

# Contemporary Turkish Politics

December 7, 2016

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## **The Project on Middle East Political Science**

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see <http://www.pomeps.org>.

Turkey has been in the news repeatedly in 2016, from the coup attempt of July to the subsequent government purges to its renewed fight against the PKK and crackdown on Kurdish populations. However surprising these developments may appear for an outside observer, they are deeply rooted in the history of the Turkish state, the evolution of the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), and the complex identity politics of the region. In October, more than a dozen scholars of Turkish politics gathered at Rice University's Baker Institute in Houston for a Project on Middle East Political Science workshop to delve into some of these underlying themes. The memos produced for that workshop have been published individually on the [POMEPS website](#) and the full collection is now available as a free download here. The authors in this collection provide rich context, new data, and sharp analysis of the nuanced challenges facing the country and the region today.

The relationship between state and religion is one of the key issues to understand Turkish politics. [Sebnem Gumuscu](#) describes how competition between two main Islamist organizations evolved and influenced the government organization, somewhat paradoxically diminishing the checks and balances of the secular state that expedited the government's ability to purge. Kristin Fabbe examines the direct and indirect ways religion and government interact and asks who might fill the bureaucratic void left by the Gülen movement. The religion-state nexus not only influences domestic affairs in crucial ways but its effects also shape Turkey's stature within the regional. Once heralded as a shining beacon of democracy in the region, Turkey is now sinking on many indices of [democracy](#) and [freedom](#). [Ekrem Karakoc](#) illustrates the fluctuating popularity of the Turkish model since the Arab uprisings in other MENA countries. Unsurprisingly, Islamist parties tended to look up to the success of the AKP more than other groups. Yet the often-referenced secular/ Islamist dichotomy fails to get at the complexities of these movements and their relationships with power.

The malleable use of identity is a recurring theme in this collection. [Senem Aslan](#) paints a fascinating picture of the diverse ways in which AKP leaders use public displays of crying. In a region where machismo and tough leadership dominate political discourse, this invoking of emotion and victimhood serves a unique purpose for a party that has been in power now for more than a dozen years. [Kimberly Guiler](#) also takes up this question of victimhood, examining the use of conspiracy theories in the wake of the July 2016 coup as the AKP attempted to centralize power and promote national unity. [Esen Kirdis](#) shows how shifts in the AKP government's identity can be measured by the shifts in its foreign policy, from moderate Western-facing at the beginning of its tenure in office, to increasingly more Islam and identity focused as its support and base grew and now to a nationalist orientation as its support is wavering. [Lisel Hintz](#) describes how the Republic Nationalist orientation of previous governments gave way to the Ottoman-inspired and Islam-focused inclusive politics that downplayed the importance of ethnicity, opening an all too brief window of opportunity for addressing the Kurdish question. In their analysis of female political representation, Abdullah Aydogan, Melissa Marschall, and Marwa Shalaby explore the effects of gender roles and norms on women's nomination and winning at the local and national level offices. Counterintuitively, they find that national offices are more open to female representation than local levels.

Expanding on the Kurdish question, Sabri Çiftçi illustrates the unique challenges to ethnic descriptive representation of Kurds in Turkey, especially in the context of conflict. The lack of demographic data remains a main challenge, but Avital Livny fills in the missing information gap with some innovative new survey data to measure Kurdish politicization. Şener Aktürk presents and analyzes several often-cited hypotheses about why the PKK ended its ceasefire in 2015, suggesting that foreign policy may have played a larger role than many believe. During this period of renewed war, Aysegul Aydin and Cem Emrence illustrate how curfews have been used not only as a means of civilian control but also selectively to punish areas that have voted for the Kurdish party and to entice voters who live in more competitive electoral districts. Güneş Murat Tezcür presents his unique dataset of Turkish foreign fighters leaving the country to join either nationalist struggles of Kurds or the religious call of *ummah* and caliphate, showing how these individuals are similar and very different and what this means for Turkish society.

Useful for students, academics, and policy-makers alike, the pieces in *POMEPS Studies 22 Contemporary Turkish Politics*, offer a uniquely accessible yet nuanced analysis of a country in flux. Download it today.

*Lauren Baker*  
December 2016

## **Religion, the State, and the Party**

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# The Clash of Islamists: The crisis of the Turkish state and democracy

Sebnem Gumuscu, Middlebury College

Two powerful movements – the *Milli Gorus* (National Outlook) and Fethullah Gulen's *Hizmet* – have dominated Islamic politics in Turkey since the 1970s. Capitalizing on their increasing power and presence in different realms of life, these Islamic movements allied in 2007 to put an end to tutelary democracy guided by the secular establishment, i.e. military and judiciary.<sup>1</sup> This marriage of convenience delivered benefits for both actors; the AKP successfully eliminated the veto powers in the secular state,<sup>2</sup> while the Gulen movement steered clear of the pressure of the secular establishment and accelerated its penetration of the state apparatus. The end of the tutelary regime in Turkey has not led to democratic consolidation though, as many had hoped. Instead the two Islamic movements in the course of their alliance and their subsequent struggle for power undermined democratic politics, the rule of law, civil liberties and governance capacity of the Turkish state.

Political Islam in Turkey came to be dominated by these two movements following distinct methods: 1) the political parties of the *Milli Gorus* movement seeking the capture of political power and the state apparatus to Islamicize the society top-down; and 2) the Gulen movement seeking Islamization of the individual, the society, and eventually the state through *da'wa* and bottom-up mobilization. Despite this difference in their methods, both movements shared the ideal of establishing an order based on some version of Islam, which, for them, is not only a religion but also a total system encapsulating and regulating all aspects of life. Both movements were inspired by Salafi reformists of the 19th century such as Jamal Al-din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh as well as their more conservative followers like Hasan al Banna. Also, both movements strived to strike a synthesis of Salafi reformism with Sufi traditions in Anatolia. In short, they agreed that Muslims should live under Islamic states and converged on an equally statist, authoritarian, hierarchic and anti-pluralist outlooks albeit from different angles and using different

strategies. The most important difference between the *Milli Gorus* and Gulen's *Hizmet*, therefore, does not stem from their ideological aspirations but from their respective strategies of replacing the secular republican regime with an Islamic order.

The *Milli Gorus* movement emerged in the early 1970s and established successive political parties to mobilize and represent marginalized and disenfranchised pious constituencies with an explicitly Islamist discourse. This political mobilization via explicitly Islamist messages led to the closure of several Islamic parties by the Constitutional Court. The final incarnation of the movement following the closure of the *Fazilet Partisi* (Virtue Party) in 2000 brought about a split and the birth of the ruling *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi* (Justice and Development Party, AKP) in 2001. The AKP came to power in late 2002 and eventually turned into a dominant party by way of establishing an electoral hegemony in subsequent elections.<sup>3</sup>

The Gulen movement (or *Hizmet* as their members would call it) was established in 1966 with the goal of fighting communism and raising a "Golden generation" that would be pious, hardworking, and well educated with a strong sense of solidarity and "military-like discipline."<sup>4</sup> The leader of the movement, Fethullah Gulen, wary of secular regime's repression, rejected explicit political mobilization instead building a network of educational institutions, civil society organizations, media companies and businesses motivated by Islamic principles. One of the primary, yet less publicized, targets of Fethullah Gulen remained colonization of the state bureaucracy with the members of the "Golden generation,"<sup>5</sup> primarily through manipulation of bureaucratic recruitment processes, i.e. centrally administered tests or appointments based on drawing of lots. The following excerpt from one of his taped sermons in the 1990s reveals the movement's intentions of penetrating the state as well as its gradualist and non-confrontational strategy:

You must move in the arteries of the system without anyone noticing your existence until you reach all the power centers ... until the conditions are ripe, they [the followers] must continue like this. If they do something prematurely, the world will crush our heads, and Muslims will suffer everywhere, like in the tragedies in Algeria, like in 1982 [in] Syria ... like in the yearly disasters and tragedies in Egypt. The time is not yet right. You must wait for the time when you are complete and conditions are ripe, until we can shoulder the entire world and carry it ... You must wait until such time as you have gotten all the state power; until you have brought to your side all the power of the constitutional institutions in Turkey ... Until that time, any step taken would be too early—like breaking an egg without waiting the full forty days for it to hatch. It would be like killing the chick inside. The work to be done is [in] confronting the world. Now, I have expressed my feelings and thoughts to you all—in confidence ... trusting your loyalty and secrecy. I know that when you leave here—[just] as you discard your empty juice boxes, you must discard the thoughts and the feelings that I expressed here.<sup>6</sup>

While the *Milli Gorus* parties oscillated between confrontation and accommodation in its relationship with the secular regime in particular and the West in general, the Gulen movement opted for appeasement and accommodation<sup>7</sup> and avoided outright confrontation with the secular establishment and the non-Muslim world as testified by Gulen's words above. These two movements thus kept their distance until 2002 and had fundamental differences vis-à-vis their respective relationship with the Turkish state, the secular establishment, and the Western world.

With the AKP's rise to power in 2002, the relationship between the two movements improved remarkably. The rapprochement of the AKP and the Gulen movement eventually turned into an alliance against the secular establishment by 2007. Among the triggers of this alliance were a series of political crises the AKP faced in 2007 and 2008, including the presidential elections, e-memorandum of the chief of the general staff, and the closure case against

the party. In the meantime, the Gulen movement had been under scrutiny between 1999 and 2006 as Fethullah Gulen himself was tried in absentia for conspiring against the secular state by way of infiltrating the security forces since the 1980s. Then, in 2004 the National Security Council (MGK) adopted a document that identified the Gulen movement as a threat to the Turkish state.

The AKP-Gulen alliance was established to end the military tutelage in particular and undermine the secular establishment in general, "using all necessary means" in Yavuz's words.<sup>8</sup> A key instrument of this alliance was trials by "special courts," which targeted disparate groups within and outside of the state, including political dissidents and foci of power that could threaten the two Islamic movements. The *Ergenekon* and *Balyoz* cases accused several retired and on-duty members of the Turkish armed forces of conspiring to overthrow the AKP government with the help of the media, universities, and civil society activists; OdaTV in conjunction with *Ergenekon* case incriminated critical journalists; Devrimci Karargah tried members of a radical leftist organization along with a former police chief, members of the National Intelligence Organization (MIT) and journalists; the KCK trials prosecuted academics, civil society activists, unionists, journalists, politicians, students, and members of the MIT for association with the KCK (Kurdistan Workers' Party's urban network); and finally, the *Sike* case accused prominent figures of the largest football clubs in Turkey of engaging in organized crime.

In the course of these trials, the judges and public prosecutors frequently violated the fundamental rights of the defendants. Prolonged pre-trial detention became the norm; the prosecutors extensively relied on secret witness testimony, fabricated evidence, and frequently violated the due process.<sup>9</sup> The courts also imposed a media blackout on these probes limiting public scrutiny over the cases. Since the start of the special courts, 4,091 investigations have been launched against journalists, who reported on these probes, for breaches of the confidentiality of investigations.<sup>10</sup> Such violations led to changes in Turkey's scores in democracy indices; in its 2013 report, Freedom

House lowered Turkey's civil liberties score from 3 to 4 (where 1 is the most free and 7 is the least) "due to the pretrial detention of thousands of individuals—including Kurdish activists, journalists, union leaders, students, and military officers—in campaigns that many believe to be politically motivated. The conduct of the trials, together with mass arrests of Kurdish activists in other cases, prompted widespread concern about the government's commitment to civil liberties and the rule of law."<sup>11</sup>

As the parameters of civil-military relations changed through sham trials, the AKP-Gulen alliance set to redesign the judicial system. In a constitutional referendum in 2010, both the party and the movement ran a joint campaign in favor of a yes vote. Fethullah Gulen, who traditionally denied any involvement in politics, publicly condoned the reform package that would restructure the higher courts and judicial councils and allow for further penetration of the judiciary by the Gulenists. Indicating the significance of this constitutional reform for the movement, Gulen suggested that even the dead should rise from their graves to vote in favor of the package. The referendum passed with 58 percent of the votes, and soon the Gulen movement secured its control over the supreme judicial council and several chambers of the higher courts<sup>12</sup> in addition to the special courts, which comprised Gulenists' stronghold in the judiciary.

A pro-government columnist admitted that the Gulen movement had grown 15 fold under Erdogan's premiership between 2003 and 2014.<sup>13</sup> In a recent interview, Hakan Yavuz affirmed this assessment with the claim that the AKP government had indeed ceded the control of the ministries of education, internal affairs and judiciary to the Gulen movement<sup>14</sup>, allowing the colonization of the state by its partner. Perhaps more importantly, Erdogan himself in the early stages of the conflict reproached the movement for being ungrateful to the AKP, which had given whatever the Gulen movement asked for.<sup>15</sup> In short, the AKP-Gulen alliance replaced merit with ideological and political criteria in bureaucratic appointments to replace the remnants of the secular establishment while substantially inflating the Gulenists' presence in the state.

As the rule of law and meritocracy deteriorated, so did fundamental rights and civil liberties. In the course of the AKP-Gulen alliance, the pressure over the media mounted, the number of incarcerated journalists increased, self-censorship soared, and Turkey's rankings in media freedom indices rapidly deteriorated, as shown in Figure 1. By April 2012, there were more than 100 journalists in prison. The government, in the meantime, publicly defended the detention of journalists in cases like KCK and *Ergenekon*.<sup>16</sup>

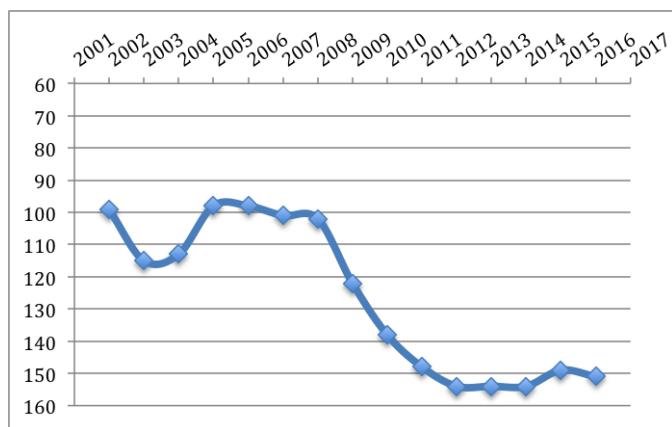


Figure 1 Turkey's rankings in Reporters without Borders Index

The AKP-Gulen alliance, however, soon disintegrated as the two Islamic movements clashed over the distribution of power in the "new Turkey." In fact, at various time both Cemil Cicek and Besir Atalay, two prominent figures in the AKP, complained of Gulen movement's growing involvement in decision-making processes.<sup>17</sup> The conflict rapidly escalated as the Gulen movement, entrenched in security forces and the judiciary, attempted to undermine Erdogan's power through a series of investigations, including a graft probe in late 2013, while Erdogan in retribution cut the major sources of social capital and finance for the Gulen movement, curtailed its media power, and weakened the movement's presence in the judiciary and security forces.

Fighting its former ally deeply entrenched in the state apparatus, the AKP government resorted to

unconstitutional measures and bypassed the rule of law as it set to eradicate the Gulenist cadres from the state. The power struggle between former allies further undermined civil liberties, independence of the judiciary<sup>18</sup> (or whatever was left of it), and the rule of law. The government banned Twitter and YouTube prior to 2014 local elections; reshuffled thousands of police officers and prosecutors; passed new legislation to redesign the supreme judicial council; denied access to the satellite systems for pro-Gulen TV stations; seized the property of leading businessmen; and appointed trustees to companies, foundations, universities and newspapers with links to the Gulen movement following the graft probe of December 2013.<sup>19</sup>

The coup attempt on July 15, 2016, according to the AKP, was the Gulenists' final attempt to take over the government. Killing 240 people and injuring more than 2000, the coup attempt allowed the government to declare emergency law sidelining the European Convention of Human Rights and the constitution. In a series of executive decrees, President Erdogan and the cabinet suspended 88,056 civil servants, including 27,715 teachers,<sup>20</sup> and expelled more than 40,000 civil servants, including 7,669 police officers, 3,390 judges and prosecutors,<sup>21</sup> and 4,451 military officers for their alleged connections to the coup.

Democratic backsliding gained further momentum under the emergency law, which extended detention period up to 30 days<sup>22</sup> for more than 40,000 people placed under detention. Of those detained, 20,355 have been arrested<sup>23</sup>, 105 of whom are journalists awaiting trial. In the meantime, the government shut down 170 TV stations, newspapers, magazines, and news agencies, including pro-Kurdish, pro-secular and left wing media.<sup>24</sup> The decrees also closed down 35 health care facilities, 934 schools, 109 dormitories, 104 foundations, 1125 associations, 15 universities and 19 trade unions.<sup>25</sup> In an attempt to redesign the institutions of higher education, an executive decree issued on October 29 canceled rector elections in public universities and expelled more than 1,200 academics from their positions.<sup>26</sup> Businesses were not immune to this crackdown as the courts appointed trustees to 94

companies, with alleged ties to the Gulen movement, by the end of July;<sup>27</sup> the ministry of finance placed injunction on the property of more than 100,000 individuals in the month following the coup attempt.<sup>28</sup> As confirmed by the deputy prime minister on October 19, more than 115,000 people have been subject to post-coup investigations.<sup>29</sup>

While these measures seriously threaten the rule of law, civil liberties, and property rights and might cause irreparable damage to individuals, whose connection with the Gulen movement or the coup attempt is not yet proven in a court of law, ongoing purges also put substantial pressure over the Turkish state and its capacity to provide public goods such as security, education, and health care for its people.

Turkey's two Islamic movements, motivated by the creation of an Islamic state and society, successfully ended tutelary democracy guided by the secular establishment.<sup>30</sup> However, in the course of this process, the AKP-Gulen alliance weakened all sources of potential checks and balances – democratic and undemocratic alike – over the executive: the secular military, judiciary, mainstream media, and civil society. Paradoxically, their success has not only led to the AKP's political hegemony and Gulenist colonization of the state but also a bitter power struggle between former allies. This power struggle in turn undermined both democratic politics and state's governance capacity in Turkey.

*Author's acknowledgments: I would like to thank Berk Esen for his comments and suggestions on an earlier draft of the essay.*

(Endnotes)

1 Esen, Berk and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1581-1606.

2 Ciddi, Sinan and Berk Esen "Turkey's Republican People's Party: Politics of Opposition under a Dominant Party System," *Turkish Studies*, 15:3, (2014) 419-441

3 Gumuscu, Sebnem. "The Emerging Predominant Party System in Turkey." *Government and Opposition*, 48, no. 2 (2013): 223–244; Keyman E. Fuat and Sebnem Gumuscu, *Democracy, Identity and Foreign Policy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan 2014; Müftüler-Bac, Meltem, and E. Fuat Keyman. "The Era of Dominant-party Politics." *Journal of Democracy* 23, no. 1 (2012): 85–99; Ayan Musil, Pelin. "Emergence of a dominant party system after multipartyism: theoretical implications from the case of the AKP in Turkey." *South European Society and Politics* 20.1 (2015): 71-92; Sayari, Sabri. "Back to a Predominant Party System: The November 2015 Snap Election in Turkey." *South European Society and Politics* (2016): 1-18.

4 Yavuz, M. Hakan, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2003: 189

5 Yavuz suggests that Gulen's ultimate goal is to become a political and cultural bridge between the state and the conservative middle class and upwardly mobile technocrats (2003, p. 199). Some Islamist groups in Turkey contend that "by gradually penetrating the state Gulen and others will be able to transform its Kemalist and antireligious foundation and render impossible any repeat of 'Jacobin' assault on Islam that Mustafa Kemal and his coterie carried out" (2003, p. 202).

6 Quoted in Sharon-Krespin, Rachel. "Fethullah Gülen's Grand Ambition." *Middle East Quarterly* Winter (2009), pp. 55-66.

7 Yavuz, M. Hakan, *Toward and Islamic Enlightenment*, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013.

8 Yavuz, 2013: 213.

9 Doğan, Pınar, and Dani Rodrik. *Yargı, Cemaat ve Bir Darbe Kurgusunun İcyüzü*. İstanbul: Destek Yayinevi, 2014.

10 European Commission Progress Report for Turkey, 2010

11 Freedom House, [www.freedomhouse.org](http://www.freedomhouse.org)

12 The constitutional reform package permitted the election of a new HSYK (Supreme Council of Judges and Prosecutors). Prior to the elections the bureaucrats of the Ministry of Justice prepared and circulated a list of candidates. Not surprisingly, every single name on the list was elected while no other candidate supported by other groups—Kemalists and non-Kemalists—were elected to the council. "The HSYK has the authority to conduct the following procedures concerning the civil and administrative judiciary judges and prosecutors: Admission to the profession, appointment, transference, granting temporary authorization, promotion, allocation as first class, distributing cadres, making decisions about those who are not considered suitable to continue to perform their profession, rendering decisions about disciplinary punishments, suspension from office; and to issue circulars exclusively about the above mentioned subjects and the inspections, researches, examinations and investigations regarding the judges and prosecutors." <http://www.hcjp.gov.tr/About.aspx>

13 <http://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/AbdulkadirSelvi-once-sulhname-sonra-operasyon-46996>

14 <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/prof-dr-hakan-yavuz-cemaatciler-savasi-kaybetmis-naziler-gibi-hocaya-karsi-isyan-var-40203038>

15 Erdogan's speech available at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-m9NL8xz\\_Hw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-m9NL8xz_Hw)

16 In his speech in the Council of Europe in 2011 Erdogan defended the detainments of two journalists (Ahmet Sik and Nedim Sener) by likening Sik's unpublished book to a bomb: "It is a crime to use a bomb, but it is also a crime to use materials from which a bomb is made. If informed that all materials needed to construct a bomb have been placed in a certain location, wouldn't the security forces collect these materials?" Quoted in "Turkish PM rebuffs criticism over press freedom" *Hürriyet Daily News*, April 13 2011. Erdogan in a later interview sustained this view and claimed that some books are indeed more effective than bombs. "Erdoğan: Bazi kitaplar bombadan daha etkili" (Some books have greater impact than bombs) Available at: <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/id/25222191/#storyContinued>

17 In an interview with Hakan Yavuz in 2010, a high-ranking advisor to the Ministry of Internal Affairs states: "there is an increasing anger against the [Gulen] movement within the Erdogan government because they interfere with almost every regulation and appointment. I think the perception that the Turkish police force is heavily recruited by the followers of the movement is very dangerous for the credibility of the police force in the country." Yavuz, 2013: 218

18 Ozbudun, Ergun. "Turkey's Judiciary and the Drift toward Competitive Authoritarianism." *International Spectator* 50, no. 2 (2015): 42–55.

19 <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2016/06/turkey-unemployed-youth-demand-trustee-post.html#ixzz4CUU1lGwM>

20 <http://www.diken.com.tr/darbe-girisimi-canikli-27-bin-715-ogretmen-ihrac-edildi-9-bin-465i-aciga-alindi/>

21 As of September 2, 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler-turkiye-37253156>

22 <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/07/20160723-8.htm>

23 As of August 17, 2016. <http://www.bloomberg.com/haberler/haber/1907559-yildirim-gozalti-sayisi-40-bin-tutuklu-sayisi-20-bin-355>

24 As of October 29, 2016. See Turkish Journalists Association's press release at <http://www.tgc.org.tr/aciklamalar/1114-tgc-cumhuriyet-e-operasyonu-protesto-ediyoruz.html>

25 <http://t24.com.tr/haber/kapatilan-dernek-hastane-sendika-universite-okul-ve-yurtlar,351464>

26 <http://www.resmigazete.gov.tr/eskiler/2016/10/20161029-4.htm>

27 <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2016/07/28/13-sirkete-daha-kayyum-atandi>

28 <http://t24.com.tr/haber/mal-varligina-el-koyma-nasil-uygulanıyor,355039>

29 <http://www.trthaber.com/haber/gundem/medyanin-feto-mucadelesine-katki-saglamasi-onemli-277811.html>

30 Esen, Berk and Sebnem Gumuscu, "Rising competitive authoritarianism in Turkey," *Third World Quarterly* 37, no. 9 (2016): 1581–1606.



# Forward-Facing and Behind the Scenes: Shifts in Political Islam in Post-July 15 Turkey

By Kristin Fabbe, Harvard Business School

It is well known that the failed July 2016 coup in Turkey was quickly followed with an attempt at a full-scale purge of the Gülen movement (and other alleged enemies), hollowing out much of the state bureaucracy. Who will fill the void and what role, if any, will religion play in this process? With these questions in mind, this memo draws from a longer working paper to briefly address several facets of the shifting politicization of Islam in Turkey. First, I document some of the forward-facing changes in Turkey's official Islam via the overt politicization of the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşler Başkanlığı*) against the Gülen movement, focusing on the period after July 15th. Publicly, Erdoğan is undoubtedly working the levers of official Islam through the Diyanet to shore-up a display of national unity. Second, I suggest that behind the scenes other dynamics are at play. The potential for competition between remaining sects, religious orders, communities and brotherhoods (*cemaats and tarikats*) as well as hints that a change in official state policy towards these groups may be underway are two additional factors likely to shift the landscape of political Islam in the near future.

