TURKEY

Kurds

Activity: 1965-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- The first evidence for separatist activity we found is in 1965, when the separatist Kurdish Democratic Party was formed (Hewitt & Cheetham 2000: 301; Atlas n.d.). In 1974 the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) was formed. The movement is ongoing as of 2020 (Degenhardt 1988; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Hewitt et al. 2008; Keesing's; Marshall & Gurr 2003, 2005; Minahan 2002; MAR; UCDP/PRIO; Roth 2015: 200). [start date: 1965; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- The start of separatist activity is pegged at 1965, when the separatist Turkish Kurdistan Democratic Party was formed. Identifying the dominant claim of the party proved difficult. However, according to Barkey and Fuller (1998: 45), the party was closely affiliated with the Iraqi Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP). The KDP, demanded "autonomy for Kurdistan, democracy for Iraq" and at fist renounced the idea of an independent state, which only remained a long term strategic goal (Rogg and Rimscha 2007: 826). Lacking clear evidence of the claim of the Kurds in Turkey in this early period, the KDP claim is adopted. [1965-1974: autonomy claim]
- In 1974 the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK) was formed. According to Minorities at Risk, the PKK seeks "an independent Kurdistan and union with Kurds living in Iraq, Iran and Syria". This was certainly the case at the beginning, as confirmed by Yavuz and Özcan (2006: 106), Kirişci et al. (1997: 166), and Global Security (2016). [1975-1999: independence claim]
- After the arrest of its leader Abdullah Öcalan in 1999, PKK's demands seemed to have moved away from Kurdish independence and mainly focused on gaining more political rights (Minorities at Risk). This is in line with evidence from Icduygu et al. (1999: 994), who mention several PKK statements that suggest that the movement changed its demands away from a separate Kurdish state towards a federal-type solution. Leezenberg (2016: 673) also states that the PKK moved "away from national independence to a form of autonomy within Turkey" in the post-1999 period. Apart from the PKK, there were several other Kurdish organization in Turkey: People's Labor Party (HEP, active 1990-1993), Democracy Party (DEP, 1993-1994), People's Democracy Party (HADEP, 1994-2003), Democratic People's Party (DEHAP, 1997-2005), Democratic Society Movement (DTH, 2005), Democratic Society Party (DTP, 2005-2009), Peace and Democracy Party (BDP, 2008-2014), Democratic Regions Party (DBP, 2014-present), Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP, 2012-present). Within HADEP and its two predecessors, HEP and DEP, there was no consensus regarding the goal. Whereas hard-liners envisaged "a federation to be the ultimate end result", moderates considered "cultural autonomy associated with significant state economic aid and recognition of the distinctiveness of Kurdish ethnicity and culture" sufficient (Barkey 1998: 131). Tuncer Bakirhan, the leader of DEHAP, in 2003 indicated that DEHAP is in favor of neither a federation nor a division (Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada 2004). The DTP in 2007 included the demand for autonomy in the six Kurdish provinces in the party program (Jenkins 2007). The BDP's political objectives are described as "democratic autonomy", whereby the BDP has "no intention of dividing the country with its calls for bilingualism and "democratic autonomy," but rather seeks total decentralization" (CORI 2011). Since the PKK,

which Icduygu et al. (1999: 994) describe as the "most important Kurdish movement in Turkey's history", demanded independence until 1999, independence is also coded as the dominant claim until 1999. With the PKK's switch to regional autonomy and with a large share of most other parties also pursuing autonomy, autonomy is coded as the dominant claim from 2000 onwards. In 2010, the PKK reiterated the demand for autonomy and promised to lay down its arms if a significant degree of autonomy is granted (BBC 2010, PressTV 2010). In the 2015 elections (first election in June), the HDP won 13.12% of the votes and 80 seats in parliament, thereby passing the 10% election threshold. The HDP, which has regional autonomy in its program, hereby also benefited from the support of the pro-PKK electorate. Hence, regional autonomy is continued to be coded as the dominant claim (despite the renewed insurgency). [2000-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

