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The Decline of PKK and the Viability of a One-state Solution in Turkey

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Abstract

Prior to the 1990s, most regional experts insisted that only a negotiated settlement could provide a solution to "the Kurdish problem" in Turkey. It was widely assumed that the uncompromising stance of the government would result in a radicalization of the Kurdish population, which would further fuel violence. This has not happened. In the late 1990s, the Turkish state defeated the insurgent organization PKK militarily, without making any important concessions to Kurdish nationalism. This article analyzes the effect of Turkey's hard-line policy on Kurdish politics. First, it is argued that PKK's collapse resulted from strategic factors and had little to do with popular support. Second, the article contends that the radicalization of Turkish Kurds in the 1990s was overstated. The median Kurdish voter probably supported center-right Turkish political parties. Intra-ethnic and cross-cutting political cleavages explain why polarization has not been the overwhelming trajectory of recent Kurdish politics in Turkey.

0. Introduction

0.1. As recently as 1998, the foremost expert on Kurdish history wrote:

> *The conflict between the Republic of Turkey and a large part of its Kurdish population continues to be escalating. On both sides moderates have had to yield to hardliners, and the prospects for a peaceful settlement are not very bright. If wisdom does not prevail – and there are as yet no signs that it will – we are likely to witness an ongoing confrontation of increasing violence and brutality in which either the Kurdish secessionist movement is physically destroyed or the social costs of the war become so high to Turkey that the as yet unthinkable alternative, secession, will come to be considered as the best solution* (Bruinessen 1998).

0.2. Despite the steadily declining battlefield fortunes of PKK[1] during the second half of the 1990s, most observers agreed with Bruinessen's assessment and argued for the

[1] The *Parti Karkaren Kurdistan,* or Kurdish Workers Party, is a militant organisation established with the aim of creating an independent, Marxist-Leninist, Kurdish state in Southeastern Turkey.

necessity of a political compromise by the Turkish state.[2] They insisted that the state's single-minded focus on a military response to PKK would only further polarise identity and opinion, turning peaceful civilians into militants.

0.3. Developments in Turkey since the late 1990s pose a puzzle for this analysis. As of 2002, the Kurdish Southeast of Turkey is largely pacified. PKK guerrillas have withdrawn across the Iraqi border. Abdullah Öcalan, the PKK leader, languishes in the island prison of Imralı. Emergency rule has been lifted in all but four provinces. For all intents and purposes, PKK is no longer a military presence in Turkey. Moreover, this outcome was achieved without the granting of *any* important concessions by the state.

0.4. If violence results from frustrated ethno-politics, then we should not be seeing what we are seeing in Turkey. What Bozarslan (1996) calls the "policy of *aggiornamento*" should have caused an increase in militancy rather than its decline. Instead, since the capture of Abdullah Öcalan in February 1999, a new political movement has begun to emerge in Turkey that favours electoral competition and non-institutional pressure tactics over violence. Only since the collapse of militancy has the government begun to make hesitant steps toward concessions.

0.5. The failure of those with the best area knowledge to foresee these events resulted, I believe, from flawed theory: in particular, a tendency to conflate distinct processes of conflict and violence (Brubaker and Laitin 1998). Violence is neither a natural nor an inevitable consequence of ethnic politics, even when political demands not satisfied. Organised violence is always the product of organisations designed for violence, and violent organisations are not reducible to the social groups they purport to represent. PKK managed to build an impressive base of both active and passive popular support in the early 90s, but it remained throughout an organisation "built" for war and dedicated to winning compliance and control. PKK lost its war to a determined enemy using an effective counterinsurgency strategy.

0.6. The civilian population of the Kurdish region was profoundly effected by the civil war that raged from 1984 to 1999. Many were killed; vast numbers were uprooted from their lands. The effects of insurgency and counterinsurgency on their ethnic identities and political views are difficult to measure, but it would be a caricature to treat the conflict as one that pitted rigid ethnic blocs against each other. Although the civil war appears to have had a polarising effect on *some* Kurds, that result was not universal. The evidence suggests that ethnic boundaries in Turkey continue to be porous and multifaceted, while ethnicity is only one of the factors that influence political opinion.

0.7. The strategy of this volume, disaggregating violence, identity, and opinion, is therefore well suited to analysing Kurdish politics, because the effect of Turkish government policy on each component of the ethnic research agenda is distinct. This chapter is divided into three main sections, each addressing one of these three dependent

[2] See Barkey and Fuller 1998, 214; Muller 1996, 193; Kirisçi and Winrow 1997, 183, for similar statements.

variables. In Section 1, I argue that PKK/state violence is best described as a classic rural insurgency, rather than a popular uprising. The state's counterinsurgency campaign was effective in defeating it, and similar violence is unlikely to arise in the future due mainly to rapid urbanisation. Section 2 addresses identity. I argue that, despite civil war, the boundaries of Kurdish identity are more open than is often appreciated. Although polarisation has occurred for some individuals, processes of assimilation continue simultaneously, and further ethnification is not inevitable. In Section 3, I address support for Kurdish nationalism by examining returns from three recent elections. Although Kurdish nationalist parties have been competitive, the majority of Kurdish voters favoured rightist and Islamist parties, which suggests that support for nationalism is weaker than usually thought. I conclude by discussing some of the policy implications of this case.

Note on Terminology

0.8. The “Kurdish question” is fraught with semantic discord. The state insists that use of the term "Kurdistan" implies an endorsement of secession; Kurdish nationalists argue that terms like "the Southeast" are euphemistic, intended to deny their existence as a distinct group. Similarly, the state argues that calling PKK violence "civil war" legitimates the organisation; they prefer "terrorist".

