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When democratization radicalizes: The Kurdish nationalist movement in Turkey

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Abstract

This article addresses a historical puzzle: Why did the insurgent PKK (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan), which was militarily defeated, which renounced the goal of secession, and whose leader was under the custody of the Turkish state, remobilize its armed forces in a time when opportunities for the peaceful solution of the Kurdish question were unprecedented in Turkey? The PKK's *radicalization* at a period of EU-induced democratization in Turkey counters the conventional argument that fostering democracy would reduce the problems of ethnic conflict. Explanations based on resource mobilization, political opportunity structures, and cognitive framing fail to provide a satisfactory answer. The article argues that democratization will 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. Under the dynamics of competition, the survival of the organization necessitates radicalization rather than moderation. As long as the insurgent organization successfully recruits new militants, democratization is not a panacea to violent conflict. The findings indicate that research on the micro-level dynamics of insurgency recruitment will contribute to a better understanding of ethnic conflict management. Data come from multiple sources including ethnographic fieldwork, statistical analyses of quantitative data (i.e. spatial clustering and ecological inference), and systematic reading of original documents.

Keywords

democracy, ethnic conflict, Kurds, moderation, Turkey

Historical puzzle

The origins of Kurdish nationalism in Turkey go back to the last years of the Ottoman Empire (Jwaideh, 1999; Van Bruinessen, 2003). While Turkey witnessed a series of armed Kurdish rebellions in the early years of the republic (Olson, 1989), none of these have had the breadth, longevity, and support comparable to the PKK's (Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan) guerilla warfare in the 1980s and 1990s. The fight between the PKK and the Turkish state resulted in around 30,000 casualties by the late 1990s (McDowall, 2000: 418–454). The PKK can be conceptualized as a 'persistent insurgency' that survived the overwhelming force of the Turkish state and maintained substantial public support, even if it failed to achieve its goal of replacing the state authority (Goodwin, 2001: 217).

The 'Kurdish question' entered a new era with the capture of the PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999. The PKK claimed to withdraw its militants from Turkey on 1 September 1999 following Öcalan's calls for ending the armed struggle. Öcalan, who remained the undisputed PKK leader, asked for autonomy and claimed that the PKK would reinvent itself as a legal organization (Özcan, 2005: 247). Öcalan also reasoned that the Turkish state would recognize the rights of the

Kurdish people to be successful in its quest for EU membership (Öcalan, 2003). The PKK also made attempts to be recognized as a legitimate representative of the Kurds in international relations (cf. Bob, 2005). As a result of the EU-induced reforms that aimed to increase the power of elected politicians vis-à-vis the military, expand the scope of civil liberties and political rights, and ease restrictions on public expressions of ethnic identities, Turkey's democratic achievements significantly improved. In this context, the PKK's decision to reinstate the armed struggle on 1 June 2004 was a paradoxical development.

Why did the PKK, which was militarily defeated, which renounced the goal of secession, and whose leader was under the custody of the Turkish state, remobilize its armed forces in a time when opportunities for the peaceful solution of the Kurdish question were unprecedented? The PKK's *radicalization* at a period of democratization counters the conventional argument: 'the problems of reducing ethnic conflict are at many points connected to the problems of fostering

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democracy, so much so that success in the one will probably mean a measure of success in the other as well' (Horowitz, 2000: xvii). Explanations based on resource mobilization and political opportunity structures fail to provide a satisfactory answer (Jenkins & Perrow, 1977; McCarthy & Zald, 1977). The changes in the political environment that created new opportunities and the nonviolent resources mobilized by social actors were not able to make PKK renounce arms in favor of less violent means. Furthermore, Kurdish actors were cognitively capable of framing and articulating their demands in a way that would appeal to their constituency, the liberal public in Turkey, and international actors (Campbell, 2005: 48–50).

Argument

The article proposes that a 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. Under the dynamics of competition, the survival of the organization necessitates radicalization rather than moderation. The analytical focus is not on ethnic groups but on organizations, which are the main protagonists in ethnic conflict (Brubaker, 2002: 171–172; Weinstein, 2007; Sinno, 2008). The PKK was faced with intense competition from the AKP (Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi), which espoused a relatively accommodative Kurdish policy. The AKP electorally outperformed the Kurdish DTP (Demokratik Toplum Partisi), which had close links to the PKK, in the 2004 local and 2007 national elections. The AKP's ability to capture the Kurdish vote undermined the PKK's basic reason for existence: being the true representative of the Kurdish citizens of Turkey. For this reason, the PKK had strong incentives to derail AKP's reform proposals by radicalizing the political atmosphere.

Methods and data

This article focuses on the behavior of Kurdish nationalists and analyzes the causes of temporal (i.e. evolution of the PKK) and within case (i.e. Kurdish political actors) variation (Brady & Collier, 2004; Gerring, 2007: 28). The PKK is the leading actor of the transnational Kurdish nationalist movement that also includes several political parties, many associations, and a large constituency in Turkey and elsewhere. This study employs process tracing, in which 'multiple types of evidence are employed for the verification of a single inference', which is ideal for elucidating micro-mechanisms that characterize a causal relationship (Gerring, 2007: 173). This approach is particularly useful for refining and generating novel theoretical knowledge (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Data come from a variety of sources. I have conducted in-depth interviews with dozens of politicians, activists, intellectuals, journalists, and voters in Turkey and the Kurdistan region of Iraq since 2002. Also, I have visited all Kurdish-populated provinces of eastern Turkey in the last six years.

These visits provided me unique perspectives on popular perceptions of the insurgency and state policies. Additionally, I collected information about the regional and local variations in insurgency strength to be able to measure the competition between the insurgents and their rivals at several levels. A valuable source of information comes from obituaries of the insurgents who were killed in combat. The obituaries are available at PKK affiliated websites. I also systematically compiled and analyzed speeches delivered and interviews given by PKK leadership. Pamphlets, brochures, and publications of the PKK and other Kurdish organizations are also included in the analysis. Moreover, I utilized reports prepared by NGOs and systematically collected the relevant news stories. Finally, I statistically analyzed electoral and demographic data to identify the dynamics of competition over the Kurdish vote. Data sources include the electoral results from the 2002 and 2007 parliamentary elections and demographic indicators.

Theoretical framework

Ethnic boundaries and political behavior

Some scholars argue that ethnic identities are fixed by birth and provide the basis for the only successful type of political mobilization in ethnic wars (Kaufmann, 1996: 138–140). Ethnic heterogeneity significantly increases the risk of ethnic wars (Sambanis, 2001). Political polarization along ethnic identities results in permanent electoral majorities and minorities in deeply divided societies (Horowitz, 2000: 86). Other scholars argue that the relationship between ethnic identities and political behavior is not direct and boundaries that differentiate among members of ethnic groups are inherently fluid (Young, 1976: 11–13). A major challenge is to explain why ethnic boundaries have varying degrees of political salience (Wimmer, 2008: 985). The *process* of identity crystallization is dynamic and often driven by the self-interests of political elites (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). In some contexts, the political salience of an ethnic cleavage depends on the size of the relevant ethnic groups and whether or not they become the means for political competition (Posner, 2004). In others, ethnic boundaries are activated when ethnic groups compete over the same valued resources regardless of the scope of cultural differences (Olzak, 1992). Along similar lines, the success of ethnic parties depends on their ability to distribute patronage and provide opportunities for upward mobility within the party ranks rather than on the degree of ethnic tension and conflict in society (Chandra, 2004).