- See above for the start date. While it is likely that many Kurds would continue to favor independence today, all sources consulted indicate that the PKK abandoned its claim for independence in 1999 (in addition to sources noted above, see al-Ali & Tas 2018: 457). Nor is there further evidence of organized claims for independence beyond the PKK (such as from the HDP or Free Cause Party) after 1999. [start date: 1974; end date: 1999]

Irredentist claims

NA

Claimed territory

- In general, the Kurds in Turkey claim the area in southeastern Turkey. However, this claim is not clearly defined as territorial demands vary substantially within the movement (Roth 2015: 201f). In the absence of a clear-cut territorial claim, we code Kurdistan in line with the following description: "a roughly defined geo-cultural region wherein the Kurdish people form a prominent majority population [...]" (Zaken 2007). Following SDM's coding rules on cross-border claims, we code only the territories within Turkey based on a map published by the CIA (1992).

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- MAR's quinquennial rebellion score is 4 from 1975-1979, indicating a small-scale insurgency. The coding notes do not explain this coding. UCDP/PRIO would not suggest armed conflict during those years; similarly, Marshall & Gurr (2003, 2005) and Hewitt et al. (2008) do not note armed conflict before 1984. We investigated this further using qualitative sources.
    - According to the University of Central Arkansas conflict database, the PKK instigated large numbers of killings in 1978-1981: "PKK rebels killed 213 civilians and 30 government soldiers between 1978 and March 1981." A military crackdown followed, and "Abdullah Ocalan fled to Syria in September 1980" and "Thirty-five PKK rebels were sentenced to death on May 24, 1983. Three Kurds were convicted and sentenced to death for treason in Diyarbakir on December 1, 1983, and another 48 Kurds were convicted and sentenced to death in Diyarbakir on April 19, 1984. Two Kurds were convicted and sentenced to death in Adana on May 4, 1984."

    - This broad narrative is confirmed by other sources (e.g., Gunter 1988: 395). Violence appears to have then decreased until the onset of the armed insurgency in 1984.
    - While there is therefore clear evidence of substantial violence in 1978-1981, the reports we found all highlight that PKK murdered hundreds of people, which led to a crackdown, arrests, and death penalties. What we could not find is evidence of reciprocated battles or deaths of rebels in the battlefield. Furthermore, 1984 is generally cited as the year the PKK insurgency began. It is possible that the criteria for a LVIOLSD coding in 1978-1981 were met, but the evidence is too thin.
- The HVIOLSD coding for 1984-2003 follows Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019).
- The number of casualties began to decline in 2000, which is why SSW code an end to the war in 2003. Yet, low-intensity violence continued throughout 2001-2005, and UCDP/PRIO codes a minor war in 2004 (194 battle-related deaths). We code LVIOLSD in 2004.
- The HVIOLSD coding for 2005-2013 follows Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019).
- In December 2012, a new round of talks began between Turkey and the imprisoned PKK leader, Abdullah Öcalan. In March 2013, Öcalan declared a cease-fire. The PKK had declared cease-fires in the past, e.g. in August 2005, September-October 2006, June 2007, September 2008, December 2008, April 2009, and August 2010), but these were either not adhered to or of short duration. The 2013 cease-fire was different and, according to the UCDP Conflict Encyclopedia, "there was no fatal violence between the warring parties after a ceasefire was announced by Öcalan on March 21. Talks continued throughout the year, and in May 2013, PKK began a withdrawal into northern Iraq of all forces on Turkish soil."
    - UCDP/PRIO records 10 battle-related deaths in 2014, but the above narrative suggests that there was no sustained fighting from March 2013. Therefore, 2014 is coded with NVIOLSD.
- The violence escalated again in 2015. The Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP), one of the main pro-Kurds organisations in Turkey, passed the notoriously high 10% minimum threshold in the general election in June 2015 while support for the government party AKP decreased. In July 2015, before a coalition government could be formed, an ISIS bombing claimed the lives of 32 people, mostly Kurds. PKK supporters accused the Turkish government of being complicit. In the same month, two policemen were assassinated by unidentified men, and later 9 Kurds were anonymously accused of conducting the assassination under the order of the PKK. Two days later, the Turkish government started large-scale police and military operations against both the PKK and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (IPA News 2019). This led to renewed civil war. The HVIOLSD coding for 2015-2020 (ongoing) follows Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019). [1965-1983: NVIOLSD; 1984-2003: HVIOLSD; 2004: LVIOLSD; 2005-2013: HVIOLSD; 2014: NVIOLSD; 2015-ongoing: HVIOLSD]