## The Changing Face of Official Islam

In an earlier memo for POMEPS in February 2015 I argued that "problems could arise if the AKP decides – and is able – to leverage the Diyanet as a political weapon against the Gülen Movement."<sup>1</sup> Immediately after the failed coup in July 2016, I wrote in the Washington Post's *Monkey Cage* that "It seems that time has now come."<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as I argue in a book manuscript currently under review, recent claims about increases in the Diyanet's influence under AKP rule have been somewhat misleading, because they truncate metrics, ignoring a long trajectory of Diyanet growth that began over half a century ago.<sup>3</sup> Here my contention is that such metrics, truncated or not, are also somewhat unsatisfying: a large bureaucracy is not

necessarily a politicized one. Rather than simply looking at budgets and head-counts of religious civil servants, as I do in previous work, in this memo I give attention to what the Diyanet's key actors are saying and doing. Actions and statements by Diyanet President Mehmet Görmez and other state officials unquestioningly reveal the politicization of the Diyanet. Indeed, the AKP is now using the Diyanet – long a relatively apolitical arm of the state bureaucracy – to actively further its partisan agenda of rooting out and discrediting particular religious enemies. I back this claim using several types of evidence including texts from recent Friday sermons (*hutbeler*), a brief overview of the proceedings of the Extraordinary Religious Council (*Din Şurası*) held in August 2016, and publicized interviews and official television statements by Diyanet President Görmez and AKP officials. I also draw from other press sources and currents in Turkish popular culture to suggest what the future might hold.

## The July-15<sup>th</sup> "Rush to the Mosques" and Friday Prayers

Turkish and foreign media both documented the Diyanet's staff and official state mosques playing a key role during the night of July 15. Imams began voicing prayers for martyrs as early as 11:00 PM, called the incident "fitne," (or incitement) and urged people to resist the coup attempt. In an exclusive interview with the Turkish private TV channel NTV on August 29, Diyanet President Görmez later said that he had learned of coup attempt around 10 PM and quickly established a crisis management desk together with his colleagues. According to Görmez, the group believed their duty as Diyanet employees should not be confined to simply performing ritual prayers. After "consulting with their friends" the crisis committee "... decided to stand in solidarity with the nation by sending messages to Diyanet staff, running to the mosques, and reading/leading prayer (sela)." Görmez stated that, "We read/led prayer (sela) to lay claim to the law of the nation."

*All of Turkey's mosques were like this until morning. We feel fortunate that we were able to offer this small bit of support while our nation was eradicating a threat to its very existence.<sup>4</sup>* The Diyanet's prayers for the martyred continued into the following day. In an official statement on July 19, the Diyanet announced that it would not provide religious services, including prayers and funeral ceremonies, for the putschists/coup plotters.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond this initial rush to the mosques, the Diyanet's politicization gained momentum in the weeks following the coup attempt as evidenced in the undertones of official Friday prayers (*hutbeler*). The July 29th sermon, entitled "Exploiting the sacred values of the religion is the greatest depravity," makes no direct reference to the Gülen movement or Gülen himself; but it implicitly besmirched Gülen's leadership, reminding followers that "We should not surrender our heart, sense, soul, mind, ideas and will to others. We should not give even the slightest credit to those who call on people to become their subjects in lieu of Allah."<sup>6</sup> The August 5th sermon "Worshipping is exclusively (done) to Allah" included similar messages, instructing pious Turks that "[w]e must not pay attention to those who promise (us) the 'letter of emancipation' and claim that the truth is exclusive to them."<sup>7</sup> The August 12th sermon contained statements that appeared to be even more directly aimed against the movement:

*Monotheistic belief constitutes the righteous and straight path. On this path, obedience, submission and worship are confined to Allah, who is "the one." On this path there is no polytheism, depravity or sycophancy, [instead] there is cohesion between one's deeds and discourses and the wearing of one's heart on his/her sleeve. (...) On this right path, no one has the authority to legitimize or forbid anything in line with his personal desires. (...) Both those who attempt to found a new religion by prioritizing themselves over the Quran and Sunnah and those who blindly follow such persons are on a void and futile journey.<sup>8</sup>*

Finally, the August 19th sermon also implicitly accused the Gülen movement of "stealing moral values by exploiting

Islam" and warned the people against being deceived through the use of the holy religion.<sup>9</sup>

### The Extraordinary Religious Council (*Din Şurası*)

The political content of official Friday sermons is relatively tame and muted compared to the statements made at the Extraordinary Religious Council held in early August. From August 3 to 4, the Religious Council (*Din Şurası*), a body that normally convenes once every five years, held the first extraordinary meeting in its history. The agenda was almost singularly focused on discrediting the Gülen movement. President Erdoğan, Speaker of the Parliament İsmail Kahraman, Deputy Prime Minister Kurtulmuş and Diyanet President Görmez, as well as academicians, deans of the faculties of theology from various universities, scholars of Fiqih and other high-ranking Diyanet officials attended the two-day meeting.

Görmez took an explicitly harsh approach against Gülenists in his speech. He criticized the movement for its hypocrisy, its double speak, and its immoral and covert tactics. He claimed that it had now become clear that the organization was operating a massive scam under the guise of educational volunteers committed to principles of love and tolerance. Even worse, in Görmez's opinion, was that the group had capitalized on the recent global surge in Islamophobia to try to endear itself to West, engaging in interfaith dialogue for the sake of "political engineering efforts."<sup>10</sup> Deputy Prime Minister Kurtulmuş dubbed the movement "the most wicked, despicable and excellently organized group of infidelity and treachery that the Islamic world has ever seen since the earliest days of its history." The government, he said, would show no mercy to those linked to this group, and he asked Islamic scholars to "scratch out the group from the history of Islam."<sup>11</sup> Erdoğan derogatorily likened the Gülen movement to the medieval Hashshashin/Hashashin (*Haşhaşiler*) religious order. He claimed the groups shared a set of characteristics: they both possess a good education; they have the ability to hide their identity for a long time; they show undisputable obedience to their leader, and; they are willing to use violent tactics.<sup>12</sup>

The *Din Şurası* meeting culminated in a twenty-article declaration presented by Görmez. The final declaration set an extremely harsh tone against the Gülen movement, as evidence by its first article, “We Do Not Consider FETÖ/PDY to be a Religious Organization”:

*FETÖ—which considers every path legitimate en route to achieving its secret and dark objectives, exploits religion and religious sentiments; which steals our nation’s alms and blessings (sadaka, zekat and kurban), snatching them from our children; which distorts and destroys the basic values and concepts of our religion; which creates opportunities and resources for itself through un-Islamic and immoral approaches and behaviors, depravity, malice, lies and plots; which attempts to take the nation’s future under its control by infiltrating all state organs and which was caught red-handed by the nation during the last coup attempt—cannot be named as a religious organization. The ringleader of this structure cannot be considered a religious scholar/pundit or a great/esteemed teacher (hocafeendi).<sup>13</sup>*

### A New Legal Order?

Interestingly, the last four articles of the declaration from the *Din Şurası* went beyond the meeting’s obvious aim of countering and vilifying the Gülen movement to suggest that Turkey’s official Islamic bureaucracy might begin taking a more active role in religious regulation, especially with respect to unofficial religious orders, communities and brotherhood. These groups were officially banned by Kemalist regime in 1925, but their presence is more like an open secret in Turkish society, as they have been functioning underground and in the open to various degrees ever since. Article 18 of the declaration affirmed the Diyanet’s aim of doing “joint works” with other socio-religious organizations to ensure that they do not divert themselves from the Islamic “mainstream” and to make sure they become more transparent and accountable. The penultimate article of the declaration even foreshadowed changes in the legal architecture of religion-state relations, albeit in a vague fashion, remarking: “...This

situation obliges us the revisit/reconsider relations among religion, state and society in our country, including the establishment of its appropriate legal basis.”<sup>14</sup> Such sentiments were later echoed, again ambiguously, in Görmez’s aforementioned August 29 interview:

*Many of the cemaat’s in Turkey have a long tradition and they all should not be put into one single category. . . In order for [other cemaats] not to repeat the same mistake [as the Gülen Movement], each of them should be self regulating. In the past, two ways of getting rid of all the cemaats were discussed: banning all of them or making them official by subordinating them to the Diyanet. Neither of these two ways is right. The right method is to set up mechanisms to make them transparent and stick to the principles of merit and loyalty as well as to establish their own self-discipline to ensure that they do not veer from the true path of Islam.<sup>15</sup>*

At this point, one can only guess how successive purges of the Gülen movement will ultimately impact the state’s relationship with other religious orders. The overt politicization of the Diyanet and the foreshadowing of a potential shift in official state policy toward religious orders are only the first rumblings of change. With reliable informational becoming increasingly scarce, we enter the realm of speculation.

Some believe that the weakening of the Gülen movement *vis-à-vis* the state will intensify competition between other religious orders. For example, even before the attempted coup in July, information was swirling in various parts of the Turkish press about competition among the numerous other clandestine groups and religious orders allegedly vying for power and entry points into the state bureaucracy as the Gülenists were being weakened and pushed out. Mehmet Yilmaz’s 22 December 2015 article in *Hürriyet*, “The Ministry Where Tarikats Run Wild”, listed the following groups as already competing for power—not in the Diyanet, where one might suspect—but in the Ministry of the Interior and the Police: *Milli Damarcilar, KÖZcüler, Okuyucular, Yazicilar, Süleymancilar, Milli*

*Görüşüler, Hak Yolcular, Menzilciler, Kırkinci Hocacilar.*<sup>16</sup> Similarly, according to an interview with several former, self-proclaimed Kemalist police chiefs that were forcibly sent into retirement by the government last year, the vacuum within the national police (Emniyet) was filled by the members of other religious orders and brotherhoods, including some offshoots of the *Nur* movement, *Menzilciler, Yazicilar* and *KÖZcüler*. The police chiefs claimed that “Only the name of the given *cemaat* now occupying the police force has changed, nothing else.”<sup>17</sup>

A second potential outcome is a sharp and prolonged increase in state regulation focused on the intersection of religious orders and bureaucratic appointments. Shortly after the failure of the July 15th coup, the online magazine *Zaytung*, which is popular with Turkish young adults and known for its tongue-in-cheek style, ran a piece parodying the upheaval in the Turkish bureaucracy that suggested just this. Using deadpan humor, the mock-article entitled “September 1 Deadline Announced for those Cemaat Members Seeking to Submit Applications for State Positions” reported that because of a coup attempt by the “cemaat that had spent the last 30 years infiltrating various civil service positions with the help of the ruling party... the government was now compelled to be more sensitive to other religious groups.” According to the article, the civil service positions emptied after the failed coup would be refilled in a balanced way by drawing from other religious orders through an exam administered by the official Measurement, Selection and Placement Center (*ÖSYM/ Ölçme, Seçme ve Yerleştirme Merkezi*). A new Cemaat Assessment and Placement Center (*CÖYM*) also would be set up by the state “to objectively administer examinations for members of religious orders interested in joining the bureaucracy.” The article further joked that a quota system would be used to divvy up state positions amongst the various religious orders and included the following made-up statement by a Deputy Prime Minister:

*There is nothing to be alarmed about friends. In the state, continuity is essential. Turkey has a religious tradition of easily being able to fill its state ranks. Based on the government's recent woes, though, we have found that having a single cemaat able to take-*

*up government positions without public competition is closely related to favoritism. From now on, we are no longer going to allow this type of monopolization. For however many cemaats and tarikats there are remaining, they'll take ÖYSM's exam and will be required to fulfill the necessary requirements. We will then put them in appropriate positions as we see fit.*<sup>18</sup>

All kidding aside, the sardonic article from *Zaytung* begs the question of what is next for the Turkish state and its relationship with religion, especially unofficial religious orders. My hunch is that *Zaytung*'s humor may contain a grain of truth about how the Turkish state might pivot with respect to such organizations. The Diyanet is now clearly politicized. In a next step, perhaps something like *Zaytung*'s fictional Cemaat Assessment and Placement Center (*CÖYM*) will be made a reality, lest history repeat itself yet again in Turkey.

#### (Endnotes)

1 Fabbe, Kristin. [“Turkey’s Secularization in Reverse?”](#) In *Rethinking Nation and Nationalism*. No. 14, 17–19. POMEPS Studies. Washington, D.C.: Project on Middle East Political Science, 2015.

2 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/07/19/why-there-are-so-many-conspiracy-theories-about-the-turkish-coup/>

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6 <http://ankara.diyanet.gov.tr/Sayfalar/contentdetail.aspx?ContentId=295&MenuCategory=Kurumsal>

- 7 <http://ankara.diyanet.gov.tr/Sayfalar/contentdetail.aspx?ContentId=300&MenuCategory=Kurumsal>
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- 9 [http://webdosyasp.diyanet.gov.tr/UserFiles/aksaray/UserFiles/Files/M%C3%BCCmin ve Emanet Bilinci\\_ad7b5354-360f-4549-a938-9bba482f7bcd.pdf](http://webdosyasp.diyanet.gov.tr/UserFiles/aksaray/UserFiles/Files/M%C3%BCCmin ve Emanet Bilinci_ad7b5354-360f-4549-a938-9bba482f7bcd.pdf)
- 10 For a recording of the event and speech see: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5xMF18SHdU>
- 11 [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzsNl\\_1N4rs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gzsNl_1N4rs)
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## Good things don't last forever: Arab uprisings and the Turkish model

*By Ekrem Karakoc, Binghamton University (SUNY)*

In the aftermath of the Arab uprisings, many policymakers and scholars, from leading American commentators to political elites in the MENA region, pointed to Turkey as a political model for transitioning countries. This debate produced a number of studies examining different aspects of the Turkish model, ranging from domestic politics and foreign policy activism under the AKP to public opinion regarding Turkey and Turkish foreign policy in the Middle East (Altunisik, 2005; Göksel, 2014; Kaddorah, 2010; Kubicek, 2013; Özcan, Köse, & Karakoç, 2015; Perekli, 2012; Tol, 2012; Tuğal, 2016).

However, not unlike previous discussions of the Turkish model in the 1990s in regard to the then-

newly independent Turkic states in Central Asia, these discussions have not survived long, and proponents have lost their previous enthusiasm. Several explanations have been offered for the decline of Turkey's appeal in the region. First, the Arab uprisings have failed to bring about the desired political and economic developments. Second, Turkey has also been perceived as an ineffective actor in pushing for democratic and peaceful solutions in the region, whether in Egypt, Libya or Syria. Third, the growing ethnic and sectarian tensions in the country, the stagnation of its economy, the curbing of political liberties, especially since the Gezi Park protests and the criticism of its increasing authoritarianism and the constant portrayal of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as an authoritarian leader in the

international media have led to increasing criticism of the Turkish model (Taşpinar, 2014; Tuğal, 2016).

These explanations account for why the Turkish model has lost its earlier appeal, but they do not explain the persistence of substantial support for it in some countries. While positive assessments of the Turkish model have declined precipitously in Turkish and international media, this study argues that the decline in popularity of this model has not been uniform in the Arab streets, with variations across the MENA region. As we show with our public-opinion survey in Tunisia, perception of Turkey has remained largely positive despite Turkey's continued move toward authoritarianism. Turkish popularity in the region has been less affected by domestic developments in part because, relative to the monarchies, military regimes and single-party regimes that do not even allow free elections, the Turkish political system may still be more appealing to the people in the region.

In addition, the existence of some positive perceptions of Turkey as a model country should not be surprising, as the economic, political, and social demands (bread, freedom and human dignity) of the Arab uprisings, persist in these countries, with no prospect of improvement in the short term. In contrast to Tunisia, the Turkish model does not inspire most of the population in Lebanon. We argue that the ramifications of the Syrian Civil War, especially the impact of the refugee crisis, on domestic Lebanese politics has significantly reduced support for the Turkish model despite the relatively high evaluation of its economic and political systems.

Regardless of the drop and variation in support for the Turkish model across the region, an important question remains unanswered: To what extent has the Turkish model been received positively, and why did it appeal to people in the Arab Middle East in the first place? As potential explanations, some have pointed to the democratic nature of Turkey as a Muslim-majority country, while others have noted that the secular character of the Turkish political system in a relatively religious country serves as a model for these countries. Others have

asserted that it is Turkey's economic performance that is most appealing to the people of the region. Taking these different factors into account, Ennis and Momanı (2013, p. 1130) argue that the Turkish model has caused Arab perceptions of Turkey to shift from seeing it as a "military state," with negative imperial legacies, to a "trading state," a modern regional hub of economic productivity. Or could it be that, as some argue, the Turkish model only appeals to supporters of political Islam?

Using original surveys in Lebanon and Tunisia, this study demonstrates that support for the Turkish model has been particularistic. In Lebanon, the Turkish model has little support beyond Sunni Muslims, whereas it has almost no support among Shia and low support among Christians and Druze. In Tunisia, it finds substantial support among secular Tunisians as well as Ennahda supporters. Our surveys show a near consensus in both countries regarding Turkey's strong economy, while views differ regarding its secular and democratic nature. We also show that citizens of both countries are highly critical of Turkey's policy regarding the Syrian conflict, while its policy toward Israel receives relatively substantial support in Tunisia.

### Support for the Turkish Model in Tunisia and Lebanon

We conducted original public-opinion surveys in Tunisia and Lebanon in November 2014 and October 2015, respectively. These two countries provide significant variation in our main variable of interest, but they also reflect ethnic and religious variation in the region. In addition, both countries have been politically and economically affected by political developments surrounding the Arab Uprisings. In particular, Libyan refugees and terror attacks in Tunisia and Syrian refugees in Lebanon remain important political and economic concerns, increasing anxiety regarding the political and economic stability of both countries. Finally, both countries have unfinished democratic transitions and relatively open societies that reduce problems concerning running a public opinion survey in the region.

Our first survey was conducted in Tunisia, right after its

parliamentary election on October 26, 2014. The face-to-face interviews were completed between November 2 and 21, 2014, with a sample of 1,500 adults over the age of 18. Stratified random sampling was adopted to collect data in a country where economic inequalities, as well as urban-rural differences across regions, are substantial. The face-to-face interviews in Lebanon were conducted between October 2 and 26, 2015 with a nationally representative sample of 1,200 adults over the age of 18, using the Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) sampling technique.

To determine the level of positive attitudes toward Turkey, we asked Tunisian and Lebanese respondents two questions, but here we will present only one, as both yield similar findings: "Following the political changes during and after the Arab Uprisings, most people have offered various countries that Middle Eastern countries might consider as models to emulate. Please tell me how positively you would consider the following countries as models for Middle Eastern countries. Please respond on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to 'Not positive at all' and 5 corresponds to 'Very positive.'"<sup>1</sup> We also asked people's attitudes toward three other countries to compare with Turkey..

**Figure 1. Attitudes Regarding the Turkish Model and Three Other Models (%)**

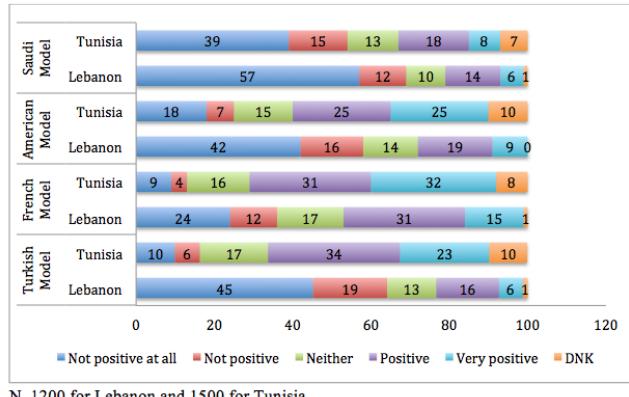


Figure 1 demonstrates how people of Tunisia and Lebanon have different perceptions of the Turkish model. In Tunisia, 57 percent of respondents assess the Turkish model

positively while 16 percent report a negative assessment. Lebanon, on the other hand, offers almost the opposite picture. About 22 percent there view the Turkish model positively , while 64 percent hold a negative view of Turkish model. Looking at the other three countries helps situate these reactions. We find that 62 percent of Tunisians and 46 percent of Lebanese in our survey positively assessed the French model, while 26 percent of Lebanese and 50 percent of Tunisians preferred the American model, and only 22 percent in Lebanon and 26 percent in Tunisia positively viewed the Saudi model.

What factors underlie this disparity? To understand the answer to this question, we have to understand how these views vary across political and sectarian identities in these countries and how the Turkish political and economic system has been perceived by the populations of these countries.

### Political and Sectarian Cleavages and the Turkish Model

When we disaggregate attitudes regarding the Turkish model by domestic political and sectarian groups, we see considerable variation in attitudes, especially in Lebanon, where Sunnis significantly differ from other sectarian groups as shown in Table 1. Fifty-eight percent of Sunnis support the Turkish model, while only 27 percent of them view it negatively. Only 3 percent of Shiites and 10 percent of Maronites hold a positive view of the Turkish model. Support for the Turkish model is a little higher among Orthodox Lebanese, Druze and Catholics – 11 percent, 19 percent and 21 percent, respectively. The negative perception of the Turkish model is spectacularly high among non-Sunni groups. Eighty-one percent of Shiites, 78 percent of Maronites, 84 percent of Eastern Orthodox, 71 percent of Catholics and 65 percent of Druze reject the Turkish model.

**Table 1. Turkey as a Role Model and Favorable Country by Sectarian Groups in Lebanon (%)**

	Sunni (%)	Shiite (%)	Maronite (%)	Orthodox (%)	Catholic (%)	Druze (%)	Other (%)
<b>Positive</b>	57.8	2.9	9.7	10.9	20.8	19.0	10.4
<b>Neither</b>	14.7	15.2	10.6	3.1	6.3	16.0	3.5
<b>Negative</b>	26.6	80.6	77.8	84.4	70.8	65.0	86.2

Note: N. 1,200

In Tunisia, Table 2 suggests that the secular versus religious cleavage is substantial in shaping people's attitudes, but not to the degree observed in Lebanon. Among the more religious Ennahda voters, 72 percent hold a positive attitude toward Turkey, but 57 percent among the more secular Nidaa Tounes party do so. The difference in negative attitudes regarding the model is also less marked, with 22 percent among Nidaa voters and 8 percent among Ennahda voters holding a negative attitude.

The positive evaluation of the Turkish model by Ennahda supporters should not be surprising. The Ennahda leadership endorsed and even stated that they embraced the Turkish model as a role model for the country during their electoral campaign in the 2011 election, but then went silent as criticism toward the Turkish model increased in the West and the region. However, since 2013 the party's leader, Rached Ghannushi, and others have been reluctant to express any criticism of the Turkish model. It is true that Turkey is more popular among Ennahda supporters, but support among secularist parties should not be underestimated. More than half of secularist-party supporters view the Turkish model positively. Goksel (2015) reports that secularist leaders view Turkey as a country in which Islamists and secularists come together and engage in politics. In addition, the Turkish model emerges as a potential example among secularist parties of the coexistence of an Islamist party with the West that Tunisia can embrace.

**Table 2. Turkey as a Role Model and Favorable Country by Islamist and Secularist Parties in Tunisia (%)**

	Nidaa Tounes (%)	Ennahda (%)	Non-Islamist parties (%)
<b>Turkish Model</b>			
<b>Positive</b>	56.6	72.4	53.9
<b>Negative</b>	21.9	8.3	19.6

N. 1500. The percentage of non-voters and no respondents are not represented above.

## Perceptions of Turkey

We have presented empirical evidence for the level of positive attitudes regarding the Turkish model, but doesn't answer why people consider Turkey a model country. We asked the respondents the following questions: "Please tell me to what extent you agree with the following statements about Turkey. Please respond on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to 'I strongly disagree' and 5 corresponds to 'I strongly agree': Turkey has a democratic political system; Turkey has a good economy; Turkey has a secular political system; Turkey is a close ally of the West." These variables are recoded as follows: 1 disagree, 2 somewhat agree and 3 agree.

Tunisians and Lebanese have a similar view of the Turkish economy and its secular political system. Eighty-two percent of Tunisians and 79 percent of Lebanese agree that Turkey has a healthy economy. Around 42 percent of Tunisians and 47 percent of Lebanese agree that Turkey has a secular political system, but 15 percent of the former and 28 percent of the latter disagree.

How do people in the two countries view the Turkish political system? Fifty-four percent of Tunisians and 37 percent of Lebanese agree that Turkey has a democratic political system, while 15 percent of Tunisians and 40 percent of Lebanese disagree. The findings above suggest that Tunisians overwhelmingly consider Turkey to be democratic, while Lebanese are divided on the issue.

**Table 3. The Perception of Turkey in Tunisia and Lebanon**

	Somewhat			
	Disagree (%)	Agree (%)	Agree (%)	DNK (%)
<b>Democratic System</b>				
Tunisia	15.3	11.2	54.2	19.4
Lebanon	40.3	15.3	36.2	8.3
<b>Good Economy</b>				
Tunisia	3.0	6.7	82.1	8.3
Lebanon	8.0	8.5	78.5	5.0
<b>Secular System</b>				
Tunisia	14.7	10.7	41.7	32.9
Lebanon	27.6	20.7	45.6	6.2
<b>Western ally</b>				
Tunisia	17.6	12.4	45.7	24.3
Lebanon	8.8	7.9	77.3	6.0

Note: N. 1,550

Another significant divergence emerges regarding whether Turkey is a close ally of the West. Seventy-seven percent of Lebanese agree with the statement and only 9 percent disagree. Interestingly, only 46 percent of Tunisians see Turkey a close ally of the West, and 18 percent think the opposite. Except for the question regarding the Turkish economy, we observe a significant variation within and across both countries regarding the perception of the Turkish political system and its relations with the West. In order further to study this, we disaggregate these perceptions by political and sectarian identity.