Ethnic defection, defined as 'a process whereby individuals join organizations explicitly opposed to the national aspirations of the ethnic group with which they identify and end up fighting against their coethnics', is more likely when 'incumbent states facing ethnic rebellion' seek to recruit ethnic defectors (Kalyvas, 2008: 1048). In such situations, the political affiliations of the members of an ethnic group are up for grabs and incumbent states tend to avoid mass killings

(cf. Valentino, Huth & Balch-Lindsay, 2004; Mason & Krane, 1989; Herreros, 2006).

Hypothesis I: Ethnic identity does not necessarily determine political loyalty and behavior in wars between an incumbent state and an ethnic organization, as long as the disputants actively try to gain the allegiance of people belonging to the same ethnic category.

Democratization and moderation

According to an influential argument, incorporating radical political groups into the political system brings their moderation. Participation in electoral politics and having parliamentary representation weakens *exit* tendencies (i.e. engaging in violence) among radical actors by empowering the *voice* option. 'Competitive political systems have a considerable capacity to divert what might otherwise be a revolutionary ground swell into tame discontent with the governing party' (Hirschman, 1970: 28). The political incorporation of revolutionary groups, which provides them with access to state resources and influence in decisionmaking, generates de-radicalization (Goodwin, 2001: 46–47). Other scholars have applied different versions of this argument to socialist (e.g. Michels, [1915] 1962: 333–341; Przeworski & Sprague, 1986: 18, 24, 182–183), and religious parties (e.g. Schwedler, 2006; Tezcür, 2010).

When applied to ethnic conflict situations, this logic suggests that ethnic groups' participation in electoral politics and access to governmental positions would increase their moderation and contribute to democratic consolidation (Birnir, 2007: 9–18). Similarly, democratization makes the cost of armed resistance for the insurgent organization higher than the cost of unarmed participation in the political system and facilitates conflict resolution (Shugart, 1992). Furthermore, democratization reduces the capacity of revolutionary movements to mobilize a broad coalition (Ryan, 1994: 30). In this sense, 'the ballot box ... has proven to be the coffin of revolutionary movements' (Goodwin & Skocpol, 1989: 495). 'The political origins of the very political phenomenon (electoral democracy) that, in my theory of revolution, has the crucial political effect of weakening and ultimately defeating revolutionary guerilla movements' (Wickham-Crowley, 1994: 546).

Yet this argument does not explain the PKK's radicalization in spite of the opening of the Turkish political system. Organization theory offers valuable insights to understand the priorities of insurgent organizations such as the PKK. The natural system perspective emphasizes how the goal of organizational survival and maintenance rather than the achievement of the declared goals become the primary concern (Scott, 1992: 9, 23). As a result, the stated and real goals of the organizations often diverge (pp. 52–53). Organizations survive as long as they satisfy the key groups and individuals who contribute to their existence (Barnard, 1968: 92). They persist even if their goals become unachievable, as long as members continue to have a sense of comradeship and social solidarity. Besides,

violent organizations 'routinely engage in actions to perpetuate and justify their existence, even when these undermine their official political agendas' (Abrahms, 2008: 102). Violence also serves to generate and maintain exclusive ethnic identities (Byman, 1998). Similarly, war-making remains rational for insurgents who capitalize on material benefits even if the violence does not necessarily serve the organization's declared political goals (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). Furthermore, adaptability (e.g. renouncing violence) does not guarantee survival; lack of adaptability does not necessarily mean failure (Hannan & Freeman, 1977). Inertia often characterizes organizations that persist despite being inefficient (Hannan, 2005: 62).

From this organizational perspective, an insurgent organization may not moderate and reinvent itself as a nonviolent entity during democratization. In fact, the introduction of democratic competition may threaten the organization's control over its ethnic constituency. Non-ethnic parties with superior material resources may make significant inroads into the constituency. Most importantly, successful insurgent recruitment depends on the level of control the insurgent organization exerts over its constituency. This control weakens when rival organizations challenge the political hegemony of the organization (Gates, 2002).

Hypothesis II: An ethnic insurgent organization is likely to radicalize rather than moderate if democratic reforms introduce competition from other organizations that effectively challenge its control over the ethnic constituency.

The sustainability of insurgency recruitment

The survival of an insurgent organization is a function of its ability to recruit new members and prevent splits (Walter, 2004). People may join or support an insurgent organization because they seek selective incentives in the shape of pecuniary rewards, which overcome the collective action problem (e.g. Lichbach, 1994). An insurgency often controls substantial economic endowments that contribute to its ability to recruit new members and to act relatively independently from its constituency (Weinstein, 2007: 47–53). The insurgency may gain control of a territory and establish government-like structures with power to punish defectors and uncooperative locals. In these situations, involuntary recruitment is a powerful factor sustaining the insurgency (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2008).

In the case of the PKK, abductions were uncommon. While the PKK gradually gained command of vast economic resources from voluntary contributions, extortion, smuggling, the drug trade, and external support, it was unable to create 'liberated areas' within Turkey. Furthermore, new PKK recruits received few material benefits while they had to endure very harsh physical conditions. Consequently, material incentives and fear of retribution cannot be the primary reasons for young people joining the PKK (cf. Goldstone, 1994). As in El Salvador, emotional and moral motives, not materially selective incentives, are likely to be decisive in the local population's support for the PKK (Wood, 2003). The PKK's appeal was

particularly strong among young males of low socio-economic status and with few prospects in life (Romano, 2006: 88–89). Many joined the PKK after sweeping counterinsurgency operations, violence by paramilitary groups, and successful guerilla operations demonstrated the insurgency's strength (Kowalewski, 1992; Wickham-Crowley, 1987: 486). Young women joined the organization to free themselves from a patriarchal order and overcome feelings of powerlessness (Buldan, 2004). But it must be noted that an insurgent organization may alienate the local population if it employs excessively oppressive methods, as happened in Peru (Starn, 1995).

Hypothesis III: The survival of an insurgent organization ultimately depends on its ability to replenish its ranks. An insurgent organization has strong incentives to engage in armed action and provoke state repression because it gains new recruits by portraying itself as the only defender of the constituency.

Hypothesis IV: An insurgent organization has strong incentives to disarm and reinvent itself as a nonviolent entity when its recruitment level drops below the sustenance rate, which is likely to happen when autonomous organizations representing the constituency flourish and are empowered.

The Kurdish insurgency in Turkey (1984–1999)

The Turkish state's Kurdish policy has historically consisted of the suppression of public expressions of Kurdish identity and the assimilation of the Kurdish-speaking population under the rubric of the Turkish nation (Canefe, 2002; Yeğen, 1999). Recent scholarship suggests that this dominant and homogenizing Turkish nationalism has given rise to chauvinistic Kurdish nationalism (Saatci, 2002). The PKK, established in 1974, pursued a strategy of armed propaganda that aimed to mobilize public support by targeting other Kurdish organizations and local notables until 1980 (Marcus, 2007: 15–75; Özcan, 2005: 84–97). The 1980 coup destroyed any chances of nonviolent and legal expression of Kurdish demands, generated a spiral of radicalization among Kurdish activists, and contributed to the rise of the PKK by eliminating other competing Kurdish organizations (Romano, 2006).