Historical context

- Kurdish territory was split between the Safavid and Ottoman empires after the Persian defeat in the battle of Chaldiran in 1514. In the Ottoman Empire, the Kurdish territory was ruled as a separate principality with considerable autonomy. This autonomy was ended in the 19th century, when the decaying empire centralized its administration and abolished minority self-rule. The end of autonomy sparked several Kurdish revolts against the Ottoman Empire (Minahan 2002: 1058).
- After the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in the First World War, the Kurdish were promised independence in the Treaty of Sèvres that partitioned the Ottoman Empire. However, the treaty was abandoned after the Kemalist victory in the Turkish War of Independence and the formation of a modern Turkish state. The treaty of Lausanne signed by Turkey and the allies in 1923 partitioned Kurdistan between Turkey, Iran, and the British and French administrations of Iraq and Syria (Minahan 2002: 1058).
- While the Ottoman Empire had been multi-cultural, Turkey was decidedly mono-cultural and promoted Turkish assimilation policies. Several separatist Kurdish uprisings in the 1920s and 1930s were successfully crushed by the Turkish government. Large numbers of Kurds were killed – up to 1.5 million according to some estimates; ethnic outsiders including Turks, Syrians, and Albanians were relocated to Kurdistan; and Kurds were resettled in western Turkey. The words

Kurd and Kurdistan were declared illegal, thus denying the very existence of Kurdish identity. Instead, Kurds were referred to as "Mountain Turks". Kurdish regions were centralized, Kurdish parties outlawed, and Kurdish cultural activities banned (Minahan 2002: 1059; Natali 2005: 77ff; Roth 2015: 200f; Yegen 2009).

- In the 1940s, the Turkish state halted its compulsory resettlement policies (Yegen 2009: 604). Yet, repression, including cultural repression, of the Kurds continued over the next decades (Natali 2005). After the 1960 coup d'état, Kurdish names of numerous Kurdish towns and villages were replaced with Tukish names and various Kurdish journals were prohibited (Kolcak 2016). [1960: cultural rights restriction]