0.9. There is no way out of these arguments except to state one's prejudices. I do not believe the legitimacy of ethno-national claims to political status can be decided in ideal terms. A Kurdish state has no more, *or less*, right to exist than states based on any of the other identities that cross-cut or sub-divide Kurdish identity. I concur with Levy (2000, ch. 3), who argues that a generalised right to self-determination is incoherent. When identities overlap and crosscut, granting self-determination to one group *entails* denying it to others.

0.10. Given that I do not endorse one "side", I use the terms that identify the region interchangeably. Although terror has been part of PKK's (and the state's) repertoire, it has been the predominant tactic of neither. By historical standards, the 5,424 civilians reported killed from 1984 to 1999 (U.S. DOS 2000) is extraordinarily low, and suggests selectivity and restraint by both parties to the violence.[3] The violence in Southeastern Turkey satisfies scholarly definitions of civil war, insurgency, and ethnic violence, and I use all three in ways that are consistent with that literature.

[3] This figure is based on government sources and may be an underestimate. I am unaware of any independent attempt to estimate war deaths in Kurdistan. Even if the true figure is five times greater, this case was far less deadly than insurgencies in, e.g., South Vietnam, Algeria, or Sri Lanka. In civil wars, civilian casualties typically exceed combatant casualties (Kalyvas 2000a, 6), which has not been true in Turkey.

1. Violence and Demographic Shift

1.1. In this section, I argue that Turkey is unlikely to return to the violence of the period 1984–99, regardless of the degree to which it accommodates Kurdish nationalist demands. The reason for this is fundamentally strategic, not political. The civil war in Kurdistan was a rural insurgency, not a popular uprising, and while Southeastern Turkey was ideally suited to guerrilla warfare in the early 1980s, it is no longer. The civil war has fundamentally altered the demographics of the region, inducing vast internal migration and rapid urbanisation. Insurgency warfare is a rural phenomenon and cannot be resurrected in the new urban landscapes of Kurdish life. Though we will likely continue to see ethno-national political activity in Kurdistan, some of which may overflow non-violent boundaries, the coming years are unlikely to witness a return to generalised violence.

1.2. There are two dominant narratives about the Kurdish region prior to the civil war. On the one hand, the region is described as prostrate under state repression (McDowall 2000, 402). The second narrative identifies the region as lawless and neglected by authorities. Yalman (1969, 213) describes the area around Diyarbakir as "[V]ery unsettled. The law is weak and distant. Only tough men can survive the ruthlessness of the struggle. The landlord who is weak loses all he has and may, indeed, have to write off very considerable and valuable property as a total loss." In Yalçın-Hekmann's (1991) description of life in a Kurdish village, relations with the state were arbitrary, but sporadic. Before the civil war, Kurdistan was predominantly rural, with low population density: 62 per cent of the inhabitants lived in villages and there may have been as many as 36,000 settlements of less than 2,000 persons (McDowall 1996, 400). These ethnographic accounts suggest that the state was both repressive and weak. Indeed, the two factors may be linked; established states typically use more and more arbitrary violence in regions they control less fully (Ron forthcoming).

1.3. The civil war inaugurated by PKK in 1984, was not a spontaneous uprising. PKK was formed by Kurdish militants who splintered from Turkish Marxist-Leninist youth groups in the mid-1970s. Left–right violence was endemic to urban areas of Turkey in the late 1970s; it largely crosscut the Turkish–Kurdish divide. Öcalan's fledgling organisation was in the minority in adopting an ethnic and separatist orientation. PKK attacked landlords and rightists in the Siverek region in the late 1970s. The organisation was largely rolled up following the *coup d'etat* of 12 September 1980. A small number of activists, including Öcalan, escaped to Syria, where they were supported with sanctuary, weapons, and training in a bid to destabilise Turkey. PKK had no popular base at this time; Öcalan himself admits that Syrian support was crucial to the organisation's survival and development (İmset 1992, 25).

1.4. The civil war began as a series of cross-border raids staged from sanctuaries in northern Iraq (İmset 1992, 38–41). The initial wave of militants often had few ties to the local inhabitants of the provinces where the insurgency began, coming instead from the original heartland of PKK in Siverek. After a few tactically disastrous attacks against the

security forces, PKK adopted a strategy of targeting civilians: mayors, schoolteachers, and tribal chiefs, anyone perceived as an actual or potential collaborator with the state (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 28; İmset 1992, 34–35, 44, 100).

1.5. PKK strategy conformed closely to classic Maoist principles of "revolutionary" war, what statist analysts call "insurgency" (Blaufarb and Tanham 1989). Rather than targeting the state's military forces, insurgency aims to create a climate of insecurity for all but large and well-armed elements of the state, reducing contact between the population and its government and undermining confidence in the state's ability to provide security and enforce its mandate. The ensuing void of authority is filled by insurgent counter-government, which is used to extract the intelligence, manpower, and resources needed for further operations. According to Öcalan, "Before anything else, there is the duty to bring the people to the stage of defending themselves and to make them believe, before anything else, that they need to be defended" (quoted in İmset 1992, 99).

1.6. The practice of basing one's logistics network on local production is charitably referred to as "revolutionary taxation", or less charitably as "looting". A sharp distinction between the two is difficult to sustain empirically (Kalyvas 2001b, 103). Villagers in insecure areas may wish to assist the guerrillas, or they may prefer directing scarce resources toward their families. Those who support insurgent goals may prefer that their neighbours shoulder the burden of paying for it. Whether giving to the guerrillas is "free" or "coerced" is difficult to determine, since it depends upon unobserved or off-the-equilibrium-path behaviour. A single beating or killing in the past, or the story of a similar incident elsewhere, may be sufficient to induce apparently voluntary compliance in the present.

1.7. In this sense, insurgents are no different from the state; both seek compliance from supporters and non-supporters alike. For this reason, students of counter-insurgency have long recognised that defeating insurgent strategy depends upon the state's ability to provide security for the population. Critics of counterinsurgency practice argue that "security" is a euphemism for "control", and that legitimate governments have no need for coercive strategies. But, security and control are opposite sides of the same coin; a state that cannot protect its citizens from the coercion of other parties cannot gain their compliance for itself.