The armed conflict between the PKK and the Turkish state in the 1980s and 1990s had the characteristics of an irregular war where disputants vie for territorial control and the allegiance of the local population (Kalyvas & Kocher, 2007). As suggested by Hypothesis I, ethnic identity was a poor predictor of political loyalty and behavior. Many Kurds were allied with the Turkish state by fear, religion, material interest or loyalty. The Turkish state sought to sustain its legitimacy among its Kurdish citizens through assimilation, co-opting local elites through parliamentary politics, emphasizing Islam as a common bond between ethnic Turks and Kurds, and economic packages. The state created a village guard system in which mostly Kurdish villagers were put on the payroll in exchange

for fighting against the PKK (Beşe, 2006). State repression employed indiscriminate violence (e.g. Jongerden, 2004/2005) that translated into greater numbers of recruits for the organization (cf. Kalyvas, 2004; Wickham-Crowley, 1990). Additionally, the state's suppression of all political expressions of Kurdish identity alienated large segments of the Kurdish population from the state (Entessar, 1992: 9; Romano, 2006). While Turkey continued to hold competitive elections, the legal persecution and intolerance of Kurdish political demands (Watts, 1999) was accompanied by a more sinister counterinsurgency campaign that involved thousands of extrajudicial killings (Bozarslan, 2001; TBMM, 1995; Tezcür, 2009). In response, the PKK targeted the pro-state Kurdish villages to intimidate the other state-allied villages into submission. Yet the Turkish army was ultimately successful in curbing the power of the PKK by the late 1990s.

Available evidence points out that the public appeal of the PKK ultimately depended on its ability to portray itself as the only organization capable of responding in kind to state violence. This is consistent with Hypothesis III that focuses on the role of state repression in feeding new recruits to the insurgent organizations. For instance, the provincial authorities banned public celebrations on the day of the 2008 Kurdish traditional festival of Newroz (21 March) in Hakkari. Interviews with locals in August 2008 revealed that the state's heavy-handed response to the demonstrations fueled feelings of revenge and exclusion among young people who found the radical and confrontational discourse of the PKK appealing. Around a dozen high school students from the town of Yüksekova gradually joined the insurgent organization in the aftermath of the Newroz incident.

Democratization in Turkey (1999–2004)

The years between 1999 and 2004 were one of the most ambitious reform periods in modern Turkish history. The impetus came from the EU, which approved Turkey's candidacy in its Helsinki Summit held in December 1999. The Turkish parliament amended the Constitution in October 2001 and enacted eight 'harmonization packages' between February 2002 and July 2004. These packages abolished the death penalty; liberalized the political parties, press, and associations laws; improved imprisonment and custody regulations; facilitated broadcasting and education in languages other than Turkish (i.e. Kurdish); recognized the legal standing of the European Court of Human Rights; increased civilian control over the military; reduced the scope of the military courts; abolished the State Security Courts; extended greater rights to non-Muslim minorities; and revoked a highly restrictive sentence of the Anti-Terror Law. Another amendment in May 2004 further liberalized the constitution. Accompanying these reforms was the emergence of a broader public sphere that contributed to a more liberal discussion of the Kurdish question. A systematic analysis of the most prominent Turkish newspaper demonstrated that the recognition of Kurdishness

as a separate identity that is entitled to rights consistently increased from the early 1980s to 2003 (Somer, 2005, 2007). The government also enacted partial amnesties targeting low-ranking PKK militants in 1999, 2000, and 2003. The AKP, which came to power with the 2002 elections, adopted a stance that was accommodative of Kurdish cultural identity. The state TV broadcast in Kurdish for the first time in history in June 2004. On 12 August 2005, Prime Minister and AKP leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan acknowledged the 'Kurdish reality' and criticized the past assimilative state policies. The EU opened membership negotiations in December 2004. Negotiations started on 3 October 2005.

There were also clear indications that the legal space for Kurdish activism was enlarging. First, the reforms eroded the veto power of the military and expanded the range of options available to civilian government in the Kurdish question (cf. Cunningham, 2006). Second, prominent Kurdish political actors, who now had more channels to express their voice, became strong advocates of the EU. In this sense, the reforms also resulted in structural political openings that were *perceived* to generate unique political opportunities by key political actors providing incentives for new forms of collective action (Tarrow, 1998: 76–77; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004). Öcalan, in solitary confinement since his capture, became an advocate of Turkey's membership to the EU (Öcalan, 2003). In June 2004, four prominent Kurdish politicians, who had been imprisoned since 1994, were released. A large group of Kurdish public figures published a statement entitled, 'What do the Kurds want in Turkey?' in the *International Herald Tribune*, only a few days before the EU summit in 2004. Their demands included a new and democratic constitution that recognized the existence of the Kurdish people, a general amnesty, and the implementation of a program of economic development in the Kurdish regions. Meanwhile, Kurdish social mobilization generated new avenues of nonviolent collective protest. The Kurdish nationalist party won a sizeable number of municipalities in the 1999 local elections and 6% of the national vote in the 2002 parliamentary elections. The publications in Kurdish proliferated; the number of books in Kurdish doubled from 2002 to 2003 (Malmisanij, 2006: 22). Legal persecution targeting Kurdish book publishers substantially decreased after 2002 despite the continuation of practical obstacles (Telephone conversation with Abdullah Keskin, the owner of Avesta Publishing House, 16 December 2008.).

The constitutional amendments and legal reforms also led to some significant positive changes in state practices. Figure 1 demonstrates four different indicators of human rights violations in Turkey from 1994 to 2008. Data are compiled from the annual publications of the Human Rights Association of Turkey (www.ihd.org.tr). There was a steady and substantial decrease in violations between 1999 and 2004. Drops in extrajudicial killings and deaths under custody or due to torture were partially due to the decline in the intensity of fighting by the second half of the 1990s. At the same time, other

indicators clearly demonstrate significant improvements in the human rights situation accompanying the political reforms. Between 1999 and 2004, the annual number of banned or confiscated publications decreased from 283 to 9; the number of raided political entities, NGOs, publishers, and cultural centers from 266 to 35; and the number of banned political entities, NGOs, and publishers from 169 to 24. These improvements enlarged the scope for legal and nonviolent expressions of Kurdish identity and demands. Given all these developments, Freedom House assigned Turkey a score of 3 for both political rights and civil liberties in 2004 (on a scale of 1 to 7; 1 being most democratic). Turkey's score had been 4 for political rights and 5 for civil liberties in 1999.

Democratization–radicalization dynamic

Despite these changes, it can still be reasonably argued that the Kurdish movement had no real incentive to eschew armed struggle without obtaining some concrete concessions (Bozarslan, 2000: 28). After all, the Turkish political actors neither offered a constitutional recognition of the Kurdish identity nor institutionally facilitated the incorporation of the PKK top cadres into civil life (i.e. a general amnesty). Additionally, the state did not completely abandon its assimilative practices and policies and did little to address the plight of citizens hurt by its policies. Important political actors (e.g. the armed forces, opposition parties) constrained the ability and willingness of the AKP to offer more recognition to the Kurdish identity. For these reasons, it may not be surprising that the Kurdish nationalist movement did not consistently moderate its methods and give up contentious action. Yet, what is most puzzling is not PKK's lack of moderation, but its radicalization during democratization. There is a major difference between nonviolent but contentious action that involves civic disobedience and the revival of armed struggle. It was clear that radicalization would also undermine the democratization process and the inclusion of the Kurdish political actors into mainstream Turkish politics over time. Hence, the insufficient democratization argument, by itself, explains neither the PKK decision to revive armed struggle nor its timing.