### Perception of Turkey and Identities

In Lebanon, we found a significant divergence across sectarian groups in views about Turkey. Sixty-one percent of Sunnis, but only 34 percent of Shiites, 21 percent of Maronites, 19 percent of Orthodox, 29 percent of Catholics and 33 percent of Druze believe that Turkey has a democratic system. However, this substantial difference in views between Sunnis and Shiites disappears regarding the secular nature of the Turkish political system: 56 percent of both groups agree that Turkey has a secular system. The figures are around 35 percent among Christian groups and 32 percent among Druze. As for the economy question, 91 percent of Sunnis and Druze believe that Turkey has a strong economy, but this declines to 65 percent among Shiites, 78 among Maronites and 73 percent among Orthodox and Catholics. Eighty-one percent of Sunnis and 85 percent of Shiites believe that Turkey is a close ally of the West, but the figures are only

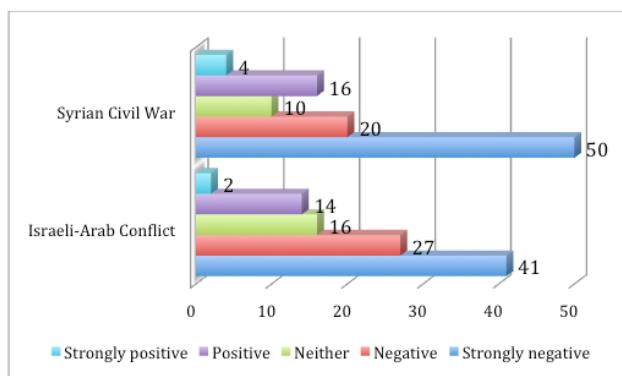
68, 69 and 73 percent among Maronites, Orthodox and Catholics, respectively. Interestingly, Druze agrees with this claim more than any other group, with 93 percent.

In Tunisia, we find that political identities have less impact on the perception of Turkish democracy and economic performance. Supporters of all three parties agree with the statement that Turkey has a good economy. Eighty-three percent of Nidaa and 87 percent of Ennahda supporters affirm this statement. Fifty-one percent of Nidaa and 47 percent of Ennahda supporters agree that Turkey is a close ally of the West. A slightly higher number of non-Islamist-party supporters agree, 54 percent.

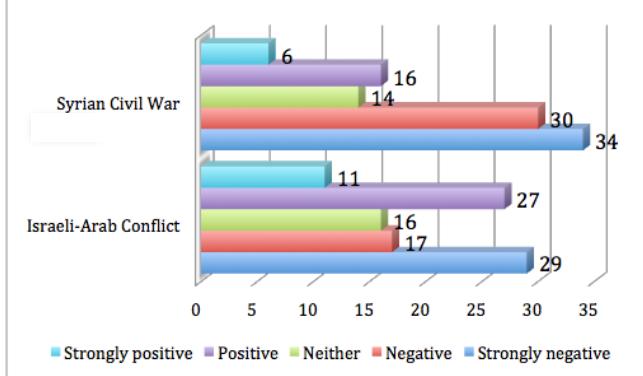
Regarding whether Turkey has a democratic political system, Ennahda supporters exceed Nidaa supporters, 72 versus 51 percent. However, minorities of both groups view the Turkish system as secular: 46 percent of Nidaa voters and 48 percent of Ennahda voters view Turkey as a secular regime. As for non-Islamist-party voters, 53 percent of them view Turkey as a democratic country, and 39 percent of them as a secular regime.

### Attitudes regarding Turkish Foreign Policy on the Israeli-Arab and Syrian Conflicts

Turkey's popularity is tied to its Israeli-Arab policy (Dal & Erşen, 2014), while its decline is associated with Turkish foreign policy on the Syrian conflict. However, we do not have any empirical evidence for either assertion in the literature, to the best of our knowledge. To see how Turkish foreign policy on these two issues is assessed, we asked about people's attitudes regarding Turkish foreign policy on these two conflicts. We asked them: "How would you evaluate Turkish foreign policy toward the conflict in Syria? Please respond on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to 'Strongly negative' and 5 corresponds to 'Strongly positive.' And how would you evaluate Turkish foreign policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Please respond on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 corresponds to 'Strongly negative' and 5 corresponds to 'Strongly positive.'"

**Figure 2. Attitudes Regarding Turkish Foreign Policy in Lebanon**

N. 1200.

**Figure 3. Attitudes Regarding Turkish Foreign Policy in Tunisia (%)**

N. 1500.

A close comparison of Figures 2 and 3 shows that Turkey's Israeli-Arab policy finds more support in Tunisia than in Lebanon. Thirty-eight percent of Tunisians support Turkish foreign policy regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict, whereas only 16 percent of Lebanese do so. As expected, both publics are very critical of Turkish policy regarding the Syrian civil war, which receives similarly low positive scores in both countries, only 20 percent in Lebanon and 22 percent in Tunisia. The negative assessment of Turkish policy regarding the Syrian conflict is dominant in both countries: 70 percent in Lebanon and 64 percent in Tunisia.

## Conclusion

This research shows that, despite Turkey's move away from democracy, positive attitudes toward Turkey persist in Tunisia, where the Turkish model is regarded highly only

by Sunnis. Interestingly, despite the differences regarding the Turkish model in the two countries, there are some similarities and substantive positive attitudes regarding Turkey's political system and economic performance. Tunisians and Lebanese with different political and sectarian identities hold relatively similar positive attitudes regarding Turkey's economy and relationship with the West. Even though a substantial percentage of citizens of both countries consider the Turkish political system to be democratic and secular, there is not much enthusiasm for Turkey in Lebanon, unlike in Tunisia. As well, we find that support for Turkish foreign policy regarding the Israeli-Arab conflict and the Syrian civil war is low in both countries, with a significant variation in support across Lebanese sectarian groups, but less variation across Tunisian political groups.

If the findings hold in other MENA countries, we would expect support for the Turkish model to be low or only exist among political Islamist or Sunni groups in countries with Shia-dominated regimes. Indeed, our research on Iran and Masoud et al.'s (2015) findings on Egypt provide empirical evidence for the findings here. This research also suggests that citizens of countries in the region or supporters of Islamic parties may not be aware of Turkey's democratic deficiencies and repressive policies toward the secular political opposition. This may be because civil and political liberties are more restricted in their own countries than in Turkey, because of their sympathy for the AKP as an Islamist party, or because Islamist groups in particular may consider the AKP a role model. Regardless of the reason – which future studies may be able to determine more precisely – this research shows that the region will keep looking for political models in the future, and we hope that the region finds a better model than Turkey today.

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## **Identity politics**

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# Piety, Intimacy, and Emotions: Political Symbolism of the AKP Government

By Senem Aslan, Bates College

In August 2013, then-prime minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan began to cry during a live television broadcast as a letter written by the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood politician Mohammed el-Baltagy was being read. The dramatic letter was addressed to el-Baltagy's deceased daughter killed by Egyptian security forces during the violent protests against the military coup that ousted the Muslim Brotherhood from power. The cameras zoomed in on Erdoğan for several minutes as he cried. When the moderator asked what made him so emotional, Erdoğan stated that the poem made him think about his own children who could not see their father adequately while growing up because he was working so hard for his political cause. He added that he was moved by el-Baltagy's maturity in approaching life after death and his daughter's martyrdom.<sup>1</sup>

This was not the first or the last time Erdoğan appeared emotional on TV. Contradicting the typical image of a tough authoritarian strongman, Erdoğan has been seen crying many times in public. In 2007, he cried at the parliament while listening to a poem by Mehmet Akif Ersoy, an Islamist-nationalist poet who wrote the Turkish national anthem.<sup>2</sup> In 2009, he cried during an interview on TV while reciting a nationalist poem.<sup>3</sup> In 2010, he could not hold his tears back at the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) group meeting while talking about executions by the military after the 1980 coup.<sup>4</sup> Such emotional displays became more pronounced, finding more publicity in the media after the Gezi protests. In 2014, the AKP's election campaign song filled his eyes with tears.<sup>5</sup> In 2015 he cried with his wife in Albania as they listened to a poem by a student during a mosque's inauguration ceremony.<sup>6</sup> The cameras zoomed in on Erdoğan's eyes once more when brimmed with tears listening to a student reciting a poem during the opening ceremony of the Diyanet Center of America in Maryland in April 2016.<sup>7</sup> Recently, Erdoğan broke down in tears while

attending a funeral for his former campaign manager and others who were killed in the violence during the failed coup attempt in July 2016. He had to cut his speech short because he was too emotional.<sup>8</sup> He has also provoked his audience to cry with his emotional speeches. While speaking at a conference, he brought many to tears when he asked for soil to be taken from the grave of an Ottoman soldier in Myanmar's Arakan to be put in his grave.<sup>9</sup>

Other prominent members of the AKP have also cried in public several times. In a 2015 election campaign video, party leader and former prime minister Ahmet Davutoğlu could be seen in tears hugging a Palestinian man in Gaza.<sup>10</sup> At an inauguration ceremony, AKP politician Bülent Arınç could not contain his tears while giving a speech that also made Davutoğlu cry.<sup>11</sup> Melih Gökçek, Abdullah Gül, Ali Babacan, and Abdulkadir Aksu were among other AKP politicians who cried at different public occasions.<sup>12</sup>

Erdoğan's propensity to tears in public does not easily conform to his tough, masculine, and relentless posturing. Statesmen and politicians' crying in public is also unprecedented in Turkish political history. In addition, such expressions of vulnerability contradict AKP's assertions of power through grandiose political spectacles. Particularly after the Gezi Protests, as the government drifted more towards authoritarianism and encountered significant opposition to its rule, its official iconography and ceremonies became more daring, provocative, and spectacular. At grandiose opening ceremonies of public works and massive rallies marked by special audio-visual effects, the AKP remobilized its electoral base, reaffirming solidarity with Erdoğan. These venues also asserted authority and communicated the extent of the government's power to the opposition. So how can we make sense of such public displays of emotionality by Erdoğan and other leaders of the AKP?

### Crying as an important part of Islamist imagery

A sign of devotion to God and innocence, crying is important to Islamists across the globe. It also communicates the message of Muslim victimhood and suffering. Thomas Hegghammer (2015: 8-9) writes how weeping is socially appreciated among jihadis and that communal weeping is an integral part of the jihadi culture like poetry, music, and dream interpretation. According to Hegghammer (2015: 10), one needs to understand the emotional appeal of the cultural practices of jihadism to understand why people are attracted to it. In Turkey, too, the image of crying has been integral to Islamist visual imagery. “Various photographs, illustrations, and drawings of pain and tears, mostly of children, circulate through a wide range of Islamic media, from television to print media to the Internet,” writes Özlem Savaş (2013: 111). Fethullah Gülen, Erdoğan’s most prominent Islamist opponent, is well known for crying while delivering his sermons, inducing mass weeping in the audience. Esra Özyürek (1997) suggests that crying communicates powerlessness and sincerity in face of God. For Gülenists, crying symbolizes purity, compassion, innocence, and awareness of injustices in today’s world (Savaş 2013: 115).

Muslim victimhood and suffering due to injustices at the hands of the enemy – whether Kemalists, Westerners, secularists, Israelis, or the military – are also central themes in the AKP’s rhetoric. The AKP government stands out in Turkish political history in its heavy use of Islamist symbolism during its tenure, initiating significant changes in the official symbolic repertoire. It moved away from expressions of staunch secularism, making religious symbols more visible in public space. For example, official ceremonies began to include prayers led by the head of the Religious Affairs Directorate (Diyanet) and Quran recitations. In some venues, it is President Erdoğan himself who recites verses from the Quran.<sup>13</sup> The government reordered the rules of state protocol, curbing the public profile of the military and moving up the position of the Religious Affairs Directorate in the official hierarchy. It also incorporated Ottoman and Islamic imagery into the state’s symbolic repertoire. For example, it scaled down

official national days that are associated with Turkey’s secular Republican history and promoted alternative days of commemoration that celebrate Turkey’s Ottoman and Islamic heritage like the conquest of Istanbul and the birth of Prophet Muhammed (the Holy Birth Week).

Crying is part of this Islamist symbolic repertoire, signaling Muslim solidarity and empathy. By crying for the suffering of fellow political Islamists abroad or the injustices he suffered during his political career, Erdoğan connects himself to the larger Islamist movement in the Middle East and calls attention to the threats Islamists continue to face. The campaign song that filled Erdoğan’s eyes with tears praised him as “the feared nightmare of the oppressor,” “loud voice of the oppressed,” and “the light of hope of the millions.” The poem that triggered an emotional response from Erdoğan and his wife in Albania reads like a prayer, begging God not to allow the country to be taken over by non-Muslims.<sup>14</sup> Crying communicates vulnerability and reminds the AKP constituency of the importance of devotion to the cause and persistence in the face of continuing threats and challenges. It helps make AKP support a “felt identity” (Berezin 2001: 86).

### Populist leaders and public emotion

Public crying also relates to populism. The AKP came to power with a strong anti-elitist discourse, emphasizing the victimhood of the majority at the hands of a repressive, secular, and Western-oriented minority. The party presents itself as the representative of the real “national will” and the people on the street. In his speeches Erdoğan frequently brought up the discrimination and humiliation that people from lower-income, conservative groups from rural backgrounds encountered (Koyuncu 2014: 157-173). “In this country there are White Turks as well as Black Turks. Your brother Tayyip belongs to the Black Turks,” he stated.<sup>15</sup> In another speech he said, “We know very well what exclusion means due to someone’s belief, exercise of religion, and scarf on her head. We know what poverty is... We are the children of this land.” (Koyuncu 2014: 165). He boasted of working hard, selling lemonade on the street, coming from a pious and modest family, and

attending a religious school (Türk 2014). Other leaders of the AKP have also frequently signaled their piety, previous lower-class status, and closeness to the public through the ways they speak, dress, and act. As does the increased emphasis on Islam and piety, crying in public connects the ruler and the ruled because it communicates intimacy, approachability, and equality with fellow citizens.

In one instance, Erdoğan's crying was triggered by a sentimental poem titled "Farewell Mother," recited on stage by İbrahim Sadri, a poet and an artist popular particularly among Turkey's conservatives.<sup>16</sup> After finishing the poem, Sadri gave a short speech emphasizing Erdoğan's loyalty to his friends, saying that Erdoğan never left him alone during difficult times when he lost his mother and his brother. Such instances of emotionality foster the image of a compassionate and authentic leader. After crying over el-Baltagy's farewell letter to his deceased daughter, Erdoğan underlined that he spoke not as the prime minister but as an ordinary citizen. It is not a coincidence that the pro-AKP media covered Erdoğan's public crying more frequently particularly after the Gezi Protests when sustaining the credibility of a populist discourse as he consolidated authoritarian rule has become increasingly challenging. The image of emotionality helps legitimize Erdoğan's populist discourse at a time when his growing political power and economic wealth increasingly set him apart from the politically and economically marginalized he claims to represent.

### **The ambiguity of public crying**

The public appearance of vulnerability and fragility are closely linked to grandiose spectacles of power and assertions of omnipresence by Erdoğan and the AKP. As Fethi Açıkel suggests, the emphasis on suffering, victimhood, and vulnerability is an ambivalent political discourse. While it expresses a need for compassion and affection, it also communicates a desire for more power and revenge (Savaş 2013: 117-118). This dichotomy has been apparent in Erdoğan's discourse after Gezi, as he more frequently expresses vulnerability through crying but also appears aggressive and defiant in public, using

expressions of rage and vengefulness, conspiratorial language, and heavy-handed assertions of power over the opposition. Crying not only suggests vulnerability, it also points to the perpetrators of injustice and suffering<sup>17</sup> and highlights the necessity to defend oneself against opponents. As Erdoğan frequently declares in his speeches, "We won't turn the other cheek to those who slap us."<sup>18</sup>

The symbolic practices of the AKP government have mixed consequences. On the one hand, it is crucial to understand the emotional dynamic that this movement created among its supporters through rhetoric and symbolism. AKP's electoral success and its ability to mobilize the masses cannot be understood without its emotional appeal. On the other hand, far from legitimizing the AKP's rule broadly, this symbolism has divided society further, hardening political and cultural identities and escalating political tension. Symbolic practices of the AKP government, including Erdoğan's and other AKP leaders' public crying, has been severely criticized and mocked by the opposition. Symbolic expressions can exacerbate conflict when they emphasize exclusion, incompatible values, outside threats, a sense of victimization, and revenge (Ross 2007). The AKP's symbolism has provoked increased politicization of the society by evoking strong and conflicting emotions among its supporters and opponents. The result is a highly polarized and emotionally charged society, presenting ample opportunities for further political unrest and civil strife.

### **(Endnotes)**

1 The video with English translation can be found at:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOIF0eLb73I>

2 <http://www.ensonhaber.com/gundem/35662/basbakan-mecliste-agladi.html>

3 <http://www.mynet.com/tv/basbakan-sarki-soyledi-siir-okudu-agladi-vid-2689310/>

4 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MBZcG5IV6EI>

5 <http://t24.com.tr/haber/akpnin-secim-sarkisi-erdoganin-gozlerini-doldurdu,251491>

6 <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/video-poetic-prayer-makes-erdogan-couple-shed-tears-in-albania.aspx?PageID=238&NID=82390&NewsCatID=510>

7 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-bujHl8zcI>

8 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YKc1AM2PEs>

9 See <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/erdogan-reveals-last-will-moves-everyone-to-tears.aspx?PageID=238&NID=83280&NewsCatID=338>. For another example see, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ujTsRKtOBx8>.

10 The video can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVsZiDphrDE>

11 <http://www.sabah.com.tr/gundem/2014/11/07/bulent-arinc-hem-agladi-hem-de-aglatti>

12 For a few examples see, <http://www.cnnturk.com/haber/turkiye/bulent-arinc-konusurken-duygulandi-davutoglu-agladi>, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/gundem/26719543.asp>, [https://www.avrupagazete.com/turkiye/199655-basbakan-ahmet-davutoglu-o\\_olay-karsisinda-agladi.html](https://www.avrupagazete.com/turkiye/199655-basbakan-ahmet-davutoglu-o_olay-karsisinda-agladi.html), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgc0z7XLPkk>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d1WNV30rr4g>, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-ve-basbakan-yildirim-agladi-40175845>, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E04PkVcq\\_FE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E04PkVcq_FE), <http://t24.com.tr/haber/bakanlar-kurulunun-veda-toplantisinda-bazi-bakanlar-agladi,268832>.

13 For example, he recited the Quran during the inauguration ceremony of the mosque in Maryland, funded by Diyanet. See, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lZtNYA8aAwM>.

14 The full translation can be found at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/video-poetic-prayer-makes-erdogan-couple-shed-tears-in-albania.aspx?PageID=238&NID=82390&NewsCatID=510>. Erdoğan cried at the same poem in 2016 during the commemoration ceremony of the Turkish victory at the Gallipoli campaign in World War I: <http://www.ahaber.com.tr/gundem/2016/03/18/imam-hatip-ogrencisinin-dua-siiri-erdogani-aglatti>. He recited the same poem in a television commercial prepared for the 100th anniversary of the Gallipoli campaign. The commercial can be watched at: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogans-gallipoli-prayer-stirs-debate.aspx?pageID=238&nID=81350&NewsCatID=338>.

15 [http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12484/white-turks-black-turks-and-negroes\\_the-politics-o](http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/12484/white-turks-black-turks-and-negroes_the-politics-o)

16 Sadri's performance and Erdoğan's response can be watched at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C35Otcn4UsA>

17 I thank Ekrem Karakoç for calling my attention to this point.

18 <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-europe-migrants-turkey-eu-idUSKCN0XL0L6>

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## Towards Erdogan and the East: Conspiracies and public perception in post-coup Turkey

By Kimberly Guiler, The University of Texas at Austin

Following the abortive July 15 to 16 military coup in Turkey, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has embarked on a series of massive and indiscriminate purges of the military, police, judiciary, media, education sector and, most recently, the Kurdish opposition. Less discussed, however, has been the Erdogan government's use of conspiratorial rhetoric to fan the flames of anti-Western sentiment and increase popular support for Erdogan's post-coup strongman initiatives. These rhetorical strategies have set the stage for Erdogan to consolidate power and have prepared the public for a potential foreign policy shift toward the East.

### Criminalizing the West

During the days following the failed coup, President Erdogan accused the West of "supporting terrorism and taking sides with coups." Turkish Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, a close Erdogan associate who was Turkey's Labor Minister at the time, stated in a televised interview that, "America is behind the coup." The Turkish media went further, directly accusing the United States of trying to assassinate President Erdogan and

tactically supporting the bombing of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey.

Turkey, which has been recently reinstated as the world's worst jailer of journalists, fosters an environment of media self-censorship where the government can easily control public discourse. In the wake of the aborted coup, one hundred media outlets critical of the government have been closed, 42 journalists have been placed in provisional detention, and many other reporters have been banned from travelling abroad. Just last month, Turkish authorities dissolved 15 Kurdish media outlets and detained the editor and several prominent journalists of Cumhuriyet, one of the country's most respected and last remaining opposition newspapers.

### Conspiracy theories and Turkish politics

Conspiracy theories are not new to Turkish politics. Since the 1960s, whenever Turkey's generals have intervened in politics, the country has accused the United States and other outsiders of playing a behind-the-scenes role. Still,

the Turkish government's present engagement with anti-Western conspiracy theories is puzzling for two reasons.

First, this discourse positions the Erdogan government in opposition to its Western allies at a time when support from friends abroad seems critical. Political instability in Turkey has put new stress on a country already coping with challenges from the rising threat of Islamist State forces, the nearby Syrian war, a domestic Kurdish insurgency, and a growing refugee crisis. Why would Turkey risk alienating the European Union, its biggest trade partner, and the United States, its ally in NATO and in the war against the Islamic State?

Second, the post-coup conspiracy rhetoric positions President Erdogan as the victim of an external assassination attempt. This image of Erdogan as a fragile victim strongly contradicts the ruthless, strong, and masculine image he generally cultivates.

Why is the AKP government actively disseminating rhetoric that criminalizes its allies and victimizes its leader, Erdogan?

Several of the memos in this series suggest that the AKP and Erdogan have historically positioned themselves as political victims in order to gain sympathy and support from voters. Senem Aslan describes how the party came to power with a discourse that emphasized the “victimhood of the majority at the hands of a repressive, secular, and Western-oriented minority.” Esen Kirdis argues that the AKP has defined itself as the representative of an “oppressed majority” throughout its 14 years in power.

Erdogan has cleverly drawn on gestures and rhetoric to maintain his image as a political victim despite his growing political power and economic wealth. Senem Aslan argues, for instance, that Erdogan sustains his image as a “man who has sacrificed a lot” through acts of public crying. My dissertation, which draws on original surveys with embedded experiments, also advances the notion that voters in Turkey are more likely to feel positively toward candidates, like Erdogan, who have suffered

time in prison for their political cause. Furthermore, in a Monkey Cage article written immediately after the 2016 failed coup, Kristin Fabbe and I suggested that the Erdogan government was actively deploying conspiracy theories that victimized Erdogan and blamed outsiders to encourage national unity.

### Conspiracies and public opinion

Importantly, public opinion research suggests that Erdogan’s repetitive dissemination of anti-outsider conspiracy theories through his speeches and the media may be both rational and strategic. According to John Zaller (1992), citizens tend to follow elite cues when making judgments about agency and causality in the political world.<sup>1</sup> Elite political cues can alter individuals’ political attitudes by selectively refocusing their attention towards particular politicians or by impacting their political judgments.<sup>2</sup>

Political attitudes are most malleable when prevailing conditions threaten people’s economic or personal security and cause them to feel out of control.<sup>3</sup> Specifically, Whitson and Galinsky argue that individuals who feel they lack control are more likely to harbor beliefs in conspiracy theories.<sup>4</sup> According to these authors, individuals can overcome their lack of control by identifying illusory patterns, or conspiracies, in order to make sense of their environment. Elites can, then, take advantage of anxiety-producing events where people lose their sense of control by “fomenting suspicion and uncertainty and then proffering solutions by identifying a source of blame.”<sup>5</sup> Following this logic, the bloody coup attempt

1 Zaller, John R. 1992. *The Nature and Origins of Mass Opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

2 Bartels, Larry M. 1996. “Uninformed votes: Information effects in presidential elections.” *American Journal of Political Science* pp. 194–230.

3 Douglas, Tom. 1995. *Scapegoats: Transferring Blame*. New York: Routledge.

4 Whitson, Jennifer A., and Adam D. Galinsky. 2008. Lacking Control Increases Illusory Pattern Perception. *Science* 322 (5898):115–17.