1.8. The key role of security explains why insurgency is an almost wholly rural phenomenon (Laqueur 1998, 403–4): defence is much easier when the population is concentrated. The Kurdish case is no exception; throughout the civil war, towns were state strongholds. During the period of its greatest success, PKK contested the state for control of some district and provincial centres (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 29). However, in the force-on-force encounters that are required to take and hold towns, PKK suffered dreadful losses (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 28).

1.9. The government's control over rural Kurdistan, however, steadily declined throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Some observers believe that the Turkish military

did not take the threat seriously enough during the early years of the insurgency (İmset 1992; Pope and Pope 1997). Consequently, the military stayed "inside the wire," instead of taking the battle to the enemy (Ron 1995). The state's strategy for rural defence mainly involved recruiting tribesmen into a local militia as *köy korucu* or village guards. The *korucu* and their families took the brunt of PKK attacks during this period, and the militia's numbers dwindled as the risks increased (İmset 1991, 100).

1.10. In the early 1990s, the state seems to have concluded that static defence of villages was a strategic failure. The security forces, while maintaining the *korucu* system, began driving civilians from their villages. "Evacuation", as this process is euphemistically described, is also a standard element of the counterinsurgent playbook. It aims to disrupt guerrilla logistics by physically removing the population. Evacuation concentrates populations in larger settlements, which can be effectively defended. The government pursued a less expensive variant of this strategy by accelerating existing processes of migration to the cities and towns. Direct action by the state was complemented by "voluntary" migration of people desperate to escape violence and economic collapse.

1.11. According to government estimates, 3,236 settlements had been cleared in Southeastern Turkey as of 1999, forcibly displacing 362,915 persons (U.S. DOS 2000, 18).[4] Villages were often destroyed to deny their use by guerrillas and prevent the return of residents. In some documented instances, these evacuations were carried out brutally. Soldiers met resistance with coercion: beatings, rapes, and selective instances of extra-judicial killing (Ron 1995). However conducted, being forcibly removed from ancestral villages is a horrifying and life-altering event.

1.12. The civil war dramatically altered the demography of the Kurdish region. Table 1 presents statistics on the urbanisation of Kurdistan that span the fiercest periods of violence, when the majority of evacuations took place. Two methods are used to identify the region. First, the 13 provinces that have been part of the emergency region (OHAL) are identified separately. Second, I distinguish 21 provinces that had more than 10 per cent mother-tongue speakers of Kurdish languages in the 1965 census (when language was last officially counted). Turkey identifies as an urban resident anyone who lives in a district centre.

1.13. According to the upper half of the table, the absolute size of the rural population in the OHAL provinces plunged by 11.9 per cent from 1990 to 1997, despite population growth of 14 per cent. The population of district centres in the same region jumped by 45 per cent. Simultaneously, the rural population of the rest of Turkey declined by 4 per cent, while urban areas grew by 21 per cent.

[4] This figure is disputed. At the upper bound, a figure of 2–3 million displaced by evacuation is widely touted by human rights groups. The number is too high; if true, it would account for the entire 1990 rural population of OHAL or nearly a third of the *total* 1990 population of the Southeast.

Table 1: Rapid Urbanisation of the Kurdish Provinces, 1990–97

Provinces	% Δ Population 1990–97	% Δ Rural population 1990–97	% Δ Urban population 1990–97
OHAL (13)	14.0	–11.9	44.5
Non- OHAL (67)	11.0	–4.0	20.9
Kurdish (21)	12.8	–10.3	39.8
Non-Kurdish (59)	11.0	–3.4	19.9
Kurdish non-OHAL (8)	11.4	–8.3	34.3

Provinces	% Rural 1990	% Rural 1997	% Δ Rural 1990–97
OHAL (13)	54.2	41.9	–14.0
Non- OHAL (67)	39.6	34.2	–5.4
Kurdish (21)	53.9	42.9	–11.0
Non-Kurdish (54)	38.2	33.2	–5.0
Kurdish non- OHAL (8)	53.7	44.1	–9.5

Source: T.C. Ba∏bakanlık, Devlet⁄statistik Enstitηsη

1.14. A direct comparison with base rates is misleading, however. While rural de-population in the OHAL region proceeded nearly three times faster than in the rest of Turkey, the population of OHAL was growing faster at the same time. Similarly, anecdotal evidence suggests many new migrants to the cities of western Turkey came from the Southeast. A similar, though less dramatic, pattern is evident if we consider all 21 Kurdish provinces.

1.15. Table 1 shows that urbanisation in Kurdistan changed dramatically from 1990 to 1997 in relative terms as well. In 1990, a far higher percentage of the population of Kurdistan lived in rural areas than did so in the rest of Turkey. By 1997, the Kurdish region was almost as urbanised as the rest of Turkey had been in 1990. Although urbanisation was rapid across Turkey, it was 2–3 times as rapid in Kurdistan. Southeastern Turkey changed from a majority rural region to a majority urban region in only seven years.

1.16. It is impossible to directly test the effects of the civil war, but the data are suggestive. The Kurdish provinces outside OHAL almost certainly suffered much less from evacuation. That these provinces displayed rates of urbanisation nearly as high as OHAL suggests that economic decline and general insecurity were more important causes of migration than previously appreciated.

1.17. However, even the dramatic statistics in Table 1 understate the urbanising trend in Turkish Kurdistan. While Kurdish residents were moving from the villages to the towns, they were also favouring larger towns. Table 2 illustrates this pattern by disaggregating growth rates to the district level in Diyarbakir Province. The table displays percentage growth figures for rural and urban populations and raw figures for cumulative population change.

