need to use a range of media in order to understand what is going in the political field due to the lack of a public service broadcaster. Alongside this, the independent media has difficulty in obtaining funding because the biggest companies are monopolised by the two ruling parties. Consequently, the partisan media cannot be objective in terms of all the issues precisely because of its nature. Conversely, the opposition media are widely accepted by the majority of young people in terms of their coverage of corruption due to their daring to cover this issue, particularly since the emergence of the Gorran movement and its media channel.

The other main finding of the research is that political issues are magnified on TV more than in the print media online. However, during the last Iraqi parliamentary election in April 2014 some print media online such as Millat Press and Post Kurdistan emerged from the two ruling parties although they claimed to be independent. The aim of these was to criticise the political parties who both sought to gain their support because the views of the journalists working in these types of media were not always clear. Consequently, the future development of online print media seemed to become uncontrolled and outside the sphere of government influence. The problematic situation of these two websites is that their sponsors and funds are not stable and they use defamation messages against some political parties in favour of the other side. Moreover, it would require extensive effort to coordinate work between civil society organisations, pressure groups, syndicates of journalists and lawyers as well as the government to prevent this kind of journalism that is contrary to the professional ethics of the media and accepted democratic values.

In addition there are still issues surrounding the lack of freedom to obtain information in the public sector and present the news or report it without reference to its source,

all of which need to be considered by news-makers. For instance the *Awena* and *Sbeiy* websites addressed some news issues without identifying the name of the persons interviewed while arguing that they wanted to protect their identities particularly in relation to sensitive issues. This problem aggravates the lack of transparency on the part of the government to allow freedom to publish. Therefore, media pluralism cannot be solved in Kurdistan without taking sufficient measures to promote democracy and political tolerance. Alongside this, the syndicates of journalists and other civil society organisations should take into consideration professional ethics for journalists through regulation and training. Another point is the importance of solving the transparency issue through developing the media offices of the public sector and expanding their powers in order to enable them to give press conferences on a regular basis and in an orderly way.

This research suggests some points as a solution and challenges to the media in Kurdistan through two legal regulations. The first would be the establishing of a public service media in order to strike a balance between the opposition and ruling parties and to offer coverage of the political issues without the influence of political parties on their output.

The second regulation would be difficult to achieve quickly because it is related to the level of corruption in the government and ruling parties that have monopolised the biggest companies in order to provide funds to the independent media for advertising. Al Zaidi and Sadiq (2012) argue that the independent media have played a major role in improving the political process through developing the opposition parties and expanding people's critical thinking about democratisation in Kurdistan. In addition, group pressure has become embedded in the independent media, while the majority of liberal members of the political parties publish their views in the independent media. Consequently, the actions taken to support the opposition media in Kurdistan will eventually have a positive effect on the political process and democratisation because independent and opposition media tend to criticise government's policies and investigate corruption. The main independent media such as *Awena* and *Hawlati* have strived for objectivity, despite the lack of funds and the lack of transparency in the government.

7.5 Suggestions for Future Research

The research project focussed on attempting to identify the frames and values of media coverage in particular relating to political issues while examining young people's understanding and response to it. The examination of this process led to further understanding of political communication among young people, as this demographic category is important in Kurdish society as in many other developing countries. In recent years young people have played a major role in changing society, whether during the struggle of the Kurdish National Movement against the Iraqi regimes in the past or their participation in demonstrations during the Arab spring against the Kurdistan Regional Government. They have fought for several causes, such as combatting corruption, supporting reforms and asking the government to open up the democratic process. This research has examined the role of the media in shaping the political attitudes of young people. As an intervening variable the media is supposed to play an active role in shaping the political attitudes and participation of young people. During the research project some questions have been raised which were important in highlighting certain solutions that can contribute to the fight against corruption and hasten the process of reform, development of the political process and democratisation. Consequently, this research suggests the importance of conducting research into the role of the political background of young people, which has been seen to be a major factor in evaluating the media's impact on them. Furthermore, research is required into why and how young people are engaged by the political parties, as this research has identified that the role of the political background of young people on their understanding and response to the political news was more significant than any demographic variables. Alongside this the thesis found that corruption and the lack of government performance originate in the client system which is in turn based on the rentier system. However, there was no opportunity to explore this dimension in depth as the present research is the field of media studies which do not allow wider analysis of clientalism. This would be valuable in any future research on clientalism. The outcome of this thesis can be taken as a starting point by future researchers of political science to investigate further and in more detail the issue of clientalism and its implication in Kurdistan.

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Appendix

Appendix (1) The transcription of the focus groups (14- 28 April 2013)

Focus Group first was students from media study conducted in Sulaymaniyah University for discussing the *GK TV* in 28th April, 2013

1. Lanya, Female, Kurdish Islamic Union (opposition party)

The media of the ruling parties do not focus on corruption and try to show people that the government is perfect. As I can say the media of the ruling parties is not really a platform to provide people with information about the real issues due to the extensive coverage of external issues and the advantages of the government. These channels have lost their influence because people believe these channels are attempting to manipulate people through the coverage of unnecessary themes.

2. Daban, Male, (opposition party)

The opposition media are focused on corruption and they have taken a critical stance against the government. This style has become the identity of the opposition channels, whereas the media of the ruling parties have become known for supporting the government and hiding its imperfections at any cost. The differing agendas of the Kurdish media have thus become more transparent for people. Moreover, the opposition media have put the media of the ruling parties in a defensive position. Furthermore, the media of the ruling parties try to ignore local issues through the coverage of external topics. So, the media of the ruling parties have lost their reliability and influence.

3. Aso, Male, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (ruling party)

GK TV and the other media that belong to the ruling parties have gone into a defensive position as they have tended to exclude news and reports about corruption. At the same time the opposition media have focused on corruption to the extent that people do not trust the government, only those who belong to the ruling parties. Moreover, the opposition media try to convince people that the opposition parties are a viable alternative to take power. Accordingly, sections of the population do not trust either the opposition or the ruling parties' media because they believe that both have lost their reliability. This reason has motivated people to look for independent media, although the independent media are rather similar to the opposition media. Therefore, I can say that we need professional media which could operate objectively.

I think the effect of the media is related to the political background of the viewer, as the political background of each person depends on the family political background of

that person. Moreover, the political background of the majority of people returns to the financial benefits gained by families from the political parties. So, those who still do not receive any financial benefit from the political parties in rule prefer to support the opposition parties.

4. Shwan, Male, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (ruling party)

GK TV is a means for showing the projects and activities done by the government, particularly in those sectors administered by the PUK, while at the same time the KDP uses its media for the same reason. Therefore, *GK TV* tends to show the advantages of the government, as it does not show any corruption issues. Alongside this, the opposition media underrate the government's activities and projects. So, the media that belongs to the ruling parties are forced to take a defensive position, which means that the opposition media have taken an offensive position.

GK is becoming a regional channel because it focuses on the other parts of Kurdistan, such as Turkey, Iran and Syria. So it cannot cover every internal issue.

5. Lara, Female, independent

I don't agree with the argument that the opposition media do not work objectivily because they show reports with audio-visual and the government are not able to correct most of these news items which are shown across the opposition media. So I understand they want to reduce the role of the opposition media, as they want to reiterate that the current opposition parties are not a viable alternative government. This is the other negative aspect of the ruling political parties as they cannot make reforms and most of their members have lost their sense for money and privileges. Instead of behaving logically and reflecting our society, they try to manipulate people for the small family or group who monopolise power. The government is fundamentally corrupt and the media are not able to cover all aspects of this corruption. It is clear that the government has expired, but at the same time it is not allowing the rotation of power in a peaceful manner. Young people are aware of all the facts but there is not a real choice. We understand we need change but we do not know how to implement change.