The PKK's declared reasons for the revival of its armed struggle were the continuing operations of the Turkish Armed Forces (Türk Silahlı Kuvvetleri – TSK) and Öcalan's deteriorating prison conditions. The first reason was ironic given the fact that Öcalan ordered the PKK forces out of the Turkish borders in 1999. The continuing TSK operations indicated that militants actually remained in Turkish territory. The second reason by itself was hardly sufficient to generate such a dramatic change in the PKK behavior. While the authorities often restricted Öcalan's meetings with his lawyers and family, Öcalan was not subject to maltreatment or torture (CPT, 2004). Besides, the PKK did not only declare a ceasefire in 1999. It basically laid down its arms after Öcalan announced that he found violence meaningless and that the PKK needed to reinvent itself

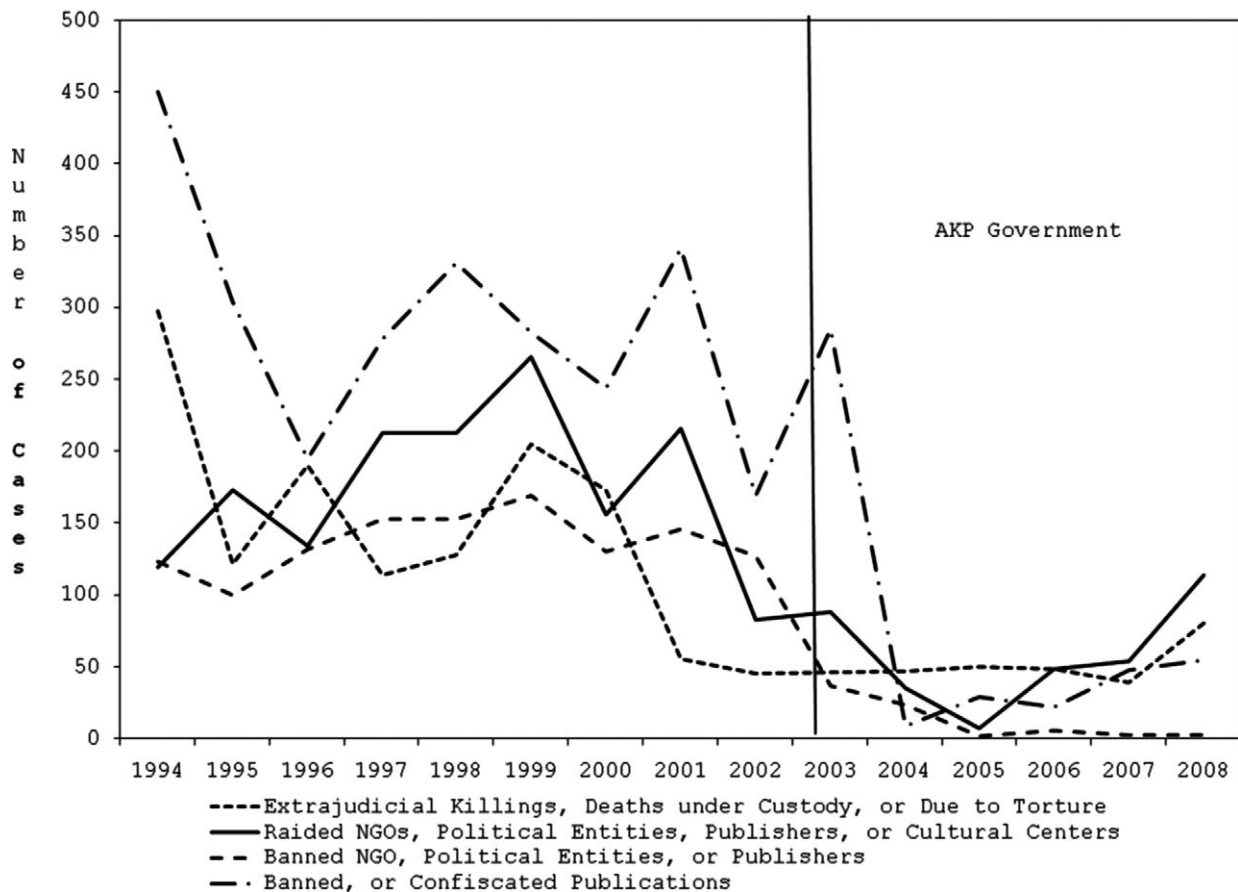


Figure 1. Human rights violations in Turkey (1994–2008)

democratically (Öcalan, 1999a,b; Özcan, 2005: 124–136). This announcement was shocking to militants who had spent years in the mountains in pursuit of an independent Kurdistan (Personal communication with an ex-PKK commander, 19 November 2007, Erbil).

Available evidence suggests that Öcalan directly ordered armed action in spring 2004 (Anonymous, 2008). Why did Öcalan and the PKK completely reverse their policies of the last five years and adopt a confrontational position vis-à-vis the Turkish state? One plausible explanation is that as long as the PKK had reliable external patronage, it had no incentives to moderate (Jenne, 2006). While the PKK had a relatively safe sanctuary in Iraqi Kurdistan, it had lacked a consistent and strong external backer since 1998. It appears that the PKK never made any serious attempt to pursue a strategy other than armed struggle. In fact, the PKK actively recruited new members to replenish its ranks and preserve its fighting capacity. Figure 2 shows the recruitment cohorts of the PKK militants killed between 2003 and 2008. Data are compiled from the official and semi-official PKK websites (e.g. www.hpg-online.com and www.sehid.com) that post death notices. There is no reason to doubt the authenticity of the information as the websites intend to honor the fallen comrades and inform their families. In fact, hundreds and

occasionally thousands of people attend the funerals of the militants. It is highly probable that the organization downplays its losses. Yet, this does not present a problem for the purposes of the current analysis, which focuses on the recruitment years and birth provinces of the militants. The sample is large enough ($N = 880$) to permit reliable inferences.

Figure 2 reveals that an overwhelming majority of the PKK militants were recruited between 1999 and 2003 when the PKK allegedly ended its armed struggle. In fact, without new recruits in this period, the PKK would have lacked trained cadres to wage war against the TSK after June 2004. It took full benefit of the ‘ceasefire period’ to revitalize itself as a fighting force rather than reorganize as a nonviolent party and social movement. The data throws doubt on the argument that a general amnesty would have brought the PKK top cadres down from the mountains. After all, the PKK commanders would not have actively recruited new militants if they were only waiting for an amnesty to end their long careers. Furthermore, Figure 3 makes it clear that most of the new PKK recruits came from Kurdish areas in southeastern Turkey. This indicates that many young Kurds in Turkey were willing to risk their lives despite the political reforms. As suggested by Hypothesis IV, the PKK had no strong incentives to disarm because it kept a very steady recruitment rate. The proposition that indiscriminate state violence