1.18. Districts are listed in increasing order of their 1997 population. First, these data confirm the effects demonstrated in Table 1. The absolute size of the rural population declined in all but two districts of Diyarbakir Province from 1990 to 1997, while the urban population grew in 11 out of 14 districts. The only significant rural population *gain* occurred in the district centre, the one town in the province with suburbs. Without this district, rural decline would have been twice as great. In addition, the two largest towns in the province, Bismil and Diyarbakir, accounted for 83 per cent of the total urban growth from 1990 to 1997, while three smaller towns in the province declined in population. In short, urban growth favoured the larger towns in Diyarbakir.

1.19. These data probably understate changes in rural concentration in one additional respect. The evacuations targeted high-altitude villages at a rate higher than more accessible settlements in valleys and near roads (Ron 1995, ch. 2). High-altitude villages tend to be smaller, because food production in mountainous areas cannot support high population densities. Small, scattered settlements were also more vulnerable to coercion and taxation by PKK, and residents may have sought the relative security of larger villages.

Table 2: Rapid Urbanisation in Diyarbakir Province, 1990–97

District	% Δ Rural Population 1990–97	District centre 1990–97 Cum. Δ Rural Population	% Δ Urban population 1990–97	District centre 1990–97 Cum. Δ Urban population
Kocaköy	–23.0	–2,567	19.3	819
Çunguş	–20.4	–5,248	5.2	1,022
Hazro	–36.5	–11,058	–25.5	–1,029
Lice	–73.5	–37,101	–20.2	–3,378
Egil	–1.0	–38,729	–7.2	–3,722
Hanı	4.0	–38,050	5.1	–3,194
Kulp	–56.4	–62,323	46.6	291
Dicle	–19.6	–68,322	140.4	7,891
Çermik	–1.7	–68,885	128.1	10,009
Çınar	–0.4	–69,048	56.3	15,684
Erganı	–4.8	–71,022	28.2	26,237
Silvan	–12.1	–77,105	22.8	39,894
Bismil	–15.1	–86,027	154.6	101,469
Province Centre	48.2	–43,737	34.2	231,965
Province Total	–9.0	–43,737	38.6	231,965

Source: T. C. Ba∏bakanlık, Devlet⁄statistik Enstitηsη

1.20. The consequences of rural concentration for PKK were consistent with the counterinsurgency paradigm:

> *[F]rom 1996 the PKK found itself increasingly on the defensive, losing access to food and shelter because of the evictions and suffering an increasing level of casualties. By 1996 the estimated number of deaths [total, since 1984] was 20,000. By 1999 they were thought to exceed 35,000. The area dominated by the*

> *PKK was unmistakably contracting. It was clear that guerrilla tactics were failing (McDowall 2000, 442).*

Far from forcing the population into the hands of PKK, the vast majority of civilians fled into government-controlled territory. Scholarly and journalistic reports amply attest to the rage that many migrants maintain against the state, but the expected nationalist explosions never materialised.

2. Identity

2.1. In this section I discuss Kurdish identity. This reverses the usual order of presentation, in which violence is treated as the *consequence* of an identity cleavage. Fearon and Laitin (1996) have shown that it is a mistake to assume that identity causes violence; in fact, violence between ethnic groups is rare. In the preceding section, I argued that the rise and fall of PKK depended on strategic factors that are largely independent of the ethnic identities and opinions of the population. However, if ethnic difference does not cause violence, it remains an open question what effect violence has on the perceptions and identities of the population. Kaufman (1996) has argued that the causes of ethnic violence are irrelevant to the policy question of how violence is to be contained, because violence turns cleavages into chasms, hardening formerly fluid identities into rigid boundaries.

2.2. By contrast, I argue that the boundaries between Turkish and Kurdish identity have historically been porous and crosscut by key religious cleavages. Although the civil war has caused ethnic boundaries to rigidify for some people, the surprising fact is that Turkish and Kurdish communities remain quite open to each other and societal-level tensions continue to be quite manageable. The trajectory of ethnic identity in Turkey is difficult to predict, but I argue (in this section and the following one) that the most likely future involves a Kurdish population that remains bilingual and integrated into mainstream political life.

2.3. In its broadest understanding, the term “Kurdish” applies to speakers of one of four closely related Indo-Iranian languages (Kurmanji, Sorani, Zaza, and Gurani), or descendants of people so identified who speak other languages (McDowall 2000, 9–10). The number of people who satisfy this criterion is unknown, but some observers place it in the range of 25 million persons (Randal 1999, 16), giving rise to the oft-repeated claim that Kurds are the “world's largest ethnic group without its own state”. Broad-definition Kurds are located mainly in contiguous territory within the borders of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, with smaller indigenous populations in Syria and Armenia. Millions live as settled migrants in the cities of western Turkey, and large numbers have emigrated to the developed world, primarily Germany. The number of Kurds in Turkey is a subject of dispute. By a purely linguistic criterion, roughly 13 per cent of the population was Kurdish in the early 1990s (Kirişçi and Winrow 1997). If Turkish-speaking descendants of Kurds are included, the figure is certainly much higher.

2.4. The viability of the broad definition as the basis for a political identity, much less an actual state on the territory of Turkey, Iraq, and Iran, is minimal and does not appear to be on anyone's agenda in the region, though it probably has substantial support in the European diaspora. The borders in this region, though "artificial", have had a profound effect on political and social identities: "In each of these countries, the modern world was only accessible through the state language; but the Kurds who were literate in Turkish and their fellow Kurds who used Arabic or Persian came to inhabit different symbolic universes" (Bruinessen 1998).