Focus Group second was young people in not in higher education and conducted in Cafe shop for discussing the *GK TV* in 15th April, 2013

1. Bahasht, Female, Gorran movement (opposition party)

GK TV focuses on the new public services provided by the government to show that it is perfect and efficient. However, there is more corruption on the ground which is not covered by *GK TV*. GK does not address the real issues objectively. I don't trust *GK TV* so I try watching other TV channels to understand what is going on.

2. Rawand, Male, Islamic Group (opposition)

GK TV does not cover the issues impartially because it covers the positive aspects of the government only and remains silent on corruption cases. Also it tries to ignore the people's issues through the coverage of foreign countries' news. *GK TV* is the tool used by the PUK as a political target for them, not to help people understand what is right and what the government should take into consideration in order to be useful for the people.

3. Hawar, Male, independent

Every person is sure that there is more corruption even among the political leaders, although this is not covered by *GK TV* or other media that are owned by the political parties in power. The media owned by the political parties in power are faltering in popularity, especially amongst young people because they do not give a true account of the government's performance. The Kurdish authorities do not want to provide any services to normal people; instead they give services only to those who have political affiliation to them. The government started to improve the country's infrastructure due to critical pressure from the opposition parties. I mean the government does not function properly even when reform is forced on them by the opposition parties. So how can I trust *GK TV* which is owned by corrupt political parties? At the same time I do not think the opposition media is perfect because it is working for a specific target which represents the political parties' interests. I hope the independent media will grow so it can give us a real account of what is happening on the ground. We also need new political parties which can legislate for what is useful for Kurdish society not for their members only. I do not trust any media whether owned by the political parties in power or by the opposition parties. However, I watch them, and then I try to create new ideas because each media channel focuses on specific issues with a specific interpretation

4. Soran, Male, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (ruling party)

GK TV shows some news on corruption however it does not cover the big cases because *GK TV* is owned by the PUK which is in power. I do not agree with some of my friends' arguments that *GK TV* does not cover national news. Instead, it focuses more on the coverage of external news because *GK TV* is satellite TV and it has viewers in another parts of Kurdistan, such as Turkey, Iran and Syria. TV news is controlled by politics in Kurdistan, and although there are independent newspapers and websites, TV is still the main effective tool. So, I would prefer to see the emergence of independent TV channels which would be the best means of showing us the facts of real life in Kurdistan. *GK TV* has a right to focus on the news that is related to the advantageous projects introduced by the government, because the channel obtains its funds from the PUK. So, it is not a shame that *GK TV* shows the advantages of the

government. Besides, *GK* has a weekly discussion programme that invites two people from different backgrounds while *KNN TV* invites only those from the opposition whose opinions are always against the government.

Focus Group third was students from media study conducted in Sulaymaniyah University for discussing the *KNN TV* in 14th April, 2013

1. Nian, Female, Islamic Group (opposition)

KNN TV is one of the channels that has been an active participant for addressing corruption, however it shows that the Gorran Movement is the only alternative that has a suitable solution. So, that is not true because most of the political leaders of Gorran were in power before the cleavage from the PUK. Furthermore, recently corruption has emerged inside Gorran as well, whether amongst their own members or *KNN* staff members.

2. Shaida, Female, Gorran movement (opposition party)

KNN has changed the critical thinking of Kurdish society. Before the emergence of *KNN* TV the other opposition parties were weak and they did not dare to address corruption more openly. *KNN* has opened horizons for debating several cases that contribute to helping people understand what their rights are and how to demand these rights. However, there is not full freedom in more places which could help the media to investigate several issues due to a lack of democracy as well as the right to access of information.

The government is unable to improve the system definitely, as we cannot believe them because they have not given any good evidence. For example, the government has no plan for young people even those who are educated and have higher degrees and qualifications, although the budget is increasing more and more. I am not optimistic about my future life because jobs are more difficult to find as you need mediation and nepotism. Also some jobs are not available for females, particularly in the private sector.

3. Sarwar, Male, Islamic Group (opposition)

I think *KNN TV* has an important role in raising the level of awareness of the people. This channel has clarified some concepts in particular relating to corruption which were not familiar to a wide range of Kurdish society, such as clarifying the corruption of government by using data. Moreover, *KNN* has helped people to understand their rights through explaining the budget of the government and government economic policy.

The government has taken a wrong policy whether at the level of internal policy or that towards Baghdad due to the actions of President Massoud Barzani who has

tended to be over-authoritarian. Consequently, the wrong policy of exerting presidential authority in Kurdistan against Baghdad has been reflected on two levels. Firstly the division of the political parties' discourse, as many of them have a different vision towards Baghdad and Barzani does not share them. The second has led to creating crises with Baghdad. Anyway, I think we need to change this power structure as it has not been successful because the government has promised to reform several times and has demonstrated to us that it is unable to do so.

4. Barham, Male, independent

According to my point of view, *KNN TV* is focused only on corruption and it ignores the reforms that have been made by the government. So, this style of coverage by the channel makes me sceptical. We need to correct the vision that is conducted on the ground. For example, I try to watch the opposition and ruling party TV to understand the reality of the issues, as each one of them interprets issues consistent with its own agenda. However the ruling party TV claims that the government is taking the right way to bring about reform and that the government is perfect.

The government makes improvements occasionally because it does not have a real strategic plan for reform. I think both people and the authorities are remiss in apportioning blame for corruption.

5. Alan, Male, Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) (ruling party)

I think that *KNN* does not cover the important issues on the ground and deals with events and cases according to its own interests. It works for the Gorran Movement, which is the main opposition entity, so *KNN TV* has a specific policy, for instance, it shows some reports only at certain times. So, this channel can be assumed to remain silent on some issues such as corruption, particularly when the Gorran Movement becomes too comfortable with the political parties in power.

The problem of Kurdish media is its funding. Therefore; I think the Kurdish media cannot be characterised by professionalism, accordingly, working in the Kurdish media is like working in the other organs of the same political parties. Alongside this, *KNN TV* or the other media companies are owned by the governing parties so they have an absolute affiliation to the political parties who fund them.

I think the case of reform in Kurdistan is related to the political system of Kurdistan established by all the political parties. In this case, if the opposition parties take power, the system will not become better. So, I don't think the opposition parties are the best alternative

6. Naza, Female, independent

Most people are aware of corruption through both the opposition and independent media because the media of the political parties in power shows only the advantages of the government. Also, the Kurdish authorities send the message to us that they are the best and there is no alternative. The two main political parties argue that the other parties have no right to take power because they created freedom for the Kurdish people. So the government are not in favour of any peaceful rotation of power. Furthermore, the political parties in power try to create a crisis in order to distract people from thinking about their rights.

7. Shaho, Male, Islamic Group (opposition)

I do not believe that the government has the ability to act against corruption and improve the government's performance. Every day the independent Media and the opposition TVs show a huge amount of corruption in the public sector, although the government does not take any consideration of this. The current government has lost its reliability, as every person is sure this government is bad. Besides, the government is not considering the citizens' lack of trust due to the use of public funds to buy votes, and the increased salaries of those belonging to the ruling political parties. So, I do not think we have any real choice because the loyalty of a wide number of Kurdish people has already been bought, particularly the middle and elderly generations.