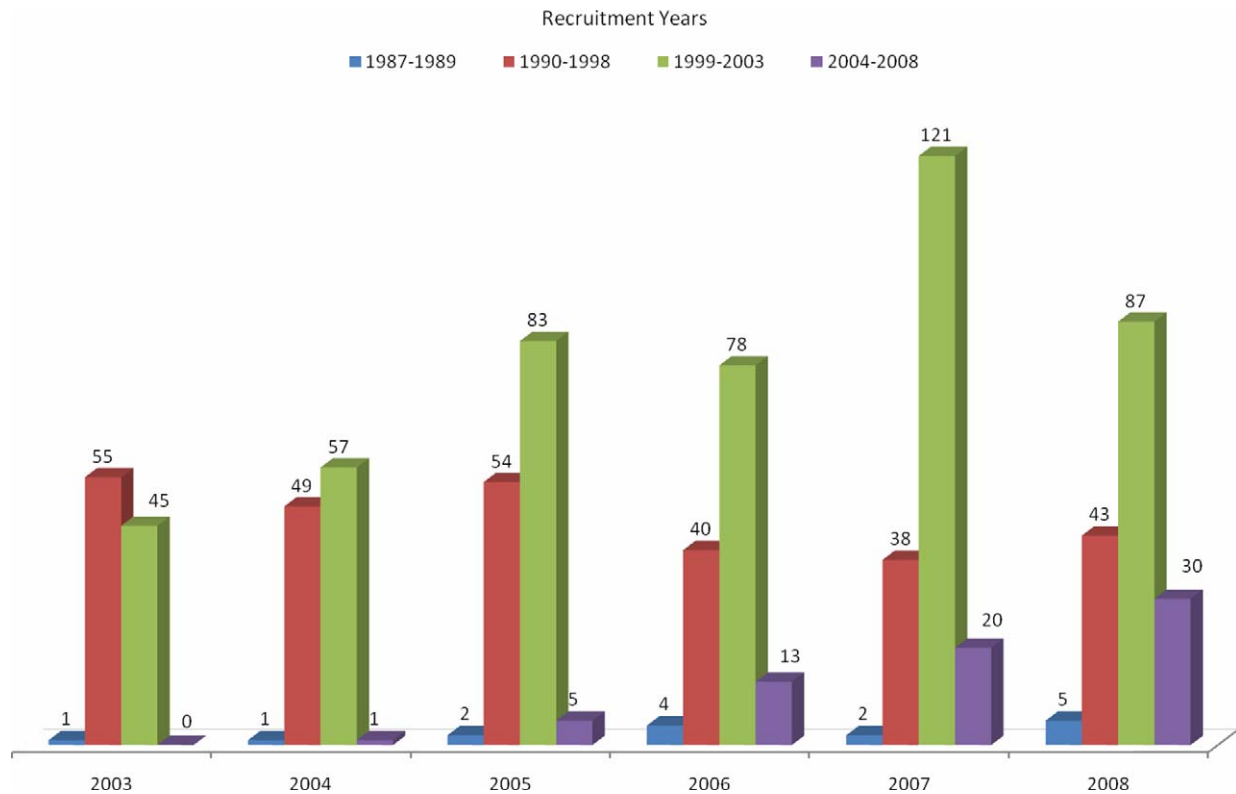


Figure 2. Recruitment cohorts of the PKK militants killed in action (2003–2008)

begot new recruits is not completely convincing given the substantial improvements in Turkey's human rights record during this period (Goodwin, 2001: 235).

If the PKK never pursued disarmament, then what explains the timing of its re-engagement in armed struggle? The answer is based on two unprecedented developments that elevated the threat perception of the PKK leadership: (1) the unexpected rise of the AKP as a viable alternative among the Kurdish citizens of Turkey, and (2) the formation of a *de facto* Kurdish state under US protection following the invasion of Iraq in March 2003.

Öcalan anxiously observed the rise of the AKP in Turkey and the Barzani family in Iraqi Kurdistan in spring 2004. The US invasion of Iraq enabled the Barzani family to consolidate its authority at the expense of both Turkey and the PKK and provided the family with great leverage vis-à-vis its neighbors (O'Leary & Salih, 2005; Van Bruinessen, 2005). For Öcalan, the primary concern was a US-backed strategic alliance between the AKP and the Barzani – based on religious ties and coincidence of material interests – that undermined the achievements of the secular 'Kurdish nationalist movement'. The invasion altered the point of reference of Kurdish nationalists. In March 2003, a PKK sympathizer from Batman was enthusiastic about the EU process that would fulfill the Kurdish demands for rights. In June 2007, the same individual was no longer interested in the EU. He now most admired the 'independent Kurdish state' in the south. The invasion also significantly

reduced Turkish influence in Iraqi Kurdistan, which translated into greater logistical opportunities for the PKK.

Another troublesome development for Öcalan was the sweeping victory of the AKP in the 2004 local elections. In March 2004, the party emerged as the leading political force in Kurdish regions by wresting the control of municipalities from the Kurdish nationalists in cities such as Ağrı, Bingöl, Siirt, and Van. The AKP sought the support of the 'Kurdish bourgeoisie' and mobilized state resources to capture the Kurdish vote. Öcalan described this as the 'silent re-conquest of Kurdish provinces' (Öcalan, 2004a). In summary, the reformist AKP threatened the PKK's hegemony over its Kurdish constituency.

Another factor that concerned Öcalan was the growing divisions within the PKK (Öcalan, 2004b). Osman Öcalan, the brother of the PKK leader, and a group of high-ranking PKK commanders left the organization in May 2004. The group, who established the PWD (Partiya Welatparêzên Demokrat) publicly criticized the practice of following the orders of a captive leader, the authoritarian culture dominating the PKK, and the PKK's hostility towards the achievements of the Iraqi Kurds (e.g. Öcalan, O., 2004). In response, the PKK death squads murdered several PWD members in Iraqi Kurdistan in 2004 and 2005. In a particularly gruesome instance, hit men gunned down a leading organizer of the PWD in Diyarbakır in July 2005. The PKK employed violence to police its constituency and silence dissent (cf. Kalyvas, 2006: 10).

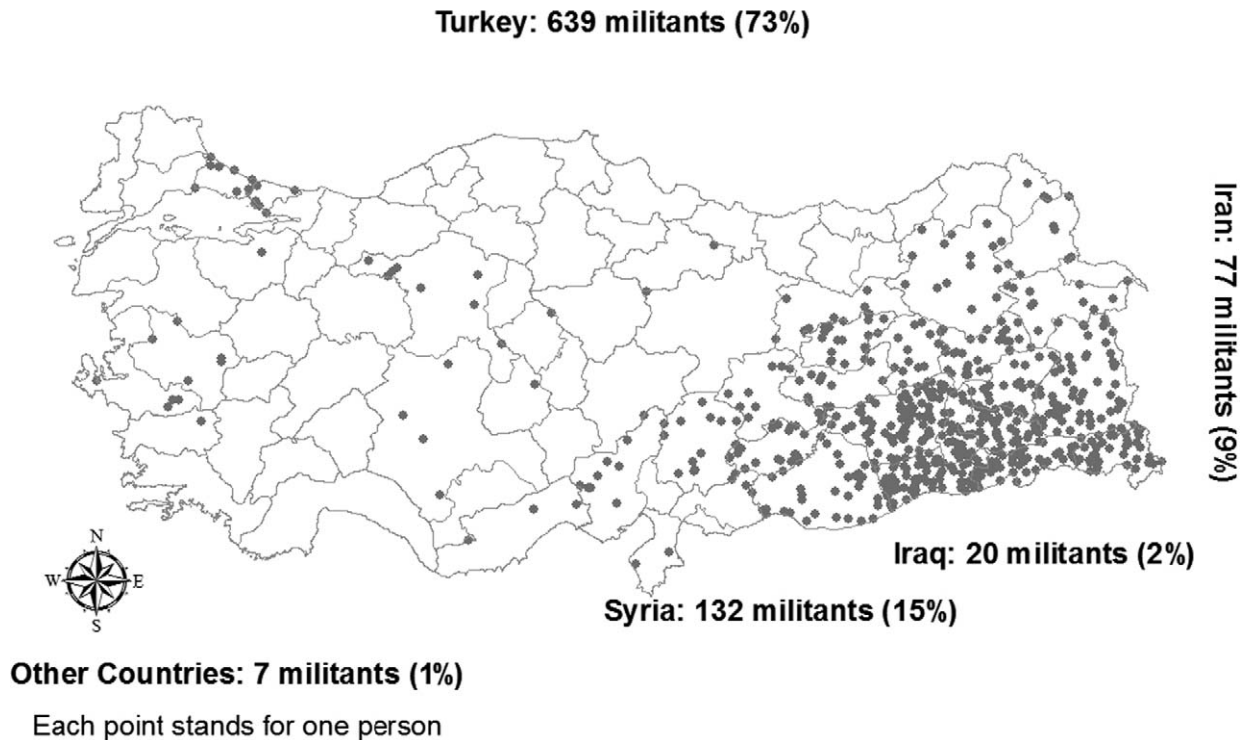


Figure 3. Birth places of the PKK militants killed in action (2003–2008)