2.5. Turkish nation-building is often treated as a failed experiment, largely on the basis of Kurdish evidence, but this is a misunderstanding. In fact, Turkey has been more successful than most twentieth-century states in assimilating a diverse population to a relatively unified collective identity (Cornell 2001). Pre-republican Anatolia was exceptionally diverse. Even discounting non-Muslims, Turkey embraced large numbers of Kurds, Arabs, Laz, Circassians, Albanians, Pomaks, and Greek-speaking Muslims. With the exception of Kurdish, these linguistic identities are not so much forgotten as they are politically inconsequential. Most people see no contradiction between being Laz and being Turkish.

2.6. Although assimilation is often characterised as "forcing" people to abandon their identity, this, too, is misleading. According to Bruinessen (1998): "More important, and ultimately much more successful [than violence], however, were the more peaceful means to which nation-building regimes everywhere have had recourse: compulsive general education, general conscription into the army (for males at least) and state-controlled radio and press." His understanding of Turkey is consistent with the literature on European nation-building, which generally treats benefits as more important than sanctions. The success of nation-building is probably attributable more than anything else to the relative openness of the Turkish opportunity structure. The Ruritanians of Gellner's (1983) modernisation story found ample room for economic and political integration.

2.7. Kurds were no exception: "This difficulty [of assimilating them] was not so much due to the strength of Kurdish nationalism as to the Kurds' sheer numbers and the tribal social structure of their society" (Bruinessen 1998). Turks eagerly point to ethnic Kurds like Türgüt Özal (a former president of Turkey) and Ibrahim Tatlises (a singer and television personality, arguably Turkey's most popular media figure) as evidence of a common identity. Assimilation is often crudely rendered as "selling out", but the reality is more complex. For many individuals, assimilation was essentially complete prior to the intense politicisation of the 1980s. For others, being Kurdish and Turkish poses no contradiction; their political identity does not supervene on their cultural identity (Barkey and Fuller 1998, 81).

2.8. The processes of identity formation and change in Turkey are extremely fluid, and their future direction and magnitude are uncertain. Bruinessen (1998) sees assimilation in full retreat, but he draws heavily on observation of the European diaspora community, whose political dynamics are quite different from those within Turkey. Many activists and scholars believe the counterinsurgency campaign and state harassment of Kurdish

politics has radicalised the population along ethnolinguistic lines (Wedel 2000; McDowall 2000; Pope and Pope 1997). There can be no doubt but that they are correct about an important segment of the population. Barkey and Fuller (1998, 82) suggest that ethnic mobilisation and assimilation are occurring *simultaneously*.

2.9. Indeed, the institutions of nation-building, principally conscription and universal education, are still in place. Turkish national identity also has an autonomous capacity to reproduce and draw "converts" as well, given the degree to which individual life-chances are linked to the metropolitan identity. The Kurdish region of Turkey is predominantly a bi- or multilingual region. Compulsory education is conducted entirely in Turkish, and conscription entails that Kurdish men will spend at least 550 days of their lives in an all-Turkish environment. Even in the east, a great deal of commerce, and of course all official discourse with the state, is conducted in Turkish. Consequently, it is unusual to meet Kurdish men who do not speak Turkish with a fairly high level of fluency.

2.10. In my judgement, there are formidable obstacles to the development of a literate Kurdish culture in Turkey which result from factors largely outside the state's control. Given the current paucity of Kurdish-language materials, a student trained to read only Kurdish would find little to read; a student trained in Kurdish and Turkish would read mostly Turkish if he read at all. Economic opportunities in Turkey are linked tightly to literacy in Turkish and European languages, especially in the urban areas. When I asked Kurdish informants in Turkey what language they would choose to teach their children if Kurdish became a realistic option, the most common choice was both: Turkish for opportunity, Kurdish for identity.

2.11. In addition to the porousness of identity in Turkey, there is a key religious distinction that directly crosscuts the Kurdish/Turkish cleavage. Although the majority of the residents of Anatolia are Sunni Muslims, as many as 30 per cent are members of religious groups that are historically and doctrinally related to Shi'ism (U.S. LOC 1996). By far the largest of these groups is the Alevi, and this name is often used as shorthand for all Shi'ite-derived groups within Turkey. Roughly an equal proportion of Kurds and Turks are Alevi. Their confession was regarded as heretical by the state-monopoly Sunni Islam of the Ottoman Empire. The proclamation of a secular republic in 1925 was widely embraced by Alevis, who stood to gain from Atatürk's abrogation of the official Sunni religious monopoly. Mustafa Kemal is still especially revered among Alevis.

2.12. Scholars are divided as to the political consequences of the Alevi identity for Kurdish nationalism. Some believe that Alevi mobilisation will further undermine the conceit of a unitary identity in Turkey. Others see the Alevi/Sunni division as weakening the unity of an appeal to Kurdishness.

2.13. At a social and cultural level, the Alevi/Sunni cleavage has traditionally been of far greater importance than any linguistic divisions. According to Yalman (1971, 214), in the Kurdish region "[A] Sunni Kurdish-speaker and Sunni Turkish-speaker are much closer to each other in every aspect of their culture and personality than either group is with, for instance, Turkish or Kurdish-speaking Alevi or Bektashi [another Shi'ite-related sect]."

Intermarriage between ethnic Turks and Kurds is common; between Sunnis and Alevis, it is rare. The urban violence that convulsed Turkey in the late 1970s, though ideological, broke closely along religious lines. As recently as 1993, an anti-Alevi pogrom in Sivas took the lives of 37 people (Pope and Pope 1997, 324–5); despite the public passions roused by the civil war, there has been virtually no societal-level violence between Turks and Kurds (Cornell 2001). On the other hand, Kurdish Alevis have not been spared by the military's counter-insurgency campaign; Wedel (2000, 191) found Kurdish Alevi migrants in one Istanbul neighbourhood mobilising along the linguistic cleavage in response to their perception of state repression.