Focus Group fourth was students from media study conducted in Sulaymaniyah University for discussing the *KNN TV* in 21th April, 2013

1. Aram, Male, independent

KNN TV has played an active role in raising people's awareness, in particular relating to corruption and government policy. The coverage of *KNN TV* makes the government carry out some reforms. I think if there were no strong opposition parties in the political arena of Kurdistan, the government would not work as well.

2. Gaylan, Male, independent

The government has become corrupt, particularly after the split between the Gorran Movement and the PUK because the balance of power changed and the KDP started to control the government because the PUK became weak. Furthermore, the emergence of Gorran led to people discovering to what extent the ruling parties had become corrupt because previously there was no method of investigating government activity and the opposition parties were weak at that time due to the lack of freedom for journalists and the media. Therefore, I can say that corruption is much greater than is presented to the people and if we made a full investigation, more and more corruption could be uncovered. So I want to say that *KNN* has a good role to play in enabling young people to understand political issues.

3. Tahsen, Male, independent

I think before the emergence of Gorran and its *KNN TV* the political life of Kurdistan was closed and non-interactive because the opposition parties were weak, as at the same time the level of freedom did not encourage competition in any way. The government does not want to make reforms as more people are interested in the government from which they obtain their salary, especially those of middle age and above. So, any change to the current system in Kurdistan is not easy because fundamentally the wider part of Kurdish society supports the government. Furthermore, elections are controlled by the ruling political parties so there is a lack of integrity in the elections. The government is manipulating the people in several ways, such as creating the crisis against Baghdad and making false promises to the people. According to the President of Kurdistan as mentioned earlier, he promised to make reforms, but it is clear that there is nobody who can drive forward the reform process.

4. Rovan, Male, Gorran movement (opposition party)

I think there is no kind of reform in Kurdistan and the two biggest parties have monopolised public funds to enable them to stay in power. Although the budget increase more and more every year, the infrastructure of Kurdistan is still not established.

5. Lana, Female, independent

I think *KNN TV* shows an overestimated image of corruption because this TV has a specific agenda that concentrates on the negative part of the government. I think if the opposition parties took power they would behave in the same way as the current government. In particular, the Gorran movement as most of its members were members of the PUK prior to the split between them. It is 22 years since we separated from Baghdad and the Kurdish authorities have not provided us with good policy-making even yet. So we do not know who are better political parties, those in power or the opposition parties. I mean there is no real choice because there is not a good alternative. Moreover, the two biggest parties do not allow any new political entity to gain power because they control everything, such as, the armed forces, security and even public funds. So we are sure the political parties will not accept any peaceful transfer of power and we cannot think that a revolution would be useful, as the Arab Spring did not produce any good or lasting solutions.

6. Nvar, Female, independent

KNN TV every day shows corruption in the government and this issue has become familiar. This media coverage does not affect the government's policy. We have adapted to corruption as it has become the norm in the everyday lives of most people. The Gorran movement and its *KNN TV* are corrupt as well. So, I do not think that we have the chance to make any reforms.

7. Shanaz, Female, independent

KNN TV has helped people to understand their rights but this does not mean that the Gorran movement is a good alternative to take power. We have to take consideration of the social and political components of Kurdistan that are divided into several areas of influence and each political party has a strong power base in some of them. The Gorran movement has more influence in Sulaymaniyah province where the other opposition parties consist of no more than 15%. I think any change to the current system is difficult, so I prefer to ask the government to make plans for reform.

Focus Group Fifth was students from political science conducted in Human Development University for discussing the *Awena* in 20th April, 2013

1. Xhdr, Male, independent

It is one of the media platforms that provide information to people about corruption in the government but it does not have more influence than the opposition's media because the opposition media has more correspondents and employees in the public sector that provide them with information about corruption. Besides this, the opposition TV has a bigger role in covering government corruption, for example *KNN* TV has revealed the extent of corruption in the public sector which it shows to viewers every day. I think the problem of corruption in Kurdistan is the system itself. Even if professional employees were openly assigned to the public sector, corruption would not be reduced. Because the public sector is controlled by the political parties in every place it becomes difficult to distinguish between the political parties and the government. So I cannot imagine that the Kurdistan government will make reform in any way.

2. Rebaz, Male, independent

There is no media channel which is able to show the real extent of corruption in Kurdistan because the system is corrupt absolutely. There is not full freedom for the media to investigate the public sector, especially sensitive documents and economic contracts. The government does not want to make reforms, for instance it argues that it is doing its best, while at the same time we see corruption every day in every place. The independent media and opposition media take the same stance and they are trying to uncover corruption. Furthermore, the independent media have the role to raise awareness of people of their rights, while at the same time helping the opposition parties to achieve support from people. So it can be seen that the independent media have a greater role in the reform process and the political process indirectly as well. Besides, the independent media have more influence because they do not have any aims to reach power, while some critics argue that the opposition media are making propaganda to assist the opposition parties to take power.

3. Rozan, Female, independent

Awena and the independent media are the best and most reliable resources, as the independent media cover the political ground clearly, while the opposition media merely try to create a bad image of the government. The opposition media should show the advantages and disadvantages of the government. The government is not capable of carrying out reform because it does not have any long term strategy, so every year the main issues facing people become worse. Although the budget has increased rapidly because of oil revenues, the average standard of living has decreased every year, particularly for young people because jobs and housing have become more difficult to find.

4. Massud, Male, Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) (ruling party)

I think the *Awena* website addresses corruption cases objectively, as it has an active role to inform people about corruption. At the same time we should understand that the KRG is not like a developed country, so we should understand that we are in a transition stage and the situation is improving step by step. Kurdistan needs reconstruction, whilst the opposition and independent media claim that everything should become perfect. Moreover, the *Awena* website focuses on deficiencies and defects in the government, so consequently it gives people the wrong idea about the government's performance and encourages pessimism. In the same way the ruling parties' media channels portray the government doing everything perfectly, so we see the opposite view from both sides

5. Kamaran, Male, Democratic Party of Kurdistan (KDP) (ruling party)

 I have a different view from my friends I think *Awena* does not address corruption cases objectively as it is not accurate. Usually it shows a big headline without addressing the issue in-depth. This daily coverage by some media channels of corruption in the public sector has led to the normalisation of corruption as well. We need the solution to come from the government as I do not think that the opposition parties are a viable alternative to take power. So we should ask the government to make reforms in any way they can.

6. Jutyar, Male, Gorran movement (opposition party)

Awena shows the sensitive documents exposing corruption, however most of the time it does not reference its news sources as *Awena* argues that it is obtained from information leaked by government employees. So it is difficult to be trusted, while the media channels that belong to the Gorran movement present more sensitive news because they have power and the government is unable to punish them easily. In this case, both independent media, such as *Awena* and the opposition media, are the main

sources which tell us what the government is doing and in what ways the government is corrupt and why.

I do not believe that the government wants to make reforms because every day we see the independent and opposition media uncovering further corruption and the government does not listen because the political parties in power have their own economic interests as they are stealing public funds through their big companies.

The independent media channels have another important role which is giving space for some independent writers to assume the role of a pressure group as more young people are influenced by them.