While relations between the EU and Turkey reached new historical milestones, Öcalan became increasingly critical of the EU. He was predominantly troubled by the EU description of the PKK as a terrorist organization. He explicitly asked the EU countries to call for peaceful negotiations between the PKK and Turkey before the EU summit in December 2004. 'If the EU does not make such a decision, it forces us to fight' (Öcalan, 2004c). After the summit, Öcalan ceased to make positive references to the EU process. In September 2007, a DTP leader argued, 'We do not agree with solutions proposed by the EU. The EU is only concerned with individual liberties, and does not offer solutions regarding political and social rights of the Kurds'.

All these developments give support to Hypothesis II suggesting that democratization leads to radicalization of an insurgent organization if it also undermines its control over its constituency. Political reforms increased the appeal of the AKP among the Kurds of Turkey, and geopolitical developments tended to empower the AKP and the Barzani family at the expense of the PKK. The survival and strategic interests of the insurgent organization demanded a radical response that would reaffirm the PKK as the ultimate defender of Kurdish rights in the eyes of its constituency. That was in fact what happened, especially after the 2007 elections when the fighting between the TSK and the PKK intensified. Independent Kurdish intellectuals and activists criticized the PKK for forsaking democratic solutions for the sake of its organizational priorities, but were helpless to stop the spiral of violence

(Personal communications with Ümit Fırat, 28 November 2007, İstanbul, and Haşim Haşimi, 12 December 2007, Ankara). As identified by Hypothesis III, the rekindling of the armed conflict that provoked heavy-handed state responses contributed to the PKK's popular appeal, silenced internal critics, and reasserted the PKK hegemony over rival Kurdish organizations. A Kurdish dissident perceptively observed the logic of the PKK actions: 'The organization cannot keep thousands of militants in the mountains indefinitely without engaging in action. It has to fight and radiate an aura of strength to sustain itself' (Personal communication with İbrahim Güçlü, 19 October 2007, Diyarbakır).

Competition for the Kurdish vote (2004–2007)

The competition between the AKP and the PKK-led Kurdish nationalist movement requires a detailed analysis. It can be argued that the AKP monopolized the anti-PKK Kurdish vote that was previously fragmented among several parties without being able to convert any PKK sympathizers. Additionally, it can be objected that the Kurds supported the AKP primarily because of material inducements (i.e. food and coal aid to the poor) and public services provided by the AKP, and its religious appeal among pious Kurdish citizens. Hence, the AKP did not really emerge as a serious ideological contender to the Kurdish nationalist movement – in fact, it bought off its constituency with money and religion. Statistical and ethnographic evidence paints a more complicated picture, however,

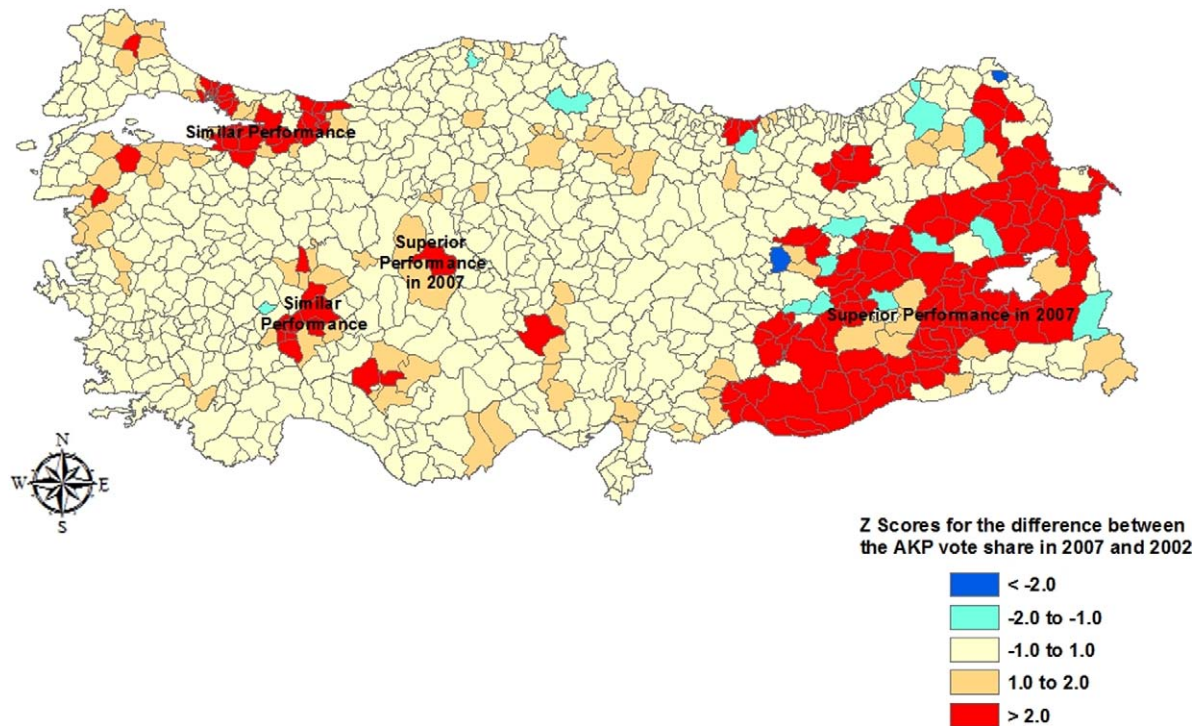


Figure 4. Comparison of the AKP's vote performance between 2002 and 2007

which shows that the AKP won over some of the Kurdish nationalist vote.

The AKP explicitly and repeatedly challenged the PKK's claim of being the real representative of the Kurds of Turkey. The AKP leader Erdoğan repeatedly claimed that the PKK could not speak on behalf of the Kurds. According to a Kurdish ex-parliamentarian from another party, 'Tayyip [Erdoğan] is the most moderate face of the Turkish state in the eyes of the Kurds since the death of President Turgut Özal in 1993' (Personal communication with Esat Canan, 11 October 2007, Ankara). In the words of a Kurdish AKP parliamentarian, 'When I became the provincial head of the party in Diyarbakır in July 2004, people were uneasy to express their support to the AKP. People now think that they can live in this country without their pride hurt' (Personal communication with Abdurrahman Kurt, 13 December 2007, Ankara). Consistent with the expectations of these voters, the AKP refused to authorize military incursions into Iraq in pursuit of the PKK militants before the 2007 elections, despite intense pressure from the TSK and the opposition parties. The AKP's claim to represent the Kurds drew harsh responses from the PKK and the DTP. Interviews with knowledgeable observers and critical insiders in 2007 disclosed that the PKK cadres had veto power over the candidates running under the DTP ticket. Being uneasy with appeal of the AKP, the PKK and DTP vigorously tried to discredit Kurdish members of the AKP as being 'pseudo-Kurds' who betrayed the Kurdish cause. A DTP leader went as far as claiming that the ethnic Kurds who become candidates for the AKP can no longer be considered

Kurds (Speech delivered by Emine Ayna, 2 December 2008, Varto).