2.14. There is an unfortunate tendency in the literature on Kurdish politics to assume that Kurdishness is a more "natural" category and the direction that ethnogenesis "should" pursue. In Turkey, Kurdish identity is in at least a three-cornered fight with religious and state-national identity. All three have undoubted appeal. In the following section, I discuss some evidence on public opinion about Kurdish nationalism in Southeastern Turkey. This information has relevance, albeit more tenuously, for questions of identity, because it tells us something about the degree to which individuals condition on ethnicity in the formation of opinion.

3. Public Opinion

3.1. In this section, I use data on voting behaviour as an indicator of Kurdish public opinion. The available evidence, though far from conclusive, suggests that supporters of Kurdish nationalism remain in the minority, even in the Southeast, and despite the brutality and dislocation of the civil war. I argue that the Kurdish mainstream remains politically conservative and unwilling to embrace the leftist agenda of Turkey's only Kurdish party.

3.2. Public opinion is notoriously difficult to measure in war zones. When identifying combatants it is common, though erroneous, to call armies by the names of the groups they fight for (Kalyvas 2001b, 111). Thus, journalists often say that "the Kurds" have been waging a war for secession. In fact, at least twice as many Kurds were actively employed in the security forces than were members of PKK militias at the height of insurgent mobilisation.[5] Of course, the latter is a measure only of *compliance*, not opinion: presumably both Turkish and Kurdish boys would rather have been doing something else. PKK is known to have engaged in kidnapping as a tool of recruitment (İmset 1992, 84–6), and Kurdish families have been subjected to revolutionary surcharges if their sons report for military service (Rosenberg 1994).

3.3. In Turkey, only the military claims to have conducted systematic opinion surveys. Their data have not been made available, and their bias is well known. The best-known

[5] Barkey and Fuller (1998, 47) estimate 5–10,000 PKK guerrillas, plus a militia of 50,000, though it is not clear what years this figure covers. The village guard system was estimated to have 67,000 fighters in 1995 (Ron 1995), of which we can assume nearly all were Kurdish. The military had 410,200 draftees in 1995 (U.S. LOC, 1996). If 20 per cent of the population is Kurdish, and we assume a constant rate of conscription, there were 82,040 Kurdish conscripts in the Turkish army in 1995.

independent survey of Kurdish opinion during the civil war found substantial support for Kurdish nationalism and very little support for secession, but it had an urban bias and was based on a sample of convenience.[6]

3.4. Anecdotal evidence on Kurdish opinion is abounding, but can be extremely misleading. In April 2000 the Istanbul correspondent for a major Western newspaper, who had travelled in and reported from Kurdistan extensively over a period of years, told me: "In the Southeast, everyone supports Öcalan." When he was captured in 1999, Kurds staged demonstrations in cities across Turkey and Western Europe. However, "expressions of support", can mean many things. They can mean, "We respect this man who has fought for us", they can mean, "We support his goals and tactics", or they can mean, "We want this man to govern us". There is no necessary connection between these preferences. Most observers believe that very few Kurds in Turkey have ever supported secession, though it is widely believed that Kurdish-language broadcasting and education would be extremely popular. In casual conversations I had while travelling through Southeastern Turkey, I found people eager to insist that "this place is Kurdistan" (a punishable statement in Turkey), while simultaneously thanking God for the end of a war the Turkish military has so decisively won.

3.5. Journalists and travellers are subject to opposing biases. Travellers usually favour security, which means government control. Journalists often seek out controversy and conflict. They have very little interest in "the dog that does not bark", since it makes for poor copy. Nevertheless, in any war zone the absence of battle is far more common than its presence; civilians outnumber both activists and combatants.

3.6. All visitors to Turkey are probably subject to a bias in identifying Kurds as well. If one asks to meet Kurds, one is likely to be steered towards nationalists; if one asks "Turks" about their background, one often discovers Kurdish parents or grandparents. I have encountered people who are not entirely sure if they are Kurdish. "Discovering" one's Kurdishness is a common occurrence among Turkish citizens. One Kurmanji-speaking student I met in Istanbul griped to me about the *poseurs* who suddenly find they are Kurdish and seek him out for instruction on what to do.

3.7. The bottom line is that we do not know what the Kurds of Turkey believe and what they prefer. At best, we know what some think and want at a particular moment in time. Until systematic opinion studies by independent scholars are permitted, we simply cannot answer this question with any degree of precision.

3.8. There is one source of data on public opinion that has been somewhat neglected: election returns. Turkey was rare among states experiencing civil war in holding regular elections throughout the violence. These elections have generally been considered free and fair, though the Kurdish nationalist parties have at times been harassed by Turkish

[6] This survey, conducted by Prof. Doğu Ergil for the Turkish Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry (TOBB), is cited in several sources (Barkey and Fuller 1998; Kirisçi and Winrow 1997), but I have not been able to obtain a copy. My criticisms of the survey are based on personal communication with Professor Ergil.

security services (U.S. DOS 2000, 3). In the early- to mid-1990s, several members of Kurdish parties were gunned down in "mystery killings", presumably committed by government-supported contra-guerrillas.

3.9. Election data have drawbacks as indicators of opinion. Ideology and ethnicity are only two among many issues that matter to voters. Turkish parties are thought to be exceptionally "personalistic". Most observers think Turkish politics is more venal than in most democracies. It has been argued that Kurdish magnates can deliver their members *en masse* to political parties. The notion that tribesmen are manipulable has been badly damaged by ethnography (Yalçın-Hekmann 1991) showing that tribal politics involves complex two-way transactions, but bloc voting remains a reality that may undermine the conclusions that can be drawn from studying vote choice in Kurdistan. Nevertheless, electoral data have the benefits of systematicity and low measurement error. They are the best indicators we have regarding Kurdish opinion.