7. Revan, Female, independent

There is corruption in every area of the public sector, and even the private sector is becoming corrupt because they are not controlled by any regulation. So the *Awena* Website is not capable of covering the real extent of corruption. Besides, *Awena* should cover some new services introduced by the government, in order not to appear biased to the opposition parties.

8. Fahmey, Male, Gorran movement (opposition party)

Awena is the first newspaper to criticise the government and contribute to raising political awareness of the Kurdish people. In addition it is one of the factors among the opposition parties which has led to the encouragement of some political leaders and groups who favour the reform process.

The media of the political parties in power is not trusted by the people, and even some members of the political class prefer the independent media and opposition media because their employees work in these parties and can criticise their parties as well.

The problem of the independent media is represented by some of the sensitive information from the government that is leaked by some employees in a confidential manner. Therefore, some people believe that some of these reports are not true.

The majority of Kurdish people still belong to the political parties, particularly those who are middle-aged and older, so any change to the system becomes difficult. I think it will take several years because most of the younger generation would prefer to change the system through the change the power.

Focus Group sixth was students from political science conducted in university of Sulaymaniyah for discussing the *Sbeiy* in 24th April, 2013

1. Rezaw, Female, (opposition)

The competition between the ruling political parties and those in opposition means that I don't trust either of them. We understand the government is corrupt because this is covered by the media that do not have any political interest. Accordingly I prefer the independent media because it does not use propaganda for any particular political party to take power.

The opposition parties have a specific aim which is to take power only and not to fight against corruption and make reforms. I am not happy with the government, even though there is no choice and no alternative party or parties are capable of removing the two main parties in power, particularly the KDP

2. Shoxan, Female, Gorran movement (opposition party)

The two main political parties in power have not carried out any real reform, even though they have introduced some projects and services in the public sector following pressure on them by the opposition parties. This also enabled them to tell people that they have started to make reforms.

There is no guarantee that the government will continue these reforms, as at any time a crisis can happen because the government does not have any strategic plans.

We need to change the system and devolve power because reform will not come from the two current political parties in power. Instead, they continue to monopolise power in several ways, such as distributing public funds and privileges to their members and to those who promise to give them their votes. Accordingly the two ruling political parties believe that they do not have any strong opposition rival as yet. Therefore the government thinks that reform is not necessary.

3. Sheren, Female, independent

The daily coverage of corruption by the *Sbaiy* Website makes me feel pessimistic about the government even though the government has some positive points. I would prefer *Sbaiy* to show the advantages and disadvantages of the government in order to appear more objective. Furthermore, I need to know what new projects are coming from the government, so in this case I tend to follow the media that belong to the political parties in power.

So we need a professional media that covers both sides and makes us quite sure about what is happening on the ground. Due to the high levels of unemployment, most people give their votes to the political parties in power in order to obtain financial support or privileges, as most of these people are not capable of obtaining financial support in any other way.

4. Xhagy, Female, independent

The independent media and that of the opposition parties uncover government corruption every day but the government does not listen. Corruption cases have become a normal thing because the majority of people have an interest in this situation. I think the people are divided into two groups. The first one supports the government because they receive funds and privileges as they are the majority. The second group does not favour the government because they do not receive any such funds and jobs. This second group can be subdivided into categories such as: young people, people adhering to the opposition parties and people who demand social justice and reform.

Focus Group seventh was students from political science conducted in university of Sulaymaniyah for discussing the *Xendan* in 20th April, 2013

1. Salar, Male, KurdishIslamic Union (opposition party)

I believe the majority of Kurdish media channels are biased because they belong to the political parties and the media workers have a specific political and social background as well. Furthermore, I can say that the Kurdish media channels do not work objectively, particularly, the opposition media because they only show the disadvantages of government policy.

I do not see that the government is capable of carrying out reform because more and more people are becoming upper class or lower class whereas the middle class are faltering every day. Besides, I believe there is no real choice because the opposition parties in the political arena do not offer a better alternative as well.

2. Dana, Male, Kurdish Islamic Union (opposition party)

There is no public broadcasting service in Kurdistan, even the media of each of the two main political parties in power focus on activities conducted by those in power in the same political party which funds the media at the same time. In another sense, the media of the PUK does not focus on sectors which are managed by those responsible within the KDP, although both PUK and KDP are in a coalition government.

The media channels of the political parties in power try to focus people's attention onto certain issues so that people do not think about the main issues. For instance, when people ask for reforms, the media of the two ruling political parties focus on the political crisis with Baghdad. The government has suspended some decisions regarding relations with Baghdad in order to use them when any internal crisis may occur.

3. Mardan, Male, Gorran movement (opposition party)

The budget of the government has increased dramatically because of our oil production after 2003 due to the economic sanctions being lifted. However, the

government does not have any suitable strategy for establishing infrastructure and controlling unemployment because of corruption. At the same time the media channels belonging to the two political parties in power try to obscure the facts from people's' eyes.

I do not believe that the government is able to fight corruption and make reforms in any way, as the leaders of the two political parties have become a kind of Mafia because they are clearly stealing public funds. If he independent media and opposition media did not exist, nobody would know to what extent the government is corrupt. We cannot trust the government because it has already acknowledged corruption for several years and has not punished any one. Accordingly, how can we trust the government.

4. Harem, Male, independent

The people are quite sure that the government is corrupt, accordingly people do not trust the government and the media channels which support the government due to all the false promises made by the government over the last decade that they would introduce reforms.

If we need reform this government should be taken over by the opposition parties, as all people understand that the government is not capable of fighting against corruption, but some people have an interest to maintain the current situation. In other words, the government supports some people by offering financial funds and privileges, so this group of people are helping the government by giving them votes and legitimacy.

5. Hazar, Male, (opposition)

The *Xendan* website and other media channels belonging to the political parties in power are a means of defending the government instead of being used to inform people of what is being conducted on the ground.

We cannot trust the government because it has failed to make reforms as, day by the day the standard of living is worsening, although the budget of the government has been increasing more and more every year. We hope that the system will be changed as soon as possible. However, I do not think the system can be changed due to the fact that the two main parties control all the sensitive organs of authority.

6. Shamal, Male, independent

There is no real freedom in Kurdistan and the level of integrity of the government is not sufficient, as it does not encourage the independent and opposition media to investigate properly. Thus, we believe that corruption is actually much greater than has been shown.

7. Salam, Male, independent

We need the independent media to actually reflect the facts to the people because the media channels belonging to the political parties, and even the opposition media, do not function objectively, particularly in periods of crisis, as each of these media channels has a specific agenda in order to help its given political party to take power. Consequently, some people do not trust the media because they think that political issues are interpreted differently through the media owned by the ruling political parties and by the opposition media. Instead people prefer to obtain the facts from the news and information given by people who have actually witnessed certain cases. For instance, people trust the news about corruption when the story is mentioned to them by employees in the public sector rather than believing stories presented by the media.

Appendix (2) The transcription of In- Depth Interviews with young people (2- 25 May 2013)

1. Ekram Male, from village, student in Political Science at the University of Sulaymaniyah (Independent):

How do you see the government's performance?

The opposition's media shows a huge amount of corruption in the public sector, but at the same time the media of the ruling parties argue that the government is perfect. So it is difficult to trust which one of them is telling the truth. As for an evaluation of the government's performance, we rely on the service process in the public sector to judge how it is running. I see there are no sanctions in the public sector if employees do not treat people equally. So what is the role of the government and how can we trust it?