Concessions and restrictions

- Repression of Kurdish identity continued unabated between 1965 and the 1980s. A significant development was that not long after the 1971 military coup, the giving of non-Turkish names to newborns was banned in 1972 (Kolcak 2016). [1972: cultural rights restriction]
- Following the 1980 coup, the military regime "introduced a ban on the explanation, publication and broadcasting of ideas and opinions in any language other than Turkish (Kolcak 2016: 31). According to Yegen (2009: 605), the respective Law 2932 was enacted in 1983. The regime also confiscated books, films and newspapers pertaining to Kurdish people or their culture (Kolcak 2016: 31). [1983: cultural rights restriction]
- There was a limited rapprochement in the early 1990s (Nahali 2005). MAR suggests that Kurdish ethnicity was recognized in 1991. Minahan suggests that the ban on the Kurdish language was revoked in 1991 (Minahan 2002: 1060). Meanwhile, the much more detailed account in Nahali (2005: 109) suggests a concession in 1992, when "limited language opportunities for Kurds" were allowed and a Kurdish cultural center in Istanbal was allowed. However, as Kolcak (2016: 31) explains, following the sudden death of the Turkish president Turgut Özal in April 1993, Turkey quickly embraced the "cultural togetherness" policy again and there were no serious steps towards the abrogation of Turkification policies until the early 2000s. We do not code a concession.
- Turkey has repeatedly outlawed Kurdish parties, including the People's Labor Party (HEP) in 1993, the Democratic Party (DEP) in 1994, and the People's Democracy Party (HADEP) in 2003 (MAR). This is not a restriction as defined in the codebook.
- The PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, was arrested in 1999 (Minahan 2002: 1061). This is not a restriction as defined in the codebook.
- In 2001, Turkey repealed the ban on the use of languages other than Turkish in broadcasting (Cunningham 2014: 227 Kolcak 2016: 34). This occurred in the context of Turkey's ambition to join the EU. In 2002, AKP came to power and pursued a somewhat more liberal policy towards the Kurds, which proceeded to allow limited broadcasting in the Kurdish language (Kolcak 2016: 34). [2001: cultural rights concession]
- The AKP government further enhanced Kurdish broadcasting rights in 2008, when the AKP-dominated parliament decided to allow Kurdish broadcasting, previously limited to 4-5 hours per week, 24 hours a day (Kolcak 2016: 35). [2008: cultural rights concession]
- In 2009, public and private universities were allowed to provide language courses in Kurdish (Kolcak 2016: 40f). Importantly, though, instruction in Kurdish in schools remained illegal. [2009: cultural rights concession]
- According to MAR, the Turkish parliament laws allowing parents to give their children Kurdish names; however, as MRGI explains: "In September 2003, the law was restricted to curtailing names containing the letters q, w and x, which are common in Kurdish. Thus, Kurds are still precluded by law from giving their children Kurdish names that include these letters." Kolcak (2016: 36f) explains that this restriction was removed only in 2013 along with several other Kurdish language rights. Thereby all Kurdish personal names were liberalized. [2013: cultural rights concession]
    - Kolcak (2016) suggests this concession was part of the 2013 Democratization Package, which was announced in late September 2013. Sambanis & Schulhofer-Wohl (2019)

code the end of the 2005-2013 civil war in March 2013. The concession therefore occurred after the end of separatist violence.
    - Likely related to the above: In 2014, bilingual education in Turkish and Kurdish became possible in the context of private schools (Kolcak 2016: 44f). From 2014 onward, Kurdish place names, which had been Turkified since the 1920s, began to be restored (Kolcak 2016: 38). Furthermore, in 2014, the use of the Kurdish language and other non-Turkish languages was allowed for political campaigning (Kolcak 2016: 38f).
- In February 2015 the PKK and Turkey negotiated the Dolmabahçe Agreement, a 10-point plan for long-term peace. There was no implementation, however, and shortly thereafter, Erdoğan backtracked (Çiçek and Coşkun 2016).
- The Turkish government restricted the rights of Kurds as part of its campaign against the PKK in 2015, which re-initiated the civil war. Measures included the changing of street names that had honored Kurdish figures, the removal of statues of Kurdish heroes, and the closing down of television channels broadcasting in Kurdish. Kingsley (2017) suggests that the crackdown on Turkish culture began in June 2015, and thus before the start of the war in late July (Kingsley 2017). [2015: cultural rights restriction]
- In 2020, university dissertations written in Kurdish were outlawed by Turkey's higher education council (Arab News 2020). [2020: cultural rights restriction]

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

NA

EPR2SDM

Movement	Kurds
Scenario	1:1
EPR group(s)	Kurds
Gwgroupid(s)	64001000

Power access

- We draw on EPR, which codes the Kurds as discriminated against throughout. [1965-2020: discriminated]

Group size

- We use EPR's population size estimate, which stems from the CIA World Factbook (18%). [0.18]

Regional concentration

- EPR codes regional concentration and MAR suggests that the Kurds make up a majority in their regional base while less than 25% live dispersed throughout Turkey. Minahan (2002: 1055) suggests that Kurds make up 70% of the population of their regional base, though he also includes areas in other countries including Iraq, Iran, and Syria. [regional concentration]

Kin

- There are large Kurdish populations, numbering in the millions, in several adjacent and nearby states including Syria, Iraq, and Iran. There is a smaller Kurdish population (though above the 100,000 threshold) also in Lebanon (Minahan 2002: 1055). MAR also codes kin adjacent to the Kurds' regional base, as does EPR. [kin in adjacent country]

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