3.10. Table 3 gives vote share in selected provinces for the parties that garnered 94.2 per cent of the total vote in the 1999 general election. In this analysis I have collapsed together parties that occupy roughly the same ideological space. A single vote share is given for the centre-left Democratic Left Party (DSP) and Republican People's Party (CHP); the True Path Party (DYP) and the Motherland Party (ANAP) are treated as a centre-right bloc. The hard-right National Action Party (MHP), the Islamist Virtue Party (FP) and the Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HADEP) are treated separately. Of these seven parties, only five received seats in parliament; HADEP and CHP failed to meet the 10 per cent electoral threshold. Three groups of provinces are included: the thirteen OHAL provinces, the eight Kurdish provinces not included in OHAL ("other Kurdish provinces"), and four metropolitan areas in western Turkey that are thought to have large Kurdish populations.

3.11. Scholars have noted the failure of Kurdish nationalist parties to capture anything close to the presumed proportion of Kurds in the population of Turkey's western cities (Bozarslan 1996a; Bozarslan 1996b; Kirişçi and Winrow 1997). It is widely believed by residents that 20–30 per cent of the population of Istanbul is now Kurdish, but HADEP's best showing out of Istanbul's three electoral precincts in 1999 was 4.7 per cent. Bozarslan (1996a, 152), analysing HADEP's similar performance in the 1995 general election, comments, "This poor showing seems to indicate that the metropolitan cities continue to have an important integrative function that give [*sic*] birth to new political formations."

Table 3: Vote Share for Selected Parties, 1999 General Elections

1999 General Election	DYP/ANAP	FP	MHP	DSP/CHP	HADEP
Turkey	25.2 %	15.4 %	18.0 %	30.9 %	4.7 %
All Kurdish provinces	29.8	19.3	12.2	12.5	19.1
OHAL provinces	29.1	17.3	6.5	10.8	27.0
HADEP Max. (Hâkkari)	27.5	9.9	2.0	10.6	46.1
HADEP Min. (Elazığ)	15.6	24.5	13.6	8.8	4.9
Other Kurd. provinces	30.6	21.5	18.4	14.4	10.5
HADEP Max. (Ağrı)	21.9	12.8	7.7	6.9	33.7
HADEP Min. (Malatya)	13.2	25.3	19.8	20.2	2.3
Major cities	25.9	15.3	12.8	40.5	4.3
HADEP Max. (Adana)	21.2	10.3	23.6	33.9	7.4
HADEP Min. (Antalya)	32.5	6.3	22.3	32.3	2.5

Source: T.C. Ba∏bakanlık, Devlet⁄statistik Enstitηsη

3.12. However, there is another possibility, namely that urban Kurdish politics reflects long-standing *intra-ethnic* ideological and party loyalties. What is most surprising about these data is that HADEP, the only party with Kurdish nationalist credentials, was unable to muster a majority in *any* province of Turkey. Across the OHAL provinces, only 27 per cent of the electorate chose HADEP, while the secular centre-right and far-right (excluding the Islamist FP) gained a collective 35.6 per cent of the ballot. In the other Kurdish provinces, the party's performance was abysmal: less than 11 per cent supported HADEP, while the right garnered 48 per cent. In this context, HADEP's low level of support in the metropolis is less surprising.

3.13. Table 4 gives similar data for the 1991 and 1995 general elections. The party system in 1995 was virtually identical, and the electoral results were quite similar. Indeed, Kurdish nationalism did somewhat better in the Southeast in 1999 than it did in 1995, but the overall tendency was a stable centre- and far-right majority in Kurdistan. In 1991, HEP (a Kurdish nationalist precursor to HADEP) formed a special electoral alliance with SHP (an ancestor of today's CHP). Though HEP had a distinct corporate identity, its candidates ran on the SHP list. Thus, a vote for SHP could have been the vote of a nationalist or a non-nationalist leftist. SHP did very well in 1991, gaining outright majorities in some provinces of OHAL. In Kurdistan as a whole, however, the right did much better. In short, during the 1990s, a period of Kurdish nationalist efflorescence and secessionist civil war, there was a stable tendency for large numbers of Kurds (probably majorities) to vote for rightist Turkish parties.

3.14. Several explanations have been offered for HADEP's poor showing. The party itself claimed widespread intimidation of rural voters, who were supposedly told by security forces to cast blank ballots (*Reuters* 19 April 1999). This allegation is not supported in the data. Although the participation rate in 21 Kurdish provinces (83 per cent) was lower than in Turkey overall (87 per cent), the proportion of valid to total votes in the Kurdish provinces was higher (95 to 94 per cent).

Table 4: Vote Share for Selected Parties, 1995 and 1991 General Elections

1995 General Election	DYP/ANAP	RP[7]	MHP	DSP/CHP	HADEP
Turkey	38.8 %	21.4 %	8.2 %	25.3 %	4.2 %
All Kurdish provinces	32.8	29.1	7.1	9.7	16.2
OHAL Provinces	31.2	26.4	5.1	7.6	24.2
HADEP Max. (Hâkkari)	31.3	6.0	2.2	4.6	54.2
HADEP Min. (Elazığ)	36.0	41.8	6.9	9.8	3.9
Other Kurd. provinces	34.6	31.8	9.1	11.9	7.8
HADEP Max. (⁄ğdir)	25.2	9.4	15.1	21.2	21.7
HADEP Min. (K.Maraş)	36.4	36.8	10.5	12.0	2.7
Major Cities	38.6	20.8	7.8	26.8	4.0
HADEP Max. (Adana)	34.0	16.7	14.3	26.6	6.7
HADEP Min. (Antalya)	41.2	13.3	12.2	30.0	1.9