2. Zana Male, from city, student in Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah (opposition):

Is there a difference in attitude between young people and others towards the government's performance?

Most people of middle age and above do not have any sense of responsibility towards the young generation and they are just looking after their own interest because they support the government, although they are quite sure that the government does not treat the public equally. Accordingly, the government does not tend to make reforms because the largest sections of society are happy with the current situation.

Why, as you said, are some categories happy with the government?

Well, because they have self - interest with the government, such as jobs, pensions, getting a house or piece of land for establishing a house. What's more, they have got all of these by mediation and favouritism rather than through open and fair competition.

3. Heshw Female, from Sulaymaniyah, student in Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah (ruling parties):

What are your views on people's voting at the next election?

I will give my vote to one of the political parties in power, although I know this party has become corrupt due to the fact that some of my family were victimised by this party, but still we are getting pensions from the party as well as receiving some privileges.

What about other people who do not have the opportunity to offer sacrifice for the Kurdish national movement?

Well, at the same time I feel unhappy because all people have a right to get the privileges through good opportunities and the authorities should treat them equally.

4. Zala Female, from Sulaymaniyah city, student in Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah (independent):

What do you think about the government policy, particularly in relation to reform and corruption, as these concepts are becoming more common amongst media and political parties?

I cannot imagine how the government can make reform because the KDP and PUK have held power since the revolution in 1991 and they have divided Kurdistan into two zones of influence. Ever since then there are many people who support these parties through the military, intelligence and security services. Alongside this, the two parties started appointing many people in to the public sectors and giving pensions to people in order to influence them in the elections. The big part of Kurdish society obtain such privileges from the two main parties, for instance there are 1.5 million employees in the public sector. Accordingly the largest part of society still supports the government because of their own vested interests.

Who do you mean when you talk about the largest part of society who still supports the government?

Well, most of them are middle aged and above, particularly those who live in rural areas and are not educated, as well as some young people who are affiliated to the political parties due to their salaries and jobs.

5. Shorsh Male, from town, student in Political Science in at University of Sulaymaniyah (independent):

Why do the opposition and independent media focus on the reform of the political system, as the government has called for reforms against corruption?

The two main parties do not make reforms because they want to stay in power in any way. So the devolution of power in a peaceful manner in any new democracy is difficult. I want the opposition parties to be stronger in order to observe the government and stand firmly against corruption. Accordingly, the reform of our system will need more time. At the same time there are many people who want the system to change more quickly as they are waiting for specific results from the opposition parties. Alongside this, I fear these people will lose their endurance to support the opposition parties. I am sure we will change the system given time.

Why would you like the system to be changed?

Well, it is our right to seek a change in the system because we need to test the other political parties as the two main parties in power are absolutely corrupt.

How can the system be changed?

Well, we need all people to understand that the two political parties are not capable of making reform, so they need the people to change their political behaviour in order to choose opposition parties.

6. Soma Female, from Sulaymaniyah city, student in Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah (opposition parties)

What do you think about government policy and the opposition media's arguments against the government?

The government is weak if compared with the political parties' offices in all the main cities, as the KDP has the main power in its zone of influence and the PUK has the main power in its zone, whereas the central government is controlled by them. What is clear is that the government is administered by the personal whims of government officials in the political parties instead of being run through regulation and the terms of the constitution. For instance, when you go to different institutions in different places of the public sector you receive different treatment and services because the process is related to the employee not to the system exactly. Moreover, government resolutions are made by a few higher political leaders and decisions are based on their own personal mood as well. The parliament serves only to rubber stamp these resolutions. Also, the parliamentary members of the ruling parties are controlled by their political parties.

So, what can be the solution for all the problems of the political system as you mentioned?

Well, we need our system to become more democratic in order for all people and the political parties to have equal opportunity of obtaining financial funds. We also need transparency of government policy and fair elections. And then, the government will try to make reforms and the opposition parties will achieve a real chance to take power. Also the people will understand the facts and they will become free to choose which parties are most suitable for holding office.

7. Rabar Male from, Sulaymaniyah city, student in Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah (opposition parties)

What do you think about the government performance, as you know we are near the next election?

The people are not happy with the government's policy even some of those who have self-interests through their jobs, pensions and privileges because they think that the distribution of privileges is not divided equally among political members and those who have affiliation as well. As a consequence, I think all people who want reform but they are afraid of losing the current gains.

Why do some people fear to lose the current gains and what do you mean by these gains?

Well, due to the lack of equal opportunity for people to find jobs on the ground. If you support one of the ruling political parties you will be supported by the party through offering you a job in the public sector and in an organ of the party as well as being more likely to be nominated for one of these positions. This is because most positions in the public sector are distributed to those who have a good reference from the party rather than those with the necessary experience and qualifications.

Why do young people make up the largest sector of the population who seek political reform?

The young people are seeking reforms and achievement of their rights due to the fact that they have little or nothing to lose. There is high unemployment amongst them because the government has appointed older people to more jobs in the public sector in order to win the last election and achieve the people's support by apparently reducing the level of unemployment.

8. Zahra Female from Sulaymaniyah city, student in Media Studies at the University of Sulaymaniyah (ruling parties)

What do you think about the government's policy?

Well, since the revolution in 1991 we hoped we would become more democratic but day by the day the ruling political parties are holding onto power. Particularly the KDP has controlled the Kurdistan Regional Government, in areas such as economic agreements and policy, foreign departments and higher posts of government. Consequently, the opposition parties cannot change the power structure even if they win the election.

What about the PUK, which is the other political party in power and has influence on its zone (the Green Zone of political influence) as well?

Well, that is right but the PUK is not really similar to the KDP, especially in relation to the issues of freedom. The Green Zone fundamentally allows more space for the people to express their ideas and the emergence of an independent media as well. Moreover, the PUK has lost its power since the split of Nawsherwan's group (Gorran movement) from the PUK and became the main opposition in Kurdistan.

Consequently, this zone has become much better than the Yellow Zone (the KDP's zone).

What are the benefits of the Green Zone for the media and political process, as you said that it is much better than the Yellow Zone?

Well, the problem is democracy and the political knowledge and attitudes of the people towards the political parties. I think more people still need to understand their responsibilities and their rights, but the majority of people are focusing on their self-interest in the short term. Some opposition media organisations are working more professionally and they have similar messages to the opposition media, as both of them are trying to help people understand the government's policy. It is also important for people to use their role to participate in finding the solution by using their votes because the majority of people do not believe they have any role in elections.

9. Barzan Male, from Erbil Capital city, graduated from the Salahaddin University Erbil- Capital city (opposition)

What do you think about the government policy?

The budget of the government has increased and some people became well off on the other hand unemployment has increased as well especially amongst young people coming out of university because there are not enough jobs in public sector and salaries in the private sector are no better as they do not include life insurance. So, I think life for normal people will become worse.

What do you mean by "normal people" and why will life become worse as you said?

Well, by normal people I mean those who have no mediation with political officials and they do not become employees in the public sector, especially young people.

What is your suggestion for finding a solution and what should the government do to solve these issues?

I think the government does not want to find a solution because it is focussing on its own members and those affiliated to its own political party. I mean the government does not feel any responsibility towards the public and does not treat people equally. Accordingly there is not any solution for normal people. That is the choice of the people as I cannot envisage how life can be changed.