5 Radnitz, S. and Underwood, P., 2015. Is belief in conspiracy theories pathological? A survey experiment on the cognitive roots of extreme suspicion. *British Journal of Political Science*, pp.1-17.

and subsequent environment of uncertainty in Turkey presented a strategic opportunity for Erdogan to position himself as the key victim of a national tragedy and to unite the nation against a common source of blame: the West.

To what extent, however, were Erdogan's attempts to influence public attitudes successful? Descriptive statistics from the Turkey Coup Attitudes Survey (TCAS), distributed by the author in collaboration with Matthew Cebul and Sharan Grewal shortly after the attempted coup, provide early evidence that an increase in pro-Erdogan and anti-Western attitudes has begun to crystallize in post-putsch Turkey. The survey was conducted with Turkish citizens recruited through Facebook advertisements. While the sample may not be representative of all Turks, it reflects the overall voting ratio in public opinion: 50 percent of respondents say they supported the AKP in the November 2015 elections, 25 percent say they supported the Republican People's Party (CHP), 12 percent say they supported the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP), and 3 percent say they supported the pro-Kurdish People's Democratic Party (HDP).<sup>6</sup>

Importantly, whereas 50 percent of respondents say they supported Erdogan's AKP in November of 2015, 54 percent say they would support the party in elections today. This increase of 4 percent is noteworthy given speculation that the AKP will hold a referendum soon to push through constitutional amendments creating an executive presidency. Statements by pundits, Turkish politicians, and voters suggest that a de-facto presidential system is already in place in Turkey. Still others assert that officially replacing the country's parliamentary government with a presidential one would further propel Turkey towards a one-man dictatorship.

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6 Actual vote returns for the November 2015 election are as follows: AKP: 49.50%; CHP: 25.32%; MHP: 11.90%; and HDP: 10.76%. When rounded to the nearest percent, the TCAS reported vote share for the AKP, CHP, and MHP are identical to the actual returns (50%, 25%, and 12%, respectively). TCAS reported support for the pro-Kurdish HDP, however, was notably much lower than the party's actual vote share. Respondents may have underreported their support for HDP given the ongoing vilification of the pro-Kurdish party in the Turkish press in the post-coup environment.

Despite overwhelming support for Erdogan and his recent use of repressive tactics, Turkish citizens remain committed to key principles of democracy. Among TCAS respondents, only 35 percent agree that the president of the republic should be more powerful than the parliament. Similarly, only 28 percent say that a strong leader is preferable to a democratic leader. Turkish citizens also remain hopeful about Turkey's future. Despite ongoing purges of the military, police, judiciary, education system, media, civil service sector and opposition, 53 percent of respondents say that Turkey is better off after the failed coup.

Survey results also indicate, however, that popular support for the West-Turkey alliance may be among the failed coup's casualties. Turkish mistrust of Western institutions – fueled by recent disputes with the United States over strategies for combatting ISIS, disagreements with the European Union over the migrant crisis, and the weakening Turkey-NATO relationship – are crystallizing in the aftermath of the putsch. Findings from the August 2016 TCAS can be contrasted with those from a July 2015 survey conducted by the German Marshall Fund. Whereas a plurality (39 percent) of respondents in the July 2015 German Marshall study said they preferred cooperating with the West to other alternatives, only 4 percent of respondents said they favored cooperation with Russia. Results from the TCAS about a year later and after the coup, in contrast, show the opposite trend. Whereas only 39 percent of TCAS respondents say they support a continued relationship with the United States and only 50 percent support a continued relationship with NATO, an overwhelming 77 percent support a strengthened alliance with Russia.

Additionally, an overwhelming 88 percent of TCAS respondents report that they think the coup plotters received help from abroad. This finding suggests that Turkish citizens believe – or are at least claiming to believe – the government's framing of the coup attempt as an attack that was supported by foreign (namely, Western) elements. A poll cited in the Economist in August similarly reported that 84 percent of respondents thought the coup was supported by elements overseas and that 70

percent of Turks suspect that America played a role in the aborted coup. When the pro-government Daily Sabah asked Turks in a [poll conducted on Twitter](#) which U.S. institution provided the largest amount of support to the coup plotters, the vast majority of respondents (69 percent) chose the CIA. Fewer respondents blamed the White House (20 percent), Department of State (6 percent) and FBI (5 percent).

### Erdogan's Strategy

Taken as a whole, recent survey data and insights from a budding literature on public opinion and conspiracy theories lend support to the notion that Erdogan has been deploying anti-Western rhetoric for a strategic purpose. The bloody attempted coup enabled Erdogan to position himself as the central victim of a tragic national event. It also presented a rare political opportunity for Erdogan to unite his co-victims – Turks from across the political spectrum who opposed the coup – against a common external enemy, the West. Turkish citizens, steeped in collective memories of the economic, political, and personal consequences of past military coups, were more likely to accept Erdogan's inflammatory accusations due to the destabilizing post-coup environment. In the language of Whitson and Galinsky, citizens who "lack control" in the post-coup milieu are more prone to accept Erdogan's anti-Western conspiracies because these narratives provide a framework, even if an illusory one, for understanding and overcoming their political and psychological uncertainty.

It is too soon to know whether Turkey's strained alliance with the West will rebound or decay in the face of mounting anti-Western skepticism fueled by conspiracies. In the end, however, one thing is clear: Erdogan is using his strategic leverage with the West and his hold over public opinion in Turkey to strengthen his standing both at home and abroad. In uniting diverse Turkish constituencies against the [Gulen Movement](#) and its [supposed Western allies](#), Erdogan successfully primed the country for his consolidation of power. To stand against the government and its policies has become synonymous with supporting the coup plotters. Given Turkey's ongoing "state of emergency" and the widespread purge of suspected coup supporters, Erdogan is now uniquely positioned to push through reforms that would further consolidate his control.

As his popularity rises among an anxious and uncertain Turkish citizenry, Erdogan continues to wield influence over his constrained Western allies. Despite increasingly authoritarian behavior and a recent pivot eastwards, the [US. government](#) and Turkey's [other Western allies](#) have yet to hold the Erdogan government accountable. It remains to be seen how long Erdogan will be able to simultaneously maintain his leverage over the West and his popularity back home. Recent survey and observational evidence, however, indicates that Erdogan probably isn't going anywhere any time soon.



# AKP's Foreign Policy and Its Party Identity\*

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The identity of the ruling Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi, or AKP) has often been defined by its foreign policy. In 2002, when the AKP first took office, observers cited the new party's support for the EU as a sign of its transformation away from its Islamist roots in the National Outlook Movement.<sup>1</sup> Then, over the next decade, the party was often criticized for its "Islamic" identity due to its close engagement with the Middle East and its support for the Arab Spring.<sup>2</sup> And today, the party's foreign policy towards Syria has turned into a domestic political issue. Although AKP's foreign policy has not directly influenced the voting behavior of the Turkish electorate,<sup>3</sup> it has influenced how the electorate perceives the party's identity, i.e. "the image that citizens have in mind when they think about that party."<sup>4</sup>

The foreign policy of a political party serves several important roles in constructing party identity. First, it signals to the electorate how the party perceives the country and its place in world politics,<sup>5</sup> showing the electorate what the party will stand for in domestic politics. Furthermore, a political party's foreign policy tells voters how it defines the state's national identity and tells the electorate what the purpose of the country is going to be so that "they can feel proud of the nation's (and therefore their) image and standing."<sup>6</sup> Last but not least, a political party's foreign policy signals to the electorate who the insiders and outsiders of their government are going to be, and in so doing tells the electorate who is part of a society and who is not.<sup>7</sup>

To discuss the relationship between foreign policy and party identity, this memo will briefly focus on (1) the context in which the AKP has formulated its foreign policy, (2) how the party has redefined Turkish foreign policy identity, (3) how this reformulated foreign policy

identity influenced the way in which voters view the party's political identity, and (4) the consequences of such party identifications, for each term the party has been in office.

## AKP's First Term (2002-2007)

In 2002, when the AKP first took office, secular state institutions and secular voters had many questions about the party's Islamist past in the National Outlook Movement and its intentions for the secular (laicist) character of the Turkish Republic. Indeed, it was only the recent past, in the late 1990s, when AKP's predecessors in the Welfare Party of the National Outlook Movement led a coalition government and advocated for the creation of a Muslim G-8. At that time, Welfare Party leaders had defined Turkey's EU quest as "becoming the servant" of the EU and as losing "the very essence of our identity."<sup>9</sup> In this context, although the AKP had won elections, it still needed to build trust among the secular state institutions and secular voters and assure them that this was a reformed party.

During this first period in office, the AKP, in stark contrast to its predecessors in the National Outlook Movement, moved in the opposite direction in its foreign policy and has promised to make "the Copenhagen criteria the Ankara criteria" (*Hürriyet*, December 17, 2002). For this end, the party passed multiple pro-EU reform packages at a speed never before seen in Turkish politics. This reorientation in foreign policy was not only a departure from AKP's Islamist predecessors but more importantly, in line with secular Turkey's historically Western-oriented foreign policy identity.

Such a reorientation signaled reform in the AKP that was moving through an "ideological moderation" process and away "from a relatively closed and rigid worldview to one more open and tolerant of alternative perspectives."<sup>10</sup> In stark contrast to its forerunners in the National Outlook

\*This memo is derived in part from an article published in *Turkish Studies*, available online: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14683849.2015.1044444>

Movement, the AKP emphasized how it would prioritize democratization and EU accession.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, such a pro-EU reorientation in foreign policy told Turkish voters that this new party's priority in domestic politics would be economic reform rather than Islamic revival. Within this framework, the party capitalized on the public perception that EU accession would be a catalyst for a stable democracy and a better economy<sup>12</sup> and emphasized how EU membership would be a vehicle for economic and structural reforms<sup>13</sup> by appointing its then-Economy Minister, Ali Babacan also as its chief EU negotiator. Then-Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Gül explained Babacan's "double appointment" as a necessity given that "today international financial institutions and Turkey's relations with the EU run parallel to each other" (*Milliyet*, May 24, 2005). Such a pro-EU foreign policy meant that the party was now not only a reformed but also a pragmatic party searching for solutions to problems at home through its foreign policy prioritization.

By situating itself as a reformed and pragmatic party, AKP "double[d] its support from those who did not identify themselves as religious (from 15 to 39 percent)." <sup>14</sup> Furthermore, such a pro-EU foreign policy was a winner among both liberal and conservative constituents. While pro-EU reforms meant liberal democratic reforms for liberal constituents, it also meant protection of religious rights from strict secularism (laicism) for conservative constituents.<sup>15</sup>

### **AKP's Second Term (2007-2011)**

As the AKP entered its second term in office, it faced a rather peculiar situation. In domestic politics, the party had increased its vote shares and continued to govern Turkey without a coalition partner, but it also was facing a trial by the Turkish Constitutional Court for its closure. In foreign policy, the AKP was suffering from the backlashes of the slowing down of EU accession negotiations. Hence, the party aimed both, in then-Foreign Affairs Minister Davutoğlu's words, "to inject foreign policy activism and self-confidence back into the domestic political scene"<sup>16</sup> after the EU snub and to show how under AKP's central

role in Turkish politics, "Turkey has been able to formulate a systematic and cohesive methodological approach to world affairs because its political party has been able to govern, resulting in real political stability at home."<sup>17</sup> In short, the AKP aimed to consolidate its voter base at home in the face of new challenges.

During this period, the party redefined traditional Turkish foreign policy identity under then-Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu. He introduced the "zero problems policy toward Turkey's neighbors,"<sup>18</sup> which situated Turkey as a central player in world politics. Specifically, this new foreign policy reorientation aimed not only to continue Turkey's traditional Western alliances but also to establish better relations with Turkey's southeastern neighbors in the Middle East and northeastern neighbors in Caucasia (Russia). This new foreign policy identity also emphasized Turkey's unique leadership position in the Middle East as a democracy in a Muslim-majority country. This reorientation in foreign policy was a departure from Turkey's traditional defensive and passive foreign policy in its active reengagement with Turkey's wider neighborhood.

Through such rebranding of Turkish foreign policy identity, the AKP rebranded Turkey as a central player in global politics and the AKP itself as "the" party carrying Turkey into such a leadership position. Within this formulation, the AKP situated itself as the representative of an "oppressed majority" at home and abroad. Internationally, Palestine occupied a special place as the historically friendly relations between Turkey and Israel deteriorated starting with the infamous "one-minute" intervention by the then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan against then-President of Israel Simon Peres (*New York Times*, January 29, 2009). Before this, Turkish citizens commonly believed that Turkey was passively fulfilling the demands of great powers, especially Western powers, in its foreign policy, even if those demands were counterproductive to the interests of Turkey. The party portrayed its departure from the international status-quo on Palestine as a move to break away from past dependencies and start a new era for Turkish foreign policy voicing the demands of the

“silent majority.”<sup>19</sup> By more vocally critiquing international powers on the issue of Palestine, the AKP was telling the Turkish electorate that now was the time for the “oppressed majority” in the “peripheries”<sup>20</sup> in domestic politics, namely, those in the conservative majority who had been marginalized politically by secular (laicist) elites, to redefine the political center of Turkish politics under the leadership of the AKP.<sup>21</sup>

Such a rebranding of Turkish foreign policy identity and by extension AKP’s party identity not only appealed to the nationalist sentiments among the Turkish electorate regardless of political orientations<sup>22</sup> but also strengthened AKP’s support by consolidating party identity among its base. “As of 2011 only about 10% of the electorate appear[ed] to have shifted from one party to another compared to 2007.”<sup>23</sup>

### **AKP’s Third Term (2011-2015)**

Unlike its first two terms in office, the AKP started its third term in office with confidence. Not only had it won a third consecutive election, but it also had grown into a “dominant party,” that is “a party that outdistances all the others (and thus) is significantly stronger than others.”<sup>24</sup> In addition to controlling the executive and the legislative offices, the 2010 referendum decreased the political balancing power of the judiciary and the military. This contrasted with the AKP’s first two terms, in which the party was limited in its actions despite its electoral dominance. This confidence and dominance meant the party could reshape Turkish politics.

In this period, AKP’s foreign policy became more identity-based. In particular, the party started emphasizing the importance of traditions, values, history and geography in its foreign policy,<sup>25</sup> positioning itself as a new regional hegemon and as an example to the rest of the Muslim Middle East.<sup>26</sup> In his 2011 elections victory speech, then-Prime Minister *Erdoğan* stated that AKP’s victory was the victory of the “oppressed” and that it was “much of a victory for Istanbul as it is in Sarajevo, as much of a victory for Izmir as it is for Beirut, as much of a victory for

Diyarbakir as it is for the West Bank and Gaza” and that “the winner today is not only Turkey but also the Middle East, Caucasia, and the Balkans” (T24, June 12, 2011). In the following year, AKP became an outspoken supporter of protesters during the Arab Spring and started espousing Turkey as a model for the region. In then-Foreign Affairs Minister Davutoğlu’s words, “when you compared them years ago with Turkey today, you could see the change of democratic spirit and institutionalization.”<sup>27</sup>

Through such an identity-based foreign policy, the AKP was telling its supporters that the party represented a community, rather than a constituency, beyond national territories and bound by a common culture, values, and traditions. In so doing, the party was communicating its “community” that their bonds were emotional rather than strategic/political. For instance, in the 2014 municipal election rallies, even though this was a local election about urban problems, the party brought up the military overthrow of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and made analogies between the overthrow of former President Mohamed Morsi and the AKP, suggesting that “outside forces” in alliance with old elites were trying to weaken the majority, the Brotherhood and by extension the AKP.

Such an identity-based foreign policy, however, also created socio-political polarizations. In particular, the domestication of the Syrian conflict with the increasing number of Syrian refugees and twin car bombs in *Reyhanlı near the Syrian border*, which killed 51 individuals, in 2013, furthered this divide. In this polarizing context, the military coup against the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt became a metaphor for Turkish domestic politics. While the AKP associated the Brotherhood’s overthrow in Egypt with past military coups and past closures of Islamic parties in Turkey, the CHP, the major opposition party, saw the situation as an example of the dangers of using religion for political purposes (*Milliyet*, July 6, 2013). While the AKP continued to consolidate party identifications among its supporters, this identity-based community building also started to create polarizations in Turkey.

## AKP's Fourth Term (2015-)

The AKP started its fourth term facing serious threats to its political dominance: in the June 2015 general elections, AKP lost its parliamentary majority only to win it back in the November 2015 general elections, and on July 15, 2016, it witnessed a coup attempt. Furthermore, the party identified serious external threats due to regional developments. Deputy Prime Minister Numan Kurtulmuş stated, "a lot of Turkey's problems today are the result of Turkey's Syria foreign policy" (*Hürriyet*, August 18, 2016). As the AKP started its fourth and current term, it seriously needed to unite Turkish public opinion.

To do so, the AKP today seems to have turned toward a nationalist foreign policy aimed to create national unity against external threats. The AKP has foremost complained that the international community left Turkey alone against these unprecedented threats after the coup attempt. Specifically, the AKP started criticizing traditional allies, the United States and the EU in particular, for not showing their support for Turkish democracy. One theme brought up by the news media has been the allegation that the last military coup in 1980 had tacit U.S. support because the U.S. embassy in Turkey allegedly notified then-U.S. President Carter of the coup with the words "our boys have done it." Furthermore, when on August 24, 2016, President Erdoğan announced the Turkish military's Syria involvement, he stated "you cannot divide our nation, you cannot lower our flag, you cannot smash up our homeland, our state, you cannot silence our call to prayer, you cannot bring this country to your knees, you cannot bring to heel these people" (AA, August 24, 2016).

Such nationalist reorientation in foreign policy and domestic calls for national unity has been somewhat reminiscent of the secular (laicist) foreign policy paradigm in Turkish politics that "Turks have no friends other than Turks." How the Turkish electorate will perceive and react to AKP's latest expression of party identity as a result of this new foreign policy orientation is yet to be seen.

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# Opportunity Missed: Identity Alignment and Turkey's Kurdish Question

By Lisel Hintz, Barnard College

Over the last year and a half, the approach of Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP) to the country's so-called "Kurdish Question" has been characterized by highly polarizing nationalist rhetoric, deadly sieges targeting Kurdish cities, and persecution of individuals demonstrating support for the Kurdish cause.<sup>1</sup> Prior to this period, however, the AKP had taken unprecedented steps toward resolving the decades-long conflict between the Turkish state and the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) with the "Solution Process" (*Çözüm Süreci*) approach it announced in 2013. Most notably, the AKP crossed a former red line in Turkish politics by holding secret negotiations with jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan. In return for promises to make concessions such as allowing legal defenses to be in one's mother tongue, the Kurdish delegation – comprised, importantly, of politicians who publicly advocated a peaceful resolution to the conflict<sup>2</sup> – promised to work towards the PKK's laying down of arms and withdrawal from Turkish territory. A solution to the Kurdish Question seemed closer than ever in 2014.

This recent prospect for the resolution of a conflict that has cost tens of thousands of lives and has plagued the Turkish Republic since its founding in 1923 throws the country's current potential to devolve into civil war into even starker relief.<sup>3</sup> Rather than detail the bafflingly intricate set of back-and-forth gambits in the rise and fall of the Kurdish Question under AKP rule – nearly all of

which are disputed by each party<sup>4</sup> – this paper explores the conditions that enabled ground-breaking overtures by the AKP toward solving the Kurdish Question. In brief, I illustrate how a generally unthinkable policy becomes possible. Applying an identity content framework, I illustrate how what I term Republican Nationalists and Ottoman Islamists view the issue of Turkey's Kurds in profoundly different ways and how these differences shape the spectrum of options deemed appropriate to address the issues for each.

Specifically, while Republican Nationalists' conception of Kurdish politics as inherently dangerous creates an identity red line that precludes public expression of Kurdishness, no such notion limits the AKP's Ottoman Islamist understanding of national identity in this way. I therefore conceptualize the missed opportunity to solve the Kurdish Question as a case of identity alignment, in which the absence of identity red lines created space for policy outreach impossible under previous governments. This analysis reveals that current hostilities between the AKP government and the Kurds are rooted in political power struggles over Kurdish support for President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's efforts to consolidate personal power by downplaying animosity between groups. As conflictual as their relations appear now, this distinction shapes the potential for the eventual resolution of the Kurdish Question.

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4 The AKP, for example, claims that the PKK broke the ceasefire by assassinating two policemen on 22 July 2015, thus justifying the bombing of PKK militants in airstrikes beginning 24 July. The PKK denied responsibility for the assassinations, suggesting they were carried out by the People's Defense Forces (HPG), a militant wing separate from the PKK, and thus did not constitute a breach of the ceasefire agreement. See "PKK'dan Şehit Edilen İki Polis için Flaş Açıklama: Biz Yapmadık," Cumhuriyet Gazetesi, 29 July 2015: [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/333183/PKK\\_dan\\_sehit\\_edilen\\_iki\\_polis\\_icin\\_flas\\_aciklama\\_Biz\\_yapmadik.html#](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/333183/PKK_dan_sehit_edilen_iki_polis_icin_flas_aciklama_Biz_yapmadik.html#).

## **Identity Red Lines: Proscribed Behavior and Permissive Conditions**

While the AKP crossed one political red line by carrying out talks with the PKK, another form of red line was involved to make this act possible. In previous work, I develop the concept of identity “red lines” to denote stances on issues seemingly deemed intolerable by supporters of competing understandings of national identity.<sup>5</sup> In making the nebulous concept of identity easier to operationalize, I use a framework for the content of various “proposals” for national identity to parse out behaviors and attitudes that are not only inappropriate but fundamentally unacceptable to supporters of a rival proposal, i.e. identity redlines. First, constitutive norms provide guidelines for membership and appropriate behavior within the Ingroup, defining who “we” are and how we should behave. Second, the social purpose defines group interests – that is, the goals that the Ingroup believes it should achieve. Third, relational meaning defines the Ingroup’s relation to various Outgroups. Finally, the cognitive worldview component provides an overarching sense of the group’s role in the world. Collectively, these components delineate who the group is and how its members should behave. Importantly, this framework does not assume that any of these elements are fixed; rather, through processes of contestation – both within an Ingroup and among an Ingroup and various Outgroups, – these components can and do change.

Drawing inspiration from Ottoman-era administration of social groups along religious lines, institutionalized in the *millet* system, the AKP and its supporters view religion as the most salient category of membership. As the Ottoman caliphate represented the institutional and spiritual home of Sunni Islam, being a Sunni Muslim is thus a constitutive norm of membership in today’s Ottoman Islamist Ingroup. The internalization of religion as the primary identity

<sup>5</sup> The qualifier “seemingly” is used here to emphasize the constructed and malleable nature of identities and their constitutive components, no matter how intractable contestation over particular components may appear at a given time. Lisel Hintz, “Take It Outside! National Identity Contestation in the Foreign Policy Arena,” *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2016.

line for societal organization meant that ethnicity was a relatively less salient and politically unimportant form of identification. Relatedly, the AKP’s Ottoman Islamist understanding of Turkey’s national identity promoted by the AKP contains no red line, no prohibition against the public and even political expression of ethnic identity.

In direct contrast, previous Turkish government and military elites holding a Republican Nationalist understanding of Turkish identity supported the elimination of the public expression of ethnicity, often through brutal means.<sup>6</sup> For Republican Nationalists, who draw inspiration from Ottoman collapse rather than Ottoman glory, particularly the devastatingly dismembering effects of ethno-nationalism during the Balkan Wars and World War I, articulating an ethnic identity was the equivalent of potential support for a separatist movement. Even uttering the word “Kurd” or engaging in Kurdish naming practices was considered threatening to the unity and stability of the Republic.<sup>7</sup> Difference was inherently dangerous. While Kurdish militants revolted against the nationalization efforts<sup>8</sup> of the Turkish government in the Republic’s early years as part of the Sheikh Said Rebellion and later as the PKK, Republican Nationalists in government and society generally viewed all self-proclaimed Kurds as dangerous irrespective of their individual views on violence against the Turkish state. Public expression of Kurdishness was a red line not to be tolerated.

As a brief demonstration of the power of such red lines, the idea of the ultra-right Nationalist Action Party (MHP) making favorable outreaches to the Kurds is virtually unthinkable no matter how big the electoral payoff might seem; its Pan-Turkic Nationalist members would not support it, and, equally importantly, Turkey’s Kurds would

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Welat Zeydanlioğlu, “The White Turkish Man’s Burden: Orientalism, Kemalism, and the Kurds in Turkey,” Guido Rings and Anne Ife (eds) *Neocolonial Mentalities in Contemporary Europe* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> See Senem Aslan, “Incoherent State: The Controversy over Kurdish Naming in Turkey,” *European Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 10, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> On this concept, see Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

not buy it. This history of open enmity and violent attacks<sup>9</sup> by Pan-Turkic Nationalists directed toward Kurds rules out any electoral cooperation, at least in the foreseeable future.

For Ottoman Islamists, however, Kurds who openly declare their Kurdishness can be part of the Ingroup as long as they meet the other constitutive criteria. Alevi Kurds, for example, do not adhere to the Sunni Muslim constitutive norm and thus are relegated to the Outgroup by both Ottoman Islamists and Republican Nationalists.<sup>10</sup> Sunni Kurds, however, can be and were enthusiastically courted by the AKP through multiple rounds of outreach. This absence of a red line against the public expression of ethnic identity thus becomes a permissive condition in the AKP's extension of overtures toward the Kurds. In effect, the Ottoman Islamist proposal for national identity aligns with a particular initiative in a configuration that is novel in Turkish politics.