1991 General Election	DYP/ANAP	RP	——	DSP	SHP
Turkey	51.0 %	16.9 %	——	10.7 %	20.8 %
All Kurdish provinces	45.2	21.8	——	3.3	28.6
OHAL provinces	41.3	19.0	——	1.9	36.5
SHP Max. (Şırnak)	34.2	2.5	——	1.1	61.2
SHP Min. (Elazığ)	52.5	29.3	——	2.4	15.5
Other Kurd provinces	49.4	24.9	——	4.9	20.0
SHP Max. (Kars)	43.9	7.1	——	17.2	31.1
SHP Min. (Erzurum)	50.1	37.0	——	3.4	9.0
Major cities	49.3	14.2	——	14.2	21.7
SHP Max. (Ankara)	46.9	17.6	——	10.4	24.6
SHP Min. (Istanbul)	46.3	16.7	——	17.6	18.8

Source: T. C. Ba∏bakanlık, Devlet⁄statistik Enstitηsη

3.15. Bozarslan (1996a, b) argues that HADEP's success is confined to a “micro-space” of compact Sunni-Kurmanji settlement. On his account, the party's failure elsewhere is "closely linked to intra-Kurdish ethnic differentiations". This account cannot be rejected, given that many Alevis abjure Kurdish identification. There are reasons to doubt his story also. Bozarslan’s reasoning explains why HADEP did worse in some Kurdish provinces than in others, but it cannot explain why Kurdish nationalists underperformed overall. Moreover, Alevism cannot explain support for rightist and Sunni-Islamist parties, which was widespread outside Bozarslan’s micro-space, since Alevism is traditionally associated with the left and with suspicion of Sunni dominance.

3.16. HADEP's failure to galvanise Kurdish voters is best explained by its leftist identity. The left performed badly across the board in the Southeast. McDowall (2000, 397) argues that Kurdistan was an area "hostile to, and dangerous for, radicals of the secular left" as early as the 1950s. DSP and CHP together received only 10.8 and 14.4 per cent in OHAL and the other Kurdish provinces, respectively, at a time when DSP became the most popular party in Turkey. This raises two possibilities: either HADEP monopolised the

[7] "RP" stands for "Refah Partisi," or Welfare Party, the Islamist precursor to FP.

left vote in Kurdistan, or many Kurds will only vote left for an ethnic party. The data are inconclusive on this question, yet it is clear that Kurdish voters have not shaken off the conservatism that puzzled Bruinessen (1992) in the 1960s.

3.17. The 6.5 and 18.4 per cent captured by MHP in OHAL and the other Kurdish regions, respectively, is the most surprising finding. Often known by the name of its militant wing, the Greywolves, MHP long advocated an extreme, racialist Turkism (Çağlar 1990) and has consistently resisted any concession to Kurdish demands. The appeal of MHP to some Kurds was confirmed by one of my informants. An educated young man, raised in the predominantly Kurdish provinces of Ağrı and Adıyaman, he explained that two of his uncles had long-standing ties to MHP. Both were native Kurmanji-speakers, from Ağrı. The votes of ethnic Turks undoubtedly account for some of MHP's support in the east. Nevertheless, determining why individuals cross ethnic cleavages, sometimes to extremes, is a key question for the study of ethnic politics. The most likely explanation is that contemporary MHP support stems from the left–right cleavage of 1970s Turkish politics (McDowall 2000, 411), which was weakly linked to Kurdish ethnicity.

3.18. Bruinessen (1992) concluded that the "primordial" loyalties of local tribal and kinship relations explained persistent political conservatism among the Kurds and tended to undermine a broader nationalism. The civil war may have helped to revitalise these solidarities as security-seeking induced individuals to work collectively (Yalçin-Hekmann 1991, 71). The village guard system, in particular, was built largely along tribal lines and tribal leaders have often acted as agents of the state in the recruitment of militia forces.

3.19. The rapid urbanisation of the past decade is likely to undermine these solidarities, not least because tribes lose something of their security function in urban areas. What sort of new solidarity will emerge is difficult to predict. The evidence on Kurdish vote choice we have available suggests that urban migrants may adopt differing views depending upon where they land: the large urban areas of the east, such as Diyarbakir and Batman are emerging as strongholds of Kurdish political mobilisation, while nationalism appears to be fizzling somewhat among migrants to the Turkish milieu of the west.

4. Implications for Future Policy

4.1. Many readers will find the conclusions of this chapter normatively depressing, because it suggests that states can "win" with repression. In fact, the Turkish case should give policy-makers several reasons for optimism

4.2. First, there is very little that is worse for democracy and human rights than civil war. Although it is common to argue that rebellion results from repression and brutality, in fact the causal arrow points more strongly in the opposite direction. The end of the civil war in Turkey ought to be greeted with relief by anyone whose goal is the protection of human rights, since its continuation would surely have resulted in far more brutality on both sides.

4.3. Second, the decline of PKK suggests that the aftermath of ethnic civil wars need not involve territorial separation of ethnic groups, as Kaufman (1996) has argued. Although the civil war in Turkey involved considerable brutality, it never degenerated to the point where populations were indiscriminately targeted by ethnicity alone. Most Kurds never favoured secession, and most do not favour it now. PKK never succeeded in creating a *fait accompli*, as other rebel groups like the Kosovo Liberation Army have done. The Turkish case tells us that stable multi-ethnicity can be maintained in the face of ethnic violence.

4.4. Third, throughout the civil war, the state and mainstream political parties opposed opening the system to explicitly Kurdish demands. Important political groups in Turkey continue to support their exclusion on the grounds that "concessions" on Kurdish policy will promote secession. If, as I have argued, the production of violence depends on factors that are largely independent of peaceful politics, then suppression of Kurdish politics cannot be justified as a defence against separatism. Kurdish political organisations in Turkey have renounced violence and separatism. The question for the state is the credibility of those claims. If my argument is correct their credibility is high, because violent secession is no longer a realistic option. The state can now maintain its Weberian monopoly on coercion at a low cost, while permitting a more open politics than it has in the past. The Western governments that have generously supported Turkey's campaign against PKK (Ron 1995, App. B) should make it clear that the indefinite postponement of reform occasioned by civil war is no longer justified.

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