Figure 4, created by using ArcGis 9.2, applies cluster/outlier analysis to the change in the AKP vote between the 2002 and 2007 elections. This analysis is based on a measure called local Moran's I (Anselin, 1995; Wilhelm & Steck, 1998). High local Moran's I scores indicate a local concentration of either low or high values of the difference between the AKP performance in 2002 and 2007. The cluster/outlier analysis with Z rendering identifies the localities that have non-randomly (statistically significant) similar values, either high or low, and localities that are non-randomly dissimilar to their neighbors, either high or low. Figure 4 neatly demonstrates that the rise of the support for the AKP in 2007 had an exceptional pattern in predominantly Kurdish regions of eastern Turkey (shown in red; districts in light blue indicating outliers). With the exception of several districts, the AKP remarkably increased its popular appeal in the region. Interestingly, the AKP experienced a similar rise in several central districts with substantial Kurdish population (high values in a region characterized by medium values).

Were there any defections from the Kurdish nationalist party to the AKP in 2007? In other words, did a considerable number of citizens who had voted for the Kurdish nationalist DEHAP (Demokratik Halk Partisi) in 2002 switch to the AKP in 2007? Interviews with voters and participant observation in Kurdish provinces before and after the 2007 elections pointed out that many DEHAP supporters voted for the AKP. Yet in the absence of survey data

collected over time, it is difficult to ascertain the magnitude of voter transitions in the predominantly Kurdish areas of eastern Turkey. An alternative method is to estimate voter migrations from the DEHAP in 2002 to the AKP in 2007 on the basis of aggregate electoral results, which entails ecological inference, 'the process of using aggregate data to infer individual-level relationships of interest' (King, 1997: xiv). This method is faced with the problem of the ecological fallacy, which 'consists in thinking that relationships observed for groups necessarily hold for individuals', given the fact that the parameters of interests at the individual level are unobservable (Freedman, 2001: 4027). Aggregation bias, loss of precious information when individual-level data are aggregated, causes inaccurate results (Cho & Gaines, 2004). The method ultimately relies on several assumptions that are untestable with aggregate data. If assumptions are wrong, then the results can be misleading (Gelman et al., 2001). Consequently, it is crucial to be cognizant of the trade-offs involved in making strong assumptions and the limits of the ecological inference (Cho & Manski, 2008). The current analysis has a modest goal and does not aim for precision: whether or not a substantial number of DEHAP supporters switched to the AKP in 2007.

A heuristic way to deal with aggregation bias is to include a covariate in the analysis that captures the correlation between the size of the population groups and the estimators (Ferre, 2004). In this analysis, the ratio of non-AKP voters in 2002 who voted for the AKP in 2007 depends on the vote performance of the Islamist RP (Refah Partisi) in the 1995 elections. The leading cadres of the AKP emerged from the RP and both parties' electoral support was strongly related to each other. The higher the vote for the RP in 1995, the higher was the vote for the AKP in 2007. Hence, DEHAP voters were more likely to vote for the AKP in 2007 if they lived in districts with strong RP support in 1995. The presence of spatial autocorrelation (i.e. when similar values cluster together in space) also leads to problems in estimates and results in loss of precision in estimators (Anselin & Cho, 2002). The present analysis overcomes this particular problem by focusing on Kurdish regions that are clearly differentiated from the rest of the country, as demonstrated by local Moran's *I*s produced by Figure 4 (also see Shin & Agnew, 2007).

It can be reasonably asserted that citizens who had voted for DEHAP in 2002 supported the DTP, switched to the AKP, or abstained. The DTP and the AKP were the only sizeable parties in an overwhelming majority of the eastern districts in 2007 ($N = 126$). It seems that many DEHAP voters did not abstain as participation rates (the ratio of *valid* votes to registered voters) increased in 86% of the districts. Most DTP candidates received fewer votes than DEHAP in 2002 despite increases in the number of registered voters and the overall participation rate. This simplifies the problem, as an overwhelming majority of DEHAP voters either voted for the DTP candidates or the AKP in 2007. Figure 5 shows the results of the ecological inference analysis conducted by using King's

EI software (available at gking.harvard.edu/stats.shtml). The results reveal significant local variation in voter transitions. In general, PKK weakness translated into DTP weakness. The DTP was most successful in preserving its base in the border provinces of Hakkari, Mardin, and Şırnak; the southern districts of Van; and the province of Diyarbakır. These are also the provinces where the PKK had significant presence. In contrast, the DTP performed very poorly and lost to the AKP in the provinces of Ağrı, Bingöl, Bitlis, and Urfa, and southern districts of Erzurum. The electoral support for the DTP was ultimately tied to the mass mobilizing power of the PKK. This finding provides additional evidence for the PKK's preference for radicalization and contentious mobilization after the DTP's defeat in the 2007 parliamentary elections and before the critical 2009 local elections.

The 2009 local elections

The radicalization of the PKK, the resistance of the TSK, the judiciary, the main opposition parties, and a considerable segment of civil society to the AKP policies, and the EU's increasing reluctance to engage with Turkey ultimately slowed down the reform process after 2005. Especially after the AKP increased its vote share among the Kurdish voters in 2007, it did not exhibit strong political will and acumen to sustain a consistent and moderate Kurdish policy. Meanwhile, the Kurdish nationalists identified the AKP as their main rival and increasingly radicalized. Under these circumstances, the March 2009 local elections were critical for the Kurdish nationalist movement that was fearful of complete marginalization. Another electoral setback would demoralize the movement and seriously undermine its claim to be the authentic representative of Kurdish people. Moreover, the local elections have historically been more important for the movement than the parliamentary elections, as the control of municipalities entails substantial financial and administrative resources. The AKP aimed to capitalize on its previous electoral successes through piecemeal reforms such as the start of a Kurdish public TV channel and plans for Kurdish language and culture departments in universities. In response, the Kurdish nationalist movement declared that the local elections would be a referendum and portrayed the electoral contest as a choice between voting for the 30-year struggle for the rights of Kurdish people and approval of the AKP and the Turkish state's oppressive policies. It organized huge protests when Prime Minister Erdoğan visited Diyarbakır and other Kurdish cities in October and November 2008.