However, the AKP did not make substantial outreaches to the Kurds until its later terms, with a (largely unsuccessful) Kurdish Opening announced in 2009<sup>11</sup> and the Solution Process of 2013. As Tezcür notes, the AKP was arguably constrained from doing so when it first came to power in 2002 because of the political strength of actors such as the Turkish military, historically a staunchly Republican Nationalist institution.<sup>12</sup> After using the EU accession process as a foreign policy arena in which to contest Republican Nationalism and weaken its institutional representatives back home,<sup>13</sup> the AKP was no longer restricted in its menu of choices for dealing with the Kurdish Question.

9 See, for example: "Video Shows Turkish Nationalists Attacking Pro-Kurdish Party Offices in Capital," *Reuters and Vice News*, 9 September 2015: <https://news.vice.com/article/video-shows-turkish-nationalists-attacking-pro-kurdish-party-offices-in-capital>.

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13 See Hintz 2016.

The unprecedented nature of the Solution Process reflects a recognition by the AKP that previous efforts had failed. It also produced an unprecedented response. At the 2013 annual celebration of the Spring Festival of *Newroz* in Diyarbakır, PKK leader Öcalan's *Newroz* message read by Kurdish politicians, not only called for a ceasefire but also proclaimed: "The Turkish people who live in what is called Turkey today – ancient Anatolia – should recognize that their *common life with the Kurds, under the flag of Islam*, rests on the principles of amity and solidarity."<sup>14</sup> Given the radical Marxist roots of the PKK, the use of Islam as an overarching identity that binds Turks and Kurds together is truly extraordinary. However politically calculated the statement may have been, elites were urging their constituencies to recognize a long-standing commonality, to acknowledge being privileged members of a common Ingroup with sacred roots. Such statements would not have been possible under a Republican Nationalist government (or any Pan-Turkic Nationalist government that could have been in power), nor would they have been believed by either constituency if declared.

### Opportunity Missed: Power Politics

The shift from previous Republican Nationalist political elites' perception of red lines to a case of identity alignment under Turkey's current Ottoman Islamist AKP government helps to explain how a previously inconceivable political outreaches to the Kurds was made possible. The AKP was able to convincingly and effectively cross the political red line of negotiating with Kurds as Ingroup partners because of the absence of an identity red line that deems the political recognition of Kurdishness anathema to Turkishness. While the Solution Process was not without difficulties,<sup>15</sup> the ceasefire held and the parties remained committed to negotiations. Erdoğan received enough of the Kurdish vote to grant him victory in the first round of the 2014

14 "Abdullah Öcalan'ın Newroz Mesajının Tam Metni: 'Bu Son Değil Yeni bir Başlangıçtır,'" *Sendika.org*, 21 March 2013: <http://sendika10.org/2013/03/abdullah-ocalanin-newroz-mesajinin-tam-metni-bu-son-degil-yeni-bir-baslangictir/>. Emphasis mine.

15 For example a frustrated Kurdish delegation said the AKP was too slow to act on its promises, some Kurds engaged in the anti-government Gezi Protests beginning June 2013, and most Kurds were disappointed that the September 2013 "democratization package" of proposed constitutional amendments did not include mother-tongue education

presidential election. Selahattin Demirtaş, co-chairman of the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) – a pro-Kurdish party that courts a broad electoral base with a platform supporting gender equality, pro-environmental policies, and LGBTQ rights – received approximately 10 percent of the vote. While an impressive achievement for Kurds and Turkish liberals alike, the numbers also signal that Erdoğan's promises to continue the Solution Process and his use of brotherly Muslim communal outreaches<sup>16</sup> were successful in his outreaches to significant elements of Kurdish voters. In the Kurdish-populated provinces of Şanlıurfa, Bingöl, and Van, Erdoğan received 69, 66, and 43 percent, respectively; in Diyarbakır, he received 34 percent.<sup>17</sup>

However, signs that the interests of Kurds were not taken seriously dramatically weakened this developing partnership. Ultimately, a power struggle intensified by personal ambitions, rather than any deep-seated group-level identity conflict, scuppered what was Turkey's most likely chance at solving the Kurdish Question. Frustrated by the Turkish government's refusal to defend the Kurdish-populated Syrian city of Kobani against an ISIS siege in September 2014, Kurdish leaders began to withdraw their backing of Turkey's move to a presidential system.<sup>18</sup> This constituted a serious betrayal to Erdoğan, who views a presidential system as the ideal embodiment of his consolidated rule and has politically disowned members of his party who did not support his ambition.<sup>19</sup> The HDP's catapult over the 10 percent electoral threshold – originally put in place as part of the 1982 military-written

16 See, for example, a speech given in Diyarbakır two weeks prior to the election: "Başbakan Erdoğan: Bu Irkçı Adaya Buradan Oy Çıkmayacak," Star, 26 July 2014: <http://www.star.com.tr/guncel/basbakan-erdogandan-diyarbakirda-onemli-aciklamalar-haber-918829/>.

17 "Cumhurbaşkanlığı: Seçim 2014," InternetHaber.com, 23 February 2015: <http://secim.internethaber.com/cumhurbaskanligi-secimi-2014/>.

18 Demirtaş stated: "We are not a bargaining party... We will not make you president." Quoted in Sinan Onuş, "Erdoğan ve Demirtaş'ın Cıktıları Ne Anlama Geliyor?" BBC Türkçe, 18 March 2015: [http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/03/150318\\_sinan\\_erdogan\\_demirtas](http://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/03/150318_sinan_erdogan_demirtas).

19 One of the reasons for hand-selected Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu's early (and most likely forced) resignation was his unsatisfactory support for the shift to a presidential system. See "Erdoğan Davutoğlu Arası Neden Bozuldu 'İstifa Süreci,'" MemurHaber.com, 5 May 2016: <http://www.memurhaber.com/erdogan-davutoglu-arasi-neden-bozuldu-istifa-sureci-1590777h.htm>.

constitution to keep Kurdish parties out of parliament<sup>20</sup> – further provoked Erdoğan's ire, as the party's allotted seats dislodged the AKP's parliamentary majority for the first time since it came to power in 2002. Crucial for achieving Erdoğan's primary goal, the loss of a two-thirds majority in the June 2015 election greatly hindered the chances of approving a presidential system for Turkey. The future of the AKP and Erdoğan's leadership appeared shakier than ever.

The timing of the breakdown in the ceasefire is puzzling unless we consider the provocative effect created by the Kurds' obstruction of Erdoğan's presidential ambitions. Although PKK militants killed members of the Turkish security forces in several attacks following the Kobani siege, the Turkish government decided to act in reprisal against PKK forces only after the HDP's June election gains. Two days after the 22 July 2015 revenge killing of two police officers in anger over the failure to prevent an ISIS bomb attack that killed 32 Kurdish activists headed to rebuild Kobani, an act for which the PKK denied responsibility,<sup>21</sup> the Turkish Armed Forces began bombing PKK targets again for the first time in more than two years. The sieges of cities like Cizre in which tens of civilians died were legitimized as necessary in the campaigns to root out terrorists.<sup>22</sup>

The constitutive act of the AKP's naming of Kurds as terrorists generated a visceral effect for its supporters that exacerbated the polarization in Turkey already existing along many lines, such conservative/secular and Alevi/Sunni. Following twin bomb attacks in October 2015 that killed more than 100 Kurdish and leftist peace activists in Ankara, government officials and supporters reacted with

20 "Yüzde 10 Barajının Öyküsü," NTV.com, 30 March 2011: <http://www.ntv.com.tr/turkiye/yuzde-10-barajinin-oykusunu,3xMZ-FVFNkWjU9mAPgxf9g>.

21 "PKK'dan Şehit Edilen İki Polis İçin Flaş Açıklama: Biz Yapmadık," Cumhuriyet Gazetesi, 29 July 2015: [http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/333183/PKK\\_dan\\_sehit\\_edilen\\_iki\\_polis\\_icin\\_flas\\_aciklama\\_\\_Biz\\_yapmadik.html#](http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/333183/PKK_dan_sehit_edilen_iki_polis_icin_flas_aciklama__Biz_yapmadik.html#).

22 Mahmut Bozarslan, "Adı Cizre Görünümlü Kobani," Al-Monitor, 18 September 2015: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/tr/originals/2015/09/turkey-kurds-pkk-cizre-curfew-civilian-demand-answers.html>.

indifference at best,<sup>23</sup> and with jeering at worst.<sup>24</sup> Because those who lost their lives were Kurdish or leftist, or just part of the opposition, they were assumed to be radical, deviant others who had it coming. Difference has once again come to be seen as inherently dangerous, this time as a product of personal animosity and tactical rhetoric.

## Conclusion

The analytical use of identity proposals and red lines specifying particular points of contestation among those proposals allows us to understand how previously unthinkable policies become conceivable. The groundbreaking outreach to Kurds under the later terms of AKP rule become possible because of the identity alignment of the AKP's Ottoman Islamism with initiatives that recognize the public expression of ethnic identity such as Kurdishness. The political weakening of Republican Nationalists under the AKP reduced the significance of their objections to recognizing Kurdishness and negotiating with the PKK.

This novel condition of identity alignment makes the opportunity missed in the breakdown of the Solution Process, due to power struggles and the personal animosity of Turkey's president, all the more frustrating for those involved. It may be the case, however, that the public recognition of Kurdishness legalized under the AKP may become normalized and internalized to the point where rolling back the societal and political shifts witnessed under the AKP may, in turn, become unthinkable, irrespective of the identity understanding of the future party in power. On the other hand, a (re)hardening of identities<sup>25</sup> along Turkish-Kurdish lines may also occur should the conflict continue or devolve, as it currently threatens, into civil war. New red lines could form where none existed, further narrowing the chances of a resolution to the Kurdish Question.

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23 "Why Did the Justice Minister Smile," *Hürriyet Daily News*, 13 October 2015: <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/why-did-the-justice-minister-smile.aspx?PageID=238&NID=89764&NewsCatID=503>.

24 "Konya'da 'Saygi Duyurusu': Ankara'da Hayatını Kaybedenler Yuhalanıp Islıklandı," *Diken.tr.com*, 13 October 2015: <http://www.diken.com.tr/konyada-saygi-durusu-ankarada-hayatini-kaybedenler-isliklandi/>.

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25 See Daniel Byman and Taylor Seybolt, "Humanitarian Intervention and Communal Civil Wars: Problems and Alternative Approaches," *Security Studies*, Vol 13, No. 1, 2003.

# Women's Representation across National and Local Office in Turkey

By Abdullah Aydogan, Melissa Marschall, and Marwa Shalaby, Rice University's Baker Institute

Existing research on political representation in established democracies has shown that lower-level and less prestigious offices tend to be more open and accessible to women as well as other underrepresented groups (Diamond 1977; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Rule 1987; Welch and Karnig 1979, Vengroff et al. 2003). When it comes to transitioning democracies, however, much less is known. This is partly because research on the Middle East and other regions has focused almost exclusively on women's representation at the national level. Indeed, due to the limited availability of data when it comes to gender representation at the local level, we know significantly less about who runs for and holds office, regardless of region or level of democracy.

In this memo, we bridge this gap in the literature by exploring the relationship between the level and importance (i.e. prestige) of office and women's political representation. Turkey is an ideal case for investigating this relationship due to the multi-level structure of its electoral system. To be specific, it has three levels of local councils and three levels of mayoral positions. Additionally, Turkey provides an intriguing case, because it has been a pioneer in granting women political rights since the 1930s, yet currently ranks lower than many other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries with regards to women's representation in national parliaments. Indeed, while women's political inclusion in the MENA region has surged over the past decade, Turkey only recently has witnessed a modest increase, due solely to policies introduced by the secular left-leaning parties.

To examine the relationship between female representation and the level of office, we use an extensive dataset on electoral candidates and winners in Turkey. We first compare female representation in national versus local legislatures, then analyze variations across local electoral offices. The final part of our analysis focuses on how the importance of the office – based on electoral geography as

well as functional responsibilities – affects the distribution of female candidates and winners. Our data demonstrate two main findings. First, the percentage of female candidates and winners is systematically lower in local legislative offices compared to the national assembly. Second, the relationship between female candidacy in local elections and the importance of office is non-linear; specifically, female representation in local office is highest for mid-level offices and lower for both low- and high-level offices.

## Women's Political Representation Across Levels of Office

Focusing on women and politics at the national level, existing studies on the MENA region have paid much attention to the effect of culture and conservative gender attitudes on women's access to political office (Norris and Inglehart 2001; Fish 2002; Rizzo et al. 2007). Other studies have highlighted the impact of institutional mechanisms, such as electoral laws and quota systems (Abou-Zeid 2006; Darhour and Dahlerup 2013). Some research has also examined the role played by party ideology. These studies find that whereas parties with leftist ideologies are more likely to encourage women's representation (Beckwith 1992; Reynolds 1999), parties with conservative ideologies tend to marginalize women in their party ranks by emphasizing women's traditional roles within the family. Conservative parties are also less likely to adopt quota mechanisms than left-leaning parties (Şahin-Mencutek 2014). Finally, research has emphasized the effect of economic development and demographic characteristics, such as income, population characteristics, and unemployment rates on women's success in the electoral realm (Tolunay 2014).

When it comes to the determinants of women's representation in local politics, very little is known about the MENA region in general, and the Turkish case in particular. Regional studies have shown that local elections are generally viewed as more parochial and less important

to the policymaking process (Tekeli 1981, 1991; Nanes 2015). Consistent with this view, previous work conducted in established democracies has suggested that lower-level and less prestigious offices are more open and accessible to women (Diamond 1977; Sanbonmatsu 2002; Rule 1987). According to this argument, female candidates gravitate toward less competitive political offices, which tend to have lower compensation, shorter terms and less prestige, because the entry barriers are lower and the likelihood of winning is greater. In most Western contexts, these offices tend to concentrate at the local level. To date, however, few studies have tested this argument empirically. Thus, it is not clear whether it applies to the MENA region or to the Turkish case.

### **Female Representation in Local versus National Legislative Office in Turkey**

As a part of our larger project investigating the determinants of women's candidacy and election in Turkish local politics, we explore in this section the relationship between the level of office and women's representation in elected office. Using an original dataset of the winners and candidates in the last two local (2009 and 2014) and three national (2011, June 2015, and November 2015) elections,<sup>1</sup> we aim not only to systematically examine which offices female candidates in Turkey are more likely to seek and win, but also to empirically test the extent to which patterns of women's candidacies and office-holding at the local level differ from those at the national level.

As previously noted, Turkey is an interesting case for the purpose of our study due to its multi-level system of governance. The most prestigious elected office, after the presidency, is a legislative position in the parliament, the Turkish Grand National Assembly. Currently, the Assembly has 550 seats that are occupied by the four major political parties: AKP (the governing party), CHP (center-left), MHP (right-wing nationalist), and BDP/HDP (left wing pro-Kurdish). When it comes to local governance, Turkey has a complex administrative structure. The highest

local administrative division is based on the provinces. There are 81 provinces, 30 of which are designated as metropolitan municipalities. Furthermore, there are currently 919 district municipalities under the provinces: 519 belong to a metropolitan municipality, whereas the remaining 400 have no overarching municipal body. The lowest municipal unit is the sub-district municipality. Although many of its demographic characteristics are similar to those of villages, the sub-district is normally administered under a municipal authority (Ozcaclar, 1996). Currently, there are 397 sub-district municipalities.<sup>2</sup>

At each of the three levels of local government, there are elected mayors and councils.<sup>3</sup> Both national and local legislative offices are elected through a closed party-list, proportional representation system, while mayoral offices are elected through plurality rule. Our dataset includes information for 383,229 candidates from 25 political parties who competed for 61,531 elected offices.<sup>4</sup>

We begin our analysis by comparing the proportion of female candidates and winners across legislative offices. Figure 1 reports the percentage of female candidates by party for the national assembly versus the three local councils.<sup>5</sup> Overall, the data show that the rate of female candidacies in national elections is consistently higher than all the local legislative offices. The ruling AKP accounted for about 16 percent of the female candidates during the national elections versus 13 percent for those in the district council elections, 5 percent for those in province council elections, and 4 percent for those in sub-district council elections.

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2 The number of districts and sub-districts varied significantly across the last two local elections due to the recently enacted laws on local governance (e.g. Law#6360 approved on Nov 12th, 2012). We present here the most recent data obtained from the government source: <https://www.e-icisleri.gov.tr/Anasayfa/MulkildariBolumleri.aspx>

3 Non-metropolitan provinces do not have a mayor, but they have a council.

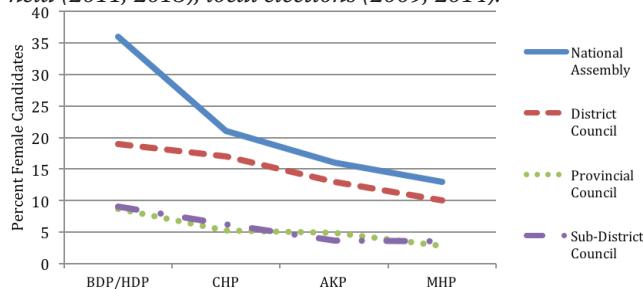
4 The entire dataset was obtained from the Turkish Higher Electoral Council (YSK) website. For his invaluable help on data gathering and processing, we are very grateful to Tayfun Tuna (Ph.D., Computer Science Department, University of Houston).

5 The numbers for the national elections represent the average percentage of female candidates in the past three elections (2011, 2015-June, 2015-November) while the numbers for the local elections represent the average percentage of female candidates in the two last district council elections (2009, 2014).

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1 The gender of the candidates was coded using computer assisted automated coding technique combined with hand-coding method. The reliability of our coding is 96.29.

*Figure 1. Percentage of Female Candidates in National versus Local Legislative Elections* Note: National elections held (2011, 2015); local elections (2009, 2014).



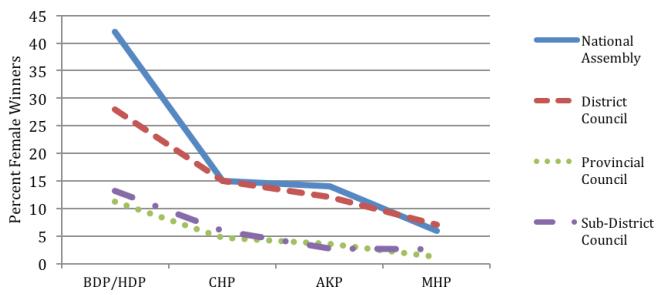
On the other hand, women made up more than 35 percent of the BDP/HDP's parliamentary candidates, compared to about 20 percent of its district council candidates, and 9 percent of its province and sub-district council candidates. The BDP/HDP's high representation in national elections can mainly be attributed to its recently enforced party quota. Results for the CHP and the MHP also show that the proportion of female candidates is higher in national elections than in local legislative elections. In terms of candidacy, local offices are not more accessible to female politicians and the percentage of female candidates is relatively lower in local versus national office.

When it comes to the winners of national versus local legislative elections, the picture is not much different. As the data in Figure 2 show, the percentage of female winners in national elections is almost equal to the percentage of female winners in district council elections for the MHP, CHP and AKP; however, there is about 15-percentage points gap between these two offices for the BDP/HDP. Furthermore, female representation in the provincial and sub-district councils is almost identical for all the parties and about 10 percentage points lower than female representation in the district councils. Hence, contrary to expectations, the proportion of female office holders is not higher in local legislatures compared to the national assembly.

### Female Representation in Local Legislature and Executives Offices

Beyond simply comparing rates of female candidates and winners across parliamentary and local council

*Figure 2. Percentage of Female Winners for the National Assembly versus Local Councils*



elections, our research also examines the nature of female representation in all local offices in more detail. As presented in Table 1, the highest incidence of women candidates (15.3 percent) and winners (14.1 percent) was in the 2014 district council elections. Women were least represented in the 2009 sub-district council elections (3.9 percent of all candidates), and in the 2009 metropolitan mayoral elections, which had no female winners.

The data in Table 1 also reveal a striking difference between the percentage of female candidates and winners for some of the offices – namely, district mayors, provincial councils, and metropolitan mayors. In some cases, the percentage of female winners is less than half the percentage of female candidates. Our explanation for such difference is twofold. First, this difference can be attributed to the fact that the major parties, which account for the overwhelming majority of winners, tend to have lower shares of female candidates compared to smaller parties. For example, in 2009 the percentage of female provincial council candidates for the four major political parties was 6.68, whereas the overall percentage of female candidates was 10.06. Second, it may be due to differences in regard to how parties place female candidates on their lists. Parties may strategically place women higher or lower on their lists depending on their electoral prospects. In other work, we show that the AKP and MHP are more likely to place female candidates lower on their lists in districts where they are more likely to win, compared to districts dominated by leftist parties (Shalaby, Marschall and Aydogan 2016).

**Table 1. Female Candidacy and Representation in Local Politics**

	Total Voters		Total Offices		Voters per Office		%Female Candidates		%Female Winners	
	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014	2009	2014
Subdistrict Councils	3,711,960	814,662	17,504	3,565	212	229	3.88	4.88	3.02	4.82
Subdistrict Mayors	3,711,960	814,662	1,974	391	1,880	2,084	4.17	4.72	3.22	4.11
District Councils	36,097,314	47,909,579	14,580	17,021	2,476	2,815	11.53	15.3	10.5	14.05
District Mayors	36,097,314	47,909,579	957	961	37,719	49,854	7.46	8.6	3.76	4.68
Provincial Councils	36,097,314	47,909,579	3,281	1,251	11,002	38,297	10.06	9.69	3.51	4.81
Metropolitan Mayors	22,677,450	40,727,194	16	30	1,417,341	1,357,573	10.09	11.27	0	10

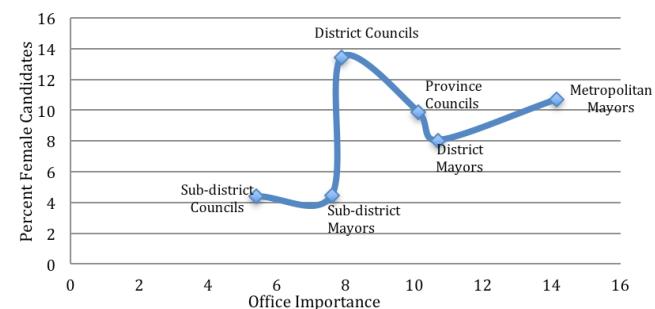
### Office Importance and Women's Political Representation in Local Office

To compare representation across different types and levels of local government more systematically, we create a measure of 'office importance'. We define importance by the number of constituents represented by the office since this taps not only the complexity and prestige of the office, but also its electoral competitiveness. It is simply the number of registered voters divided by the number of seats (or mayoral positions) for each office for the 2009 and 2014 local elections. Based on this measure, local offices are ranked from least to most important as follows: sub-district council, sub-district mayor, district council, provincial council, district mayor, and metropolitan mayor.

To illustrate the relationship between office importance and female representation, we graph office importance (logged) by the average percentage of female candidates (Figure 3) and winners (Figure 4).

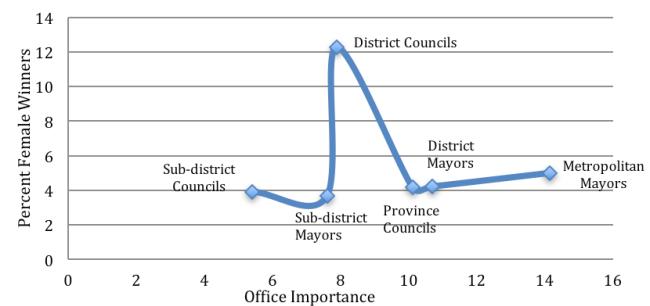
Figure 3 indicates that the percentage of female candidates is highest for district councils, which ranks in the middle in terms of office importance. In the least important offices – sub-district councils and mayoralties – the percentage of female candidacies is the lowest. Finally, for the most important offices – district mayorships, provincial councils, and metropolitan mayorships – the proportion of female candidates is somewhere in the middle, ranging from 8 to 10 percent.

*Figure 3. Percentage of Female Candidates by Local Office Importance*



When we look at the percentage of female winners, the inverse U-shaped pattern is even more pronounced. As Figure 4 demonstrates, female candidates are elected at the highest rates in these mid-level importance district councils – about 12 percent – while all other offices have lower rates, ranging from 3 to 5 percent.

*Figure 4. Percentage of Female Winners by Office Importance*



There are a number of explanations for the patterns depicted in Figures 3 and 4. First, the low level of female representation in sub-district offices may be attributed to the demographic characteristics of these jurisdictions. Since sub-districts are akin to large villages (Ozcaglar 1996), they are more rural in nature and typically have lower levels of development and education compared to the larger districts. Gender roles also tend to be more traditional in these areas. We suspect that women are less likely to be recruited as candidates in sub-districts, and to face more electoral challenges when they are on the ballot for these offices.