What about the role of the election and "normal people" as you mentioned who are not happy with this situation, and what is the role of the media in this issue?

The government does not take any consideration of the election because fundamentally it has control of everything, such as the majority of people by providing them with a job, salary, and pension. Furthermore, if the two parties lost in the election it is more likely that fighting would break out, especially the KDP.

10. Kwvan Male, from Erbil Capital city not completed the higher education (independent)

What do you think about the government policy?

The government has unstable plans, for example we export the oil and the petrol is expensive in our country. I focus on my job I do not have any salary in the public sectors, so If I had a job in the public sector that would be best.

Do you think the people have a right to ask the government to decrease the price of petrol and offer the state pension to people?

Yes of course but the government does not listen to us.

Do you mean the government has not got a good policy and what about the opposition parties?

Yes, the government just focuses on its own power and helps those who support the party to stay in power. The opposition parties are also similar to those parties in power. The opposition parties show the government's mistakes because they are not participating in power.

11. Saber Male, employee in the public sector in Erbil (ruling parties)

What do you think about the media, especially in relation to reform and corruption issues?

Well, I think all the reports covered on opposition TV and some independent websites are true. But these channels have a specific target which is showing a negative image of the government to people and telling people that if we the opposition took power, we would all be better off. So, I think the government has some advantages and disadvantages as well, and then I do not think the opposition parties are a good alternative for taking power.

You said the government has some disadvantages, how do you know about that and who is providing you with this knowledge?

We hear about corruption from people who are working in the public sector and I can see something in our daily lives, also sometimes we hear it from the media.

Do you think corruption is a normal issue in the government and who is responsible for making reform?

Well, I think nobody starts out corrupt, I just want to say that people become corrupt because they are looking for favouritisms when they apply for a jobs or even when they visit a public sector office to obtain a service.

Do you mean if someone has mediation in the public sector he or she will receive service more quickly and secure a job as well?

Yes, absolutely, as that is clear, who are you if you don't know about that? Are you not from this country!?

What is the role of the government in punishing employees in the public sector who do not treat people equally?

Well, as I said people are corrupt and the government can manipulate people in our country because we do not have a state pension in our system. So the majority of employees appointed to the public sector will also try to manipulate the situation and offer service and favours to their relatives and friends rather than to the general public.

12. Dlawar Male from Erbil Capital city not completed the higher education (ruling parties)

How do you see the government performance?

The level of public life and public services has become much better than some years ago. I am quite optimistic about the future because we have a good security situation and the budget of the government is improving due to the income from the oil.

What about the opposition and the independent media that show some corruption within the government as well as arguing that parts of society do not feel satisfied with the current government?

Well, the opposition and the independent media focus on some disadvantages of the government only, I mean they do not show both sides because the opposition parties have specific framing for covering the news in order to affect people's attitudes. Furthermore, the opposition parties have a specific agenda that they hope will lead them to take power.

Do you mean that you cannot trust the opposition and the independent media?

Well, I trust some news covered by the opposition and independent media, otherwise it does not mean that the government is totally bad because there is not any government in the world which has not made any mistakes, even in the western countries.

13. Darwn Female, from Kifri town, student at educational department at the University of Garmian (opposition parties) and the interviews hold in Young club in Kifri town

How do you see the government performance?

Well, I would like to say in brief that the government is unstable and it is administered purely by (destiny) and (fate) because there is not any guarantee of meeting the promises made by the government.

Do you mean that you cannot trust the government?

Yes, and absolutely, because the government is not based on any specific institutional administration, as it is run according to individuals' whims. Moreover, the government does not have any clear strategy, particularly when the administration of the government is changed, as the new administration makes its own plan. So I can say the Kurdish government is undeveloped as yet.

What is the reason behind the government being undeveloped as yet according to what you are saying?

Well, there are many factors. Firstly, the historical conflict between the KDP and PUK led to division of the government into two governments, and although unification of the departments occurred in 2005, there are still two distinct areas of influence. Alongside this, each political party has its own military, security services, intelligence agency and a certain share of the Ministry of Finance. Secondly, each political party appoints a leader for all the public sector in its own separate area of influence. Moreover, the offices of the two main political parties have influence on the public sector in the cities, towns and even in the countryside. So, I can say we have a system of political parties which hold power and we live in such a traditional political system.

14. Sayran Female, from Kifri town, student at educational department at the University of Garmian (opposition parties) and the interviews hold in Young club in Kifri town

What do you think about the government's performance?

The government does not follow any coherent strategy and I have seen there are not suitable political parties to take power, because the problem is the system. So we need more time to pass this stage as both political parties and public need to improve because all individuals only consider their own self-interest.

What is the role of people in the election?

As I said, we need make reform in our system whereas the political parties and the majority of people are not ready to do that. I think the elections will change the cover

of the government rather than the foundations of the system due to the fact we have done some election and the basic political issues are still did not addressed.

15. Hanan Female, from Kifri town, student at educational department at Salahaddin University in Erbil (ruling parties) and the interviews hold in Young club in Kifri town

What do you think about the government's performance?

Well, it is not perfect like in western countries but they are widely accepted by people in Kurdistan because the level of public services in Kurdistan is much better than in other parts of Iraq. Alongside this, I see the current political parties in power are better than the opposition parties because the opposition parties do not have the experience in governance, particularly in the field of security. I mean the opposition parties are not a perfect alternative especially at this stage because there is no guarantee that the opposition parties would be any better. Therefore, it is not reasonable we should support the opposition parties only on an assumption that the opposition parties still haven't held power and could be better if we chose them.

Appendix (3) Semi Structured Interviews with young people

1. Sarkawt, young male from Sulaymaniyah:

How do you see the election campaign and what will affect the political process after the election?

Well, I think there will not be a big change in the political process due to the fact that the KDP has kept control of its area of influence that includes the capital city, at the same time the KDP has become the leading political party especially after the split of the Gorran group from the PUK. The political system was split 50-50, as currently the KDP has more power because the PUK has lost more than half of its affiliated supporters because of the split. Following this, the KDP has changed some regulations and has held power since the last election. Arguably Kurdistan has become two regions: the first one is Dohuk and Erbil that is controlled by the KDP absolutely. The second one is Sulaymaniyah province that is administered by the PUK formally but the majority of people there support the opposition parties. Therefore, the political process has become worse because the main political parties in power have changed from the two main parties to one main party which is the KDP that tends to be more authoritarian and the small party which is the PUK. Following this, the KDP has taken power individually and uses the PUK just for legitimacy.

2. Azad, young male from Sulaymaniyah:

How do you see the election campaign, especially most of the slogans that refer to making reforms, fighting corruption and delivering a more fair outcome; and what about the promises during the election campaign?

Well, I think it is a shame for the political parties in power that say they will carry out reforms because what about 22 years ago when they had absolute power in Kurdistan, why did they not do it then? I am not like some people who cannot remember that political parties have promised things and have not done it. However, I am not optimistic that I have a right to choose because there is no real choice on the ground due to everything being controlled by the KDP. As I predict the KDP will win because it will use public funds to buy votes, therefore, the opposition parties will not be able to take power in this election.

Do you mean that the opposition parties will not win the election and the current parties will take power again?