The election results were a significant setback for the AKP, which received around 39% of the national vote. The AKP also lost a significant number of municipalities to the DTP and received fewer votes than the DTP in ten provinces. The behavior of the DTP and PKK in the aftermath of the 2009 elections was consistent with the theoretical expectations stated in this article. The relative electoral

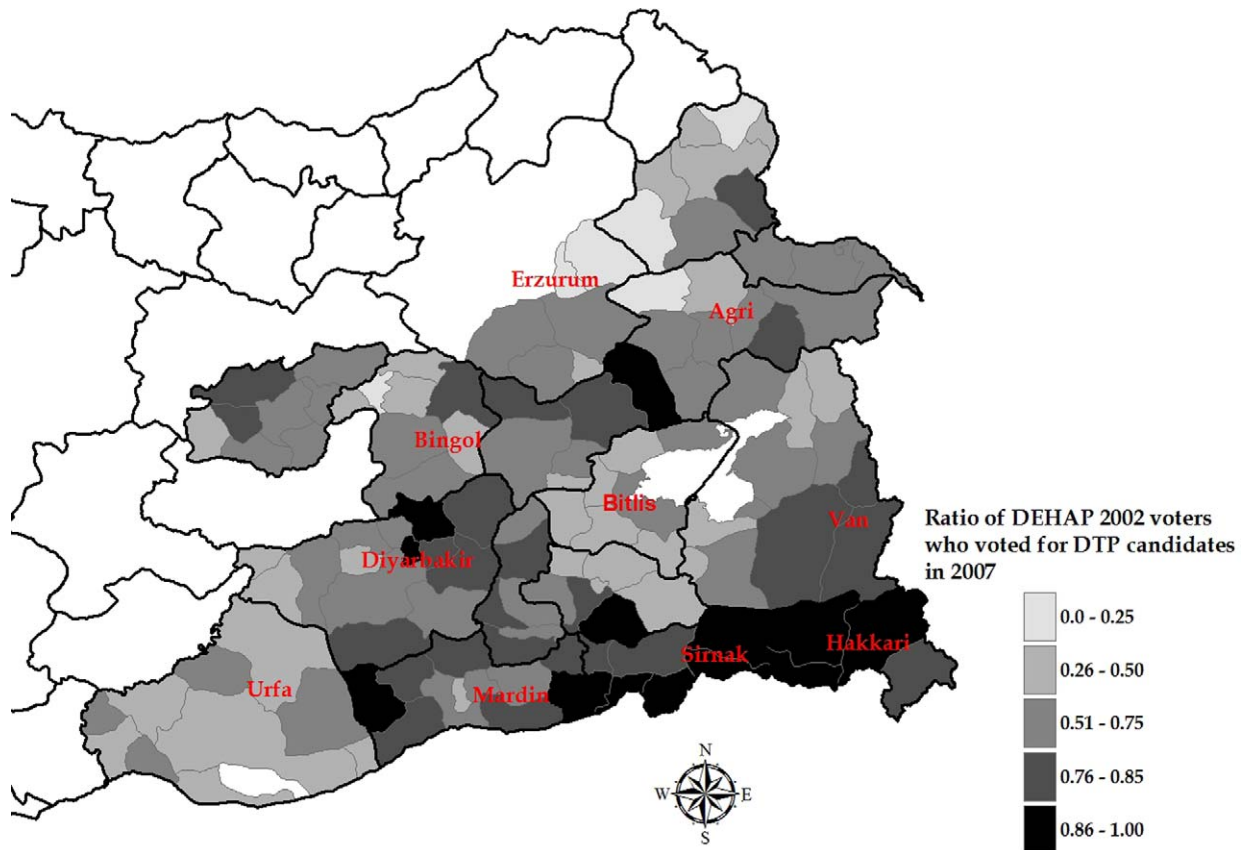


Figure 5. Vote retention rate for the Kurdish nationalist movement between 2002 and 2007

success and ability to temporarily ward off competition gave the Kurdish nationalist movement confidence and led to a tactical moderation in its behavior. The PKK declared a temporary ceasefire until 1 June 2009 and later extended it to 15 July. Fatalities on both sides significantly decreased in early summer 2009 compared to the same period in previous years. A well-known PKK leader gave numerous interviews to Turkish and international media and declared the PKK's readiness for a negotiated solution in May 2009. The DTP leadership repeatedly called on Turkish authorities to directly negotiate with Öcalan. Around the same time, Turkish President Gül remarked that Turkey should increase its democratic level to find a solution to its most important problem, the Kurdish question. Turkey improved its relations with the Kurdistan Regional Government in Iraq in a concerted effort to isolate the PKK. Yet, the TSK leadership interpreted recent PKK overtures as signs of weaknesses and opposed any concessions to the organization.

Conclusion

This article contributes to a better understanding of the conditions under which insurgent organizations – formed by disadvantaged groups – adopt nonviolent strategies of political

change. It offers an explanation for the paradox of the Kurdish nationalist radicalization during the most ambitious period of democratization in modern Turkish history. A perspective based on political opportunity and resource mobilization would suggest that the Kurdish movement, which is cognitively capable of pursuing democratic goals, would mobilize its already considerable social networks and nonviolent organizations to capitalize on political reforms. Yet this did not happen. This article argues that democratization and political reforms do not necessarily bring the moderation of ethnic insurgents. Democratization may have the ironic and unintended consequence of generating a process of radicalization when it introduces nonviolent competition over the ethnic constituency. As suggested by organization theory, insurgents do not necessarily exploit new political opportunities generated by political reform. They are primarily concerned with their survival, even if this contradicts their declared political goals and the interests of the ethnic constituency. The perpetuation of the organization and its leadership cult becomes the ultimate goal. What is good for Öcalan is good for the PKK and good for the Kurds (Marcus, 2007). The behavior of the PKK is similar to that of Sendero Luminoso in Peru in 1980. 'The irony of the 1980 "political opportunity," then, is that greater political *openness* in Peru sparked Sendero's turn to armed struggle' (Ron,

2001: 582). The insurgents, fearing political marginalization under the dynamics of electoral competition, attacked the left-ist organizations. Radicalization under a democratization thesis is also consistent with the finding that democratization can be destabilizing and generate violence in the short run (Hegre et al., 2001).

The Kurdish nationalist movement and its leader Öcalan prioritize the power and prestige that comes with recognition by the Turkish state over any other goal. Yet no Turkish politician can enter into direct negotiations with the Kurdish nationalist movement without taking enormous political risks that may doom his or her career. The only plausible way out from this stalemate, barring a major military victory, is the emergence of autonomous oppositional Kurdish political actors that pursue nonviolent strategies. The proliferation and empowerment of nonviolent ethnic organizations, such as an autonomous ethnic party, is likely to erode the hegemony of the insurgent organization in the long run, decrease the number of new recruits, facilitate its abandonment of armed struggle, and marginalize the radicals.

The dilemma is that the Kurdish insurgent organization, as much as the Turkish state, has been unwilling to permit such a development. The DTP and Kurdish civil society actors cannot credibly take the lead in exhorting the PKK to disarm unless the Turkish state fully lifts the restrictions on the Kurdish identity and language (Personal communication with Ahmet Türk, the DTP chairman, 26 September 2008, Ankara). The elementary logic of the principal-agent problem also applies to the relationship between the Kurdish insurgent organization and its constituency. The constituency has few means at its disposal to monitor whether the actions of the organization are guided by its declared goals (i.e. expansion of political rights) (Simon, 1991). Consequently, the constituency may lack the information to hold the organization responsible for failing to pursue its declared goals. Only when the Turkish government is willing to unequivocally commit to the expansion of liberties and a comprehensive democratic agenda that involves strategic coalitions among political actors pursuing rights agendas and amendments to de-ethnicize the Turkish constitution, can autonomous Kurdish political actors categorically demand an end to PKK violence. Under such conditions, PKK violence is likely to backfire. In fact, the radical strategies pursued by the Kurdish nationalist movement were not successful in preventing many Kurds from supporting the AKP in 2007. Yet the AKP did not pursue a consistent policy of democratic reform and lost ground in the March 2009 elections. It announced a new initiative in summer 2009 in order to neutralize the PKK. The success of this new initiative would ultimately depend on the rise of autonomous Kurdish organizations seeking political change through nonviolence.

Data replication

The data used in this article are available at www.prio.no/jpr/datasets.

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