Second, the low number of female candidates winning metropolitan mayoral elections can be attributed to the importance and the strong competition associated with these offices. While we observe more female candidates running in metropolitan mayoral elections, this is largely driven by the fact that smaller parties with already low probability of winning tend to nominate more women for these positions. Indeed, during the last two elections, small parties nominated 66 out of the 77 female candidates for the metropolitan mayoral offices. However, only in Eskisehir, a small party, (*Demokratik Sol Parti*, DSP) won a metropolitan mayoral office in the 2009 elections.

When it comes to explaining the curvilinear relationship in both figures, we believe that – in contrast to sub-districts – districts are more urbanized administrative units with higher levels of socio-economic development in which gender norms tend to be relatively more egalitarian. Furthermore, electoral competition for these offices is considerably less fierce compared to metropolitan and provincial offices, hence, these offices are more accessible to female politicians. Finally, the observed pattern for female nomination and winning in district councils is intriguing and worth further examination to untangle its underlying mechanisms. The authors are currently working on a project to better understand this puzzle.

## Conclusion

In this memo, we explored patterns of female office-seeking and office-holding in Turkey and shed new empirical light on an aspect of representation that has heretofore received scant attention in the literature. Our results indicate that contrary to previous research, national legislative offices are more accessible to female politicians compared to local ones in the Turkish context. We also find a non-linear relationship between female representation and the importance of local offices.

Taken together, these findings have important implications for women's political inclusion in Turkey. This analysis presents an alarming picture of the current state of women's political representation in the country. Despite international and domestic pressure – especially from the European Union and women's movements – to build a more inclusive political system, the past decade has not witnessed much improvement for women as political leaders. Women continue to be marginalized in politics, especially in less visible and prestigious offices.

Finally, given the current political situation in Turkey, especially in the aftermath of the failed coup, elites are more focused on the country's security and stability, at the cost of advancing female representation. As in other parts of the world, women's issues are often pushed aside amid heightened national threats or concerns, such as economic or security crises. Voices calling for increased women's rights, including political rights, are often marginalized in the name of the national interest. If political elites, especially party leaders do not take the issue of women's political inclusion seriously, women's political representation will continue to drop as evidenced in the country's latest parliamentary elections.

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## **The Kurdish Question**

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# The Many Faces of Kurdish Political Representation in Turkey

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Empirical scholarship on representative democracy does not fully explain the role of political representation in the presence of enduring ethnic conflict. Ethnic politics involves complicated choices ranging from the use of violence to inclusion in governance. Leaders of an ethnic movement may form political parties, participate in elections and representative institutions, use violence, or utilize a combination of these means toward the achievement of ethnic interests. Turkey has had an oscillating record of democratization and an irregular civil war in the last thirty years. One of the longest ethnic insurgencies, recently escalating in the midst of Syrian war, between *Partiya Karkerân Kurdistan* (PKK) and the Turkish state provides unique opportunities for understanding the synergies between ethnic conflict and politics of representation. In this essay, I discuss the challenges and consequences of Kurdish political representation in Turkey.

The political wing of Kurdish ethno-political movement has remained highly active in the Turkish political scene since the 1990s, forming political parties, participating in elections, and voicing their demands in parliament. However, while this participation is significant, descriptive representation of the Kurdish minority operates under dual constraints. The first arises from the strict representational style of Turkish nationalist elite privileging majoritarianism over participatory and deliberative interpretations of democracy. According to this view, representative democracy is a procedural game that aggregates individual preferences into a “general will,” the embodiment of national interest. This abstract notion of “general will” dismisses the idea of minority representation. As a result, any representative initiatives aiming to legitimize the expression of Kurdish identity and advance substantive representation of minority interests have been blocked by the state elites through constitutional restrictions, legal procedures, and non-political means.

The second constraint is the use of violent insurgent strategy and its capacity to undermine diversified minority representation. The insurgent organization, PKK, has been keen to protect its political hegemony over Kurdish people for future recruitment and for increased bargaining power with the state. To that end, PKK has strategically used violence by provoking state repression against the civilians. This strategy paid off to the extent that “victimization” led to increased support for the violent insurgency in Kurdish dominated districts. At the same time, PKK has exploited Kurdish descriptive representation as leverage to expand the boundaries of “acceptable demands” toward Kurdish cultural and political autonomy. While this strategy has been generally successful, it comes at the expense of independent and diversified representation of ethnic interests. Under these constraints, the Kurdish members of parliament have utilized parliamentary means and deliberative channels in civil society to represent minority interests in a way that allowed them to make limited contributions to the Turkish democracy. I explain these arguments below by drawing from the recent advances in representational theory and by introducing preliminary data from a larger research project.

## Why does ethnic descriptive representation matter?

Representation is defined as the act of “making present again” by *standing for* and *acting for* the represented (Pitkin, 1967). The standard account of representation focuses on procedural formalities including authorization of a representative and the resulting responsiveness (i.e. accountability) of this agent to her constituency. Proponents of contemporary representational theory, in contrast, argue that representation cannot be reduced to predefined authorization rules insofar as its meaning and scope remains contingent on political realities (Plotke 1997). Such contingency most readily concerns the representation of historically disadvantaged groups (Williams, 2000) and emergence of deliberative democratic

practices (Habermas 1996). Representing is no longer the aristocratic business of a select few nor can it be limited to the equalizing power of territorial representation. Representation is best defined as “politics of presence” (Phillips 1998) and “inclusion” of all (Plotke 1997; Williams 2000).

In contemporary views of democracy, representation of women and historically marginalized groups becomes a contingent reality within an informal and deliberative public sphere (Urbinati and Warren 2008). In this conceptualization, descriptive representation of ethnic groups is particularly relevant and can serve multiple functions beyond political inclusion. Descriptive representation is defined as the level of resemblance between the represented and the agent (Pitkin 1967). It allows minority representatives to gain legitimacy for the marginalized groups, attend to constituency interests, use formal political spaces to inform policy, and contribute to a culture of consensus by forming new political alliances (Griffin, 2014; Mansbridge 1999). In summary, descriptive representation leads to substantive representation, allowing an agent to pursue the interest of the represented (Pitkin 1967).

These functions are especially likely to gain salience in conflict settings where substantive representation of ethnic minorities may help end violence. Furthermore, descriptive representation of historically disadvantaged groups, such as those that have been subject to constant repression, may increase their civic participation if representatives of these groups use informal venues to mobilize their constituency in the presence of continual conflict. While several challenges prevented the Kurdish political movement from reaping the full benefits of participation in representative institutions, members of parliament were, nonetheless, instrumental in the implementation of policies on Kurdish language in education and public spaces, cultural expressions of Kurdish identity, and human rights protection.

### **Challenges facing Kurdish Political Representation in Turkey**

Several factors prevent descriptive representation of Kurdish minority to serve its full potential. Turkey has a parliamentary system with some unusual characteristics including a 10 percent electoral threshold and a popularly elected president with extensive powers over legislative and executive domain in the context of a parliamentary system. In the same vein, the 1982 Turkish Constitution privileges a wholesale defense of national interest against individual rights. For example, the so-called “spirit of constitution” implies that once a “general will” is formed in elections the representatives will strive to act in accordance with the interests of the whole. As a result, tensions between the representation of the whole and the parts are not uncommon in the Turkish political scene.

The constitution bans the formation of ethnic political parties, yet Kurdish elite have formed several parties since the early 1990s, fueling tensions between the proponents of “national interest” and those representing ethnic demands. As Hanna Pitkin (1967, p.217) argues, “one of the most important features of representative government is in its capacity for resolving the conflicting claims of the parts, on the basis of their common interest in the common welfare of the state.” The inability of state elites to resolve such dilemmas has resulted in a number of political exclusion strategies, including closure of several ethnic political parties, extrajudicial killings, removal of legislative immunity, prosecution of Kurdish parliamentarians, and more recently the exclusion of Kurdish political representatives from institutional deliberation since the resurgence of conflict in 2015. Facing such obstacles, Kurdish representatives have pursued an ambitious agenda toward the expressions of Kurdish political identity and the expansion of their demands beyond the limits predefined by the constitution. Under such pressures, descriptive representation of the Kurdish minority has evolved into symbolic representation of an ethnic identity with instances of “inverse representation” (Barker, 1942). Inverse representation is characterized by shifting the sides of principal-agent dichotomy in the act of re-presenting and,

as described below, it makes the constituency (Kurdish people) represent what the principal (i.e. PKK) wants.

Inverse representation is as much the result of non-compromising elites who sacredly protect “national interest” as it is the result of additional constraints placed on Kurdish representatives by the insurgent organization. The PKK has built its political hegemony on the Kurdish ethnic constituency through the strategic use of violence during instances of political openings. Such strategy is quite unexpected given existing political science research on ethnic conflict resolution. Common wisdom holds that democratization induces pluralized decision-making to serve the interests of historically disadvantaged groups and to bring about peaceful resolution of ethnic conflict (Alonso and Ruiz-Rufino, 2007). However, this rationale falls short of explaining both “inverse representation” and continuation of violent ethnic conflict in Turkey to the extent that “democratization process does not necessarily facilitate the end of violent conflict as long as it introduces competition that challenges the political hegemony of the insurgent organization over its ethnic constituency” (Tezcür 2010, 776). The implications of this logic can be applied to the representative behavior of the Kurdish members of parliament in Turkey. Following a relative peace period in 1999-2004, the PKK reverted to a violent campaign as Justice and Development Party (AKP) made significant electoral gains in Kurdish districts to threaten the electoral base of insurgent organization. The organization used a similar strategy during negotiations between Abdullah Öcalan and the Turkish state (2011-2015) when a period of ceasefire was followed by the intensification of conflict. This violence brought about repressive state policies against the civilian population, which in turn increased the acceptability of such discourses as “victimhood” and “repression of Kurdish identity” in the eye of the Kurdish people. By provoking state led violence and repression against the civilians, PKK emerged as the defender of grievances and managed to justify its role as the liberator of Kurdish people. This strategy, while helping the organization’s survival, nonetheless, had negative consequences for substantive representation of Kurdish citizens. When an insurgent organization institutes

monopoly over its ethnic constituency, it will gain the upper hand in using the formal spaces of representation to open new political avenues for advancing its own goals.

A long line of ethnic political parties starting with the Democratic Society Party (DTP) and today continuing with the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), mostly served as interlocutors between the insurgent organization and the Kurdish constituents. For example, the PKK managed to manipulate descriptive representation of Kurdish people to assume the role of the *principal* in the representational equation. By consolidating its electoral monopoly on the Kurdish constituency, the PKK has shifted the object of “re-election incentive” from the constituents’ interests to the “goals of PKK leadership” creating a pattern of *inverse representation*. The PKK has also selectively fielded candidates to exert its control over the possible actions of to-be-representatives, a particularly effective strategy when defining the parameters of substantive representation. Descriptive representatives are “individuals who in their own backgrounds mirror some of the more frequent experiences and out-ward manifestations of belonging to the group” (Mansbridge 1999, p. 628). In this regard, being a Kurd is sufficient qualification to represent the Kurdish people. Rather, shared experiences and the ability to relate to constituents creates the “resemblance clause” essential for descriptive representation. The insurgent organization has supported candidates whose personal stories exemplify the effects of state repression. In other words, shared experiences of victimized by the state civilians and representatives created an overlap between descriptive and substantive representation of the Kurds.

In 1994, Kurdish businessman Savaş Buldan was abducted and killed. His wife, Pervin Buldan, founded the Association of Solidarity and Assistance for the Families of Missing Persons and became highly active against state repression. She was elected to the parliament to represent the eastern province of İğdir in 2007 and was re-elected in 2011 and 2015. A prominent figure within the Kurdish political movement and a member of parliament since 2011, Idris Baluken, became active in Kurdish political scene following his brother’s death during a clash between

the security forces and the PKK militants. And many other candidates and members of parliament – including Sirri Sakık, Aysel Tuğluk, and Selahattin Demirtaş – share stories similar to the life experiences of those who have been subjected to state repression. These representatives became embodiments of suppressed Kurdish identity to substantively represent the Kurdish political cause. They are deemed fit to represent the Kurdish people because their stories allow the insurgent organization to create a sense of belonging among the Kurds. Rather than using violence and political representation as alternative strategies, insurgent organization has utilized both. The end product of this approach has been a shift toward “inverse representational style” in the name of PKK and Abdullah Öcalan.

### **The future of Kurdish representation**

Analysis of data drawn from parliamentary questions and speeches for a larger research project about Kurdish political representation (Çiftçi and Yıldırım, 2016) reveals that against all odds, members of parliament from the pro-Kurdish parties remained active on the floor, in parliamentary committees, and in the administrative bodies of the Turkish Grand National Assembly. They asked many oral and written questions about government policies, spent considerable time in legislative debates, and carried substantive discussions in committees during their tenure. While some of these activities mirrored the goals and ideology of insurgent organization, others concerned constituency service and policy goals. The most important policy areas appear to be about education in Kurdish language, human rights protection, economic and social development of Kurdish dominated regions, and European Union membership. By making their presence in the parliament known, these representatives expanded the boundaries of acceptable demands and created de facto legitimacy for the representation of ethnic interest against the strong challenge of nationalist elite and the agenda-setting power of the insurgent organization. When formal participation channels were closed for Kurdish members of parliament, as in the current legislative term, they turned to civil society and assumed the role of agency

for Kurdish ethno-political mobilization. Such engagement is an example of extra-parliamentary representation. Thus, we can argue that Kurdish representatives have also contributed to various incarnations of deliberative democracy through civic activism in the midst of conflict.

In conclusion, the analysis of Kurdish representation in Turkey shows that ethnic movements can use descriptive representation in conjunction with violent means to advance their agenda. While serving the goals of insurgent groups, such strategy however, may undermine the substantive representation of ethnic minorities in the presence of recalcitrant nationalist elites. Although it introduces new opportunities for extra-parliamentary representation, opening formal representative channels to ethno-political movements may not necessarily be conducive to democratization in ethnically divided societies.

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## Counting the Uncounted Measuring the Politicization of Kurdish Identity in Turkey

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The success of the pro-Kurdish Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* or HDP) in Turkey's June 2015 general election came as a considerable surprise, even among party members. Although some pre-election polls in late May had the party crossing Turkey's steep 10 percent electoral threshold, none expected the party to do as well as it did, winning over 13 percent of the national vote and securing 80 parliamentary seats. And even with violent government crackdown in many party strongholds in the lead-up to the early elections called for November of that same year, the HDP once again managed to overcome the threshold, winning 10.8 percent of the national vote and 59 seats. This string of successes represented a major change in the electoral performance of pro-Kurdish parties that, at their best, had captured no more than 5 or 6 percent of the national vote in previous election years.

If we view this as a general trend, a number of questions naturally follow: Does the rising success of pro-Kurdish

parties indicate that the size of the Kurdish population in Turkey has itself increased? Or have Kurdish Turks becoming increasingly politicized and therefore more willing to support a pro-Kurdish party? Alternatively, has the liberal, left-wing political agenda of the party been increasingly able to win the support of more ethnic Turks? Tracing such a demographic shift or change in the relationship between ethnicity and political preferences would be relatively straightforward in many contexts where official census data or nationally representative surveys are available. But in Turkey, information about ethnic difference is so tightly controlled by the government that even international surveyors are prohibited from asking about them, to say nothing of official statistics on ethnicity which have not been published since 1965.

To fill the information gap, I use nationally representative survey data on ethnic self-identification and political preferences to assess patterns at the individual-level and

in the aggregate, estimating the relative size of the Kurdish population, across space and across time. Though I find no recent increase that could account for the success of Kurdish party politics, I find a steady increase in the percent of Kurdish voters that express support for pro-Kurdish parties, alongside a decline in support for these parties among members of the ethnic Turkish majority. Altogether, the share of Kurdish voters supporting pro-Kurdish parties has increased from only 3 percent of the total electorate in March 2010 to 10.8 percent in September 2015, enough to just pass the threshold without the support of other voters. Preliminary evidence indicates that the largest increases in support came from those Kurds living in districts (*ilçeler*) with larger Kurdish populations, indicating targeted mobilization by party activists.

### 1. Measuring Ethnicity in Contemporary Turkey

Despite their considerable political, economic, and historical relevance, ethnic differences have largely been ignored by the Turkish state. While the Ottoman Empire was known for centuries as a place of pluralism, coexistence turned to conflict as the empire began to collapse, and many minority communities emigrated, whether by choice or by force, in the early decades of the twentieth century. When the Turkish Republic emerged from the ashes of the collapsed empire, the mood changed yet again – a singular focus on the Turkish-Sunni nation-state meant a denial of ethnic and religious differences in favor of an illusion of homogeneity, resulting in a paucity of data on identity. Although early Republican censuses continued the Ottoman tradition of enumerating mother tongue (a proxy for ethnicity) and religious denomination, there is some evidence of official manipulation of these results and, starting in 1965, they ceased being published altogether. In the absence of official statistics, scholars of ethnicity in contemporary Turkey have been left to rely on demographic projections from fifty-year-old censuses and data on mother tongue from the Demographic and Health Survey, both of which may introduce some bias into their estimations of group size.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> While the former makes a number of assumptions about population growth rates and migratory patterns over a fifty-year period, the latter – like the official censuses – assumes that mother tongue is the same as ethnic identity, although it is, at best, only an imperfect proxy.

As a corrective to these existing limitations, I look at responses to a series of 54 nationally representative face-to-face surveys conducted by KONDA Research and Consultancy between 2010 and 2015. Altogether, survey data exist for just under 150,000 respondents from nearly 6000 neighborhoods and villages in 490 districts (*ilçeler*) in 66 provinces across all 12 of Turkey's geographical regions. Consistently across all surveys, respondents are asked a sensitively-worded subjective question about their ethnic identity: “We are all citizens of the Republic of Turkey, but we may have different ethnic roots. As far as you know or feel, what is your identity?”<sup>2</sup> In Turkish: “*Hepimiz Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşyız, ama değişik etnik kökenlerden olabiliriz; Siz kendinizi, kimliğinizi ne olarak biliyorsunuz veya hissediyorsunuz?*” Answers are transcribed verbatim and later coded as either Turkish, Kurdish, Zaza, Arab, or Other. In addition, respondents are asked how they would vote if a general election were held tomorrow, with answers ranging from one of the major political parties to a minor party or independent candidate to being undecided or being uninterested in voting at all.

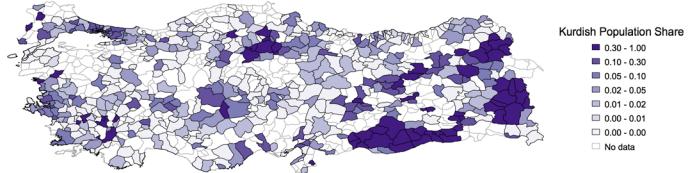


Figure 1: Kurdish Population Share across Districts

Across all respondents, I find that 13.1 percent self-identify as Kurdish, with considerable sub-national variation (Figure 1). (Although some provinces (*iller*) are not covered in the survey data and, within them, some districts (*ilçeler*), there is no systematic pattern to this missingness, so that the data can be taken as broadly representative.) Large Kurdish populations have been correctly identified in much of southeastern Turkey, as well as parts of the northeast, while urban centers in western and central Turkey are also identified as having relatively large Kurdish populations. When I disaggregate the national average

<sup>2</sup> In Turkish: “*Hepimiz Türkiye Cumhuriyeti vatandaşyız, ama değişik etnik kökenlerden olabiliriz; Siz kendinizi, kimliğinizi ne olarak biliyorsunuz veya hissediyorsunuz?*”

across time, I find no indication of an increase in the size of Turkey's Kurdish population over the past five years that might explain the parallel rise in the success of pro-Kurdish parties (Figure 2). If anything, the only group that appears to have grown over time is the catch-all "Other" category, which has seen a slight increase at the expense of self-identified ethnic Turks.<sup>3</sup>

Disaggregation of this catch-all category indicates that the increase is not in self-identified Arabs or Zazas but in those who fall into far smaller categories or who eschew the use of ethnic categories altogether.

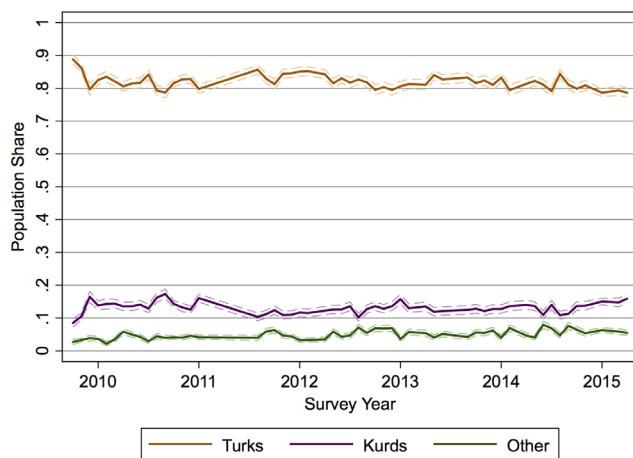


Figure 2: Population Share of Ethnic Groups, 2010-2015

## 2. The Rise of Kurdish Political Identity in Turkey

If the relative size of the Kurdish population has not increased in recent years, how are we to explain the rising success of pro-Kurdish political parties? One concern is response bias that is masking a real change in underlying demographics. If that were the case, stated support for pro-Kurdish parties would likely also be under-reported. But unlike the relative share of the Kurdish population, levels of self-reported support for the pro-Kurdish Peace and Democracy Party (*Başın ve Demokrasi Partisi* or BDP) and the HDP have steadily increased over time, paralleling the party's rising success in local and general elections (Figure

3 Disaggregation of this catch-all category indicates that the increase is not in self-identified Arabs or Zazas but in those who fall into far smaller categories or who eschew the use of ethnic categories altogether.

3). While only 2.5 percent said that they would support the BDP in March 2010, 9.9 percent indicated their support for its successor, the HDP, in September 2015. This is a considerable increase, especially given the large percentage of undecided respondents (16.9 percent) and those who say they would not vote (almost 4 percent).

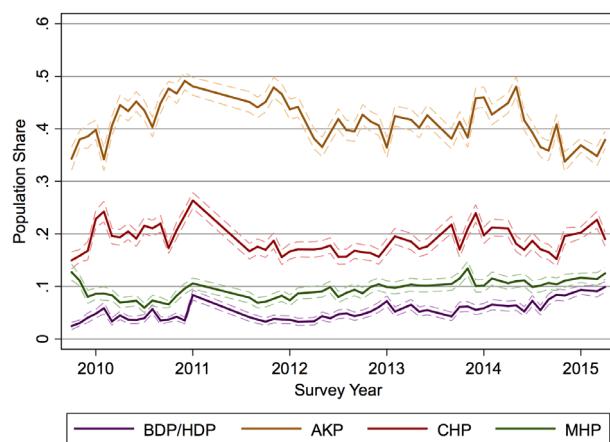


Figure 3: Support for Major Political Parties, 2010-2015

An increase in stated support for pro-Kurdish parties should alleviate some concerns about response bias, but it does not address our motivating question: what explains the rising success of Kurdish-based politics? An examination of variation in support for Kurdish parties across ethnic categories over time indicates the surge in support has come almost entirely from voters who identify as Kurdish (Figure 4). While support for the BDP and HDP among Turkish voters has remained consistently small over time – hovering at or under 1 percent – support for the pro-Kurdish parties among Kurdish voters has steadily increased, from under 35.8 percent in March 2010 to nearly 68.0 percent in September 2015. (There is also some indication that support for pro-Kurdish parties is growing among voters who identify as ethnically "Other" – from 0 percent in the earliest surveys to almost 13 percent in 2015 – but the small size of this group – just 5 percent of the Turkish population – limits the extent to which this increase could actually influence the outcome of a general election.) Even without an increase in the relative size of the Kurdish population, this shift in party support has meant that Kurdish voter support for Kurdish parties

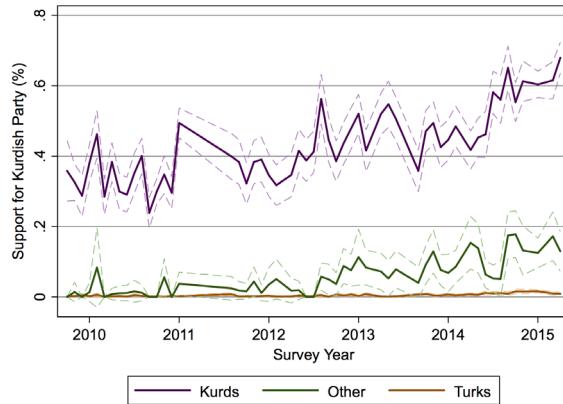


Figure 4: Support for Kurdish Political Parties, by Ethnic Identity 2010-2015

doubled from just 4.4 percent of all decided respondents in 2010 to 8.8 percent in 2015.

So what explains this increase? One possibility is that a demographic shift within the Kurdish population has increased the extent to which Kurdish identity is politicized. Across all respondents, I find greater support for pro-Kurdish parties among younger male voters who are relatively undereducated. If the Kurdish population has become increasingly younger, increasingly less educated or if there has been a shift in its gender balance, demographics might be able to explain the change over time. I account for this possibility by running multivariate regressions of pro-Kurdish party support including basic demographic characteristics – age, gender, and education – and bivariate indicators of Kurdish and Turkish ethnicity for each year in the dataset. A plot of the ethnicity coefficients over time (Figure 5) reveals that the impact of Turkish ethnicity on pro-Kurdish party support rose and then fell, while the magnitude of the Kurdish coefficient has almost monotonically increased, even after controlling for demographic differences.