Yes, of course, but it does not lead me to withdraw support from the opposition parties because we need to send a message to tell the government that this number of people do not want the current political parties to stay in power. As well as this, voting for the opposition parties can be helpful for people, especially in parliament

because the opposition members of parliament were the only ones defending projects and regulations that were useful for normal people

3. Farman, young male from Sulaymaniyah:

What do you think will happen after the election particularly in relation to public services, government performance and the reform process as we know in the election campaign stage?

Well, this election will not change anything as the two political parties in power will form a coalition government and they will go on with their previous strategies as this policy is suitable for this stage.

What do you mean it is suitable for this stage and do you think that the current strategy of government is perfect?

Well, the two political parties have offered service to us since the Kurdish National Movement. So, how can we not support them at a time when the opposition parties are not offering a good alternative? We also have to take into consideration that the current parties will not accept losing power as they have some companies that have made a lot of economic agreements for the long term, so if they fail in the election everything will be revealed. Therefore, the two parties will do everything to protect their interests even starting a fire.

4. Bestwn, young male from Sulaymaniyah:

How do you see the election campaign and to what extent can the change of power take place through the elections in Kurdistan?

Well, the two political parties in power do not want to lose control and they conducted the election to obtain legitimacy from the international community and to say to people that they are practising democracy. I mean they are not going to offer any devolution of power in a peaceful manner. So, the ruling parties have distorted the image of democracy. As well as this, they are holding an election to silence the electorate, especially when people are demanding their rights by telling the country that they have been returned with public support in the election. By this, I want to explain what kind of democracy we have. Democracy here gives legitimacy to corrupt political parties and manipulates the local population and the world community.

Do you want to say that you do not trust the election?

Yes absolutely, and I will cast my vote just to tell the current government we want to change.

Why do you and other people do not prefer to change the government as you would like that?

We hope to change the system in any way and we cannot do that because the majority of people are still with the government for their own self-interest. Moreover, as I said the ruling parties still control everything.

5. Dashet, young male from Sulaymaniyah:

How do you see the election campaign and how will it affect the political future of Kurdistan?

Well, the election should give an opportunity to both political parties and people to make a decision about the political process in order to be helpful for our society. Nevertheless, there is no choice for people and the opposition parties to make because the ruling parties control everything, such as the army, security and financial funds. Therefore, I cannot imagine that the two main political parties will accept a loss of power and become the opposition because they are planning to take power for their generation like in some Arab countries where power was taken and later lost in the Arab Spring.

What about the opposition parties who have declared during the election campaign that they will change the system if they win?

Well, they have to tell to people that in order to try and win the election and get more votes but I cannot believe that the ruling parties will allow any other political parties to take power in any way.

What about the PUK which has lost some of its popularity due to the Gorran group splitting from them as some observers claim?

Well, despite the PUK losing its popularity, it will control the authority in the area of its influence even if the Gorran group gets more votes. For instance, the KDP and PUK entered under one list in the last election and the PUK did not achieve more votes in its zone compared with the Gorran list. Otherwise, the KDP would have agreed to form a coalition government with the PUK on the basis of 50-50 members in parliament in order to allow each of them to retain control of their own zone of influence, although the KDP won more votes compared with the PUK. So, in this election the KDP and PUK will keep power, although each of them has entered separately in this election, as I think they will establish a coalition government together again.

 6. Lawand, young male from Erbil:

How do you see the election campaign and what will be changed after the election?

Well, I expect that the KDP will attain more votes and the PUK will achieve fewer votes than in the last election so this will affect the balance between them. However, the

KDP will look to help the PUK because both of them have a similar interest if they remain in power. Furthermore, the two parties did not pay attention to corruption and they have a quite similar method of administration. I think this is the most likely scenario that will happen. Otherwise, there is another scenario if all the opposition parties attain more than 50 per cent of the votes, the KDP and PUK could be out of power or one of them at least. While it is difficult for this to happen at this stage, the opposition parties are gaining more and more support because the ruling parties are not making real reforms that are demanded by the people.

What do you think will happen if the opposition parties attain more than 50 per cent of the votes as you said that is one scenario that may occur?

Well, we hope this will happen as I mentioned before the two ruling parties or one of them could be out of power and the opposition parties would be able to participate in in the government by gaining more than 50 per cent of the votes which would mean a change in the political system that has been monopolised by the two parties since the Kurdish revolution. What is more, it could control corruption as all the hidden contracts and documents made by the current ruling parties would be revealed. Alongside this, we would be able to make developments in the political system and improve the democratic process that reflects on our standard of living.

7. Hunar, young male from Erbil:

How do you see the election campaign and how the political system be affected, particularly in relation to people's standard of living?

Well, I am not an employee in the public sector. So, I do not think the election will influence my life because I am not an employee who is waiting for an increase in my salary by the government. Furthermore, the price of everything tends to increase if people's salaries are increased as well. So, I do not have any interest in the government because I am responsible for meeting my own needs.

Do you intend to vote in the election?

I will go to cast my vote, although it will not change anything in my life.

If you see that the election will not affect your life, why will you spend your time going to vote?

Although the government has no influence on my life I see we have to go and vote because we have the one entity and need to respect it, and our previous generations struggled in order to allow us to live in freedom. So, participation in the election is a national duty and shows respect to the martyrs of the Kurdish National Movement.

Appendix (4) Focus Group Guide Questions
A. Questions and themes that asked young people who watch *GK TV*

- Did you think the *GK TV* addressed the necessary political issues? How and why?

- What do you think of *GK TV*'s coverage of political issues?

- What did you think of *GK TV*'s coverage of the corruption?

- Do you think the *GK TV* addressed all kind of corruption on ground and their causes?

- Do you see something that was not covered by *GK TV* about corruption? How?

- What did you think of opposition TV's coverage of the corruption?

- How did you feel toward the corruption? Were you thinking you obtained enough information? What was lacking?

- How the *GK TV* addressed the reform process and the government performance?

- Do you think the opposition's TV reduces the possibility of the government to make reforms and the performance of government?

- Do you think the *GK TV* addressed the reforms and the government performance objectively and how? Did you think the government able to make reform?

- What did you think that government is active or opposition parties if who were on power?

- Do you think they had similar/different thought with your thought? Why? And how?

- What did you think of other young people who saw the political news on *GK TV*?

- What is relationship between young people and their political background (political knowledge, political interest, political affiliation) with *GK TV* the coverage of political issues?

- Which category of young people who trusted *GK TV*? Why? And how?

B. Questions and themes that asked young people who watch *KNN TV*

- What do you think of *KNN*'s coverage of political issues?

- Do you think the *KNN TV* addressed the necessary political issues? How and why?

- What do you think of *KNN*'s coverage of the corruption?

 -Do you think the *KNN TV* addressed all kind of corruption objectively on ground and their causes?

- What did you think the coverage of corruption across the ruling parties TV?

- Do you think that the ruling TV or opposition TV are covered the corruption objectively and the causes of corruption

- How *KNN TV* addressed the reform process and the government performance?

- Did you think the *KNN TV* that addressed the reforms and the government performance objectively and how? Did you think the government able to make reform?

- What do you think of other young people who watch the political news on *KNN TV*?

- What is relationship between young people and their political background (political knowledge, political interest, political affiliation) with *KNN TV* the coverage of political issues?

C. Questions and themes that asked young people who read political news across the *Xendan* website.

- What do you think of *Xendan*'s coverage of political issues?

- Do you think the *Xendan* addressed the necessary political issues? How and why?

- What did you think of *Xendan*'s coverage of the corruption?