To understand what factors have become increasingly important in determining Kurdish voters' support for pro-Kurdish parties, I ran a number of regression models of party preferences among survey respondents who self-identify as Kurdish. In each, I included interaction between a given variable – individual demographics, including age, gender and education, as well as geographic ones,

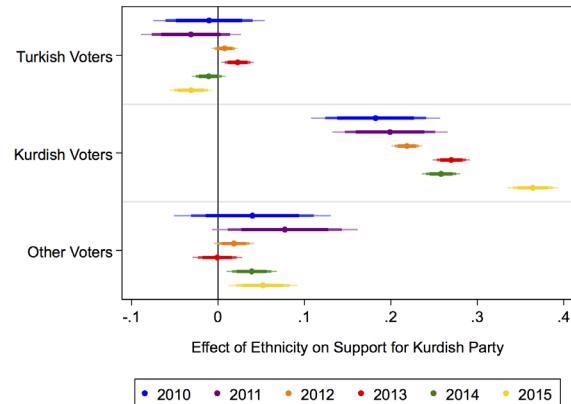


Figure 5: Effect of Ethnicity on Support for pro-Kurdish Parties, 2010-2015

including the estimated size of the Kurdish population in the respondent's home district – and bivariate indicators of each survey year after 2010. Most remarkable, perhaps, is what I did not find: the impact of individual-level demographic characteristics on Kurdish voters' preference for pro-Kurdish parties has remained entirely stable over time. Age, gender and education impact their preference for pro-Kurdish parties in the same way in 2015 as they did in every previous year. The only significant pattern is the importance of local demographics to individual vote-choices: among Kurdish voters, the relative size of the Kurdish population in their home district boosts their level of support for pro-Kurdish parties in all years, but the magnitude of this positive effect increases over time, especially after 2011 (Figure 6).

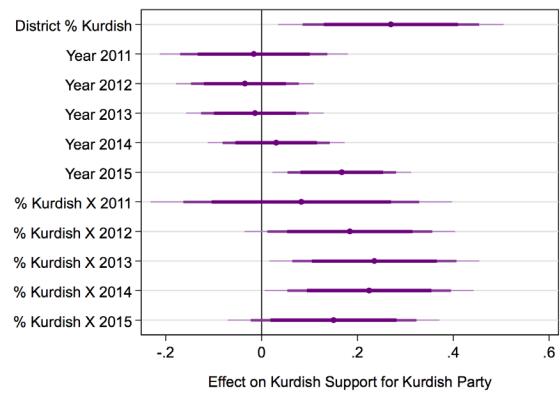


Figure 6: Effect of District Demographics on Kurdish Support for Kurdish Parties

This interaction effect largely explains the increase in pro-Kurdish party support over time, although there remains a positive intercept shift in 2015. Further, these interaction effects are robust to the inclusion of fixed effects at the region- (*bölge*) and province-level, indicating that this is more about local environment than geographic variation. Still the reasons for the increasing importance of local demographics remains unclear: it is possible that HDP officials are targeting their mobilization efforts in the most heavily Kurdish areas; alternatively, it may be that Kurdish voters most open to pro-Kurdish politics are choosing to live in areas where they constitute a large share of the population. Using information about survey respondents' birth province, as well as their father's birth province, I am able to test for this type of a sorting mechanism. Controlling for respondents' current home province, I find that internal migration has a direct positive effect on Kurdish support for pro-Kurdish parties but that this effect has decreased over time, evidence against a sorting mechanism.

## Conclusion

Using new data on ethnic identification and political preferences in Turkey, I am able to confirm that the recent rise in pro-Kurdish politics is the result not of an underlying demographic shift nor of the increasing support of ethnic Turks. Instead, it appears that the ethnic identity of Kurdish voters in Turkey has become increasingly politicized in recent years, especially in areas with larger Kurdish populations. It is clear, therefore, that ethnic demography is becoming increasingly important in Turkish politics, a trend that warrants more attention from country specialists.



# Why did the PKK declare Revolutionary People's War in July 2015?

By Şener Aktürk, Koç University, Istanbul

On July 11, 2015, KCK, a political umbrella organization for the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK), declared an end to the ceasefire with Turkey due to the hydroelectric "dams being built for a military purpose" by the Turkish state (T24 2015). Three days later, Bese Hozat (2015), the co-chair of the KCK, published an op-ed in *Özgür Gündem*, the semiofficial newspaper of the PKK, titled, "The new process is Revolutionary People's War," where she declared the beginning of the PKK's offensive. What followed was the most violent episode of uninterrupted fighting between the PKK and the Turkish Armed Forces (TAF) since the 1990s, compounded with frequent suicide bombing attacks that hit civilians in major urban centers such as Istanbul, Ankara, Bitlis, Bursa, Elazığ and Van, among others. The violence between the PKK and TAF that began in July 2015 has been continuing as of this writing in October 2016.

Why did the PKK declare "Revolutionary People's War" in July 2015? This is a genuine puzzle of the highest order for both political scientists and policy makers alike, since the political historical significance of the spiral of violence that began in July 2015 cannot be overstated. PKK's decision to go to war is a significant puzzle at least for two primary reasons. First, based on the progress Turkey made in terms of ethno-linguistic rights for the Kurds under the AK Party governments, such as Kurdish public television and Kurdish languages as elective courses in public schools (Akturk 2012), one may not expect the PKK to launch a major offensive that could be very difficult to justify to its Kurdish recruiting base. Second, based on the meteoric rise of the pro-PKK, socialist Peoples' Democratic Party (*Halkların Demokratik Partisi* or HDP), one would think that the PKK would like to capitalize on this election victory and leverage the political clout rather than launch a major offensive likely to marginalize it.

In this brief memo, I posit five explanations for the PKK's decision that are seemingly logical at a very basic level, then scrutinize each by using publicly available data that challenge or corroborate it. The first three explanations

are based on Turkey's domestic politics, whereas the latter two explanations are based on Turkey's foreign policy vis-à-vis Syria. Except for the third hypothesis, these hypotheses cover possible short-term, proximate causes of the PKK's offensive, and thus do not include any long-term, structural reasons that may explain why the PKK has been at war against Turkey for the last three decades. Long-term, structural reasons that are not specific to 2015 may give some insights about the nature of the conflict but they cannot explain why the largest PKK offensive in the last 15 years occurred in July 2015. In other words, this brief piece seeks to uncover the immediate, short-term "trigger" that led to the PKK offensive in July 2015.

## Hypothesis 1: HDP-PKK Rivalry

First, the spectacular and unprecedented surge of the HDP in Turkey's June 2015 elections may have threatened to undo the unofficial subordination of the legal political party, HDP, to the illegal PKK. This rivalry potentially motivated the PKK to launch its largest offensive in more than a decade as a show of force vis-à-vis Kurds and non-Kurds alike including the HDP. Among many leftist columnists, opinion leaders, and politicians, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, the leader of the main opposition party, Kemalist CHP, explicitly stated that "PKK is aiming to keep HDP out of the parliament" (*Habertürk* 2015) by launching this offensive. There is some evidence to support this hypothesis. In an op-ed published in PKK's *Özgür Gündem* in August 2015, Duran Kalkan, a member of the PKK executive committee, listed the faults of the HDP and called on the party to engage in self-criticism on these issues (Diken 2015). PKK's sporadic criticisms of the HDP continued after the November 2015 elections. For example, KCK co-chair Cemil Bayık claimed right after HDP's election victory that, "if it wasn't for us [i.e., KCK-PKK], HDP could not even garner 5% [of the vote]" (*AlJazeera Turk* 2015). Despite Bayık's (and PKK's) claims, let me briefly note that HDP's popular base is greater than the sympathizers of the PKK, and it includes a

significant share of Kurdish and non-Kurdish socialists, as well as some liberals, and even Islamic conservatives. Thus, PKK sympathizers are but a subset, albeit the most demographically significant, of HDP supporters.

What makes this hypothesis ultimately unconvincing is the virtual absence of any direct condemnation or criticism coming from the HDP against the PKK, which, if it existed, could substantiate the alleged aspiration of the HDP to free itself from the yoke of the PKK. Even when the PKK detonated 15 tons of explosives killing 16 Kurdish civilians, including teenagers (BBC 2015; Sabah 2015), the HDP did not condemn the PKK for its actions. The HDP had 80 members of the parliament (MPs) after June 2015 elections, and 59 MPs after the November 2015 elections. Not a single one resigned from the party to protest PKK's Revolutionary People's War, or the HDP's silence vis-à-vis PKK's new offensive, which increasingly included urban terrorism that killed many civilians. The only notable HDP representative who openly criticized PKK was a former political Islamist, Altan Tan, who was then criticized for his criticisms. Thus, this hypothesis relies on a secret if not wishful/imaginary split between the PKK and the HDP, explaining PKK's offensive as an attempt to discipline and subordinate the HDP, whereas no publicly available evidence shows HDP's insubordination to, let alone conflict with, the PKK.

### **Hypothesis 2: Mobilizational Spillover**

Second, and based on an assumption that is almost exact opposite of the first hypothesis, one can argue that the PKK interpreted the historic electoral highpoint of the HDP as a popular mandate for a revolutionary insurrection to establish a Kurdish socialist state. This may be a radical misinterpretation of the reasons why six million people voted for the HDP in June 2015, since many explicitly justified their endorsement of the HDP by arguing that strong electoral support for the HDP would strengthen the party and weaken the PKK and end to its decades-long violent armed struggle. "Supporting HDP in order to pacify PKK" was perhaps the most popular argument in favor of endorsing the HDP prior to the June 2015 elections, as the leader of the HDP, Selahattin Demirtaş

himself explicitly stated (IMC 2015). However, PKK is likely to have disagreed with this line of argument, instead seeing the swelling of electoral support for the HDP as an endorsement of the PKK, as Cemil Bayık's statement quoted earlier (AlJazeera Turk 2015) also corroborates. In that case, PKK may have sought to utilize the mobilizational success achieved during the election cycle for the purposes of its violent insurgency. Lending credence to this claim is the empirical observation that there has been a somewhat regular spike in PKK attacks around the 2007 general elections (Tezcür 2009, p.781), and 2011 general elections (Çağaptay 2013), the two preceding electoral cycles.

In contrast, one can also plausibly argue that both the magnitude of the PKK offensive in July 2015, which was unprecedented since the 1990s (before Abdullah Ocalan's capture in 1999), and the fact that it did not subside but rather *increased* after the end of the second general election in (November) 2015, both challenge the plausibility of this hypothesis. Moreover, HDP lost more than a million votes, and its national vote declined from 13.1 to 10.7 percent in just over three months after the PKK's offensive began. Thus, the end of the election cycle, if not the especially precipitous fall in the HDP votes, should have also led to PKK's demobilization, if violence was indeed caused primarily by Turkish election cycles.

### **Hypothesis 3: Government Inaction**

Third, government (re)action, or rather government inaction, in the face of PKK demands for power sharing over the years could be posited as a reason for the beginning of the PKK offensive in July 2015. After all, in the declaration ending the ceasefire in July 11, 2015, in addition to "dams being built for a military purpose," the PKK also accused Turkish government of committing a "political genocide" against it. Kurdish socialist HDP and the AK Party government in Turkey fiercely compete for the ethnic Kurdish vote, and in certain electoral cycles such as in 2007, AK Party received significantly more Kurdish votes than the Kurdish socialist parties, which could be interpreted as a "political genocide" by the PKK. However, the June 2015 election would have been the

least supportive of this argument since HDP received the highest number and percentage of votes of any Kurdish socialist party in history. Although the Turkish government refuses to enter into some kind of a power-sharing agreement with the PKK, this refusal is not new, since numerous Turkish governments over the last 32 years all refused to enter into any formal power sharing agreement with the PKK. Such a refusal now would not distinguish July 2015 from any other period in the last three decades.

These three hypotheses provide domestic level explanations for the PKK's decision to end ceasefire and launch Revolutionary People's War in the first half of July 2015. However, one can also posit at least two different but related international level explanations for the PKK's critical decision in this historical juncture, both of which relate to the developments in the Syrian civil war at the time.

#### **Hypothesis 4: the PYD State**

Fourth explanation for the PKK's decision to end the ceasefire and launch its offensive in July 2015 would be the protection of the de facto state that has been established by the PYD in northeastern Syria. PYD is the Syrian branch of the PKK (Aktürk 2016). There was a brief period of rapprochement between Turkey and the PYD leadership. For example, PYD leader Salih Muslim visited Ankara in October 2014 (AlJazeera Turk 2014) and soon thereafter Turkey facilitated the passage of Iraqi Kurdish peshmerga through Turkey to Kobane, which was critical in defeating the ISIS assault on that city. However, this ambiguous episode was the exception rather than the rule in Turkish-PYD relations, and Turkey has been steadfastly against the consolidation of PYD power in northern Syria since then. Moreover, in the spring and early summer of 2015, the Turkish-backed Syrian opposition was advancing against the Assad regime forces. Thus, the critical period between the June and November 2015 elections, when Turkey only had a provisional government and intermittent coalition negotiations, presented a window of opportunity for the PKK to launch a preemptive attack against Turkey in order to safeguard the existence of the PYD state in northern Syria, or Rojava (literally translated as "the West," meaning Western Kurdistan). Elevation of the "Rojava Revolution"

myth in the domestic and international PKK propaganda lends credence to this hypothesis as does the mobilization of numerous socialist (Kurdish and non-Kurdish) militants within Turkey, who traveled to Syria to join the PYD. Indeed, the Turkish military was primarily occupied with fighting the PKK between July 2015 and July 2016, and was only able to launch an incursion into northern Syria in late August 2016. This one-year period gave the PYD the opportunity to consolidate and even expand its territorial control across much of northern Syria.

#### **Hypothesis 5: the Russian-Iranian Axis**

Fifth, there may have been a tacit mutual understanding, or perhaps a secret agreement, among Russia, Iran, the Assad regime, and the PYD earlier in 2015. Although unbeknownst to almost everyone, including many Russia observers, Russia had been planning to militarily intervene in Syria, which it eventually did in September 2015. In preparation for this intervention, Russia, Iran, and the regime may have struck a deal with the PYD-PKK, in which the PKK would launch a major offensive within Turkey to prevent the Turkish military from intervening in Syria before or during the initial stages of the impending Russian intervention. The rapid escalation of tensions between Russia and Turkey after the Russian intervention in Syria, which culminated in Turkey shooting down a Russian bomber in November 24, 2015, and was followed by increased Russian military and political support for the PYD, all lend credence to this hypothesis. This hypothesis is also theoretically consistent with the arguments found in international relations scholarship that emphasizes the critical role of external patrons of terrorist organizations (San-Akca 2016) or insurgent ethnic groups (Mylonas 2012). In just a couple of months in late 2015, Russian intervention was able to reverse the decline of the Assad regime, and change the military strategic calculus against the Syrian opposition forces backed by Turkey.

#### **What can we learn from counterfactuals?**

Counterfactuals are useful if not necessary in the absence of real experiments in the social sciences. In an effort to summarize the five hypotheses outlined in this brief memo,

one can summarize each in the form of a counterfactual question and posit a tentative answer on the basis of what we know from publicly available sources. Would the PKK launch its July 2015 offensive in the absence of the HDP's historically high polling in the June 2015 elections? Would the PKK launch its offensive if the HDP demonstrated unswerving and indisputable obedience to the PKK? My answer to each of these questions would be a tentative "yes." Would the PKK launch its offensive if Turkey unofficially recognized and even supported the PYD state in Syria? I think the answer to that question is "almost certainly no," because such recognition would provide the PKK leadership and the rank-and-file both a symbolic and a substantive victory in achieving their ultimate goal of creating a Kurdish socialist state in the Middle East, and hence would justify extending the ceasefire with Turkey. Finally, if Turkey struck a deal with Russia, Iran, and even the Assad regime itself, about the future of Syria that envisioned shrinking the territory controlled by the PYD, would the PKK launch its offensive? My answer would be, "possibly yes, but with much greater difficulty," because the PKK is not an actor that is entirely or primarily subservient to the Iranian-Syrian geopolitical axis, as some Turkish observers seem to think. The PKK could launch an offensive against Turkey, as long as it felt the PYD entity in Syria or the PKK's position within Turkey were threatened, even if Turkey mended its relations with Russia, Iran, or the Assad regime in Syria, which are considered geopolitical patrons of the PKK at one time or another.

In short, PKK's fateful decision to end the ceasefire and launch Revolutionary People's War against Turkey in the first half of July 2015 had enormous social and political consequences that cannot be overstated. Despite its significance, however, the cause(s) that motivated this critical decision have not been systematically studied and scrutinized. In this brief memo I formulated five potentially plausible hypotheses based on some of the popularly cited reasons for the PKK offensive in order explain this decision, and discussed some of the claims in favor and against them.

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## Politics of Confinement: Curfews and Civilian Control in Turkish Counterinsurgency

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Following his visit to Turkey on April 14, 2016, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Nils Muižnieks, reported that, "round-the-clock, open-ended and increasingly long curfews declared in entire neighborhoods or cities in South-Eastern Turkey" have been the defining feature of counterinsurgency operations since July 2015. In response to the renewed conflict in Kurdish areas in the wake of the June 2015 election, the AKP government launched a massive campaign of curfews in city centers. The duration of the curfews ranged from several days to several weeks with the longest one in the Cizre district of Sirnak, lasting nine months, the first 79 days of which civilians were confined 24 hours a day.

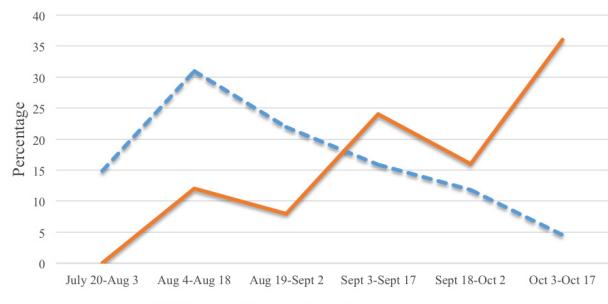
Curfews were population control measures. They targeted civilians by suspending individual rights and freedoms and resulted in hundreds of deaths, displaced thousands, and destroyed whole towns. In terms of its effect on civilian populations, this episode of Turkish counterinsurgency remains unprecedented in the long history of the Kurdish conflict. Human rights organizations report that curfews affected more than one million residents and led to the displacement of an estimated 100,000 civilians. Turkey Human Rights Organization (TIHV) estimates that 321 civilians died, mostly because of lack of access to emergency care and by fire from armored vehicles. Use of heavy weaponry in populated settings led to the complete destruction of city centers. In Sirnak alone, 9 of 12

neighborhoods were wiped out leading to the demolition of an estimated 7,000 buildings.

These curfews escaped the scrutiny of the Turkish parliament. Unlike previous emergency rule legislations that had to be approved by the Turkish Grand National Assembly according to the Turkey's 1982 Constitution, curfews were announced by province and sub-province governors with no legislative or judiciary oversight. Basing their decision on the Provincial Administration Law, local bureaucrats took advantage of a legal framework that does not even mention curfews and therefore lacks the safeguards of the Constitution ([Venice Commission](#)). This strategy allowed the counterinsurgent to suspend constitutional rights of citizens without justifying its decision to the public and international audiences. The AKP government argued that governors should have jurisdiction over curfews because they are in a better position to evaluate the security threats in their areas and respond accordingly. Ironically, however, the wording of curfew announcements in different districts was almost identical, indicating the possibility that governors were simply implementing the government's priorities.

The curious timing and distribution of curfews in southeast Anatolia raises critical questions. Our data on 113 districts in the southeast corner of Turkey – previously known as OHAL Bolgesi, State of Emergency zone – show that neither the distribution of insurgent attacks nor of self-rule announcements by movement activists seems to explain which cities were put on lockdown. First, the timing and geographical coverage of insurgent attacks hardly justify the argument that curfews were a military necessity. A closer look shows that of the 25 districts that received 70 percent of all insurgent attacks between the two elections in 2015, only eight were subject to curfew and experienced 29 percent of total attacks. Similarly, a biweekly classification of insurgent attacks starting by July 20 and ending on the day of the snap election in November, shows that by October 3, 95 percent of all insurgent attacks were over. However, curfews were slowly picking up pace. Forty percent of all curfew announcements came after October 3, and the duration of curfews increased over time.

**Figure 1. Timing of Insurgent Attacks and Curfews**



Second, PKK's increasing control in urban areas was not a new development. Self-rule announcements by HDP representatives and PKK affiliates were only the final step in PKK's urban encroachment. If curfews responded to self-rule attempts, why did the counterinsurgent wait until October? All self-rule announcements were made in mid-August, in celebration of the PKK's 31st anniversary. There were also other districts with self-rule declarations, fifteen in total, where no curfew was ordered. For instance, the Başkale district in Van provided all the justifications for the counterinsurgent to impose a curfew, but the governor carefully avoided one.

If not insurgency or autonomy demands, then what drove Turkish counterinsurgency measures in this episode? Scholars working on the determinants of electoral support in Turkey mainly looked at the effect of PKK attacks but failed to account for incumbent violence (Kibris 2011). Our argument benefits from the literature on political violence and elections. [Wilkinson \(2004\)](#), for instance, shows that in localities characterized by close electoral races, the incumbent can mobilize its constituencies by instigating or refusing to intervene in communal violence. Evidence from the Turkish case supports this point and also presents several novelties. The main distinguishing characteristic of the Turkish experience was that curfews were adopted as part of a counterinsurgency campaign that targeted areas where the Kurdish mass party has a significant following. Organic ties between the HDP and the insurgent organization allowed the counterinsurgent to legitimately make the argument that party strongholds were also terrorist hideouts.

Considering their dramatic effect on civilian populations, do curfews involve any political costs for the Turkish government? At first look, the political consequences of curfews are hardly surprising. Urban voters in curfew settings punished the AKP and rewarded the HDP. Incumbent losses were substantial at the district level (5.4 percentage points) when curfew districts are compared to non-curfew districts. If curfews as a counterinsurgency policy backfired politically, then why did the government use them extensively? Most important, curfews were a political instrument. The incumbent used information from the June election to detect political preferences, then used repression selectively to punish pro-HDP districts and reward pro-AKP districts (Dunning 2011). Districts that received curfews were in which the ethnic party received at least 50 percent of the valid vote. Accordingly, all districts ( $n=12$ ) where curfews were announced in urban areas emerged as HDP strongholds in the June election. In fact, 9 of the 12 curfew districts were among the 22 urban areas where the incumbent party received the fewest votes in June. Therefore, the incumbent had no realistic expectations from these areas in the November 2015 election.

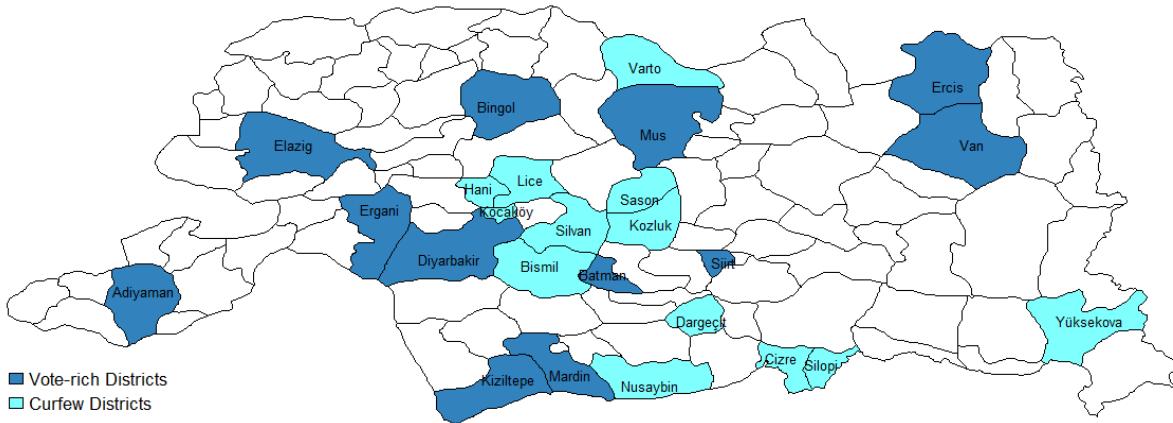
Curfews were the perfect instrument to reduce support for the ethnic party. Restrictions led to an average decrease of 3.5 percent in turnout. With the breakdown of peace negotiations in July, the government implemented scorched earth counterinsurgency tactics. Destruction of neighborhoods during urban warfare forced residents to leave, and resettlement was discouraged. Civilians were barred from entering partially destroyed buildings or fixing their property. Remaining buildings were confiscated and handed over to the Housing Development Administration. Those who stayed were uneasily confined by open-ended curfews and feared to leave their homes to go to the ballot box. Homeless residents were left to fend for themselves with no relocation opportunities or reimbursement of housing costs. In one of these extreme measures, Sırnak

province has been relegated to the status of a district to discourage investment with tax breaks and limit economic opportunities for would-be residents. The dense social ties in close-knit neighborhoods that were once utilized by movement activists to spread the word were destroyed to prevent political mobilization.

By contrast, in areas where political expectations were involved, the government was careful not to alienate civilians. When forced to choose between military priorities and electoral calculations, the government's answer was obvious. The intricacies of electoral geography in southeast Turkey expose the political motivations behind curfew ordinances. The region is characterized by a few populous central districts and several districts with few residents. Accordingly, the fifteen districts with the largest number of registered voters in the June election are home to roughly half of all registered voters in the region. Thirteen districts in this group are central districts, which are province centers or central districts carved from province centers of Van, Mardin and Diyarbakır. These vote-rich districts determined the outcome of the election and held the key to electoral victory in the snap election.

Governors refrained from invoking a curfew in the 15 vote-rich districts despite the fact they received a fair share of insurgent violence (Map 1). Of this group, six were among the top 25 targets of the insurgency. Vote-rich districts accounted for 17 percent of insurgent attacks and 12 percent of security casualties in urban settings. Populated localities were neither peaceful havens nor hotbeds of insurgency. Yet the government's response was unexpected. Despite the tough talk on PKK violence and harsh counterinsurgency measures elsewhere, population control was out of question in highly populated vote-rich Bağlar district of Diyarbakır. In other words, curfews bypassed these districts altogether in order to secure an electoral victory in the November election.

Map 1. Curfews and Electoral Politics in Southeastern Turkey  
(June–November 2015)



*Note: The map treats central districts of Diyarbakir, Van and Mardin as single units. Three central districts, two in Diyarbakir and one in Van, experienced curfews. Since curfews and vote-rich districts do not overlap, this does not change our conclusions.*

A comparison of district level vote shares in June and November elections strongly suggests that the incumbent's political calculation paid off. Not experiencing civilian control measures, vote-rich districts awarded the government party substantial support: 56 percent of all AKP gains (187,957 votes) in southeast Turkey in November came from these fifteen districts. This sub-regional trend translated into a major loss for the HDP, corresponding to 48 percent of all HDP losses (133,533 votes) in the election. In sum, counterinsurgency tactics that exploited the divisions within the Kurdish society between conservatives and ethnicists worked to increase

electoral support for the government. Whether civilians in these settings approved violence or hid their true preferences to avoid being the victim of the next military campaign remains a question. Elections only present an aggregate way to examine political preferences. Despite such limitations, election results may perhaps be our only gateway to civilians' attitudes and their transformation in war zones. In the Turkish context, evidence strongly suggests that, if skillfully crafted to reward supporters and punish the opposition, selective repression may deliver major political dividends for the incumbent in institutional politics.



# Foreign Fighters from Turkey

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## Introduction

One of the effects of the Syrian civil war on Turkey has been the significant rise in the number of foreign fighters from this country. While Turkish citizens have traveled to foreign lands and fought in the “wars of others” since at least the early 1970s, the scope and pace of foreign fighter mobilization since the outbreak of the Syrian civil war has been unprecedented. These fighters primarily pursued two opposing ideological goals, risking their lives to take arms either for religious (i.e., *ummah* and caliphate) or nationalist (i.e., Kurdistan) political projects. Demographic analysis of hundreds of these fighters sheds some light on exactly who these individuals are, where they come from and how they differ from those who left Turkey to fight a generation ago. It also provides some insights about the motives of these individuals. As some of these individuals return after conflict abroad – at times with deadly consequences – understanding these motivations becomes increasingly important.

## Fighting for Kurdistan

The armed struggle between the Turkish state and the PKK (*Partiya Karkarên Kurdistan*, or the Kurdistan Worker’s Party) is one of the longest lasting ethnic conflicts of contemporary times. Two factors have contributed to the resiliency of the PKK over more than three decades. First, access to safe havens in neighboring countries allow it to train military forces, support a reserve of fighters, and regroup after periods of defeat and disunity. Next, the PKK is a transnational ethno-nationalist insurgency with strong appeal among not only Kurds of Turkey but also Kurds in the neighboring countries and the Kurdish Diaspora in Europe. In particular, a large number of Syrian and Iranian Kurds have lost their lives fighting security forces

in Turkey.<sup>1</sup> In turn, Kurds from Turkey have fought against the Iranian regime since 2004 and have participated in the Syrian civil war since 2012. More than fifty percent of the 123 PJAK (*Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê*, a PKK-affiliated Kurdish organization based primarily in Iran) militants who lost their lives fighting the Islamic Republic of Iran between 2005 and June 2016 were actually Turkish citizens. Thousands of young individuals from Turkey traveled to Syria to fight in the ranks of YPG (*Yekîneyên Parastina Gel*), a Kurdish militia force with extensive linkages to the PKK, since 2012.

The Turkish government’s decision to start negotiations with the PKK leadership in early 2013 decreased the fatalities due to armed clashes to their lowest level since the early 2000s. However, this temporary lull in violence was undermined after the self-styled Islamic State (IS) besieged the border town of Kobanî in the de facto autonomous Kurdish region of Syria, *Rojava*, in fall 2014. I have identified 706 Turkish citizens who fought in the ranks of the YPG against jihadist groups and were killed in Syria between July 2013 and September 2016.<sup>2</sup> While some of the individuals were seasoned militants who joined the PKK many years ago, others were fresh recruits who directly joined the YPG. Overall, Kurdish youth fighting in *Rojava* do not seem to have significantly different characteristics than Kurdish youth fighting against the Turkish security forces, blurring the distinction between Kurdish foreign fighters and insurgents.

An overwhelming majority of these fighters were single

<sup>1</sup> At least 20 percent of the deceased PKK fighters were born in Syria, Iran, or Iraq. These numbers come from the Kurdish Insurgency Militants (KIM) dataset that is available at [www.tezcur.org](http://www.tezcur.org). For a comprehensive study of PKK militants, see Güneş Murat Tezcür, “Ordinary People, Extraordinary Risks: Participation in an Ethnic Rebellion,” *American Political Science Review* 110 (May 2016): 247-64.

<sup>2</sup> The information is obtained from various Kurdish and Turkish news agencies (i.e., Ajansa Nûçeyan a Firatê) in addition to the YPG official website (<http://ypgrojava.com/ku/index.php/y-daxuyani/menu-showcase/y-sehidenme>).

men and women in teens or twenties suggesting the importance of biographical availability for recruitment. More than 40 percent came from only three provinces: Diyarbakır, the most populous Kurdish majority province in the country; Şırnak, a mountainous province just across the Iraqi Kurdistan; and Mardin, just north of the Kurdish controlled Hasakah region of Syria. As shown in Table 1, these three provinces have exhibited strong support for the Kurdish nationalist movement for many years. They have had the highest numbers of PKK recruits too. The images of Kurdish women waging an existential fight are widely circulated in media outlets globally and have bolstered the Kurdish nationalist claim as an effective force facing jihadist extremism in Syria.<sup>3</sup> Around 21 percent of the deceased YPG fighters from Turkey are women, a ratio higher than that of among deceased PKK fighters (14 percent for the 1976-2012 period).

The armed struggle in *Rojava* has also attracted individuals with disparate levels of education and prospects of social mobility. For example, Rizgar – who had a journalism degree from the Istanbul University and interned at a popular independent media network – lost his life during the siege of Kobanî in October 2014. At the same time, many individuals with limited educational endowments also joined the ranks of YPG. Arjin migrated to Istanbul with her family at the age of four and had an arranged marriage with a relative at the age of 21. Yet she left her husband after three years and traveled to Syria in July 2014. Three months later, she staged a suicide attack in a street battle with the IS forces in Kobanî. Others survived the fighting with the IS and returned to Turkey after the restart of violence in summer 2015. Roza, a villager with primary school education, joined the PKK in 2009 when she was 23 years old. She also participated in the battle of Kobanî as a sniper. She survived the battle and returned to Turkey, fought and died in the battle of Sur, the historic center of Diyarbakır, in February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> For instance, see <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/30/kurdish-women-died-kobani-isis-syria> & <http://www.marianne.net/reportage-au-kurdistan-irakien-les-combattantes-yezidies-100242905.html>.

Table 1. Kurdish and Islamist Foreign Fighters from Turkey

YPG	Jihadists		
147 females (21%) & 559 males	9 females (4%) & 229 males		
<i>Provinces with the highest number of fighters (in %)</i>			
Diyarbakır	18	Adiyaman	10
Şırnak	13	Konya	10
Mardin	10	Ankara	8
Hakkari	8.5	Gaziantep	7
Van	8	Bingöl	7

### Fighting for *Ummah* and Caliphate

Turkish citizens have been fighting in the ranks of Islamist groups in foreign lands since the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s. At least several thousands have traveled to all over the world including Bosnia, Chechnya, Iraq, and Ethiopia to participate in jihadist campaigns. The outbreak of the Syrian civil war, however, led to a huge increase in the number of Turkish citizens joining Salafi-jihadist organizations such as the IS and al-Nusra in Syria.<sup>4</sup> Two factors have contributed to this spike in jihadist foreign fighters from Turkey: a) the feasibility and ease of traveling to Syria until recently, and b) widespread moral outrage in response to stories and images of Muslim suffering in Syria.

I have assembled an original sample of 458 Turkish citizens who traveled abroad and fought with jihadist groups since the Afghan civil war in the 1980s. I have employed

<sup>4</sup> According to a police report dating from April 2016, around 2,750 Turkish citizens joined the Salafi-jihadist organizations in Syria. Reported by Turkish dailies *Hürriyet*, April 25, 2016. Available at <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/iste-emniyetin-selef-i-raporu-turkiye-tabanlari-20-bine-ulasti-bu-bir-tehdit-40094417>. and *Yeni Hayat*, May 11, 2016. Available at <https://www.yenihayatgazetesi.com/isid-hucrelerle-buyuyor-9537>.

triangulation and consulted diverse sources including news reports, social media accounts, and Islamist forums. Of these individuals, 238 fought in Syria since 2012, and the remaining 220 participated in the previous wars. Two interesting patterns emerge from a comparison of these religious foreign fighters. First, the new generation of fighters traveling from Turkey is younger and less likely to have a prior experience of political mobilization than previous generation of fighters. The Syrian jihad has attracted a broader demographic group than previous jihadist struggles. Additionally, IS recruitment is especially strong among individuals with no history of previous Islamic activism. It seems that the IS's uncompromising, puritan, and highly reductionist ideology appeals to individuals whose religious knowledge and training is limited. These individuals are likely to lack Islamic knowledge and socialization to critically engage with the *takfiri* ideology propagated by the IS. These observations are consistent with widespread reports that the Syrian civil war and the rise of the IS have broadened the reach of jihadism among new types of individuals.<sup>5</sup>

An overwhelming majority of jihadists are men even if some Turkish women ended up joining the IS. This is in sharp contrast to Kurdish foreign fighters whose ranks include large number of women. Unlike individuals who join Kurdish movements, biographical availability (i.e., having few family obligations and life commitments) does not seem to be a significant factor in jihadist foreign fighter mobilization. In terms of age distribution, jihadist foreign fighters tend to be slightly older than Kurdish foreign fighters who typically join the armed struggle as teenagers or in their early twenties. While a plurality of Turkish citizens who fight with the jihadist in Syria are their twenties, a considerable number of them are individuals who in their thirties and forties. Furthermore, and unlike Kurdish foreign fighters, many jihadists are married with children at the time of their decision to travel to Syria. In fact, many of them take their families to Syria. Regarding

educational attainments, 67 of 151 jihadists (around 44 percent) whose educational levels are known have at least some college education. Similarly, many Turkish citizens joining the YPG are college students. In comparison, only around 15 percent of all Turkish citizens had college degrees in 2015. While the limited availability of data decreases the reliability of inferences, there is no evidence that religious and ethno-nationalist foreign fighters from Turkey come from less educated segments of the society, a finding consistent with scholarship that debunks the association between poverty and violent political action.<sup>6</sup> For instance, Süleyman, a nineteen years old student of dentistry in a prestigious university in Ankara, took his younger twin brothers who were high-school students, and joined the IS in spring of 2015. Their father was a university professor.

A disproportionate number of jihadist foreign fighters from Turkey are ethnic Kurds. The sample has the records of ethnicity of 326 individuals, 147 of whom – or 44 percent – are Kurds, well above the Kurdish population of Turkey, estimated at 15 to 20 percent. This dual pattern among Kurds in Turkey to fight for either religious or ethno-nationalist goals likely reflects their lack of strong national identification with the Republic of Turkey. Their experience as a marginalized minority in the Republic facilitates their decision to take arms for alternative political platforms. At the same time, jihadists and ethno-nationalists tend to come from different Kurdish provinces. As noted above, YPG fighters come from localities with strong networks of Kurdish nationalist mobilization. The average vote share of Kurdish nationalist parties and candidates in three parliamentary elections in 2011 and 2015 were 84 percent in Hakkari, 81 in Şırnak, 73 in Diyarbakır, and 64 in both Mardin and Van. As Table 1 demonstrates, these five provinces are also characterized by high levels of YPG recruitment. In contrast, jihadist Kurdish foreign fighters typically come from localities with dense Islamist networks (i.e., provinces with a history of popular informal brotherhoods and formal piety

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5 For instance, Bergen, Peter, Courtney Schuster, and David Sterman. *ISIS in the West: The New Faces of Extremism*. New America. November 2015. Available at [https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/ISP-Isis-In-The-West\\_2015.pdf](https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/ISP-Isis-In-The-West_2015.pdf).

6 For instance, See Alan B. Krueger, and Jitka Malečková, "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection?" *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17 (Fall 2003): 119-44.

associations) and relatively weaker Kurdish nationalist presence. The average vote share of Kurdish nationalists were 15 percent in Adiyaman, and 32 in Bingöl, two Kurdish majority provinces with high levels of jihadist mobilization. These observations point to the importance of face-to-face relations and quotidian contacts for violent mobilization.

### Dynamics of Recruitment and Implications

This brief analysis provides some tentative responses to two important questions. What are the factors contributing to the decision of Turkish citizens to fight in Turkey? What are the implications of the foreign fighter mobilization for Turkish politics? Regarding the first question, several patterns can be detected. First, pecuniary considerations do not seem to play a decisive role in the decisions of these foreign fighters who face dire conditions and life-threatening risks in Syria. In fact, many of them come from relatively well-off backgrounds. Next, the role of state repression and political violence seems to have limited influence on their decisions. Many foreign fighters from Turkey joined the YPG during a period of truce between the Turkish state and PKK that lasted until the summer of 2015. Many were active in Kurdish political associations before their decision to travel to Syria and some were subject to various forms of repressive state practices, including detentions and disciplinary policies given their activism. In contrast, most jihadist fighters, especially the ones who joined the IS, did not have a history of political activism and were not subject to persecution. In this regard, pre-recruitment socialization experiences of Kurdish nationalist and jihadist fighters appear to diverge. Third, many ethno-nationalist and jihadist fighters are often embedded in face-to-face networks (e.g., local party branches and associations affiliated with the Kurdish political movement in the case of former, local mosques and tea houses in the case of latter) characterized by repeated interactions before taking arms. These networks generate not only dense social ties conducive to group solidarity but also frames of collective threat perception and victimhood transcending national borders. Such frames based on moral outrage

(e.g., Kurdish/Muslim suffering) are associated with higher risk acceptance and greater urge to fight against perceived sources of collective threat. Furthermore, they make the logistics of joining the fighting groups in Syria easier and contribute to its feasibility.

The second question concerns the effects of returning foreign fighters for peace and security in Turkey. These effects are twofold. First, the PKK's decision to organize an urban resistance by the fall of 2015 was a reflection of the strategies it developed and mastered during the Syrian civil war. Many fighters who fought against the IS in Kobanî and other cities also participated in battles of cities in Kurdish towns from fall 2015 to spring 2016. These battles where Turkish security forces imposed indefinite curfews and used heavy weaponry destroyed large sections of Kurdish towns and resulted in levels of civilian victimization unseen since the 1990s.<sup>7</sup>

Next, Turkey has a history of returnee jihadists staging large-scale attacks directly targeting civilians. A group of jihadists trained in al-Qaeda camps carries out a several attacks in 2003 and 2004, including the suicidal bomb explosions targeting the HSBC building and British Consulate in Istanbul. Similarly, the assault on the U.S. consulate in Istanbul in July 2008 was plotted and executed by individuals who had been to al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan. The primary targets of these attacks were the symbols of non-Muslim presence in Turkey. As returnee IS militants expanded their target selection, returnee jihadist violence became an unprecedented source of terrorist threat in Turkey by 2015. The deadliest terrorist attack in the modern Turkish history has been the Ankara bombing on October 20, 2015. Two suicide bombers blew themselves in the midst of a political rally organized by opposition groups, killing more than 100 individuals. One of the bombers was Yunus Emre Alagöz, a 25-year-old from the Kurdish town of Adiyaman. He traveled to Afghanistan 2009 before joining the IS with the outbreak of the Syrian civil war. His younger brother Şeyh Abdullah

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<sup>7</sup> For a brief empirical analysis of civilian victimization, see <https://politicalviolenceataglance.org/2016/09/23/violence-in-turkey-is-increasingly-resembling-violence-in-syria-heres-data-to-show-why>.

who also joined the IS in Syria, was the suicide bomber in the Suruç attack, targeting another group of leftist activists on July 22, 2015. Turkish security forces have dismantled several local IS cells and captured dozens of militants since then. All returnees who engaged in violence in Turkey were affiliated with the IS rather than any other group in Syria indicating the importance of *takfiri* ideology in

shaping the nature of violence (i.e., indiscriminate attacks against civilians) and target selection (i.e., Turkey as a land of war, *dar al-harb*). At the same time, extensive research is required to identify the source of variation in returnee behavior and to explore to distinguish the characteristics of violent returnees from non-violent ones.



## Is there still hope for Turkish democracy?

The night of July 15, 2016 marked a distinct moment in Turkish democratic history as hundreds of thousands of Turks took to the streets to defy a coup attempt. Yet only a few months later, Turkish police moved to detain scores of MPs from the pro-Kurdish opposition party the HDP. In the months since the failed coup, tens of thousands of academics, journalists and civil society activists have been purged from their jobs, with many imprisoned. The government's war with the PKK has escalated dramatically. This POMEPS Studies collection poses a sobering question: do we now have conclusive evidence that Turkey should no longer be considered a democracy?

The answer is more nuanced than a simple yes or no. The dramatic post-coup developments may be proof of the political system's evolution into a hybrid regime: competitive authoritarianism.

As defined by Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way, in competitive authoritarian regimes "formal democratic institutions are widely viewed as the principal means of obtaining and exercising political authority. Incumbents violate those rules so often and to such an extent, however, that the regime fails to meet conventional minimum standards for democracy." Such political regimes blend democratic appearance with strong authoritarian features, ruling by "velvet fist".

While the procedural democratic institutions operate in form, they are entirely devoid of substance. Executive, judicial, legislative, economic and media institutions are contorted in ways that advantage the governing party. Contemporary examples of competitive authoritarianism include Putin's Russia, Orban's Hungary, Maduro's – and formerly Chavez's – Venezuela, Mohamad's Malaysia, Sissi's Egypt and now Erdogan's Turkey.

Understanding Turkey's evolution into such a hybrid regime helps reconcile the continuing importance of electoral institutions with the sharp deterioration in public freedoms. Well before the failed coup attempt, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan had begun pushing for constitutional changes to replace the parliamentary system in Turkey with a presidential one, which would centralize power in the presidency and weaken key checks and balances built into the parliamentary system.

Erdogan's moves toward autocratic rule have little to do with his Islamism, and a great deal to do with an utterly normal quest for temporal power. Erdogan's autocratic tendencies, as revealed over the last half decade, look like those of any leader who has been in power too long and become incapable of imagining a state without him in charge.

Turkey's democratic deterioration did not begin with this year's failed coup. After years as a thriving democracy, data from Freedom House shows that beginning in 2009 Turkey has experienced a sharply downward trend. Indicators of freedom of expression, pluralism, rule of law, freedom of association suffered the sharpest declines. This trend took a sharply downward turn around the Gezi Park protests in the summer of 2013 and fell again after the government escalated its confrontation with its Kurdish citizens following the AKP's weak performance in the June 2015 Parliamentary election.

But this does not mean that the failed coup had no impact. Just as the Arab uprisings drove challenged regimes to more extreme forms of repression, the failed coup triggered Erdogan's extreme sense of threat from domestic enemies. His assault on state and civil society institutions, particularly against the media and academia, goes far beyond the reasonable. Unfortunately, many of the state and societal institutions that he associates with that threat are also those that would traditionally provide structural defense against authoritarian descent. The very real recent coup experience makes it more difficult to parse out what is meant as defensive protection against another putsch and what is an offensive move against political enemies.

One way of determining whether Turkey should be viewed as a democracy or as a hybrid regime is if it is possible for the government to actually change through elections. The intense debate among scholars of Turkey at the POMEPS workshop highlights that the answer is not immediately obvious. Some irregularities notwithstanding, elections are still rated as mostly free and fair. Both the government and the opposition have expressed commitment to upholding the electoral process, rejecting extra-democratic interventions and honoring the people's will. The military's influence on the democratic process had already been greatly reduced before the coup, and civilian oversight over the military is established. And only 18 months ago, the AKP *did* fail to win a parliamentary majority.

But if the June 2015 election proved that the AKP could lose, it also proved that the party's ability to remain in power despite defeat. Erdogan took advantage of the inability of his opponents to form a viable coalition and in August exercised his prerogative to call snap elections after the failure of coalition negotiations. The AKP then regained its majority in the November election. While deeply frustrating to Erdogan's opponents, these political maneuvers fell well within the bounds of normal parliamentary politics. Less normal, however, was Erdogan's decision to escalate war with the Kurds in the intervening period, effectively changing the political context to undermine the emergent HDP opposition party.

Since the failed coup attempt, Erdogan has gone significantly further beyond the bounds of normal democratic politics in ways that could permanently change the systemic rules. The AKP has sought to channel the overwhelming outflow of support behind the democratically elected government into a more robust consolidation of power. This has most clearly been seen in the unprecedented purge against non-loyalists in the country. The AKP has accused the Islamist Gulen movement of sponsoring the coup, launching a shockingly wide-ranging purge of alleged Gulenists in the bureaucracy and elsewhere. The purge has extended far beyond Gulenists, targeting Kurds, secular and liberal groups, and other political opponents.

The Turkish government's assault on the infrastructure of democratic political life poses the sharpest challenge to the notion that the country can remain a democracy. In particular, its failure to uphold press freedom and the scale of purges of the opposition and independent civil society suggests an intention to pursue domination.

The state of press freedom and Internet freedom has suffered the most, ultimately bringing Turkey to the league of most repressive regimes around the world. Since the declaration of the State of

Emergency on July 20, the number of media outlets shut down by the government soared to more than 170, including newspapers, magazines, radio stations, publishers and TV stations. Currently, 145 journalists are imprisoned, making Turkey the worst jailer of journalists globally. Reporters Without Borders ranks Turkey 151 out of 180 countries worldwide in its 2016 World Press Freedom Index. Similarly, Turkey regularly slows or shuts down the Internet to certain regions, blocks access to social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and WhatsApp, and bars VPN services that help circumvent social media bans. On both press freedom and Internet freedom, Turkey has regressed into the “not free” category in Freedom House ratings.

Suppression of the media and the Internet primarily serves to stifle oppositional discourse and to intimidate critical voices, both of which are vital elements of democratic governance. A society that is ill informed and collectively manipulated by censorship lacks the means to hold the government accountable for its actions.

A Turkish descent into autocracy has long been restrained not only by a robust democratic culture and strong civil society, but also by international alliances incentivizing democratic practice. Those international restraints have also weakened in recent years. Turkish foreign policy is quickly moving away from the historical anchors of democratization. Erdogan could not have helped but notice that the Obama administration did little in the face of Egypt’s military coup, Bahrain’s brutal sectarian repression, or the autocratic backsliding in most of its other regional allies. To this point U.S. president-elect Donald Trump has shown little interest in promoting democracy. Even if he did, American reliance on Turkey for its wars in Syria and Iraq, along with a rabidly anti-American nationalist discourse that dominates Turkish media, helps deflect any U.S. pressure on human rights or democracy. Meanwhile, the European Union has edged closer to suspending the long moribund EU-Turkey accession talks. Turkey’s ties to NATO have weakened to historically low levels, while Turkish-Russian security cooperation is picking up pace. The Turkish government has indicated willingness to join the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

Erdogan’s purge of political enemies, arrest of opposition politicians, and assault on political liberties, the media and civil society pose a direct and serious threat to the underpinnings of democracy. Many have also expressed their legitimate concerns about his bid to revise the constitution, concentrating powers in the presidency. Despite all this, the electoral system remains a silver lining, demonstrating the possibility – however distant it appears at this moment – for autocratic ambitions to be checked at the ballot box. As long as that chance exists, Turkey’s slide to authoritarianism will remain partial and potentially reversible. But regional and international trends suggest that any such pushback will have to come from within.

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## **The Project on Middle East Political Science**

The Project on Middle East Political Science (POMEPS) is a collaborative network that aims to increase the impact of political scientists specializing in the study of the Middle East in the public sphere and in the academic community. POMEPS, directed by Marc Lynch, is based at the Institute for Middle East Studies at the George Washington University and is supported by Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Henry Luce Foundation. For more information, see <http://www.pomeps.org>.