- Do you think the *Xendan* that addressed all kind of corruption on ground and their causes?

- Do you see something that was not covered by *Xendan* about corruption? How?

- How do you feel toward the corruption? Were you thinking you obtain enough information? What was lacking?

- What do you think of coverage of the corruption across the print media online of opposition and independent?

- Which kind of print media online is covered the corruption and the causes of corruption objectively? such as, ruling parties, opposition parties and independent

- How *Xendan* addressed the reform process and the government performance?

- Do you think the *Xendan* addressed the reforms and the government performance objectively and how? Did you think the government able to make reform?

- Do you think the print media online of opposition parties and independent have reduced the possibility of the government to make reforms and the performance of government?

- What did you think that government is active or opposition parties if who were on power?

- What do you think of other young people who read the political news across the print media online of opposition parties and independent?

- Did you think they had similar/different thought with your thought? Why? And how?

- What is relationship between young people and their political background (political knowledge, political interest, political affiliation) with the coverage of political issues across the print media online of opposition parties and independent?

- Which category of the young people who trusted the print media online of opposition parties and independent? Why? And how?

D. Questions and themes that asked young people who read political news across the *Sbeiy* website.

- What do you think of *Sbeiy*'s coverage of political issues?

- Do you think the *Sbeiy* addressed the necessary political issues? How and why?

- What do you think of *Sbeiy*'s coverage of the corruption?

-Do you think the *Sbeiy* that addressed all kind of corruption on ground and their causes?

- Do you see something that was not covered by *Sbeiy* about corruption? How?

- How did you feel toward the corruption? Were you thinking you obtain enough information? What was lacking?

- What do you think of coverage of the corruption across the print media online of ruling parties and independent?

- Which kind of print media online is covered the corruption and the causes of corruption objectively? such as, ruling parties, opposition parties and independent

- How *Sbeiy* addressed the reform process and the government performance?

- Do you think the *Sbeiy* addressed the reforms and the government performance objectively and how? Did you think the government able to make reform?

- Do you think the print media online of opposition parties and independent have reduced the possibility of the government to make reforms and the performance of government?

- What did you think that government is active or opposition parties if who were on power?

- What did you think of other young people who read the political news across the print media online of opposition parties and independent?

- Did you think they had similar/different thought with your thought? Why? And how?

- What is relationship between young people and their political background (political knowledge, political interest, political affiliation) with the coverage of political issues across the print media online of opposition parties and independent?

- Which category of the young people who trusted the print media online of ruling parties and independent? Why? And how?

E. Questions and themes that asked young people who read political news across the *Awena* website

- What do you think of coverage of political issues across the *Awena*?

- Do you think the *Awena* are addressed the necessary political issues? How and why?

- What do you think of coverage of the corruption across *Awena*?

- Do you think the *Awena* that addressed all kind of corruption on ground and their causes?

- Do you see something that was not covered by *Awena* about corruption? How?

- How did you feel toward the corruption? Were you thinking you obtain enough information? What was lacking?

- What do you think of coverage of the corruption across the print media online of ruling parties and opposition parties?

- Which kind of print media online is covered the corruption and the causes of corruption objectively? such as, ruling parties, opposition parties and independent

- How *Awena* addressed the reform process and the government performance?

- Do you think the *Awena* addressed the reforms and the government performance objectively and how? Did you think the government able to make reform?

- Do you think the print media online of opposition parties and independent have reduced the possibility of the government to make reforms and the performance of government?

- What did you think that government is active or opposition parties if who were on power?

What do you think of other young people who read the political news across the print media online of ruling parties and opposition parties?

- Do you think they had similar/different thought with your thought? Why? And how?

- What is relationship between young people and their political background (political knowledge, political interest, political affiliation) with the coverage of political issues across the print media online of ruling parties and opposition parties?

- Which category of the young people who trusted the print media online of ruling parties and opposition parties? Why? And how?

Appendix (5)Content Analysis Coding Sheet

Quantitative Descriptive Analysis Coding of News content Analysis

Media	Duration of Selecting the Sample for the News Content Analysis							Internal Issues				Disputed Areas	Other News	Values		
	11 April	12 April	13 April	14 April	15 April	16 April	17 April	Corruption	Reform	Government Performance	Citizens' Trust			Positive	Negative	Neutral
GK TV																
KNN TV																
Xendan Website																
Sbeiy Website																
Awena Website																

Qualitative Framing Analysis Coding of News content Analysis

Media	Duration of Selecting the Sample for the News Content Analysis							Internal Issues				The Four Frames Components				The Other Frames						
	11 April	12 April	13 April	14 April	15 April	16 April	17 April	Corruption	Reform	Government Performance	Citizens' Trust	Problem Definition	Causal Interpretation	Moral Evaluation	Treatment Recommendation	magnified frame	consequences frame negative	consequences frame positive	reframing	simplify frame	localising frame	internal security frame
GK TV																						
KNN TV																						
Xendan Website																						
Sbeiy Website																						
Awena Website																						

Appendix (6) In- depth Interviews Guide Questions with Media Workers of (*GK TV*, *KNN TV*, *Xendan* Website, *Sbeiy* Website and *Awena* Website)

themes and aspects	Questions
the history of the media	- when did they start - brief history
Staff	-number of journalists - number of reporters - number of freelance reporters and journalists - number of news editors - number of news proof-readers - number of technical staff
Sources of funding	- funding from International Organisations - funding from Non-Governmental Organisations - funding from advertising - is there any government funding - is there any charity funds - funding from political parties
Salary	- minimum and maximum salary of the staff if available - minimum and maximum for freelance reporters if available
Editorial policy	- how you are addressing the political issues - how you are addressing corruption, reform and government performance - how you are addressing the citizens' trust in the government
Freedom to access the information to the journalists	- how do you obtain the information on the government's department and the political issues - how does the government provide the information particularly about the corruption and shortcomings of the government - do government departments provide you information easily and equally why - what are the most important obstacles to obtain information - why some information are provided to the media in secret - why do some Kurdish media able to achieve the information in secret - what is the disadvantages publishing and broadcasting of the confidential information across the Kurdish media - what are the main forms of the obstacles facing the Kurdish media - how do solve the problem of freedom to access the information

Appendix (7) In-depth Interview with Media Worker

Positions of media professionals	Date of in-depth interview	Place and the method of the and-depth interview
News Chief Editor of *Xendan*	22/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
Managing News Editor of *KNN TV*	22/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
The Head of Public Relations of GK TV	14/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
News Chief Editor of *Awena* website	19/2/2013	By Skype
News Chief Editor of *Sbeiy*	1/5/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office
Former News Editor In *GK TV*	14/4/2013	Face to face interviewing in his office in Cafe

Appendix (8) Letter of Consent of the Young People of the Focus Groups and Conducting Interviews

LETTER OF CONSENT

I fully understand that this focus group will take place to collect data which will be used to compile a thesis for a Doctorate (PhD) in the United Kingdom. The subject of this research is political communication and the media in Kurdistan.

I fully understand my capacity as a volunteer in this research which I am entering into without any pressure.

I understand that I have a right to stop the interview process at any time by telling the researcher that this is my wish.

I have read this letter and I freely consent to participate in this study.

I hereby freely agree to sign and provide pseudonym to indicate my consent.

Signed in the city of_____, Kurdistan, Iraq, on the ____day of_____ (month) in the year_____

Signature   :_____

Name :_____